Faith works. If you’re not already convinced, I’m counting on God to prove the principle to you over the next nine weeks. In fact, nothing works like faith. It brings God-ordained dividends, and its absence carries huge costs. Nothing equals the impact of faith, because it invites God to answer with proof.

This week we are going to study the paramount importance of faith and how it is acquired, but before we do, perhaps we’d better define it. In Greek, the original language of the New Testament, the word pistis means assurance, belief, believe, faith, fidelity. With very few exceptions the words faith, belief, believing, and believe are all translated from the word pistis. When I use the phrase believing God, therefore, you can think of it interchangeably with having faith in God. I prefer believing for our purposes because it has a far stronger implication of action.

The kind of faith you and I will study can turn a noun into an action verb quicker than you can say, “See Spot run.” I can still picture the page in my first-grade primer. Spot wasn’t getting ready to run. Nor was he in a past-tense heap of exhaustion beside his water bowl. “See Spot run” meant he could presently be caught in the act of running. What does seeing Spot run have to do with believing God? Verb tenses! Stick with me for a moment, and I’ll show you how.

Please read Ephesians 1:11-23 and write a one-sentence synopsis.

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The NIV uses two very important and distinctive tenses of the verb believe in verses 13 and 19. Verse 13 speaks of Christians having believed. This faith-action refers to the exercise of belief that leads to salvation. Every Christian heard the gospel message at some point and chose to believe and receive it. Because we exercised this faith-action, we immediately became Christ’s. We were given His Holy Spirit and marked with a seal. This faith-action was exercised in the past with obviously radical results.

Now concentrate on verse 19. The Greek verb tense of the word believe in this verse is vital to our series. It is called a present active participle. One of my Greek instructors explained it: “Beth, when you see a present active participle Greek verb, you can think of the word ‘continually’ preceding the verb.” In other words, the promise given in verses 19-20 is not applied to those “having believed” as in verse 13 where they had believed to become Christians. Rather, it is applied to those who are presently; actively; and, yes, continually believing God.

My point? Our glorious faith walk began with an act of faith that brought us into relationship with Jesus Christ as our Savior, but it doesn’t end there! Having believed in Christ, we’ve
been called to continue believing all He came to do and say! Tragically, some who have believed in Christ have believed little of Christ since. He who began a work in us has far more He wants to accomplish! God is calling us to leave the passive life bred by a past-tense view of faith and to participate in present-active-participle believing! For the next few days we’re going to study what is at stake, but you need turn no further than today’s text to see something huge.

What specific promise applies to those who continue believing, as stated in verses 19-20?

Let it sink in. Write it in permanent marker on the wallpaper of your mind. God exerts an incomparable power in the lives of those who continue believing Him. Hear it again: nothing on earth compares to the strength God is willing to interject into lives caught in the act of believing. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul likens it to the stunning power God exerted when He raised His Son from the dead!

Do you hear that, Beloved? Can you think of any need you might have that would require more strength than God exercised to raise the dead? Me either. God can raise marriages from the dead, and He can restore life and purpose to those who have given up. He can forgive and purify the vilest sinner. You don’t have a need that exceeds His power. Faith is God’s favorite invitation to RSVP with proof. So what’s at stake in whether we’re going to become present-active-participle believers? The earthward plunge of divine power, for starters.

1. We’ve talked about belief and continuing to believe. God gave us His Word first and foremost to call us into relationship with its Author and our Savior. Second Timothy 3:16-17 lists additional reasons God has given us His Word. Write them below.

The doctrines of our faith and the commandments of God are vital to our relationship with God. The Bible records the history of God’s people and invites us to learn lessons from both their good and bad examples. Over the next nine weeks, however, we will focus on the fact that Scripture is stacked with truths and promises we are invited to personally apply and believe God to fulfill in our lives. The Bible bulges with opportunities to be caught in the act of believing God. For our purposes we’ve chosen to simplify and categorize them into a five-statement pledge of faith. This pledge helps us wrap our arms around the concept and clarify what we are believing God about. We learned the pledge and practiced it in session 1. I want you to be able to say this pledge practically standing on your head and in your sleep.
Please write all five statements on the lines below.

