

LIVING BOLDLY IN VIEW OF
G O D ' S P R O M I S E S

TREASURES
OF
FAITH

LEADER'S GUIDE

CHUCK and SHARON
B E T T E R S


P U B L I S H I N G
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INTRODUCTION



The book of Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians who lived during the second half of the first century. The persecution of fellow believers had cooled their enthusiasm for their faith, and many had returned to their former lifestyles. The unknown writer of the book of Hebrews urged those who remained in the church to walk boldly and to base their walk and testimony on God's promises, despite conditions in a broken world. He reminded them that God had already fulfilled His promise to send the all-sufficient Redeemer, Jesus Christ, and that therefore God would fulfill *all* His promises to His people.

Those early Christians learned that for the child of God, perseverance is about more than survival. It is about experiencing the treasures of faith, resulting in a daily pattern of living that encourages other believers and draws unbelievers to God. Those principles of faith are no less true for us today.

Each life story mentioned in Hebrews 11 could be a Bible study course in itself. The possible applications are endless. For the purposes of this group study, we will narrow the focus to three goals:

1. To discover God's pursuit of and unfolding purposes for His church, as revealed through His interaction with the struggling saints mentioned in Hebrews 11.
2. To experience the treasures of faith God gives to His persevering sons and daughters so that we can finish the race victoriously.
3. To learn how those treasures equip us not only to survive in a broken world but to build a legacy of faith for subsequent generations.

As we trace the journeys of our forefathers in the faith, we will discover remarkable similarities between their struggles and ours. Observing God's hand at work in their hardships will help us track His presence in our own lives and discern how He uses difficult circumstances to edify us and build His kingdom.

You will notice frequent references to women throughout this Leader's Guide. In 1999 the Presbyterian Church in America held an international conference for

women. The theme was "Daughters of the Covenant: What Does God Require?" The conference was a "call to daughters of the covenant to love God and to keep the covenant requirements of justice, mercy, and humility."¹ Its purpose was to equip women to implement ministries of compassion through the women's ministries of their local churches. Knowing that women would leave the conference with many practical ideas for mercy ministry, the event planners also wanted the women to remember that our mercy ministry must be a response to God's mercy and grace, lest it amount merely to self-generated good works. Because all of us function within our theology, the organizers wanted to make available a follow-up Bible study that would remind women of the driving force behind mercy ministry—God's compassion toward His people.

Those who did not attend the conference but have read *Treasures of Faith* can, of course, use this Leader's Guide with benefit. It can be adapted for mixed groups, or for men alone.

SMALL GROUP BASICS

When you lead a small group Bible study, you are following Jesus' example of discipling. Leading a Bible study is often exciting and spiritually stretching, though it can sometimes be frustrating. Remember that just as the eternal impact of Jesus' small group was not immediately realized, neither will you see the fullness of God's work within your group. To prepare for those frustrating times, you need to define carefully your motivation for investing energy and time in this study.

Paul's prayer for believers in Colossians 1:9–14 describes the ultimate goal for the Christian. He wanted them to experience more than saving faith; he wanted them to experience the treasures of their faith. Like Paul's prayer, our desire for our students should be that they will not be content with "religion as usual" but, rather, hunger for an intimate knowledge of God that equips them to live redemptively. Leaders who see themselves as part of an eternal plan have servants' hearts. And it is a servant's heart that changes a mere program into genuine ministry. As you prepare for this study, keep the following thoughts in mind.

1. Pray! Cover and saturate your group with prayer! As soon as you know you will be leading, begin praying for God to direct the study and pray specifically for each woman who will attend. Ask a friend to pray for you throughout the series. Make fervent prayer your highest priority as you prepare each week,² and pray through Colossians 1:9–14 for your group. Fervent prayer transforms our inadequacies into God’s channels of grace.

2. Apply the Word. Real maturity happens when we study and apply God’s Word. Although you are using *Treasures of Faith* as a study book, God’s Word is the focus of the daily devotions and group study. The book is only a tool to get people into God’s Word. “For the word of God is *living and active*. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12, emphasis added).

A danger in small group studies is that members’ opinions can sometimes take precedence over Scripture. Emphasize that God’s Word is the focus of your time together and that Scripture is the only standard by which we are to measure our thoughts, attitudes, and behavior. To keep discussion focused, try to be over-prepared with Scripture references, especially for discussion questions that you think might prove to be controversial.

