LESSON 8 *May 16–22

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Having Faith



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Mark 8:11, 12; Matt. 15:21–28; Luke 7:1–10; Eph. 2:8; Hebrews 11; Rev. 14:12.*

Memory Text: **"Faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see"** *(Hebrews 11:1, NLT)***.**

Someone once said, "Faith is like WiFi. It's invisible, but it has the power to connect you to what you need." No doubt: without faith, there would be no relationship with God.

What is your faith like today? Has your faith in God ever been shaky? Perhaps you've experienced something that has challenged you to the point where you've not known how to move forward with your relationship with God. Or is your faith like a rose that grows from a green stem into a tiny bud that eventually opens into a bold, colorful flower and fills the room with an unforgettable scent? For truly, "faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see" *(Heb. 11:1, NLT)*. It's not something we can generate by ourselves, for "God has dealt to each one a measure of faith" *(Rom. 12:3, NKJV)*. Faith is a gift of God *(Eph. 2:8, 9)*, and even then, our faith in God is possible only because of what God is already doing in and for us.

This week let's explore the topic of faith: what to do with doubt and unbelief; what, according to Jesus, strong faith looks like; and what it means to have "the faith of Jesus."

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 23.*

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Just Give Me a Sign!

Maybe you've heard it said, "If I could just see the Red Sea parted, or manna on the ground, or Jesus heal a blind man, I'd believe." Or perhaps you have had those same kinds of thoughts yourself.

Why should it be easier for us now to have faith than it was for those in ancient Bible times? The Israelites didn't own a whole Bible, nor did they have such a long history to look back on as we do. Moses reinforced the importance of looking back in order to remember God's leading and goodness *(see Deut. 4:7–10; Deut. 8:2, 3)*. Unlike the Israelites, we have 6,000 years of Bible history to draw from *(see John 20:30, 31)*.

Every generation wants a sign, and ours is no different. But signs are all around us. If you read Matthew 24, you will see how many things have been and are being fulfilled even now.

People even in Jesus' time wanted a sign that Jesus was really God's Son, even though they had received many signs. How did Jesus respond? *(See Mark 8:11, 12.)*

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Do we argue with Jesus and test Him as did the Pharisees? Do we make Him "[sigh] deeply in His Spirit" *(Mark 8:12, NKJV)* because of our lack of faith, when He has already given us all we need to believe?

"These signs were not what the Jews needed. No mere external evidence could benefit them. What they needed was not intellectual enlightenment, but spiritual renovation."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 406. Could it be that we, too, need spiritual renovation—a genuine, real, moment-by-moment walk with God? Perhaps we actually don't need a sign, because we have a lot of knowledge at our fingertips, especially from our own Bibles.

So, instead of making Jesus "[sigh] deeply" because of our lack of faith, may we remember the words Jesus spoke to Thomas: " 'Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed!' " *(John 20:29; see also Heb. 11:1)*. God does not ask us to have blind faith—He has already given us so many reasons to believe. And yet, even with all these reasons, there is always room for doubt. The key is to focus on what affirms faith, not on what brings doubt.

In just 60 seconds, how would you describe your faith in God? What does your answer tell you about your walk with God?

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Jesus Sees Our Faith

Compare **how Jesus describes His disciples' faith in Mark 4:40 with the faith of the woman in Matthew 15:21–28.**

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Just because we call ourselves followers of Jesus doesn't automatically mean our faith is strong. In fact, some people claimed to believe, but Jesus discerned what was really in their hearts *(John 2:23–25)*.

Read **Luke 7:1–10. What do we learn about faith from this account?**

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In Mark 9, we read about the man who came to Jesus so that Jesus would cast the demon out of his son, but who could only muster up enough faith to say, " 'Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!' " *(Mark 9:24, NKJV)*.

In each of these interactions, Jesus noticed people's faith, or lack thereof, and performed miracles as a result of that faith or in order to strengthen it.