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Now, if possible, say it aloud and add your hand motions. You may feel silly at first, but I promise these hand motions will become powerful reminders of an incomparable invitation to faith. And admit it! It’s fun!

2. Use the search feature in your Online Bible Reference Library to look up each occurrence* of the word faith in the Book of Ephesians. Record on the lines below what each tells you about the concept of believing God.

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Lord, the biggest challenges I have before me right now are …

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Computer Help

*1. Select the Search link in the navigation area in the Online Bible Reference Library.
2. Select the Bible or Bible translation you want to search in.
3. Enter faith in the Enter search text box.
5. Select Ephesians from the Select book pulldown.
6. Press the Search button. Your results will be displayed in the same window. You’ll see the words “Viewing X–X of X (page X of X)” at the top of the results. If there is more than one page, clicking on the Next link at the right top of the window will take you to the next page of results.
The deepest desires about those challenges are...

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From what I understand so far from my relationship with You and from Your Word, Your will seems clear to me about the following challenges.

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But it seems less clear to me in these challenges.

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Please, Lord, give me insight into Your will so that I will know how best to pray and what to ask.
Begin by stating your five-statement pledge of faith. Now soak in the words of Today’s Treasure. Read it several times, emphasizing a different phrase each time. Over the days and weeks to come, we will treat this Scripture like a diamond, turning and tilting it at different angles in the light of divine insight so that we can behold its numerous dimensions. Today we are going to hold this diamond to the light with our eyes cast on the angle presented in yesterday’s lesson. We want to consider what’s at stake as we turn the noun of our faith into a present-active-participle verb. This week days 1–3 center on why we should sell out to lives of active faith, and days 4–5 will tell us how. In yesterday’s lesson we discussed a wonderful motivation for a life of active faith, based on Ephesians 1:19.

What does God choose to exert in the lives of those who continually accept the challenge to believe Him?

Hebrews 11:6 includes two additional motivations for believing God. The most obvious is also the highest priority. Purely and simply, faith pleases God.

Use the Online Bible Reference Library to look up Hebrews 11:6 in the KJV with Strong’s translation and click on the word please. Keep in mind that this tool is always based on the KJV, but no matter which English translation you use, the original Greek word is the same. What is the Greek word for please, and what does it mean?

Why were we created, according to Revelation 4:11? “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created” (KJV). ’

Viewing Hebrews 11:6 and Revelation 4:11 side by side can suggest both a means and an end. No greater or higher goal for our lives exists than to please God. Indeed, it is why we were
created. Thankfully, we need not feel cheated or afraid. Romans 12:2 tells us God’s will is good, pleasing, and perfect. It is never degrading and always fulfilling. Through the unfolding of His pleasing will for each of our lives,

- God is glorified;
- the body of Christ is edified;
- our souls are satisfied;
- the world is further evangelized.

If the chief purpose or end of our lives is to please God, Hebrews 11:6 suggests that the primary means to such a valuable end is faith. We can’t experience the fulfillment and enjoyment of God’s perfect will for our lives without present-active-participle believing God. Glance at all of Hebrews 11 for a moment. In weeks 4 and 5 we’re going to consider the faith challenges of 10 different figures in this passage that is often called the Hall of Faith. For now realize that the very reasons their names appear in the chapter are that the end result of their lives was the pleasure of God and that the means was clearly “by faith.”

Our call to prioritize God and our faith in Him through Jesus Christ is reciprocated in stunning ways certainly not owed to us.

How does Hebrews 11:6 say God will respond to those who believe Him and seek Him?

He is a ______________________________ of those who seek Him.

Every time this concept falls on me afresh, I am amazed and dazzled. God has already promised that when we seek Him, we will find Him. Is that not enough? Do we need rewards as well? And yet He promises!

Do you see God’s heart? Yes, He requires much if we’re going to fulfill a divinely ordained destiny. I won’t kid you, but what He is prepared to do in behalf of those who are obedient staggers the imagination.

