

A GREAT HIGH PRIEST

A Catholic Journey Through the Letter to the Hebrews

Session 10 · By Faith · Hebrews 11

LEADER'S GUIDE · NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

Part 1 · Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group walks the sermon's portrait gallery and discovers its grammar: every “by faith” wears a verb: offered, built, obeyed, went out, chose, refused, passed through, fell down, and thereby learns what biblical faith is: not a feeling about God but a trust that moves. The sola fide steelman is met from the chapter's own syntax, with St. Clement of Rome holding both truths in one first-century letter, and the gallery's stunning last line is planted for next week: they did not receive what was promised, “that apart from us they should not be made perfect.”

Catholic Touchstone. Faith as the Catechism defines it: the theological virtue by which we believe and commit our whole selves (CCC 1814), living faith working through love, dead without works (Galatians 5:6; James 2): the Catholic both/and, discovered rather than asserted, from the forty verbs of Hebrews 11.

What You Need to Know

The definition (11:1-3), read with care. “Now faith is the assurance (*hypostasis*, the substance, the ground under) of things hoped for, the conviction (*elenchos*, the proof, the evidence) of things not seen.” Faith, in this sermon, is not certainty's opposite but hope's foundation: the solid footing under realities promised and unseen. Note its objects: things hoped for (future) and things not seen (invisible): faith is the faculty for exactly the two categories the senses cannot audit: which is why the righteous “live by” it between the promise and the arrival (10:38, last week's bridge).

The grammar is the theology. The homework asked the group to underline the verb after every “by faith,” and the harvest is the session: by faith Abel offered; Noah constructed; Abraham obeyed and went out and sojourned; Sarah received power to conceive; Abraham, tested, offered up Isaac; Moses' parents hid him; Moses refused, chose, considered, left, kept the Passover; the people crossed; the walls fell after they were encircled; Rahab welcomed. Not one entry reads “by faith he felt assured” or “by faith she held correct opinions.” In this chapter faith is never inert: it is trust with its boots on, and the verbs are not additions to faith but faith's own body. This observation, made by the group's own underlining, is the steelman's entire answer in advance.

The two summits: Abraham and Moses. Give the gallery's two largest portraits their space. Abraham: called to go out, “not knowing where he was going” (11:8: obedience with incomplete information is the norm, not the exception); looking for “the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (11:10: the patriarch in tents was homesick for architecture he had never seen); and

the Akedah (11:17–19): “he considered that God was able to raise men even from the dead; hence, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back”: Abraham’s logic on Moriah was resurrection logic, and Isaac carried the wood for his own sacrifice up a hill in the land of Moriah, a scene in which Christian tradition has always recognized a figure of the Son carrying the wood of the cross (leader background: the tradition locating the temple mount in “the land of Moriah,” 2 Chronicles 3:1). Moses: the calculus of

11:24–26: he refused a throne, chose ill-treatment with God’s people, “considering abuse suffered for the Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he looked to the reward”: faith as accounting: Moses ran the numbers with eternity on the ledger and Egypt lost.

The gallery’s dark wing (11:32–38). The chapter’s honesty must not be skipped: the same “through faith” that conquered kingdoms and stopped lions also introduces those who “were tortured, refusing to accept release... suffered mocking and scourging, chains and imprisonment... were stoned, sawn in two, killed with the sword... destitute, afflicted, ill-treated, of whom the world was not worthy.” Faith is not a success formula; the gallery hangs the rescued and the unrescued on the same wall, under the same caption. Some by faith escaped the sword (11:34); some by faith died on it (11:37): and the sermon honors the second group with its highest sentence. Your group knows people in both wings; teach the wall whole.

