

Lesson 1

Introduction - What is Christian Faith?

Perhaps the two most important themes emphasized in scripture are the *gift* of God's grace to man and the *response* of man's faith to God. God's grace is expressed to man in the *gift* of life, with its attendant blessings, and the *promise* of its continuance in another dimension of blessings, because of the work of Jesus Christ. Man's response of faith is expressed to God by acknowledging Him with worship, gratitude, and obedience. The biblical definition of faith by the writer of Hebrews highlights three aspects of its meaning:

"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see...By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible." (Hebrews 11:1-3)

God's interaction with man has always been based on faith which can only be exercised in circumstances that allow for doubt—such as God's invisibility, unanswered prayers and the presence of suffering and evil in the world. God's plan from the beginning was not to intrude in human affairs with some continuing series of spectacular interventions, but rather to provide mankind with *freedom* to choose; to provide an *environment* in which faith could be a choice and love could grow from a genuine heart, to respond to His incredible love. Faith becomes the most important concept to understand in our relationship with God, because without it we cannot *please* God and with it we can *overcome* the world, and be victorious in the struggles this life will bring (1Jn.5:4,5) and, ultimately, be triumphant over our own physical death.

Paul's encouragement to Timothy captures the essence of the "good news" to mankind: *"Jesus destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."* (2Tim.1:10). Paul affirms that Christians have the same *"victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."* (1Cor.15:56, 57).

But how is it possible to *develop* a relationship with someone we cannot physically see, hear, or touch? How is it possible to *"love with all the heart, soul, strength and mind"* such a Being? It is only possible because we are created *in His image!* And this affinity with God gives us a *spiritual nature* with the *ability to reason*, the *emotion* to love and the *capacity to worship*. The incarnation was the incredible gift of the tangible presence of God on earth in disguise--disguised as a man. The only way man could come to *know God* in a more intimate way was for Him to enter a body like ours and experience what we experience. Jesus entered a fleshly body to reveal God in a more intimate way, and, with this stunning disclosure, we learn more about the nature of God and His incredible love for us. This demonstration of love acts like a magnet to *"draw us to Him"* and Paul reminds us, *"He is not far from each one of us."* (Acts 17:27)

Faith in God has reached a new level of plausibility and attraction because of the work of Christ "in making known the Father." **Jesus' reaction** to human behavior is God's reaction. The pain of others touched him, obstinacy frustrated him, self-righteousness infuriated him, hypocrisy disgusted him; arrogance repulsed him; but simple faith thrilled him and humility pleased him. Through Christ we learn the *nature* of God so touched with **empathy**, over the sadness of Mary and Martha's loss of their brother that he **wept** with them; he showed **compassion** for those suffering from disabilities by healing them; he **forgave** those who put him to death, even the thief that died with him. His life was a dramatic demonstration of God's love for everyone. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life."(Jn.3:16) **The only way** to know God in a redemptive relationship is to know Christ in a personal relationship.

"Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ"(Jn.17:3)

Discuss Together

- * "Hebrews 11 says; "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see...
 - * Based on your faith in Christ, what are you hoping for and at the same time you are sure of?
 - * Based on your faith in Christ, what can you not see and at the same time you are sure of?

- * In John 14, Jesus said "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father."
 - * List the things you have seen in the life of Jesus that have increased your faith in God.

- * Share prayer requests with each other. Pray that your faith will grow.

Lesson 2 .Living by Faith is Seeing the Invisible

"He (Moses) persevered because he saw him who is invisible." (Heb.11:27)

Everything we see in life is temporary. We see the outward "wasting away" of our bodies; we witness the passing parade of things and people that are here for a short time and then gone. We see the *uncertainty* of life in diseases and accidents and the *certainty* of death, which hangs like a dark cloud over every living thing.

Paul was determined to not allow despair to overwhelm him, in the great struggles of his life. Even though *outwardly* his body was *wasting away*, he was being *renewed inwardly day by day*, as he "*Fixed (his) eyes, not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal*" (2Cor.4:16-18)

A life of faith does not look for *visible signs* to validate it; it believes the testimony and evidence God has provided to establish it. The philosophy of **materialism** is a belief system that limits reality to only what is *seen* and tangible, discounting any spiritual reality.

Naturalism is the view of the world that takes into account only natural elements and forces, excluding any supernatural causes for their existence. All phenomena in nature are covered by the laws of nature and any explanation other than *natural* is, therefore, without value. Man's big mistake is to accept *natural law* as something that is natural. Saying that something is natural is like saying it is expected, ordinary, commonplace, reasonable, and regular. The only thing natural about natural law is our pathetic ignorance of its wondrous complexity and the intelligence that made it possible!

When we are totally and continuously immersed in an environment, the wonder of it diminishes; awareness of that uniqueness fades, and it becomes, just natural, ordinary and commonplace. But, in reality, we are surrounded with and a part of the deepest and most spectacular mystery of all--the existence of existence!

The ancient Greeks believed that if you can't see it, it doesn't exist. If something is not observable, does that mean it is non-existent? Science has completely shattered that concept by the discovery of fields of energy and invisible waves of force that give dramatic evidence of their existence! Man has been able to harness this power by developing tools to utilize it, such as television, radar, computers, satellites, cell phones, etc. The brilliant poet, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* had this deep conviction:

"All I have seen teaches me to trust the Creator for all I have not seen."

