INTRODUCTION:
One of my most favorite passages in the Bible is Hebrews 11:1—12:2. It is here that we are given the very definition of “faith” and it is here that we are provided a long list of examples of those who have lived by faith. Through their stories and examples we can learn how we are to face life with faith. Through their witness we can gain the courage to follow our Lord wherever He may lead us. I recommend a careful reading of the passage above, perhaps several times. Listen and reflect on how others have lived out their faith in God’s promises, and reflect on those examples to which you can relate.

We know that “faith comes from hearing and hearing by the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17). Hearing how others have lived their faith can help us live ours. From the beginning God has made promises to His people. Before Christ’s coming, people lived by faith that God would keep His promises. We who live after Christ’s coming have the blessing of having seen God’s promise fulfilled in and through Christ. But we continue to live in a skeptical world that only believes in what can be seen and proven. God asks us to have faith in His Word… in His Promises… even if we cannot see or understand how they work or how they will come to pass in our lives.

DEFINITION OF FAITH:
“Now faith is being sure of what we hope and certain of what we do not see” (Hebrews 11:1). We are all familiar with the saying, “seeing is believing” but faith requires believing in what you cannot see. Faith is believing in God even though we cannot see Him. But we can see the evidence of His existence if we are willing to open the eyes of our heart and look. Faith is placing our hope and trust in God even though we cannot see how He will answer our prayers or fulfill our trust. Essentially, faith is believing that God exists and does what He says He will do.

God is the Creator of all things. Hebrews 11:3 says, “By 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.” This passage confesses belief that what is spoken in Genesis 1:1 is true: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” If we believe that God created all things and is in control of all things, then we should be able to trust Him with our life and our future.
Hebrews 11:6 says, “And 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.” If we do not truly believe in God, that He exists and keeps His promises, then we will not surrender our lives to Him and live a life that pleases Him. This is why “faith” is so essential in order to have a relationship with the Lord.

EXAMPLES OF FAITH:

By Faith we Honor God:
Hebrews 11:4 says, “By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.” Genesis says that “Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil” (Genesis 4:3), but Abel “brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock” (Genesis 4:4). Everything we have is a gift from God. Cain dishonored God by only giving Him “some of the fruits” but Abel offered God “fat portions” from the “firstborn” of his flock. In other words, Abel gave from the best of what he had to give. We too honor or dishonor God by what we offer in return for all He has given us. Living by faith means offering God the best you have while trusting that He will continue to provide for your needs. Those who feel that if they give God their best they won’t have enough for themselves walk by fear rather than by faith.

By Faith we Trust God:
Hebrews 11:7 says, “By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.” Noah had faith that God could destroy the whole world with a flood and, that with God’s help, could build an ark to hold his family and all the animals God would send to him to save. Noah believed God while the world disbelieved God, therefore, Noah’s choice of obedience stood in contrast to the world’s choice of disobedience, condemning the world to destruction. We too have a choice to either believe and obey God or disbelieve and disobey. It is not what we “say” we believe that will make a difference but how we “act” on our faith. Noah built an enormous ark because God told him to. God generally does not ask as much of us, but He does ask that we live our life in obedience to His Word.
By Faith we are Guided by God:
Hebrews 11:8 says, “By 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.” God led Abraham to a place far away from his family and friends, but it was where God wanted him and had plans to bless him. God knows the plans He has for us and knows where we need to be. God will guide us to that place if we will listen and obey. It may be fearful to go to a place we do not know or have no family or friends, but if we follow God we will never be alone because He will be with us. If we are living by faith we listen and obey God’s direction for our life.

By Faith we Believe God’s Promises:
Hebrews 11:9-10 says, “By 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. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.” When God instructed Abraham to go to an unfamiliar land He also told him that it would be his home and promised him descendents that would possess the land. Abraham went believing in God’s promises. Abraham trusted God to do what He promised. God makes many promises in the Bible to those who will believe and obey Him. When we live by faith we don’t “hope” (as in wishful thinking) that God will keep His promises, but we go forward “trusting” He will do so.

