

MISCONCEPTIONS
(Lies we believe... at our own peril)
“Faith is optional”

Christianophobia: the irrational hatred and/or fear of Christians.

“Believe if you want to. Have faith in Jesus Christ if you need to.”

-prominent atheist, Alex Rosenberg

People of faith:

- Live longer.
- Have less stress .
- Experience less depression and more contentment.
- Suffer less physical pain.
- Are less likely to panic.
- Have children who are less likely to get involved with drugs and underage sex.
- Have marriages that last longer.

The higher a city’s church membership rate, the lower its rates of burglary, larceny, robbery, assault, rape, sexually transmitted disease and homicide.

Questions for those who feel faith is irrelevant or not worth investing in:

1. Where will you find peace in the midst of the storm?
2. What will you fill your heart with?
3. What foundation will you help your kids build their lives upon?
4. How will you navigate the spiritual dimension of life without faith?

“Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits—who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s. The Lord works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed.”

Psalm 103:1-6 (NIV)

THE WHY... Because of evil.

THE WHAT... Benefits of Faith:

- God forgives all your sins (vs. 3)
- God heals all your diseases (vs. 3)
- God redeems your life from the pit (vs. 4)
- God crowns you with love and compassion (vs. 4)
- God satisfies your desires with good things (so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s) (vs. 5)

Leadership Tip!

One of the keys to leading a life group is asking the right questions. Are you doing more talking or asking? Are you inviting people to share? Are you leading by example in sharing personal stories?

Misconceptions - Faith is Optional

STARTER QUESTION:

What piece of your identity have you been working on based on last week's message?

- 1) your sin and past,
- 2) other people's thoughts and approval,
- 3) or trying to earn it from God by working for his approval?

MAIN IDEA:

Misconceptions are based on the lies we believe and give power to in our lives. Often times these very lies do great damage in separating us from reality and where God really wants us to be. In the second week of this series, we take a deeper look into our faith. Is our faith optional? What is the benefit to having faith? These sorts of questions are often times pondered, but we have a hard time asking because of the nature of what others might think.

What is your perception about faith in our culture right now?

Do you hear more positive or negative thoughts towards faith and religion?

The world we live in seems to be becoming more about self reliance and less about the belief in something greater. Relying on God seems to be a crutch or a prescription for a weak-minded person from the world's vantage point. This subtle attack or marginalizing Christians and those seeking answers have unfortunately caused a lot of people to reconsider their stances.

As a reminder from Sunday's message from Pastor Hank, we took a look at how research actually points towards the benefits of believing in God and having faith. People tend to -

- Live longer and are less likely to have a heart attack.
- Have less stress in their life.
- Experience less depression and more contentment.

- Suffer less physical pain.
- Are less likely to panic under pressure.
- Have children who are less likely to get involved with drugs and underage sex.
- Have marriages that last longer.

As a Christian, it can be hard to see these benefits at times in our lives. Is there a time where you noticed the benefit your faith made in a situation?

(ask someone to read the following passage)

Psalm 103:1-6 (NLT)

***Let all that I am praise the Lord;
with my whole heart, I will praise his holy name.***

***Let all that I am praise the Lord;
may I never forget the good things he does for me.***

He forgives all my sins

and heals all my diseases.

***He redeems me from death
and crowns me with love and tender mercies.***

He fills my life with good things.

My youth is renewed like the eagle's!

***The Lord gives righteousness
and justice to all who are treated unfairly.***

King David was aware of the vast number of benefits we receive when we place our faith in Him, and Him alone. There are several key benefits from this verse. Each one speaks to a different component of our faith and to our current situation.

Which benefit sticks out to you?

What is God saying to you from this passage?

As we have seen in recent news, this world can be an evil and dark place (as if we need to be reminded). The enemy is at work and his game is distraction and destruction. He is anxiously awaiting for his chance to discourage us, cause us to be distracted, or even destroy our hope and faith.

John 10:10 (NLT)

The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.

Ephesians 6:16 (NLT)

In addition to all of these, hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil.

