

Mar 1/26 - The Way of Faith
Hebrews 11:1-3, 11:8-12, 11:32-12:2
Gospel: Matthew 16:21-28

Small Group Questions with Leader Guide

1. What immediately comes to mind when you hear the words “faith” or “belief”?

This is more of an icebreaker to get your group thinking about how they think and feel about the idea of faith. Encourage them to share their honest first impressions. We're not looking for the “correct” answer here, but honest personal reflection.

2. Hebrews 11:1 defines faith as “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” How does this definition challenge or deepen your understanding of faith? In what way(s) is hope related to conviction?

In the sermon, we considered how faith is certainty about God's promised future that transforms the present. This keeps us in a biblical tension between hope, which is oriented towards God's promised future of the fully manifest new creation, and conviction, which is a present assurance of the beginning (or “inauguration”) of the new creation in Jesus.

This question is meant to help your group discuss and explore this tension as it relates to their own faith. Are there ways in which an overemphasis on the future has brought an escapist mentality, neglecting the reality of God's inbreaking kingdom in the present? Are there ways in which an overemphasis on the present has robbed us of the awareness of God's promised future (the ultimate hope of Jesus' return, cosmic resurrection, judgement and justice carried out, and the heavenly city come to earth (Revelation 21:1-2))?

3. Read Hebrews 11:8-19. How does the passage talk about the hope to which the people of God looked forward?

The preacher names the hope. God's people were looking forward to a “better country” and a “city with foundations.” This language points to a hope that is this-worldly, not merely an escape from the world.

Consider Abraham and Sarah's journey of faith. Where do you see the seeds of resurrection hope in their story? How does their story point to the fulfillment of their hope (and our hope) in Jesus?

The preacher to the Hebrews drops some seeds of resurrection hope in Abraham and Sarah's story by emphasizing that Abraham was "as good as dead" (11:12) when it came to trusting in God's promise to give them offspring. In the episode about the sacrifice of Isaac (11:17-19), the preacher claims that Abraham's trusting obedience in God was rooted in a conviction that God can raise the dead.

We see Jesus and his resurrection power "seeded" all over these stories of faith. They bear witness to God's plan to fulfill his promise to bless the world ultimately and finally through Jesus, Abraham's offspring (Matthew 1:1-16)

- 4. The faith that is commended in Hebrews and the New Testament is a faith that trusts God and obeys, even when common sense and sight point to the seeming foolishness and riskiness of the endeavor. What do you find challenging or costly about obeying God when you don't understand or when you don't fully see the place God is leading you to? How does Jesus' own suffering and perseverance shape our understanding of faithful endurance?**

Explore the real challenges of living by faith in a world where we see so much suffering, curse, chaos, persecution, and injustice. The preacher lays out an array of outcomes of faith in 11:32-38. Some were triumphs, others were hardships. Arguably, even the triumphs came through significant perseverance and cost to those involved. Since faith is a function of relationship with a personal God - Jesus and through Jesus with the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit - help your group consider how our faith can grow and good can come through the hardship we endure as we abide in Christ. (Philippians 3:10-11 might be helpful here).

- 5. Faith is not vague optimism or wishful thinking that things will somehow work out in the end. Rather, faith is confidence in a promised resurrection of cosmic proportions. Through Jesus' resurrection, God's promised future has already begun.**

How does believing in the resurrection of Jesus empower bold and hopeful faith rather than passive waiting? How does the resurrection of Jesus change the way we make decisions, pursue justice, or endure hardship?

Help your group consider how faith sends us into the world (not to escape the world) with hope and empowers cross-shaped, self-giving, loving mission.

What are some ways the resurrection of Jesus helps us see signs of God's inbreaking Kingdom in the present?

While faith gives us confidence in the midst of unseen realities, faith also helps us to see, name, and give thanks for the ways God is at work. Help your group discuss the ways you are seeing glimpses of hope, resurrection, and God's inbreaking kingdom in your lives and in the world.

6. Consider Hebrews 12:2 where Jesus is called the "pioneer and perfecter of faith."

In what ways is Jesus more than merely a model or example of faith for us? How does fixing our eyes on Jesus help us grow in our faith in the context of daily life? What are some practices that help us fix our eyes on Jesus? Are there any practices that have been mentioned that you might want to implement into your own life-rhythm?

Help your group discuss Jesus' identity and work in 12:2 and from previous passages we've covered in Hebrews (Son of God [1:1-2], greater than angels [1:6], fully human [2:14], the great high priest [2:17], the perfect sacrifice [10:10], the mediator of a new covenant [chps. 8-9], the exalted and reigning Lord [1:3, 13:8]). Jesus isn't just one more example in a long list of examples. He is the source and author of our faith, and he is the perfecter and finisher of our faith. Help your group understand that faith, while an active response on our part, is at the same time the work of Christ in us by the Holy Spirit. This points us to divine resources that far exceed our own and cast our faith on Jesus and his power at work in us.

Closing Prayer

Close in a time of prayer focused on:

- Giving thanks for Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, whose power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine.
- Bringing petitions for areas of struggle where trusting-obedience is difficult or where endurance may be needed.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to help you fix your eyes on Jesus and grow your faith in him in the days to come.