

The Foundations Of Faith

**Volume III
The Way Of Enoch**

Thomas M. Mitchell

The Foundations Of Faith – The Way of Enoch Volume III

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Walk With God Ministries adopted these Chinese characters that are part of a course created by Pastor Archie Parish as a symbol of the message that is at the heart of our vision. Over the years these characters have been used by many believers to introduce the Gospel.

2500 years before the birth of Christ and 2100 years before the first recorded crucifixion, the Chinese language gave us the secret of how to live forever... *the secret to eternal life.*

Cross The first character depicted is a cross.



Man Next is a man placed on a cross... a great man dying.



Two Men Two men are crucified along side of this great man. The full character depicts Jesus dying on the cross with the two thieves crucified alongside Him. One thief rejected Him (Luke 23:39) and the other one believed Him (Luke 23:40-42). This is the character Lai, which means *Come*.



Mouth



The second character begins with a man's word coming out of his mouth.

Standing



This character represents a man standing by his word. Combined this is the character Xin, which means *Believe*.

Lai Xin



When these two characters are taken together they represent *Come and Believe*. The circle surrounding them represents eternity.

2500 years before the birth of Jesus the Chinese language clearly stated the Gospel message and depicted the only road to eternal life... Jesus. Come to Jesus and Believe that He died for your sins, that you might have eternal life. Here we are some 4,500 years later and His Word is still true:

John 3:16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life.

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INTRODUCTION

In this book I want to take some time and look at the engine that supplies all the power to our hope. The furnace in the basement that responds to the temperature we dial on the thermostat; our faith. It's the rock-face of our Christianity but so often we get wrapped up in the struggles and trials of this world (right where the enemy wants us) and we lose sight of just how powerful our belief system is.

It isn't going to be possible to go into the detail I would like to but my goal is to encourage you to press into what God has to say about faith. As you study His Word you will find Him speaking directly to you about where you are in developing your faith and what you need to do to go deeper.

As the bride of Christ it is incumbent upon each one of us to not only know the ground that we stand on, we need to firmly stand on it moment-by-moment. Faith is the cornerstone upon which Christ built His church, and it's the key to the advancement of His Kingdom. Without a strong faith we're potential pawns in the hands of the enemy in the world around us.

The Lord reminded me recently that our foundation never gets finished being laid. I thought about that as I have always believed that when my foundation was set I would begin building up from there. Not so. He is the One who does the building on top of our foundation. For us, our foundation is an ongoing project as He will continually reveal to us the cracks that need to be attended to so that when He builds upon it, it will stand the stress. And the key to

a solid foundation is faith. So let's begin with a commitment to really grab hold of and understand the faith that God has given us—*the lifeblood of our Christian Walk*.

CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS FAITH?

Perhaps the best way to begin is to look at what the world has to say about faith and contrast that with how God defines it:

- *Webster's Dictionary*—Faith is a firm persuasion, conviction based on hearing, a building process.
- *Hebrews 11:1*—Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Let's look at one more definition from Nelson's Bible Dictionary:

Faith is a belief in or confident attitude toward God, involving commitment to His will for one's life. According to Hebrews 11, faith was already present in the experience of many people in the Old Testament as a key element of their spiritual lives. The various heroes of the Old Testament (Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses) are described as living by faith. In addition, the Old Testament itself makes the same point. Abraham believed in the Lord (Gen 15:6); the Israelites believed (Ex 4:31; 14:31); and the prophet Habakkuk taught that the just shall live by his faith (Hab 2:4).

In the New Testament, "faith" covers various levels of personal commitment. Mere intellectual agreement to a truth is illustrated in (*James 2:19*) where even demons are said to believe that there is one God. Obviously, salvation doesn't come by this type of belief, genuine saving faith is a personal attachment to Christ. It's best thought of as a combination of two ideas—reliance on Christ and a commitment to Him. Saving faith involves personally depending on the finished work of Christ's sacrifice as the only basis for forgiveness of sin and entrance into heaven. But saving faith is also a personal commitment of one's life to follow Christ in obedience to His commands:

2 Tim 1:12 I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.

Faith is the foundational part of our Christian life and it undergirds our journey from beginning to end. As the instrument by which the gift of salvation is received (*Eph 2:8-9*), faith is therefore separate from the basis of salvation, which is grace, and from the working out of salvation, which is sanctification; evidenced by the fruit of the Spirit. The apostle Paul declared that salvation is through faith, not through keeping the works of the law (*Eph 2:8, 9*).

Finally, in the New Testament, faith can refer to the teachings of the Bible, the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints (*Jude 3*). But today, faith has been weakened in meaning so that some people use it to mean self-confidence whereas in the Bible true faith is confidence in Christ, not in oneself. Jesus is our bridegroom and by faith we, as His bride, need to heed His call and draw ever closer to Him.

FAITH IS A PATTERN TO FOLLOW

Look at this statement of faith made by Paul when he was in a situation similar to that facing Jonah (*Jonah 1*).

Acts 27:23-25 For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, 24 saying, 'Do not be afraid, [fear not] Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you.' 25 Therefore take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me.

While Jonah demonstrated little or no faith, Paul showed us the faith that was locked in his heart. Remember, in a time of crisis you can rest assured that what you've placed in your heart will come out; faith or fear. Paul, like Jonah, knew the voice of the Lord, the difference was that Paul paid attention to it. For that reason he could stand up in the moment of crisis and say, on authority, that an angel of the Lord had assured him that none should be lost. Jesus put it this way:

Luke 6:45 A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

Paul may have been far out to sea but God knew how to find him. As a prisoner he was probably down in the ship's hold just like Jonah, but while Jonah was trying to hide from God, Paul was seeking Him. The angel told him to "Fear Not," and that is just what Jesus tells us to do in our times of trial and testing (*Matt 10:28; Luke 12:7*). The key to Paul's response was *I believe God*

(pisteuo; commitment). It's one thing to believe in your head but it takes *pisteuo* to give it life. Commitment in your spirit has to be there or it's simply wishing and hoping. That's like dialing in the desired temperature on the thermostat when the furnace isn't working, nothing is going to happen. Paul drew upon the treasure of the Word of God that he had been storing up in his heart for times like he was facing.

The Word tells us that we are to *fear not*, in fact we are told that in the presence of love, fear flees (*1 John 4:18*). Our faith is built up by hearing the Word of God, and one of the keys to hearing His Word is walking in love. Faith and fear are mutually exclusive; they can't coexist in our heart. When we're in the midst of our storms we need to hold tightly to that fact and let our love for our bridegroom bring forth the faith that puts fear on the run.

Rom 4:20-21 He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; 21 And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.

Paul said that he (Abraham) was not in strife with himself. He didn't doubt the promise of God, and in fact his faith did just the opposite, it strengthened him. That strength was manifested in his giving glory to God by being fully persuaded that what God had promised *He was also able to perform*. He was certain that God was going to give him a son and so he set about the work at hand without doubt in his heart. Note that he didn't even "stagger" at God's promise; *contend with, doubt or judge*. He didn't hesitate a moment at the thought, which was evident in his faith; the absolute opposite of unbelief. Backup to verse 19 and we see the impact of this statement:

Rom 4:19 And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb:

Abraham was an old man beyond the thought of fathering a son, and yet he “did not consider” or “take into account” his own physical condition or that of Sarah. He didn’t dwell on the physical impossibility of that promise but rather on the faithfulness of God. Weak faith is what causes us to lay awake at night and pour over the difficulties and impossibilities that seem to stand in the way of God’s promises. We always seem to justify that action by believing that we’re being wise in considering and reflecting on the facts when in reality it’s really our lack of faith that opens us up to anxiety, worry, and fear. As I write this section I am reflecting on having lived through that exercise far too many times.

FAITH IN ACTION

In the past, when facing some significant obstacles to obtain God’s promises, I fell off the wagon so to speak. Those were times when the enemy came in with such doubt and fear that I couldn’t get back to sleep, so I just laid there trying to reason it all out. How foolish! But the moment I began to reflect on God’s promises in His Word, the heaviness of the depression that was gripping me began to lift. Did the obstacles go away in the morning? No! But I was able to take Abraham’s example to heart and look to a faithful God who is fully able to perform what He has promised.

In reality we have these opportunities every day, and we will have them the rest of our natural lives. That’s why, in the heat of battle, we need to remember that it’s our faith that pleases God. A

son or a daughter that is *fully persuaded* brings Him glory and honor.

*Heb 11:6 But **without faith it is impossible to please Him**, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that **He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.***

Note the last part of this verse: *those who diligently seek Him*. That's the secret to keeping our faith strong and ready to respond at the moment of testing. It should be our testimony that we have total faith and confidence in Him. Let's look at the reality of faith in our daily lives.

Heb 11:1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Faith is like piloting an airplane in the clouds under Instrument Flight Rules (IFR); flying in the soup with no reference to the horizon. If you looked outside the cockpit you wouldn't be able to discern up from down or right from left. Your faith in the instruments is the substance of the hope you have to find the unseen airport. I coined a phrase while giving this example in class one time: IFR = *Internal Faith Required*. Here are a few scriptures to paint that picture for you from God's perspective.

Step 1 (Get Your Clearance)

*Isa 30:21 And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, **This is the way, walk ye in it**, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.*

The first thing required for an IFR flight is a clearance from the Air Route Traffic Controller; the authority that approves your flight plan and gives you permission to take off. Once in the air we use our instruments to keep us headed in the right direction.

2 Tim 3:16-17 All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

The voice of God is like the compass that always points to the true heading. If we faithfully follow it, no matter what we feel, see, or hear, we'll always be on course. The Holy Spirit is the one who tells us when to go, where to go, and how to get there. Avoiding His directions puts us in peril just like the pilot who disregards the route for which he has been cleared.

Step 2 (Fly the Instruments)

Ps 37:5 Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass.

In the Hebrew this literally says; *roll your way upon Yahweh' as you walk you are to trust in Him, and then He shall bring it to pass; after trusting.* If we don't follow our instruments we'll most certainly wind up meeting some part of the earth in a very unusual attitude.

The first thing you learn about flying on instruments is to “always” trust them over your instincts. There are many times flying on instruments when your “inner ear” is screaming something to your brain that doesn't match what you see in the

instruments and vertigo is the result. It's usually caused by making quick movements with your head that disturbs the inner ear fluid, and the next thing you encounter is an overpowering feeling that you are in a descending left turn or a climbing right turn when the instruments say you're flying straight and level.

The question at hand is clear—who are you going to believe? The only answer is to put your faith in the instruments and force your brain through the process. It's exactly like that in the challenges and trials of this world. Our soul wants to react based on how we “feel,” but our spirit “knows” how we need to respond. Where are you putting your faith in your moments of crisis?

Step 3 (Trust Your Instruments)

*Eph 4:14 That we henceforth **be no more children**, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;*

The Greek word for children used here is *nopios* (one who cannot speak). This refers to a young believer who can't communicate the Gospel. He is likened to a ship on the ocean without a rudder or a sail, and the waves are representative of the circumstances surrounding him. If we don't trust our instruments that's us, being tossed all over the sky by the wind, lost in a sea of clouds that confuse our attempts to find the right path. We wind up like this as a result of paying attention to the deceit of man and not trusting God. His direction never fails while our natural senses fail us all the time. Try flying in clouds by your natural senses (by the seat of your pants) and you will soon find yourself upside down.

The word “doctrine” in the original Greek is *didaskalia*, which means learning or teaching. False teaching is something that has plagued the church from the beginning and Paul admonished those in Ephesus not to be like babies and allow man to fill their heads with teaching that was contrary to the Word of God. If there was ever a time in the history of the church when there was an abundance of false teaching it’s now. We have plenty of opportunity to fall under false teaching if we follow our head and not our spirit. It’s our faith in the Word of God and in His Spirit that will insulate us from “every wind of doctrine;” anything that departs the faith for some new teaching at the expense of the Cross and the atoning blood of Jesus. It’s not the “theory of atonement,” it’s “the atonement of Christ.”

*Isa 26:3 Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because **he trusteth in thee.***

*Pro 3:5 **Trust in the LORD** with all thine heart; and **lean not unto thine own understanding.***

But trust has to come with commitment attached to it; *pisteuo!* Commitment as in nothing less than “all your heart” is required to attain the fullest that God has for you. Every choice, decision, motive, or intention must be directed to what God wants and what He can do. Biblical scholar Dr. David Hubbard, in his study on Proverbs said: *Trust steps onto the bridge of God’s loving power and leaves the shoreline of our own abilities and ambitions behind.* I think he’s saying that we need to bet our lives on God’s truth and wisdom and not our own understanding... we need to fly our instruments.

A LESSON NOT FORGOTTEN

In writing this book the Lord brought to remembrance an incident that happened back in Viet Nam while I was flying in a fighter squadron off the USS Kitty Hawk. Many times we had come down through the clouds on an instrument approach to the ship without seeing anything for a visual reference until just before touchdown. But I will never forget one especially miserable night during the monsoon season. We had just returned to the ship from a bombing mission, the weather was terrible, and at that point we were only interested in getting back on deck in one piece.

The bottom of the overcast was at 150 feet (75 feet above the flight deck) and the visibility was about 1/4 mile (1,320 feet). At an approach speed of 155 miles per hour you covered that distance in 6.3 seconds. When we finished the instrument approach through the rain and clouds we had just those 6.3 seconds in which to look up from the instruments and take over visually. We made several attempts to land but each time when we broke out of the overcast we were either improperly lined up with the flight deck or we would hit the deck only to miss the arresting cable and launch off into the night again to try and get aboard.

After several passes we were desperately low on fuel with nowhere to go but that ship. It was then that we turned to something we had with us all the time; the Automatic Carrier Landing System. It had the ability to fly our Phantom all the way to an arrested landing on a pitching flight deck; "hands off." But there was just one problem. We had never used it at night. But after being shot at and bounced around in thunderstorms for most of the night we were more than happy to hook up the ACLS on the last pass.

What peace there was to feel the aircraft respond to unseen electronic hands deep inside the bowels of the ship. After what

seemed like an eternity in a very dark ink well we broke out of the overcast exactly on heading, airspeed, and altitude. In less than a moment we were on deck and decelerating from 155 miles per hour to a stop in less than two seconds, more relieved than you can even imagine or that we would admit.

Isn't that just like most of us? The Holy Spirit is there waiting for us to give the controls to Him but we just keep on fighting all the outside forces in our own strength. As a result we're constantly being thrown about and forever missing the mark. Finally, in desperation, we yield to His perfect control and stand amazed as He brings us to another perfect landing. But, sadly, many times we keep pushing and run out of gas before we yield to Him. Those times are always self-induced but we often blame God for not doing anything. The ACLS will never bring a plane to a safe landing if the system isn't engaged.

As we move through this study, I trust you will find all the confirmation you need to totally, once and for all, put your trust in the One who controls your instruments. We have a very key role to play and in playing it just remember that when it comes to faith, God created it and He can always be trusted. The only question is will we trust Him; totally?

CHAPTER 2

FAITH IS FOUNDATIONAL

Belief is truth held in the mind; faith is fire in the heart.