Though the Holy Spirit prompts us to believe, the enemy of souls wants us to doubt or dismiss God's involvement in our lives. "The unbelief which is cherished in the soul has a bewitching power. The seeds of doubt that they have been sowing will produce their harvest but they must continue to dig up every root of unbelief. When these poisonous plants are pulled up, they cease to grow for want of nourishment in word and action. The soul must have the precious plants of faith and love put in the soil of the heart and enthroned there."—Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, p. 17.

When we have doubts about God, His character, or His Word, what should we do with them? God does not ignore or bypass human reason, for He created us in His image and invites us to dialogue with Him, as He did with Abraham, Moses, and Job. God invites us to learn to work within His large, infinite patterns of reason, even if at some point we must surrender to what we don't fully understand.

Think of all the logical reasons you have for faith. At the same time, at what point does logic stop and faith, solid and reasonable faith, need to be exerted?

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Faith Is Not a Feeling

Jesus said that if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you'll move mountains *(Matt. 17:20)*. If you've ever seen a mustard seed, you know how tiny it is. Yet, having faith this small can effect such huge change. Faith must, therefore, be very important and must also be powerful and strong enough to do something superhuman. However, just as a mustard seed can grow into a large tree *(Matt. 13:31, 32)*, our faith should grow and not remain static.

Indeed, we need a measure of faith in order to have a relationship with God in the first place *(see Rom. 12:3)*.

What does Ephesians 2:8 tell us about the role of faith in being saved? Why can't a person justly say, "I don't have faith because God hasn't given me any"?

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We must first understand that faith is not a material thing; it's a human response prompted by the Holy Spirit. God is the gracious initiator, who, through the Holy Spirit, draws us to Himself when we allow Him to do so *(Jer. 31:3)*. We're saved by grace, through faith, which is a response to God's grace given to us through Jesus' death. We are saved because we believe in God as a result of His grace. This lies at the heart of having a relationship with Him.

Next, we must remember that faith is not a feeling. "Many do not exercise that faith which it is their privilege and duty to exercise, often waiting for that feeling which faith alone can bring. Feeling is not faith. . . . Faith is ours to exercise, but joyful feeling and the blessing are God's to give."—Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, p. 72.

Some people might feel as though they don't have faith because they don't feel close to God or are not what they should be as a Christian. But faith is about believing and trusting God, not only in the good times but in darkness or in a storm, or even when you can't fully understand what is going on in your life.

Feelings should never dominate our religious experience or our relationship with God. It's precisely when we think we're distant from God that we need to exercise our faith and call on Him (as did the father in Mark 9:24).

Look up the following Bible verses and claim them as an act of faith to strengthen your relationship with God today: *Heb. 12:1, 2; 2 Chron. 15:7; Rom. 3:23–26; Luke 7:50***. Speak them out loud as part of your prayer to God.**

Examples of Faith

Spend some time today studying Hebrews 11, the great faith chapter. Read it aloud first, without stopping. Then read it a second time, and write down your thoughts to the following questions:

• Reread verse 1. What do you hope for today that you cannot yet see? (Think of immediate needs and eternal dreams.)
• What role does faith play in your personal testimony and in your conversion?
• Read verse 3 again, about God and Creation. Why, in many ways, should the existence of the Creator God be the easiest thing to accept on faith?
• Read verse 6 and write the message of this verse in your own words.
• Verses 7–40 unpack the lives of various biblical personages. Why is faith the central factor that defines the strength of these people's relationship with God?

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Knowing God and having a living, strong relationship with Him requires faith. How can you strengthen your faith or encourage someone whose faith is wavering? Here are just a few ideas:

A tiny faith (like a mustard seed) is powerful and is all you need in order to grow a relationship with God *(Matt. 17:20)***.** As long as you're willing to work with Him, God will help your faith grow.

Faith comes from hearing God speak to us in His Word, the Bible *(Rom. 10:17)***.** Commit to daily Bible study and prayer.

