Can Faith be Defined?

Albert Einstein famously said that if he were to be given an hour to solve a particular problem, he'd spend 55 minutes getting to grips with the problem! The corollary being, once you've identified the real issues, the solution becomes relatively easy to 'define'.

It appears to me that we're living in a world that demands instant answers to the many challenges that we're facing. And the very-human response is usually a knee-jerk reaction that may appear to solve the symptoms, rather than to identify the core issues that will enable 'treatment of the disease'. The result is often temporary relief, but then leads to long-term chaos for someone else try something else…

In essence, Einstein took great care to identify the issues that cause a problem, or stood in the way of scientific progress, for example, before wasting time by failing to solve the real issue. Scientists and engineers (myself included, when I was one) are past masters at finding definitions to help them do this. But in spiritual matters, any attempt to define faith (and belief), for example, diverts us from 'the spiritual' towards 'the provable'. And that's not helpful - trust me; I've been there!

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews has this to say about faith:

- KJV and NEB: ***Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen***.
- NIV: ***Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.***
- ESV: ***Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.***

St. Augustine said, ***Faith is to believe what you do not see*** - and added : ***the reward of this faith is to see what you believe***. This recurring theme that faith is the substance of things hoped for means that faith provides a sense of reality and assurance for things we long for, but can't yet see or possess.

Though for the Week: It occurs to me that our spiritual / religious faith is so much more than wishful thinking: it can, and should, be a deep-seated conviction that whatever it is that we hope for, and desire 'in-the-faith' will come to pass.

Our confidence in the outcome isn't based on our own knowledge, experience, 'IQ' or effort; but based on our absolute trust that God always keeps His promises. Jesus proved that to be absolutely true once-and-for-everyone.

So the words that really matter aren't definitions of faith at all, but 'consequences': confidence, and assurance that God has given us the faith that we need for His purposes. When we truly 'get that' in our hearts, our faith will develop and grow along the right path, no matter what happens in 'the world'.

It's up to us to make sure that our act of trust can be seen as a demonstration of living our faith, rather than 'just having it". James 2 says this rather bluntly: "… ***faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead***".

The question for every Christian, I think, is this: Does your life demonstrate faith in active and trusting obedience?