3. Grow Together. Instead of calling yourself the “teacher,” present and accept yourself as a fellow traveler along the spiritual pathway to maturity. Also, remember that your attitude toward the study will determine the group’s attitude. If you seem bored or ill-prepared, the group will be bored and negligent in their own preparations. If you model honesty, vulnerability, and an expectation that God is present and ready to work in each student, your group members will feel safe and will gradually reflect that same honesty, vulnerability, and anticipation of God’s presence.

4. Be a Committed Community. Maturing Christians look beyond their own needs and reach out to a larger community. A group of six to ten is a good size to learn about community. If God calls more members than that to your group, ask Him to provide more leaders.

Ask your members to give your group time the same importance they would give a doctor’s appointment and to schedule activities around it rather than in place of it. Explain that spending regular group time in God’s Word will encourage deep relationships, and that members’ commitment to the

group reflects their commitment to one another. A local church known for its compassionate care of the Body of Christ is a spiritually maturing church and a magnet to unbelievers.

5. Stress Student Preparation. Group members will mature more quickly if they prepare ahead of time. Emphasize that your group time will focus on deepening understanding of what members are learning during their personal study time. Raise their level of commitment by raising your level of expectation.

6. Do Your Own Homework. Do not expect to lead this study effectively with little personal preparation. The book will raise numerous questions among your students and the opportunities to go off on tangents will be endless. Your personal preparation will keep you sensitive to the Holy Spirit’s direction and help you to know when to gently restore group focus and when to allow the group to explore an area you did not plan to develop.

7. Humbly Trust in the Lord. Last but most important, remember that this is not your group; it is the Lord’s. It’s up to Him to accomplish His goals for each woman. By faith, give Him your limited abilities and your best efforts. Relinquish your expectations and watch Him work His purposes. Believe His promise in Isaiah 55:8–11:

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways,”
declares the LORD.

“As the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

As the rain and the snow
come down from heaven,
and do not return to it
without watering the earth
and making it bud and flourish,
so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for
the eater,

so is my word that goes out from my mouth:

It will not return to me empty,
but will accomplish what I desire
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”

What an idea! We may never see results on this earth, but this passage promises that God is working His plan through His living Word. We believe that one day in heaven, faithful Bible study leaders will be amazed to see how God used their obedience to change lives!

GETTING STARTED

Authorization. If this Bible study is part of a local church ministry, get permission from your church leadership to organize it. Show your pastor a copy of *Treasures of Faith*, and give him a written synopsis of the purpose of the small group study.

Publicity. Creatively publicize the study through unusual means. Depending only on announcements by the pastor and church bulletins is called “passing the buck”! Involve people committed to the study to assist with personal invitations, transportation, etc. The more involved they are, the more they “own” the study as their responsibility. Ask permission to have a table where you can display colorful posters and copies of the Bible study materials. Wrap up a box to resemble a treasure chest, fill it with anything that looks like precious riches. Be sure someone excited about the study stays at the table to answer questions.

After getting permission from the pastor or church leadership, place posters strategically throughout the church: in the nurseries, on the doors of rest room stalls, etc. Make up posters for the men’s room with the message: “Men, do yourself a favor and encourage your wife to attend the women’s Bible study!” Use the same color paper for all announcements and correspondence. Have fun creatively encouraging women to come. But remember, nothing replaces a personal invitation or an offer to give another woman a ride to the study. And even that invitation is only effective when it is directed by prayer. If you delegate the responsibility of publicity, copy these instructions for that person.

Preparing for the Series. It bears repeating that you should cover yourself and every detail of the series with prayer. Ask a friend to commit to praying for you throughout the course of the study. (If you have an assistant, pray with her weekly for each woman in your group. Record in your journal specific prayers for your study.)

Read through the entire text of *Treasures of Faith* and the Leader’s Guide, noting specific points that stand out. At least a week before the first group meeting, urge all participants in the study to read the first chapter and to write their answers to the Digging Deeper questions in an 8-1/2-by-11-inch three-ring notebook for the first meeting.

Prior to that first class, prepare a large timeline poster that duplicates the “Historical Timeline” handout for lesson 1

and spend significant time in prayer for this exercise. (See “Preparing the ‘Historical Timeline’,” at the end of this introduction. The handout itself should be photocopied from a collection of lesson handouts in the back of this guide.)

