

Faith



SABBATH—APRIL 4

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Ephesians 6:10–18; Hebrews 11; James 2:18, 19; 1 Peter 1:3–8.

MEMORY VERSE: “God’s grace¹ has saved you because of your faith in Christ. Your salvation² doesn’t [does not] come from anything you do. It is God’s gift. It is not based on anything you have done. No one can brag about earning it” (Ephesians 2:8, 9, Nlrv).

WE SHOULD NOT CONFUSE FAITH WITH PERSONAL BELIEF. According to the Bible, faith does not depend on reason. Faith does not depend on our emotions. Instead, faith is a deep-rooted belief that influences³ the entire person. Faith is a principle⁴ that rules the life. Faith is how we reach out and grab hold of the promises of a God we cannot see. We cannot see Him, but we know He is there.

Hebrews 11:1 speaks about the “substance” (basis, “meat”) of our faith. William G. Johnsson, an expert on Hebrews, suggests that the best translation is, “Faith is the title deed⁵ to what we hope for. It is knowing for sure what we do not see.”—Adapted from *Hebrews, The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier* (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1994), page 204.

A CLOSER LOOK AT THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Faith is the guiding principle in the life of a Christian. It is how we are to live and to relate to God and to others. It is important that we know doctrines (church beliefs). But faith is so much more than just knowing doctrines. This week we will look at how much more.

1. grace—God’s gift of forgiveness and mercy that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

2. salvation—God’s plan for saving sinners from eternal (without end) death; the gift of eternal life; being saved.

3. influences—to have power, or an effect, over persons or things.

4. principle—a law or rule upon which other laws are based.

5. title deed—a legal document or paper that gives a person rights or ownership to something. Faith is the title deed to our hope in eternal (without end) life with Jesus.

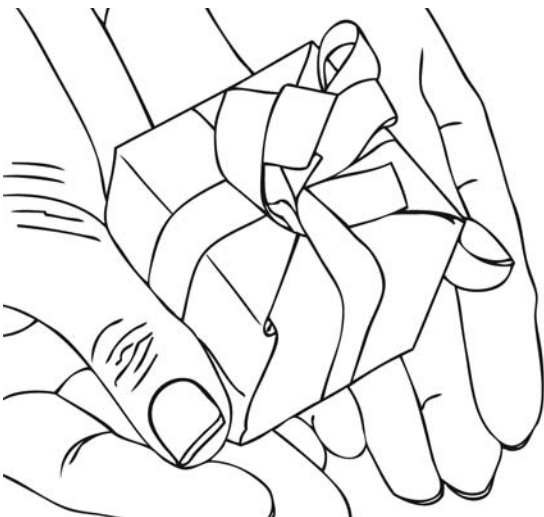
SUNDAY—APRIL 5**FAITH—A GIFT FROM GOD
(Ephesians 2:8)**

What is faith?

A simple meaning could read something like this: “Faith is trusting fully that God is real, powerful, and loving. His trust, power, and love are shown in His acts and in His promises to us.”

Faith is a wonderful gift to have in a terribly fallen and broken world such as ours. It is no surprise that many people believe that faith is the most wonderful of all gifts humans could have.

Now, the question is, Have you ever tried to discover where your faith came from? Why is it that you have faith in God and others you know do not? Was it how your parents raised you? Have you always attended church? Did your study of the Bible, and your reading of books about the Bible, make you believe that there is a God who loves you? Faith truly is a gift from God.



Faith is a gift from God.

How does Paul describe the importance of the gift of faith in Ephesians 2:8?

One thing is sure: we cannot be fully human without love. In the same way, we cannot be what we should be without faith. “‘Without faith it is impossible to please God.’ . . . Note that the book of Hebrews does not teach that without faith it is hard to please God. Nor does Hebrews teach without faith it will take a long time to please Him. Instead the book of Hebrews says that it is impossible [to please God without faith]. In short, faith has nothing that can take its place. It is by faith that God’s heroes lived in the past. And it is by faith that His people must live today.”—Adapted from George R. Knight, *Exploring Hebrews: A Devotional Commentary* (Hagerstown, Maryland: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 2003), page 198.

According to Romans 10:17 and Hebrews 11:6, how can we make ourselves ready to receive the gift of faith? What changes can we make in our lives to become more willing to receive that gift?

