

# *Live a God-Pleasing Life!*

## Bible Study 1

### *Faith Is the Foundation*

#### **Prayer**

*Our gracious heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of faith. Grant us steadfast faith so that we can withstand the temptations of Satan, the world, and our flesh. Help us to be people who seek to do your will and fulfill the purposes you have for our lives. We ask for blessings on this study. As we read and study your Word, we pray that your Spirit will enlighten our hearts and minds so we may draw closer to you and more clearly understand and follow your will for our lives. May all that we do give you honor and praise. We pray this in the precious name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus. Amen.*

#### **What Is Faith?**

*"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" (Hebrews 11:1). Faith is the foundation of stewards **living a God-pleasing life**. "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him" (Hebrews 11:6). This eleventh chapter of Hebrews is known as the "Faith Chapter." From Abel on down through the ages, the writer names the heroes of faith, listing their accomplishments, preceding each one with "by faith." "By faith we understand . . . By faith, Abel offered . . . By faith Enoch was taken . . ." On and on we read. Maybe the writer became a little overwhelmed with the magnitude of his task, for in verse 32 he writes, "And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson . . ."*

Just hearing their names brings to mind the biblical accounts of their exploits: Abraham preparing to sacrifice Isaac, Jacob raising twelve sons to be the leaders of the tribes of Israel, Moses leading his people across the Red Sea, David killing Goliath, and so on. "They don't come like that anymore," we may think. Secretly we compare our insignificant, unexciting lives with theirs. If the list were to be continued, would our names be on it? We doubt it, don't we? We forget the momentary lapses of faith these great men of faith experienced.

- † We forget about the younger Abraham who took his wife's maid because, for a time, he lost faith in God's promise to give him a son.
- † We forget about the frightened Jacob who lied to get his father's blessing, because, for a time, he lost faith in God's promise to fulfill his plan in Jacob.
- † We forget about the stammering Moses who balked at God's command, because, for a time, his knowledge of God's power was limited.

- ✠ We forget about David's sin with Bathsheba, because, for a time, he put himself before the God who had protected him throughout his life.

We forget that those included in this list are there because of faith, not because of their deeds. **Faith was the foundation** of their lives. Faith is the reason they pleased God. Faith enables stewards **to live a God-pleasing life**.

## Questions for Discussion

1. Read Hebrews 11. Choose a name from among those heroes, review his/her "biography" in Scripture.
  - a. How was that person a steward of the gifts God gave him/her?
  - b. What were the weaknesses of that person?
  - c. How were those weaknesses overcome?
  - d. Why did you choose the person you did?
  - e. What can you apply to your stewardship life from what you've learned in your study?
2. Memorize Hebrews 11:1 and 11:6.

## Source of Faith

Our hopes are raised! We're not heroes, yet we can please God. We haven't done anything that would make for interesting reading, yet we are useful to God. Then, just as quickly, our hopes again are dashed as we realize we don't have the kind of faith that will part waters and slay giants. We have the same foibles as these heroes of faith, but we don't have the faith they did. Or do we?



Where did Moses' faith come from? Did he inherit it from his godly parents who saw that he was a special child and took extreme and risky measures to save his life? Where was that faith, then, when he fled in fear after killing the Egyptian? As we read of Moses' first encounter with God in Exodus 3 and continue on through his argument with God, we recognize a change in Moses. From flat refusal to obey God's command to becoming the leader of his people and through excuse after excuse about his inferiority ("*Who am I?*"), his inadequacy ("*What if they won't listen to me?*"), and his inability ("*I am slow of speech and tongue.*"), God patiently leads him to acceptance of the task. Gradually, God plants his gift of faith in Moses as he speaks to him. "*You shall speak . . . I will help both of you speak . . . He [Aaron, Moses' brother] will speak . . .*" (Exodus 3, 4).

This is the experience of all stewards **living a God-pleasing life**. We have our times of victory and our times of defeat. We are inconsistent. God is not. "*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever*" (Hebrews 13:8). **Faith was the foundation** of Moses' life and

it is of ours as well. Moses' faith was born through the Word of the Lord. Starting with his declaration of who he is, "I AM WHO I AM" (Exodus 3:14), God continued to reveal himself to Moses and to build his faith through his Word.

To this day, God comes to us through his Word. Moses heard God's audible voice; we hear God's voice through his Word and Sacrament. Moses felt inferior. He thought no one would listen to him. He knew he was not the sort of speaker who would command anyone's attention and respect. We are in the same position, no more and no less capable than he. Therefore, like Moses, we cannot base our lives on what we feel or think or even know through human logic. We base our lives on who God is, what his Word tells us, and on his revelation of himself to us through Word and Sacraments.