Hear this: anytime you put forth the time and attention a God-seeking Bible study like this requires and you exercise the faith to apply what you learn, you will be rewarded. I don’t believe you’ll make it through this series without seeing all sorts of rewards. God gives all good gifts. He wants to shower blessings on you! God wants us to be men and women He can bless.

God’s pleasure is the end. Our faith is the means. You and I are invited to believe God. The eye-opening news may be that we can also believe Him for reward, as long as the desire for reward doesn’t exceed our desire for Him personally. Sooner or later, Dear One, your God-seeking faith will be rewarded. You will never outspend God.

1. I think you’ll love the definition for the Greek word translated “that diligently seek” in Hebrews 11:6. Look up Hebrews 11:6 in the KJV with Strong’s translation in the Online Bible Reference Library and click on the word seek. What is the Greek word, and what does it mean?

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2. The phrase “that diligently seek” is in the verb tense we’re highlighting and encouraging in our series. It is a present active participle. Based on my Greek instructor’s advice in yesterday’s lesson, what does the verb tense tell us about the kind of seeking God most rewards?

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Remember not to get discouraged because you don’t have or don’t presently practice everything God desires of you. Pray for what you lack! When we pray God’s will, we will receive what we ask! Pray for a heart and a mind to diligently seek Him. Then immediately begin walking in faith as one who already has what she has asked. Start seeking God through His Word and spending time in prayer, at the same time asking Him for a hunger and thirst to seek Him diligently. He will develop in you what you are seeking!

Complete any of the sentences below that pertain to you.

Lord, I want to please You, but…

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The biggest obstacles I encounter in diligently seeking You are …

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(Pray through each obstacle and ask God for insight and empowerment to move those obstacles or climb over them.)
God, some of the rewards I’ve already received through seeking You are …

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Lord, I need to know that Your love for me is steadfast and unconditional even during seasons when my life is not pleasing to You. (Read Isaiah 54:10. Write a prayer-response back to God in the space below restating and receiving what He is saying to you.)

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Sometimes our problem with God is that we don’t like the rules. I can remember trying to hang on to both God and my idols. As my grandmother would say, I wanted to have my cake and eat it too. Have you tried that approach? I felt as if God spoke to my heart and said, “Child, My precepts are from everlasting to everlasting. You’re not going to be the one for whom the rules change. Repent of your arrogance and lay those idols down.”

Today we’re going to talk about a precept we often wish were different, but we’re not going to be the ones for whom the rules change. God is all-wise, and His primary purpose in creating humans was to engage them in active relationship. He’s in the business of making present-active-participle verbs out of our phlegmatic nouns. The requirement of faith before we see certain acts of God is one way He enforces engagement.

Read each of the following Scriptures and record what Christ has to say about faith. I’m going to use Scriptures from the same Gospel, but rest assured we could find the principle restated in all four Gospels, then underscored powerfully from the Book of Acts through Revelation.

Matthew 9:20-22

Matthew 9:27-30

Matthew 15:28

Matthew 17:14-21

During week 3 we will discuss whether miracles have ceased in our day and whether God still heals often enough for us to even bother asking. Today, however, I want you to focus on the required means of faith intimated above rather than the specific kind of result. The faith-precept we’re discussing today came straight from the mouth of Christ. Not a single Gospel writer missed it. Nor do we have any biblical grounds to believe that the teaching has changed.

What is this teaching? According to your faith it will be done to you. If you’re the way I’ve often been, you want to have your cake and eat it too. We want to continue in our God-testing unbelief and still see Him move mountains. Sure, it occasionally happens in our individual lives. God is merciful that way.
Why do you think God is sometimes willing to reveal Himself dramatically even when we're not actively believing Him?

Though God may have countless reasons, the most probable cause is to encourage belief. He graciously reminds us that He can … and still does. If we persist in stubborn unbelief after such merciful revelation, we can probably expect to see less and less activity of God. Mind you, God can do anything He wants under any conditions (see Ps. 115:3).

The story of the widow's son whom Christ raised from the dead is one of my favorite occasions in Scripture when faith was a nonissue (see Luke 7:11-17). Yes, God does what He wants, but He primarily wants our faith (see Heb. 11:6). He certainly makes exceptions, but His primary rule is: according to your faith it will be done to you. That means the more we believe God, the more we are likely to see and experience His intervening power.