Ask God to increase your faith *(Luke 17:5)***.** As did the father who came to Jesus with a possessed child and who "cried out and said with tears, 'Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!' " *(Mark 9:24, NKJV)*, we can recognize our unbelief and ask for God to increase our faith.

Faith and doubt can exist together *(Mark 9:24)***.** Don't walk away from God simply because you have questions. In fact, it's important to work out your salvation with fear and trembling *(Phil. 2:12–16)* and to "own" your faith rather than borrow it from another, as five of the virgins tried to do *(Matt. 25:8)*.

Respond to the Holy Spirit and ask for more of Him in your life.

Exercise your faith. Remember that faith is not a feeling but a decision to believe. Remember that even in darkness, when you can't see Him, God is there *(2 Cor. 5:7)*.

As a personal **prayer of thanks to God for His faithfulness**, consider the words from the hymn "Great Is Thy Faithfulness."

The Faith of Jesus

As this world comes to a close, part of the three angels' messages describes God's people keeping the commandments of God and having the faith of Jesus.

Read Revelation 14:12. What does "the faith of Jesus" mean?

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If you study how Seventh-day Adventists have understood justification by faith, you'll see that in the 1890s, an understanding of the faith of Jesus and the three angels' messages was greatly emphasized in the church. Up until then, the church had put a great deal of emphasis on the law, and it needed more of a gospel emphasis. Ellen G. White summarized it well: "The commandments of God have been proclaimed, but the faith of Jesus Christ has not been proclaimed by Seventh-day Adventists as of equal importance, the law and the gospel going hand in hand."—*Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 172.

Although Hebrews 11 lists godly men and women who had strong faith, no one has had faith that is comparable to Jesus' faith.

Read Matthew 26:36–42. What does this tell us about the faith of Jesus at this crucial moment?

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When we have the faith of Jesus, this means not only that by obedience to Him and His Word we will emulate the faith that He had in God, but also that we will have an active and living daily experience with Jesus. It's knowing and acting on the fact that without making Jesus the center of our daily lives, we can't have a saving relationship with God.

Having the faith of Jesus means to have Jesus abiding in us, and thus His faith in our hearts, for Jesus is the true foundation of our faith. At times our faith might be weak and feeble. But Jesus is worthy *(Rev. 5:9)*, and we can have His faith, both reflected in our own experience and being credited to us, by His gift of grace to all who believe.

How much do you want the faith of Jesus? Humbly ask God to give it to you and claim Hebrews 11:6 as your personal prayer, saying, "Lord, without faith it's impossible to please You. I come to You and believe that You are, and that You will reward me when I diligently seek You. I do so now."

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Further Thought: We are justified (pardoned and set right with God) by faith *(Rom. 5:1)*. We are then also sanctified (given power to be like Jesus) by faith *(Acts 26:18)*. When we invite Jesus into our lives, we also become God's children by faith *(John 1:12)*. We live by faith in the Son of God *(Gal. 2:20)*.

"Nothing is apparently more helpless, yet really more invincible, than the soul that feels its nothingness and relies wholly on the merits of the Saviour. By prayer, by the study of His word, by faith in His abiding presence, the weakness of human beings may live in contact with the living Christ, and He will hold them by a hand that will never let go."—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 182.

"Their faith must be strengthened by fervent prayer and fasting, and humiliation of heart. They must be emptied of self, and be filled with the Spirit and power of God. Earnest, persevering supplication to God in faith—faith that leads to entire dependence upon God, and unreserved consecration to His work—can alone avail to bring men to the Holy Spirit's aid in the battle against principalities and powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world, and wicked spirits in high places."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 431.

Discussion Questions:

1 What five main points are highlighted in the quote immediately above when it comes to collaborating with the Holy Spirit against the enemy?