Joseph Fort Newton

As we begin to discover just what faith is, let's start at the rock-face so to speak and look at just what our foundation is made of. It will be a good refresher for some and perhaps new revelation for others. In either case, what the Word has to say about what we base our belief on is the only thing that matters. The old expression—well God said it, I believe it, and that settles it—is about as wrong as you can be. We need to stop right after *God said it*. God's Word settled in the first four words of the Bible; *In the beginning God*. My believing has nothing to do with it.

Jesus has given us the faith that we need to believe, but He has left it up to us to not only exercise it but to understand it. We can't possibly walk through our allotted time here on earth and accomplish what God has set before us without a full and complete understanding faith; the perfect faith He has set within us.

We don't only have the obligation and duty to understand and develop that faith; we have the privilege to do so. This book is all about just that; understanding the privilege that God has given us to build up our faith in Him so that we can become and enjoy all

that He created us to be. And along the way we'll discover that faith is all that we need to help us through those difficult times that come with living in this fallen world. Here are a few foundational thoughts to get you thinking.

SALVATION IS IMPOSSIBLE WITHOUT FAITH

*Eph 2:8-9 **For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.***

The Greek language combines the past tense with the present tense and we get the perfect tense. Here it shows that the action (being saved) took place in the past but the results continue up to the present. Listen to how Kenneth West (*The New Testament: An Expanded Translation*) puts this verse:

*For by the grace **have you been saved** in time past completely, **through faith** with the result that your salvation **persists through the present time**. Grace is God reaching out to us and faith is our means of reaching out to Him.*

FAITH IS OUR DUTY

*John 6:28-29 Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? 29 Jesus answered and said unto them, **This is the work of God that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.***

The work of God is faith. It's believing in the One whom the Father sent and receiving what He has to give. Believe (*commit or*

trust) is the noun form of *pisteuo* used here and it's active not passive; faith in God is the prerequisite for obedience. The disciples wanted to know "how to work" God's work and Jesus told them that there was no work more acceptable than believing in Him as the Messiah and in the One who sent Him.

*John 20:27 Then saith he to Thomas, reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and **be not faithless, but believing.***

Thomas saw and believed, but we're like John before he saw the risen Lord; he believed and trusted those who had seen and believed. As we each heard Him call our name we responded by trusting in faith, and He responded with the presence of His Spirit. It takes active faith to move forward with God but so often many of the bride exercise the faith to believe that Jesus is their Saviour but stop there and never leave the foot of the Cross.

Think for a minute about the *Book of Hebrews* and the example of the temple Paul used to help make the case that Jesus is a better covenant than the Law. The temple had three main areas: The Outer Court, The Holy Place, and the Holiest Place (Holy of Holies). For the Christian, being outside the Outer Court represents our status prior to coming to faith in Christ; being born again. We then moved into the Outer Court; the place of the altar of sacrifice (the Cross). We have been saved, our salvation is sure in Christ because of His sacrifice. Now we are able to enter into the Holy Place. This is where God wants us to stay. We can't stay forever at the foot of the Cross or we will be like the Hebrew Christians Paul was challenging; immature and still feeding on milk when they should have been chewing the meat (the Word of God).

Jesus' sacrifice opened up the Holiest Place (the presence of God), and we are told that we are now to enter directly into the place that only the high priest could enter only once each year on the Day of Atonement.

I don't want to stray too far from our subject but it's important to understand that the Holiest Place is where God always intended us to live; the Garden of Eden. This is the garden that the bride speaks of in the Song of Solomon—the place where she has her most intimate relationship with her bridegroom. This is what is known as the Spirit-filled life, where the spiritual Christian lives, not at the Cross or in the Holy Place with the carnal or nominal Christian. And should we find ourselves slipping back into the Holy Place, it's critically important that we confess our sin, repent, and once again return to the Holiest Place.

The Hebrew Christians were content to just live in the Holy Place—in their salvation alone—and in doing so they weren't maturing in their faith. They were opening themselves up to the potential of slipping back into the Law. For the spiritual Christian that is slipping back into the world that they have been called out of. It's by the blood of Christ and our faith that we reside in the Holiest Place; the place where we mature in our spiritual walk and grow ever closer to Jesus as the Holy Spirit cleanses us, one spot or blemish at a time.

How sad that our lives are so often unfulfilled just because we don't exercise and strengthen our faith. It didn't take much faith for Thomas to believe because he based it on what he "saw" with his natural eyes, it took much more faith for you to believe because you did so with your eyes of faith. Look what Jesus said to Thomas after he believed:

*John 20:29 Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: **blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed***

We can't forget that by faith we have believed and we are the blessed.

FAITH NEVER CHANGES – IT'S A WAY OF LIFE

Col 2:6 As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him:

Received by faith—walk by faith. Look up *Gal 2:20* and note that faith is an integral part of your walk with Jesus. You didn't just receive some doctrine about Him, you received Him. Being “in” Jesus is the essence of our faith that springs up within us when we call upon it. In addition, we need to understand that to walk in Christ is to become like Him.

The great concern of those who have received Christ is to walk in him—to make their practices conformable to their principles and their conversation agreeable to their engagements. As we have received Christ, or consented to be his, so we must walk with him in our daily course and keep up our communion with him.

Matthew Henry

That's the critical component to our walk; keeping up our communion with Him. It's fundamental to building up our faith, trust, and confidence, and it takes place in the Holiest Place, not the Holy Place.

FAITH TRIGGERS WORKS

*James 2:26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so **faith without works is dead** also.*

*James 2:17-25 Even so **faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone**: 18 Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works: 19 Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. 20 But wilt thou know, O vain man, that **faith without works is dead**? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? 22 Seest thou how **faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect**? 23 And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, **Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness**: and he was called the Friend of God. 24 Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. 25 Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?*

In verse 26 James told us that just like the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead. What then are the works we see in verses 17-25? They're twofold: 1) works done by us in the flesh (which brings glory to us); and 2) works done with the assistance of the Holy Spirit (which brings glory to God.) To see the works of the "flesh" defined read *Gal 5:19-21*. The works of the Spirit, on the other hand, don't originate with us. They're the "fruit" of the Spirit (*Gal 5:22-23*).

The bottom line is found in verse 20: *faith without works is dead*. Faith without the fruit of the Spirit is dead just as faith that is

only intellectual is dead; the same way works done in the flesh are dead. It's our faith that triggers our works and they are the testimony of our faith; the natural byproduct of the Spirit at work in us. That's what James said—my faith generates works of the Spirit as a natural result of the Spirit of God within me. Unlike the rotten fruit of the flesh, the fruit of the Spirit is sweet.

FAITH IS OBTAINED

Rom 10:17 So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

God's Word tells us that *out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks* (Matt 12:34; Luke 6:45). We speak forth that which is in our heart; faith of fear. Only the Word of God hidden in our heart will build faith, anything else is from the soul realm and is mere human hope.

We put the abundance of God's Word into our heart by hearing it, and better still by hearing it from our own lips. What better way to hear the Word than to preach or teach it! The Word of God is called The Word of Faith because hearing it generates faith. God gives us faith in the beginning by hearing His Word, the very faith we need to respond to His offer of forgiveness of sin and the blessing of eternal life. The process continues for the rest of our life and the end result is directly proportional to how much of the Word we've heard and stored in our spirit.

FAITH IS REQUIRED

*1 John 3:23 And **this is his commandment, That we should believe** on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.*

There is some Old Testament understanding required here. Faith in the Old Testament meant to put your weight down upon God's faithfulness (*Heb 2:4*). It's not a bold, careless leap, it's a direct response to the fact that God's trustworthiness has been revealed to us. When I'm really convinced that Jesus is trustworthy, then I will believe in Him and be able to love others as he has commanded me. But without believing in Him I don't have His Spirit, without whom it's impossible for me to love (*agape; unconditional love*) others as He does. Believing is not an option.

*Heb 11:6 But **without faith it is impossible to please him:** for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*

Put in the proper context we see that Paul was talking about two men of faith, Abel and Enoch (*Heb 11:4-5*) who, by their faith, pleased God. Able by his heart and attitude toward God and Enoch through his faith. No one is going to obey God unless they believe in Him and believe that He knows what He's doing. On the other hand, failing to obey God is disbelief (lack of faith) and God does not take pleasure in disbelief.

To believe in anything other than God is to assume that we can do anything without His help. That's denying the character of God and assuming His role as our own. Our faith in Him is the foundation upon which we must build our relationship because the alternative is unacceptable; faith in ourselves is the foundation of

self-righteousness and it results in a wall being erected in our relationship with Jesus.

FAITH IS ESSENTIAL TO SUCCESSFUL PRAYER

*James 1:5-6 If any of you lack wisdom **let him ask of God**, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. 6 But **let him ask in faith**, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.*

God wants us to enjoy more than experiential, human wisdom. But to obtain His wisdom we must first ask Him for it, and James tells us that we need to ask without wavering (*diakrinomenos*; *doubting*); that's active obedience. God has instructed us to ask for wisdom and if we truly believe His Word we'll ask Him for it, fully believing that we'll receive it. Remember, faith excludes doubting because they cannot mutually coexist. Look at verse 5 in The Living Bible:

*Jas 1:5 If you want to know what God wants you to do, **ask him, and he will gladly tell you**, for he is always ready to give a bountiful supply of wisdom to all who ask him; he will not resent it.*

The bottom line is that we must believe that God is not only capable but willing to give us the wisdom we ask for if we want to receive it.

GOD IS THE OBJECT OF FAITH

*Mk 11:22 And Jesus answering saith unto them, **Have faith in God.***

This expression is a Hebraism (a characteristic of the Hebrew language appearing in another language), which means to have the faith of God; the strongest faith. And that faith can only come from God when He is the central object of our faith. Faith placed anywhere else is simply unbelief. Once again it comes down to those challenging words of Solomon (too bad he failed to continue to follow them throughout his life):

*Prov 3:5-6 **Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; 6 In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.***

In the next chapter we'll take a look at what faith does for us.

CHAPTER 3

WHAT FAITH DOES

A right relationship is based on faith—the heartfelt inner confidence that God is who he says he is and does what he says he will do. Right actions follow naturally as by-products.

The Handbook of Bible Application

Faith is a powerful force in the life of the believer and yet so often it is discounted; not only what it can do but what it has already done. Let's put this in perspective by taking a brief look at just a few of the things that have faith as their foundation. This is by no means a complete list but it's a good reminder to get you thinking about how important and powerful your faith is; the very faith God has given you.

FAITH SECURES SALVATION

*John 3:14-16 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: 15 That **whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.** 16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that **whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.***

We are all familiar with *John 3:16*, but in verses 14-15 we find a very interesting parallel. Just like the children of Israel were

saved from the serpents (*Num 21:4-9*) by looking at the serpent on the pole, so we're saved by looking at Jesus on the Cross. The serpent on the pole was a "type" of the Messiah to come who was to be crucified on the Cross. It took faith then to believe in salvation from the "bite" of the serpent, and it takes faith today to be saved from the "grasp" of the serpent.

*John 5:24 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, **and believeth** on him that sent me, **hath everlasting life**, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.*

You first have to hear and that means you are "listening." The word for heareth (*akono*) means not only to hear but to understand and believe. What is it that we give audience to and believe? It needs to be the Word of God.

*Romans 10:17: So then **faith cometh by hearing**, and hearing by the word of God.*

God has provided us a great way to increase our ability to trust in Him. I like to think about the fact that Jesus is called the Word and we are told to hear Him to build up our faith. We read, we hear, and we grow in faith; all by spending time with Jesus.

FAITH BRINGS SUCCESS

*2 Chr 20:20 And they rose early in the morning, and went forth into the wilderness of Tekoa: and as they went forth, Jehoshaphat stood and said, Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem; **Believe in the LORD your God**, so*

shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper.

Here the Hebrew word for established (*aman*) carries the meaning of permanence, certainty, or long continuance. It's a long-term relationship that takes time to become well established. The Israelites were told that believing in God was the key to a permanent foundation. What followed being established was to prosper (*tsalach*), but that isn't the material prosperity many think of today. It means to breakout, push forward, come mightily, or be good as well as be profitable.

So what were they to believe of the prophets? They were to believe that they spoke *the word of God*. At that time God was saying the same thing He is today—we need to hear, listen, and believe. If we want to push forward in our lives we need to believe in God and in His Word, that is what allows us to walk through life with “certainty.”

*Mk 11:24 Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray; **believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.***

This verse is often taken out of context and many have made a religion out of it. Let's take a minute and put it in perspective:

*Mark 11:20-26: 20 And in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. 21 And Peter calling to remembrance saith unto him, Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away. 22 And Jesus answering saith unto them, **Have faith in God.** 23 For verily I say unto you, That **whosoever shall say** unto this mountain, **Be thou***

removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. 24 Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them. 25 And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. 26 But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.

Here Jesus was commenting about the fig tree He had cursed the day before. His immediate response to Peter's statement (21) was, *have faith in God*. Then in verse 23 he spoke to them in terms they would understand. Removing a mountain served as a common figure of speech among Jews who wanted to describe an impossible situation (*Zech 14:3-10*). Jesus was teaching them about faith by using the nation of Israel as symbolized by the fig tree.

Israel was green with all its "religion" but it was without fruit; without its Messiah. In verse 20 Peter made note of the tree that Jesus cursed in verse 14. The tree was empty, just like Israel was without a true belief in God. Remember that just the day before Jesus had been ushered into Jerusalem with honor (9), and here He was the next day going to the temple to reject and cast out the moneychangers.

Answered prayer has a number of conditions, including believing and forgiving. There are many today that put emphasis on the "speaking" and forget that speaking is just empty words without a "non-doubting belief." I like what David McKenna has to say in his commentary on the *Gospel of Mark*.

- ***The Creative Mind of Christ***: Jesus becomes very creative in getting his point across.
- ***Attitude***: Attitude is a key ingredient in creativity. Everything regarding the fig tree is negative and Jesus completely ignored the comment regarding it. He did not dwell on the negative, He turned it into a positive; when you pray—believe.
- ***Viewpoint***: Look how quickly Jesus gets their eyes off the withered fig tree to grand view from the mountaintop. He wants them to see the potential of faith.
- ***The Unlimited Power of Prayer***: Behind the promise of the unlimited power of prayer are three timely conditions:
 1. *The will of God* – We can't pray outside His Will; His Word.
 2. *The faith of the one praying* – Doubt is a limiting factor.
 3. *The failure to forgive* – Holding something against someone.

The first time I read this it hit me just how much we focus on the fig trees in our lives and not on the mountain views. How many times we focus on the circumstances and come to God with a heart full of unforgiveness. In that instance we're just like the Israelites, green on the outside but without fruit on the inside. Our hearts are focused on the situation and ourselves, failing to recognize the deceitfulness residing on the inside.