We can live our life by only what we can see *physically* and experience *naturally* and miss another world completely--the world of the *metaphysical (Beyond the physical)*. We can focus our eyes only on the temporal things of this life and miss the vision of the eternal! We can spend our lives reaching for the *material* and ignoring the spiritual, which Jesus exposes as the greatest folly of life, by asking this sobering question:

"What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? (Mat. 16:26)

There is nothing in this world worth jeopardizing your soul to attain. *"The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever." (1Jn. 2:17)*

Job said: *"My heart has not been led by my eyes." (31:7)* Our heart is where we find God. *"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." (Jer. 29:13)*

Discuss Together

- * Think of an example of something that you can not see, but you know that it exists.

- * What "testimony and evidence" has God provided for us to increase our faith in Him?

- * Read the following scriptures and discuss this question; what things increase our faith
 - o 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

 - o Psalm 19:1-6

 - o Romans 1:18-21

 - o Ephesians 1:18

- * Pray for God to open the eyes of your heart and increase your faith.

Lesson 3

Living by Faith is Responding to a Person

Christian faith is in a **Person**, not some *doctrinal* system. One can be mistaken in his understanding of doctrine and be right in his relationship with Christ. Faith is devotion and *commitment* to Jesus Christ, not *loyalty* to any doctrinal system.

Doctrines can be theories and opinions about facts rather than facts themselves. The gospel is a message of **facts** about a Person--his death, burial, and resurrection--not theories or speculation!

Faith is a commitment of the heart which gives new **direction** to life; it is "Obedience that comes from faith" (1:5), which is in contrast to the obedience that comes from law! One is internal; the other external. The obedience of faith is a *response of the heart*. (10:9,10) The new covenant would be *written on the tablet of the heart*.

The pious gestures of an external religion have little or no value in God's eyes. Jesus denounced the hypocrisy of people who "*honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.*" (Mat. 15:8)

Our focus can be easily diverted and our attention misdirected toward the trivial rather than the tremendous, the things that really matter in the eyes of God. "*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith...*" (Heb. 12:2)

We can define "righteousness" as the heart's resolve to follow the will of God, whose will it is to follow His Son, not a manmade doctrine!

Living by faith is living a victorious life

By Faith we overcome the world. "*This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.*" (1Jn. 5:4). This journey of life involves challenges, struggles, and temptations. We have a sinful nature that can be overwhelming at times. We can be easily deceived; unfairly treated; abused and berated. We can make the choice to be mad or sad; better or bitter when the circumstances of life beat us down.

But when the "*slings and arrows of outrageous fortune*" strike, Paul writes that we can *stand* and not fall "*when the day of evil comes*" because we can put on *God's armor!* (Eph. 6:10-18). This spiritual armor consists of *truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, the word of God and the presence of God's Spirit*. This is an impregnable defense system "*with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one*" and stand victorious because we have access to the invincible power of God!

Christ's mission statement is found in John 10:10: "*My purpose is to give life in all its fullness.* We can live our life with *emptiness* and *voids* that could, instead, be filled with *purpose* and joy. We can experience the peace that *enriches* life, and express behavior that can be a *blessing* to others. Jesus' stated purpose in his coming is to *enrich, enhance, deepen* and give *meaning* and *hope* to your life.

The burden of guilt and sin can be removed; the fear of death replaced with hope of a future life, with the dimension of eternity, instead of a freefall into despair, pessimism and nothingness.

Living by faith is dying with hope and living victoriously!

Discuss Together

- * Share how Jesus has changed your heart.

- * Read Hebrews 12:2 and discuss what it means to “fix your eyes on Jesus”.

- * Read the following scriptures and discuss this question; what is a victorious life in Jesus?
 - o Galatians 5:19-25

 - o Ephesians 6:10-20

- * Pray for a deeper love for Jesus and increased faith in Him.

Lesson 4 - Faith is Living with Certainty that Realities Unseen are Real

Faith is the conviction that things we have never seen exist. Jesus said to Thomas: "Because you have seen me you have believed, blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." (Jn.20:29) Just because something is *non-observable* does not mean it is *non-existent*. Science, by definition, is limited to the *observable, measurable, and repeatable*. This is called *empirical evidence*. When we limit physical reality to only what we can experience with our five senses, we are ignoring a vast amount of metaphysical realities.

The laws of physics God designed for physical life are confined to our three dimensions of space: *length, width, and height* and Einstein added a fourth, the *linier progression of time*. We live within these dimensions and our dimensional realm never changes. This limits our capacity to what our *five senses* can comprehend, visualize or experience.

Modern-day scientists now affirm the discovery of *11 dimensions* of space and time. Some rank this as one of the great scientific achievements of the 20th century. These newly proven extra dimensions of reality help explain mysterious, inexplicable phenomenon in the universe and offer new insights into God's inscrutable power as well as expand the powers of man's imagination.

One difficulty with faith lies in our inability to *visualize* phenomena in a realm beyond our experience...because our experience is limited to a *four-dimensional realm*. We struggle to force-fit the truth of biblical revelation into our *four-dimensional framework*, and we cannot do so. The *new creation God will bring about* will be in dimensions we don't and can't understand; it is easy to dismiss them as impossible; it is better to trust Him who can make all things possible.