THE LESSON

Lessons are divided into five segments, each building on the others, and each providing opportunities for group members to develop deeper relationships while applying God’s Word to their lives. After each meeting, evaluate how well the group completed each of these components. Make adjustments in your style of presentation and expectations as you go. The five segments in each lesson are as follows:

THE TREASURES OF COMMUNITY

Several ingredients will help your group develop a strong sense of community.

A Welcome Setting. Arrive early and be sure the room is prepared so that you are free to welcome the women as they arrive. Room arrangements influence interaction. Place chairs or tables so that the group can divide into smaller groups without disruption and each person can see the others as they contribute to discussions. Use flower arrangements, refreshments, small gifts—book marks, magnets, etc.—to communicate to the women that this study is important, and so are they.

Try to greet each woman as she arrives, and provide an opportunity for group members to connect with one another on a surface level. Women feel more connected if at least one person speaks to them and they speak to another person. Look for the woman standing by herself and help her connect with another woman. Set an example for more established Bible study members. Talk to old friends later. Let them know this is time to minister to newer women. Don’t forget name tags.

Icebreakers with a Purpose. This is the time to lead group members into greater intimacy with one another. In addition to using the suggested activities, you can develop your own as you get to know the needs of your group.

Scripture Memory. Although your group will be praying Colossians 1:9–12 for one another, they will be memorizing Colossians 1:9–14, beginning no later than the second week. Some leaders may wish to begin the memory work during the first week.

Prayer Partners. Praying for another person connects us intimately and cultivates community in ways we do not fully understand. Pair up women and challenge them to pray with each other—by phone or in person—once each week. If you have a number of new women in your group, consider having secret prayer partners, which may not be as intimidating as a face-to-face pairing. Ask each woman to pick a name out of a hat and pray for that person for the duration of the Bible study. Suggest that they send anonymous “secret pal” notes, small gifts, etc. At the final meeting for the study, reveal the secret prayer partners. Be sensitive to the Holy Spirit’s guidance in this, as in everything else. In some cases, pairing a younger woman—although new to the group—with an older or more experienced woman may be more beneficial than randomly selected secret pairings. Rely on the Spirit’s wisdom and leading in making this determination.

Testimonies. Periodically ask a woman to share a two-minute testimony with the group that illustrates the Faith Principle you are discussing. To help her stay within that time limit, ask her to submit to you the written testimony a week beforehand. You may even ask her to verbalize her testimony to you so that you can suggest ways to be more effective. When done properly, these testimonies are powerful.

Delegating Responsibility. Serving in a ministry creates ownership. In the short term, it often seems easier to do things yourself, but in the long term, delegating is worth the time invested. It gives women an opportunity to use their gifts, and provides you with the opportunity to observe them in action and make note of potential leaders. Consider delegating the following responsibilities:

- ◆ *Group Environment:* room set-up, table decorations that create warmth, small gifts, book table, group members’ address list, name tags, etc.
- ◆ *Refreshments:* Provide light refreshments at the beginning of the study so women can connect as they arrive. The aroma of refreshments is welcoming, and the table draws women together. Holding a beverage or snack in her hand sometimes gives a woman more confidence in a new setting. The refreshments also invite women to continue to fellowship once the study is over.
- ◆ *Copying and Distributing Handouts:* Save time by copying all the handouts at once.
- ◆ *Keeping Attendance and Contacting Missing Members.*
- ◆ *Testimony Preparation:* Be sure that the one you ask to oversee this knows your expectations—two-minute testimonies, prepared and practiced.

- ◆ *Publicity.*
- ◆ *Book Distribution and Collection of Monies.*
- ◆ *Preparation of Scripture Cards and Memory Helps:* Periodically give this person two or three minutes to share creative memory work ideas. Some memory helps are listed on the “Scripture Memory” handout.

THE TREASURES OF WORSHIP

Most women attending the study will arrive breathless and stressed. Help them to reconnect with God by providing some time for them to acknowledge His presence and praise Him for who He is. Remember, God inhabits the praises of His people (Psalm 22:3). Through praise, God joins us in a supernatural way. Worship centers us on Him, not our own needs. Worship also connects us to one another and helps women transition from the stress and rush of getting there to sitting at Jesus’ feet.

THE TREASURES OF GOD’S WORD

It’s been said that we all function within our theology. Real change takes place when the Holy Spirit moves through God’s Word; understanding God’s Word motivates our behavior. Therefore, we will spend most of our time in this segment as we focus on our Scripture study.

