

Hebrews 11:1-16

Discussion Questions

These questions are provided by the Connection-Group Committee for groups which would like to continue thinking about and discussing the passage used in today's sermon.

1. This letter is written to Jewish Christians who are facing pressure, and even persecution, to recant their Christian beliefs and return to Judaism. In encouraging them to hold the course, the author appeals to great people in Jewish history who have held to their beliefs and trusted God through difficult trials. Verse 11:1 speaks of faith as “the conviction of things not seen.” What “things” do these Jewish Christian readers need to maintain conviction of?
2. The Greek word translated “faith” in Hebrews 11 is *pistis*. It is also translated in the New Testament using the English words “trust” and “confidence.” How do you see these three aspects of *pistis* interacting in this passage (11:1-16)? What is the relationship in this passage between faith in God and hope in verses 1-3?
3. The word “faith” is used many different ways in our culture. D. A. Carson points out that this word is often used to mean a “religious preference” or “belief without grounding in fact or truth.” How does (or doesn't) that definition fit with the faith of Abel, Enoch, Noah and Abraham? (See, for instance, 11:11.) How does this definition aid or hinder discussing your faith with non-Christians?
4. Verse 11:6 says, “And without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.” At first glance this makes it sound like, unless we have sufficient confidence in the “things not seen” (v. 1), then God is displeased. Is that what the author is saying?
5. Raymond Brown sees five aspects of faith in the story of Abraham in 11:8-12: his faith was *responsive*, since he obeyed the call; it was *sacrificial*, given all he gave up to follow that call; it was *courageous*, since he was going to a strange land; it was *persistent*, because he and his offspring faced many challenges making their way to Canaan; it was *dependent*—he had to depend on God to follow through. And, for Abraham, God's promise of so many offspring was fulfilled only after his death.

What is the most difficult thing God has called you to do? Which of the five aspects of faith listed above did (or do) you find most challenging? What promises do you look forward to, which may be fulfilled only after your death?