

## Hebrews 11:4-7 The Necessity of Faith

### Introduction

In the *Jungle Book*, Baloo the bear sings about the *bare necessities* of life. You remember the song. “Look for the bare necessities, the simple bare necessities...” For Baloo, the bare necessities are honey and prickly pear. With all due respect to Baloo, for most of earth’s life forms there’s something even more necessary. It’s called oxygen. When it comes to the bare necessities of life, oxygen is it. You can survive without the carbon and nitrogen in food for weeks. You can go days without taking in water. But just a few minutes without oxygen can end your life. From a physical perspective, oxygen is a bare necessity of life.

Hebrews chapter 11:4-7 reminds us there’s another bare necessity of life. The necessity of faith. We are told straight-up in verse 6, “without faith it is impossible to please him.” **Faith is necessary to please God.** Faith is like oxygen, it’s a bare necessity of life. Without faith you cannot please God. And faith that pleases God also has a proper object. The author of Hebrews is all about Jesus. He tells us that God has spoken and acted decisively in his Son Jesus. Only through Jesus are our sins completely forgiven. Only through Jesus are our consciences perfectly cleansed. Only through Jesus can we draw near to God. So, when we talk about faith, we’re talking about faith in Jesus.

Hebrews was written to encourage its first readers to keep Jesus as the object of their faith. For these Jewish Christians everything is going wrong. And so, they were tempted to quit Jesus and go back to their old ways. But the author tells them to stand firm because their faith is in exactly the right place. And now, in Hebrews 11, the author reminds his readers that God’s people have always had to exercise faith in the face of difficulty and doubt. That’s the essence of faith: to be confident of the things we cannot now see. And so, in our passage, the writer reminds his first readers, and us, that **faith is necessary to please God.** He doesn’t just tell us, he gives three *examples* that show **faith is necessary to please God.** First, Abel’s example shows us **faith is necessary for pleasing worship of God.** Second, Enoch’s example shows us **faith is necessary for a pleasing walk with God.** Third, Noah’s example shows us **faith is necessary for a pleasing witness for God.**

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1. **Faith is necessary for pleasing worship of God.**

By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks. (v.4)

For the first example, the author of Hebrews looks back to Genesis 4 and the story of Cain and Abel. These boys are born into a new world – a newly fallen world. In Genesis we read:

...Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. (vv. 3-5a)

In the Genesis account we're simply told that "the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard." Notice that God had regard for *Abel*...and his offering. In that order. This means there was something about Abel – the person – that was first pleasing to God before the act of worship. The writer of Hebrews tells us it's faith. Abel *believed* God was of greatest value and worth. That's what the word "worship" means – to "assign worth." Since Abel already had what was of greatest value, he gladly gave God the best of his flocks. Both men perform acts of worship but only Abel's act of worship flows out of a heart of worship. So, we see that **faith is necessary for pleasing worship**. We tend to look at outward appearances. But God looks on the heart.

Because of Abel's faith in God, he is commended by God as righteous. The author of Hebrews ties Abel's example back to the OT quotation from Hebrews 10:38: "But my righteous one will live by faith." In the midst of difficulty and doubt, the author encourages his first readers of the necessity of faith. Abel is a great example of living by faith. And through his faith God is pleased with his worship. It's the same for us. We are to believe that Jesus is of greatest value and worth. This is the faith that is necessary for pleasing worship.

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But in real life we are tempted to believe we can find ultimate value and worth in other things. We're tempted to worship other things. One psychologist writes, "We live in a society that worships success, celebrity, and money." Those are just a few of the things we are tempted to believe will provide meaning and happiness. But God's people have always had to exercise faith in the face of temptation, difficulties and doubt. And the writer of Hebrews calls us to stand firm in our faith in Jesus because our faith is in exactly the right place.

Over the first 10 chapters, the author of Hebrews multiplies reasons to worship Jesus. He took on flesh to deliver us from death. He is a high priest who can sympathize with our weaknesses. He is a permanent high priest who offered up himself for our sins once for all. He is the mediator of a new covenant in which God becomes ours and we his. Recently, I heard a smart guy give another reason to worship Jesus. "Pretty much anything else you worship will eat you alive. If you worship money and things, if they are where you tap real meaning in life, then you will never have enough, never feel you have enough. It's the truth. Worship your body and beauty and sexual allure and you will always feel ugly. And when time and age start showing, you will die a million deaths before they finally grieve you... Worship power, you will end up feeling weak and afraid, and you will need ever more power over others to numb you to your own fear. Worship your intellect, being seen as smart, you will end up feeling stupid, a fraud, always on the verge of being found out."