One of the major fears of inexperienced Bible study leaders is that they will give the wrong answers to the study questions. To overcome this problem, answers to some of the Leader’s Guide questions are provided for you or are easily discovered in the book. However, these answers are not meant to be all inclusive. Be willing to listen openly to group members’ answers and utilize them whenever possible.

Application questions are woven throughout this guide to help you elicit discussion, and will require answers unique to the student. Do not read the answers to your group if they have given adequate responses. That may shut down discussion by implying that their answers are not good enough. Your goal should be for them to talk more than you. They will more likely feel that the study is a success if they have been involved in the discussion. Lecturing to a small group is deadly. Remember, this is *their* time to talk.

Ask the questions in your own words and *utilize Scripture* to expand these questions/answers according to your group’s needs. The more comfortable you feel leading the group, the more you should develop your own discussion questions *with scriptural answers*.

The “student text” refers to the *Treasures of Faith* study book. Directions and additional information for the leader are in regular type. Suggested comments and discussion questions appear in a different font. Feel free to put all leader’s remarks into your own words.

Don’t be frustrated by the amount of material in each lesson. There is much more than you will have time to use. This is only a guide. Prayerfully trim and alter it to fit the needs of your group.

THE TREASURES OF LIVING BY FAITH

Although application questions are woven throughout each study, this segment is meant to place added emphasis on ways to apply our study. It asks, “What personal or group action will we take in response to God’s Word?”

THE TREASURES OF PRAYER

Don’t skimp on this segment. Each example of living by faith will raise serious issues for many students. Some may gain a new awareness of God’s grace, or become mindful of the ways God wants to transform their “scorch marks” into building blocks for His kingdom. Others may need to forgive and/or seek forgiveness of their anger against those whom God has used to test their faith. Give your students time to respond, through prayer, to what they learn each week. To encourage them to keep a prayer journal, you might also give them time to write their thoughts in their notebooks before class is dismissed.

WEEKLY PREPARATIONS

The better prepared you are, the better equipped you will be to guide your group. The following checklist will help ensure that you are prepared for each group session:

- ◆ Read each week’s chapter and lesson several times to familiarize yourself with the material.
- ◆ Answer the questions for that week’s Digging Deeper devotions. (Your own study will be more personal if you discover the answers for yourself *before* studying the Leader’s Guide.)
- ◆ Copy the week’s handout(s) if you did not copy them all prior to convening the study.
- ◆ Be prepared to affix the appropriate cards on the Historical Timeline.
- ◆ Pray Colossians 1:9–14 daily for each of your students. (See the sample prayer on page 6 of lesson 1, under “The Treasures of Community.”)

- ◆ Prepare a one-minute preview of the next week’s chapter or, if leadership is passed from one group member to another, leave a moment during the lesson for next week’s leader to do so.
- ◆ Do whatever other preparations are listed in the current lesson.

Remember that this Leader’s Guide is only a guide. Since you will have much more information than you will have time to share, prayerfully plan which items to cover and mark those items in the margins of the guide. If your group is not familiar with the stories of the Old Testament characters, emphasize the questions that focus on those accounts. If the women are familiar with the stories, emphasize the questions that draw parallels between the Bible character’s culture and/or failings and our own. Make a note in the margin of the time when you wish to begin each segment in order to keep moving ahead, but be flexible and sensitive to the Spirit’s leading.

(For more ideas on how to lead a small group Bible study, see *Small Group Bible Studies—How to Lead Them*, by Pat J. Sikora [Cincinnati: Standard Publishing], 1991.)

PREPARING THE “HISTORICAL TIMELINE”

On a large poster draw a straight line with arrows on either end. Write “History of the Church Timeline” at the top of the poster. Make 18 cards that are the right size to be affixed in sequence along the timeline (use tape or Velcro). Write on each card an event or person(s) listed on the “Historical Timeline” handout.

Each week you will attach one or more cards to the timeline, thereby placing within their historical framework the event(s) and/or person(s) discussed in the lesson for that week. Group members will follow your lead by filling out the “Historical Timeline” handout. This will provide an unfolding model for their filling out a second timeline, a “Personal Timeline” that identifies significant events in their lives. 

¹ To purchase the conference videos and/or cassettes, or to learn more about the Core Curriculum Bible Study materials of the Women In the Church (WIC) of the Presbyterian Church in America, call the PCA Bookstore: 1-800-283-1357.