By Faith we are Enabled by God:
Hebrews 11:11 says, “By faith 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.” Even though Abraham was a very old man and his wife Sarah was both beyond child bearing age and barren (had never been able to conceive a child), when God told him that they would have children he believed because he believed God was faithful to His Word. Jesus said, “with God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26). When we walk by faith we believe that God can do anything and is capable of fulfilling any promise He makes to His children. The largest obstacle preventing God from doing miracles in our lives is our own disbelief. When God asks or commands you do something, don’t make excuses or doubt its possibility; simply do it!
By Faith we are Tested by God:

Hebrews 11:17-19 says, “By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, “It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.” Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.” Abraham did not know how God could produce descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven and the sands of the seashore through his son Isaac when God asked him to kill Isaac as a sacrifice. Abraham reasoned that God might bring him back to life, but he really didn’t know what God was going to do. In any case, Abraham was willing to sacrifice his one and only son when God asked him to do so. Abraham put his obedience to God even before his own family. Unlike with Abraham, God willingly sacrificed His one and only Son for our salvation. If God can do so much for us, can we not walk in total obedience to Him? God does not ask us to kill our family for Him. On the contrary, God has forbidden human sacrifice. But God does ask us to present ourselves as a “living sacrifice” (Romans 12:1). We are not to “die” for God but to “live” for God through our faith in God.

By Faith we Walk a Harder Path:

Hebrews 11:24-26 says, “By faith Moses, when he had grown up refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.” No one ever promised that being a child of God would be easy. On the contrary, following God will often put one in conflict with the world. The path God would have us walk in following Him is narrow and often hard. Jesus said, "Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it” (Matthew 7:13). Like Moses, we each have a choice. We can take the easy path filled with sin and the pleasures of this world, or we can follow Christ and take the path that leads to life eternal. By faith Moses chose the harder path leading to eternal life because he valued the things of God more than the things of this world. We too have to make this choice. It is tempting to fill our lives with compromises and indulge in sinful pleasures, but this is a path that leads to destruction.
By Faith God’s People Persevere:
Hebrews 11:35b-38a says, “…Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—the world was not worthy of them.” This excerpt is part of a longer passage referencing the many people who because they walked by faith suffered at the hands of the world. Like Moses and so many others, they put God before everything and everyone else, living a life of obedience and faith. The Scripture bears witness that even though the world treated them harshly, the “world was unworthy of them.” Jesus demonstrated this truth in His own life and death. He was persecuted, suffered and died at the hands of the world, and did it willingly out of love for us. If we live a life of faith we are willing to do so for Him and to sacrifice ourselves for the sake of others that God may be glorified.

Faith in God’s Promises:
Hebrews 11:13a and 16 say, “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…. Instead, 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.” Remember Jesus’ words, saying, “Everyone therefore who shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 10:32-33). All those who lived before the coming of Christ lived by faith trusting in God’s promises even if they didn’t see the promises fulfilled in their own lifetimes. This was because their focus was not on earthly things but heavenly things. God is not ashamed of those who live by faith for through living out our faith we honor and please Him. Jesus made it clear that God will honor those who honor Him, and will deny those who deny Him. Let us live out our faith and never deny our Lord.
Jesus is the Fulfillment of God’s Promise:

Speaking of those who lived and died by faith before the coming of Christ, Hebrews 11:39-40 says, “These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.” Jesus’ death on the cross for the sins of the world was for all who lived by faith—past, present and future. Those who lived before lived in faith believing in God’s promise to redeem them in the future. What we have received is something better—we have received Christ Himself—the fulfillment of the promise of God. We must not take the blessing we have received for granted or replace faith with doubts. God has always and continues to be true to His promise. Through Jesus Christ, God has redeemed the world to Himself. Jesus honors all those who have believed when He speaks to Thomas after the resurrection, saying, “Because you have seen Me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20:29). Those who “have believed” are those who walked by faith in the promise without seeing it fulfilled. We have truly received “something better” for we have the witness of Christ Himself.

Witness of Faith:

Finally, Hebrews 12:1-2 says, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” The author of Hebrews is reminding us that if so many before us could live by faith in the promises of God without seeing their fulfillment, that we can certainly live for our Lord Jesus Christ, whom we have seen sacrifice Himself for us. Jesus endured the cross for us. Can we not throw everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles aside and live our faith in the Lord. Jesus truly is the author and perfecter of our faith. Behold those who have come before, and so likewise, live your faith in God.