

Living Faith

Embracing God's Plan for Your Life
When it's Not the Life You Expected

Kristie Gant



SAMPLE PAGES:

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Lesson One

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About this Study

Frequently Asked Questions

What do I need to complete this course?

You will need a pencil or pen and this course book.

Won't I also need a Bible?

For those who study on-the-go, you can find almost all of the Scripture passages this study mentions in the Scripture-at-a-Glance section in the back of this course book. Thus, you do not need your own copy of the Bible in order to complete most of the lessons.

Nevertheless, if you have access to a Bible as you study, we do recommend that you use it rather than the Scripture-at-a-Glance section. Looking up the passages in a Bible allows you to see more of the context surrounding each passage and helps you gain a greater familiarity with the Scriptures.

If I use my own Bible, does it matter which translation I have?

Quotations throughout this course come from the New King James Version of the Bible. It is fine to use another translation, for example the English Standard Version, New American Standard Bible or New International Version, to answer questions. Paraphrases, such as The Living Bible, will be more difficult to use for study.

Is there anything else I might want to have on hand?

Occasionally there is an option to complete a word study (looking up definitions for the Hebrew or Greek words used in the original Bible languages) or to read from a commentary. Many of these resources are available free online. See Appendix B for more information on word studies and where to find these resources.

If I join a group late, do I have to start from the beginning?

In order to lay a good foundation for study, first complete Days One and Five of Lesson One *and* Day One of Lesson Two; when done, jump ahead to the lesson your group is currently completing. At the end of the study, you can come back to the beginning and work through any lessons you missed.

Why are there boxes to initial?

It is all too easy to plunge right in and begin studying without pausing to ask God's blessing on, and help in, your Bible study endeavors. To remind you of the importance of prayer, and encourage you to make it a serious part of your study time, we include a small box for you to initial after completing a time of prayer.

What if I don't understand, or don't have an answer for a question?

If you occasionally have trouble answering a question, make a mark in the margin and go on to the next question. Many times an answer will come to light as you continue to study.

Why does each lesson end with a hymn?

God has designed music to be a large part of our worship, spiritual encouragement and comfort in life; therefore I have included a hymn at the close of each weekly lesson. If you are unfamiliar with any of the melodies, you can simply be encouraged by reading the words aloud, or you can find audio demonstrations at websites such as:

hymnbook.igracemusic.com/hymns

In addition to the lyrics, this site also includes lead sheets, chord charts, stories behind the hymns, and more. Some of the selections are the traditional melodies; however, many are updated or changed.

hymntime.com/tch/index.htm

This home site for The Cyber Hymnal provides the traditional lyrics and melodies for many hymns.

Why are there so many quotations?

Not only has God designed music to be a part of our worship, spiritual encouragement and comfort, He has also given us one another.² To that end, each lesson includes encouraging quotations written by authors whose lives span hundreds of years of Christian history. I pray that you will find strength as you observe their words and faith, and be encouraged as you see God's grace abound from generation to generation.

What is P.A.T.H.?

At the end of each day's study you will find a box marked P.A.T.H. (**P**rayers, **A**pplications, and **T**houghts of my **H**eart). The box includes a quotation or hymn text for meditation, followed by some lines.

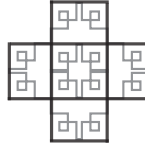
You can use these lines in a variety of ways. For instance, you might record a prayer, thoughts about something you studied in the lesson, some specific actions you would like to take in the coming days, or questions that remain for further study. Whether you actually write something down or not, **the main point** is to make sure that you do not simply complete an academic-type observation of the Scriptures and close your book, but rather that you take some time at the close of study to prayerfully consider God's words and your response.

I'd love to hear from you!

If you have comments or questions, or if you would like to share what the LORD has done in your life as you've completed this course, please write to me at: kristiegant@inpraiseministries.com.

