Group exercise:

This passage in Hebrews was written for Christian Jews.

The tension in the this reading comes form Christian Jews who sold all of their worldly possessions to prepare for the return of Jesus – an obvious misunderstanding of Christ’s message.

The frustration expressed by some Christian Jews is an example of circumstantial faith – faith based on personal experiences (both sorrowful and pleasurable):

Two things that erode faith faster than anything else:  a. Life Style decisions that affect what we believe and b. Unexplainable circumstances where God does not do what we want God to do.

What does circumstantial faith mean to you?

Give examples of circumstantial faith?

When has circumstantial faith failed you?
Part 1: Better Odds:

Hebrews 4

New International Version (NIV)

A Sabbath-Rest for the People of God

4 Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. 2 For we also have had the good news proclaimed to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because they did not share the faith of those who obeyed. 3 Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said, “So I declared on oath in my anger, ‘They shall never enter my rest.’” (see Gen. 2:2)

And yet his works have been finished since the creation of the world. 4 For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: “On the seventh day God rested from all his works.”[e] 5 And again in the passage above he says, “They shall never enter my rest.” 6 Therefore since it still remains for some to enter that rest, and since those who formerly had the good news proclaimed to them did not go in because of their disobedience, 7 God again set a certain day, calling it “Today.” This he did when a long time later he spoke through David, as in the passage already quoted: “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.”
Part 1: Better Odds:

**Hebrews 4**

New International Version (NIV)

**A Sabbath-Rest for the People of God**

8 For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. 9 There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; 10 for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his. 11 Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience.

12 For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. 13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

**Jesus the Great High Priest**

14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet he did not sin. 16 Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.
Show video
Part 1: Better Odds:

See the story of Joseph in Genesis – he was key to get the Jews in Egypt. For 15 years, Joseph endured difficult circumstances. However, he maintained the long view by maintaining faithful to God.

Joseph understood that God’s time frame is different from our own.

We do not interpret the voice of God very well.

Perhaps you misunderstand God like we misunderstand each other.

It is fragile faith if you think that you will get things right every time that you think you hear from God. This is faith based on my experience alone.

It is true that God will use a set of circumstances to launch our faith.

Often have a “God moment” that launches one’s faith (a visit to a church, seeing great music). The catalyst to our faith.

God never intended for these moments to be our foundation of our faith. We are never to lean our faith on these moments because those moments come and go.

Your circumstantial faith will fail. The sorrows and pleasures life will eventually cause your faith to become inconvenient.
Part 1: Better Odds:

Your circumstantial faith will fail.

The sorrows and pleasures life will eventually cause your faith to become inconvenient.

You will trump pleasure over faith every time if all that you have is circumstantial faith.

Eventually, circumstantial faith will fail you and not hold you up.

Unlike current day philosophy and other religions, the foundation of Christianity is not an experience, not my ability to have the world make sense.

Many adapt a belief system to follow our behavior.

See: Hebrews 4:14

Jesus was the great high priest.

The foundation of our faith is a real person that happened in history. Not events and circumstances and not because we have an answer to every question.
Parts 2 and 3
Group exercise:

In your own words, define hope?

In your own words define true biblical faith?

Give an example when hope failed you?
Part 2 and 3: Betting on Hope and Beating the Odds:

**Hebrews 11**

New International Version (NIV)

**Faith in Action**

11 Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for.

3 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.

4 By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did. By faith he was commended as righteous, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith Abel still speaks, even though he is dead.

5 By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death: “He could not be found, because God had taken him away.”[a] For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God.

6 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.

7 By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that is in keeping with faith.

8 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.

9 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.

13 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, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. 14 People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own.
Part 2 and 3: Betting on Hope and Beating the Odds:

Hebrews 4
New International Version (NIV)

Jesus the Great High Priest
14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are —yet he did not sin. 16 Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.
Show video
Part 2 and 3: Betting on Hope and Beating the Odds:

If we asked everyone a definition of faith, we would probably get a different answer.

Regardless of your station in life, we all have faith (faith in God, faith in yourself, faith in an object).

What is the Christian definition of faith?

How Christians view faith is different than how others view faith.

Is the lack of an early goal, a product of lack of faith.

Hebrews 11 often preached incorrectly.

Regrettably, we all want a manageable God that we shrink down and fit into our earthly life.

Hebrews 11 makes God totally un-manageable.

What biblical faith is not
Part 2 and 3: Betting on Hope and Beating the Odds:

What biblical faith is not:
1. Not a force like STAR WARS.
2. If I believe, I will receive
3. Outside God
4. I was able to do ____ because I have great faith
5. Not a power to tap into, meditate into,
6. Confidence – I believe that we are going to win
7. Not complicated

The longer you are a Christian, the more you will not like Pastor Stanley’s definition of faith.

If you go back to every season of your life, you will find that the correct definition of faith helps explain a lot outcomes from past events.

A correct definition of biblical faith helps explain a lot of difficult

Definition of Faith: Living your life with the expectation and confidence that God will deliver on what he promised. Faith is being sure things that God promised. Faith is having certainty for those things that are unseen. Faith is being sure of those things that you had previously only hoped for.

The grid to view all other biblical teachings.
Part 2 and 3: Betting on Hope and Beating the Odds:

Why do you believe that God created the heavens and the earth?

It is an act of faith.

The bridge between hope and faith is the promise of God.

The reason that we display confidence in something

Presumption is hope gone wild.

If you go back to every season of your life, you will find that the correct definition of faith helps explain a lot outcomes from past events.

Jesus did not heal everybody. See John Chapter 5

If we now understand that true biblical faith is: Living your life with the expectation and confidence that God will deliver on what he promised.

So what exactly has God promised?
Part 2 and 3: Betting on Hope and Beating the Odds:

So what exactly has God promised?