You may really be bristling right now. If so, I understand. Perhaps you really believed God in the past for something, but it didn't happen. Later we're going to talk about our disappointments, some of the reasons we didn't get what we asked, and the overriding sovereign wisdom of God. For now let's talk about one of my old reasons for bristling and see if you share it.

My resistance to the faith principle—according to your faith it will be done to you—was primarily spiritual laziness. Believing God can really be work at times! When external evidences scream to the contrary, we have to exert volitional muscle. Deciding to believe God's Word over our circumstances can be a tremendous exercise of the will at times. I'll just go ahead and say it: the great adventure of faith is not for the languid, but if He can raise the dead, He can surely enliven the lazy! We have been called to a present-active-participle walk of faith, not a park 'n' ride.

The walk of faith assumes a walk with God. Faith cannot walk alone. Faith on its own changes nothing. In fact, it cannot even exist independently. Faith's very essence is dependency. For faith to have life, it must find a powerful object in which to be placed or a powerful Person by whom to walk. In your earlier Scripture readings, faith on its own did nothing to heal. The beneficiaries' faith in Christ healed them. Two thousand years later, the God-ordained precepts have not changed. God wants to stretch forth His mighty hand in our lives in manifold ways, but as a rule, it's present-active-participle faith in Christ that most attracts Him. God has much He wants to do and say in our generation. Faith is the primary means by which we place our hand in the outstretched hand of God and join Him.

1. Please read Acts 3:11-16. List all the ways this account underscores the principles we've discussed in today's lesson.

2. So far in our first week we've discussed four motivations for present-active-participle believing God (one in day 1, two from the same Scripture in day 2, and another today). On the following page, write the motivations beside the Scriptures that teach them.
We have one more motivation to learn in day 4. Then in day 5 we'll focus all our attention on how to have faith.

God, my primary hang-up with the faith principle we learned today is that …

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Please, Lord, grant me insight or help me simply hang up my hang-up and trust that I'll understand it all when I see You.

Lord, in all honesty I'm probably seeing little because I'm believing little of You in the area of …

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Thank You, Lord, that even this week You're going to teach me how to exercise a much greater faith. (Conclude by telling God how much you need Him and why.)

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Bedtime Meditation
This lesson is one of those I can’t even begin without tears stinging my eyes. Oh, how I pray that God will empower me by His Holy Spirit to do some semblance of justice to the fifth motivation for present-active-participle faith. The truth I’m sharing with you today has been a lifeline for me. Today’s commentary will be longer than usual because I’ll add a personal testimony. Before we read our text, let’s review four motivations for a life of believing God.

- Incomparable power (see Eph. 1:19)
- The pleasure of God (see Heb. 11:6a)
- Reward (see Heb. 11:6b)
- God will often act according to our faith (see Matt. 9:29).

Romans 4 is the home of our next precept of faith. It is so critical to our series that I am going to ask you to do something entirely unique to the Bible studies I’ve written. In just a few moments I’m going to ask you to read it in its entirety for the first time in our series, but over the course of the next eight weeks, I am asking you to read it 19 more times. It will not be part of your daily assignment. Rather, I am asking that you read it intermittently throughout the series on your own until it completely invades your belief system.

Week 4 will center on a very important part of Romans 4, so I’m hoping by then you’ve read it at least five or six more times. Today put a sticky note or a card on the page in your Bible where you find Romans 4 and write the date on it every time you read it. Starting with today’s date, I’m asking for 20 date entries before our series ends. When possible, read it aloud. Read it to your spouse. Read it to your dogs, for crying out loud, but read it until it lives in you!

Now I’ll hush and let you read. Record the principles that hit you most profoundly.

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Right at this moment I wish all of us had a New International Version, but all of the major translations say the same thing in verse 12 with various wording. The NIV speaks of those of us who “walk in the footsteps of the faith.” I so desperately want to walk in the footsteps of the faith, still warm from the feet of our spiritual forefathers, don’t you? I crave to leave a legacy of faith to my children and not just a list of works. I want us to center on the New Testament references and applications to Abraham’s faith.
Meditate on the key words in the chapter: "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness" (v. 3). God is obviously very intent on our receiving the concept because He not only stated it originally in Genesis 15:6, but He also said it repeatedly in Romans, then again in the Books of Galatians and James. Unlike me, God is never one to waste words. Any repetitions are to be considered paramount.