² Where this Leader’s Guide speaks of “weekly” group meetings, you may want to follow another regular schedule that suits the members of your group.

1 LIVING FAITH



FAITH PRINCIPLE #1

*Biblical faith is believing that God exists
and that He rewards those who seek Him.*

Lesson Objectives

- ◆ To introduce the study.
- ◆ To define faith.
- ◆ To encourage students to see their own life journeys in the context of God's eternal purposes.

Preparation

1. Complete the Weekly Preparations on page 5, and read Hebrews 11:1–3.
2. Don't forget to prepare a one-minute preview of chapter 2 or to remind next week's leader to do so.
3. Be sure you have asked students to bring an 8-1/2-by-11-inch three-ring notebook (or plan to provide folders).
4. Ask someone, or a few women, to be prepared to read the *Heirs of the Covenant* handout (found near the back of this Leader's Guide). This reading will take place during the Treasures of Worship portion of the lesson. Ask the reader(s) to read slowly and with expression. The reading should last approximately four minutes.
5. Be prepared to affix cards for Eternity Past, Creation, Hebrews 12:1–3, and Eternity Future to the Historical Timeline poster.

THE TREASURES OF COMMUNITY

Ask each woman to introduce herself by giving her name and telling the group why she is attending the study. Introduce yourself and tell them why you are leading this study. Ask the group members to note the name of the women sitting on their right so that they can pray silently for them later.

Feel free to put all Leader's remarks into your own words. During our time together we will learn how to persevere

in faith throughout our daily experiences so that the treasures of the gospel minister grace and truth in us and to the world around us. A child of God must never be satisfied with simply possessing saving faith, but she should long to experience faith that not only enables her to persevere but also equips her to touch others' lives with God's compassion. Colossians 1:9–12 describes that kind of faith. I have prayed this Scripture for each of you. Pray with me now as we ask God to show us how to experience His presence in this way.

Pray through Colossians 1:9–12 aloud.

Example: Dear Father, please fill each woman in this study with the knowledge of Your will for her life. Show her that such knowledge not only will help her to persevere in her own circumstances but will also bear fruit as she ministers to others. Strengthen her with Your power so that she patiently endures the unexpected twists and turns of her life, and joyfully gives thanks to You for her salvation and the promise of Your eternal presence, no matter how difficult life becomes. Amen.

THE TREASURES OF WORSHIP

Psalm 22:3 tells us that God inhabits the praises of His people. Starting our group time with corporate worship will quiet our hearts and make us more sensitive to His message. Please listen carefully while _____ reads a passage from *Heirs of the Covenant* that not only will remind us that God has fulfilled His promise to provide a Redeemer, but also will put the message of Hebrews 11 into the context of the whole of Scripture.

After the reading, explain that if Jesus Christ is our Savior then God's promises to Abraham are for us as well (Galatians 3:29). Close the worship time with a short prayer.

THE TREASURES OF GOD'S WORD

GOAL: To see that biblical faith enables us to evaluate significant life-events from an eternal perspective.

While some studies of faith define it in terms of good feelings here and now, others seem to focus exclusively on eternity. They treat faith as an anesthetic that numbs us to the emotions that flow from day-to-day experience, or as a warm, fuzzy feeling that covers up the hard realities of this life. Such studies are not only self-defeating but self-centered. Biblical faith is about more than our own personal comfort or survival. True biblical faith spills over into a community. It connects us with other people—past, present, and future.

TIMELINE EXERCISES

GOAL: To visualize our lives within the context of the history of redemption.

Hebrews 11 is a timeline of God's involvement with His people. But it is not only a history lesson; these stories have real life application to all believers. Though it may seem to be an elementary exercise, the Historical Timeline is a visual means of helping us to learn about the history of the church. It will also help us see our own lives as a vital link in that history and is, therefore, an important part of the overall emphasis of this study, well worth the time devoted to it.

As you explain the purpose of this exercise, affix the prepared cards for Eternity Past, Creation, Hebrews 12:1-3, and Eternity Future on the timeline poster. Tell the women to write these events on their "Historical Timeline" handout. Ask the women to look at the poster and envision where each person and/or event fits as they listen to you read Hebrews 11:1-12:3. The reading will take about five minutes. Explain that each week you will add the event and/or name of the saint whose life you are studying.

