

GOALS FOR THE GROUP LEADER

Help the group members to see:

1. that our Christian life begins with justification by faith
2. that our Christian life should be lived daily in faith

I. WORSHIP (14 min.)

1. Prayer

Pray that God will guide us through his Spirit; that we will be aware of his presence and that we will listen to what he says.

2. Meditation

Worship is to submit to God's help.

Theme: God is my Helper

Read the Bible verses mentioned below and the explanation. Or explain the verses in your own words.

Deuteronomy 1:29-33

²⁹ Then I said to you, "Do not be terrified; do not be afraid of them. ³⁰ The LORD your God, who is going before you, will fight for you, as he did for you in Egypt, before your very eyes, ³¹ and in the desert. There you saw how the LORD your God carried you, as a father carries his son, all the way you went until you reached this place."

³² In spite of this, you did not trust in the LORD your God, ³³ who went ahead of you on your journey, in fire by night and in a cloud by day, to search out places for you to camp and to show you the way you should go.

➤ *God helps you against your enemies*

Every believer has enemies at certain times. Sometimes they are family members and friends, who reject or ridicule your faith in Jesus Christ. Sometimes they are evil spirits that attack you, because you have occupied yourself with them before. But most of the time your enemies are the sinful world with its temptations around you and your sinful nature with its desires inside you.

God is our Helper. He says: "Do not be terrified; do not be afraid of them (i.e. your enemies). The LORD your God, who is going before you, will fight for you."

How does God fight for you? Sometimes he allows you to watch how he conquers your enemies and removes them (2 Chronicles 20:12-17,22-23). But sometimes he does

not remove them, because he wants to teach you to love your enemies and pray for them (Luke 6:27-28; 1 Peter 2:21-23). When your reaction to your enemies pleases him, he may even cause your enemies to make peace with you (Proverbs 16:7). God wants to equip you for spiritual warfare against evil spirits and evil governments (Ephesians 6:10-17). And God wants you to fight against your own sinful desires (1 Peter 2:11).

➤ *God helps you in all your circumstances*

A journey through a desert can be very difficult! The heat by Day and cold by night, the lack of water and food, the dangers of snakes and scorpions threaten you all the time. God's people had to endure these difficulties for 40 years as they travelled through the desert! And yet they saw (experienced) how God carried them, just as a father carries his child on his neck, all the way until they reached their destination.

Often God does not remove your difficult circumstances from you, but he never leaves you in the lurch. You do not have to conquer these difficulties alone. You must face the difficulties, but God carries you right through these difficulties. While he is carrying you, he is training you to trust his presence, wisdom, power, salvation and help.

➤ *God helps you on your journey of life*

It is not easy to go on a journey when you do not know the way. Although you know your final destination, you do not know the way to it. You have never travelled along this way before! You have never encountered these circumstances before!

People, who travel along the road of their life without God, have no eternal goal in life. They have no map or compass to guide them along the road. Without a dependent relationship with God you too would lose your way. Without your heavenly Father holding your hand, you would run around without resting. But with God going before you, you cannot lose the way.

Generally God does not show you the way a long time ahead of time. He is training you to trust his guidance, to put your hand in his hand and to allow him to guide each step of the way. The Bible teaches that God guides a Christian through the lamp of his Word one step at a time (Psalm 119:105).

God does not expect his people to run all the time. He knows when and where his children must rest. He will lead you to places of rest.

3. Worship

Let everyone in the small group take a turn to worship God (in one or two sentences) as our Helper.

II. INTRODUCTION THEME (1 min.)

The theme for this meeting is: Walking by faith

Read or explain in your own words.

By grace God has bound his people to himself through the covenant. In this covenant God is the greater party and you and I as believers are the lesser party. The way we enter into this covenant relationship is by faith. And the way we live as his covenant people is by faith. Without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6)!

How does a believer walk by faith? How does he practically claim God's promises? This is the theme of this study.

III. SHARING OF QUIET TIMES (30 min.)

Let everyone in the small group take a turn to share (or read) what he has learned from one of the assigned quiet times.