Even though Abel was murdered, his faith still speaks to us this morning. God's people have always had to exercise faith in the face of difficulty and doubt. So, stand firm in your faith in Jesus. Faith in Jesus is necessary for pleasing worship of God. And faith in Jesus is the only safe place for your soul. Everything else will eat you alive.

Abel's example shows us that faith is necessary for pleasing worship of God. Next, Enoch's example shows us that faith is necessary for a pleasing walk with God.

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**2. Faith is necessary for a pleasing walk with God.**

By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God. (v.5)

Enoch's story is found in Genesis 5. It's all of four verses. In Genesis 5 we're confronted with the reality of physical death. The familiar refrain is, "and he died...and he died." One after another. Enoch is the noticeable exception.

According to Genesis Enoch was 65 years old when his son, Methuselah, was born. Then we read,

Enoch walked with God after he fathered Methuselah 300 years. Thus all the days of Enoch were 365 years. Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him. (5:22-24)

Hebrews interprets Enoch's story for us. The author of Hebrews emphasizes the fact that Enoch didn't die. (He mentions it five times in verse 5.) But he also emphasizes the reason Enoch didn't die. His faith was pleasing to God. The Hebrew metaphor of "walking with God" means "pleased God." So, we conclude that **faith is necessary for a pleasing walk with God.**

Others have pointed out that the metaphor of walking reveals how Enoch pleased God. First, walking together requires mutual *desire*. Two persons must both want to walk together. Think of a husband and wife who join hands as they begin to walk together. By faith Enoch grasped God's hand. Second, walking together requires a mutual *destination*. If a husband wants to walk to Cabella's and a wife to Nordstrom's it's not going to work. Walking together requires a mutual destination. By faith Enoch was heading in God's direction toward God's destination. Third, walking together requires a mutual *pace*. Husband and wife must keep in step with each other. By faith Enoch was in step with God. Day after day, Enoch walked with God. For 300 years! Kent Hughes observes the result: "When two walk toward the same place on the same path at the same pace for 300 years, they experience sweet fellowship or communion."

In case we missed it, the author underscores the necessity of faith in verse 6: "And without faith it is impossible to please him..." Faith is necessary to please

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God. The author continues, “for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.” Enoch drew near to God because he was convinced the unseen God exists and the unseen God is good. That’s the only way anyone will draw near to God and walk with God.

Enoch’s example should encourage us. And yet we have even more evidence that the unseen God exists and the unseen God is good. For one, the unseen God has taken on flesh and become visible. At the beginning of Hebrews, the writer says that Jesus is “the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature.” Elsewhere Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.” The amazing life, death, and resurrection of Jesus is what we would expect if the invisible God has taken on flesh and entered into human history. So, in Jesus, we can be confident God exists. And because of Jesus, we can be confident God is good. As one author put it: “God sent his Son, he condemned his Son, and he abandoned his Son on the cross so that you can come close.” The Father’s willingness to send his Son and the Son’s willingness to lay down his life for us provide tangible evidence that God is good. In Jesus we have evidence that the unseen God exists and that he is good.

But it requires a response of faith. Faith is necessary for a pleasing walk with God. The kind of faith that pleases God is more than “I believe the facts about Jesus.” Faith that pleases God is “I trust in Jesus.” It’s like the difference between saying we believe a chair will hold us up as we look at it versus showing that we believe the chair will hold us up by sitting in it. The action of sitting in the chair is an expression of faith.

Faith is the necessary first step for a pleasing walk with God. And faith is necessary for an ongoing walk with God. Faith is the oxygen of the Christian life. First and foremost, you walk with God by believing that, in Jesus, he loves you.

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And you keep believing it. This isn't as easy as it sounds. I confess I still struggle to really believe God's love for me in Christ. I found some help from the puritan John Owen. Owen said this: "The greatest sorrow and burden you can lay on the Father, the greatest unkindness you can do to him, is not believing in his love." Think about that. If you are a Christian, the greatest burden you can lay on your Father is not to believe that he loves you. So, Christian, believe it! Because faith is necessary for a pleasing walk with God.

We've seen two examples that show **faith is necessary to please God**. In Abel, we see that **faith is necessary for pleasing worship**. In Enoch, we see that **faith is necessary for a pleasing walk**. Finally, in Noah's example, we see that **faith is necessary for a pleasing witness**.