*Luke 8:49-50 While he yet spake, there cometh one from the ruler of the synagogue's house, saying to him, Thy daughter is dead; trouble not the Master. 50 But when Jesus heard it, he answered him, saying, **Fear not: believe only, and she shall be made whole.***

Look at verse 49 and note what Jesus was referring to; the negative input of others that goes against the will of God. He told Jairus to do two things: fear not and only believe. We can't fear the circumstances around us and believe in God at the same time. It's important to remember that your circumstances are always subject to change. Jesus didn't speak to the believers of the bad report, in fact He didn't even acknowledge them. He wouldn't even let their unbelief accompany Him into the little girl's room. Look at the next verse:

*Luke 8:51 And when he came into the house, **he suffered no man to go in, save Peter, and James, and John, and the father and the mother of the maiden.***

Faith is powerful, but it must be full of life if it's going to walk in the presence of unbelief and not fail.

FAITH IS A GREAT DEFENSE/PROTECTION

*Eph 6:16 Above all, taking the **shield of faith**, wherewith ye shall be able **to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.***

The shield used by the Roman soldiers was made of leather and was soaked in water prior to going into battle so the fiery arrows (darts) would be quenched when they hit the shield. It's no less important for us today to soak our shield (faith) with water (Word)

before we go into battle. The shield of faith has the entire power of the Godhead behind it and when used it will quench all the fiery darts.

The problem is that we want those fiery darts to go out immediately on contact but sometimes it doesn't work that way. Many times it gets pretty hot before the fire goes out, and what would happen if we dropped our shield and ran? We all know the answer because we've done it by failing to put all our trust in God in those tough spots. Had we held our shield of faith a little longer that fiery dart would have been quenched. This is yet another reason for building up our faith by *hearing the Word of God*. Take time and read the end of the sixth chapter of Ephesians and consider how the shield is used to protect all the other parts of the body.

*1 Thess 5:8 But let us, who are of the day, be sober, **putting on the breastplate of faith and love**; and for a helmet, the hope of salvation.*

Note that faith and love are connected, the breastplate protected the soldier's heart and so they protect our spiritual heart.

1 Tim 1:19 Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck:

Our lack of faith puts us on the rocks. C. S. Lewis, in his *Screwtape Letters*, shows us that waging good warfare requires a realistic appraisal of the nature of the battle and the enemy's strategy. However, preoccupation with the enemy can lead to despair while ignoring him can invite disaster. Paul told Timothy to hold on to his faith and fight the battle with it and a good conscience. Should we expect our battle to be any different?

*1 Tim 6:12 **Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.***

Fight (*agoona; disciplined and determined struggle*) and lay hold on (*epilabou; a completed reality*) to eternal life. We continue to fight but the assurance of eternal life is a completed reality. Jamieson says that we are to fight that fight against Satan, the world and the flesh.

Paul wrote this letter to Timothy from Corinth and was referencing the national games; the Olympics. *Lay hold on* is like holding on to the garland wreath of a winner; 1st prize (*Jas 1:12; Rev 2:10*). Doesn't the winner of an Olympic event hold on to the prize with "great vigor?"

The statement *professed a good profession* is an interesting use of words. It means that you *confessed a good confession*; a Christian confession made before many witnesses. In other words, when you became a Christian you confessed faith in Jesus Christ. Now you need to grab hold of your confession and stand in faith and fight for what you have been given; what you confessed.

*Heb 10:19-23 Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, 20 By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, **his flesh**; 21 And having an high priest over the house of God; 22 Let us draw near with a true heart **in full assurance of faith**, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. 23 **Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering**; (for he is faithful that promised);*

In verses 19-21 Paul was talking about boldness. We are to have the boldness to enter into a relationship with Jesus because of His blood that was shed for us. He created the path for us by His death and cleansing blood.

The word boldness (*parresian*) refers to permission to approach an authority without fear; plainly or openly. In verse 20 Paul compared a flesh sacrifice with the word for life (*zosan*). Here is a new and living way: Jesus was slain, a perfect sacrifice, but He has risen from the dead (living). And His flesh—slain and risen—is our way into the Holiest Place; a living relationship.

Now look at verse 22: *Let us draw near*. Paul has shown us how Jesus prepared the way and he's told us to use it. But if we do, it must be done with a true heart; transparent and without guile. It has to be a heart that is full of assurance or filled with faith. And we can accomplish that because Jesus' blood has sprinkled our hearts and we no longer have an evil conscience.

Finally we come to verse 23 and are told, in light of 19-22, to hold fast (*tighten down*) the confession of our faith without wavering (*being of balance or leaning*). Don't bend or waver under the circumstances and pressures. Why? Because Jesus, the One who made us the promise, is faithful. So be bold because He has paid the price, and in doing so He opened a path for us into the deepest of intimate relationships with Him. All we have to do is use the boldness He's given us and draw near, standing firmly and unwaveringly on His promise. We need to exercise our faith!

FAITH BRINGS PEACE/ACCESS

Rom 5:1-2 Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: 2 By whom also we

have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

This is another statement that stands alongside *Heb 10:22*. By our faith in Jesus we are justified. The word *dikaioo* (justified) means innocent or made righteous. In other words, we are justified by our faith in Jesus, which brings us peace with the Father. Now, if that wasn't enough, we also get access to the Father and have the hope of His glory. Jesus brings this "standing" with the Father to us and it's permanent. Our faith brings us there but it doesn't keep us there; Jesus does.

FAITH BRINGS JUSTIFICATION

*Hab 2:4 Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but **the just shall live by his faith.***

The Hebrew word translated as "just" is *tsaddiyq*, and it means righteous; the man who has right standing with God. He is the one who lives by His faith, which is the key to obtaining that righteousness. We are made righteous (given standing with God) by our faith in Jesus. Remember Abraham, he was judged righteous by God because of his faith (*Gen. 15:6*). And like him, our faith leads us to the same One who gives us our righteousness.

Faith is the solid rock foundation of our Walk With God, and anything that attempts to steal, destroy, limit, or damage that faith must be our number one concern. Without our faith solidly placed in Jesus we will find ourselves being subject to the wind and waves of the enemy; the chaos of the world's system that desperately wants to silence our message.

There are people who do not want us to be free. They don't want us to be free before God, accepted just as we are by his grace. They don't want us to be free to express our faith originally and creatively in the world. They insist that all look alike, talk alike and act alike, thus validating one another's worth. Without being aware of it we become anxious about what others will say about us, obsessively concerned about what others think we should do. We no longer live the good news but anxiously try to memorize and recite the script that someone else has assigned to us. We may be secure, but we will not be free.

Eugene Peterson

FAITH REMOVES OBSTACLES

German Jesuit and theologian Karl Rahner made the statement that *the number one cause of atheism is Christians*. He was referring to those who proclaim God with their mouths but deny him with their life-style. They don't exercise their faith in the face of the trials and tribulations they confront in this life.

Without a solid and unwavering faith we are truly tossed about by the world's waves of confusion and the tides of our own uncertainty. How well the Lord knew that we couldn't do it alone and in His love for us He "gave" us the seed of faith that we needed to turn to Him for our salvation. But we can't let that seed go unattended. If we nurture it into full maturity along the way we will be blessed to see its fruit in our life. That is what the bride in the *Song of Solomon* came to realize. Once again consider Jesus and the fig tree. For us there is no fruit when we walk in unbelief, but there is no failure when we pray believing.

*Matt 17:20 And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, **ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.***

Our faith is the key to removing the obstacles in our midst because it opens up the potential of the full power of God in any situation. There were times when, due to the unbelief around Him, Jesus was unable to perform miracles. If we are an unbelieving vessel should we really expect the power of God to be evident in our lives?

*Matt 13:58 And he did not many mighty works there **because of their unbelief.***

We are told to ask in prayer, believing. That simply means to petition God or ask Him with a heart that is not in doubt. Unlike the religious professions of many hypocritical people, those with a faith-filled heart will bear fruit; not just green leaves. Like the fig tree had the appearance of being fruitful from a distance, when you got closer it became obvious that it was all show and no go. However, not only are we to have faith, we are to “doubt not” because doubting spoils faith. Paul told us in *Romans 4:20* to *stagger not at the promise*. Our prayers must have faith or they are like the fig tree with nothing but beautiful green leaves.

Unfortunately, many believe that their faith is to be used to get God to do what they want. That isn't the correct meaning of *with God all things are possible (Matt 19:26)*. The Hebrew Rabbis were considered to be “movers of mountains” or solvers of great difficulties. They were the ones the people looked to when facing

impossible situations. Removing mountains and rooting up mountains were phrases they generally used to suggest removing or conquering great difficulties.

He that has faith will get through every difficulty and perplexity; mountains shall become molehills or plains before him. The saying is neither to be taken in its literal sense, nor is it hyperbolic: it is a proverbial form of speech, which no Jew could misunderstand, and with which no Christian ought to be puzzled.

Matthew Henry

Our faith in God's promise to answer our prayers associated with His Word and His Will is what makes us "movers of mountains" and "solvers of great difficulties."

FAITH BRINGS HOPE AND JOY

To begin looking at hope and joy, here is a good foundation from Nelson's Bible Dictionary:

Hope

- *Hope is confident expectancy.* In the Bible, the word hope stands for both the act of hoping (*Rom 4:18; 1 Cor 9:10*) and the thing hoped for (*Col 1:5; 1 Pet 1:3*). Hope does not arise from the individual's desires or wishes but from God, who is Himself the believer's hope: *My hope is in You (Ps 39:7).*

- *Genuine hope is not wishful thinking.* It is a firm assurance about things that are unseen and still in the future (*Rom 8:24-25; Heb 11:1, 7*).
- *Hope distinguishes the Christian from the unbeliever.* The one who has no hope (*Eph 2:12; 1 Thess 4:13*) is the one who does not believe. A Christian is one in whom hope resides (*1 Pet 3:15; 1 John 3:3*). In contrast to Old Testament hope, the Christian hope is superior (*Heb 7:19*).
- *Christian hope comes from God.* (*Rom 15:13*). It comes from His calling (*Eph 1:18; 4:4*), His grace (*2 Thess 2:16*), His Word (*Rom 15:4*) and His Gospel (*Col 1:23*).
- *Hope is directed Toward God and Christ* (*Acts 24:15; 1 Pet 1:21... (1Thes 1:3; 1Tim 1:1)*). Its appropriate objects are eternal life (*Titus 1:2; 3:7*), salvation (*1 Thess 5:8*), righteousness (*Gal 5:5*), and the glory of God (*Rom 5:2; Col 1:27*), the appearing of Christ (*Titus 2:13*) and the resurrection from the dead (*Acts 23:6; 26:6-7*).

Faith brings about hope because Jesus is hope. When we have faith in Him we have hope. Now let's look at joy.

Joy

- *A positive attitude or pleasant emotion; delight.* Many kinds of joy are reported in the Bible. This makes it difficult to give a simple definition as even the wicked are said to experience joy in their triumphs over the righteous (*1 Cor 13:6; Rev 11:10*). There are many levels of joy, including gladness, contentment and cheerfulness. But the joy which the people of God should have is holy and pure.

This joy rises above circumstances and focuses on the very character of God. In the Psalms the psalmist rejoices over God's righteousness (71:14-16), salvation (21:1; 71:23), mercy (31:7), creation (148:5), word (119:14,162) and faithfulness (33:1-6). God's characteristics as well as His acts are the cause of rejoicing.

- *The joy required of the righteous person (Ps 150; Phil 4:4).* Christian joy is produced by the Spirit of God (Gal 5:22). This kind of joy looks beyond the present to our future salvation (Rom 5:2; 8:18; 1 Pet 1:4,6) and to our sovereign God, who works out all things for our ultimate good; Christ-likeness (Rom 8:28-30). This kind of joy is distinct from mere happiness. Joy like this is possible, even in the midst of sorrow (1 Cor 12:26; 2 Cor 6:10; 7:4).

Christians often get joy mixed up with happiness. A simple way to differentiate the two is to remember that happiness is temporal but joy is eternal. Joy is one of today's benefits of our eternal life in Jesus; we have it now and it will last forever. We are told in the scriptures that the *joy of the Lord is our strength (Nem 8:10)*; if we maintain our joy we'll maintain our strength.

However, to maintain our joy we need to stand in faith and hold on to the hope of His promise that He is coming again for us to live with Him for all eternity. With that kind of faith in His Word our life is filled with the joy that gives us strength far beyond that which is worked up in the flesh. Just think about that for a moment.

Jesus made us a promise and when we believe Him it brings us joy. Sounds like we might just be responsible for what kind of day we are having! Look at the following verse and note that God is the one who fills us with joy and peace through our believing. The

result is that we abound (*perisseuo: have in abundance; have more to spare; exceed*) in hope. How? By the Holy Spirit.

*Rom 15:13 Now the God of hope fill you with **all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.***

All joy means all possible joy; the joy that comes from the God of hope, the author of hope (*elpis; confident expectation*). Peace with God and peace of conscience are the result of our faith; a hope made strong by the Holy Spirit.

FAITH BRINGS BOLDNESS

*Eph 3:12 In whom we have **boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him.***

When we have confidence in our heart we'll see boldness come forth (*parrhesia; outspokenness, frankness, bluntness, assurance*). Jesus gives us boldness that we can rely on and have total confidence in because it comes from Him. It's His boldness that gives our faith its strength. If we're completely honest, don't we all become bold in the position we take when we're absolutely certain that we're right? Well how much more bold should we be when we have the confidence of the Word of God underpinning what we believe, "who" we are, and "whose" we are? This should encourage us and instill in us a desire to "build up our faith." There are many ways to accomplish that and certainly Paul set the table for us:

*Rom 10:17 So then faith comes **by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.***

There is no better place to begin than with the Word of God. Paul told us to “hear” the Word (*hear it preached*), but that also means to hear it another way; read the Word out loud. Stop and think about it for a moment, aren’t we all quick to listen to the sound of our own voice? It grabs our total attention while at the same time drowning out any other thoughts; we can’t effectively talk and listen at the same time. It’s a proven medical fact that the sound of our own voice triggers something in our inner ear and our brain that causes us to immediately focus on what we’re saying. By the way, the same thing holds true when praying. If we pray out loud it will keep those distracting thoughts out of our mind.

Well there is also another way that our faith is built up and it’s directed by no one other than the Lord Himself. In the next chapter we’ll take a hard look at how our faith is built up by “testing.” There is no better way to find out where you stand by how you stand when you’re tested.

*James 1:2-4 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that **the testing of your faith develops perseverance.** Perseverance must finish its work **so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.***

CHAPTER 4

FAITH IS TESTED

Character is developed through challenges. God tested Abraham, not to trip him and watch him fall, but to deepen his capacity to obey God and thus develop his character. Just as fire refines ore to extract precious metals, God refines us through difficult circumstances. When we are tested, we can complain, or we can try to see how God is stretching us to develop our character.

The Handbook of Bible Application

So far we have seen many reasons why God made faith the centerpiece of our life. In fact, it's so important that not only has God given us the seed of faith we need to believe in Him, He ensures that it will grow by testing it throughout our life. Just when we think our faith is strong and can withstand the pressures of the enemy's attacks, the Lord will show us that we aren't there yet by setting a test in front of us. But He doesn't do it to follow some sort of eternal grading system; it's to show us where we are and how much we need to depend upon Him.

