

Book 1 of 2

Table of Contents

Forward		3
Chapter 1	Abraham's faith was tested by difficulties.	4
Chapter 2	God's provision is as large as your faith	14
Chapter 3	Faith is not based on personal comfort.	23
Chapter 4	The relationship between faith and deeds	32

Forward

Recently, I was deeply impressed with the thought inspired by the Holy Spirit. The thought was: “You don’t ask the Lord for nearly as much as you should ask”.

Some believers are very considerate people, and want to help others as much as possible, and ask for little in return.

Well, the Lord does not care how much you ask of him. When it comes to seeking God, ask largely, and be filled with joy.

Develop an attitude of expectation. This is a part of faith. Your Faith will be tested. Yet, God’s provision is as large as your faith.

In this study, you will encounter many scripture that should increase your faith. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Being filled with the word of God, is a necessity.

On some Bibles, if you read 40 pages each day, you can read through the entire Bible each month. As Godly workers, we must know the Bible.

An Attitude of Expectation

Chapter 1



Abraham's faith was tested by difficulties.

Genesis 12:10

At that time there was a severe famine in the land, so Abram went down to Egypt to wait it out.

When famine struck, Abram went to Egypt where there was food. Why would there be a famine in the land where God had just called Abram? This was a test of Abram's faith, and Abram passed.

He didn't question God's leading when facing this difficulty. Many believers find that when they determine to follow God, they immediately encounter great obstacles. The next time you face such a test, don't try to second-guess what God is doing. Use the intelligence God gave you, as Abram did when he temporarily moved to Egypt, and wait for new opportunities.

Faith made Abraham right with God.

Genesis 15:6

And Abram believed the Lord, and the Lord declared him righteous because of his faith.

Although Abram had been demonstrating his faith through his actions, it was his belief in the Lord, not his actions that made Abram right with God (Romans 4:1-5). We too can have a right relationship with God by trusting him. Our outward actions—church attendance, prayer, good deeds—will not by themselves make us right with God.

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 will follow naturally as by-products.

Lack of faith brings series of problem

Genesis 16:3

So Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian servant and gave her to Abram as a wife. (This happened ten years after Abram first arrived in the land of Canaan.)

Sarai gave Hagar to Abram as a substitute wife, a common practice of that time. A married woman who could not have children was shamed by her peers and was often required to give a female servant to her husband in order to produce heirs. The children born to the servant woman were considered the children of the wife. Abram was acting in line with the custom of the day, but his action showed a lack of faith that God would fulfill his promise.

Sarai took matters into her own hands by giving Hagar to Abram. Like Abram she had trouble believing God's promise that was apparently directed specifically toward Abram and Sarai. Out of this lack of faith came a series of problems.

This invariably happens when we take over for God, trying to make his promise come true through efforts that are not in line with his specific directions. In this case, time was the greatest test of Abram and Sarai's willingness to let God work in their lives.

Sometimes we too must simply wait. When we ask God for something and have to wait, it is a temptation to take matters into our own hands and interfere with God's plans.

Faith grows with exercise.

Genesis 50:24

"Soon I will die," Joseph told his brothers, "but God will surely come for you, to lead you out of this land of Egypt. He will bring you back to the land he vowed to give to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."

Joseph was ready to die. He had no doubts that God would keep his promise and one day bring the Israelites back to their homeland. What a tremendous example! The secret of that kind of faith is a lifetime of trusting God. Your faith is like a muscle—it grows with exercise, gaining strength over time. After a lifetime of exercising trust, your faith can be as strong as Joseph's.

Then at your death, you can be confident that God will fulfill all his promises to you and to all those faithful to him who may live after you.

This verse sets the stage for what would begin to happen in Exodus and come to completion in Joshua. God was going to make Jacob's family into a great nation, lead them out of Egypt, and bring them into the land he had promised them. The nation would rely heavily on this promise, and Joseph emphasized his belief that God would do what he had promised.

Complaining can show lack of faith.

Exodus 14:11-12

Then they turned against Moses and complained, "Why did you bring us out here to die in the wilderness? Weren't there enough graves for us in Egypt? Why did you make us leave? Didn't we tell you to leave us alone while we were still in Egypt? Our Egyptian slavery was far better than dying out here in the wilderness!"