The last line, planted (11:39–40). “And all these, though well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had foreseen something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.” Two moves here. The Tally scores (“something better,” 11:40: and 11:16’s “better country” and 11:35’s “better life” earlier: three entries tonight). And the astonishing final clause: the heroes wait for us: their perfecting is deliberately incomplete until the whole family is in: which is one verse away from next session’s cloud of witnesses and festal assembly. Plant it, read it twice, explain nothing: “next week the sermon tells us where they all are now, and what they are doing, and it involves you.” Guard accordingly.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Genesis 22:1–14. The Akedah: the test, the wood on Isaac’s back, the raised knife, the provided ram, and the sermon’s window into Abraham’s mind: “he considered that God was able to raise men even from the dead.” The night’s central live discovery, read with 11:17–19 open beside it.

Genesis 15:5–6. “He believed the LORD; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness”: the verse every steelman on faith must reckon with, and note what Abraham’s believing looked like in the very next chapters: leaving, sojourning, climbing Moriah. Genesis itself never separates the crediting from the walking.

Joshua 2 and 6 (Rahab). The gallery’s most scandalous portrait: a Canaanite prostitute, saved “because she had given friendly welcome to the spies” (11:31): her faith was a hidden rope and a red cord, and St. James chose her, alongside Abraham, as his second exhibit that faith without works is dead (James 2:25). The gallery and James use the same two examples: file it for the steelman.

Voices of the Church

St. Clement of Rome *Letter to the Corinthians*

The first-century bishop, who quotes Hebrews 1 elsewhere, holds tonight’s whole balance in one

letter: we are not justified by ourselves, nor by our own wisdom or works, but by faith, through which Almighty God has justified all men from the beginning: and, pages earlier, that Abraham was blessed because he wrought righteousness and truth through faith, and pages later, that we must be justified by deeds, not words. The generation of the apostles saw no contradiction: faith justifies, and justifying faith works. Both sentences, one saint, one letter.

St. Augustine *Sermon 169*

The Doctor of Grace, whom no one accuses of crediting human merit too much, preached the line the Church has never let go: he who created you without you will not justify you without you. Grace does everything, and grace does not do it over your head: faith is grace's landing site in a free creature, and the freed will's yes, lived out, is grace's own work in us: which is why the gallery's faith always has hands.

St. John Chrysostom *Homilies on the Epistle to the Hebrews*

On the definition, Chrysostom marvels: faith gives substance to things hoped for: it makes the unseen stand solid before the soul, so that the faithful man deals with the promises as with realities already in hand. The heroes acted strangely by the world's arithmetic, he says, because they were doing sums with invisible integers: the reproach of Christ outweighing Egypt is only madness if the reward is not real.

Catechism Connection

CCC 145–147. The Catechism's own treatment of faith opens with Hebrews 11 by name: Abraham obeying, Sarah conceiving, the whole cloud of the Old Testament's faithful: to live in faith is the Letter to the Hebrews' great proclamation.

CCC 1814–1815. Faith: the theological virtue by which we believe in God and all he has revealed, committing our entire selves: and the gift of faith remains in one who has not sinned against it, but “faith apart from works is dead”: the Catechism quoting James inside its definition of faith.

CCC 2008–2009. Merit, defined without Pelagian residue: the merit of our good works is due first to the grace of God, then to the faithful; our merits are God's gifts. The gallery's rewarded verbs, guarded against both boasting and despair.

CCC 1821. We can hope in the glory of heaven promised by God to those who love him and do his will: hope's grammar matches 11:6: whoever would draw near must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

Thread Watch

11:39–40 · THE PLANT (GUARD IT)

Read the gallery's last two verses twice and explain nothing: the heroes did not receive the promise, so that apart from us they should not be made perfect. Say only: “Next week the sermon tells us where all these people are right now, and what they are doing, and it involves you personally.” Do

not preview the cloud, the mountain, or the festal assembly.

THREAD 2 · THE BETTER TALLY (PUBLIC: TRIPLE SCORE)

Three entries: a better country, that is, a heavenly one (11:16); a better life through resurrection (11:35); God had foreseen something better for us (11:40). The board is in double digits; one session of collection remains before the total.