2 What role does faith play in the battle against evil?

3 How do you see this battle right now in your own life?

4 Read Hebrews 10:23. Why is it important to hold fast to our confession of faith?

5 How often do you consider this truth that when you feel helpless, it's an opportunity for you to rely more wholly upon Jesus?

Summary: God gives each person a measure of faith as a foundation for a relationship with Him. As the Author and Finisher of our faith, Jesus modeled the power of faith for us all. When our faith is small, when we come with weeping and supplication and have a surrendered heart, God will work miracles in our lives *(see Jer. 31:2–4, 9, 11, 12)*. He will lead us in His straight ways so that we do not stumble any longer, and we will have peace. Jesus is the perfect example in all things, and having His faith will identify us as His people in the end times.

Going to Solusi to Hide

Lindsay didn't go to Solusi University, a Seventh-day Adventist institution in Zimbabwe, because of her faith. She wasn't Adventist. She didn't go because she had friends there. She didn't know anyone on the campus. She went to Solusi because she didn't want to be caught in a falsehood.

As Lindsay completed high school, she dreamed about studying at a university. But then her parents broke the news that they didn't have the money.

"You have to understand," Mother said. "I promise that you will go to the university, even if it takes time."

Mother was a tailor, and Father sold the dresses, curtains, and sofa covers that she made. But the business wasn't doing well when Lindsay finished high school, and her parents decided to move to Botswana.

Father tried to encourage her. "Things will get better," he said.

Lindsay helped with the family business for the next five years. Old friends called from Zimbabwe to see how she was doing.

"What's happening in your life?" they asked.

"I'm studying just like you," she replied.

As time passed, she nearly gave up on her dream of going to a university.

Mother's business gradually improved. She got more customers and opened a shop. One day, she and Father called Lindsay over and, with smiles, announced that she could choose a university to continue her studies.

Lindsay was thrilled, but she was unsure where to go. She considered the University of Zimbabwe, but friends were studying there, and she didn't want them to know that she hadn't been studying. She looked at Midlands State University, but friends also were studying there. She had friends at every university except one: Solusi. So, she decided to go there.

When Lindsay arrived, she was unfamiliar with the Adventist Church. But she went to church every Sabbath and, eight months later, was baptized. Her parents celebrated her decision to live for Jesus.

Today, Lindsay Chikanda is 24 and finishing her first year of studies. She is ready to tell her high-school friends the truth, saying, "I'm so sorry, but I didn't tell you the truth. I wasn't studying. I actually was in Botswana because my parents couldn't afford to pay my tuition, and I was working with them. But then I came to Solusi, and I found God. Would you like to know God, too?"



Your Sabbath School mission offerings support Seventh-day Adventist education around the world. Thank you for giving for mission. Watch a short YouTube video of Lindsay at bit.ly /Lindsay-IS.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Hebrews 11:1*

Study Focus: *Hebrews 11, Gen. 15:6, Rev. 14:6.*

A story is told of a king who had everything he needed to be happy. Yet, he was anything but happy. So, he decided to travel around the world to search for happiness.

One day, as he was walking through the woods, depressed and discouraged, he heard a man singing. The singing filled the king's heart with joy. He reasoned to himself that if the song filled him with joy, then the singer's own heart must be filled with joy, too. Quietly, the king moved toward the singing man and then hid behind a bush to watch him, unobserved. Indeed, the man seemed to be happy. The king was intrigued by the man's happiness and wondered what made him so happy. The king decided to approach the man to find out.

The king asked, "What do you have?"

The man was startled and did not know how to respond. He stuttered, "What do I have?"

"Yes, what do you have?" repeated the king. "What do you have that makes you so happy?"

The man responded: "This shirt is the only thing I have."

The king proposed a deal: "Give me your shirt, and in exchange I will make you rich."

The man agreed. He gave his shirt to the king in exchange for a pouch of gold and then left.

The king wore the shirt and walked a few steps, touching his new shirt again and again. Nothing had changed. He still was not happy.