EXAMPLES OF TESTING

Sometimes He Gives Us “Strange Plans”

Joshua 6:3 And ye shall compass the city, all ye men of war, and go round about the city once. Thus shalt thou do six days. 4 And seven priests shall bear before the ark seven trumpets of rams' horns: and the seventh day ye shall compass the city seven times, and the priests shall blow with the trumpets. 5 And it shall come to pass, that when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when ye hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city shall fall down flat, and the people shall ascend up every man straight before him.

Sometimes I think God goes out of His way to choose strange means to accomplish His will. I'll bet Joshua didn't have any tactical military plans that looked like this. Only God would come up with such a plan to get Joshua to trust Him and not his own clever understanding (*Prov 3:5*). Normally, when a city was under siege those surrounding it would taunt the inhabitants as part of the siege, shouting and blowing their trumpets. But Joshua admonished all the people to keep silent until the day in which he commanded them to shout (*Josh 6:10*). Can you imagine what the people of Jericho must have been thinking?

What about Gideon and the strange instructions God gave him (*Jug 7:2-8*)? Reducing your army from 22,000 to 300 doesn't sound like a very smart move. Can you imagine Gideon sitting there, worried that those 22,000 soldiers weren't enough and the commander and chief cut back the defense budget? But look at it from God's perspective. He didn't want Gideon to be able to take

any credit for the victory. Only through his faith and obedience to the Word of God would he be victorious.

Suffice it to say that the strange plans God gives us sometimes are only His way of reducing our resources down to almost nothing. When we're at our least, God is always at His best.

Sometimes it's Apparently "Useless Work"

2 Kings 3:16-17 And he said, Thus saith the LORD, Make this valley full of ditches. 17 For thus saith the LORD, Ye shall not see wind, neither shall ye see rain; yet that valley shall be filled with water, that ye may drink, both ye, and your cattle, and your beasts.

Here is a perfect example of God's people being asked to prepare to receive His blessings in a manner that didn't seem very realistic. The Lord spoke through Elisha and told them to dig wide ditches and yet there wasn't any wind to stir up moisture into rain clouds. But still, He told them that the valley would be filled with water to meet their needs. And because they were obedient, not only did they have the water they needed in the morning, it also caused the Moabites to be delivered into their hands (*2 Kings 3*). Obedience really is better than sacrifice.

What about Noah? If there was ever a strange request from God this had to be it. It had never rained in the history of the world and God asked Noah to build an ark. Imagine what Noah was thinking about this request (*Gen 6:13*); what's an ark, why build one? But there he was, doing what God commanded because God said Then when he completed it God told him that in seven days it was going to rain for 40 days and nights (*Gen 7:4*). What's rain? Noah and his family had their answer in short order.

What if Noah had listened to all the naysayers and said: *This just doesn't make any sense; I think I'll wait until I get a clearer picture?* How many times have we failed to attach our faith to something that God has told us, only to find out too late how much it cost us?

Sometimes it's Preparation "With No Blessing in Sight"

2 Kings 4:2 And Elisha said unto her, What shall I do for thee? tell me, what hast thou in the house? And she said, Thine handmaid hath not anything in the house, save a pot of oil. 2 King 4:3 Then he said, Go, borrow thee vessels abroad of all thy neighbors, even empty vessels; borrow not a few.

If you think the widow thought it was strange, imagine how Elisha must have felt; this was his first miracle. But look at the faith he showed in the last part of verse 3: *borrow not a few*. Consider Jesus' statement in *Matt 14:31*. Peter walked on the water because He was obedient to the Word of God and put his faith to it. He only sank when he took notice of the circumstances and his faith weakened. What if the widow would have put all her faith in the prophet, been "fully" obedient to his word and gathered twice as many jars as she did?

Remember that God keeps giving Himself to us as long as we bring Him something He can pour Himself into. When we stop bringing, He stops pouring. Perhaps another way to look at it is that we have as much of God as we are willing to take in. When He asks us to prepare but we don't see the blessing, we need to remember those throughout the Bible like Noah, Elisha, and the widow that were obedient and stepped out in faith.

TYPES OF TESTING

Lack of Sympathy

Matt 15:22-28 And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.²³ But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us.²⁴ But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. ²⁵ Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me.²⁶ But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs. ²⁷ And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table. ²⁸ Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.

Notice first that she was persistent in the face of Jesus' apparent lack of sympathy for her situation. Was He just taking His time in not responding to let her exercise her faith? As we read on, Jesus not only responded by telling her that not only was He sent only to the house of Israel, He further likened her to a dog at the table of Israel; a gentile. But her faith was strong and she agreed with Him and said that she wasn't asking for what belongs to the highly favored Israelites but just what they didn't want. In other words, all I need is a little of you Jesus and my daughter will be delivered.

Now comes verse 28 and we hear Jesus acknowledge that her faith, in the face of all His rejection, had grown stronger. Adam

Clarke described her faith as being like a river; *it becomes large by the dykes opposed to it until at last it sweeps them all away.*

What does this tell us? Perhaps it means that we need to persevere, and when the delays have properly prepared us we will be ready to receive. *Oh woman, great is thy faith.* Jesus admired her faith and so should we; it's an example by which our lives can be radically altered.

Mark 10:13-14 And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. 14 But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.

Here is another example of faith that pleased Jesus. If we continue and read verses 15 and 16 we see that Jesus rebuked His disciples for their action. Why? Weren't they just trying to protect Him so He could deal with the more important aspects of His ministry?

The problem was that despite the fact that they had lived with Him for two years they still hadn't caught His Spirit. Jesus took the opportunity to teach them in these verses that only total and simple trust ushers us into the kingdom. Who has more faith than a little innocent child? The woman of Canaan did.

Discouraging Circumstances

Luke 5:17-20 And it came to pass on a certain day, as he was teaching, that there were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by, which were come out of every town of Galilee, and

Judaea, and Jerusalem: and the power of the Lord was present to heal them. 18 And, behold, men brought in a bed a man which was taken with a palsy: and they sought means to bring him in, and to lay him before him. 19 And when they could not find by what way they might bring him in because of the multitude, they went upon the housetop, and let him down through the tiling with his couch into the midst before Jesus. 20 And when he saw their faith, he said unto him, Man, thy sins are forgiven thee.

How many times have we let the enemy block our way and close us out of God’s blessing, keeping us from receiving our miracle? More importantly, how many times have we kept someone else from receiving his or her miracle by our lack of faith? In this case it was the men who persisted and got the sick man in front of Jesus. Jesus saw “their” faith and forgave “his” sins, and the man received his healing by exercising his faith—he got up, took his bed, and went on his way. True, God-based faith will stop discouragement and open the doors of heaven for us.

Unbelieving Friends

Mark 5:22-23, 35-36 And, behold, there cometh one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name; and when he saw him, he fell at his feet, 23 And besought him greatly, saying, My little daughter lieth at the point of death: I pray thee, come and lay thy hands on her, that she may be healed; and she shall live... 35 While he yet spake, there came from the ruler of the synagogue's house certain which said, Thy daughter is dead: why troublest thou the Master any further? 36 As soon as Jesus

heard the word that was spoken, he saith unto the ruler of the synagogue, Be not afraid, only believe.

This is one of my favorites because it seems that when my faith is being tested there is always someone who will come along to speak the devil's lies into my ear. You can't do that! It's not possible! Jesus isn't interested in that! Look at this example and don't miss the subtle act of faith.

In verse 22 we are given a great big clue as to Jairus' faith. He was a ruler of the synagogue—among those who hated Jesus—and here he was falling at Jesus' feet. Look up *John 7:47-48* where we learn that few of them believed in Jesus. So here he is, taking a big risk by worshipping Jesus in public and here comes the bad news; right on schedule.

I love what Jesus says. I can just imagine that those from his house came loudly proclaiming that his daughter was dead: *Stop bothering Jesus*. I can also imagine that Jesus quietly leaned over to Jairus and said: *just believe*. In other words, you've got it right and they don't, don't listen to them, just keep the faith, it's all you need to do; replace your fear with your faith. When doubt and unbelief are needed the enemy has an army of well meaning, well intentioned individuals at his disposal.

Scoffers

John 9:13-16 They brought to the Pharisees him that aforesaid was blind. 14 And it was the Sabbath day when Jesus made the clay, and opened his eyes. 15 Then again the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. He said unto them, He put clay upon mine eyes, and I washed, and do see. 16 Therefore said some of the Pharisees, This man is not of God,

because he keepeth not the Sabbath day. Others said, How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles? And there was a division among them.

Religious people (those focused on outward religious service) will always try and steal your joy; the joy which is evidenced by your zeal for the Lord. It's a prerequisite to the stealing of your faith. Scoffers, those who mock or scorn others, do this by stealing the Word if you let them. I love the way the blind man stood his ground.

*John 9:27 He answered them, I have told you already, and ye did not hear: wherefore would ye hear it again? **will ye also be his disciples?***

In other words, "I already told you; do you want to hear it again? Are you anxious to find out more about him so you can become his disciples also?" Then, with even more boldness he went on the offensive in verses 30 to 33.

John 9:30-33 The man answered and said unto them, Why herein is a marvelous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes. 31 Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth. 32 Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind. 33 If this man were not of God, he could do nothing.

Talk about turning the cart over. He not only wouldn't let them steal his joy (zeal), he challenged them by asking if they were seeking to get some of their own!

Divine Delays

John 11:3-6 Therefore his sisters sent unto him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick. 4 When Jesus heard that, he said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby. 5 Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. 6 When he had heard therefore that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place where he was.

I could spend pages on these verses, but the point I want to make is that we must, like Jesus, wait for God's perfect timing. If we get out ahead of Him then we're operating in our own strength and power. I've been there and found myself no match for the forces opposing me. On the other hand, when I've waited for God to move, I've hardly noticed the opposition. I know that if it had been me and I knew that I could bring Lazarus back to life I would have run there immediately.

Jesus said that this was for the glory of God and so, in obedience to His Father, He let things get worse instead of better. All of His friends must have thought it was a very strange way to show His love for Martha and Mary... *it isn't like Jesus to act like this*. But verses 5 and 6 tell us that He stayed because He loved them. He loved them and so He tried their faith because He desired to do something great for their faith. He wanted to do something for them that He hadn't done for any of His friends, and Lazarus

needed to be dead and buried to accomplish it. Look up *Isaiah 54:7-8; 49:14*. God always has His best in mind for us in the midst of the delay. We may not think He's around when We think He should be, but He is! Yes, God will continue to test our faith—thank God that He does—but just why does He?

CHAPTER 5

THE PROMISES AND BLESSINGS OF FAITH

The proud man counts his newspaper clippings; the humble man is blessings.

Fulton J. Sheen

If faith were not so important and so critical to our spiritual survival, God wouldn't have spent so much time talking about it. It's the key to our relationship with Him and everything that flows out of that relationship. Therefore it's no wonder the enemy comes to try and destroy our faith, leaving us to our own strength and devices. Sadly, that is where many of the bride of Christ find themselves today as they stumble through life, powerless without a living and dynamic faith life. They're just content to live in the Holy Place and never enter into the Holiest Place.

In the last chapter we took a brief look at how our faith is tested and proved. Sometimes it's at God's hands and at other times He allows the enemy to provide the testing. What we need to remember is that no matter what the test is, what the source of the test is, or how long the test will take, it's all about building up our faith. The more we endure, the more we see God's provision in our times of trial the stronger we become and the better prepared we

are to trust Him in the next crisis. And the next crisis always seems to be bigger than the last one.

Thank God He never leaves us where we are. He constantly works to lift us higher and higher, and the muscle He uses is our faith. But we can't forget that it's not only just about the building up; there is definitely another upside. Let's explore some of the promises and blessings that our faith brings about.

FAITH BRINGS HEALING

Mt 8:13 And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour.

Thou hast believed (*episteusas; entrusted one's spiritual well-being to Christ*) is past tense. The centurion believed first and the healing followed. One of the interesting parts of this account is contained in a previous verse (6) where he first heard the bad news. But in the face of that news he had so much faith that he told Jesus that He only needed speak the command and his servant would be healed. He came to Jesus humbly (8) and, as we see throughout the Bible, it always seems that the more humility there is the greater the level of faith. He not only had faith that Jesus could heal his servant, He believed that He could do it at a distance with just His Word. Jesus was so taken back that He said He hadn't seen such faith in all of Israel (10). Notice that He didn't admire him for his position and power, it was for his graces. Not only was he strong in faith but he was interceding for his servant. Remember what happened to Job when he prayed for his friends; he was fully restored. Here Jesus commended the centurion, a Gentile, in front of the house of Israel.

Compare this with the nobleman who insisted that Jesus come to his house (*John 4:47-49*). In that instance, Jesus wouldn't come and yet here for a lowly Roman He immediately offered not to just come but to "come and heal." In both cases Jesus healed the sick but consider His attitude in both cases. To the nobleman He refused to come to his home and to the Roman He offered to come without being asked. Oh how the Lord responds to a humble man!

Many times we come with total faith in Jesus' ability to heal but we don't immediately receive our healing. Adam Clarke's commentary on these verses addresses the school of thought that if there isn't an immediate healing there must be something yet required of the person or of God. He clearly states that this is a false assumption for this simple reason:

It's by faith that God may be manifested and honored, not by works or by sufferings, lest any man should boast.

The centurion displayed no works at all and yet his servant was immediately healed. There is a common thread here; Christ's power and our faith. When they're joined together miraculous things happen.

*Mt 9:29-30 Then touched he their eyes, saying, **According to your faith be it unto you.** 30 And their eyes were opened; and Jesus straightly charged them, saying, See that no man know it.*

Remember that faith is the catalyst for healing. It's like Jesus said to the ruler—*only believe!* And total healing for the believer will certainly come, either here in this life or when Jesus calls us home... guaranteed!

FAITH ACTIVATES POWER

Mt 17:20 And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.

Jesus responded to the disciples' failure to hear the epileptic with the parable of the mustard seed (*Matt 17:14-21*). While it may be a small seed that produces the plant, it must do something first. It must die as a seed to be transformed into new life. Faith operates like that. We must be willing to die-to-self in order to be transformed. Jesus said *bring him to me*. Likewise we need to move beyond ourselves and draw close to Jesus. This is the kind of faith that moves mountains; conquering in the face of the seemingly impossible. When we set our faith to God's will, anything can be accomplished.

*Mt 21:21-22 Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, **If ye have faith, and doubt not** ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye **shall say** unto this mountain, *Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done.* 22 And all things, **whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing,** ye shall receive.*

Looking back at the story of Jesus and the fig tree it's important to see that something very subtle is added in verse 21. Jesus told them to have faith; doubt not and say (*epo; command*) to the mountain. What He said is that our "speaking" to our circumstances shows evidence of our faith in Him to change them.

We need to exercise this much more often than we do, putting action to our faith by remembering that circumstances are subject to change. Read *Romans 4:20* and consider Abraham and his circumstances.