THREAD 3 · THE WE-HAVE INVENTORY (LEADER ONLY)

No new entry tonight; the list holds at five. The final entry arrives in Session 12, and it is the study's last discovery. Two weeks.

Session Goals

1. The definition of 11:1 is unpacked: substance of things hoped for, evidence of things not seen.
2. The verb harvest lands: the group's own underlining proves that faith, in this chapter, always moves.
3. Abraham's resurrection logic and Moses' eternal accounting get their full portraits.
4. The sola fide steelman is met with charity and the chapter's own grammar, Clement and Augustine in hand.
5. The dark wing is honored, and 11:39–40 is planted intact.

Time Note

Built for 75 to 90 minutes. If the night runs short, compress the early portraits (Question 3 handles Abel, Enoch, and Noah together) and cut the Dig Deeper, in that order. Do not cut the verb harvest (Question 2), the Akedah (Question 5), the steelman (Question 7, capped at fifteen minutes), or the dark wing and the plant (Questions 8 and 9). No ANSWER box is a script.

Part 2 · Discussion Guide

OPENING PRAYER

Father of Abel and Abraham, of Sarah and Rahab, of the rescued and the unrescued: give us the faith that is the ground under our hope and the evidence of what we cannot see. Where our trust has been an opinion, give it verbs. Where it has been comfortable, show it the reward. We would draw near; we believe that you exist, and that you reward those who seek you. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

WIN · OPENING QUESTIONS

W1. Whom have you trusted enough to act on their word alone: taking a job, a route, a leap, on someone's say-so? What made their word weight-bearing?

W2. Homework harvest: what was your verb count, and which single portrait in the gallery is your favorite? One sentence on why.

BUILD · INTO THE TEXT

READ ALOUD: Hebrews 11:1–3, 6

1. The Bible's most famous definition of faith: “the assurance (hypostasis: the substance, the ground under) of things hoped for, the conviction (the evidence) of things not seen.” Notice faith's two objects: the future, and the invisible. Why does life with God require a faculty for exactly those two categories, and what does 11:6 add about the minimum content of faith?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Because everything decisive in the covenant is one or the other: the promises are future and the Promiser is invisible: the senses can audit neither, so trust must carry what sight cannot. Faith is not certainty's opposite or reason's rival; it is the ground under hope: it makes the promised things weight-bearing enough to build a life on, which is exactly what every portrait tonight did. And 11:6's minimum: whoever would draw near “must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him”: not just a God, but a good God who repays seeking: faith's floor is trust in God's character, not mere assent to his existence: the demons manage the latter (James 2:19) and remain demons.

2. Now the harvest. Go around the room: read out the verbs you underlined after every “by faith,” rapid-fire, no commentary. Then the question: what kind of word never appears after “by faith” in this entire chapter, and what does the grammar itself teach about what faith is?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The list should thunder: offered, was attested, was taken up, pleased, constructed, condemned, became, obeyed, went out, sojourned, looked forward, received power, considered, greeted, acknowledged, desired, offered up, invoked, blessed, made mention, gave directions, was hidden, refused, chose, considered, left, endured, kept, sprinkled, crossed, encircled, fell, welcomed. What never appears: “by faith he felt certain,” “by faith she held correct views,” “by faith they had a

religious experience.” In this chapter faith is never inert: every occurrence wears a verb, because the verbs are not additions to faith but faith's own body: trust with its boots on. Write the observation on the board and leave it there; we will need it verbatim in twenty minutes.