Jesus is about a different mission. His mission is to give us a rich and satisfying life. This doesn't imply the comfy life with glamorous riches but rather satisfied internally. We no longer strive for the things of this world because our hunger and thirst have been met. Our needs quenched. The Psalms describe God over and over again as a God who is good, loving, delivering us from evil, and our strength. These are reminders of why our faith in God is so critical. Jesus gives us a stark contrast in John 10:10 about what the two powers represent. **Their purposes are vastly different and if we aren't careful we begin to be reminded more of the thief than the Savior.**

What do you need to be reminded of from God?

What does God need to move to the forefront of your thinking?

We all need to be reminded of the good and everlasting promises from God. The good conquers the evil and our faith in Jesus carries the greatest benefits we will ever have on this side of eternity.

Practical Application Step:

- Consider writing down a verse on an index card and placing it on the mirror in your bathroom, your dashboard, in your wallet, etc. These promises from Scripture serve as a reminder and causes our faith to be placed in only one who is deserving of it.

FINAL THOUGHTS:

Ultimately our faith has a huge impact in our lives. The greatest benefit from our faith is Jesus. Our faith in God means that we have accepted the saving grace from Jesus and the Holy Spirit now lives in us. For each one of us, we are all in need of accepting this benefit and taking steps towards living it out each and every day. Look at the words from Paul as we conclude this week's discussion -

Ephesians 1:4-8 (NLT)

Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure. So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son.

He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins. He has showered his kindness on us, along with all wisdom and understanding.

The final question in light of the discussion today is centered around your next step -

What is God asking you to do?

Other key verses on faith:

Hebrews 11:1; 1 Peter 1:7,21; 2 Corinthians 5:7; 1 Corinthians 15:14-17; 1 John 5:4; 1 Peter 5:9;

1 Corinthians 16:13; 1 Corinthians 2:5

FAMILY FOCUS: (This would be great to have your kids and adults do together)

Materials: 1 gallon ZipLoc bag, a container of water, 6-7 sharp pencils, a plastic tub big enough for someone to stand in

In this object lesson, you have two kids hold both ends of a GALLON size ZipLoc bag. Pour about a 1/2 gallon of water into the bag, then zip it closed. Reach into your pocket, and say "Before I show you what's in my pocket, I need a volunteer."

At this point, you can either select another child, or if you really want to up the interest, pick a parent. (Neither should be in on the trick)

Next, instruct the adult to hold the bag of water over his/her head. This should make your parent rather nervous.

Build the tension. Produce the plastic tub, and ask the parent if they wouldn't mind standing in the tub. "Just in case any water spills, we don't want to get the floor wet."

Now (with a flourish) pull the pencils out of your pocket (or bag, etc.) and say "Wow, I've got six or seven VERY SHARP pencils. I wonder what I could do with

six VERY SHARP pencils, a volunteer in a waterproof tub AND a plastic bag of water?"

At this point, your parent MAY step out of the tub, or out from under the bag. You can either ask them to have faith in you and get back in the tub, or you could find a different volunteer.

At this point, slowly push the pencils, one at a time through the plastic bag, in one side, then out the other. If done correctly, no water should leak out of the bag. The bag is flexible enough that the water pressure inside will seal the bag against the pencils. There should be a lot of interest during the first or second pencil, then people should stop being interested. Use this to make your point:

"It's one thing when that first pencil goes in. It took a lot of FAITH and TRUST on the part of Billy to stand under that bag, because he had no idea whether he was going to get his nice suit wet. Did you notice how after I put a few pencils in the bag, he wasn't as nervous, and YOU didn't think it was such a big deal? That's because you realized things were safe."

"Well, sometimes God asks us to do things we don't understand, but we can have FAITH and TRUST in God that He will always do what is right. And you know, as you live your life for God, and stand in HIS bucket more and more, you start to realize that (just like the third or fourth or fifth pencil) that you can trust Him, and it gets a little bit easier to trust."

"That doesn't mean that older Christians (those who've been saved for a long time) don't need faith. It does mean though that we know that we can trust God, and put our faith in Him. James 2:17 says that 'Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.' If you really have faith in God, you'll put that faith into action and trust God to see you through."