... the way and means of exercising this faith, and of doing that which is to be done by it; All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive. Faith is the soul, prayer is the body; both together make a complete man for any service. Faith, if it be right, will excite prayer; and prayer is not right, if it do not spring from faith. This is the condition of our receiving—we must ask in prayer, believing. The requests of prayer shall not be denied; the expectations of faith shall not be frustrated. We have many promises to this purport from the mouth of our Lord Jesus, and all to encourage faith, the principal grace, and prayer, the principal duty, of a Christian. It is but ask and have, believe and receive; and what would we more? Observe how comprehensive the promise is—all things whatsoever ye shall ask; this is like all and every the premises in a conveyance. All things, in general; whatsoever, brings it to particulars; though generals include particulars, yet such is the folly of our unbelief, that, though we think we assent to promises in the general, yet we fly off when it comes to particulars, and therefore, that we might have strong consolation, it is thus copiously expressed, All things whatsoever.

Mathew Henry

*John 14:12 Verily, verily, I say unto you, **He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.***

The key to continuing the spiritual works of Jesus in our life is to believe in Him. Only by believing in Him will the greater spiritual works be done, bringing glory to God. The greater works referred to here are not only greater in quality but greater in extent (*meizon; in degree*). This is something that Jesus, in bodily form, couldn't do. But now as His ambassadors we make that possible, greatly expanding His works here on earth.

That which was done by Peter at Pentecost, by Paul all over the world, that which is effected by an ordinary preacher, a single believer, by bringing the Spirit into the heart, could not be done by Jesus during His sojourn in this world.

Frederick Godet

FAITH BRINGS ANSWERS TO PRAYER

Mt 21:22 And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.

Remember that there is no failure when we pray—believing—because faith brings fruitfulness.

Heb 11:1 faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Substance (*hupostasis; concrete essence, confident substance*) is the raw material that becomes something when we ask (speak) and believe (have faith). Believe is the Greek word *lambano*, which means to take, seize, or remove. We need to add action to our faith by speaking in faith and seizing what we ask for in the

spirit; even if we can't see it in the natural. Whatever is happening now in your natural life is the result of what first transpired in the spirit. If you want to change something in your life you must first take action in the spirit, and that takes faith.

FAITH BRINGS SONSHIP

*John 1:12 But as many as received him, to them gave he **power** to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:*

Let's focus for a moment on the word "power"—*exousia*: *privilege, force, capacity, competency, freedom; delegated influence: authority, jurisdiction, liberty, power, right, strength.* The power to become a son (*huios*; *fully mature son*) is given to us the moment we receive Jesus as our Saviour. But what brings us to the point of receiving Him is faith, and even that has to come from Him. When we exercise our faith He gives us the authority, jurisdiction, liberty, and right to become His fully mature (spiritually) sons and daughters. He gives us the capacity and the authority to believe.

FAITH GIVES OUR SOUL REST

*Heb 4:7-11 Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, To day, after so long a time; as it is said, Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. 8 For **if Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day.** 9 There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. 10 For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. 11 Let us*

labor therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.

Here we can apply Israel's wilderness experience directly to our life. This is a heart attitude and refers to the “rest” of faith or a full surrender. Can you see that rest refers to stopping our attempts to do everything in our own power (our works)? We need to let our soul rest from *works* so our spirit can rise to accomplish the *work* of the Holy Spirit. The works must be God's, we are to be the willing vessel. Our entering into rest is dependent upon our remaining steadfast in our faith.

... In the condition of rest, the faithful believer experiences the exhilaration of creativity and productivity; stress and anxiety are minimized; joy lifts the spirit above the waves of normal frustrations and a holy purpose stimulates a vitality that is not overwhelmed by difficulties. Serenity and laughter are the marks of being in the place of rest. The rest of God is not cessation from activity, but a peace within the toil.

Louis Evans

In *our time* and *our way* is in *our strength*. In *His time* and *His way* is in *His strength*. There really isn't much of a question which one brings us peace within the toil.

*... God has provided rest, and **this rest is to be occupied or entered into. Unbelief blocks entrance into God's rest, while faith opens wide the entrance; and so this rest is available only to true Christians.** Joshua did not give this rest to his generation only; therefore **the promised rest is still open.** There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God*

appointed for believers today. It is a rest both present and future that depends not upon “works”, but upon the faith of the believers...

Wycliffe Commentary

True Rest is found in the Holiest Place at Jesus' feet, not working in the Holy Place.

FAITH BRINGS SPIRITUAL INHERITANCE

Jas 2:5 Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?

James said not to dishonor the poor because they are truly rich in the kingdom of God; spiritually rich. He told us not to hold the faith of our Lord with any sense of partiality. It's available to and belongs to all who will claim it, and we are not to pay special favor or attention to the rich (because of what they might do for us). Faith is not the quality by which the poor are rich, they are rich in their “position” in Jesus.

Perhaps another way of putting this is that the poor shouldn't be neglected because they aren't rich. It isn't that God doesn't want to save the rich but the conditions surrounding the poor make it more likely they will embrace the Gospel. They may be poor in the worldly goods but they're rich in heavenly goods. After all, isn't this far more valuable than all the gold and silver that man attempts to accumulate? Consider what's happening in many of the poorer parts of the world today. They aren't materially rich but they're rich in the Spirit, and as a result the Holy Spirit is

manifesting His presence in awesome ways. The bride of Christ in America has much to learn from the bride in these countries.

FAITH KEEPS US ON OUR SPIRITUAL FOUNDATION

1 Pet 2:6-8 Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. 7 Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, 8 And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.

Here the building of a house is compared to building up the body of Christ (the bride), our individual spiritual life in which Jesus is the chief cornerstone (*akrogoniaios; the extreme corner*). This word comes from the root word *akron* (*tip, top, or uttermost part*) and it identifies Jesus as the head of the true church. Peter quoted *Isaiah 28:16* and said that anyone who believes on Jesus (makes Him their cornerstone) will not be confounded (*kataischuno; shamed; disgraced; dishonored*).

Now, if we look at another definition of cornerstone we'll see what we believe in. Webster says that it's a stone that lies at the corner of two walls and serves to unite them. Specifically it's a stone built into a corner of the foundation of an important edifice, as the actual or nominal starting point of the building. So, look at Jesus as God's cornerstone for His bride (the important edifice) and He lies between two walls (God and Man) as the stone that unites them.

Eph 2:21-22 We who believe are carefully joined together with Christ as parts of a beautiful, constantly growing temple for God. 22 And you also are joined with him and with each other by the Spirit and are part of this dwelling place of God.

Look at the alternative to accepting Him as the cornerstone:

1 Peter 2:7-8 Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, 8 And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.

Here Peter quoted *Psalms 118:22* where the psalmist was speaking of the army of Israel that was hard pressed in battle; it was also prophetic with respect to non believers. In verse 8 the result of rejection is revealed in a quote from *Isaiah 8:14*; it becomes a stumbling block. There is no neutral position with Jesus. He is either your cornerstone (foundation) or your stumbling block.

FAITH BRINGS ABOUT SPIRITUAL ASSURANCE

1 John 5:14-15 And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: 15 And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.

This assurance is confidence in Jesus. He is faithful to perform and complete that which He started in each one of us. His will is to

complete that which He began—*the desires of thine heart (Ps 37:4)*—which He placed there. What is foundational for God’s will for our lives? It’s that we love the Lord our God with all our heart and love our neighbor as our self (*Mark 12:30-31*). If we’re advancing these two most important commandments in our life then we’re in His will and He hears us and responds, all to the end of satisfying the desires of our hearts and completing His will in our life. When we seek Him first we’re able to recognize the desires He’s placed in us. Then it’s our faith in His ability to bring them about that fuels our prayers. We can then stand firmly and count on His granting our petitions.

FAITH BRINGS HIS CONTINUAL PRESENCE

John 7:38 He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.

The Greek word for belly is *koilias* and it means the innermost part of a man; his heart or his soul. It’s used in the same context as in *Ex 17:6* where the water *came out of the rock*; meaning deep within. Here we are assured that there will be a continual presence of the Holy Spirit to pour out from deep within us; *shall flow (1 Cor 10:4; John 4:14)*. This is the only place in the New Testament that *reusousin (shall flow)* is used and it means to run like a river, strong and deep.

Not only does Jesus quench our thirst but also through us He is able to quench the thirst of others with Living Water (*hudoor zoon; fresh, perennial*). This is water that comes from a well that is continually supplied by springs. In saying it this way there is also the assumed opposite, which is stagnant or dead water. In *John 4:10* He contrasts His water with that of the dead doctrine of the Jews. Isn’t it the very same thing for us today?

I remember as a young boy driving the 100 miles to visit my grandparents on hot summer days; long before car air conditioning. It was hot in the car and the wind in the open windows didn't help much. About half way there, alongside the road, was an artesian well that was the highlight of the trip for all of us. Once there we could hardly wait to get our glass out and drink some of the cool fresh water. I was always amazed that it never stopped and it never ran out. That is just what the Holy Spirit wants to be in each of us; a constant flow of the refreshing love and Word of God—never slowing, never stopping. Our continual belief (faith) brings His continual presence, which brings continual rivers of living water (His Spirit).

CHAPTER 6

AIDS TO FAITH

In his last moments with his disciples, Jesus warned them about further persecution. He told them where, when, and why he was going, and assured them that they wouldn't be left alone but that the Spirit would come. He knew what lay ahead and He didn't want their faith shaken or destroyed. God wants you to know you aren't alone. You have the Holy Spirit to comfort you, teach you the truth and help you.

One of the ways that the Holy Spirit helps us build-up our faith is to remind us of all the times that God has been faithful to those who have preceded us. Time and time again He has shown Himself to be strong on behalf of those who love Him, to encourage and strengthen their faith. In this chapter let's revisit some of those instances and let them encourage us in our journey through this world, becoming more like Him every day.

EXAMPLES OF AIDS TO FAITH

Moses' Rod

Exodus 4:1 And Moses answered and said, But, behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice: for they will

say, The LORD hath not appeared unto thee. 2 And the LORD said unto him, What is that in thine hand? And he said, A rod. 3 And he said, Cast it on the ground. And he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from before it: 4 And the LORD said unto Moses, Put forth thine hand, and take it by the tail. And he put forth his hand, and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand: 5 That they may believe that the LORD God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath appeared unto thee.

This was part of the excuse Moses made to God for not wanting to lead the people. He said that there wasn't anything in his life that would validate what he said to them. So God gave Moses something to attach his faith to; a validation. And look what He gave him, a shepherd's rod. It was something that Moses was very familiar with and had a lot of experience using. In our walk are we bold enough to ask God for too much or do we settle for too little? Look at *John 14:12*:

*John 14:12 Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and **greater works than these he will do**, because I go to My Father.*

The key to the following verses in *Exodus* is found in what Moses said to God: *I can't do it; who am I*. That's where God wants each of us so that He can take some unique part of us (our rod) and use it to build our faith, which at the same time becomes a witness to others of God's place in our life.

Glory Cloud

Exodus 19:9 And the LORD said unto Moses, Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak

with thee, and believe thee forever. And Moses told the words of the people unto the LORD.

Here God gave the people a sign to assure them that He was truly speaking to Moses, validating his leadership of the people. By hearing God's voice there was no way the people could accuse Moses of performing the miracles by sorcery. This is just like the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus after His baptism whereby the voice of God validated Jesus as His son (*Mt 3:17*). How about the descending of the Holy Spirit on the apostles in the form of fire (*Acts 2:3*)? God answers our faith and validates His presence in our lives, but just as the Israelites had to declare themselves willing to obey the voice of God, so we have to declare ourselves willing (*John 7:17*). If we are obedient to do God's will we will know what His will is.

John The Baptist

John 1:6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe.

The light (*phos; luminousness, fire*) was born witness by John The Baptist. He is identified as being sent by God, but for what purpose? He was a witness to build up the faith of God's people in Jesus. He was a testimony to the fact that Jesus was the Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world (*John 1:29*). The true light that enlightens every man had come into the world and John was His witness. Note that he was to be a witness to "all" men.

God opened John's eyes to see the light so that he could tell the world what he saw. Is it any different for us today? Shouldn't we also tell others what God has shown us by opening our eyes? Think for a moment that we are that light. We are like the moon in that the moon isn't the sun but it reflects the sun's light into a dark world. Well, we are to reflect the light of the Son into a spiritually dark world. We are not that light but we are reflectors of it. Therefore it is incumbent upon us to make sure that we are like the "full" moon and not some partial moon. We need to be sure the nothing in our life is hindering our reflection. How we accomplish that is by faith and time spent with Jesus in the Holiest Place; the garden He made for each one of us where He is always waiting for us.

As an aside here, it's interesting that from Jesus point of view we are "The Light." That is how He sees us although we don't see ourselves that way and neither does the world. But one day that will all change when He comes for His bride and we will shine with His full brightness.

Lazarus

John 11:15,41-42 And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him ... 41 Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. 42 And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it that they may believe that thou hast sent me.

Jesus waited three days to go to Lazarus so there would be no question of his death. Jewish tradition held that the spirit of a man

was not gone until after the third day. The raising of Lazarus was for the express purpose of building up the faith of God's people in Jesus as their Messiah. There was to be no confusion as to Lazarus' state when Jesus called his name; he was dead. Jesus told His disciples that He was glad for their sakes that He hadn't been there. Why? Well, nobody had ever died in Jesus' presence, in which case one of the greatest lessons in faith would never have been given. Without his death there could never have been a resurrection.

Judas' Betrayal

John 13:19 Now I tell you before it come, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am He.

Jesus spoke this prophetically as a sign to build up the disciples' faith because He knew what they would be facing after He was gone. The tense used in the expression *ye may believe* indicates to *keep on believing*; believing that Jesus is the Messiah. This sign, just like Moses rod, Lazarus' resurrection, and John's hearing God's voice, was for the purpose of building faith.

There is a key distinction here we need to be sure we don't miss. These signs were not given to create faith but rather to *increase* faith that already existed.

The Coming Resurrection

John 14:28-29 Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater

than I. 29 And now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe.

Jesus didn't say to the disciples that He felt they didn't love Him. He told them that because of their Jewish prejudices they didn't have the full grasp of who He is. But because of these prejudices He gave them yet another building block to their faith, something more to hang onto after He was gone.

The Risen Christ

*John 20:30 And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: 31 But these are written, **that ye might believe** that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.*

Just like the rod of Moses, the glory cloud, John the Baptist, Lazarus, the foretelling of Judas' betrayal, and the foretelling of Jesus resurrection, John states the signs he witnessed were an aid to building faith in Jesus as the Messiah. *That ye might believe* is the key to these verses. Nothing Jesus did was ever wasted and everything that He did pointed to who He is. Our faith is built up by hearing the Word of God and these "faith builders" are put in the Word to accomplish just that. The signs that Jesus did in the presence of man were for the purpose of our believing so that in doing so we might be saved. That is what "signs and wonders" are all about, they validate the Gospel—the Word of God.

GOD'S WORD IS FAITH'S FOUNDATION

God's Promise

1 Kings 8:56-60 Blessed be the LORD, that hath given rest unto his people Israel, according to all that he promised: there hath not failed one word of all his good promise, which he promised by the hand of Moses his servant. 57 The LORD our God be with us, as he was with our fathers: let him not leave us, nor forsake us: 58 That he may incline our hearts unto him, to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, and his statutes, and his judgments, which he commanded our fathers. 59 And let these my words, wherewith I have made supplication before the LORD, be nigh unto the LORD our God day and night, that he maintain the cause of his servant, and the cause of his people Israel at all times, as the matter shall require: 60 That all the people of the earth may know that the LORD is God, and that there is none else.

