

Prayer

Halleluiah! The Spirit of God has come!
We praise You, God of love, for the gift of Your Spirit.
For He teaches us the eternal truth about life and about sin;
His challenges us to follow in the narrow pathway of Jesus Christ;
He ministers the grace of salvation and the call to holiness;
He touches our souls with healing compassion.
Halleluiah! The Spirit has come! AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Light

We often speak of darkness and light as two extremes representing evil and good. Pray today against the darkness in the world and ask God to send the light of His Holy Spirit.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for people who will today be told they have cancer*
- *Give thanks for the many blessings given to you the Lord*
- *Pray for the country of Sri Lanka, for stability and reconciliation*

Meditation

We have a God who is active in the world
To take what is little, and make it much more!
He takes the innocence and charm of youth
To bring love and stability into the world!
He takes the prayers of the sick and infirm
To bless the world, and even to change it!
He takes the wisdom of people in later years
To empower and encourage all who will hear!
He takes the devotion and passion of parents
To be an example to all of real commitment!
He takes the trust and energy of a little child
To give everyone the truest example of faith!
We have a God who delights in His people
And grants all who will trust Him, His love.

Bible Study - Hebrews 11:4-7

⁴ *By faith, Abel offered to God a greater sacrifice than Cain, and in this way he was approved as a righteous man, for God Himself commended his offerings; and he still speaks through his faith, even though he is dead.* ⁵ *By faith, Enoch was taken from this life and did not experience death; he was 'found no more' because God had taken him, and before he was taken he was commended as one who pleased God.* ⁶ *Now, without faith, it is impossible to please Him, because anyone who wants to come near to Him must believe both that He*

exists and that those who seek Him are rewarded. ⁷ By faith, Noah, when warned about events yet to happen took heed, and built an ark in order to save his family; and in this way he condemned the world and became one who receives the righteousness which comes by faith.

Review

After the powerful description of faith found in the first three verses of chapter 11, Hebrews continues by giving examples of faith from the Scriptures. The writer draws from the deep well of God's Old Testament Word with its heritage of stories about famous people who demonstrated qualities of faith in times long before the coming of Jesus Christ, and the rest of chapter 11 continues in this way. Today, our reading outlines some of the key characteristics of the faith as found within three characters from the earliest of times in Old Testament history. They are all from the first 11 chapters of Genesis which is sometimes called the 'prologue' to the Bible, and are Abel, Enoch and Noah.

Abel was murdered by his brother Cain (Genesis 4:1-16) because Cain was jealous of God's acceptance of his brother's offering and not his own. Abel's offering was distinguished from Cain's by being called 'the best' (Gen 4:4), and Scripture does not give us any other clear reason to understand why it was more acceptable than Cain's gift of fruit (Gen 4:3). However, after the turmoil of what happened in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3), Abel's offering represented what God wanted from His people; honest worship. It was a sign of hope that even though humanity had been corrupted by sin, it was still possible for someone to appreciate the spiritual value of bringing their best in worship to God. It is interesting that although people today often quote Abraham as the first example of faith in the Bible (because of the mention of Abraham's 'belief' in Genesis 15:6), Hebrews regards Abel's offering as the earliest example of faith in Scripture. In our reading, this faith is called a 'greater sacrifice', and faith is clearly linked to the idea of 'the best in worship'.

The story of Enoch is even briefer than that of Abel, and the relevant text from Genesis says 'Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took Him.' (Gen 5:24). Hebrews clearly does not feel it necessary to make the subject of faith more complicated than it need be, because this example of Enoch is simplicity itself. Enoch's walk with God could only have happened on the basis of his faith in the existence of God, as is described by Hebrews in verse 6. Even though Enoch was one man who lived amongst many, long before God had chosen His own people, the description of his being transported to heaven without death was sufficient proof of this utterly basic yet vitally important faith for the writer of Hebrews to commend it. This example of the faith of Enoch has the added advantage that it hints at the power of God to save people from the power of death.

The last example of faith in this passage is that of Noah. What Hebrews says about Noah reminds us that the epic story of the salvation of all people through the ark and the Flood could not have happened without faith, though we often forget that although the word faith does not appear in Noah's story, it is essential to the story. Noah's 'righteousness' (Gen 6:9) led him to trust God, and by putting his faith into practice in a quite remarkable way, Noah shamed the world and 'condemned' it to God's destruction. Noah's faith and obedience were also used by God to save his family and so start the history of humanity again, from his own sons (Gen 10), and we all too readily forget our debt of gratitude to Noah and the primitive but effective faith he demonstrated.

None of these three examples of faith are irrelevant, just because we now have the story of the life of Christ and the teachings of Jesus, Paul and others within Scripture. As so often in the Bible, they are significant starting points that show us both what faith is and how it is shown in people in different ways. These examples of faith stand as the earliest examples in the Bible, and they illustrate the connection between faith and worship, discipleship and

practical faith. They also show the consistency of God in seeking faith from people throughout the history of the world, and they provide the backbone for what the Scriptures eventually tell us about faith through the ministry of Jesus. There is no excuse for us not to understand the meaning of faith when the Bible gives us these and many more examples. All we have to do is read the Bible and accept that each story has a purpose in God's plan of salvation.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. How does the example of Abel's faith inspire God's people today, and how can we live that faith?
2. How does the example of Enoch's faith inspire God's people today, and how can we live that faith?
3. How does the example of Noah's faith inspire God's people today, and how can we live such faith?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

It is easy to think of faith as a very personal thing; something which is deeply individual to us and therefore impervious to attempts by others to say that we should think about it differently. Scripture however, challenges us to reflect on what God Himself requires of us to show our faith, and this must challenge us to think of faith from a wider perspective. Certainly, if our own faith is something that is not expressed in worship, in our daily walk with God, or in what we do with our lives in general, then we are open to be challenged as to whether our faith is truly genuine and scriptural. Faith is not just a personal position, for it is our connection with the One God who had made the world, not a figment of our imagination!

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Reflect on the three features of faith that are highlighted today and ask yourself how they figure in your daily life? Discuss this with those who are close to you and seek to gain the perspective of others on what you believe.*
- *Pray for God's church today as it seeks to help people express their faith within the community and within regular worship and service.*

Final Prayer

As each day passes, dear Lord, we long to know more of You and feel the touch of Your hand on what we do and how we live. Guide us we pray, not merely through the mysteries of life and its coincidences and unfolding happenings, but through Your Word, Your touch and Your positive guidance. Thank You, Lord God: AMEN