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BECAUSE PEOPLE MATTER  
REACH+EQUIP+GO

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## “BUILDING A GREAT LIFE OF FAITH”

For use the week of October 30, 2011

### Read to the group

Colin Chapman, in *The Case for Christianity*, quotes Ugandan bishop Festo Kivengere's account of the 1973 execution by firing squad of three men from his diocese:

*As we walked into the centre of the stadium, I was wondering what to say. How do you give the gospel to doomed men who are probably seething with rage?*

*We approached them from behind, and as they turned to look at us, what a sight! Their faces were all alight with an unmistakable glow and radiance. Before we could say anything, one of them burst out: "Bishop, thank you for coming! I wanted to tell you. The day I was arrested, in my prison cell, I asked the Lord Jesus to come into my heart. He came in and forgave me all my sins! Heaven is now open, and there is nothing between me and my God! Please tell my wife and children that I am going to be with Jesus. Ask them to accept him into their lives as I did."*

*The other two men told similar stories, excitedly raising their hands, which rattled with handcuffs.*

*I felt that what I needed to do was to talk to the soldiers, not to the condemned. So I translated what the men had said into a language the soldiers understood. The military men were standing there with guns cocked and bewilderment on their faces. They were so dumbfounded that they forgot to put the hoods over the men's faces.*

*The three men faced the firing squad standing close together. They looked towards the people and began to wave, handcuffs and all. The people waved back. Then shots were fired and they were with Jesus...It was a day never to be forgotten. Though dead, the men spoke loudly to all of the Kigezi District and beyond, so that there was an upsurge of life in Christ, which challenges death and defeats it.*

(Lion Publishing, Tring, Herts, England, 1981, ©.)

### CONNECTING WITH EACH OTHER (10-20 minutes)

**Answer and discuss one of these questions:**

1. What surprises you, puzzles you, or pleases you about the 3 men's comments as they faced the firing squad?

2. When have you seen recently someone publicly display faith in God?

### **STUDYING THE SCRIPTURE (20-30 MINUTES)**

Hebrews, chapter 11 has been called “The Faith Chapter”, and for good reason. The word faith and its variations appear 26 times in this chapter, recounting over 20 specific stories of faith and points the reader to many more unnamed people and their faith stories.

*<sup>32</sup> And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets, <sup>33</sup> who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, <sup>34</sup> quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. <sup>35</sup> Women received back their dead, raised to life again. There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. <sup>36</sup> Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. <sup>37</sup> They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated— <sup>38</sup> the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground. <sup>39</sup> These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, <sup>40</sup> since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect. (Hebrews 11:32-40 NIV)*

#### What faith offers:

- Read Hebrews 11:32-34. What action verbs are used? What kinds of conflicts are mentioned?
- Read Hebrews 11:35-38. The “good guys” weren’t always winning. List some of the apparent defeats.
- Read Hebrews 11:39-40. Why did the apparent defeats not seem to matter? What were they focused on during the apparent defeats?
- Why did God not give them “what had been promised”?
- What is the “something better” that God planned?

#### What faith delivers:

- Read Hebrews 11:1, “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” (NIV)
- Is faith simply blind hope? Are there examples of things we are certain of that we do not see?

- What do Christ followers hope for?
- What are Christ followers certain of?

#### How faith is built:

- Read Romans 10:17, *“Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.” (NIV)*
- What is the source of our faith in God?
- Read 1 Peter 1:6-7, *“...you have to put up with every kind of aggravation in the meantime. Pure gold put in the fire comes out of it proved pure; genuine faith put through this suffering comes out proved genuine. When Jesus wraps this all up, it's your faith, not your gold, that God will have on display as evidence of his victory.” (The Message)*
- How does God build our faith?
- What happens to our faith in times of aggravation and suffering?
- When have you seen faith built in this way; in someone else or yourself? What value does God place on faith tested in these ways? What value do you place on the end result of that tested faith?

#### **GROWING TOGETHER (10-15 MINUTES)**

Everyone who is a Christ follower will have faith tested. Where are you right now?

The warning light is flashing. I can see the testing coming.

My seatbelt is fastened! I'm in the thick of it!

Whew. Here's the rest area. It's over now.

Make a list of what you can say to encourage someone in each of these faith testing life segments. How would you pray for these people? What could you do to partner with them?

Break the larger group into smaller groups of 2-3 people. As each person is comfortable doing this, identify your current faith testing segment to the others. Encourage each other, pray for each other and explore ideas for partnering with each other.