

## STUDY GUIDE

**Monday, October 19 – Read Hebrews 11:1-3, 2 Corinthians 5:7** Faith can be a tricky word...we often think of it as a synonym for “belief” or “trust” or “hope” or probably a dozen other words along those same lines. But, what does it really mean...or, more importantly, what is God’s definition of faith? Well, he tells us straight-up in Hebrews chapter 11. It is, “confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.” The key words there are *confidence* and *assurance*. These aren’t words of blind hope or wishful thinking...these are words of near certainty. Now, the “what we do not see” part is what usually trips us up. How can we be confident and assured of something we’ve never seen before? Well, that question alone could be the subject of an entire book, but the writer of Hebrews gave us one quick example. In verse 3, he uses creation itself as evidence of this kind of faith. Essentially, he says, “there was nothing, and then there was everything we see. There was the *unseen*, and because of God, there is now the *seen*.” In other words, he calls us to begin looking back on all the ways our unseen God has made himself seen by what he has done. I’m not saying that one little tidbit will solve all of our faith issues, but it all points to the big question we all have to wrestle with: *do you really believe God is in control?* When you’re faced with the big, scary unknown, do you believe that God has it in his hands? It’s a tough question, but let me leave you with one assignment to help you with your faith: make a list of all the times God has come through for you in the past. Think back on your life, and whenever you faced something unknown, what did God do...how did it work out? How did what as unseen break into your life and take care of the problem you could see?

**Tuesday, October 20 – Read Proverbs 19:21, Romans 8:37-39** Having surgery has gotten fairly routine in recent years. However, no matter what kind of surgery you have, there is always a little apprehension. You are allowing yourself to be put to sleep and have put your life in the hands of doctors and nurses (some of whom you never see). There is nothing you can do – someone else is in control and that worries us. Now, the reason this idea of trusting someone with your life can be so difficult is that we like to be in control...or at least to *feel* like we’re in control. It’s hard-wired into our independent, American spirit. But, when it comes to the big things in life – when we find ourselves staring into the unknown – we realize that we aren’t *actually* in control. And that could easily cause us to freak out...unless we realize that the One who *is* in control is very, very good at it. You see, if you stop for just a couple minutes to think about it, we aren’t actually in control of much. God is the Creator of the universe, the author of life, and is the reason we wake up and have oxygen every morning...He is fully in control! While that last sentence will make the control-freak in you want to spaz-out a little bit, it should actually fill us with resounding peace. Yes, God is in control...can’t get around that. But, God is also so good, holy, and loving that we actually *want* him to be in control. God’s character never changes, he doesn’t have a bad day, and he will never, *ever* stop loving you more than you can imagine. Who better to be in control of everything than an all-powerful God of infinite love? So, whatever unknown and freaky thing you’re facing right now, take a moment and simply pray to God: “Thank you, Lord, that you are in control and that you are good. I know you’ve got this.”

**Wednesday, October 21 – Read Matthew 6:25-34, Romans 8:28** Call it what you want, facing the unknown often causes us to worry (or flip-out, or lose it, or however you want to say it). There’s this natural anxiety that washes over us when we’re trying to peer into the future and have no idea what’s going to happen. We can imagine some things that *might* happen, and following that rabbit-trail can get real scary real quick. But, I’m sure if you’ve ever found yourself spiraling downward into worry and shared that with someone, you’ve probably received the same utterly unhelpful advice I have...*don’t worry*. Oh...*don’t* worry? I never thought of that...thank you so much for your help. [insert eye-roll emoji] Fortunately, Jesus tackled the concept of worry head on. And while his advice was in fact “don’t worry,” he provided some much-needed context as to *why* we shouldn’t worry. You’ll read it for yourself in a second, but Jesus gives us two examples from nature: flowers and birds. In both cases, he points out how they don’t worry (I mean, how would a flower worry in the first place?). But, the real point of his teaching is that these creatures don’t worry because God provides everything they need. While birds aren’t consciously aware of it, God has always and will always provide them with food, shelter, and water. I live in the desert where there is little rainfall and a relentless sun, and yet wildflowers cover the hillsides at certain times of year. No one plants them or cares for them, God just provides everything they need despite the harsh climate they live in. Jesus wraps it up pointing out what should be obvious: God cares *way more* about you and me than he does about birds and flowers. We are his prized