May the LORD bless your study,

Kristie



God's Design for a Life of Faith

Lesson One

One of my favorite childhood toys was a kaleidoscope. Perhaps you also had one — that imaginative tube with an eyehole at one end, glass or plastic at the other, and mirrors and pieces of colored glass or plastic in between. When pointed toward a source of light, a simple turn of the scope brought forth a bountiful treasure of patterns, shapes, colors and designs for the eye to behold.

Even though the little colored shapes themselves were always the same, I could sit for long stretches of time turning the end of the tube and watching them form a seemingly endless number of new patterns. Each turn of the tube brought a new way of looking at the same little colored shapes, and each one was beautiful! I loved to contemplate the different patterns, thinking about the how's and why's of the images that emerged, and comparing the present design with ones I had seen previously.

This lesson will call you to consider some “pieces” of truth about God, life, faith and unexpected paths found in chapter 11 of the New Testament book of Hebrews. You may already know some of these truths. Yet as you look through the chapter a few times, you will see that it is something like a spiritual kaleidoscope: look at Hebrews 11 one way, and you see a certain pattern emerge. Look at it another, and you see something else equally beautiful. As you study, take time to contemplate the ways that different spiritual truths come together with each reading, creating a beautiful, instructive, encouraging mosaic.

The Walk of Faith

1. For believers, prayer is one of God’s greatest gifts and sweetest commands. As you go before His throne this week, begin with the words of Psalm 119:73. When done praying, initial the small box provided as part of the “amen” to your prayer. (*The extra space in the larger box is for those who wish to write out a short prayer.*)

Psalm 119:73

Your hands have made me and fashioned me;

Give me understanding, that I may learn Your commandments.

2. Often referred to as “The Hall of Faith” or “The Saints’ Hall of Fame,” Hebrews 11 stands out, not only among other chapters in the book of Hebrews, but among other chapters in the entire Bible. In Lesson Two we will explore the context of this unique chapter — but this week our focus will be an overview of the chapter itself.

Read Hebrews 11:1-40 in your favorite translation. Read aloud, if possible.¹

a. Other than the words, “*By faith*,” what stands out most to you in this chapter?

b. What do you consider to be the main point or key verse of this passage?

c. (*Optional*) If you noticed any obvious divisions while reading, give a short title to each section.

d. Record one initial observation about each of the following:

(1) God

(2) God’s people

3. As you think about this list of faithful men and women, is there anyone mentioned here who was not called to walk an unforeseen path in life?

_____ No, not one. _____ Yes. [*Explain your choice(s) and reasoning.*]

4. Scripture also speaks of others called to walk unexpected paths: Adam, Eve, Job, Deborah, Ruth, Esther, Caleb, Hosea, Mary, Matthew, John, Peter, Ananias, Paul, Dorcas, Onesimus . . . the list could go on and on. What were some of their unexpected paths?


5. Interestingly, it seems much more common for God to have His people walk unforeseen paths, than to take “normal,” predictable, even less troublesome routes through life.

- a. As you contemplate the prevalence of unexpected paths in the lives of God’s people, do you find such insight more comforting or disquieting? Explain.
- b. Of course, both believers *and* unbelievers experience unexpected paths in life. In what ways does a believer’s unexpected path differ from an unbeliever’s? (*Give this answer additional time and thought.*)

c. Using insights from the boxed quotation below, finish the following sentence:

Walking with faith in God involves . . .

d. Record a closing prayer, application or thought (including questions!) in the P.A.T.H. section below.



Crede in Deum

God is the principal object of faith . . . which act of faith on him is not barely to believe there is a God, and but one; which is *credere Deum*, and which the devils themselves believe; nor is it merely to believe whatever he delivers in his word, as prophecies, promises, doctrines, &c. this is *credere Deo*, to give credit to God, believe what he says; but *credere in Deum*, by believing to cleave to God, lean upon him, and acquiesce in him as our all-sufficient life and salvation . . . and so it is not merely to believe there are three Persons in the Godhead, but to go forth in acts of faith and confidence on them, in things relative to our welfare and happiness here and hereafter.

