

## HOW TO PLEASE GOD

Hebrews 11

### INTRODUCTION

I admire people like George Müller. I want to have his kind of faith. Don't you wish you had his faith?

Let me ask you to do something: write down something that you are trusting God for.

Probably many of you can do that. But my guess is that some of you can't write down anything. That means that, at the present time, you are not trusting God for anything. Does that mean you have nothing that you need to trust God for?

This morning, we begin a new series on Faith. There are a couple of reasons why we decided to begin this new church year with talking about faith. One primary reason is because this is a transitional year in which we are praying and seeking a new senior pastor. I want us to have the faith that God will bring the right person here to lead Trinity into a new and flourishing future. Another reason is because I want you to experience God in a deeper way so you will be excited about your relationship with God. And living by faith will do that.

We are going to use Heb. 11 as the main chapter in this series. Let's read the beginning:

*Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. <sup>2</sup> This is what the ancients were commended for.*

<sup>3</sup> *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. ...*

<sup>5</sup> *By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death: "He could not be found, because God had taken him away." For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God. <sup>6</sup> 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 11:1-3,5-6 <sup>NIV</sup>*

This first message on faith, I want to help us understand what faith is, why it is important, and how to have faith.

Let's start with:

### I. WHY FAITH IS IMPORTANT

*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 <sup>NIV</sup>*

Faith pleases God. This is the key point I want you to remember this morning. Faith pleases God.

I would hope that one of your highest aspirations is to please God. Is that true?

This is a main teaching of Paul:

*As for other matters, brothers and sisters, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. 1 Thessalonians 4:1*

To please someone is to bring them pleasure or satisfaction. We can bring God pleasure. Isn't that a great thought? When we live by faith, we please God and bring him pleasure.

Why does faith please God?

#### 1. Faith exalts God

God gets the glory when we live by faith.

After the Israelites came through the Red Sea and the Egyptian army was drowned, Moses and the Israelites sang a song, which included these words:

*Exodus 15:11 Who among the gods*

*is like you, LORD?  
Who is like you—  
majestic in holiness,  
awesome in glory,  
working wonders?*

Faith shows the glory of God. Faith shows how great God is. When God responds to your faith, you don't get the credit. God gets the credit.

## 2. Faith requires us to be dependent on God

This is how God made us. We are created to be dependent on God. We are made to need God and look to him for things in life. Jesus stated

*"I am the way and the truth and the life. John 14:6 <sup>NIV</sup>*

Jesus is life. When we live by faith, we are putting ourselves in a position to live in Christ and receive only what he can give to us. We depend on him and look to him to do what only he can do. That's the kind of relationship God wants us to have with him.

Faith is to trust God to do something that you can't do in your own strength or effort or with your resources.

## 3. Faith is a channel of God's resources.

Without it, God won't work –

Let me contrast two scenes from Jesus' ministry. First is Jesus in his home town of Nazareth:

*When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed.*

*"Where did this man get these things?" they asked. "What's this wisdom that has been given him? What are these remarkable miracles he is performing?"*

*<sup>3</sup> Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him.*

*<sup>4</sup> Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own town, among his relatives and in his own home." <sup>5</sup> He **could not do** any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. <sup>6</sup> He was amazed at their lack of faith. Mark 6:2-6*

The people had no faith to believe in Jesus and the result was that only a few sick people were healed.

Contrast this story with an earlier scene, in:

*Mark 2:3 Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. <sup>4</sup> Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. <sup>5</sup> When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, "Son, your sins are forgiven."*

*<sup>6</sup> But some of the teachers of religious law who were sitting there thought to themselves, <sup>7</sup> "What is he saying? This is blasphemy! Only God can forgive sins!" ...*

*<sup>10</sup> Then Jesus turned to the paralyzed man and said, <sup>11</sup> "Stand up, pick up your mat, and go home!"*

*<sup>12</sup> And the man jumped up, grabbed his mat, and walked out through the stunned onlookers. They were all amazed and praised God, exclaiming, "We've never seen anything like this before!"*

With the faith of the men, Jesus healed the man. The difference was that some had faith and some didn't. If we don't have faith, God usually won't work.

Faith is important. Faith pleases God. It is essential for living a life pleasing to God. So what is

faith? How can we have faith?

## II. UNDERSTANDING FAITH

All people live by faith. E.g. going to turn on a light switch. No one stops and debates whether when they flip the switch, it is going to turn the light on. When people plan a trip to Disneyworld, they don't stop to consider whether there are gas stations along the way, they just start driving because they have faith they will find gas when they need it.

But not all faith is genuine faith.

Some years ago my mom was going through a difficult time, and she made the comment that she was going to be alright. I asked her why, and she simply said, "Because I have faith." But it became evident she was saying she had faith in faith. There was no good reason why she had faith.

What is faith?

As we read in:

*Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. Hebrews 11:1*

Faith is confidence in what we hope for. Faith is having the assurance of what you don't see yet.

What we are trusting for doesn't exist yet, but we act expectantly, that we will see the reality of our faith.

Let me give you a definition:

**Def:** *Faith is being so persuaded that you confidently expect and willingly act as if you already have what you are trusting in.*

Let me break faith down so you can understand it better. To begin with, you have a need or want.