Solomon summed it all up—the entire history of Israel speaks to the fact that God has been faithful to His promise. He was then and He is today in His new covenant with us; the covenant that was sealed with the blood of Jesus rather than that of bulls and lambs. God has never failed His Word and He never will. Solomon desired that God would, at all times, maintain the cause of the people of Israel that all the people of the earth would know that the LORD (*Jehovah; the self-existent, eternal One*) is God. We should, like Solomon, earnestly desire that the whole world know our God for who He is.

God's Oath

Ps 89:34-37 My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. 35 Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David. 36 His seed shall endure forever, and his throne as the sun before me. 37 It shall be established forever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven. Selah.

When God swears (*shaba; to seven or swear by repeating seven times*), He swears by the very thing that makes Him unique, His holiness. God's character is established in His covenant and He swears He will not break it (*chalal; pollute, defile, prostitute, or profane*). In other words, God was not going to do with regard to the covenant He made as the Israelites had done. Further, He would not alter, modify the conditions, change, or withdraw it. It will stand the same as He first spoke it.

He further pledged His holy nature (declared seven times; perfection) and by doing so He stated that if He failed in this then He is not holy. His oath will stand forever; *the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb 13:8)*. We are told to build our faith on God's Word (*Rom 10:17*) and that comes in the hearing of God's Word preached. People can't believe what they can't hear (*Isa 53:1*). God's Word stands the test of time and, as Isaiah said:

Isa 40:8 The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand forever.

God's Surety

Isa 55:11 So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish

that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.

Let's look into *Isa 55:11* a little deeper. Isaiah said that God's word from His mouth goes out to earth and effectively accomplishes His good pleasure, which is our salvation. Look at *John 1:1* (The Word); *2 Tim 3:16* (The Word); and *John 1:14* (The Word). Remember that the Word of God is the Son of God and He accomplishes what God desires.

BUT THERE ARE SOME REQUIREMENTS

We Must Abide

John 15:7-9 If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. 8 Herein is my Father glorified that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. 9 As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.

We need to do two things: 1) abide in Jesus, and 2) keep His words abiding in us. The word abide is a strong one (*meno*) meaning to stay in a place, in a state of expectancy, to dwell, endure, stand, or tarry. When we do we can *bear much fruit* (fruit of the spirit) and glorify God. Look what happens when the Word of Christ is richly dwelling deep within us:

Col 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

This is the foundation of discipleship—the more fruit we bear the more we grow as disciples.

Beware Of Deception

Gal 6:7-8 Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. 8 For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

The only weapons Satan has are his lies or deceptions. He wants us to believe what we sow we won't reap. Look at your life and reflect on the seeds you've sown by the crops around you. Our lives "always" reflect the crops from those seeds. But, by God's grace we can always begin to sow new crops any time of year. Bad crops can always be plowed under and the soil prepared again to receive good seed.

The expression *be not deceived* is actually better translated *stop being led astray*. *God is not mocked* translates as *don't turn your nose up at*. Doesn't that sound like Satan? He is forever trying to deceive us by leading us down the wrong path to the point of turning up our noses at God, thinking that we will get good crops from bad seed. It just doesn't work that way; corn brings up corn and sin brings up sin.

WE MUST GAIN KNOWLEDGE BY WORK

What Is Knowledge? Here are some comments from Nelsons Dictionary to get us thinking:

The truth or facts of life that a person acquires either through experience or thought. The greatest truth that a person can possess with the mind or learn through experience is truth about God (*Ps 46:10; John 8:31-32*). This cannot be gained by unaided human reason (*Job 11:7; Rom 11:33*). It is acquired only as God shows Himself to man—in nature and conscience (*Ps 19; Rom 1:19-20*); in history or providence (*Deut 6:20-25; Dan 2:21*); and especially in the Bible (*Ps 119; Rev 1:1-3*).

Mental knowledge by itself, as good as it may be, is inadequate; it is capable only of producing pride (*1Cor. 8:1; 13:2*). Moral knowledge affects a person's will (*Prov. 1:7; Phil. 3:11-12; 1 John 4:6*). It is knowledge of the heart, not the mind alone. The Book of Proverbs deals primarily with this kind of knowledge. Experiential knowledge is that gained through one's experience (*Gen. 4:1; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 John 4:7-8*). The Apostle Paul's wish for the church at Colosse was that they might increase in the “knowledge of God” (*Col. 1:10*).

Listen to Peter:

*2 Pet 1:3-7 According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, **through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue:** 4 Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. 5 And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; 6 And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience*

godliness; 7 And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.

We received all things that pertain to life and godliness through our knowledge of Him. With this knowledge comes the promise that we can partake in His divine nature. But, we need to use what He has given us. We see this in verses 5-7 above as Peter showed us how to build our faith. We need to add to these promises through our diligence: faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, kindness and love. Let's look at the meaning of each of these:

- **Diligence** (*spoude*) dispatch, eagerness or earnestness.
- **Faith** (*pistis*) moral conviction, assurance, belief or fidelity.
- **Virtue** (*arete*) valor or excellence.
- **Knowledge** (*gnosis*) understanding or science.
- **Temperance** (*egkrateia*) — self-control in appetite.
- **Patience** (*hupomone*) cheerful or hopeful endurance, patient continuance.
- **Godliness** (*eusebeia*) devout worship or purity.
- **Brotherly Kindness** (*philadelphia*) brotherly love.

- **Love** (*agape*) the love of God or the God kind of love; sacrificial love.

We can see that the building blocks from diligence to love are (each one) the result of the work of the Holy Spirit. When we begin to add work (*spiritual service*) to our faith we begin the process of spiritual maturity. The Holy Spirit is our teacher and the source of change within us. Look at the progression of the steps Peter outlined in verses 5-7.

We need to eagerly put our faith to “excellent work” in gaining knowledge, which will result in getting control of our appetites and developing patience. We’ll find ourselves developing a Godlike attitude in our worship, which is going to result in a love for our brothers and sisters in Christ that will deepen into the same love God has for us. What a beautiful description of the growth of our spirit under the guidance and control of the Holy Spirit. But we must start the whole process and keep it going through our faith.

It Must Be a Continual Process

Lam 3:23-26 They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness. 24 The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him. 25 The LORD is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him. 26 It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD.

In looking back at verse 22 we see that it’s God’s mercies and compassions that are new every morning. What a wonderful hymn: *Great is Thy Faithfulness*; “Morning by morning new mercies I see, all I have needed Your hand has provided.” His compassion

doesn't fail because of the steadfast love (*agape*) that He has for us. It is renewed every morning just like the manna He provided the Israelites in the wilderness. Because of His renewed mercies every day we are not consumed. His mercies to us are like the burning bush witnessed by Moses; we are burning but not consumed. Whatever hardships or trials may come our way we are renewed in Him every day (*Job 7:17-18*).

In verse 24 the soul cries out that the Lord is *my dearest treasure* (see *Ps 119:57*) and therefore all hope is in Him. Our faith reaches out to God every morning in a continual process. Our earthly portions are temporary but God's portions are eternal. When everything else has failed us we can count on the Lord to be there each day.

It is our duty to make God the portion of our souls, and then to make use of him as our portion and to take the comfort of it in the midst of our lamentations.

Matthew Henry

We need to learn the art of living day-by-day, living a life that begins and ends with faith in the Lord. But we won't accomplish that without engaging two partners in the process. I suggest you read and meditate on *Matthew 6*; especially verses 33 and 34. They changed my life!

Today is the moment God is dealing with us, challenging us, and growing us. Yesterday is gone and tomorrow isn't here, so don't waste any of the precious time He has given you today on either one of them unless that is where He leads you. Faith takes care of the past, Hope secures the future, and that allows us to live in the present... *in the Rest of Christ*.

CHAPTER 7

FAITH AND HOPE

He who despairs wants love and faith, for faith, hope, and love are three torches which blend their life together, nor does the one shine without the other.

Pietro Metastasis

FAITH AND HOPE ARE PARTNERS

There are, as we have seen, many facets to this thing called faith. It seems the more we get our arms around it the more difficult it becomes to hold on to. For the world outside of Christ the concept is so diluted with the world's system and values that it has become almost nothing more than *wishing and hoping*. Unfortunately, in the church today the concepts of hope and faith have also become blurred, leaving many believers confused and without the power they need to keep their focus on Jesus rather than on their circumstances.

Let's see if we can't clarify the difference between the two and come away with a better understanding of why hope and faith aren't just two words for the same thing but are in fact partners working for us.

Hope is the thermostat on the wall by which you dial the desired temperature. Faith is the furnace that drives the

temperature to the desired setting; you have to have both. A thermostat without a furnace is a lot of wishful thinking and furnace without a thermostat is an undirected force. You may want to make the room warmer but just setting the dial isn't going to do a thing. In the same manner, a furnace without a thermostat is wasted energy, first hot and then cold with no stability at all. *Hope in your soul sets the goal... Faith in your heart makes it happen.*

ABRAHAM

Rom 4:17-22 (As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were. 18 Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations; according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be. 19 And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb: 20 He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; 21 And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. 22 And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.

God gave Abraham the hope of becoming the father of many nations and he seized the opportunity in faith; he believed. Paul tells us in verse 19 that Abraham wasn't weak in faith and showed it by ignoring the circumstance that were in conflict with what God had told him. Even though by all accounts his body was long past being capable of fathering a son he chose to place his faith in the hope God set before him. Verse 20 indicates the commitment of

his faith—he didn't stagger at God's promise by falling into unbelief, he stood strong in faith.

Verse 17 shows us what Abraham set his faith on: *even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things, which be not as though they were.* The RSV translates it: *calls into existence the things which do not exist.* This is the Lord's power to create or, to put it another way, call into being that which doesn't exist as easily as He does that which does. The key comes in verse 18 where we learn that Abraham knew the God who could do this and took a stand of faith on that promise. Look at the circumstances surrounding him in which he had to consider the promises of God.

In verse 19 we're told that he looked to his faith in God and not the fact that his body was now impotent and Sarah's womb was dead. The Word says that he considered not his own body. That translates as *he fully observed and yet perceived that it wasn't a hindrance to His God.* We know he took this position because of what follows in verse 20. He was not at odds with himself over the promise of God because of unbelief. He was strengthened because of his faith as opposed to being weakened by unbelief, which puts us at odds with ourselves. He exercised his faith by *giving glory to God.* He was "fully persuaded" (*plerophoreo; completely convinced; entirely assured*) that God could do what He said He would do. The result was that God credited (imputed) righteousness to him because of his faith; God honored his faith.

FAITH IS THE SUBSTANCE

*Heb 11:1 Now **faith** is the substance of things **hoped** for, the **evidence** of things not seen.*

First, faith is trust in the unseen. That doesn't mean faith in the unknown because we may know by faith what we can't see with the natural eye. Faith is the assurance that things not seen are a

reality (*pragmata; a material object or thing*). Look at the word substance (*hupostasis: setting under or concretely like a foundation; assurance or confidence in a person or substance*). Another way of putting it would be that faith is the concrete foundation of what we hope for that we can't see (things expected).

Our hope is like the thermostat on the wall. We can't see or feel the 72 degrees we want in the middle of a 62-degree room but our hope is expressed by dialing 72 on the thermostat. Our faith is the furnace that responds and generates the heat that brings the temperature up to 72. The action of my hope is to stand on faith. I may want the room to warm up to 72 but it is never going to until I signal the furnace to go to work.

Those promises God has placed in us will never come to pass unless we attach our faith to His Word. Abraham did and it so pleased God that He made Him righteous. How much better for us who already have our righteousness through Jesus? We received our right standing with God by exercising our faith in Jesus. By faith we call our eternal life (which we can't see) as though it exists today... because it does! It is our faith in the promise of Jesus that allows us to stand when standing is all that we can do. Jesus' promise of eternal life is the 72 degrees we desire and our faith in Him brings it to pass in the middle of a room that is a cool 62 degrees.

FAITH IS REQUIRED

*Heb 11:6 But **without faith it is impossible to please him:** for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*

First of all, we must exercise our faith in God Himself. We can't see Him and therefore to have faith in His existence is to respond to His calling. That very act of faith is pleasing to God in such a manner that He rewards it with eternal life. Pleasing God in this context means to "gratify entirely." It comes from the root word *euaresteo*, meaning to be acceptable or well pleasing. Turning the negative into a positive tells us that by our faith we "entirely gratify" God; He finds us well pleasing and acceptable. In order to accomplish this we must "cometh" (*proserchomai; come unto or draw near to*). Once again, how can we draw near to someone we can't see unless we exercise our faith? Go back and reread *Romans 4:17* and see a perfect example of calling those things which are not as though they were.

The last part of verse 11:6 contains two very key words: *rewarder* and *diligently*. Let's take them in reverse order. Those that diligently seek God are those who search out, investigate, crave, demand, or worship Him. The result is that God *rewards* them for their faithful pursuit. We can be sure that if we diligently seek God the result will be good for us. There are two very good examples of this in *Luke 11: 5-10; 18:1-8*. In both cases note that the person was diligent in asking; he craved and demanded. The following from Vincent's New Testament Word Studies beautifully describes those times when we feel the most distant from God, which are the times that we need to diligently seek Him:

*He hides himself so wondrously
As though there were no God;
He is least seen when all the powers
Of ill are most abroad.
Or he deserts us at the hour
The fight is almost lost,*

*And seems to leave us to ourselves
Just when we need him most.
It is not so, but so it looks;
And we lose courage then;
And doubts will come if God hath kept
His promises to men.*

When all seems lost we need to remind ourselves that it isn't so. This is the moment that exercising our faith brings its most precious rewards from our bridegroom.

WE MUST FEED OUR FAITH

Faith is a way of life — we can't just try it.

*Rom 10:17 So then **faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.***

In this quote from *Isa 53:1*, Paul stated that people obtain the faith to believe in Jesus by hearing the Word of God preached. Faith comes from preaching and preaching comes from the Word. In other words, unless there is something made known there is nothing to believe in. Faith comes only by the truth and that truth is the Word of God. The result is that faith to believe in Him is manifested in the hearing, but the exercise of that faith is through application. We need to act on what we hear or there is no faith.

For those of us who have heard and believe, hearing the Word preached becomes foundational to the process of renewing our minds. It causes faith to grow as it expresses our hope in the Word. The heart (spirit) conceives the hope (soul), which is the promise. Matthew gives us another way to look at it in 12:34: *out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks*. Putting the Word of God

in your heart will build up your faith, and it will be the first thing that comes out of your mouth in a time of crises. As you hear the Word come out of your mouth (preached to yourself) your faith will grow. We have the choice of what we speak—life or death (*Pro 18:21; Jer 21:8*). But, exercising your faith to first believe in God is the beginning, not the end of a life long journey of spiritual growth.