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**3. Faith is necessary for a pleasing witness to God.**

It's easy to be discouraged by our cultural context. It's a world gone mad in so many ways. Noah's world was worse. Here's how it was described: **"The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."** It's so bad that God says, "Enough!" and promises judgment. Only Noah found favor in God's eyes. The author of Hebrews summarizes Noah's story in verse 7:

**By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. (v.7)**

God warns Noah about a future event "as yet unseen": a catastrophic flood. God promises to bring judgment by water. Implied in God's warning and instructions are a second thing "as yet unseen": a gigantic boat. Think about it. Noah was a farmer. Likely, the only flood he had seen was a puddle from an occasional thunderstorm. And he may have never seen a boat. But Noah hears God's Word and responds in 'reverent fear.' Meaning he paid close and reverent attention to God. He responds in faith. He trusts in God's Word. He was confident of things not yet seen.

And his faith results in action. Noah's faith in God's Word results in his construction of the ark. And Noah's building of the ark **bore witness** to the unseen God and his Word. For 120 years he worked on the ark. For all those years his life was a constant visual **witness**. So, we see that **faith is necessary for a pleasing witness**.

But he didn't just live a pleasing **witness**. The apostle Peter tells us that Noah was a "preacher of righteousness." By faith he witnessed with his words. I imagine Noah attracted a lot of attention building the ark. When people came he wasn't content with letting his actions witness, he also used his words. I visualize him up on the scaffolding preaching to any who would listen. No doubt, many thought he was crazy. But with his life and his words he witnessed

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to the coming judgment and called people to repentance and faith in God. Noah's witness was fueled by faith. Faith is the oxygen that fuels a pleasing witness.

Noah's example encourages us to pay close and reverent attention to God's Word. If we trust in God's Word, our lives will conform to his Word. Not perfectly. But by faith, more and more our lives will be a pleasing witness to God. And more and more we'll use our words as a pleasing witness to Jesus. Both are necessary.

I remember reading about a man who became a Christian during an evangelistic event. When the man told his boss about it, his employer responded: "That's great! I'm a Christian and have been praying for you for years!" But the new believer responded sadly, "Why didn't you ever tell me you were a Christian? You were the very reason I have not been interested in the gospel all these years." The boss was confused. He said, "How can that be? I have done my best to live the Christian life around you." "That's the point," explained the employee. "You lived such a model life without telling me it was Christ who made the difference, I convinced myself that if you could live such a good and happy life without Christ, then I could too."

A pleasing witness involves our life and our words. Both are necessary. And both flow from faith. Noah reminds us that God's people have always had to exercise faith in God's Word in the midst of a hostile culture. So, whose voice will we trust? God's voice or the voice of our culture? Here's the thing. Jesus probably won't call you to build a boat. But he does have things to say about how you treat your spouse, how you do your work, how you spend your money, how you practice your sexuality, how you treat your enemies, how you use your words, how you can be reconciled to God, gender, judgment, hell, and eternity. Faith has always been necessary for a pleasing witness. And it's necessary for us today.

We've seen three examples of faith. In Abel, we've seen faith is necessary for pleasing worship. In Enoch, we've seen that faith is necessary for a pleasing walk. In Noah, we've seen that faith is necessary for a pleasing witness. You



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might be thinking, OK, I get it. “The righteous shall live by faith.” I can’t earn God’s acceptance through my own efforts or achievements. Faith in Jesus is necessary to please God. But that’s just it. My faith in Jesus is weak. So, I don’t worship, walk, or witness the way I should. Listen to me. That’s exactly where the first readers were. Their faith was weary and weak. And the author of Hebrews directs them away from themselves and toward Jesus. It’s not the strength of your faith but the object of your faith that counts. So, look to Jesus. He’s a high priest who can sympathize with our weakness. He’s been tempted just like we are but without sin. So, draw near to Jesus so that you can receive mercy and find grace to help in your time of need. Tell him about your weak faith. Confess to him “I believe Jesus, help my unbelief.” That prayer is an act of faith. He sympathizes and is ready to provide the grace you need.

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**Conclusion**

“Without faith it is impossible to please God.” The author of Hebrews writes of the necessity of faith. Faith is necessary to please God. Faith is the oxygen of the Christian life. God’s people have always had to exercise faith in the face of difficulties and doubt. Faith is confidence in the things we cannot now see. It’s not just “I believe about” but “I trust in.” So, the writer of Hebrews encourages his first readers, and us, to stand firm in our faith in Jesus. He is the proper object of our faith. Faith in Jesus is necessary to please God. Faith in Jesus is necessary for pleasing worship, for a pleasing walk, and a pleasing witness. And if we feel weakness of our faith, we have a sympathetic high priest who is ready to help in our time of need.