The moral of this story is that happiness is not based on what we have or anything intrinsically within us. As we will learn from the testimony of God's people, as recorded in Hebrews 11 and in the time of the end *(Rev. 14:12)*, faith is not based on anything within us either.

Part II: Commentary

Introduction: How does the process of faith work? To answer, we will consult three fundamental texts on faith. The first text provides the only biblical definition of "faith" *(Heb. 11:1)*, a definition that will be confirmed by the patriarchs and heroes of faith in the Old Testament *(Heb.*

11:4–40). The second text provides an explanation of the mechanism of faith through the testimony of Abraham, who is the father of righteousness by faith *(Gen. 15:6)*. The third text is the testimony of "faith" by God's people (the "saints") at the time of the end *(Rev. 14:12)*.

The Definition of Faith *(Heb. 11:1)*. Hebrews 11:1 is the only biblical text that defines what faith is *(Heb. 11:1)*. For Paul, the author of Hebrews, faith is made of two components. The first component, "the substance of things hoped for" *(Heb. 11:1),* refers to the last event of human history, the "Advent," or the coming of God's kingdom at the end of time, which is also "the promise" that the "elders" of the Old Testament "did not receive" *(Heb. 11:39, NKJV)*.

The second component of faith is "the evidence of things not seen" *(Heb. 11:1)*. This aspect refers to the first event in human history, the Creation of the world. Note that the word "seen," *blepomenon* of Hebrews 11:1, points to the "seen," *blepomenon* of Hebrews 11:3, which refers to the Creation of the world. In other words, the foundation of faith concerns two events that are fully under divine control: God's Creation of the world and the Second Coming. Faith calls us to believe in the nonvisible process of Creation and to hope in the nonvisible, not-yet event of Christ's second coming. Thus, the fundamental understanding of faith is based upon these two events: Creation and the hope of the Second Advent. It certainly is no accident that this pattern of events is clearly visible in the canonical structure of Scripture itself. The Bible begins with Creation *(Gen. 1:1–2:1)* and ends with the coming of the Lord *(Rev. 22:20)*. The Old Testament Scriptures attest to this same canonical structure, beginning with Creation and ending with either the coming of the day of the Lord *(Mal. 4:5)* or the hope of the return from Babylonian exile during the Sabbatical year *(2 Chron. 36:21–23).*

It is worth noting that this structural pattern is attested to elsewhere in Scripture, as shown in the following examples. (1) The book of Genesis begins with Creation and ends with the perspective of the Promised Land, and, ultimately, the hope in the resurrection, as implied by Joseph's request to have his bones carried out of Egypt at the time of Israel's deliverance *(Gen. 50:24–26)*. (2) Likewise, the Pentateuch begins with Creation and ends with the same perspective of the Promised Land and the hope of the resurrection *(Deut. 34:4–6)*. (3) The book of Isaiah begins with God's call to the heavens and the earth to witness His grievance against His people and ends with the creation of new heavens and a new earth and with the prospect of redeemed humanity's eternal worship of the Lord from Sabbath to Sabbath *(Isa. 66:22, 23)*. (4) The book of Ecclesiastes begins with Creation *(Eccles. 1:1–11)* and ends with eschatological judgment *(Eccles. 12:14)*. (5) The book of Daniel begins with the food test, which

alludes to the dietary principles given at Creation *(Dan. 1:12; compare with Gen. 1:29)* and ends with the Second Coming, the day of resurrection "at the end of the days" *(Dan. 12:13)*. (6) The Gospel of John begins with Creation *(John 1:1–10)* and ends with the promise of the Second Coming *(John 21:22, 23)*.