### *Need/Want*

You want to see something happen that isn't happening yet or doesn't exist yet. You want to see a person come to Christ. You need a job because you don't have one. You need wisdom to make a decision. God speaks to you about something he wants to do for you or give you. Faith always begins with a need or want. But let me caution you here. Your need or want must honor God, not be something that is self-centered, like the prosperity gospel people.

To this need we add knowledge and this knowledge is knowledge in or of the object of your faith.

### *Need/Want + Knowledge in an object (a person, promise, statement, fact)*

What or whom are you trusting in to bring your need or want to reality? Is the object of your faith capable of doing for you what you want or need?

Let's say I'm teaching my granddaughter how to make a cake. In making the cake, I know that we are going to need to use the oven and I have faith that the oven is going to heat up and bake the cake. The oven is the object of my faith, and it is reasonable to believe that it is going to heat up.

Later that day, my granddaughter wants to make her own cake. She has one of those play kitchens, and has a miniature cake mix for kids. The mix is real, so she mixes up the cake and then turns on her play oven. Is it going to work? No. The object of her faith can't do what she wants. Her faith is unrealistic.

For faith to be effective, the object of your faith must be capable.

Let's say that I need a job and I know God wants me to have one. So I decide to pray and ask God for a job. Is my faith realistic? Yes, because God is able to do what I ask.

Do you see a connection here between your faith and your knowledge of God? We'll say more about this in another sermon.

The next part of faith is persuasion.

### *Need/Want + Knowledge in an object (a person, promise, statement, fact) + Persuasion (about the object: real, capable, character, trustworthy)*

Knowledge must become persuasion. This part moves us from an intellectual affirmation of the capability of the object of our faith to persuasion. In other words, it moves us from just thinking it could happen to being persuaded, or convinced, that it will happen. It moves us from our head to our heart.

E.g. you may believe that God can do anything. Anybody here not believe that? But you must be persuaded that what God could do, he wants to do for you. If you are not fully persuaded, you are not going to do anything. A great example is Abraham and Sarah. When God revealed to Abraham that he and Sarah were going to have a child at the age of 99 it says:

*And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise. Hebrews 11:11*

Notice it says that Sarah considered God faithful. She knew she could trust him and was persuaded because she knew God was faithful.

In Romans it brings out this aspect of being persuaded:

*Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”<sup>19</sup> Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah’s womb was also dead.<sup>20</sup> Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God,<sup>21</sup> being **fully persuaded** that God had power to do what he had promised. Romans 4:18-21<sup>NIV</sup>*

God gave the promise to Abraham and Abraham and Sarah were fully persuaded that God could do what he promised.

Persuasion then must become action.

*Need/Want + Knowledge in an object (a person, promise, statement, fact) + Persuasion (about the object: real, capable, character, trustworthy) + action*

James makes an insightful statement in:

*For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead. James 2:26<sup>ESV</sup>*

Faith without works, or action, is dead. There is no true faith unless there is action.

E.g. Let’s say that you are trying to find a teaching job in Nashua. If you tell me that you are trusting God for a job but you don’t put your application in to the Nashua school district, I would tell you that your faith is dead. You can talk all you want about your faith, you can pray all you want, but if there is no action behind your faith, your faith is dead. You have no faith.

Genuine faith has action. You are stepping out to do something that isn’t reality yet. Faith always requires us to take the first step.

A great example is Joshua and the Israelites at Jericho.

*By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the army had marched around them for seven days. Hebrews 11:30<sup>NIV</sup>*

God told Joshua to march the Israelites around the city walls of Jericho for seven days and then God would make the walls fall down. Joshua had seen God do many miracles in the previous 40 years when the Israelites came out of Egypt so he knew that God could do it. He was even persuaded that God would do it. But it was only when he put his faith into action and led the army to walk around the walls of Jericho for those seven days, that God brought down the walls.

Faith is not faith until there is action.

Finally, when you put all these together, with action, you have reality.

*Need/Want + Knowledge in an object (a person, promise, statement, fact) + Persuasion (about the object: real, capable, character, trustworthy) + action, reliance = reality*

Action brings reality. And reality means that what you are trusting God for happens. And when that

happens, God gets the glory!

I hope I have convinced you that faith pleases God, and I hope that I have motivated you to want to live by faith. I hope that you are eager and excited to trust God for something he wants to do in your life or through your life.

So, what are your next steps in doing that?

**Next Steps:**

1. Ask God what he wants to do in you or through you, to bring him honor and glory.

This is not about you. This is not the false gospel of prosperity. I'm not saying to expect God to give you something that you want unless it is something that God wants for you. This is all about God. This is about God getting the glory, whatever that may look like.

It can be as simple as taking a promise in the Bible and believing it.

*Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:6-7*

It could be a prayer to claim for yourself, such as to know God's love in a deeper way:

*And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, <sup>18</sup> may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, <sup>19</sup> and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Ephesians 3:17-19 <sup>NIV</sup>*

I'm convinced that if faith pleases God, God wants us to live by faith. Pray, and wait upon God. This doesn't mean that God is going to show you something the moment you ask. You may need to wait many hours, or day, or even months. You may need to fast and seek God.

2. When God reveals to you something, act on it. Take the first step.

Faith steps out. But let me put a caution here. If God knows that you are not going to trust him and will not take that first step, don't expect God to reveal himself or what he wants you to do. He knows whether we are going to trust him. You may need to be very honest with yourself and ask yourself the question, "Am I willing to trust God and do whatever he wants me to do?"