On our historical timeline we include Hebrews 12:1-3 to denote how our own timeline fits into God's history. Now we're going to take a few minutes to begin filling in our Personal Timeline.

Explain to the women that they will finish this exercise at home, but these few minutes will help them to understand what to do and will give them an opportunity to ask any questions that come up.

Divide your Personal Timeline into 10-year intervals, beginning with the year you were born. Record significant dates in your life. Start with several major life events: accomplishments, relationships, marriage, children, relocating, occupations, ministry, etc. Don't be too detailed, but record those events that are most memorable and joyful. Remember what you consider to be the good times first.

If you are confident that all your group members are believers, instruct them to place a cross on their timeline to mark when they met Christ. If you are not sure that everyone in your group is a believer, give the women a few minutes to work on their timelines, then explain what a Christian is and that the most significant event in every believer's life is the moment she met Christ.

If you're sure you've been "born again," place a large cross at the point at which you experienced God's forgiveness. If you are not sure but would like to talk about this, please see me after the study.

I wonder how the people in Hebrews 11 would have answered the question that begins chapter 1 in our text: "Do you sometimes wish your life were like a videotape so that you could fast-forward over difficult circumstances or rewind back to times of joy and contentment?" Take a minute to think about how you would answer that question. You're probably thinking about what the authors call a "scorch mark." What is a "scorch mark"? (See your answer for the Day Four questions in Digging Deeper at the end of chapter 1 in the text.)

Instruct the women to record three to five of their most significant scorch marks by placing an "x" for each on their timeline. Acknowledge that doing such an exercise may be difficult for some women, especially those who have endured traumatic or unresolved events in the past. Be very clear that they are in a safe place and will not be called on to share their record publicly. Explain that you will be referring to their Personal Timeline throughout the next twelve weeks and that the goal is to begin to see that every significant event that changes the direction of our lives is an opportunity to trust God. Allow several minutes of quiet time. If you notice women who are struggling, close this time by praying for them to feel God's presence as they work through this exercise.

A MARK FROM GOD

Look at the scorch marks noted on your timeline. In the text, the authors state that “such disappointments will quickly reveal whether our faith is based on an intimate, trusting relationship with God or merely on the blessings He so generously gives us.”

Ask these questions, and give time for answers.

- ◆ How do disappointments reveal our relationship to God?
- ◆ What is a worldview?
- ◆ What worldview does the author of Hebrews encourage his readers to have?
- ◆ How do a person’s reactions to the disappointments of life reflect her worldview?
- ◆ According to what we read during our worship time, what is God’s ultimate purpose?
- ◆ How should knowing God’s ultimate purpose help you to respond biblically to the twists and turns of life?

KNOWING GOD . . .

This discussion may reveal erroneous views of God (for example: God is distant, just wound up the clock of time and let it run, doesn’t really care about me, etc.) Rather than spending time defending God’s character, remind your group that the Bible is our final authority. Be prepared to share Scriptures that describe God’s love and care for His children. Assure the group that, though circumstances sometimes seem to refute it, our study of Hebrews 11 will confirm God’s goodness and compassion. Ask group members to write out their thoughts in their notebooks and expect God to reveal Himself to them as they study the Scriptures over the next twelve weeks.

- ◆ Why is it important not only to know God’s ultimate purposes but also to know Him intimately?
- ◆ Why is it not enough to believe God exists and is in control of all things?
- ◆ How does remembering that God has fulfilled His promise of redemption help us trust Him to keep the other promises He has made?

WHAT FAITH IS NOT

GOAL: To demonstrate how erroneous definitions of faith often lead to attempts to control God and our circumstances.

- ◆ Has anyone ever said to you, “You just need to have faith”? What did you interpret that to mean? What does “just have faith” seem to imply?
- ◆ Why is it important to define faith correctly?
- ◆ What are some erroneous definitions of faith? (See definitions listed on page 15 of the text.)
- ◆ What is the underlying fallacy of these definitions?
- ◆ Why are we attracted to such definitions?

WHAT BIBLICAL FAITH IS . . .

- ◆ Read Hebrews 11:1 and, in your own words, define faith according to this verse.
- ◆ What is one of the pivotal building blocks of faith?