The Faith of Abram. A Messianic vision of God inspires Abram with faith in his future. Having seen the stars in the sky as an illustration of the divine promise, Abram believed. The Hebrew verb *he'emin*, "believed," describes more than a sentimental or intellectual process, as expressed in our English verb "to believe." Equally, "believed" means more than a mere assent to a creed or religious "belief." In Hebrew, "to believe" is historical and relational, as implied by the root *'aman*, "firm," or "reliable," especially with the use of the preposition *be* ("in," "on") with the object. Relying on God, Abram "believed" that he would have descendants. This kind of belief—this faith—God "accounted" as "righteousness." God is the subject of the verb "accounted" as its most immediate antecedent. This reading is confirmed by the use of the divine passive (*niphal*) of the same verb *yekḥasheb*, "accounted," "imputed," in the same idiom elsewhere *(Lev. 7:18; compare with Ps. 106:31)*, which also have God as the subject. This use means that God "counted" *(Ps. 106:31, ESV)* Abram's faith as having the same quality as righteousness.

Such faith *is* righteousness. Human effort and works do not produce righteousness; instead, righteousness is a gift from God. Genesis 15:6 makes sense against the backdrop of the ancient Egyptian beliefs prevalent in Abram's day. In both systems, "counting" and "righteousness" belong to judicial language, and counting is used for the evaluation of righteousness. Yet, the two perspectives are fundamentally different. In ancient Egypt, the weight of human righteousness was evaluated on the basis of the counting of human works against the weight of the Maat, the divine righteousness. In this system, divine righteousness was demanded of humans, and the possession, or lack thereof, was counted for or against them. By contrast, Abram's righteousness is evaluated on the basis of the divine works for him. In the biblical perspective, "righteousness" (*tsedaqah*) is a specific divine quality *(Isa. 45:24, Dan. 9:7)*, and, as such, righteousness can only be God's gift to humanity *(Deut. 6:25, Deut. 24:13, Isa. 45:24, Ps. 24:5)*. What makes Abram righteous is not the sum of his deeds but his willingness to rely on God's deeds for him *(Rom. 4:2–4)*.

The Faith of the Saints of the End. The most immediate application of the canonical integration of the Old and New Testaments is the association of "the law and the gospel," which Ellen G. White uses to explain our

"distinctive" name (*Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 385). It is also significant that it is on the basis of this association that the name "Seventh-day Adventist" has been legally adopted to found the historical creation of the Seventh-day Adventist Church: "We, the undersigned, hereby associate ourselves together, as a church, taking the name, Seventh-day Adventists, covenanting to keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus Christ" (*The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald,* Oct. 8, 1861).

Obviously, this confession of faith is also found in the apocalyptic text of Revelation, interpreted as a prophetic reference to the last-day witnesses of biblical truth *(Rev. 14:12)*. In this verse, "the saints" are identified as "those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" *(NKJV)*. The law and "the faith of Jesus" mean more than just the concrete action of obedience, along with abstract and spiritual faith. The syntax of the phrase suggests, in fact, that the two actions belong to the same truth, with two possible nuances: the obedience to the law *is* the faith of Jesus; that is, Jesus' faith. For, in biblical thought, faith *is* righteousness *(see Gen. 15:6)*. This reconciliation between "the law of Moses" with the faith in Jesus' coming characterizes the message of the eschatological Elijah *(Mal. 4:4–6)* and constitutes the mission of the two witnesses who represent the testimony of the Old and New Testaments *(Rev. 11:3–6)*.

Part III: Life Application

Teacher's Tip: Below are some strategies to share with your students for building their faith and nurturing their prayer life. Ask for a volunteer to read the Scripture and the principles that follow. Then discuss the principles and questions with your class.

Faith Training *(read Matt. 15:21–28)*

Principle 1: Pray and behave as if God has heard your prayer and has responded or will respond.

Principle 2: Stop worrying about the "status" of your faith or about your current situation. Just move forward, trusting in God.

Principle 3: Learn to walk with God and obey His commandments, even (especially) if this obedience creates troubles (loss of position, friends, etc.).

Questions for Discussion:

1. What does it mean to have true, humble faith in God?
2. What does such humble faith look like?

Notes