Trapped against the sea, the Israelites faced the Egyptian army sweeping in for the kill. The Israelites thought they were doomed. After watching God's powerful hand deliver them from Egypt, their only response was fear, whining, and despair.

Where was their trust in God? Israel had to learn from repeated experience that God was able to provide for them. God has preserved these examples in the Bible so that we can learn to trust him the first time.

By focusing on God's faithfulness in the past we can face crises with confidence rather than with fear and complaining.

This is the first instance of grumbling and complaining by the Israelites. Their lack of faith in God is startling. Yet how often do we find ourselves doing the same thing—complaining over inconveniences or

discomforts? The Israelites were about to learn some tough lessons. Had they trusted God, they would have been spared much grief.

Lack of faith brings troubles.

Numbers 20:3-5

The people blamed Moses and said, "We wish we had died in the Lord's presence with our brothers!"

Did you bring the Lord's people into this wilderness to die, along with all our livestock?

Why did you make us leave Egypt and bring us here to this terrible place? This land has no grain, figs, grapes, or pomegranates. And there is no water to drink!"

After 37 years in the desert, the Israelites forgot that their wanderings were a result of their parents' and their own sin. They could not accept the fact that they brought their problems upon themselves, so they blamed Moses for their condition. Often our troubles result from our own disobedience or lack of faith. We cannot blame God for our sins. Until we face this reality, we will have little peace and no spiritual growth.

Despite the difficulties

Deut. 1:22

"But you responded, 'First, let's send out scouts to explore the land for us. They will advise us on the best route to take and decide which towns we should capture.'

The spies were sent into the land to determine not *whether* they should enter, but *where* they should enter. Upon returning, however, most of the spies concluded that the land was not worth the obstacles.

God would give the Israelites the power to conquer the land, but they were afraid of the risk and decided not to enter. God gives us the power to overcome our obstacles, but like the Israelites filled with fear and skepticism, we often let difficulties control our lives.

Following God regardless of the difficulties is the way to have courageous, overcoming faith.

Faith involves endurance to the end.

Joshua 14:6-12

A delegation from the tribe of Judah, led by Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite, came to Joshua at Gilgal. Caleb said to Joshua, "Remember what the Lord said to Moses, the man of God, about you and me when we were at Kadesh-barnea.

I was forty years old when Moses, the servant of the Lord, sent me from Kadesh-barnea to explore the land of Canaan. I returned and gave from my heart a good report, but my brothers who went with me frightened the people and discouraged them from entering the Promised Land. For my part, I followed the Lord my God completely.

So that day Moses promised me, 'The land of Canaan on which you were just walking will be your special possession and that of your descendants forever, because you wholeheartedly followed the Lord my God.'

"Now, as you can see, the Lord has kept me alive and well as he promised for all these forty-five years since Moses made this promise—even while Israel wandered in the wilderness. Today I am eighty-five years old.

I am as strong now as I was when Moses sent me on that journey, and I can still travel and fight as well as I could then.

So I'm asking you to give me the hill country that the Lord promised me. You will remember that as scouts we found the Anakites living there in great, walled cities.

But if the Lord is with me, I will drive them out of the land, just as the Lord said."

Caleb was faithful from the start. As one of the original spies sent into the Promised Land (Numbers 13:30-33), he saw great cities and giants, yet he knew God would help the people conquer the land. Because of his faith, God promised him a personal inheritance of land (Numbers 14:24; Deut. 1:34-36). Here, 45 years later, the land was given to him.

His faith was still unwavering. Although his inherited land still had giants, Caleb knew the Lord would help him conquer them. Like Caleb, we must be faithful to God, not only at the start of our walk with him, but through our entire lives. We must never allow ourselves to rest on our past accomplishments or reputations.

Faith is affected by relationships.

Judges 3:5-7

So Israel lived among the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, and they intermarried with them. Israelite

sons married their daughters, and Israelite daughters were given in marriage to their sons. And the Israelites worshiped their gods.