- Healing for some
- Not to reverse the consequences of a bad decision, however, some do get bailed out of bad decisions.
- Not to answer all of our prayers
- Not to be rich

John 16:33

New International Version (NIV)

33 “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

- Empathize with us (not sympathize with us). I know exactly what you are going through. Your savior says I know how that feels. Jesus has been there. Our savior was tempted in every way we are (he dreaded the events of a following day before his crucifixion, experienced the rejection of this closest friends, experienced rejection of a family member, crushing temptation)
- Provides the clarity of an example of a sinless life
- Mercy and grace in our time of need. Approach God with both grace and confidence (without formality) so that you may receive mercy and grace in your time of need. Mercy = God is going to lean in your direction because “I know”. Sometimes mercy tangible. Grace = the strength and energy to endure. Great quote: “God has not promised to deliver us from our circumstances, he has promised to deliver us through our circumstances.”
Part 4
Team exercise:

When in your life has a prayer gone un-answered – when you felt that God said no?

How were you able to deal with this?

What did you learn from this experience?
Quick Review of Parts 1, 2, and 3:

Circumstantial faith – faith based on personal experiences (both sorrowful and pleasurable):

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- b. Unexplainable circumstances where God does not do what we want God to do.

God never intended for these moments to be our foundation of our faith. We are never to lean our faith on these moments because these moments come and go.

Your circumstantial faith will fail. The sorrows and pleasures life will eventually cause your faith to become inconvenient.

The bridge between hope and faith is the promise of God.

Definition of Faith: Living your life with the expectation and confidence that God will deliver on what he promised. Faith is being sure things that God promised. Faith is having certainty for those things that are unseen. Faith is being sure of those things that you had previously only hoped for.

So what exactly has God promised? Healing for some, Not to reverse the consequences of a bad decision, not to answer all of our prayers, not to be rich, Mercy and grace in our time of need.
Part 4: No Dice – When God says no

2 Corinthians 12
New International Version (NIV)

Paul’s Vision and His Thorn
12 2 I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. 3 And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows—4 was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell. 5 I will boast about a man like that, but I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses. 6 Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say, 7 or because of these surpassingly great revelations. Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. 8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. 9 But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. 10 That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.
Show video
Part 4: No Dice – When God says no

You can not get passed the fact that Paul is a person of extraordinary faith. See Paul’s life story in ACTs

Paul asks three times to remove a “thorn in his side”

Paul is trying to do God’s work, yet is unable to heal himself (as a Christian Rock Star)

The appearance of the absence of God is initially misunderstood by Paul.

No answer after three requests

My Grace = God’s grace

God’s Grace is sufficient for you.

Instead, I am going to give you the grace to endure

God gave Paul the grace and power to keep on going.

Everyone of us has something that God does not change.

We go through seasons where we think God says no
Part 4: No Dice – When God says no

So what are you going to do?

Your faith is not based on an answer or a circumstance. Your faith is based on something else.

Additionally, when you drop your knee (instead of raising your fist at God), you arrive at a station where God's power is made perfect in your weakness.

Remember when you dug yourself into a hole?

In that moment, all of sudden you experience an extraordinary dependence on God. Then, the outcome is favorable. Is it true that your life was not changed once the pressure is off.

God wants us to live our life totally dependent on him.

For when we are weak, we are strong.

God has opted for dependence over healing.

Your greatest weakness is god’s greatest area of opportunity.
Part 4: No Dice – When God says no

God exerts his greatest power at the time of your greatest weakness – if you let him in.

Your greatest weakness is God’s greatest area of opportunity.

If you walk away, you are walking away from the provision of God’s empowering Grace.

Rev Philip Yancey (I am paraphrasing): The only thing that is worse than trial with God is toil without God.

We should come boldly to God’s throne of Grace since our weakness is God’s greatest opportunity.

You then become a reflection of God’s greatness (despite a bad circumstance).

What is great faith: Great faith = great surrender. Surrender is not weakness. It is a position of peace.

Faith is not something to leverage for your own secular benefit. Our culture can make us want to seek the easy path. Do not make Jesus part of this cultural arrogance.
When Bad Things Happen to Good People by Rabbi Harold Kushner:

“It may be that Einstein and the Book of Genesis are right. A system left to itself may evolve in the direction of randomness. On the other hand, our world may not be a system left to itself. There may in fact be creative impulses acting on it, the Spirit of God hovering over the dark waters, operating over the course of the millennia to bring order out of the chaos. It may yet come to pass that, as “Friday afternoon” of the world’s evolution ticks toward the Great Sabbath which is the End of Days, the impact of random evil will be diminished. Or it may be that God finished His work of creating eons ago, and left the rest to us. Residual chaos, chance, and mischance, things happening for no reason, will continue to be with us, the kind of evil the Milton Steinberg has called “the still un-removed scaffolding of the edifice of God’s creativity.” In that case, we will simply have to learn to live with it, sustained and comforted by the knowledge that the earthquake and the accident, are not the will of God, but represent that aspect of reality which stands independent of His will, and which angers and saddens God even as it angers and saddens us.”
Part 4: No Dice – When God says no

**The Shack by William Young:**

“I (God) am not evil. You (humans) are the ones who embrace fear and pain and power and rights so readily in your relationships. But your choices are also not stronger than my purposes, and I will use every choice you make for the ultimate good and the most loving outcome. . . . Broken humans center their lives around things that seem good to them, but that will neither fill them nor free them. Humans are addicted to power, or the illusion of security that power offers. When a disaster happens, those same people will turn against false powers they trusted. In their disappointment, they either become softened toward me or they become bolder in their independence. If you could only see how all this ends and what we will achieve without the violation of the human will – then you would understand. One day you will.”