3. The first three portraits (11:4–7): Abel offered a more acceptable sacrifice; Enoch pleased God; Noah, warned about the unseen, built an ark in dry weather. Pick the strangest: what did each one's faith cost or risk, and what was each trusting that they could not see?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Abel trusted that worship was worth his best, and it cost him his life: the gallery opens with a martyr, on purpose (and “he died, but through his faith he is still speaking”: hold that voice; it returns in two weeks). Enoch's whole biography is a walk and a disappearance: pleasing God as a life's occupation. Noah is the comic and terrifying one: a man building an ocean liner on dry land for a flood no one had seen, condemning the world by taking the unseen seriously: “reverent fear” with a hammer in its hand. Three portraits in, the pattern is set: faith looks strange precisely when it is working, because it is pricing in realities the neighbors cannot see.

READ ALOUD: Hebrews 11:8–16

4. Abraham's first portrait: he obeyed and went out, “not knowing where he was going,” lived in tents in the land of promise, and looked forward “to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” Two questions: what does 11:8 teach about how much information obedience usually gets up front? And what was a man in tents doing homesick for a city he had never seen (11:13–16)?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Obedience with incomplete information is the biblical norm: the call says go; the destination unfolds en route: anyone waiting for the full itinerary before moving will die at the trailhead, and most of God's guidance in this room's lives will arrive the same way: enough light for the next step. And the homesickness: the patriarchs “acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth,” seeking a homeland: not the one they left (they could have returned) but “a better country, that is, a heavenly one” (Tally!). Abraham in his tent pegs was aching for architecture: the city with foundations: and the sermon's astonishing reply: “God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.” The ache was evidence. Homesickness for a place you have never been is the heart's testimony that you were made for it: and next week, fair warning, the sermon names the city.

LIVE DISCOVERY: Ask someone to read Genesis 22:1–14, and someone else Hebrews 11:17–19.

5. The Akedah, with the sermon's window into Abraham's mind. Every promise ran through Isaac (“through Isaac shall your descendants be named”), and God asked for Isaac. What impossible arithmetic did Abraham have to solve on the three-day walk to Moriah, and what solution does Hebrews say he reached (11:19)? And notice what Isaac carries up the hill, and what Abraham names the place.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The arithmetic: God's promise (descendants through Isaac) and God's command (offer Isaac) cannot both stand unless something unprecedented is true. Hebrews shows Abraham's solution: "he considered that God was able to raise men even from the dead": with no resurrection ever witnessed, Abraham deduced one from God's character, because a promising God who cannot lie (our Session 5) must have a way through his own command. "Figuratively speaking, he did receive him back": Isaac came down the mountain as a parable of Easter. And the scenery preaches: the son carrying the wood for his own sacrifice up a hill in the land of Moriah (where Israel's temple would one day stand, 2 Chronicles 3:1), the father's answer "God will provide himself the lamb," the place named "The LORD will provide." The Holy Spirit intended in that scene depths its human author did not fully grasp; two thousand years later, on a hill in the same country, the providing was finished.

6. Moses' portrait is an accounting ledger (11:24–26): he refused to be called Pharaoh's daughter's son, chose ill-treatment with God's people over the fleeting pleasures of sin, "considering abuse suffered for the Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he looked to the reward." Walk the ledger: what did he debit, what did he credit, and what made the math work? Where does the same ledger sit open in your life right now?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Debited: a throne, treasure, and pleasure: real goods, and the text does not pretend otherwise (the pleasures of sin are pleasant; their defect is that they are fleeting). Credited: ill-treatment, reproach, and solidarity with slaves: plus one invisible line item: the reward. The math works only if the reward is real: with eternity on the ledger, Egypt loses; without it, Moses is a fool: which is exactly the wager every disciple's costly choice makes (and Paul ran the same books: "I count everything as loss," Philippians 3:8). Let the personal question breathe: everyone in the room has a ledger open somewhere: a career line, a relationship line, an integrity line: where the fleeting and the eternal are both bidding.

READ ALOUD: Hebrews 11:31, and recall Genesis 15:6.