The Israelites did what was evil in the Lord's sight. They forgot about the Lord their God, and they worshiped the images of Baal and the Asherah poles.

Before entering the promised land, the Israelites were to perform a consecration (purification) ceremony. This was often done before making a sacrifice or, as in this case, before witnessing a great act of God.

God's law stated that a person could become unclean for many reasons—eating certain foods (Leviticus 11), childbirth (Leviticus 12), disease (Leviticus 13-14), touching a dead person (Numbers 19:11-22). God used these various outward signs of uncleanness to illustrate man's inward uncleanness that comes as a result of sin.

The consecration ceremony pictured the importance of approaching God with a pure heart. Like the Israelites, we need God's forgiveness before we approach him.

How well does yours faith take pressure?

Judges 6:25-30

That night the Lord said to Gideon, "Take the second best bull from your father's herd, the one that is seven years old.

Pull down your father's altar to Baal, and cut down the Asherah pole standing beside it. Then build an altar to the Lord your God here on this hill, laying the stones carefully. Sacrifice the bull as a burnt offering on the altar, using as fuel the wood of the Asherah pole you cut down."

So Gideon took ten of his servants and did as the Lord had commanded. But he did it at night because he was afraid of the other members of his father's household and the people of the town. He knew what would happen if they found out who had done it.

Early the next morning, as the people of the town began to stir, someone discovered that the altar of Baal had been knocked down and that the Asherah pole beside it was gone. In their place a new altar had been built, and it had the remains of a sacrifice on it.

The people said to each other, "Who did this?" And after asking around and making a careful search, they learned that it was Gideon, the son of Joash.

"Bring out your son," they shouted to Joash. "He must die for destroying the altar of Baal and for cutting down the Asherah pole."

This curse was fulfilled in 1 Kings 16:34 when a man, Hiel, rebuilt Jericho and consequently lost his oldest and youngest sons.

It is very possible that Hiel sacrificed his sons and placed them in the foundation and gate masonry to ward off evil.

Faith to answer God's call

1 Samuel 3:8-9

So now the Lord called a third time, and once more Samuel jumped up and ran to Eli. "Here I am," he said. "What do you need?"

Then Eli realized it was the Lord who was calling the boy. So he said to Samuel, "Go and lie down again, and if someone calls again, say, 'Yes, Lord, your servant is listening.' "So Samuel went back to bed.

One would naturally expect an audible message from God to be given to the priest Eli and not to the child Samuel. Eli was older and more experienced, and he held the proper position. But God's chain of command is based on faith, not on age or position. In finding faithful followers, God may use unexpected channels.

Be prepared for the Lord to work at any place, at any time, and through anyone he chooses.

Chapter 2



God's provision is as large as your faith.

2 Kings 4:6

Soon every container was full to the brim!

"Bring me another jar," she said to one of her sons.

"There aren't any more!" he told her. And then the olive oil stopped flowing.

The woman and her sons collected jars from their neighbors, pouring oil into them from their one pot. The oil was probably olive oil and was used for cooking, for lamps, and for fuel. The oil stopped pouring only when they ran out of containers.

The number of jars they gathered was an indication of their faith. God's provision was as large as their faith and willingness to obey. Beware of limiting God's blessings by a lack of faith and obedience. God is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine (Ephes. 3:20).

Faith opens the door to new resources.

2 Kings 6:16-17 2

"Don't be afraid!" Elisha told him. "For there are more on our side than on theirs!"

Then Elisha prayed, "O Lord, open his eyes and let him see!" The Lord opened his servant's eyes, and when he looked up, he saw that the hillside around Elisha was filled with horses and chariots of fire.

Elisha's servant was no longer afraid when he saw God's mighty heavenly army.

Faith reveals that God is doing more for his people than we can ever realize through sight alone.

When you face difficulties that seem insurmountable, remember that spiritual resources are there even if you can't see them.

Look through the eyes of faith and let God show you his resources. If you don't see God working in your life, the problem may be your spiritual eyesight, not God's power.

When Elisha prophesied God's deliverance, the king's officer said it couldn't happen. The officer's faith and hope were gone, but God's words came true anyway (2 Kings 7:14-16)!