John Gill (1697-1771)²

PRAYERS, APPLICATIONS AND THOUGHTS OF MY HEART (P. A. T. H.)



Faith is . . .

1. Begin with prayer; and as before, initial the small box as the “amen” to your prayer.

Psalm 119:73
Your hands have made me and fashioned me;
Give me understanding, that I may learn Your commandments.

2. Before looking further at the people in Hebrews 11, it is essential to gain a better understanding of faith itself; and the first verse of Hebrews 11 is a good place to start!

a. In Hebrews 11:1, faith is said to be two things. What are those things?

The substance (assurance) _____.

The evidence (conviction) _____.

Although this verse is often quoted as a definition of faith, it is really an explanation or description of the *effect or working* of faith. As commentator William MacDonald says:

“. . . it is a description of what faith does for us. It makes things hoped for as real as if we already had them, and it provides unshakable evidence that the unseen, spiritual blessings of Christianity are absolutely certain and real. In other words, it brings the future within the present and makes the invisible seen.”³

b. Contemplate the following definitions as you read Hebrews 11:1 aloud.⁴

substance/assurance — a real, existing, firm base or foundation placed under something.

hoped for — to expect with desire, to hope for with trust.

evidence/conviction — proof, certain persuasion.

seen — perceived with the eyes.

c. At this point, how would you complete the following sentence?

In my own words, living by faith in God is (or results in) . . .

3. What things are necessary for living by faith and where do we get these things? (*Answer in light of the thoughts above and passages such as Romans 10:17, Ephesians 2:8, and Hebrews 11:13.*)

4. When trying to grasp a subject, it’s often helpful to state the opposite of it. Complete the following statement:

A life that is not lived by faith in God is lived . . .

5. Read aloud the boxed quotation below. (*Yes, I know it is long . . . but it's good!*)

- a. Underline the two names given to faith which you consider most descriptive of a life lived by faith.
- b. Think briefly about your life and journey in faith. In what years or circumstances have the names you underlined best described your own life — or have they?
- c. Which name (of any listed) best describes your walk of faith today? (*Explain your choice.*)

6. As you continue to meditate on life, God and faith, record a thought to contemplate.



What is Faith?

Thomas Charles was a Welsh clergyman. As a young man, he studied theology under the teaching of John Newton. Toward the end of his life, he wrote the following in response to another young clergyman's questions.

You ask me some questions about faith . . . The difficulties which you state do not appear to me to be such. Last spring I gave our young people for their exercise, to find out all the names given to faith in the Scriptures. And they set about it, and laboured hard, and at last brought to me seventy-one names given to this grace in the Bible. They learnt all the Scriptures, and repeated them publicly twice in our chapel. I must confess I was most highly gratified and edified; and I believe, received more light upon this important subject than from all the authors I have ever read: and the effect still continues sweetly on my mind. . . .

They told us with appropriate proofs, that it was — believing God — believing in the Son of God — coming to Christ — receiving Christ . . . living upon him — building upon him — resting under his shadow — casting all our cares upon him — casting our burden upon him — trusting in him — committing our way unto the Lord — delighting in the Lord — counting all things but loss and dung to win Christ — resting in the Lord . . . taking hold of his strength — lifting up the eyes to God — believing the word — understanding the word — receiving the word — seeing the glory of Christ — looking unto Christ, &c. &c. . . . this is a sample of the seventy-one. Considering faith under all these appellations, the mist is scattered, and the object is clear.

Thomas Charles (1755-1814)⁵

P. A. T. H.



Habits of Faith

1. Today, write out either the words of Psalm 119:73 or a portion of your prayer.

2. Hebrews 11 presents a beautiful mosaic as it describes how God’s people are able to live faithfully on difficult paths. How do they do it? Find out as you identify their habits by filling in the chart below.

- Be sure to notice the three blanks to complete in the left-hand column as well as those in the center column.
- After honest reflection, complete the right-hand column.