Theme: Walking by faith

Day 1	Romans 10:11-21 Faith comes from hearing the message
Day 2	Romans 4:16-25 Faith is the conviction that God keeps his promise
Day 3	1 Peter 1:3-9 The perspective of faith
Day 4	James 1:5-8 Trust without wavering
Day 5	James 2:14-26 Faith without action is dead
Day 6 ^{BS}	Hebrews 11:1-16 Examples of faith
Day 7 ^{BS}	Hebrews 11:17 – 12:3 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus
Day 8	Romans 3:19-30. God imputes your faith as righteousness
Day 9	Romans 4:1-8 Not by works, but by faith
Day 10	Romans 10:9-10 Faith leads to salvation

IV. ADDITIONAL SHARING (15 min.)

Part IV is optional.

If after sharing quiet times there is still time left over, the following may serve as subjects for conversation.

1. Discussing the study

Discuss the study with reference to the questions mentioned below:

Theme: Living with God's promises

- What is the meaning of the concept 'faith' in the Bible?
- Why may Christians claim the promises in the Bible?
- What are the characteristics of biblical promises?
- How do you practically claim God's promises?
- What is the purpose of God's promises?

2. Commitment

Let the group members consider the following questions and record their answers:

- "For which area in your life do you need faith?"
- "What has God said in the past to you that you have not yet carried out?"

3. Personal sharing

Discuss personal growth and commitment. Who would like to share a difficulty or blessing in his/her personal life? What are your thoughts or feelings?

V. MEMORISATION (5 min.)

1. Review previous Bible verses

Let pairs of group members review each other's previously memorised Bible verses (the last memorised Bible verse or the last 5 memorised Bible verses).

2. Memorisation of the new Bible verse

Explain the meaning of the new Bible verse.

WALKING BY FAITH Hebrews 10:36

You need to persevere
so that when you have done the will of God,
you will receive what he has promised.

Hebrews 10:36 (NIV)

3. Memorisation of the Bible books

The last 6 minor prophetic books:

Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.

VI. BIBLE STUDY (45 min.)

Theme: Walking by faith

1. Bible Study

Make use of the 5 step Bible Study method and study:

Hebrews 11:1-16, 39-40.

¹Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. ²This is what the ancients were commended for.

³By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

⁴By faith **Abel** offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man (cf. Matthew 23:35), when God spoke well of his offerings (Genesis 4:4). And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.

⁵By faith **Enoch** was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God. ⁶And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

⁷By faith **Noah**, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.

⁸By faith **Abraham**, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. ⁹By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

¹¹By faith he (Abraham), even though he was past age—and Sarah herself was barren—was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise. ¹²And so from this one *man*, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.

¹³**All these people** were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth.

¹⁴People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. ¹⁵If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

³⁹ These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. ⁴⁰ God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.

2. Emphasis

➤ *Faith*

Faith has to do with realities that are still future and are not yet visible. Faith consists of the revelation of God's truth, your trust in the truth and your action based on that truth.

➤ *Justification*

Justification becomes a reality when God declares the believer completely righteous and henceforth regards and treats him as perfectly righteous (forgiven) because of what Jesus Christ accomplished. Justification brings the believer into a new position: he becomes a child of God, a citizen of God's kingdom or a member of the Body of Christ. This reality is received by faith.

➤ *The Christian life*

The Christian life begins with faith, but must also be lived every Day by faith in God and in his Word.

➤ *Key words in the New Testament are already found in the Old Testament*

- 'Faith' and 'to reckon/ascribe/impute righteousness' (Genesis 6:9; 7:1; 15:6)
- 'Grace', 'love' and 'forgiveness' (Exodus 34:6-7)
- 'Obedience' (Genesis 22:18)
- 'Church' (Judges 20:2; Psalm 22:22; 107:32; 2 Chronicles 29:28)
- 'The Heavenly Jerusalem' (Isaiah 24:23; 54:11-14; Hebrews 12:22)
- 'The kingdom of God' (Exodus 19:6; Isaiah 9:7)
- 'The new earth' (Isaiah 65:17)

3. Explanation for the group leader

11:1. What is faith?

Faith is the assurance of things that Christians hope or expect. It is the proof of the existence of things that Christians cannot yet see. The promises, which God has made, have not yet been fulfilled and belong to the future.