Sometimes we become preoccupied with problems when we should be looking for opportunities. Instead of focusing on the negatives, develop an attitude of expectancy.

To say that God *cannot* rescue someone or that a situation is *impossible* demonstrates a lack of faith.

Faith believes in the impossible.

2 Kings 7:1-2

Elisha replied, "Hear this message from the Lord! This is what the Lord says: By this time tomorrow in the markets of Samaria, five quarts of fine flour will cost only half an ounce of silver, and ten quarts of barley grain will cost only half an ounce of silver."

The officer assisting the king said to the man of God, "That couldn't happen even if the Lord opened the windows of heaven!"

But Elisha replied, "You will see it happen, but you won't be able to eat any of it!"

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Don't get so preoccupied with your faith that you don't share it.
2 Kings 7:3-10

Now there were four men with leprosy sitting at the entrance of the city gates. "Why should we sit here waiting to die?" they asked each other.

"We will starve if we stay here, and we will starve if we go back into the city. So we might as well go out and surrender to the Aramean

army. If they let us live, so much the better. But if they kill us, we would have died anyway."

So that evening they went out to the camp of the Arameans, but no one was there! For the Lord had caused the whole army of Aram to hear the clatter of speeding chariots and the galloping of horses and the sounds of a great army approaching.

"The king of Israel has hired the Hittites and Egyptians to attack us!" they cried out. So they panicked and fled into the night, abandoning their tents, horses, donkeys, and everything else, and they fled for their lives.

When the lepers arrived at the edge of the camp, they went into one tent after another, eating, drinking wine, and carrying out silver and gold and clothing and hiding it.

Finally, they said to each other, "This is not right. This is wonderful news, and we aren't sharing it with anyone! If we wait until morning, some terrible calamity will certainly fall upon us. Come on, let's go back and tell the people at the palace."

So they went back to the city and told the gatekeepers what had happened—that they had gone out to the Aramean camp and no one was there! The horses and donkeys were tethered and the tents were all in order, but there was not a single person around.

The lepers discovered the deserted camp and realized their lives had been spared. At first they kept the good news to themselves, forgetting their fellow citizens who were starving in the city.

The Good News about Jesus Christ must be shared too, for no news is more important.

We must not forget those who are dying without it. We must not become so preoccupied with our own faith that we neglect sharing it with those around us. Our “good news,” like that of the lepers, will not “wait until daylight.”

Your life must show evidence of faith.

2 Kings 13:4-6

Then Jehoahaz prayed for the Lord's help, and the Lord heard his prayer. The Lord could see how terribly the king of Aram was oppressing Israel.

So the Lord raised up a deliverer to rescue the Israelites from the tyranny of the Arameans. Then Israel lived in safety again as they had in former days.

But they continued to sin, following the evil example of Jeroboam. They even set up an Asherah pole in Samaria.

The Lord heard Jehoahaz’s prayer for help. God delayed his judgment on Israel when they turned to him for help, but they did not sustain their dependence on God for long.

Although there were periodic breaks in their idol worship, there was rarely evidence of genuine faith. It is not enough to say no to sin; we must also say yes to a life of commitment to God. An occasional call for help is not a substitute for a daily life of trust in God.

God can rekindle the smallest amount of faith.

2 Kings 19:31

For a remnant of my people will spread out from Jerusalem, a group of survivors from Mount Zion. The passion of the Lord Almighty will make this happen!

As long as a tiny spark remains, a fire can be rekindled and fanned into a roaring blaze. Similarly, if just the smallest remnant of true believers retains the spark of faith, God can rebuild it into a strong nation.

And if only a glimmer of faith remains in a heart, God can use it to restore blazing faith in that believer. If you feel that only a spark of faith remains in you, ask God to use it to rekindle a blazing fire of commitment to him.

The faith of Esther

Esther 4:16

"Go and gather together all the Jews of Susa and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will do the same. And then, though it is against the law, I will go in to see the king. If I must die, I am willing to die."

By calling for a fast, Esther was asking the Jews to pray for God's help on her dangerous mission. In the Old Testament, prayer always accompanies fasting (see Exodus 34:28; Deut. 9:9; Ezra 8:21-23). An important function of a community of believers is mutual support in difficult times.