Habits of those who live faithfully, even when called to walk an unexpected path

| Those who live faithfully . . . | In other words . . . | Is this my habit in life? |
|--|---|---------------------------|
| a. Believe that God is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. (v. 6) | | |
| b. Are moved to obedience by godly fear. (v. 7) | | |
| c. (v. 10) | <i>Embrace and wait patiently for God’s promises (especially the promise of heaven).</i> | |
| d. (v. 11b) | <i>Trust God to be faithful to His promises.</i> | |
| e. See the promises afar off, are assured of them, and embrace them. (v. 13) | | |
| f. Confess that they are strangers and pilgrims on the earth. (v. 13) | | |
| g. (v. 14, 16a) | <i>Don’t seek to make this earth their homeland, but plainly see heaven as their true home.</i> | |
| h. Choose to suffer affliction rather than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin. (v. 25) | | |

3. The chart on the previous page is not complete. Record at least one more habit of faith you find in Hebrews 11.

4. In Hebrews 11, the record of “faith habits” does not begin with Abel (v. 4), but with the writer of the book of Hebrews and all other believers (the “we” in v. 3).

a. In your own words, from v. 3, what is this first-mentioned, multifaceted act of faith?

b. Why is this understanding of God and creation essential for a walk of faith?

c. Gain additional insight into faith by completing two of the following:

- Read the boxed quotation below, underlining things we “understand” by faith . . . *and note the result!*
- Record a key thought from Appendix C (excerpts from Matthew Henry’s comments on Hebrews 11:1-3).

- Gain additional insight on Hebrews 11:1-3 from other reliable commentators.

5. As you consider your answers above and in the right-hand column of question #2:

a. Which habit of faith most urgently needs to be strengthened in your life today ?

b. What is your prayer?



No Slight Opinion

. . . for they who have faith do not entertain a slight opinion as to God being the Creator of the world, but they have a deep conviction fixed in their minds and behold the true God. And further, they understand the power of his word, not only as manifested instantaneously in creating the world, but also as put forth continually in its preservation; nor is it his power only that they understand, but also his goodness, and wisdom, and justice. And hence they are led to worship, love, and honour him.

John Calvin (1509-1564)⁶

P. A. T. H.

The God Behind it All

1. Begin with prayer.

Psalm 119:73

Your hands have made me and fashioned me;
Give me understanding, that I may learn Your commandments.

2. It's been said that one of the worst things we can do when studying Scripture is to see the people (their actions, their faithfulness, their sin, etc.), and not see their God. Whether we are reading the Old Testament or the New, the prophets or the psalms, the gospels or the letters of Paul, it is of utmost importance to study to know God.

As you look further at Hebrews 11, record everything you learn about God: who He is, what He has done, what He will do, what He is like, what He has, what He controls, what pleases Him, what characterizes Him . . . and so on. Such lists are the sweetest, most life-changing lists you can ever make. Take time here! (*I've given a few entries to get you started.*)

Truths about God from Hebrews 11

- v. 3 He framed the worlds by His word (made the universe ready to fulfill its purpose).
He did not make the things which we see out of things which are visible.
- v. 4 He accepted Abel's sacrifice (which was offered by faith), but not Cain's.
- v. 5 He is powerful enough to take Enoch to heaven before Enoch died.
He was pleased by Enoch's faith.
- v. 6 Without faith, it is impossible for His people to please Him.
He is (He exists).
He rewards those who diligently seek Him (therefore, He can and should be sought).

vv. 7-10

vv. 11-16

vv. 17-19

Truths about God from Hebrews II (continued)

vv. 20-26

v. 27

vv. 39-40

3. Such knowledge of God is essential if we wish to live faithfully on all the paths of life (whether expected or unexpected)! As you review your list about God (*including the entries I provided to get you started*):

- Star a truth which might comfort a couple who has learned they will not be able to conceive a child.
- Underline a thought which might fortify the faith of someone recently diagnosed with cancer.
- Circle one truth which would encourage a young woman who would like to be married, but is single.
- Bracket a thought which might draw a single mom’s heart to deeper worship.
- Write “for me” beside the thought which most excites or comforts your heart today.