Faith is the foundation but hope is what we attach it to. Next we'll take a look at just what that means for us; how are we to ensure that our hope and faith are partners.

CHAPTER 8

WHAT FAITH REQUIRES

Great faith is not the faith that walks always in the light and knows no darkness, but the faith that perseveres in spite of God's seeming silences.

Father Andrew

THE THIRD PART OF THE EQUATION

We have spent a great deal of time so far in exploring this wonderful subject, but have only scratched the surface. However, in scratching that surface I hope it has caused an itch that will continue to encourage you to seek God for more revelation on faith and how it impacts your life as the bride of Christ. As I said in the beginning, our faith is our foundation, and if that foundation has any cracks we need to deal with them before they become gaps that will widen over time.

In this closing chapter, I want to suggest a couple of things for you to think about that will help you focus on your faith. In the last chapter we looked at faith and hope as partners, because neither one of them will work in a vacuum. We are the third part of the equation. We are the ones that have to dial the temperature on the thermostat (our hope) that will start the furnace (our faith). It

sounds like such a simple process but there seem to be things that frequently get in our way, or actions that we fail to take, that keep us from walking over to that thermostat.

Let's take a look at five things that faith requires of us if it is to be the powerful force in our life that God intended it.

FAITH REQUIRES PERSEVERANCE

*Heb 6:12-15 That ye **be not slothful**, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises. 13 For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, 14 Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. 15 And so, **after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.***

It's clear that faith and patience are partners, and together they produce the promises. The perseverance of those who have gone on before is to be a lifelong example for the bride of Christ. We are told not to be slothful or sluggish (dull of hearing) followers (*Eph 5:1, 1Cor 11:1*), but rather longsuffering and faithful. It is our faith in the present that inherits the promises of the future (*Eph 1:4*). The promises being referenced in this passage were those made to the Jews through Abraham, which were passed on to the believing Gentiles. Albert Barnes, in his notes on verse 12, warns of the danger of being slothful (emphasis mine):

*That ye be not slothful or Indolent; inactive. This was what he was especially desirous of guarding them against. By diligent and strenuous effort only could they secure themselves from **the danger of apostasy.***

Apostasy, or turning away from the faith by Israel, as described in *Jeremiah 5:6* is just as real a threat to the church today. Apostasy is generally defined as the determined, willful rejection of Jesus and His teaching by a Christian (*Heb 10:26-29*).

Diligent application of our faith to the Word of God is one sure way to avoid backsliding into apostasy. The opposite of backsliding is going forward. There is no standing still with God. As we go through life we are either going forward or backward. Only when we get to heaven will we continually move forward.

Jas 2:14 What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?

There have been a lot of interpretations of these verses, most of which miss the salient point James made. Many try and use this verse to show disparity between Paul and James. Let's just take our time and work through these 4 verses and see if we can get a clear understanding of the complete compatibility of these two men of God.

The phrase *what doth it profit (ti to ofelos)* is better translated *what is the profit*. The next word to examine is the word faith. The type of faith referred to here is "so called" or "spurious" faith. It is seen in the following phrase; *though a man say he hath faith*. Also the last phrase *can faith save him (pistis soosai auton)* is better translated *can his faith save him*. In other words, a false faith does not result in salvation or works. Hear what James said about fooling ourselves; looking to ourselves.

James 1:22-27 But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. 23 For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his

natural face in a glass: 24 For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. 25 But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. 26 If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. 27 Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

James looked at the subject “after the fact.” He was not viewing it before a man was converted or saved. He was focused on what happens after being born again. Works are not a part of salvation, which is through faith alone and not of good works. On the other hand, he told us that after the fact, faith without good works is of no value. Good works are the evidence that man is justified.

So, going back to verse 14, it's clear that if a man doesn't have good works, it's evidence that he is relying on his own faith, which cannot save him (once again my emphasis).

*The meaning here is, that that faith which does not produce good works, or which would not produce holy living if fairly acted out, will save no man, for **it is not genuine faith.***

Albert Barnes

Now let's move on to verses 15-17.

Jas 2:15-17 If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, 16 And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace,

be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?
17 Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

Here James gave us an example of the point he just made in verse 14. Faith, by itself, without the works that go with it, or the works it would bring about, is cold and without meaning. True faith should always prompt action. So, just like the naked man who wants what the prayers and good wishes bring about, our lives should not be just “religious” but “full of goodness.” In other words, faith is not genuine if the appropriate good works don’t accompany it. Faith is designed to lead to good works, to a holy life full of activity for Jesus. Jesus’ words are not theoretical; they are living water.

In verse 17 the statement “being alone” (*kath heauteen*) means by itself; completely alone in its own self-conceit, without any fruits or results. If this is the case then that faith is dead and not true faith. If it is true faith, it moves forward and produces good works because it lives. Therefore, dead faith produces no good works and is just as if it didn’t exist. Now James drives home his point in verse 18.

Jas 2:18 Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.

Some might say that faith is all that is required, or maybe your way is not the only correct way, or maybe faith is not always manifested in the same way. James responded that faith and good works are not independent—one is the source for the other. The existence of faith is only known by developing itself in good

works. He declares himself to be a living example of the point he makes—I will show you my faith, evidenced by my good works, how will you show me your faith?

Remember that it's not the good works that save a man, its faith in Jesus. The good works are the fruit of a man that has been saved. Good works are the natural (external) result of the spiritual (internal) change that has taken place.

During the first century, the Jews were under the constraints of the Law and the works that legalism required. It is just possible that James was warning them that to go to the other extreme and ignore works was equally wrong. This is further emphasized in verse 20, where he said that the devils believe in one God, just as do the Jews, but that alone does not change the fact that they are damned. They know it and they tremble!

Many scholars have tried to put Paul and James at opposite ends of this issue but, when you really understand what James said, it's clear that there are no differences. They both believed in salvation by faith alone and not of good works. James just took it one step further and stated that if there are no good works resulting from your faith then your faith is in yourself and not in God.

FAITH REQUIRES ACTION

If we understand works to be the fruit of our faith in God, then what are we to do?

*Jas 1:22-24 but **be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.** 23 For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: 24 For he beholdeth himself, and goeth*

his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.

James' point is that when we just talk a good game we only deceive ourselves. *Doer* is an interesting word in the Greek: *poietaes*, from which we get our word poet. The root word is *poiema*, which in one form, means to abide. Perhaps to be a doer of the Word is to abide or come together and proclaim it. Like a poem, the beauty of the Word is in the hearing. But James, in yet another way, challenged them to stop deceiving themselves; hearing is not enough.

Just hearing and doing nothing is like a man who looks into a mirror and sees all the imperfections in himself and determines to do something to change, but then goes away. As soon as he is away from the mirror that reminded him of his imperfection, he forgets and doesn't do anything about them—he forgets what sort of person he is.

The Word of God is like that mirror. When we hear it (understand it), it reflects the image of who we really are and we go away convicted of the revelation. But when the Word is stolen by the enemy (frequently on Sunday afternoon) we begin to rationalize our way out of being that reflected image. What we really need to do is put action to the conviction and effect the change called for. In verse 25 we see that just the opposite is true of a man who becomes a doer of the Word and not a hearer only.

*Jas 1:25 But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, **this man shall be blessed in his deed.***

Rather than being motivated by the negative, how much better it is to follow after the positive. I know I want to be *blessed in my deed*. When applied, the perfect law of liberty (the Gospel) is the way for a man to be blessed. Adam Clarke addressed this with a statement about the four types of men that visited the synagogue, and for us the church today:

1. He who enters but does not work; 2. He who works but does not enter; 3. He who enters and works; and 4. He who neither enters nor works. The first two are indifferent characters; the third is the righteous man; the fourth is wholly evil. As the path of duty is the way of safety, so it is the way of happiness; the one who obeys God from a loving heart and pure conscience, will infallibly find continual blessedness.

The righteous man, in the very act of continually applying the Word, brings a blessing upon himself (*John 14:21*). He will be full of peace and happiness. Like the Psalmist said: *in keeping of them is great reward (Ps 119:7-11)*. The word used for “being” (*genomenos*) means having become and emphasizes the fact that by continuing in the Gospel a man becomes a doer—not a hearer that forgets. In other words, he does not become like the man in verse 24. He becomes a doer who is known by works and not as a mere listener or talker.

FAITH REQUIRES US TO WATCH OUR LIPS

To believe only possibilities is not faith, but mere philosophy.

Sir Thomas Browne

What a statement to ponder—faith and philosophy. Sadly there are pulpits in America today that haven't figured out the difference, and in attempting to meld with the world and be politically correct they are confusing many in the process. God made faith the foundation of our relationship with Him and He did not intend for us to use it for “believing” in just what we can see. Faith is not a philosophy. Man chooses philosophy to try and understand the fundamental problems he has with his existence, knowledge, values, reason, and accountability; the very problems he has with God.

God gave us faith as the basis of our connection to Him, it's the glue that He uses to keep us close. It's the sole basis of our relationship with Him, even to the degree we understand and walk in His love. If we just walk and believe in only what we can see, feel, or touch, we not only do God an injustice but we open ourselves up to the enemy by discarding one of the greatest weapons God has given us to defend ourselves.

We need to remember that we are constantly sowing our next crop, and reaping the former one.

*Gal 6:7 Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for **whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.***

Many Christians get wrapped up in equating money and material wealth with this verse, but the Scripture is very specific; *whatsoever*. One area that is definitely related to this is our communication. What are we saying? What is coming out of our mouths (hearts)? *Show me where you are and I'll tell you what you've been saying.*

Remember *Luke 6:45*? What we put in our heart is the first thing that is going to come out of our mouth. If we're speaking (sowing) words of death, then death is what will be reaped. Take

for example one of the things I struggle with most; judging others. The Word is very clear on the subject. Are we sowing words of love and edification or are they of hate and destruction. We're going to reap what we sow, and whether we speak life into situations or death is our choice.

The world has discovered the secret of a positive mental attitude (PMA). Napoleon Hill wrote a book called *Think and Grow Rich* that takes spiritual truths and perverts them. He has proven that we become what we say we are. What the world doesn't realize, however, is that his teaching comes right out of the Word of God. If we put God's Word in our hearts and speak life and love, that's what we become, and just the opposite is true.

Life and death are in the tongue and it's powerful. Did you ever stop to think that the devil can't create, he can only copy what God has already done? But he is very effective in getting man to create for him by using his tongue. How many problems in our lives and the lives of those around are created by speaking in anger or judgment?

Now let's take this truth and apply it to our faith. If God's Word gives us a promise, and we are fulfilling the prerequisites, then our faith is energized. Take for example the Centurion in *Matthew 8*. The Word of God was in his heart and he knew that by his faith it would be activated. He knew that Jesus could but speak the Word and nothing more would need to be done. This is speaking life into a set of circumstances by directly connecting to the power of God. What would it have been like if he were full of doubt?

I wouldn't be so bold as to say that Jesus would not have healed his servant, but look what happened when Jesus went back to his own hometown and preached (*Matt 13:54-58*). There was so much doubt and unbelief that *He did not many mighty works*. How about the ruler of the temple in *Mark 5:36-43*?

Jesus, in immediate response to the words of death spoken in verse 35, told him *be not afraid, only believe*. When Jesus got to

the man's house He had to send everyone away who was in doubt and unbelief. It's very important for us to realize the power of our words and how important it is for us to speak the Word of God on all occasions. Jesus gave us the example when He said, *I only speak what the Father has taught me (John 8:28)*.

When the enemy comes in like a flood with circumstances that are contrary to the Word of God we need speak life rather than death. The key is to have the Words of life locked up in our hearts so that our faith will be strengthened and not weakened. Our faith is what energizes the power of God. We can't let the devil steal it by using our mouths to speak words of unbelief and death! Napoleon Hill and all the other authors of "self help" literature may think they have discovered the secret to prosperity but we know better.

Mt 12:34-37 O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. 36 But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the Day of Judgment. 37 For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.

Not only are we affected by what we say now, we will be held accountable for it in the future. I think the real question on that day will be, what did we do with the Word of God that was entrusted to us? Did we speak The Word or idle words? This passage clearly shows us that our speech is an indication of the condition of our soul. Look at a similar teaching in Matthew:

Matt 7:18-20 A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. 19 Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. 20 Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

I think the key verses are 18 and 20 where: (1) Matthew tells us that good trees can't bring forth bad fruit and bad trees can't bring forth good fruit; and (2) the tree is known by its fruit. The same analogy applies to the words that come out of our mouth. Each word, good or bad, will be judged by Jesus, the only righteous and true judge.

Let's look back at the phrase *bringeth forth* in verse 35. Translating into the Greek in this case is important because it yields a much stronger intent than English—*ekballei* means to throw or fling out. The issues in the heart are thrown or flung out as if under pressure of what's on the inside. Whatever is in the heart is going to leap on the tongue the moment the mind gives it permission. So when we couple that with the thought that every idle (non-working, inoperative, or morally useless word) is going to be judged, we really need to consider what we're putting in our heart that can't wait to get out. Those idle words don't work to increase our faith in any measure and, in fact, they work just the opposite.

Jesus is concerned with the true condition of our heart, and He tells us that our guide to its condition are the words we speak. Here is one of my favorite passages of scripture. It's all about the tongue and how powerful it is:

James 3:3-11 Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. 4 Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are

driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. 5 Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! 6 And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. 7 For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: 8 But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. 9 Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. 10 Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. 11 Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?

These words are so very true. We can almost always discover a person's heart by their tongue if we're around them long enough. Eventually what is really in there will come out. The next time someone says something and then immediately follows with "I didn't mean that," you might consider that they really did mean it.

We need to remind ourselves that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God, and that preaching (sharing) the Word is our responsibility, our reasonable service. What we forget, however, is that we are the beneficiaries. Our faith is increased every time the Word of God comes out of our mouth, and likewise it's torn down when they're nothing but idle words. We all need to take more time and listen to what we're saying—even before we speak—Jesus is listening and hearing (*Matt 12:25a*).

FAITH REQUIRES US TO WATCH WHAT WE CONCEIVE IN OUR HEART

Mk 4:26-28 And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; 27 And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. 28 For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.

Faith is like a seed in that it contains life on the inside, and therefore it works by itself when placed in the right environment. When we sow the Word by faith into other hearts it contains the faith needed to germinate. So it is with the seeds that God sows in our hearts, but they need our faith to nurture them. Just like the farmer who marvels at how the sun and rain bring forth the fruit, so we marvel at how God does the same thing in our heart. But what if the farmer was to run out every day to see what had happened overnight? He might get discouraged and pull up his crop, and then he would have to plant all over again.

One of our biggest faults in the area of faith is our lack of patience. We just quit too soon and lose our faith because it “didn’t come to pass” when or how we thought it should. How many times have we just quit on our crop because we couldn’t see anything happening in the natural. We forget that we’re just like that seed under the ground. A lot is going on that can only be seen in the spirit, and our faith and patience are necessary requirements. One day we’ll see just how close we were on many occasions, only to have our faith falter and come up short of God’s blessing. Our job is to sow words (seeds) of faith and let God work the miracle—*first the blade, then the ear, and then the corn on the cob (Mark*

4:28). If we water God’s Word with faith, the crop always comes up in its time because His Word never fails—only anxious farmers fail.