possession...his favorite thing he ever created. If he's going to take care of little things like pigeons and dandelions, he's absolutely going to take care of us. The real question for us then becomes, *do we trust that God's way is better than our way?* You see, often we worry not because we fear something bad happening (though that's part of it sometimes), but it's because we worry things won't work out exactly the way we want them to. Are you willing to give that up to trust that however God works it out will actually be better for you than whatever you had in mind in the first place? I can't tell you how many times I didn't get my way, only to see later that what I got was way better because God is in control and knows better than I do. So, what are you worrying about, and are you willing to let God have control of it? He's going to work it out, and it's going to be better than whatever "perfect" outcome you've dreamed up in your head.

**Thursday, October 22 – Read Ecclesiastes 7:13-14, Psalms 47:6-8, Psalms 46:10** We've talked a lot about faith and trusting God over the past few days, and here's why: God wants to set you free from worry. Think about it, worry is never a pleasant experience, right? As Jesus pointed out in the passage we read yesterday, it's basically a huge waste of time and energy. God doesn't want us sitting around, blood pressure elevated, driving ourselves crazy worrying about "what if." He is a good, loving Father, and he wants us to live in freedom, trusting that our Dad has everything under control. And, if finding that kind of peace meant we needed to know what was going to happen, don't you think God would have designed some way for us to actually see into the future? Well, he didn't, which means there must be a path to peace even when we have no idea what the future holds. That path is *acceptance*. That may sound overly simplistic, but coming to a point where you accept that you can't know how things will work out is the key. *There is freedom in accepting that you don't know, but you know the One who does.* Wherever you're at right now, and however much fear, anxiety, or worry you've been dealing with, think back on all that God has shown you the past few days. Over and over he reminds us that he is in control, that he is good, and that all we need to do is trust in him. I know that's easier said than done, but if you're still worrying it means you're still trying to control...you're still hoping you can figure it out. Accept that you'll never be in control. Accept that you cannot know the future. Accept that God is God and you are not, and that's actually a very good thing. Today, honestly search your heart for any ways that you've been refusing to accept God's total control over your life and the world around you. Then, finally give that control over to him.

**Friday, October 23 – Read James 4:13-17, Hebrews 13:8, Matthew 6:34** Okay, you made it...day 5! Hopefully you've spent some quality time with Jesus this week, dealing with the unknown and your own anxiety over all the "what ifs" in your head. Today, we're going to finish strong with the most practical way we can overcome our fear of the unknown. And the reason this is helpful is that it completely counteracts the enemy's plan in getting you to worry in the first place. You see, when Satan can get us freaking out and paralyzed with fear of what's to come, he can stop us from doing what God has for us right here and now. Fortunately, this is the thing we can probably control the most out of everything we've talked about this week. Instead of fixating all your prayers and energy on *God, what's going to happen?* –we can shift our focus to *God, what do you have for me today?* It doesn't give you any answers for what tomorrow holds, but as we've discussed all week, we don't *need* those answers right now. But, here's the best part: as we turn our attention to what God has for us here and now, all that future stuff starts to fade into the background. All the stuff that we can't know and can't control doesn't matter as much, because now we're focused on what God is doing right in front of us. Don't miss what God has for you today because you're too busy trying to figure out what's going to happen tomorrow, or next month, or five years from now. God will give us exactly what we need for today, and he'll show us what he wants us to do, where he wants us to go, or what he's trying to teach us in this moment. There is such beauty in walking with Jesus day after day, and just watching the adventure unfold before you. Don't let worry or fear of the unknown rob you of the joy God wants to give you...just take it one day at a time, and watch him work in ways you never imagined.

*Adapted from: <http://ccv.church>*