When the universe's time line ends, God will create everything new; He will place our spirits in *indestructible* bodies adaptable for existence in dimensions beyond the four we now have, no longer bound by the *laws and limits* of earthly existence. **God's new creation** will be completely different. "*Physical*" will take on a new meaning. All the forces and laws of physics and biology, as we now know them, will be changed. The new earth will have entirely new properties. We learn this from the last book in the Bible.

We can only visualize or imagine reality (perceptions) in the dimensions we have experienced. We cannot conceive of the *infinite with finite minds*; we cannot comprehend an end to *space* nor space without end; we cannot logically imagine a *Being* that had no *beginning*, nor an *eternity* that has no end. God is not confined to such a 4-dimensional box. He transcends all dimensions and is not limited by any boundaries of space and time. God is outside His creation just as an author is outside the novel he is writing. God is the Author of all things and He is writing the script! He knows the end from the beginning; He is the *Alpha and the Omega!* (*The Beginning and the End*)

"He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." (Rev.21:5)

Discuss Together

- * How would you answer a friend who asked you; "Why do you believe in God since we can't see him?"

- * It's good to anticipate the experience of heaven, it fills us with hope for the future and helps us through the struggles of today. What are some things you are looking forward to about the experience of heaven?

- * Read the following scriptures and discuss what God is preparing for us in heaven.
 - o Revelation 21:1-27

 - o Revelation 22:1-5

- * Pray for God to help you set your mind on things above and not to be rooted too deeply in temporary things.

Lesson 5

Living by Faith is Living with Assurance

A life of faith puts salvation within the *reach* of everyone. We do not have to attain some impossible plateau of perfection; we don't have to depend on our own goodness, but only on God's grace. Our hope is not based on our *merit* but on His *mercy*; it is not about our *performance*, it is about *Christ's perfection and our identity with him!*

Everything connected to our relationship to God is predicated on faith. The book of Romans deals with the "*righteousness*" now revealed by God, and in it Paul refers to *faith* 35 times. The very heart of the Gospel is the truth that *justification* before God is not an *absence of sin*; rather it is the *presence of His righteousness*. "*God made him who had no sin to become sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*" (2Cor.5:21) God has made possible a wondrous exchange for mankind: Christ takes our sins upon himself and suffers the penalty of death and gives to us his righteousness, providing us with a new standing and acceptance before God--*reconciled!*

Faith is the *response* that provides the *gift* of God's *righteousness*. It does not mean you become a *righteous* person; rather, it is a **declaration** of being righteous because of your faith in Christ and identity with him. This gives us assurance because it is based on our *relationship to him* not on our *performance* before him.

Faith becomes a reasonable response because God has provided the *testimony* and *evidence* to establish it, making it reasonable. The blessings of faith are *available* to everyone and within the grasp of anyone who *reaches* out to him because "*he is not far from each one of us.*" (Acts 17:27) And, also, the blessings of faith are based on God's *grace* and *mercy* not on our goodness or merit. This is freely available to us because of the initiative of divine grace!

The invitation is offered: "*Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.*" (Rev.22:17)

This means all who are thirsty are invited to the *great banquet* of God's salvation; we can be a part of the *fellowship* of His Spirit; we can be *citizens* of His Kingdom of righteousness; we can receive a fabulous inheritance of unimaginable joys in a new dimension of life, surrounded with ones we love, where tears will never fall, where death never intrudes and joy never ends.

The faithful believe it will happen because we believe the words of Him who sits on the throne of glory when He commanded John to write:

"*These words are trustworthy and true.*" (Rev.21:5)

Discuss Together

- * We can depend on our own performance OR Christ's perfection. Discuss how these 2 perspectives make a difference in our lives.

- * How much assurance have you experienced about where you will spend eternity?

- * Read the following scriptures and discuss God's assurance that he offers to us.
 - o 2 Corinthians 5:21

 - o 1 John 5:1-15

- * Pray for God to increase your depended on Him and to decrease your dependence on yourself.

Lesson 6 - Living by Faith is Living with Confidence that Hope will be Realized

"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for..." The principle of faith provides one with *assurance* that the hope offered by faith will be obtained in reality. (*Heb. 11:1-3*)

Faith is the assurance of receiving what God has promised. Peter describes our hope as being "a *living hope*". (*1Pet. 1:3*) It is a living hope because the One who made it possible is alive!

A Buddhist in Africa who was converted to Christianity was asked why he changed religions. His reply: "*If you were walking along and came to a fork in the road and two men were there and one was dead and the other was alive, which man's direction would you follow?*"

Our choices in life should reflect our *hopes*, not our fears. Our hopes should shape our future, not our hurts, not our doubts!

Martin Luther King Jr., once said: "*Hope is a vitality that keeps us moving; it is a quality that helps us go on in spite of it all*". God gave us the capacity for hope because that is what He wants us to have! *Norman Cousins* emphasized its importance with the words: "*Hope provides us with a sense of destination and the energy to get started*". Hope is a great motivator. Paul thanked God for the church in *Thessalonica*, remembering their "*work produced by faith, their labor produced by love and their endurance inspired by hope in our Lord, Jesus Christ*." (*1:3*)

Hope is an anchor for the soul. (*Heb. 6:19*) Paul refers to God as "*the God of hope*" (*Rom. 15:13*). The hope a Christian has comes from God. And Paul adds "*hope does not disappoint us*" (*5:5*) because it is based on five vital truths:

- (1) God's love (*Jn. 3:16*)
- (2) God's faithfulness (*Heb. 10:23*)
- (3) God's oath (*Heb. 6:17*)
- (4) God's promise (*Heb. 6:18*)
- (5) God's guarantee in Jesus Christ (*Heb. 7:22*)

The writer of Hebrews focuses on God's assurances by writing:

"Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath." (*Heb. 6:17*)

Then he adds: "*God did this so that, by two unchangeable things (the promise and the oath) in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged.*" (*Heb. 6:18*)

And, to add further assurance, Jesus is God's guarantee of it someday being realized.

"Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantee..." (*7:22*)

Lesson 7

Faith is Accepting the Best Explanation

"By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible." (Heb.11:3) Perhaps a better word for this expression of faith would be "explanation" instead of "understanding." *By faith we accept the explanation...*"

It is beyond us to *understand*, but *faith* provides us with the *best* and only *reasonable* explanation for the *reality of this reality!* The greatest of all mysteries is the *existence of existence!* A supernatural reality requires a supernatural Cause! Plato, an ancient philosopher, said of Socrates that he "*followed the evidence wherever it leads.*" Intellectual honesty demands it.

There have been two stunning discoveries of the 20th century:

(1) **The universe had a beginning.** The phrase "*In the beginning*" means in the beginning of time when the celestial clocks were set; when heavenly bodies began the process of measuring time. *At sometime, somewhere the processes of creation were begun. The stellar bodies were ignited and the vast pageant of the universe was born.* Because of the laws of dissipating energy, science has learned the universe has not existed forever; it is not eternal; it began at a precise point.

In the beginning there was an explosion, explained Nobel Prize--winning physicist *Steven Weinberg*, in his book, *The First Three Minutes*. The universe, he said, was filled with light and in three minutes 98% of all the matter there is or ever will be was produced. Bill Bryson added: "*And it was all done in about the time it takes to make a sandwich.*" What was troubling to the scientific community was the fact that a universe with a beginning *necessitates a cause outside the realm of physics; a Creator...some transcendent cause.*

(2) **Biology has a language.** The first event had to have a *First Cause* (a transcendent cause). The second event, the discovery of *Deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA)*, had to have an *intelligent source* because it involves a voluminous amount of *information* to form biological systems and this can only come from an intelligent source!

Hailed as the most important scientific accomplishment of the 20th century was the realization that **DNA** actually stores information--the detailed instructions for assembling protein--the building blocks of biology--in the form of a four character code. The discovery of DNA in 1953, unlocked the "*language of life*" where the genetic information is stored necessary to create all the proteins out of which all biological systems are built. Biology professor Dean Kenyon, observed: "*Nothing short of intelligence could have created this intricate cellular apparatus. This new realm of molecular genetics is where we see the most compelling evidence of design on the earth.*"

We now understand that DNA is an information-bearing molecule. The human genome is written in a chemical alphabet consisting of just four letters; it is over 3 billion letters long and carries the genetic code. It is, in that sense, the longest "word" ever discovered. The point being that when we see anything that involves language-like information, we postulate the involvement of a mind--the mind of God!

We have only one of two choices in our understanding: Either '*in the beginning were particles.*' Or "*in the beginning was the Word.*" If we begin with particles, the history of

the universe is the accidental rearrangement of particles into greater and greater complexity until they reach the high level of intelligent life. But if we begin with the *Mind of God*, then we have a rational explanation for the existence of *finite* minds, for *conscious* life, and the whole *biological* world. This makes sense. Non-sense is the belief that *unguided matter* could just accidentally organize itself into such complexity as we experience today! Evolutionist would have us believe that unguided, accidental processes could somehow evolve from *lifeless* matter into *biological* tissue and then make the transition from the *water* of biological tissue into the *wine* of consciousness with the ability of self contemplation! This would be like all the ingredients in a cake accidentally coming together, in just the right amount, making itself, with the added ability to multiply itself endlessly. To believe this could happen to a cake is absurd, and is the same for an accidental universe!

The Christian lives his life by faith not by sight (2Cor.5:7). He lives by trust not understanding.

If there is no God then nothing really matters. But if there is a God then nothing else really matters!

Discuss Together

- * The bible states “In the beginning God created”; what other explanations or theories have you heard about how the universe and people came to be?

- * How does the idea of “design” or “complexity” in creation impact your faith in God?

- * Read the following scriptures and discuss design in creation by God.
 - o Romans 1:18-21

 - o Psalm 139:13-16

- * Pray for God to open your eyes to the amazing beauty of his creation.

Lesson 8 - Living by Faith is Loving God with our Mind

Loving God with our mind (Mat.22:37) is *loving* God enough to *ponder* His creation; to *listen* to its sounds; to *see* His works of power; to think, to reason, to observe. God is worthy of our highest intellectual effort! We need to cultivate the **gift of noticing**; of stimulating our minds by **thinking**; and of challenging our **doubts with reasoning**! Before the 19th century, the term "*natural philosophy*" was used to describe what we now call "*science*". This expression simply means the "*love of wisdom about nature*". On the doorway of the famous Cavendish Physics Laboratory in Cambridge, England, Sir James Clerk Maxwell had the words of Psalm 111 carved above the door: "*Great are the works of the Lord; they are pondered by all who delight in them.*" (111:2)

Gerald Schroeder, a brilliant scientist and theologian, wrote a book he called THE HIDDEN FACE OF GOD. In it he pointed out that we encounter the *hidden face of God* when we behold the wonders of His creation. *Wisdom and information is the link between the metaphysical Creator and the physical creation. It is the hidden face of God!* The *greatest insight* of modern science has been that everything in creation is laden with *information*, obeying certain laws that are uniform; consistent and universal, and not some random, accidental self-assemblage of particles.