How do we know for a biblical fact that the concept of belief credited as righteousness applies to us? What evidence do you find in Romans 4?

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No better time to make an index card! Please write the words of Romans 4:23-24 from your favorite version. I can hardly stay in my chair to type as I read the glorious words not for him alone but also for us! Beloved, like Abraham's, our faith is what God credits as righteousness! You may ask, "Why is that such a big deal?" I can't answer for everyone else, but I'd be delighted to tell you why it's such a big deal to me: because I have such unrighteousness in my past!

I grew up believing and was still convinced into adulthood that a person's goodness is what pleased God most. By the time I was in early adulthood, I already had so many acts of unrighteousness credited to my account that I thought I'd have to live to be one hundred without a single mistake to tip the scale toward God's approval. Thank goodness not all of you can relate, but some of us have so much defeat in our past that we feel that we lost the race before we knew it started. Imagine two teams coming out to the basketball court to play a game. One team lost its previous game by 45 points. The other team won, so it enters the game with no strikes against it. Now picture the new game beginning with the scoreboard reading "0 to 45." Many of us have felt so defeated by our last round that we feel as if we'll never win. Therefore, we play like losers. Beloved, every person God created has an innate need to feel that some way exists to win. That's what Romans 4:23-24 is all about.

My fingers are hitting the keyboard with force as if to raise the volume. God does not credit our righteous acts as righteousness. Indeed, what does Isaiah 64:6 say?

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As odd as the concept may seem, not our righteous acts but our faith is credited to our account as righteousness. You may ask, "Beth, are you suggesting we can act as sinful as we want, but if we believe God, we are counted righteous anyway?" Actually, believing God while continuing in wanton sin is ultimately impossible. I hope to prove that those who practice present-active-participle faith will eventually be freed from cycles of sin to live righteous lives the self-righteous could never hope to achieve. How do I know? Because I've lived a measure of this one.

For much of my life I was a habitual sinner, cycling in and out of defeat. I wanted to be good more than anything in the world. I hated myself and the choices I continued to make, but I was powerless to stop. I became convinced that taking away alternatives would be the
answer. I got married, moved away from many temptations, soaked myself in church work, and set about to be good. I don’t regret those choices, but they weren’t enough. I didn’t understand that God wanted to heal my heart and change me from the inside—not just my behavior. In my early 30s I fell apart and entered a season of unparalleled despair and uncharacteristic depression. According to God’s calendar, it was time to deal with my stuff. And deal we did.

To the praise, glory, and honor of my wonderful God, I have been free from the cycle of defeat for years. Do you know how? I chose to believe God. He said I was forgiven. That I was beautiful to Him. That He had a purpose for my life. That I was a new woman, a virgin no less. That I no longer had to carry my old baggage or turn to my old comforts. That Christ Jesus took on my unrighteousness so that I could be the righteousness of God in Him (see 2 Cor. 5:21). That His all-surpassing power was within my jar of clay (see 2 Cor. 4:7).

And one day at a time I chose to believe Him.

Some days I cried like a baby because I’d feel the old, destructive habits starting to rise. So often I said to myself out loud, “You are not that woman any more. You get to make a different choice.” And I would. Present-active-participle believing God. That’s how the cycle was broken. We have no hope of authentic righteousness—imputed or imparted—without it.

Sweet One, when you feel as if you’re surrounded by those with a better “score” than yours, believe God! They’ll have nothing on you.

**It’s Your Turn**

1. Look up Romans 4:24 in the KJV with Strong’s in your Online Bible Reference Library. After you read the verse, click on the word **believe**. You’ll notice the Strong’s number for this word is 4100, and the Greek word is **pisteuo**. **Pisteuo** comes from the word **pistis**, the primary word for **faith** and **belief** in the Greek New Testament.

