

How To Increase Your Faith

Faith is one of the basic ingredients in getting right with God. We come into the Christian life (and receive the forgiveness of sins) through faith. Ephesians 2:8 says, “For by grace are ye saved through faith.” And Galatians 3:26 tells us that we are “the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.” In Romans 5:1, we read, “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God.” The central thought in these verses is that God sent Jesus to be the Saviour of the world, and on Calvary He paid the price for our redemption—and faith is the channel by which that redemption becomes effective. We abandon all hope for saving ourselves by our own abilities, and instead, we put complete trust in Jesus Christ for our eternal safety. That is an element of faith.

But faith involves much more than what is described in the preceding paragraph. The whole Christian life is dependent upon faith. A favorite Bible passage says: “I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. And the life which I now live, . . . I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). And the Apostle Paul says, “For we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7). We want to notice some factors about faith in the thoughts that follow.

1. The Importance of Faith

The word “faith” is a prominent word in the Bible. In the original Greek text, the words “faith” and “believing” and “trusting” are all from the same root word. Hebrews 11:6 says that “Without faith it is impossible to please God.” Faith is an absolute essential for salvation. Jesus says, as recorded in Mark 16:16, “He that believes and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believes not (has no faith) shall be damned.” In other words, without faith it is impossible to get right with God, but it is also true that without faith the Christian cannot please God in his daily life. The Bible admonishes Christians: “As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him” (Colossians 2:6). We received Him by faith; now we are to walk daily in the same manner—by faith.

It is true that there are various degrees of faith. Some have “no faith” (2 Thessalonians 3:2). Some have “little faith” (Luke 12:28). Others have “great faith” (Matthew 8:10). Still others are “rich in faith” (James 2:5). One can be poor in material things and still be rich in faith—but to be in the first category of having no faith, is to be outside the scope of God’s grace. Without faith it is impossible to please God.

2. The Meaning of Faith

Faith is a conviction of the reality of things which we do not see. It doesn't take faith to see a tree if one is walking through a forest. Faith is especially related to things which we cannot see. Faith is believing the unexplainable (and that which we cannot see), because someone in whom we have confidence says it is so. Faith is confidence, reliance, trust. Faith is a firm conviction that what is declared by another, is true.

Real biblical faith rests upon the authority of God's Word. True faith is a matter of taking for real the things which have been revealed in the Word of God. In other words, the Christian's faith rests upon the reliability of the Scriptures, and the Lord has given us a great deal of evidence for the genuineness of the Bible accounts.

One evidence is the testimony of archaeology. Archaeologists dig up the ruins of ancient civilizations. And wherever they have uncovered evidence, the results have always confirmed the Bible. Never once has an archaeological find contradicted the facts of the Bible.

Another evidence for the reliability of Scripture is the Bible's scientific accuracy. Early civilizations believed that the earth was flat, and that it was a platform resting on the backs of elephants. But Job, in the Bible, uttered a strictly scientific truth when he said, "God hangeth the earth upon nothing" (Job 26:7).

A further evidence of the trustworthiness of Scripture is the Bible's fulfilled prophecy. The twenty-second Psalm, for example, describes the crucifixion of Jesus with great accuracy—and yet crucifixion was a means of execution that was unknown in the days of the Psalmist. The prophecies concerning the Jews—their dispersion among the nations, their reproach among the people, their return to the land of Israel—are amazingly accurate.

The crowning evidence of the Bible's accuracy is the testimony of Jesus. Jesus quoted an obscure passage from the Old Testament, and said, "The Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). Jesus said at another place, "Till heaven and earth pass away, not one iota (not even a jot or tittle) shall pass from the law until all be fulfilled." Thus I am thoroughly convinced that the Bible is the Word of God; that it is a Book we must live by and die by; and that it is true and trustworthy in every way.

Romans 10:17 says that faith comes by hearing, and hearing "by the word of God." Faith comes by hearing—not just anyone's word—but God's Word. Our faith is not a careless unfounded thing. It is not like the little boy who tried to describe faith by saying "Faith is believing what you know ain't so." Not at all! True faith is based on reliable and tested testimony—the Word of God. Faith is a conviction of the reality of things which we cannot see, but that conviction is real because our resource (the Word of God) is trustworthy.