The 20th century marked the beginning of stunning discoveries that would forever change the world of science. The two most important were:

(1) *The universe had a beginning and (2) biology has a language!*

Molecular biology revealed the hidden language of life, now known as DNA. The "D" stands for "*Deo*", Latin for '*God*', because the DNA molecule performs a God-like function because it is an *information-bearing molecule* in biological growth. The English language has 26 letters, from which about one-half million words are formed. Computers have a two letter alphabet, 1's and 0's, which, with their various combinations, provide everything they produce. The language of life has a four letter chemical alphabet which spells out the genetic code of every living thing. It is over 3 billion letters long and carries the genetic code for life. It is, in that sense, the longest '*word*' ever discovered. We must assume that anything that involves language-like information has to be the product of a Mind! It is the elaborate blueprint for building every cell in every species in every living thing on earth! *Science has discovered that the essence of all life is the storage, organization, and processing of information!*

Chemistry has revealed a level of information embedded in complex molecules; *information and wisdom* are the fundamental *building blocks* of all creation!

Astronomers have learned there are an infinite number of conditions vital to the existence of life on this planet. *Our life-support is the Solar system--with everything moving at certain velocities, all maintaining certain orbits, at certain speeds, at certain distances, within certain limits of force; with careful ratios of balance, precision and detail beyond comprehension.* The odds of having all of these variables occurring at the same time and place by accident are a *statistical absurdity!*

The conversion of one of the world's most influential atheist, **Antony Flew**, said his atheism has now turned to belief. He cites two powerful facts that influenced his

thinking: (1) The discovery of DNA molecule and (2) The progress of science which was powerfully expressed in a book, written by Roy A. Varghese: "*The Wonder of the World, A journey from modern science to the mind of God.*" The book's theme: *The world reflects the attributes and mind of God. The wonder of the world is a window through which we can and do see God.*

Believing when there is no evidence is what is usually called *blind faith*. God has illuminated the world with the light of His presence which we can see clearly when we open the eyes of our heart.

All scripture is testimony; all creation is evidence; all is provided by God so that all mankind can be brought to faith, the all-important "work of God" and the all-important response of man.

Hugh Ross, a distinguished scientist, said: "*There has never been a time in history when the hard evidence of science was more confirmatory of belief in God than today.*"

Discuss Together

- * Three habits are important in order to love God with our minds: noticing creation, thinking deeply about God and his word and reasoning with our doubts. Of these three habits, which would you like to improve in your life?

- * Name some scientific truths that increase your faith in God.

- * Read the following scripture and discuss the meaning of the phrase "renewal of your mind".
 - o Romans 12:1-2

- * Pray that God would help you to notice, think and reason seriously about him and his kingdom.

Lesson 9

Faith is Living by Trust, not Understanding

We do not understand the evil, the suffering, and the misery that can come into lives in this world. If God is all-loving and all-powerful, why does He allow such evil? Why does He tolerate the heinous atrocities committed by mankind? God gives a partial answer when asked by the prophet, *Habakkuk*, about all the *injustice, destruction, violence, strife and conflict* his eyes could see in this world. He cries out for help, and accuses God of not listening! He sees justice perverted; the righteous oppressed; the law paralyzed; wickedness abounding and he screams at God:

"Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong? Why do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?" (1:3,13) Why? Why? Why? Why?

Habakkuk argues with God over his ways that appear to him incomprehensible, if not unjust. He was shocked by the wickedness, strife and oppression that were rampant in Judah at that time. And God, in Habakkuk's eyes, seemingly did nothing about it. When told the Lord was going to do something about it through the "ruthless" Babylonians (1:6), his confusion only intensified. How could God appoint such an evil nation to "execute judgment" on a people "more righteous than themselves" (1:12,13)? "Why?" He asked four times in first chapter. (v.3, 13)

In the second chapter God gives his answer:

"Then the Lord replied: Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets...for the revelation... speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay...but the righteous will live by his faith." (2:2-4)

God's answer to *Habakkuk* is that the corrupt destroyer, Babylon, will itself be destroyed. Babylon will be punished and faith will be rewarded. *Habakkuk* was to make plain the revelation of God in writing, and even though the fulfillment of it may be delayed, it will happen. Babylon was destroyed 66 years later in 539 B.C. But the people of God were to wait patiently and *live by faith*, trusting in their sovereign God. *The same principle that was applicable in the realm of national deliverance is applicable in the area of spiritual deliverance.*

The word "faith" only appears once in the Old Testament, in this verse. In the New Testament, it appears 243 times; with the verb form "**believe**" occurring countless times. About questions of how and when God is working, the answer is that his people are to wait patiently **and live by faith!**--trusting in God. This verse is quoted in New Testament four times to support the teaching that people are saved by *grace through faith*. (*Rom.1:17; Gal.3:11; Eph.2:8; Heb.10:38,39.*)

The Book of Job is also about the apparent injustice of God, and Job insinuates that of God. Job loves God and he was a righteous man. But after a series of calamities descend upon Job, he has a sense of betrayal. *Why me? What did I do wrong?* In this setting, Job and his friends discuss the mystery of suffering and other inequities of life.