MONDAY—APRIL 6**THE BASIS OF OUR FAITH
(John 5:39)**

There is a famous English hymn that has been translated in countless languages. It reminds us, “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness [holy living].”—*The*

Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal, number 522. It is important that we never forget this truth. Jesus Christ is the greatest foundation of our faith. The gift of faith is a mystery that we cannot fully understand. But we have been given some information on how faith is awakened and made stronger. Some men and women in Bible times had a sudden experience that started them on the journey of faith. Paul is probably the best example. But other people in the Bible came to understand God's leading in their lives more slowly. Experience is an important and powerful part of our spiritual (godly) life. But our faith must be fed also by God's Word (the Bible). That is why the Bible plays such an important part in building up our faith.

According to John 5:39 and 2 Timothy 3:15, what part does the Bible play in the faith experience of the believer?

Clearly, the Bible is very important. If we neglect it, we will weaken our faith. But how the Bible exactly helps to awaken and build our faith cannot truly be explained in any human words. Not even the famous faith definition (meaning) of Hebrews 11 gives this answer. "Hebrews 11:1 does not give us the meaning of *pistis* [the Greek word for faith]. In the same way, Hebrews 11:1 does not describe the way, faith works. Certainly Paul does not try to give an explanation of how the mind exercises faith. Rather, Paul sets out the two

important things that faith makes possible—(1) making hope real and (2) helping people 'see' the unseen." —Adapted from William G. Johnsson, *Hebrews*, The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1994), page 205.

What does James 2:18, 19 tell us about what faith is? Why is faith more than just knowingly believing that God and other doctrines (church beliefs) are real?

Why is Bible reading a life-changing experience for some people while others claim that it "does nothing" for them? What would you advise a person who enjoys reading the Bible as a book but does not believe that the voice of God speaks from it?

TUESDAY—APRIL 7

SHOWING FAITH (Luke 16:30, 31)

The Gospel writers⁶ tell the stories of Christ's healing miracles.⁷ They point to the idea that the miracles are not magic but faith. The people who are healed are challenged to show their faith. "It will happen to you just as you believed," Jesus said (Matthew 9:29, NIV). Unusual experiences with God's miracles do not always lead to faith. The truth is that many people find other explanations for God's miracles.

6. Gospel writers—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The four Gospels tell the story of Jesus' life and His teachings.

7. miracles—extraordinary (amazing; great) events believed to be a sign.



Two blind men begged Jesus to heal them. He said, “ ‘ It will happen to you just as you believed’ ” (Matthew 9:29, NIV).

What important point can we take from Luke 16:30, 31?

Our faith will be made stronger by the experience of seeing God at work in our own lives and in the lives of others. But our faith often will come before we experience God’s miracles in our lives. Faith will expect God to show His hand. God has promised that He will act through us for our good if we have faith in Him. In that trusting faith, we must take Him at His Word.

What do Romans 1:17; Galatians 5:6; James 2:17, 18; and 1 John 5:4, 5 teach us about how we are to live by faith?

According to Romans 11:20 and Hebrews 3:19, what is the sad result when we have no faith?

The message of Romans 11:20 makes it clear that Paul was speaking

about the Hebrews of early Bible times who had received the promise of salvation in a covenant relationship⁸ with God. They could have experienced the great blessings of life in Christ that faith brings to all who live it. But their experience, and failure, is a clear reminder to us that “without faith it isn’t [is not] possible to please God” (Hebrews 11:6, NIV).

Your faith is a gift. But what good reasons do you have for it? Also, even more important, what are useful ways in which you can make your faith stronger? At the same time, what are sure ways of losing it?

WEDNESDAY—APRIL 8

GROWING IN FAITH (2 Peter 3:18)

Faith can grow when we are faced with doubts and problems. But we must continue to go on, claiming the promises of God. We must do so, no matter how we might feel at any given moment or how frustrating the situations might be. Faith is more than a feeling. It is a principle that does not depend on weak human⁹ emotions. Faith is doing what we know God asks us to do, even though we do not want to do it.

You are growing in grace and the knowledge of Jesus Christ. As you grow, you will improve every chance

8. covenant relationship—the promises and blessings enjoyed by believers as they continue to walk with God.

9. human—having to do with men, women, or children.

to gain more knowledge about the life of Christ and who He is. You will do everything you can to grow in grace and faith.



Faith in Jesus will grow as we come to know Him.

Faith in Jesus will grow as you get to know Jesus better. This can happen by living in His life and love. You cannot dishonor God more than to claim to be His disciple (follower) while keeping yourself away from Him.

According to 2 Peter 3:18, what challenge did Peter give to the believers?