Two little girls were counting out their pennies one day. One said, “I have five pennies”; the other said, “I have ten.” “No,” the first little girl said. “You have five pennies—the same as I.” “But,” the second girl replied quickly, “My dad said that when he comes home tonight he will give me five pennies, and so I have ten cents.” The little girl had complete faith in her father’s word. His promise could be trusted—and so she counted the five pennies already. Knowing her father as she did, it was completely safe for her to speak of those pennies as **her** possession. The father did not need to show the child that he had five cents in order that she might believe that she would get them. Her faith rested completely in the character of her father. And just so, the Christian has confidence in the Word of God, and thus we too can speak of God’s promises as actual realities.

What is faith? It is believing the seemingly impossible and the unexplainable, and that which we cannot see, because someone in whom we have confidence says it is so.

3. The Object of Faith

It is possible to put confidence in the wrong object, the wrong place, or the wrong person. In other words—not all faith pleases God!

In our day the word “faith” is often used in a vague and indefinite way. I have heard folks say, “Well, you must have faith.” But faith in what? The word “faith” has become a kind of popular thing. The scientist and philosopher and actor and politician and cab-driver and prize-fighter and the housewife—all are ready to recommend faith as a remedy for our ills. If we only believe hard enough, we will make it somehow. **What** you believe (they imply) is not so important; just so you believe. Believe in yourself. Believe in your family. Believe in freedom. Believe in goodness. Just believe—even if the circumstances of life are totally against us.

The idea seems to be prominent that faith is some kind of almighty power flowing through the universe—into which anyone may plug at will. But such a view of faith has some false implications. The factor overlooked is this: **Faith is a good thing only when it engages truth.** When faith rests upon falsehoods, it usually leads to tragedy.

Charles Spurgeon often told about two men in a boat above Niagara Falls. The boat upset, and both men were struggling in the waters of the river (above the Falls). Friends on the shore threw them a rope. One man grabbed the rope and was pulled to safety. The other man desperately hung on to the overturned boat, and eventually was carried to his doom (down over the Falls). Both men trusted. But for one, the trust was a misplaced confidence. True faith must be in the right person—Jesus Christ, and must be placed in that which can be trusted—the Word of God. The object of true faith is Jesus Christ, and it is the Word of God that reveals the truth about Him.

4. The Achievements of Faith

Walking by faith accomplishes a number of good things. For one thing it provides boldness in witness. We read in 2 Corinthians 4:13, “So . . . we, having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written: I believed, and therefore have I spoken. We also believe, and therefore speak.” If one believes thoroughly that God is real, that Heaven is real, that Hell is real, and that Jesus Christ is the only escape from the wrath of God—he will be more bold and confident to share that message with others. Living by faith tends to provide boldness in witness.

Walking by faith also results in good works. One who has a genuine faith will prove the reality of that faith by the practice of good deeds, with particular reference to clothing the poor and feeding the hungry. James 2:14-16 says, “What doth it profit . . . (if) a man says he hath faith, and has not works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister be . . . destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto him, Depart in peace, be warmed and filled; notwithstanding we give them not those things which are needful to the body, what doth it profit?” It will not do any good to say, “We’ll pray for you and surely God will take care of you.” One who lives by faith will demonstrate the sincerity of that faith by giving a coat or a casserole to someone who is in need.

Walking by faith produces victory over the world. We read in 1 John 5:4, “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.” The person who lives by faith will have the greatest success in overcoming the world. One who lives by faith doesn’t make the world’s opinions his standards of right and wrong. He doesn’t mind going against the stream of this world’s customs and fads. He separates from the vain customs and the wicked morals of this world system. By faith he knows that this world is going to pass away, and that those who walk after the flesh are headed for judgment—and that God has better things prepared for those who serve Him.

Another achievement of faith is that living by faith **makes real** a glorious future. Hebrews 11:1 says, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” Faith is a firm conviction that even those things which the natural eye has never seen, are indeed very real. The eye of faith looks forward to someday meeting with Jesus; to eternal fellowship with God; to walking on streets of transparent gold. The Bible talks about these things. These are some of the “things hoped for.” These things are real to the person of faith.

Walking by faith sets us free from anxious care. Jesus says (in Matthew 6:30), “Wherefore if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?” And then He goes on and says in essence: “So don’t worry about having enough food and clothing; your Heavenly Father knows perfectly well that you need these things and He will give them to you if you seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.” Faith produces freedom from anxious care. When one who believes—

suffers reverses and calamities—he does not behave as if the bottom has fallen out of the universe. The person who lives by faith shows composure and tranquility even when hard places come.