When you are experiencing struggles, turn to fellow believers for support by sharing your trials with them and gaining strength from the bond that unites you. Ask them to pray for you. And when others need your support, give it willingly.

Not knowing all the answers develops faith.

Job 1:1

There was a man named Job who lived in the land of Uz. He was blameless, a man of complete integrity. He feared God and stayed away from evil.

As we read the book of Job, we have information that the characters of the story do not. Job, the main character of the book, lost all he had through no fault of his own. As he struggled to understand why all this was happening to him, it became clear that he was not meant to know the reasons.

He would have to face life with the answers and explanations held back. Only then would his faith fully develop.

We must experience life as Job did—one day at a time and without complete answers to all of life's questions. Will we, like Job, trust God no matter what? Or will we give in to the temptation to say that God doesn't really care?

The location of the land of Uz is uncertain. We only know that Uz had plentiful pastures and crops (Job 1:3), was located near a desert (Job 1:19), and was close enough to the Sabeans and Chaldeans to be raided (Job 1:14-17).

Uz is also mentioned in Jeremiah 25:19-20. Most scholars believe Uz was located east of the Jordan River near Canaan (Israel), where the Jews (those to whom God first revealed himself) lived. Job probably knew about God because he knew God's people.

As we see calamity and suffering in the book of Job, we must remember that we live in a fallen world where good behavior is not always rewarded and bad behavior is not always punished. When we see a notorious criminal prospering or an innocent child in pain, we say, “That’s wrong.” And it is.

Sin has twisted justice and made our world unpredictable and ugly.

The book of Job shows a good man suffering for no apparent fault of his own. Sadly, our world is like that. But Job’s story does not end in despair.

Through Job’s life we can see that faith in God is justified even when our situations look hopeless. Faith based on rewards or prosperity is hollow. To be unshakable, faith must be built on the confidence that God’s ultimate purpose will come to pass.

Adversity destroys counterfeit faith.

Job 1:9

Satan replied to the Lord, "Yes, Job fears God, but not without good reason!"

Job was a model of trust and obedience to God, yet God permitted Satan to attack him in an especially harsh manner. Although God loves us, believing and obeying him do not shelter us from life’s calamities. Setbacks, tragedies, and sorrows strike Christians and non-Christians alike.

But in our tests and trials, God expects us to express our faith to the world. How do you respond to your troubles? Do you ask God, “Why me?” or do you say, “Use me!”?

This conversation between God and Satan teaches us an important fact about God—he is fully aware of every attempt by Satan to bring suffering and difficulty upon us. While God may allow us to suffer for a reason beyond our understanding, he is never caught by surprise by our troubles and is always compassionate.

Could you trust God if you lost everything?

Job 1:20-22

Job stood up and tore his robe in grief. Then he shaved his head and fell to the ground before God. He said,

**"I came naked from my mother's womb,
and I will be stripped of everything when I die.**

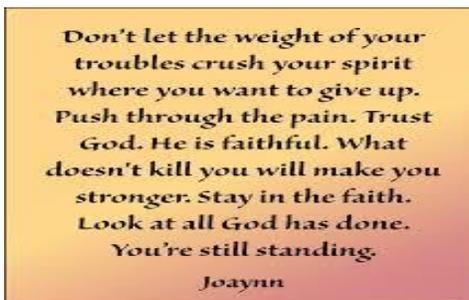
**The Lord gave me everything I had,
and the Lord has taken it away.
Praise the name of the Lord!"**

In all of this, Job did not sin by blaming God.

Job did not hide his overwhelming grief. He had not lost his faith in God; instead, his emotions showed that he was human and that he loved his family. God created our emotions, and it is not sinful or inappropriate to express them as Job did. If you have experienced a deep loss, a disappointment, or a heartbreak, admit your feelings to yourself and others, and grieve.

Job had lost his possessions and family in this first of Satan's tests, but he reacted rightly toward God by acknowledging God's sovereign authority over everything God had given him. Satan lost this first round. Job passed the test and proved that people can love God for who he is, not for what he gives.