However, Christians live as if these future things are already present realities. That is how certain they are that God will do what he had promised!

Their physical eyes cannot yet see these future realities; they cannot yet experience them. But their spiritual eyes can see these future realities! By faith they take God at his Word and arrange their life according to his Word.

Thus, faith consists of three parts:

- First, the revelation of God's words must be heard (cf. Romans 10:14-17).
- Then, God's words or promises are believed in the mind and heart. The believer trusts that they are true for him and he personally accepts them.

Finally, God's words and promises are obeyed. The believer acts on the basis of these words and promises.

Faith is the empty hand that accepts God's salvation by grace.

Faith is the trunk of a tree of which grace is the root and good works are the fruit.

11:2. A testimony or a divine commendation

The faith of the Old Testament believers are recorded (in the Bible) as 'a testimony' or 'a divine commendation'.

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews records a number of examples of faith in a historical order, thereby giving a summary overview of God's history of salvation as it progresses from the Old Testament period (the period of promise) to the New Testament period (the period of fulfilment). The New Testament period begins with the first coming of Jesus Christ, the Author and Finisher (Perfector) of our faith (Hebrews 12:2).

11:3. Faith with respect to the material creation

The creation is an example of faith being a certain conviction of a reality that cannot be seen. No man has seen the creation actually taking place and therefore no one knows exactly how the universe came into existence.

The unbelievers have various theories about creation. The Christian, however, is certain that the universe has been created by God 'out of nothing', by speaking his creative word or by performing his creative act (cf. Romans 4:17). This faith of the Christian is based on Genesis chapter 1 and 2. He believes that the universe has been created by God, because God revealed this fact to him and it was subsequently recorded in the Bible.

11:4. The faith of Abel

Abel brought a better (Greek: greater) sacrifice or offer than Cain, not because Abel brought a living lamb and Cain a dead agricultural product. God is not pleased with the material content of sacrifices, but is pleased with the attitude of the heart with which the sacrifice is being made (1 Samuel 15:22-23; Isaiah 1:11-15; Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:6-8).

Abel brought a better sacrifice than Cain, not because Abel used the correct ritual method to sacrifice and Cain the wrong method. It is also not because God required the shedding of blood, because in Genesis 4 it concerns the bringing of the first fruits, which required the bringing of either the first of the flock or the first of the

harvest and not the bringing of a sin offering, which required the shedding of blood (Hebrews 9:22).

Abel brought a better sacrifice or offer than Cain, because Abel was righteous (Matthew 23:35) and Cain remained unrighteous (1 John 3:12). The Bible clearly teaches that Cain would be accepted if he did what was right, but he chose to remain unrighteous (Genesis 4:7).

"The LORD detests the sacrifice of the wicked, but the prayer of the upright pleases him" (Proverbs 15:8). Because the righteous live by faith (Hebrews 10:38) and because it is impossible to please God without faith (Hebrews 11:6), Abel must have lived and acted by faith (Hebrews 11:4).

The faith of Abel continues to speak even after his death and it cries to God from the grave for God's just judgement against his murderer (Genesis 4:10; cf. Revelation 6:9-11).

However, the blood of Jesus Christ that cleanses from all sin speaks a better word, that is, it speaks more powerfully (with much more grace and mercy) than the blood of Abel (that cries for revenge) (Hebrews 12:24)! The blood of Jesus Christ (his sacrifice of atonement on the cross) calls people to repentance and eternal life (Acts 3:18-19)! In this way "mercy triumphs over judgement" (James 2:13)!

What is justification?

God is perfectly righteous. He demands that every person must be perfectly righteous in order to be justified (saved) and that all unrighteousness must first be punished.

God is also perfectly love. He supplied the necessary perfect righteousness in Jesus Christ by Jesus Christ who died for the unrighteousness of those who believe in him and by imputing (ascribing) the righteousness of Jesus Christ to them (2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 3:18a).

The justification of sinners during the Old Testament period was only possible because Jesus Christ later earned this necessary righteousness by his perfect life on earth, his death and his resurrection (Romans 3:24-26)!