Their conclusion: *God rewards the good and punishes the wicked, therefore Job should repent of his sins and God would relieve his miseries. This was the wrong answer! The book of Job centers not on the problem of human suffering and the reason for it, but rather on the doctrine of human freedom and the issues of sincerity that can freely flow from it! If love is bribed or coerced, it is not love! Love must be genuine to be love and it must come from the heart to be valid. Take away the rewards, Satan challenged, and watch Job's faith crumble. The implication was obvious: people, like Job, follow God only for the personal benefits derived from so doing--to have a "hedge" of protection surrounding them. An invisible God is not worthy of love and obedience unless He bribes people with special favors to do so. God's answer to Job and to all comes in two parts:*

(1) The form of questions, 77 of them, to point out the ignorance and severe limitations of man to understand the thoughts and ways of God!

"Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty?" (Job 11:7)

"Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself? (Job 40:8)

(2) The appearance of God to Job. When Job sees God, all questions melt away. *"My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."* (42:5) When God came to earth in the body of Jesus Christ, He entered into our world of suffering, temptations and death. His answer to our suffering and the suffering of Christ was to bring about a better good; something we cannot comprehend or even imagine. *But we now know, by the Incarnation of Jesus, that God participated in our suffering and sorrows, and we now understand that we are now understood!*

The fundamental fact of the Christian religion is that it is based on **faith** as opposed to tangible, visible, experiences with God; it is based on **trust**, rather than understanding or comprehending all the "whys" in this life; and it is a product of the **heart** not the **head**.

Paul gave us his summary of the Christian life in one sentence:

"The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love." (Gal.5:6)

Discuss Together

- * What suffering, injustice or evil have you seen or experienced that challenged your faith in God?
- * How does the suffering of Jesus increase your faith?
- * Read the following scriptures and discuss Job's response to seeing God and being questioned by him
 - o Job 40:1-5
 - o Job 42:1-6
- * Pray for God to use you to help others who are suffering as you trust the suffering of Jesus and his resurrection from the dead.

Lesson 10 - Faith in God is a Belief System for Living

"We live by faith, not by sight." (2Cor.5:7)

In the journey of life we can choose what path we want to take. The sovereignty of God extends over all things but He chose to give man sovereignty or rule over the creatures of the earth (Gen.1:28) and freedom of will which gives him the uniqueness of accountability and the ability to express genuine love. Man's status has been described by the Psalmist as "*being crowned with glory and honor.*" (Ps.8:5). But the transgression of Adam compromised man's sovereignty in, at least, two ways. He still has dominion over the earth, but he has been crippled in life with a sinful nature. Paul expressed this frustration pointedly in Romans 7:18, "*For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.*" We lost a part of our sovereignty because of our sinful, weakened nature. Another conspicuous loss of man's sovereignty is his inevitable decline and death. This is what the writer of Hebrews refers to when he writes: "*At present we do not see everything subject to him (man).*"(2:8) But the writer now applies Psalm 8 to Jesus, "*But we see Jesus...*" as being the *forerunner* of man's restored dominion over the earth. By his perfect life, his death of the cross, and his exaltation, he has made it possible for redeemed man to regain his sovereignty over creation, over himself and over death. "*By the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.*" (2:9) God has crowned us with *glory and honor*, by bearing His image and being guided by *intellect* instead of being limited by the boundaries of instinct or programmed to behave in a certain way. We are free moral agents capable of making moral decisions, though weakened by our sinful nature, but we are still capable of responding to God's gracious love with repentance and faith. This exalted position gives man the potential for two things:

(1) It opens the door to the possibility of evil because of bad choices.

(2) It allows man to have the unique power to have some choice in his destiny and to express with sincerity the supreme virtue of genuine love in his life, toward God and man. Bearing the image of God means we are casting the *shadow* of God (His image) on this earth and this gives to mankind infinite potential to bring glory to his Creator or shame. Man has both the power to express the *divine* and the *demonic* by his behavior. He is guided by *intellect and reason*, not just instinct; he struggles with a *sinful nature* which is in constant conflict with his spiritual nature. He feels the tug of a *moral imperative* to do what is right and to follow his conscience, but also he lives with the painful awareness of failure and the weakness of his flesh. Man's deepest desire is to live, but we must make our journey in life under the constant cloud of death, knowing that will be our ultimate destiny.

Such complications in life require a remedy, a solution, an answer, a Savior, and, thank God, He has provided One! Paul cries out in his frustration: "*What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God--through Jesus Christ our Lord!*" (Rom.8:24)

The legacy we will leave behind after we complete this brief journey of life, will be determined by the decisions we have made along the way. Our choices in life *define* us; our *values* reveal us; our *behavior* reflects both. Our future is the harvest we receive from the seeds we plant today. What we are and what we become amounts to the *sum total of our choices!* "We are, for the most part, self-determining creatures. *Neither the physics of nature, nor the genes of our bodies, nor the environment of our youth, nor the position of the planets at our birth determines our future or destiny;* we do! Our choices shape and direct the flow of events in our lives. But since God is unwilling that any should perish, He brings the force of His Spirit to bear in our decision-making process. When we yield to the promptings of our conscience and respond to the moral imperatives of our heart, and listen to His Word, we will inevitably make the right decisions. John records Jesus as saying: "*When he (Holy Spirit) comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment.*" (Jn. 16:8)

Fate plays a minimal role in the scheme of things, like the genes we *inherit*; the *environment* of our youth and the *nurture* of our growth, but ultimately, God has entrusted you with yourself!