Chapter 3



Faith must not be based on personal comfort.

Job 2:10

But Job replied, "You talk like a godless woman. Should we accept only good things from the hand of God and never anything bad?" So in all this, Job said nothing wrong.

Many people think that believing in God protects them from trouble, so when calamity comes, they question God's goodness and justice.

But the message of Job is that you should not give up on God because he allows you to have bad experiences. Faith in God does not guarantee personal prosperity, and lack of faith does not guarantee troubles in this life. If this were so, people would believe in God simply to get rich.

God is capable of rescuing us from suffering, but he may also allow suffering to come for reasons we cannot understand. It is Satan's strategy to get us to doubt God at exactly this moment. Here Job shows a perspective broader than seeking his own personal comfort.

If we always knew why we were suffering, our faith would have no room to grow.

Faith that is linked to optimism

Psalm 11:1-4

**I trust in the Lord for protection. So why do you say to me,
"Fly to the mountains for safety!"**

**The wicked are stringing their bows and setting their arrows in the
bow strings. They shoot from the shadows at those who do right.
The foundations of law and order have collapsed. What can the
righteous do?"**

**But the Lord is in his holy Temple; the Lord still rules from
heaven. He watches everything closely, examining everyone on
earth.**

When you feel stagnant in faith

Psalm 51:12

**Restore to me again the joy of your salvation, and make me willing
to obey you.**

Do you ever feel stagnant in your faith, as though you are just going through the motions? Has sin ever driven a wedge between you and God, making him seem distant? David felt this way. He had sinned with Bathsheba and had just been confronted by Nathan the prophet.

In his prayer he cried, "Restore to me the joy of your salvation." God wants us to be close to him and to experience his full and complete life. But sin that remains unconfessed makes such intimacy impossible. Confess your sin to God.

You may still have to face some earthly consequences, as David did, but God will give back the joy of your relationship with him.

Faith comes alive when we apply Scripture.

Psalm 119:125

Give discernment to me, your servant; then I will understand your decrees.

The psalmist asked God for discernment. Faith comes alive when we apply Scripture to our daily tasks and concerns. We need discernment so we can understand, and we need the desire to apply Scripture where we need help.

The Bible is like medicine—it goes to work only when we apply it to the affected areas. As you read the Bible, be alert for lessons, commands, or examples that you can put into practice.

Faith won't eliminate feelings of rejection or disappointment.

Jeremiah 21:1-2

The Lord spoke through Jeremiah when King Zedekiah sent Pashhur son of Malkijah and Zephaniah son of Maaseiah, the priest, to speak with him.

They begged Jeremiah, "Please ask the Lord to help us. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon has begun his attack on Judah. Perhaps the Lord will be gracious and do a mighty miracle as he has done in the past. Perhaps he will force Nebuchadnezzar to withdraw his armies."

Jeremiah 21-28 are Jeremiah's messages concerning Nebuchadnezzar's attacks on Jerusalem between 588 and 586 B.C. (see also 2 Kings 25). King Zedekiah decided to rebel against Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 24:20), and the nobles advised allying with Egypt. Jeremiah pronounced judgment on the kings (Jeremiah 21:1-23:8) and false prophets (Jeremiah 23:9-40) for leading the people astray.

King Zedekiah probably was referring to God's deliverance of Jerusalem from Sennacherib, king of Assyria, in the days of Hezekiah (Isaiah 36-37). But Zedekiah's hopes were dashed. He was Judah's last ruler during the time of the exile of 586 B.C.

Pashhur came to the prophet for help. (This is not the same Pashhur as in Jeremiah 20:1.) God still had work for Jeremiah to do. In living out our faith, we may find that rejection, disappointment, or hard work has brought us to the point of despondency. But we are still needed. God has important work for us as well.

Being faithful regardless of the circumstances

Daniel 3:16-18

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you.

If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power, Your Majesty. But even if he doesn't, Your Majesty can be sure that we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up."

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were pressured to deny God, but they chose to be faithful to him no matter what happened! They trusted God to deliver them, but they were determined to be faithful regardless of the consequences.