A sinner is never justified on the ground of something he himself does (his good works, his religious works like: praying, fasting, giving and making pilgrim's journeys to Jerusalem, keeping the law, being circumcised, eating clean food, performing ablutions, etc.) (Ephesians 2:8-9). A sinner is only justified by faith in what God said and did through Jesus Christ (Romans 3:28). For example, look at the faith of Abraham and David (Romans 4:1-8).

By nature all people are completely unrighteous. 'Justification' means that God by his grace and mercy declares a

person perfectly righteous when he believes and thereafter regards and treats him as perfectly righteous in his eyes.

The righteous person then has a new position in relationship to God. He stands in a right relationship to God; he is a child of God and he belongs to the people of God (the family of God, the kingdom of God, the Body of Christ).

11:5. The faith of Enoch

The original Hebrew text says: "Enoch walked with God. And he was no more, because God took him away" (Genesis 5:21,24). Our New Testament text is taken from the much later Greek translation of the Old Testament and says: "By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away" (Hebrews 11:5). The Greek word for 'taken away' can also be translated by 'changed, transformed'.

While the Hebrew text refers to the spirit (soul) of Enoch that was taken away into heaven (his spiritual transformation), the Greek text refers to the body of Enoch that was taken away into heaven (his physical transformation: he did not experience physical death). We need to explain this text in the light of the Hebrew Old Testament. Nevertheless, the writer of the letter to the Hebrews does not emphasize Enoch's transformation, but his righteous life because he believed (cf. Hebrews 10:38)!

11:6. Faith in the invisible and not yet fulfilled

The writer does not doubt that his readers desire to live a life that is pleasing to God. But he does point out that without faith no one, not even during the Old Testament period, can please God!

Genuine faith consists of two things: faith in the invisible reality of God and faith in the yet unfulfilled promises of God. The faith in God is *not* like the faith in the existence of a god, as in the other religions, but faith in the One and Only God who has revealed himself in the Bible, first by speaking through the Old Testament prophets and then by speaking through his Son, Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-2)! Faith is *not* believing in the words of one or another religious book, but faith in the words and promises of the One true and living God of the Bible!

It is not true that everyone is saved by his own faith. One can only be saved by faith in the God of the Bible who revealed himself in Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "I am the Way. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). And the apostles said, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12)!

The reward for everyone who seeks the God of the Bible will be that they will find him!

11:7. The faith of Noah

Noah was a righteous man, just like Enoch, and he too walked with God (Genesis 6:9). The writer emphasises his faith as a conviction of things he did not see. When God revealed to him that he was going to do something very unusual (the flood over the earth) in his time, Noah took God at his word and showed his faith in God and God's word by taking practical measures against what was going to happen in the future. His contemporaries must have laughed at his building of the ark on dry land, but finally his faith proved to be right and their scepticism wrong. Noah became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith (Hebrews 11:7).

11:8. The faith of Abraham

Abraham is the first of whom is said that God 'credited' his faith to him as righteousness (Genesis 15:6). The word 'credited' does not imply 'payment', but rather means 'ascribed', 'regarded', 'imputed' out of pure grace.

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews once more emphasises that faith is the certain conviction of the reality of something invisible. Abraham believed God's calling and kept walking by faith, not by sight (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:18; 5:7). Throughout his life he did not possess the Promised Land on earth and he did not see the promised heavenly city and heavenly country (verse 10 and 16). That is why Abraham is also called 'the father of all believers': whether believers during the Old Testament period who believed in the Messiah that still had to come, or believers during the New Testament period who believe in Jesus Christ that has already come. He is the father of all believers, whether they were originally Jews or Gentiles (Romans 4:11-12). When God called Abraham to leave Ur in Chaldea (modern Iraq), he believed God's promise and went on his way to a new land, without having seen this land before and without ever personally taking possession of that land.

Faith and obedience are inseparable in the Bible. Obedience is the visible (outward) proof of the invisible (inward) faith in the heart (cf. Genesis 22:17-18; 26:4-5; James 2:21-26).