7. Now tonight's steelman, at full strength, with the board's verb list behind you. It runs: we are justified by faith, not works: Genesis 15:6, "Abraham believed the LORD, and he reckoned it to him as righteousness"; Romans 4 builds on it; Ephesians 2:8–9, "by grace you have been saved through faith... not because of works, lest any man should boast." The Reformation's material principle, held by people of great holiness, guarding grace against every ladder of self-salvation. Give it its full weight. And give it its best form: the Reformers never taught that saving faith is idle. Their own maxim runs: we are justified by faith alone, but the faith that justifies is never alone; true faith necessarily bears good works as its fruit and evidence, though those works contribute nothing to justification itself. Then interrogate tonight's own chapter: what does faith do in every single verse of Hebrews 11? What does James do with the same two exhibits, Abraham and Rahab (James 2:21–25), and where does the phrase "faith

alone” actually appear in the Bible? And hear St. Clement of Rome, who managed both truths in one letter before the first century closed.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The objection's treasure is Catholic doctrine: we are saved by grace, through faith, and not by works done to earn God's initiative: the Church condemns Pelagius as firmly as any Reformer, and CCC 2008–2009 roots even our merits in God's prior gift. St. Augustine, the Doctor of Grace himself: he who created you without you will not justify you without you: everything is grace, and grace enlists rather than bypasses the free creature. Now the text: in the very chapter this sermon devotes to faith, faith never once appears without a verb: the board proves it: Abel's faith offered, Noah's built, Abraham's obeyed and climbed, Rahab's hid spies and hung a cord. Genesis itself never separates the crediting of 15:6 from the walking of chapters 12 through 22. And St. James, examining the same two exhibits, renders the verdict: “You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone” (James 2:24): the one place Scripture uses the phrase faith alone, it says not by it: because “faith apart from works is dead” (2:26), and dead faith saves no one. And meet the steelman at its strongest: the serious Protestant agrees that real faith works; the remaining question is what the works are. For the Reformer they are evidence only, never touching justification; for St. James, faith is completed by works (James 2:22) and a man is justified by works and not by faith alone (James 2:24), and for the Church the works of living faith, themselves God's gifts, are the way the justified actually grow in righteousness (CCC 2008-2009). Works are not the ticket in, but neither are they only the receipt; they are grace carrying the justified deeper into the life grace began. The Catholic synthesis, which is really just the chapter's grammar: we are justified by grace, through living faith: faith working through love (Galatians 5:6): the works are not faith's admission fee but faith's pulse: and St. Clement of Rome, whom the early Church remembered as one who had known the apostles themselves, wrote both sentences into one letter: justified by faith, and justified by deeds, not words: with no sense of contradiction, because there is none. The quarrel dissolves the moment faith is allowed to be what Hebrews 11 shows: alive. Deliver every word of this with warmth: the people who hold the objection love grace, and grace is precisely what both sides are guarding.

READ ALOUD: Hebrews 11:32–38

8. The gallery's dark wing. The catalogue turns at 11:35: some, through faith, conquered kingdoms, stopped lions, escaped the sword: and some, through the same faith, were tortured refusing release, mocked, scourged, stoned, sawn in two, killed with the sword, destitute, “of whom the world was not worthy.” Both wings hang under the same caption. What does this do to any version of faith that promises rescue as the deal, and whom does the sermon honor more?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

It demolishes the prosperity contract: faith is trust in God, not a technique for outcomes: the same trust that shut lions' mouths also walked into them, and the sermon's highest sentence (“of whom the world was not worthy”) hangs in the dark wing. Note the pivot's precise hinge: some “refused to accept release, that they might rise again to a better life” (11:35: Tally): the unrescued were not faith's failures but its purest cases, pricing the resurrection above the exit. Every believer eventually visits both wings: the prayer answered and the prayer that seemed to fall silent: and the

gallery insists the same faith, and the same God, holds both. Say it gently: someone in the room is standing in the dark wing tonight, and the world is not worthy of them either.

READ ALOUD: Hebrews 11:39–40, twice.