Notice the Part of Speech identified for this occurrence. What is it? __________________ My Complete Word Study New Testament helps me by placing the letters **pap** above the word. Guess what **pap** stands for. You’ve got it: present active participle. I could shout hallelujah! Based on all we’ve learned so far, what does the verb tense suggest in context with this specific Scripture?

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2. Read Romans 4:13-14 in the KJV with Strong’s translation in the Online Bible Reference Library. The NIV translates verse 14, “If those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless.” According to this translation, what would make faith of no value and the promise worthless?

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To the best of your ability, briefly explain why.

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3. To look up the original Greek word and meaning for “made void,” use your mouse to click on the word void in the verse on your screen. Record the transliterated word and its definition below. It is the same word translated “has no value” in the NIV.

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Now read 1 Peter 1:7. What has greater worth or value than gold?

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Righteous acts motivated by legalism: no value. Faith: more valuable than gold.

4. Based on today’s lesson and the research you’ve just accomplished, do your best to summarize Romans 4 from your point of view into a one-sentence statement.

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If you feel the way I do right now, I have some things I want to say to God. Share your heart with Him in the space below, whether you feel confused, disappointed, hopeful, or elated. Just be real with Him and respond to Him about today’s lesson.

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Perhaps this lesson is the one you’ve been waiting for all week: finally, the how of faith! In days 1–4 we concentrated on why any rational, reasoning person should consider surrendering to a life of present-active-participle faith in God. Let’s quickly refresh our memories on the motivations the following Scriptures offer.

- Ephesians 1:19
- Hebrews 11:6a
- Hebrews 11:6b
- Matthew 9:29

And we added a fifth yesterday:
- Romans 4:22-24: Believing God is credited to us as righteousness.

I don’t know about you, but I’m pretty convinced at this point that I want to live my life believing God. Too much is at stake, and too much adventure stands to be missed. If faith pleases God and invites such incomparable divine intervention in my life, I want to exercise it lavishly, don’t you? But how do we do it? We’re going to discover that the better question is, How do we get it? You see, we can’t just manufacture faith from what Scripture calls our “natural man” (1 Cor. 2:14, KJV). Like much of what God asks from us, we have to receive it from Him to offer it back. Even our initial faith to believe Christ for salvation comes through the work and conviction of the Holy Spirit. Through each of the following passages, we’re about to discover how we can receive more faith so that we can exercise more faith. Today you won’t have a separate “It’s Your Turn” section because this lesson lends itself more appropriately to our taking turns.

Look up Galatians 5:22-23 in the KJV with Strong’s in the Online Bible Reference Library. In this version’s exact wording, name the nine qualities of the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Based on what you just read,

1. Faith is a quality of the fruit of the Spirit. As New Testament believers, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in us when we receive Christ as our personal Savior, and He brings His personality with Him. When we are yielded to the Holy Spirit’s authority, His personality fills us and eclipses our own. When we’re not yielded, we grieve the Holy Spirit and operate from our carnal nature. Thank goodness, He still does not leave us, but our faith consequently shrinks.

   You see, the more we are filled with the Spirit, the more faith we can possess. Because the Holy
Spirit is one with the Father and the Son, He always believes God. When He fills us, our fleshly faithlessness will yield to His belief system, and we get to possess and exercise it as our own.

The original word translated faith in Galatians 5:22 is one that has now become familiar to us: pīstis. Most of the other major translations render the word faithfulness, but the original word is the exact one translated in a multitude of other passages simply as faith. I am no scholar, but I think the KJV may have done more justice to the translation. Why am I splitting hairs? Because I tend to define faith and faithfulness as two different concepts, based on their varying contexts in my own religious upbringing.

Before I began my research for this study, I conceptualized faith as believing God, while I tended to imagine faithfulness as obediently serving God and keeping His commands. Though faith certainly encompasses serving and obeying God, I am opening my spiritual eyes to the fact that faith is the root of all faithfulness to God. In fact, we might say that ultimately, faithfulness—serving and obeying God—is the outward expression of an inward fullness of faith. With a little different twist on the meaning, we can apply the first words of our first lesson: faith works. James, the brother of Christ, wrote an incomparable synopsis of the relationship between faith and works based on the life of Abraham: “You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did” (Jas. 2:22).