Faith Requires Us to Watch Out for the Deceiver

2 Tim 1:7 For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.

The devil’s **only** weapon is deception—he lies to us to get us into his arena; fear. Remember that fear and faith are mutually exclusive, they cannot coexist. If we try to make them we become the double minded man who is unstable in all his ways (*Jas 1:8*). The devil likes to use deception to get us doubting the Word of God because it always leads to fear; the fear of failure or unfulfilled promises or... you fill in the blank. Look where it first started (*Genesis 3:1*). He came right up to Eve and put doubt in her heart through deception; *hath God said?*

But when we look at *2 Tim 1:7* we should be encouraged because we are reminded that we have a spirit that can overcome the fear because Jesus has “already” overcome it for us.

2 Tim 1:7 For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.

Listen to a part of what Adam Clarke has to say about this verse:

God hath not given unto us the spirit of bondage—but of power (dunameoos) to work miracles, to confound enemies, to support us in trials, and enable us to do that which is lawful and right

in his sight. And of love, which enables us to hear, believe, hope, and endure all things and is the incentive to all obedience. Of a sound mind (soophronismou) of self-possession and government, according to some. But a sound mind implies much more; it means a clear understanding, a sound judgment, a rectified will, holy passions, heavenly tempers; in a word, the whole soul harmonized in all its powers and faculties; and completely regulated and influenced, so as to think, speak, and act aright in all things. The apostle says, God hath given the spirit of these things; they are not factitious; they are not assumed for times and circumstances; they are radical powers and tempers; each produced by its proper principle.

The next time the enemy comes with those words in your ear—*has God really said*—think about the wonder working power, the love that brings hope, and the mind that can make clear judgments that are within you.

In this text Paul said this very thing to Timothy (6) when he told him to stir up the gift within him. Stir up his faith because his mind was powerful, loving, and sound. Fear results from the spirit of bondage, but we are no longer bound to Satan, he only has the control over us that we allow. He deceives us into believing that he is the one in control, and when we buy into it our faith goes right out the window.

1 John 4:4: Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.

How often we forget that the Greater One lives in us, and how costly that can be. We don't need to walk around with one hand tied behind our back.

1 Cor 2:11-14 For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. 13 Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. 14 But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

It's divine wisdom that natural man doesn't understand God's plan of redemption; it's God's plan. We, however, have been given the Spirit of God and therefore we understand (fully know and appreciate) the things of God. Verse 11 asks the question, "Who knows by personal experience the things (deep hidden thoughts) of natural man?" It's the spirit of man or his "self-conscious." But the things of God are not known by self-conscious or personal experience, only by the Holy Spirit.

Don't let the enemy deceive you and cloud your wisdom, stealing the things of God from you. The clear message here is that this wisdom is referring to the Gospel and all it represents. The devil wants to cloud that truth and get you to walk in fear. You are then affectively walking like natural man: uninformed.

When we allow the enemy to steal our faith we're just like the non-believer, we're acting as if we don't know the truth. In fact, in

that state we're worse off than the non-believer because in our hearts we know the difference. The unsaved operate in the *spirit of the world* (12), which represents the evil that's at work in the world. But we have been given the Holy Spirit so that we might share the revelation He has given us. God wants us to understand the things He freely gives us (by grace) by His Spirit.

Verse 13 talks about words. Albert Barnes says that *words are the signs of thoughts*. We can look at words then as explaining or comparing for the purpose of interpreting. God's words, through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, reveal the spiritual things of God to us so that we might know Him and love Him. For the natural man, the arrogant, proud, self-reliant man (14), this is impossible because he simply can't know or love God apart from the Holy Spirit.

Then is it any wonder that the enemy wants to deceive us. He wants us to believe that we don't understand so he can steal the Word of God from us? And when he's stolen the Word he's taken the substance right out of our faith, and a faithless bride is a sad person indeed. In fact, she is much better off to have never had faith in God than to have had her faith stolen through deception. Buying into deception can lead to fear, which results in the loss of faith. It all goes back to *Hebrews 11:1—Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen*.

The Spirit of power, love, and a sound mind can be counted on to show us the things that God has freely given us. The enemy can't take them from us, he can only wait until we give them to him. So, along the way he plays a deadly game of deception with us... *has God really said?*

Let's close with a quote from one of my favorite sermons from Charles Spurgeon in which he pointed out two very key things that

true faith requires. It might be a good idea if we pause and see if they are evident in our life.

... he that has true faith will have true obedience. If a man says he has faith and has no works, he lies; if any man declares that he believes on Christ, and yet does not lead a holy life, he makes a mistake; for while we do not trust in good works, we know that faith always begets good works.

CHAPTER 9

A LAST LOOK

FAITH IS LIKE FLYING

We have tried to cover a great deal of territory in this book concerning the foundation of our belief system. Underpinning what God has done for mankind with the sacrifice of his Son is the supreme choice facing mankind; to believe in or deny that fact. Each one of us must face that bridge and make the decision to cross or not. If we stay on our side of the chasm we find our self sleeping with doubt, fear, unbelief, and ultimately death. Only on God's side will we find security, faith, peace, joy, and life.

Since a good part of my life has been involved with flying it was an easy metaphor for me to use in understanding faith. When clouds surround you there is only one option; trust your instruments. Without them you are hopelessly at the mercy of your five senses, which will only confuse you and lead you down the road of disaster. But, if you follow the instruments in the face of the conflicting information coming from your senses, you can be certain of staying right side up and on course.

The world is just like those clouds, it can surround you with circumstances that blind you to the true path, and when you lean on your own understanding you often find yourself upside down and in a nose dive. Only when we exercise our faith and lean on

God's Word can we right ourselves and once again get under control.

I also find it very interesting that learning to fly on instruments first takes place when you're flying along at altitude, not during the more dangerous aspects of takeoff and landing; that comes later. So it is with faith. As it grows we take on more and more difficult challenges. The fully qualified instrument pilot can literally begin and end his flight totally dependent upon his instruments. The bride of Christ has that same capacity, to live every day from morning to night in complete control no matter how violent the storm.

God has been faithful to give us many examples of faith in His Word, and they are all there for the express purpose of building up our faith. Just like a muscle, faith becomes more developed and stronger through exercise and use. Don't exercise it and just the opposite happens. Sometimes when one is incapacitated, muscles become atrophied and they lose their strength. In their weakened state they are unable to function as they normally do. That's why medical personnel will get the patient moving and exercising at the earliest possible time. Without strength in those unused muscles the healing process will take a lot longer. The same holds true for faith, if we don't use it we will be in trouble when the trials of life present themselves.

Paul has given us one of the great preventative measures contained in the Bible and we have come back to it time-and-time again in this book.:

Rom 5:17 so then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing the Word of God.

Here is the “exercising” of our faith muscle. As we cover ourselves in His Word we build a storehouse of strength for the future. When the enemy comes with his lies concerning our impending end we only need to stop looking outside the cockpit and focus on the instruments. As our life becomes bumpy and we are thrown about by the world, on the inside we’re in complete control, putting our faith in His Word. In fact, it can become a habit.

To become proficient at flying on instruments you fly by them even during those times when the weather is CAVU (Ceiling And Visibility Unlimited). You become so comfortable in trusting them that when the weather closes in the transition is natural. Does that mean that we’re oblivious of our surroundings? Absolutely not! A good pilot will use everything around him in keeping on course, but when conflict arises between what he sees/feels and what the instruments are saying; he *always* believes the instruments.

The Lord has designed our faith to work the same way. It’s the breadbasket of our walk with Him. Through our faith we have access to His salvation, wisdom, healing, protection, hope, joy, and His continual presence. The simple act of believing and trusting Him as the cornerstone of our Christianity becomes our faith’s foundation. That’s why the enemy is constantly throwing obstacles in the way of our faith, and that’s the very reason why the Lord allows him to do it. Every trial is yet another opportunity to exercise and deepen our faith. Every time a pilot goes into the clouds he has the opportunity of exercising his instrument flying skills, not the least of which is basic trust in the information they are providing.

We all have our faith tested every day. These are all opportunities to choose to trust the Lord or fall into doubt and unbelief; unbelief always leading to fear. Remember that fear and

faith cannot be in the same place at the same time. We were not made to operate in both at once; in fact we were not made to operate in unbelief at all. Each time we must make a choice, a simple choice between believing and not believing. Thank God He has given us examples to follow in His Word: Noah, Abraham, Moses, Elijah, Daniel, Gideon, David, and the list goes on right up to the Lord Jesus and those that followed.

Finally, let me suggest that we shouldn't forget those examples He has provided each one of us in our own lives. Those victories He has given us when we believed and trusted in Him in difficult situations are our own individual Aids to Faith. The problem that I have is remembering to call on them in times of trial. But that's what practice is all about. Not one person in this world is really good at anything without practice. It may sound funny, but it all begins in trusting God for the little things. If we can't trust Him there we certainly won't be able to trust Him when the crisis comes.

God has promised us that He will never leave or forsake us. We can take that to the bank, we've got the Holy Spirit! But we need to remember that we are the ones who can leave or forsake Him when the going gets tough. That is why the foundation of faith is built upon abiding in Him. We need that relationship to continue to nurture our growth; remember the branch and the vine. It is that abiding relationship that prepares us and builds up our faith. It is communion with Him through prayer and His Word that equip us for the trials we face in this life. As we *Walk With God* each and every day we need to be observant and listen. He is constantly speaking to us in every situation, from crisis to quiet moments. In both cases, He is a constant source of strength to build our faith. We only need to be available and obedient to His Word.

For it is in His Word that we will find our answers, our encouragement, our strength, our joy, and our peace... our faith.

BUT WE WON'T ALWAYS NEED FAITH IN ORDER TO FLY

In conclusion I want to leave you with something the Lord told me that helps me keep my faith in perspective. He showed me that when we leave this earth we will leave faith behind. We will not be taking it with us. Faith is only for here and now because it's faith that fuels our journey toward our ultimate goal. It's by faith that we learn and grow, become spiritually mature, and draw ever closer to our bridegroom. Without the His faith, the faith He has given us, we couldn't possibly endure and make it through this life. Without faith our hope would be lost and our journey would become nothing but mindless wandering. Like those in the world around us, our own weak faith would ramble through this world, searching for the missing piece that we need to fill the hole in our heart.

But our Father has given us His Faith, the faith that can move mountains and silently lift a broken heart. As His Son's bride we have the faith to reach out and provide the hope that will lift those broken hearts around us, and we have faith in the One who will provide all that we need to reach out.

Yes, faith is just for the here and now. It's faith in Jesus that will get us through all of the tests and trials we have to face in this world that are but for one purpose, to draw us ever closer to our bridegroom. Our faith is powerful, strong, mighty, and enduring. But without a committed spirit it sits like a cold furnace. We need to get up and walk over to the thermostat and dial up what we desire the most, what the Lord has shown us—our hope. And that

hope of an eternity with Jesus will also be left here on earth when our time comes to be called home.

Hope and Faith are partners, but partners that we only need here and now. They are tools used by our teacher, the Holy Spirit, to lead and guide us into becoming all we were created to be and fulfill all that has been set before us. So hold on tightly to your hope in the promises of God, and follow after that hope with faith in the One who made the promises.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Pastor Tom Mitchell has spent the better part of his ministry years exhorting, challenging, and encouraging the bride of Christ to move ever deeper into her relationship with her bridegroom. Over the past 30 years through Walk With God Ministries he has authored 13 books, written numerous articles, and has taught the Word of God from the pulpit, in the classroom, and through his weekly blog at: <http://WalkWithGod.org>.

His published works include *Wake Up And Rest – The Bride of Christ Sleeps at Her Own Peril*, along with its four companion books, *The Doorway to Rest*; *The Pathway to Rest*; *The Dangers to Rest*; and *The Battle For Rest* that challenge Jesus' bride to wake up and fulfill the role He has given her in preparing the way for His Kingdom. By anyone's clock, the time until His return is growing very short. *Wake Up And Rest* is a timely challenge the bride can ill afford to ignore, for if she does she does so at her own peril. This series reflects the urgency of the message the Lord has impressed upon Tom for His bride, to wake up and remember to whom she has committed herself and make herself ready for His soon return. The hour grows short and there is much at stake, both here and now and for all eternity. The question is... *will she wake up?*

His most recent work is the eight volume series, *The Way of Enoch*, that explores the foundation and sound scriptural doctrine that underlies God's plan for our lives. It is a journey that begins with learning who God really is and culminates in discovering how we are to walk out a loving and obedient relationship with our bridegroom. *The Way of Enoch* is a great resource for both the

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The Doorway To Rest—The Brides’ Invitation... When we consider Solomon’s Song we can easily see the relationship between Christ and His bride portrayed in many ways. Think of the “sun’s” relationship with the moon being like our relationship with the “Son.” This book is a detailed, verse-by-verse study of the *Song of Solomon*, revealing the true view of bride of Christ through

His eyes and a life changing view of the bridegroom through the eyes of the bride as she opens *The Doorway to Rest*.

The Pathway To Rest—The Brides’ Purpose... As we looked at the message of the *Song of Solomon* we were given a clear picture of not only who our bridegroom is, but equally important how He sees us and how we should see Him. His invitation opened the doorway to His Rest and now, as we walk out the days of our *ketubah*—our betrothal—we need to find out what that means and what it entails along *The Pathway To Rest*. For that we turn to the book of *Hebrews*, where we learn through each verse what sewing our wedding dress means and how important it is for us to be ready and watching for His soon return as we move up the path to spiritual maturity.

The Dangers To Rest—The Brides’ Warning... We have been inundated with not the shout of triumph but the incessant worldly scream of pending disaster. The country’s economics have been turned upside down and fear and panic have grabbed the headlines as the Middle East falls into chaos. The news is full of rampant pandemics, meteorological disasters, hopeless individuals committing tragic acts and families destroyed. And sadly, the majority of the bride of Christ is not prepared for His return. We have allowed the world and its supreme ruler to distract us from the path the lies in front of us. Now He has finally released me to write this verse-by-verse study—*The Dangers To Rest*—out of the book of *Revelation* that He put on my heart 18 years ago concerning His letters that not only deal with why He is coming back but also what we, His bride, are supposed to be doing and not doing as we wait and watch.

The Battle For Rest—The Brides’ Armor... Spiritual warfare is a war between the forces of God and the forces of rebellion led by Satan. And the bride is engaged in this spiritual war between light

and darkness, good and evil, heaven and hell and Christ and Satan. But sadly, many aren't even aware of the fact that they are in a spiritual battle every day of their life. As believing Christians we're in a grim conflict and we're not on a worldly cruise ship or a showboat; it's a battleship. It's a fight to the finish with no holds barred and we can't be neutral and we can't call a truce. This war is a personal one; very personal. In *The Battle For Rest* I have taken a detailed verse-by-verse study of the part of the book of *Ephesians* that deals with the enemy, his strategies and his goals and most importantly the battle orders we have been given to ensure victory over those personal strongholds.