

Faith in Action - Fall 2023

Lesson Title: Faith & Fear

Biblical Texts: Hebrews 11; James 2:14, 17; Phil. 4:4-9; Matt, 10:26-33; Rom. 8:31-39; Rom. 10:17

Objectives:

1. Develop a Biblical definition of “faith”
2. Develop an emotional and behavioral understanding of fear
3. Be able to describe how “faith” and “fear” are incompatible

Introduction:

Hebrews 11:1 and 11:6 give us a biblical definition of faith. “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for and conviction of things not seen.” To draw near to God we MUST believe that God (of the Bible) exists and that God rewards those who seek him. Hebrews 11 goes on to give example after example of people who demonstrated faith.

We can have “faith” in many things. A small child is willing to jump into a swimming pool if the child has “faith” that his/her parent will catch them. The child is mentally and emotionally assured that the parent is capable and is trustworthy to catch them. They hope they will and they are convinced that, though they haven’t yet tried it, the parent will do what they promise.

I have “faith” that my husband is a good driver. Meaning, I am sure (trusting) that he is able to safely drive us to where we want to go.

Hebrews 11 is filled with examples of Biblical characters who were assured of things they hoped for and were convicted of things they hadn’t seen but still believed they would happen. Another example of “faith” are Shadrach, Meshach, and Abegnego (Dan. 3:16-18), who trusted God even though they did not know the outcome of their conviction to obey Him.

I. The “faith” that Hebrews is talking about is faith in the One True Living God, the God of the Bible. To have this faith in the Biblical God requires us to know some of the characteristics of this God.

A. Ps. 86:15 tells us that this God is merciful, and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

B. II Tim. 2:13 tells us that even when we are faithless, he (Christ) remains faithful— For he cannot deny himself.

C. God is omnipotent—God has the power to perform whatever He wills (Rev. 19:6)

D. God is love (I John 4:8)

E. God love's us (John 3:16)

F. God is absolutely good (Matt. 19:17)

G. God is omniscient-God sees the entire span of his creation everywhere and all the time. He has a plan for His creation (Isaiah 46:10).

(1) We can choose to have faith in the one true God and work out our part in His plan for His creation. (This is faith)

(2) We can believe but refuse to act out His will (this is dead faith) (3) We can not believe or ignore His plan and do what seems good to us (Unbelief)

II. What are "fear" and "anxiety"?

A. Both are emotional, physical, and behavioral responses to danger.

1. Emotional: desire to avoid or escape a situation

2. Physical: shaking, sweating, racing heart, fast breathing, increased Blood pressure, "adrenaline rush"

3. Behavioral: freezing, hiding, running away

B. "Fear" is a response to a known trigger; "anxiety" is a response to the unknown.

C. A behavioral definition of "fear and anxiety."

1. We all have things in our lives that are important to us (people, things, ideas, Plans, reputation...) This is called our "personal domain". 2. If the value of or personal domain goes up, we are happy. 3. If the value of our personal domain goes down, we are sad. 4. If the value of our personal domain is threatened (but not yet unchanged), we can have different emotional responses.

a. If it is something we think that we can control, we get angry. b. If it is something we think we are helpless to control, we get afraid or anxious.

D. How are "faith" and "fear or anxiety" incompatible?

1. Remember the definition of "faith"

a. Belief that our omnipotent, omniscient, all-good God intends to include as Part of His plan to pour out His love for all creation (including us). b. How can we be afraid if we know that in the end we will be bathed in the Love of God?

2. We know that "faith" is not all-or-none.

a. We can doubt if God is all powerful, or all good, or all knowing, always present, or if He Loves us.

b. We can doubt if we are really worth loving

c. We can convince ourselves that we know better

3. Even the disciples were often chided for "little faith" (Matt. 6:30; 8:14; 14:31)

E. "Fear Tends to Create the Thing It Fears" —

True story—two Christian families had lovely 16 year old daughters who had just Started to date. Both of them chose boys that were not of good character. Both families were concerned (and rightly so). The first family responded to their fear trying to control the situation. They told their daughter that she was NOT allowed to date, call, text, email, etc. this boy. The second family took their fears to God

In prayer. They asked their daughter what she liked about this boy. Then they said, "Well, if you like it, we need to get to know him. Why don't you invite him

over for dinner.” The girl did and they were courteous and worked to get to know him. They set appropriate boundaries with curfews, etc. but treated him with kindness and respect. Nine months later, the first girl was pregnant. She married the boy, had two children and a rocky marriage that ended in divorce 5 years later. Nine months later, the 2nd girl decided to break off the relationship. She dated some during high school, but met and married during college and many years later is still happily married. And, the young man she broke up with got to experience Christian action from her parents during their dating time and she got to see what it means to put your faith in God, instead of letting fear control you!

F. In Romans 10:17 we read that “faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ.” If you want your faith to increase, spending more time in the Word, listening to the preaching of Christ or other ways Christ is taught, could help.

G. In Beth Moore’s bible study series on Esther, Beth says that when she is afraid, She thinks, “If X (X being any bad thing that might happen), then GOD.....” This statement has helped me so much through the years because I trust in the statement from Romans 8:38 “All things work together for good, for those who love the Lord.”

Discussion Questions:

1. What are the “chinks” in your armor of faith? (Trust in God’s existence, omnipotence, omniscience, goodness, love? Desire to trust in yourself?)
2. What do the verses in Phil. 4:4-9 tell you to do and to think about when you are feeling anxious?
3. What can the body of Christ do to strengthen your faith?
4. What situations are most apt to make you anxious? How can your faith in God give you strength?
5. Fear can cause Christians to do many unkind and ungodly acts without realizing it. Have you been in fear that made you try to control a situation or another person in a way that wasn’t helpful or loving?
6. What do you do to increase your faith?

Homework:

Read Hebrews 11. To which characters do you most relate and why? Why do we often limit these stories to the “VBS Version”.