When God gave man His image, He gave man the freedom to choose; in so doing, He made evil possible. Adam and his posterity made it actual; the history of man has made it visible. Christ makes it disappear in the *Mind of God*, when, by faith, we receive the *righteousness* offered to us in him.

The important question every person must answer for themselves is simply this: what is my view of this world and my place in it? God has bestowed upon me the amazing gift of being a part of his creation! How should I respond to this incredible gift? Does God expect something of me? Does my being here have purpose in God's great scheme of things? The way we answer these questions will direct our daily decisions, actions and destiny. We basically have four choices:

1. **We can live** our life totally focused on ourselves, becoming selfish and self-indulgent.
2. **We can** live our life with the dominate passion and desire to accumulate more possessions; centering all our thoughts and efforts on having more and better material things.
3. **We can strive** to grow to be a better person; to expand our awareness of what this gift of life granted to us really means. We can strive to follow the promptings of our conscience; to develop our potential; to THINK about the brevity of life and the profound significance of what it means and how we should respond to it!
4. **We can seek to know** the One who gave me this incredible gift and what to do with it!

"Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him and to our God for he will fully pardon. (Isaiah 55:6,7)

Discuss Together

- * Share how your faith affects the choices that you make in life.

- * What do you believe that your purpose is in God's great scheme and story?

- * Read the following scriptures and discuss choices and purpose:
 - o Proverbs 16:9
 - o Matthew 6:33
 - o Romans 12:1-2
 - o 1 Corinthians 10:31
 - o 1 Timothy 5:24

- * Pray for God to reveal to you his purpose for your life.

Lesson 11

Faith is a Work of God

"Jesus answered; the work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent." (Jn.6:29)

Every view of human life is shaped by two great assumptions: our *origin* and our *destiny*—where we came from and where we are going. If death brings an end to our being with nothing beyond it, then this life has no ultimate significance or meaning. But if our soul survives death, then this life is invested with profound meaning and everything we do here has significance for all eternity.

So the important question we must answer is: Are we creatures of a personal God or just products of a mindless process? *Our origin determines our destiny.* Jesus brought a message of truth—that every person bearing God's image has a value of undiminished worth; a capacity for relationship with God in an unending abundant life. Any philosophy or view of life must pass one crucial test: Can it make sense of the human predicament? Does it correspond to the reality we experience? Does it give us any meaning to our existence? Does our death mean we vanish forever and become what we were before our birth, just non-existent? Before he committed suicide, *Ernest Hemmingway*, left his dismal philosophy of life when he penned the words:

"Life is just a brief journey from nothingness to nothingness." Such a statement presents an insurmountable problem: our *brief journey* is of such complexity and magnitude; blessings and challenges; it must have meaning beyond just reproduction and death.

God's prerequisite for *pleasing Him* is to have *faith* in Him and "*believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.*" (Heb.11:6) God wants us to know that there is more to life than a destiny of dust; rather it is the expectation of a glorious future, on a new earth in new bodies, in a new environment of righteousness, not a destiny of nothingness. Embracing faith is like crossing a bridge from death to life.

"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life." (Jn.5:24)

Reason demands that such a crucial, *destiny-determining* response as faith must be established by an abundance of evidence and testimony to support it! **Bertrand Russell**, a famous philosopher and skeptic who looked upon religion as superstition and believers as naive, was once asked by a woman what he would say to the God he had spent his life demeaning, if he happened to encounter Him someday. He replied: "*I would say to Him, Sir, why did you not give me more evidence?*" Such a statement *repudiates* the work of God!

The 'work of God' refers to what God *requires of man--faith--*and what He has done to establish it. He has provided sufficient *reasons* to believe that He exists; He has offered abundant *evidence* that He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to redeem fallen man. He has provided incontestable proof in the most dramatic way possible that this is true by reversing the process of death to life with the *resurrection* of Christ. This act of

resurrection is offered as *proof* by God and it becomes the *perpetual sign* throughout the generations that Jesus lives and that he will return and judge the world. (Acts 17:31) **God has always presented evidence** of His Being and a *witness* of His presence to humanity. “*I am the Lord...I have not spoken in secret, from somewhere in a land of darkness.* (Isa.45:19). “*He has not left himself without testimony...*” (Acts 14:17) “*The heavens declare...the skies proclaim...the days speak...the night displays knowledge*”. (Psa.19:1-4) Paul addresses this issue of evidence in Rom. 1, to an ancient people: “*For since the creation of the world...men are without excuse*”. (1) Creation reveals His eternal power. (2) Conscience testifies to His *divine nature*. (3) Christ has demonstrated His *infinite love* for mankind. (4) His written word has conveyed *redemption’s* history and contains everything man needs for *life and godliness*. (2Pet.1:3)

The evidence is overwhelming; the testimony is abundant, we have been given “*many convincing proofs*” (Acts 1:3). If we but open the eyes of our mind and heart, and earnestly *ask, seek and knock*, we will learn that “*God is not far from each one of us.*” (Acts 17:27)

Discuss Together

- * Share your salvation story. Pay close attention to all the ways God worked to bring you to himself. Give him thanks and praise for giving you the gift of faith.