We believe in the living God. We believe that the very hairs of our heads are all numbered. We are confident that God reigns and that not a sparrow falls to the ground without His knowledge. So why should we be fretful and filled with worry and distrust and anxiety? Doesn't the Lord have the whole world in His hands? Doesn't He know about even the small details of our lives?

There are two interesting verses in the Bible, related to the matter of anxiety and anxious care. Matthew 10:29 says, "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing?" Luke 12:6 says, "Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings?" Some time ago, I was walking down a street, when all of a sudden I heard a thud—and saw a sparrow on the ground—his little claws stretched upward. His swift flight through the air evidently brought him into collision with a pole (or an electric wire). It was only a passing incident—just the death of a tiny sparrow. Seemingly no one else had noticed it. But like a flash, there came to mind the words of Scripture: "not a sparrow falls without your Father's notice." These words express something about the tender care of God over the tiniest and most insignificant objects of His creation. These words illustrate God's concern about the most trivial affairs in the lives of His believing children.

The sparrow was sold as an article of food in the Palestinian markets. The little bird was so cheap that two of them were sold for a mere penny. This means that four of them should have been sold for two farthings, but the Bible says that **five** were sold for two farthings. The sparrow was so insignificant that when a buyer came along with two farthings, the vendor threw in an extra sparrow, and so a person could buy five of them for just two coins! Yet Jesus says of this extra sparrow (the fifth sparrow)—which was almost worthless to the vendor — "Not one of them is forgotten before the face of God" (Luke 12:6). And just as a tiny sparrow is ever before the face of God, so the most trivial details of our lives are always under His tender care. Genuine faith sets us free from undue anxious care.

There is a saving faith (the act of receiving God's forgiveness for sin), and there is also a sustaining faith (the act of appropriating God's resources for daily living). Saving faith is an active, personal trust in Jesus Christ. It is a matter of saying one great big "yes" to Jesus Christ and His offer of eternal life. Sustaining faith is a bit different. Sustaining faith is the daily trust which is the very strength of the Christian life. Day by day, the sincere disciple of Jesus lives by faith. We walk by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7).

There is something exceedingly absurd about believing only what I can see. Likely nine out of every ten of the most wonderful things in life are things that cannot be seen. There is the power of electricity and the love of a child and the fragrance of a rose. Yet the God who cares

for the visible world, also has control of the invisible world—and to walk by faith—is to have confidence in God’s faithfulness even in the realm of the invisible. Jesus said to Thomas, “You have seen and believed,” but “Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20:29).

The principle of “sight” is really very insecure and changeable. It is alright to talk about “walking by sight” (I believe only what I can see; I accept only what can be reasoned out)—it is okay to walk by sight—in the light—but what will you do when the darkness comes on? Walking by sight is not very practical on a totally dark night. It is very well to talk about living in the present—while you are here—but when you are sick with cancer and you are lying on the death-bed—what about living for the present and walking by sight then? By way of contrast—the principle of faith has many advantages. It does best in the dark. He who walks by faith, can walk in the sunlight (like all the rest of us can), but he can also walk in the dark. Day after day, he trusts God in all circumstances, knowing that even what appears difficult and hard to understand, and mysterious to us—can never be outside God’s good purpose for us.

John G. Paton, the missionary to the New Hebrides Islands, was translating the Gospel of John—but he could not find a native word for “believe.” How can you translate the Gospel of John with out a word for “believe”? (“Believe” is the key word of the Gospel). Then, one day, a native worker came to Mr. Paton’s office, and sat on one chair with his feet up on another. He used a native word which meant “I’m resting my whole weight on these two chairs.” And Mr. Paton said to himself, “I have my word.” He translated the Gospel of John, and every time he needed the word “believe,” he used the word which meant “I’m resting my whole weight upon.” Think, for example, of John 3:16. “For God so loved the world . . . that whosoever resteth his whole weight upon him, shall not perish, but shall have everlasting life.” That is essentially what it means to “live by faith.” It means “to rest one’s whole weight” upon the Word of God, and upon the Christ whom it exalts.

There is a hymn entitled “Living By Faith.” It says, “I care not today what the morrow may bring, if shadow or sunshine or rain; the Lord I know, rules over everything, and all of my worry is vain.” The chorus says, “Living by faith, yes I’m living by faith in Jesus above; trusting, confiding in His great love. Safe from all harm, in His sheltering arm, I’m living by faith and feel no alarm.” May the Lord help us to come to Christ by faith and then to live day by day with simple trust in His care.

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