Part of the definition of the Greek word for faith, *pistis*, is “the conviction that God exists and is the Creator and ruler of all things.” Believing that God is sovereign is the cornerstone of faith. If women in your group doubt His sovereignty, ask them to write their questions in their notebook and expect to find answers during the course of this study. Explain that the Bible is our authority, and share some of the Scriptures referenced below, along with the selection from the Westminster Confession, to demonstrate God’s sovereignty. Acknowledge that sometimes circumstances are so confusing that our emotions can overwhelm the wisdom we receive from Scripture. When we live by faith we must make a deliberate choice to believe God rather than what our emotions dictate.

From the Westminster Confession of Faith (5.1):

God, the great Creator of all things, doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by his most wise and holy providence, according to his infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of his own will, to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy.¹

(See also Job 14:5; Proverbs 16:4; Isaiah 46:10; Ephesians 1:11.)

Have someone read Hebrews 11:6. Then ask:

- ◆ What is the second part of faith that this verse describes?
- ◆ What reward does a person of faith look forward to? (Hebrews 11:24–26)

This may be a very difficult discussion for women who are experiencing painful circumstances, especially if they believe that good works earn blessings from God. The book of Hebrews was written to believers who had performed good works (Hebrews 10:32–34), but were suffering. The writer’s response was to challenge them to adopt a scriptural worldview and to believe God’s promises. Consider asking a woman in your group to share a brief testimony of how God’s promises enabled her to persevere during a difficult time, even when circumstances seemed to indicate that God was not in control.

THE PROMISE OF SALVATION

- ◆ The first nine and one-half chapters of Hebrews emphasize the fact that God’s promise to provide salvation for His children has already been fulfilled through Christ. According to the writer of Hebrews, what should be our response to this great truth?
- ◆ Turn in your notebooks to your responses for Day Five of Digging Deeper. What practical action did Joan take that helped her to see God’s faithfulness when others were unaware of His presence?
- ◆ Can you share a time in your life when you saw God’s faithfulness in difficult circumstances while others saw only darkness?
- ◆ According to Hebrews 10:19–25, how should we respond to God’s gift of salvation? (Emphasize that prayerful obedience to these principles will enable us to persevere by faith.)

WHEN YOU CANNOT SEE HIS HAND . . .

Read the sentence that starts “The writer of Hebrews . . .” on page 21.

- ◆ Why does the prophet Habakkuk question God’s actions in the Israelites’ lives?
- ◆ Why does God’s response shock Habakkuk?
- ◆ What did Habakkuk choose to do in spite of his fear of and disappointment in God’s plan?

Habakkuk believed God even when circumstances appeared to refute God’s control. A simple definition of faith is “believing God.” Emphasize that faith means believing what God says about Himself and His promises, even when life is difficult.

- ◆ How does biblical faith (believing God) help us view our circumstances through the lens of God’s sovereignty?
- ◆ How do we demonstrate biblical faith when life is hard?

LIVING BY FAITH

Have someone read Judges 2:10–12. Then ask:

- ◆ What was the root sin of the Israelites?
- ◆ How does our world resemble their world?
- ◆ Why is it important to know and pass on the truths found in Hebrews 11?
- ◆ What is one practical way you can pass on your faith in the daily routines of life?

THE TREASURES OF LIVING BY FAITH

Explain that a study of Scripture is not complete until we begin to apply what we are learning. Remind the group that we function within our theology—our worldview dictates our behavior. A need to be in control reflects a distrust of God’s character. Ask someone to share her answer to the question for Day Six. Challenge the group to pray daily that God will reveal to them actions that demonstrate a distrust and/or disbelief in God’s sovereignty. Ask them to return next week prepared to share one such instance and what they learned from it.

For Next Week

Give a one-minute preview of chapter 2 and announce next week’s assignments:

- ◆ Read chapter 2 and do the Digging Deeper devotions.
- ◆ Continue filling in your Personal Timeline and begin answering the accompanying questions.
- ◆ Continue to pray Colossians 1:9–12 for the woman who sat on your right this week.
- ◆ In your notebook, record attempts to control circumstances instead of surrendering to God’s control.

THE TREASURES OF PRAYER

Remind the group that the book of Hebrews urged these beleaguered Christians to take their concerns, hurts, and fears to God and hold fast to His promises.

As you prepare to close, ask the women to bow their hearts before God as you read Hebrews 10:19–25 and then to pray silently through Colossians 1:9–12 for the women sitting on their right. After a moment of silence, say a short prayer to bring your prayer time to a close. 

¹ *The Westminster Standards, The Larger Catechism* (Norcross, Ga.: Great Commission Publications, 1994), 8.