We’ve discovered that we receive the capacity to exercise action-oriented faith when we receive the Holy Spirit.

Now let’s look at a second means of receiving faith. Please read Romans 10:17. Describe this means of gaining more faith:

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Consequently,

2. Faith comes through hearing the Word of God. Without a doubt, one of the biggest faith-builders we have is a relationship with God through His Word. The more we receptively expose ourselves to God’s Word through sermons, teachings, lessons, devotionals, and Bible studies, the more fuel we will add to the fire of our faith.

Using the KJV with Strong’s in the Online Bible Reference Library, look up the Greek term for word used in Romans 10:17. Give the word and a brief definition as you understand it.

________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

I was pleasantly surprised to find that the Greek term rendered word in Romans 10:17 is rema or rhema. We would more commonly find the word logos in reference to God’s Word. What’s the difference? Rema refers not to the whole Bible but to an individual Scripture. In other words, logos can refer to the Word of God in its entirety, while rhema can refer to very specific words within the Word. Let me illustrate. In my early 20s I used to think if I carried around my Bible and claimed to believe the whole thing, I was doing well. I could live on the Ten Commandments and John 3:16. Wrong. Now I know that to grow in faith and live victoriously, I need to actually study it for myself and hear the expository teaching of others until many parts of the Word literally abide in me. That’s what builds our faith!

Let’s consider a third means of gaining faith. Please read Luke 17:1-6. What request did the apostles make of Christ?
3. We can ask Christ to increase our faith. One way to have more faith is to ask for it! Sometimes Christ may respond as He did in this context. Making reference to the grain of mustard seed, He seemed to intimate, “You have all you need for this challenge. Step out in what you have.” If you’re like me, sometimes we don’t need more of anything. We just need the courage to exercise what we already have. Other times we authentically require an increase to do God’s will, and He will not refuse it if we ask in Jesus’ name.

Look up the original word for increase, using the KJV with Strong’s in the Online Bible Reference Library and write the Greek word and definition below.

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The moving scene in Mark 9:14-25 suggests another means by which we can increase our faith. You can be sure we’ll consider this encounter later in our series, but view it for now in our lesson’s context. What request did this father make of Christ?

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I love the NIV rendering, “‘Help me overcome my unbelief!’” Beloved, we just collided with another unmistakable index-card opportunity. In fact, you might say that the purpose of our entire series is to make this exact request of Christ. Can you imagine how our lives would be transformed if we began petitioning Christ every day to help us overcome any areas of unbelief? Why don’t we get started today? You see, we’re not unlike the father in the scene. Perhaps we’re quick to say, “I believe!” But no sooner do those words come forth from our mouths than we are convicted by the Spirit of truth, realizing how utterly paralyzed we are by unbelief at times. Therefore, a fourth means might be the following.

4. Confess our unbelief to Christ and request His help to overcome it. Jesus Christ will never turn us away when we come to Him with gut-level honesty and request what we lack. Because without faith it is impossible to please God, you and I will constantly have new challenges to believe God. If they were easy, they wouldn't require faith. We will find that we can walk on water in countless areas while drowning in unbelief in another. Let’s learn to confess our unbelief and ask Christ to empower us to overcome it.

The NASB rendering of Romans 4:20 offers us a fifth means to gain more faith. Of Abraham the Scripture says, “yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God.”

5. We can grow in faith. Thank goodness, our faith also develops, maturing and growing as we continue to walk with God. I believe the more we practice faith, the more faith we’ll have to practice. I am reminded of the Amplified Version of Psalm 37:3. “Trust (lean on, rely on, and be confident) in the Lord and do good; so shall you dwell in the land and feed surely on His faithfulness, and truly you shall be fed.” I love the idea of feeding on God’s faithfulness. Dear One, those who continually feed on God’s faithfulness are far more likely to have a ready supply when the challenge arises, because it abides in them. In fact, might we say that the more we feed on God's faithfulness, the fatter of faith we will become? How's that for a diet reversal? I'm thrilled to know we can binge on God without guilt!