4. Lists are never meant to be an end in themselves, but are also a powerful help to meditation and prayer! As you contemplate your list above and the quotation below, may your heart be drawn to prayer. You know what to do with the boxes.



Don't Misunderstand

There is much misunderstanding on this idea of faith, so let me be clear: faith is not the hope that grows to certainty; faith is the reality, or the certainty, that inspires the hope. Do you see the difference? It is not that we have a wish that we cherish and burnish like bronze until it really shines, and then call that our hope and put our faith in it . . . No, what the author is talking about here is perceiving and believing in the reality of something you cannot yet see. The faith we have which gives us hope, then, is hope in something real.

Mark Dever⁷

P. A. T. H.



With All the Saints

When life's situations surprise us or seem out-of-sync with the rest of the world, it is all too easy to take a narrow view and think we are somehow alone on our path. We may wonder why God has not shown us more favor. We may desire the blessings others have, the seemingly easier road they walk, or the lighter (or different) load they bear.

Ecclesiastes 1:9 says "there is nothing new under the sun." Throughout history, people have lived through a full range of life experiences, emotions, and difficulties. Our situations may be surprising or unexpected to us, but they are never surprising to God, and they are nothing new to humanity. There is plenty of company on the unexpected path!

God's people often walk unexpected paths. It is not only normal, and oftentimes hard, but it is a blessed privilege when we are part of the family of God. As His children, we are called to embrace His plan for our lives and walk by faith — but we never walk alone. He walks with us; and our various struggles serve to unite us with one another as well as with Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, the prophets, and so many more. God's people walk united. We walk with our eyes on the One who is Lord over all . . . and we walk with our eyes on the city He has prepared for His people.

1. As always, begin with prayer.

2. Thinking about Hebrews 11, how would you answer the following questions?

a. What is Hebrews 11 about?

b. What makes this a helpful passage for life on an unexpected path?

c. From these verses, what is one hope-giving truth can you tell yourself, or share with a friend, when facing unexpected circumstances? (*Be specific.*)

3. At the beginning of Hebrews 12, the word "Therefore" connects that chapter to Hebrews 11. Using thoughts from Hebrews 12:1-2, expand on question b or c above. (*It may be helpful to verbalize your answer before recording additional thoughts.*)

4. Briefly contemplate this “*great cloud*” (vast multitude) of believers whose lives bear witness to us regarding such things as faith, belief, trust, love, endurance, forgiveness, focus, hope in God, and so much more. They have run their races well. We, however, are still running — and it is here, in this race of life, with all its twists and turns and unexpected paths, that we have the amazing opportunity to live by faith and bring glory to God.

To conclude your overview of Hebrews 11, choose one area of life where you are struggling to trust God and live by faith. For the remaining weeks of this course, at least once per week, bring this matter to God in prayer. Ask Him for the faith you need. Plead with Him to work in your heart, and declare your desire to live faithfully.

The area of life I will be praying about is _____.

5. After reading the hymn below, will you make your requests known unto God?



For All the Saints

Words by William W. How (1823-1897)

*For all the saints, who from their labors rest,
Who Thee by faith before the world confessed,
Thy Name, O Jesus, be forever blessed.
Alleluia, Alleluia!*

*Thou wast their Rock, their Fortress and their Might;
Thou, Lord, their Captain in the well-fought fight;
Thou, in the darkness drear, their one true Light.
Alleluia, Alleluia!*

*O may Thy soldiers, faithful, true and bold,
Fight as the saints who nobly fought of old,
And win with them the victor's crown of gold.
Alleluia, Alleluia!*

*But lo! there breaks a yet more glorious day;
The saints triumphant rise in bright array;
The King of glory passes on His way.
Alleluia, Alleluia!*

*From earth's wide bounds, from ocean's farthest coast,
Through gates of pearl streams in the countless host,
And singing to Father, Son and Holy Ghost:
Alleluia, Alleluia!⁸*

P. A. T. H.

