

What is faith?



What is faith? Many, both inside and outside Christianity, ponder this question every day. How can we define faith, and how can we better understand what true faith looks like? More importantly, what kind of faith does God expect of us?

Every one of us exhibits faith in something every day; we have faith that the bus driver knows how to drive the bus, we have faith that the pilot knows how to fly the plane, we have faith that the school teachers know how to educate our children, and for Christians we have faith that God is real and that Jesus died on the cross so our sins can be forgiven.

Faith isn't something that we should exhibit only when things are going well, when we feel our circumstances prove that God is real. Corrie ten Boom, most famous for her work helping to hide Jews during WWII said " When a train goes through a tunnel and it gets dark, you don't throw away the ticket and jump off. You sit still and trust the engineer."^[1]This is true for faith; when something happens and life gets a little dark, we don't assume God has lost control and we're headed into a mountain, instead we should trust God all the more, understanding that He has full control. But faith is far more than just this vague belief that God is in the driver's seat, or that whatever happens God will get us through that dark tunnel.

In Hebrews 11: 1 it is written " Faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see." Faith is truth and trust,^[2] yet how many of us have the kind of faith that can completely trust in God regardless of our situation?

There's a story about the missionary Hudson Taylor during his first trip to China. Aboard a sailing ship, at one stage there was no wind, and they were close to islands inhabited by tribes of cannibals. With the islands, and cannibals, getting closer the captain asked Hudson if he would pray. Hudson agreed, but only if the captain set the sails, ready for the breeze. With no sign of wind the captain declined, but Hudson stood fast and refused to pray until the sails had been set, ready for the wind he had faith God would send. The captain, eventually, agreed and the crew set the sails, while Hudson set about the task of asking God for the wind to fill them. Sometime later there was a knock at the door and the captain asked Hudson if he was still praying for God to send wind. Hudson indicated he was, to which the captain replied " you better stop praying for we have more wind than we can manage!"[3]

Hudson Taylor had no doubt God would send the wind; he had faith in God. In Hebrews 11 we see examples of other expressions of faith, expressions that may seem unbelievable unless you first believe that to God, nothing is impossible.

In verse 3 we read that " by faith we understand that the entire universe was formed at God's command..."[4]None of us were there to see this, to witness this great event, and yet by faith we believe and accept this event occurred just how the Bible describes it. Similarly it was by faith that Noah built the Ark even when there was no sign of rain, or when Abraham left his homeland to take his family to a faraway land he'd never seen, or when Abraham took the son he had been told would bless the world to offer him as a sacrifice.[5]

These events describe how great faith led to a great event; a second chance for all creatures in the Ark, or a new nation that would someday bless the whole world, yet not every instance of great faith resulted in something most would see as positive. In Hebrews 11: 35-37 it is written:

But others were tortured, refusing to turn from God in order to be set free. They placed their hope in a better life after the resurrection. Some were jeered at, and their backs were cut open with whips. Others were chained in prisons. Some died by stoning, some were sawed in half, and others were killed with the sword.[6]

These verses describe people who, because of their faith, refused to reject Jesus even in the face of torture and death. Their faith caused them to trust in salvation and an eternal life, placing God above their own lives.

It is only when we come to understand faith as the kind of faith that makes you force a ship's captain to set sails while there is no sign of wind, to build a huge ship when there is no sign of rain, or to face torture and death rather than renounce your beliefs, that we approach the level of faith we see throughout the Old and New Testament.

In Psalm 26: 1 it is written “ Declare me innocent, O Lord, for I have acted with integrity; I have trusted in the Lord without wavering.”[7] Faith is trusting, without wavering. Psalm 37: 3-5 “ Trust in the Lord and do good... Take delight in the Lord Commit everything you do to the Lord. Trust him, and he will help you.”[8] All of these describe faith in God, a faith that will see you trust Him through the dark tunnels, when you are stuck in a windless calm, when you are asked to fulfil a ridiculous task, or even when faced with

death. True faith will trust God in every situation, no matter what we may face.

[1]William K. Volkmer, *These Things: A Reference Manual For Discipleship* (San Antonio: The Passionate Few, 2016), 249.

[2]Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1999), 377.

[3]. Don Jennings, *Life's Great Adventure: Walking With God* (Maitland, FL: Xuton Press, 2011), 252-253.

[4]Hebrews 11: 3 NLT (New Living Translation).

[5]Hebrews 11: 7-10, 17-19 NLT (New Living Translation).

[6]Hebrews 11: 35-37 NLT (New Living Translation).

[7]Psalm 26: 1 NLT (New Living Translation).

[8]Psalm 37: 3-5 NLT (New Living Translation).