- * Read the following verses and discuss God’s work in salvation.
 - o Ephesians 2:1-10

- * What evidence do you see of God’s work...
 - o In creation?
 - o In your life?
 - o In Christ’s life?
 - o In the Bible?

- * Pray for God to show you his work in the world, in your family and in your life every day.

Lesson 12 - Living by Faith is Embracing the Testimony Provided by God

The Bible is a book about testimony. The Old Testament is the testimony of God's intervention in the history of Israel, which was preparation for testimony to be revealed in the New Testament. Faith is always based on testimony, and testimony on facts. Facts add up to evidence and one believes because he has **reasons** to believe when he looks at the facts and weighs the testimony.

The Gospel of John is a book about *testimony* to produce belief in Jesus Christ. John uses the word "*believe*" 78 times. Testimony is given by witnesses, and John presents witness after witness to establish faith in the *supremacy, the truth and the mission* of Jesus Christ. He gives us eight witnesses:

- (1) Witness of the last Prophet, John the Baptist, (1:7, 8)
- (2) Witness of the Father (5:37)
- (3) Witness of Jesus, (8:18,14)
- (4) Witness of his works, (5:36; 10:25)
- (5) Witness of the scriptures, (5:39)
- (6) Witness of those with whom Jesus came in contact: Samaritan woman, (4:39); man born blind, (9:25, 38); people who witnessed Jesus' miracles, (12:17)
- (7) Witness of the disciples, (15:27)
- (8) Witness of the Holy Spirit (15:36)

The resurrection is the *supreme vindication* of Jesus' divine identity and inspired mission; it's God's *proof* and *sign* throughout the generations to come that this message is truth; and this event did happen! The current of eyewitness evidence is so strong it is staggering. If one were to call each of the witnesses to a court of law to be cross-examined for just 15 minutes each, they would listen to *129 straight hours* of eyewitness testimony. John concludes his account of the events of Christ by giving the reason for writing it:

"Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." (Jn.20:30)

John's gospel was written to present the witnesses and testimony that would lead to belief in Jesus Christ. In John's first letter, his purpose was to give assurance and confidence to the believers that the promises and blessings that come from that belief will be fulfilled. He begins by appealing to his personal experience by referring to three of his five senses for establishing certainty in his testimony: *hearing, seeing and touching*.

"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched--this we proclaim concerning the Word of life." (1Jn. 1:1)

John had intimate contact with the one he was proclaiming. Toward the end of the letter, he mentions *three other witnesses* that give testimony: "*For there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water and the blood...*"(5:7)

(1) The water refers to His baptism when the Father spoke from heaven and said, "*This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*" (Matt 3:13-17). At the same time the Spirit descended like a dove and rested on Him. This was the Father's validation of His Son at the beginning of Jesus' ministry.

(2) The "blood" refers to Jesus' death on the cross, the termination of his ministry, and the supernatural events surrounding it; the darkness, the earthquake, and the rending of the temple veil. (Mat. 27:45).

(3) The Holy Spirit was witness to both and gives testimony *today* in the life of the believer. "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. (Rom.8:15,16) His witness is our *inner confidence* that we belong to Christ; He bears witness through *scripture*, God's powerful word that convicts the heart. He bears witness by creating the desire to be in the *fellowship* of those with a similar Spirit. To reject this testimony is to reject the *testimony of God* and is tantamount to calling God a *liar*. (5:10) "*And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son*" (5:11). This is a one sentence summary of the purpose of all scripture, all prophesies, all testimony, all evidence; all to bring faith and life for all mankind.

The testimony focuses like a laser beam on the event of Christ, because with his coming, something *crucial, unrepeatable, and universal* had occurred. It was first and foremost *good news*; it would be like *light* coming into darkness; it would bring a joy like one being *delivered* from captivity; it would be an event of *life-changing proportions*; it would be *hope-giving*; *promise fulfilling*; *grace bestowing*...it would mean the *beginning of a new era of God's favor*... because a **Savior of the world has come!** This is the One who would *lift the curse on the earth*; *open the scroll revealing a future for mankind*; *restore the broken image of God in man*; *triumph over evil*; *conquer death*; and bring *eternal life* and *access to the Father!*

In the last verses of the last book in the Bible, John writes one of the last utterances of Jesus:

"I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the root and offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star." (Rev.22:16)

Historically, Jesus came from the lineage of David; *prophetically*, his coming was like the morning star, the *beginning* of a bright new day.

When we read in Revelation 19:10, that "*The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophesy*", we are made aware that the ultimate, grand design of prophesy was and is to bear *testimony* to Jesus Christ. God has provided this testimony abundantly so that we can rest on the firm foundation of believing in him with complete confidence!

Discuss Together

- * Talk about the resurrection of Jesus. Do you still have any doubts that this event occurred? What evidence is there to support it as a factual event.
- * What effect does the resurrection of Jesus have on your personal future? How is your life different today because of his resurrection?
- * Read the following scriptures and talk about the future resurrection of all believers:
 - o 1 Corinthians 15:50-58
 - o 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
- * Say a prayer of thanksgiving for God's work to resurrect Jesus and his promise to resurrect everyone who trusts in that work.