We could extend our list of hows even further, but I think we have compiled five very distinct means of possessing and exercising faith.
To let the precepts soak in, please list them in order below:

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We are concluding our first week of study together, having considered the vital whys and hows of faith. I’m already growing, Beloved! I hope you are too. With the whys and hows fresh on our minds, let’s refresh our memories about the whats.

Categorized into our five-statement pledge of faith, exactly what is God calling us to believe? Write our pledge from memory on the lines below.

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________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

Dear One, are you more prepared to believe God than you were before we started? I certainly am. Bless God, I think we’re on the right track!

Lord, the how that resonates most to me from our lesson today is …

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________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

Because …

________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
My primary request of You as I complete today’s lesson is . . .
Group-Leader Helps

What a privilege you have awaiting you as you lead a small group in the study of Believing God. Before assembling your group, spend time in prayer. Pray Ephesians 1:18-19, asking God to open the eyes of your heart as well as that of the group so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward those who believe. It is essential that you continue to pray for yourself and the group throughout the nine weeks. As you pray, you will be sensitive to the leadership of the Holy Spirit in recognizing members’ needs. Ask God to help you be vulnerable with your group so that members feel the freedom to share their struggles as well as victories. Celebrate together as God reveals truth to you and your group.

Each week you will be given learning activities to guide you in leading your group. Take time to read the activities in advance. Secure materials needed for each session. Your advance preparation will enhance the learning time. Do not wait until the last minute to plan for each session.

BEFORE THE SESSION
1. Write the five-statement pledge of faith on a marker board.
   1. God is who He says He is.
   2. God can do what He says He can do.
   3. I am who God says I am.
   4. I can do all things through Christ.
   5. God’s word is alive and active in me.

2. Make copies of the following faith test.
   FAITH TEST
   Mark each statement T for true or F for false.
   ____ 1. Faith pleases God.
   ____ 2. God rewards those who have faith.
   ____ 3. Our righteous acts are credited to our account as righteousness.
   ____ 4. God’s primary purpose in creating humans was for them to serve Him.
   ____ 5. The walk of faith assumes a walk with God.
   ____ 6. All of our righteous deeds are like filthy garments.
   ____ 7. Faith comes from carrying your Bible around.
   ____ 8. Faith is a fruit of the Spirit.
   ____ 9. We can ask God to increase our faith.
   ____ 10. Confessing our unbelief to Christ is sin.

3. Provide index cards.
4. Write the word Faith on poster board.

DURING THE SESSION
1. Call attention to the poster board with the word Faith on it. Ask members what immediately comes to their minds when they see the word.

2. Point to the five-statement pledge of faith and say it together. Repeat it over and over, each time erasing a word. Continue repeating the pledge until the group can say it from memory.

3. Divide into two groups. Ask each group to make a list of obstacles we encounter when dili-
gently seeking God and a list of rewards that come from seeking God. Share lists with the entire group.

4. Read Romans 4 aloud. As the passage is read, ask group members to listen for evidence that proves how we can know that the concept of belief credited as righteousness applies to us.

5. Ask volunteers to read their one-sentence summary statements of Romans 4 (p. 18).


7. Give each member an index card. Ask members to write down areas in their lives in which they struggle to believe God. Ask them to place the cards in their Bibles and to begin praying for God to replace their unbelief with faith.

8. Divide members into pairs and challenge them to hold each other accountable to memorize the Scriptures Beth suggested they write on index cards, Mark 9:24 and Romans 4:23-24. Ask them to exchange phone numbers so that they can call each other during the week and repeat the verses.

9. Close the session by asking each pair to pray together that God will strengthen them and help them believe.

ANSWERS TO LISTENING GUIDE
Introduction: promised land, invites
1. Abraham, descendants, spiritual seed
2. heaven, theology, reality
3. John 15
   a. possession, words, affirmatively answered prayer, joy, unapologetic blessing, obedient
   b. abiding, love
   c. great harvest, God does not force our callings on us
4. conquest
5. great victory, enemy, standing on it
6. pala, separate, distinguish; to be wonderful, human powers, expectations, wonders, faith, sanctification