### Questions for Discussion

3. What role did Moses' parents play in his life of faith (Exodus 2:1-10)?
  - a. Did he inherit their faith?
  - b. Can parents affect the faith and stewardship of their children?
4. Read Exodus 3.
  - a. How did God come to Moses?
  - b. What was Moses' initial reaction to God's call?
  - c. Is Moses' faith evident during this first contact with God?
  - d. If not, why did God choose to send him on this most important mission?
5. How does God come to you?
6. Do any of your excuses echo those of Moses?
7. Does your lack of faith preclude you from being a steward **living a God-pleasing life**?

### Stewardship Is God's Work!

This is what enables us to be true stewards – not what we do, not what we give, not how we serve – but what God does, what God gives, how God serves. Paul wrote to the early Ephesian Christians, "*You were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air. . .*" (Ephesians 2:1-2). "*You were dead.*" Before we became God's children through Baptism, we were dead in our sins. All who are separated from life in God still follow the ways of the world. Even though we live moral lives, give generously to the poor and needy, and volunteer our time morning, noon, and night, apart from faith ". . . *our righteous acts are like filthy rags*" (Isaiah 64:6).

*"But because of his great love for us, God who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions"* (Ephesians 2:4,5). Although we were dead, because of his mercy through his Son, God gave us life! Although we were without purpose, God has shown us his plan for our lives. "*For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do*" (verse 10). This is a definition of

stewardship: doing the good works which God has prepared for us to do. God enables and equips us to be stewards **living a God-pleasing life**.

We do not choose what we will do. God, who “*chose us in him before the creation of the world . . .*” (Ephesians 1:4) has not overlooked a plan for his creation. God has chosen each of us to carry out his work on earth. We do not wander aimlessly, waiting for heaven, nor do we squander time and energy doing that for which we're not fitted.

*“We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully” (Romans 12:6-8).*

When **faith is the foundation**, the pastor confidently enters the pulpit to speak forth the Word of the Lord. It is God's message, God's gift, and the pastor is only the channel through which it flows. When **faith is the foundation**, the servant humbly steps forward to serve. His only motive is that God may receive the glory as the servant offers his whole body – hands, feet, and lips, his soul and his mind in service. When **faith is the foundation**, the teacher diligently prepares her lessons, seeking the leading of the Holy Spirit, studying the Word of God, and looking into the hearts of her students. God creates the learning; his Spirit creates the faith. The steward is the faithful vessel God uses. When **faith is the foundation**, God can make us into stewards **living a God-pleasing life**.

### Questions for Discussion

8. How do you become a steward?
9. Read Isaiah 64 in your Bible. In light of the whole chapter, discuss the sixth verse.
10. How, then, can you expect God to accept any of your acts of stewardship (See Ephesians 2:4-10)?

### Faith and Works

Faith and works share a truth with Law and Gospel: While each must be kept distinct from the other, neither can one exist apart from the other. Unless the Law is preached in its severity, the sweetness of the Gospel is lost. Unless the Law is preached first, the sinner has no knowledge of his sin or need of forgiveness. Through the preaching of the Law, the sinner comes to realize that he is unable to fulfill its requirements and that he is hopelessly lost because of that fact; thus his yearning soul is refreshed by the saving news of the Gospel. Christ has lived the perfect life in his place and



has died and risen so the sinner, too, might be raised and live forever.

Through faith, the grace of God in Christ Jesus is ours. Absolved by grace, we are freed from the curse of sin. We are freed to do all we can for Christ out of gratitude for all that he has done for us. The works do not precede the faith. The unbeliever who has spent his life doing good deeds is just as lost as the unbeliever who has lived a dissolute and selfish life. On the other hand, the thief on the cross to whom Christ said, "*Today you will be with me in paradise*" (Luke 23:43) was no less justified than Stephen who spent his life in service and was martyred for his faith (Acts 7:54-60).

Having again emphasized this important doctrine that faith alone saves us, we are also reminded by the Apostle James, ". . . *faith without deeds is dead*" (James 2:26). He writes to believers, "*What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? If one does nothing about [another's] physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead*" (James 2:14, 16-17). James makes the point that **faith is the foundation** that is needed by stewards **living a God-pleasing life**. The deeds are the proof of the faith: "*Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do*" (James 2:18). He goes on to point out the necessary connection between the two. "*Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did*" (James 2:21-22).

We make a grave error when we put the cart before the horse, the works before the faith. If we truly desire to show our gratitude to the Lord, we will do those good works which God has created for us to do, making sure that the cart (works) is following closely behind the horse (faith)!

## Questions for Discussion

11. What is the purpose of the Law? What is the purpose of the Gospel?
12. Explain the relationship between faith and works.
13. What is the danger in co-mingling the two?
14. What role does faith play in your life as a steward?
15. What role do works play in your life as a steward?

## Prayer

*Dear heavenly Father, we thank you for this study. We pray that what we have learned today will help prepare and equip us to be more faithful in our stewardship. We thank you for the tremendous love that caused you to send your only Son to the Cross to atone for our sins. We thank you for Jesus who willingly and obediently allowed himself to suffer and die for us. We especially thank you for the victory that has been won for all people through Jesus' resurrection. Help us to live as victorious people. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.*