11:9. Abraham received 'the promise' concerning an inheritance. He did not receive 'the fulfilment of the promise' (the inheritance itself). And yet God's promise was as real to Abraham as its fulfilment! Although the land was still a foreign country, he already lived there!

11:10. The secret of the patience of Abraham was that he was looking forward to the (only) city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

In the light of the New Testament revelation the fulfilment of God's promise was much more than the Promised Land, Canaan and much more than a mere temporary kingdom. By faith Abraham looked forward to the kingdom of God that would come into existence in the time of fulfilment. He looked forward to the Church of Christ, called 'the Heavenly Jerusalem' (Galatians 4:24-27; Hebrews 11:10,16), that would be established at the first coming of Christ and that would become 'the New Jerusalem' (Hebrews 13:14; Revelation 21:1-2, 9-10) at the second coming of Christ. He looked forward to inherit, not just a small country in the Middle East, but to inherit 'the world', 'the new earth' together with the New Jerusalem (Romans 4:13)!

The blessings for the believers from the Old Testament period must be of the same order as the blessings for the Christians from the New Testament period. It is therefore not true that the believers from the Old Testament period would only receive earthly blessings and the believers from the New Testament period would only receive heavenly blessings.

11:11-12. The faith of Sarah or Abraham

Verse 11 contains a difficulty in the text. Literally the Greek text says: "By faith – and (even though) Sarah herself (was) sterile – and (even though) he was past the normal age (i.e. to beget children) - he *once for all* received power to sow seed, because he *once for all* considered him faithful who had *once for all* made the promise." The text seems to speak about Sarah as the subject, but then continues to speak about the subject receiving power to sow seed (i.e. to father, to beget or to procreate) (Greek: *katabole spermatos*), something only a man can do!

Most Bible translations choose to maintain Sarah as the subject: "By faith even Sarah, who was passed age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise."

However, in the whole Bible passage from verse 8 to verse 11, not Sarah, but Abraham is the subject! Thus the translation should read: "By faith he (Abraham), even though he was passed age – and Sarah herself was barren – was enabled to become a father, because he considered him faithful who had made the promise" (cf. Romans 4:19-22).

"And so from this one man (Abraham) (and he as good as dead) came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore (verse 12)."

11:13-16. All the Old Testament believers did not receive the things promised

They lived by faith and died by faith, that is, with the certain conviction that God would fulfil his promise. When they died, they had not yet received what God had promised. So they passed God's promise on to the next generation. They saw the fulfilment of God's promise with the eyes of faith. They welcomed God's promise from a distance. They acknowledged that they were living as 'strangers and pilgrims' on earth (cf. 1 Peter 2:11; Philippians 3:20). Their eyes of faith were certainly not looking at a small country in the Middle East which they would only possess temporarily (the Promised Land, Canaan). Their eyes of faith were looking at something much better, a heavenly country!

Even after Joshua brought the Israelites into the Promised Land, David and the believers in the Old Testament still looked forward to the future 'Sabbath-rest' (Hebrews 4:8-10), the final place of rest in the heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:22-24) that would descend as the New Jerusalem onto the new earth at the second coming of Christ (Revelation 21:1-2).

The believers from the Old Testament period will receive exactly the same inheritance as the believers from the New Testament period.

11:39-40. Also all the New Testament believers have not yet received the things promised

Also the New Testament believers are looking forward to that city that is to come (Hebrews 13:14). The believers from the Old Testament period will not receive the fulfilment of God's promise before or after the believers from the New Testament period. All believers together will receive the fulfilment of God's promise at the same time, that is, at the second coming of Christ!

When does faith reach its final goal? When all believers in Jesus Christ have completed the race marked out for them on earth (Hebrews 12:1-3; 2 Timothy 4:7-8). When their faith becomes sight (1 John 3:2)! When they receive the promised inheritance at the second coming of Christ (Hebrews 11:39-40; Romans 8:17).

VII. PRAYER (8 min.)

Pray with one another in response to what God said to you during this gathering. Let every group member take a turn to pray one or two sentences about what God taught him during this meeting.

Pray with one another for one another (Romans 15:30) and for other people (Colossians 4:12).

VIII. THE NEXT MEETING (2 min.)

Hand out the preparation for the next gathering.