9. The gallery's last line, and it is a thunderclap: all these, though well attested, “did not receive what was promised, since God had foreseen something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.” Apart from us. Do not solve it: just sit in it. What is the sermon claiming about the relationship between Abel, Abraham, Moses, Rahab: and this room?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Take reactions only and confirm the bare astonishment: the heroes' story is deliberately unfinished until ours is in: their perfecting waits on us: the family album has empty pages with our names penciled in, and God engineered the wait (“foreseen something better”: the Tally's third strike tonight). Then close the door with a smile: “Next week the sermon tells us where every person in this gallery is right now, this minute, and what they are doing, and it involves you personally. Read Hebrews 12, and pack for a mountain.” Nothing more.

SPOILER GUARD: Do not preview chapter 12: no cloud of witnesses, no two mountains, no festal assembly. The 11:39–40 plant works only if next week opens it.

DIG DEEPER

11:13: the patriarchs greeted the promises “from afar,” like travelers waving at a homeland visible from the ship's rail but not yet in port. The Church's old Latin name for the Christian in this life is exactly this posture: viator, the wayfarer; and Scripture's own earliest name for the faith, the Way (Acts 9:2), carries the same picture of a people defined by traveling. If the group has one more breath: what is the difference between living as a tourist here (consuming), a settler (accumulating), and a viator (traveling light, waving at the coastline)? Which are your bank statement and your calendar currently confessing?

SEND • TAKING IT OUT THE DOOR

S1. Your faith, this month, in one verb: what has it actually been doing? If the honest answer is “believing quietly,” what verb is God asking you to conjugate next?

S2. Moses' ledger: name the one line in your life where the fleeting is currently outbidding the eternal, and what “looking to the reward” would change about the arithmetic this week.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1. Give your faith one costly verb this week: an obedience begun before the full itinerary arrives, Abraham-style, and tell someone in the group what it was.

2. Pray for the dark wing: the persecuted Church, by name where you can: those of whom the world is not worthy, this week, on the same wall of faith as you.

3. Read Hebrews 12 before next session. Bring your favorite saint's name with you: you will need it: and if you run in any literal sense, notice this week what a crowd does to a runner.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

HEBREWS 11:1 (RSV2CE)

"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

CLOSING PRAYER

God of the gallery: of the offering and the ark, the tents and the mountain, the rescued and the unrescued: attest our faith as you attested theirs, not by our feelings but by our verbs. Teach us Moses' arithmetic and Abraham's logic, keep us tender toward the dark wing, and finish in us what you would not finish apart from us. We are strangers and exiles, and you are not ashamed to be called our God. Amen.

Part 3 • Leader Reference Card

Every passage used or assigned in Session 10, in order of appearance.

PRIMARY TEXT

Hebrews 11:1–7 • 11:8–16 • 11:17–31 • 11:32–38 • 11:39–40

LIVE DISCOVERY PASSAGES

Genesis 22:1–14 (the Akedah) • Genesis 15:5–6 • Joshua 2 and 6 (Rahab, background)

STEELMAN PASSAGES (QUESTION 7)

Genesis 15:6; Romans 4; Ephesians 2:8–9 (the objection) • James 2:21–26; Galatians 5:6 (the answer) • St. Clement of Rome and St. Augustine, Sermon 169 (read from the voice boxes) • CCC 1814–1815, 2008–2009

LEADER BACKGROUND

Hebrews 10:38 (last week's bridge) • 2 Chronicles 3:1 (Moriah and the temple mount) • Philippians 3:7–8 (Paul's ledger) • James 2:19 (the demons' faith)

CATECHISM

CCC 145–147 • CCC 1814–1815 • CCC 2008–2009 • CCC 1821

MEMORY VERSE

Hebrews 11:1

NEXT SESSION

Session 11 covers Hebrews 12: the cloud, the discipline, and the mountain where the whole gallery is standing right now. Participants bring a favorite saint's name.