According to 2 Thessalonians 1:3, how had the church in Thessalonica met that challenge?

And how does the “shield of faith” help you to grow in faith? How is faith connected with the

rest of the “armor of God” as described in Ephesians 6:10–18 (KJV)?

The goal of the Christian is to grow strong in faith. This is a lifelong practice. We experience the blessing of growth and “stand firm in the faith” (1 Corinthians 16:13, NIV). At the same time, we may wonder why others are still “weak” (Romans 14:1, NIV). But we often forget that it also has taken most of us some time before we became as strong as we are today in Christ. But no matter how we feel, we should never feel proud or judge others (1 Corinthians 10:12). God is the One who makes every seed of faith grow. He also should be given credit for any growth that takes place in our spiritual lives.



God is the One who makes every seed of faith grow.

Are there friends you have, places you visit, or certain kinds of TV shows you watch that have a negative influence on your faith? If

so, how willing are you to give them up? The answer depends on how important your faith really is to you.

THURSDAY—APRIL 9

FAITH IN A PERSON (1 Timothy 4:16)

Doctrines (church beliefs) are important. When we say that we believe in God, we will want to know more about God. It is natural to want to give a careful explanation of what we believe about our Creator (Jesus) and His dealings with us. We want to be sure that we know His will. And we believe that the doctrines of our church are true. But our faith does not depend on beliefs alone but on Jesus. The doctrines are not the goal of our religious beliefs. But the doctrines help us better understand Jesus and what He has done for us.

What does the New Testament tell us in 1 Timothy 4:16 and Titus 2:1 about the importance of sound (strong) doctrine?

Sound doctrine is very important. But doctrine and theology¹⁰ remain lifeless and can save no one unless they are put into practice. One even can be a theologian¹¹ without being a believer. Faith is not just saying you believe that what the Bible says is

true. Instead, faith is trust in the Person of these doctrines.

According to John 3:36 and John 6:35, how is salvation in this life and the life beyond connected with faith in Jesus as Savior?

According to Matthew 16:13–19, what is the fundamental belief on which the church is built?

The verses in Matthew 16 often have been used as proof that Peter should be thought of as the founder of the Christian church. But this idea finds no support from the Bible. Christ is the Stone on which the church is built. (Read 1 Peter 2:4–8.) This Stone means an unshakable belief that Jesus, the Son of God, is our Savior. This belief makes the church what it is, not a human organization¹² but the church of God.

Someone says, “I believe in Jesus, and I believe in the teachings. But sometimes I cannot help struggling with doubt.” What would you say to that person? What help and advice could you give to him or her?

FRIDAY—APRIL 10

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “Peter exhorts [encourages] his brethren to ‘grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our

10. theology—the study of God and religion.

11. theologian—a person who studies God and religion.

12. organization—the leaders who oversee the members and business of a large group of people, such as a worldwide church.

Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.' 2 Peter 3:18. When the people of God are growing in grace, they will be always getting a clearer understanding of His Word. They will find new light and beauty in its holy truths. This has been true throughout the history of the church. And it will continue to the end. . . .

"By faith we may look to eternity and lay hold of God's promise for a growth of knowledge and understanding. When the human mind is united [joined] with the mind of God, every power of the soul is being joined with the Source of light. We may rejoice in the fact that what has puzzled us in the leadings of God will then be clear to us."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, pages 112, 113.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

❶ Hebrews 11 gives a list of heroes of faith. Notice how weak the actions of just about every one of them seemed. What encouragement can you get from their mistakes and sins when you yourself are tempted to give up faith because of your own sins and weaknesses?

❷ Many of us have at some time or another gone through a crisis (hard time) of faith and have come out of

this experience renewed. If this has happened to you, how did you pull through the crisis? What can you do when it appears that members of your family or local church members are going through struggles? What did you learn from your own experience that could help them?

❸ What are the challenges to your faith? Are they mental challenges? For example, in the area of science versus religion? Or are they challenges related to the environment (area) in which you live and work or where you find your recreation? Or possibly in the area of relationships? Why is it important to meet these challenges head-on?

❹ You do not need faith to believe in what you can prove. You need faith to believe in what you cannot prove. Why is it important to understand that we have proof for our beliefs, but there will be things we just do not understand?

SUMMARY: Faith is experience. It has to do with being sure that God is with us. And it has to do with trust. The Bible awakens and strengthens our faith and belief in God. But faith is not just belief. It is a principle that guides how we live our lives before God and others.