If God always rescued those who were true to him, Christians would not need faith. Their religion would be a great insurance policy, and there would be lines of selfish people ready to sign up. We should be faithful to serve God whether he intervenes on our behalf or not. Our eternal reward is worth any suffering we may have to endure first.

Is yours faith real?

Matthew 3:9-10

Don't just say, 'We're safe—we're the descendants of Abraham.' That proves nothing. God can change these stones here into children of Abraham.

Even now the ax of God's judgment is poised, ready to sever your roots. Yes, every tree that does not produce good fruit will be chopped down and thrown into the fire.

Just as a fruit tree is expected to bear fruit, God's people should produce a crop of good deeds. God has no use for people who call themselves Christians but do nothing about it.

Like many people in John's day who were God's people in name only, we are of no value if we are Christians in name only. If others can't see our faith in the way we treat them, we may not be God's people at all.

God's message hasn't changed since the Old Testament—people will be judged for their unproductive lives. God calls us to be *active* in our obedience.

John compared people who claim they believe God but don't live for God to unproductive trees that will be cut down. To be productive for God, we must obey his teachings, resist temptation, actively serve and help others, and share our faith. How productive are you for God?

Faith doesn't always exempt us from suffering.

Acts 5:17-18

The high priest and his friends, who were Sadducees, reacted with violent jealousy.

They arrested the apostles and put them in the jail.

The religious leaders were jealous—Peter and the apostles were already commanding more respect than they had ever received. The difference, however, was that the religious leaders demanded respect and reverence for themselves; the apostles' goal was to bring respect and reverence to God.

The apostles were respected not because they demanded it, but because they deserved it.

The apostles experienced power to do miracles, great boldness in preaching, and God's presence in their lives, yet they were not free from hatred and persecution. They were arrested, put in jail, beaten, and slandered by community leaders.

Faith in God does not make troubles disappear; it makes troubles appear less frightening because it puts them in the right perspective. Don't expect everyone to react favorably when you share something as dynamic as your faith in Christ.

Some will be jealous, afraid, or threatened. Expect some negative reactions, and remember that you must be more concerned about serving God than about the reactions of people (see Acts 5:29).

Hebrews 11:35-39

Women received their loved ones back again from death. But others trusted God and were tortured, preferring to die rather than turn from God and be free. They placed their hope in the resurrection to a better life.

Some were mocked, and their backs were cut open with whips. Others were chained in dungeons. Some died by stoning, and some were sawed in half; others were killed with the sword.

Some went about in skins of sheep and goats, hungry and oppressed and mistreated. They were too good for this world. They wandered over deserts and mountains, hiding in caves and holes in the ground.

All of these people we have mentioned received God's approval because of their faith, yet none of them received all that God had promised.

Many think that pain is the exception in the Christian life. When suffering occurs, they say, “Why me?” They feel as though God deserted them, or perhaps they accuse him of not being as dependable as they thought. In reality, however, we live in an evil world filled with suffering, even for believers.

But God is still in control. He allows some Christians to become martyrs for the faith, and he allows others to survive persecution. Rather than asking, “Why me?” it is much more helpful to ask, “Why not me?”

Our faith and the values of this world are on a collision course. If we expect pain and suffering to come, we will not be shocked when it hits. But we can also take comfort in knowing that Jesus also suffered.

He understands our fears, our weaknesses, and our disappointments (see Hebrews 2:16-18; Hebrews 4:14-16). He promised never to leave us (Matthew 28:18-20), and he intercedes on our behalf (Hebrews 7:24-25).

In times of pain, persecution, or suffering we should trust confidently in Christ.

Disciples were not always strong in faith.

Mark 1:16-20

One day as Jesus was walking along the shores of the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother, Andrew, fishing with a net, for they were commercial fishermen.

We often assume that Jesus' disciples were great men of faith from the first time they met Jesus.

But they had to grow in their faith just as all believers do (Mark 14:48-50, 66-72; John 14:1-9; John 20:26-29). This is apparently not the only time Jesus called Peter (Simon), James, and John to follow him (see Luke 5:1-11 and John 1:35-42 for two other times).

Although it took time for Jesus' call and his message to get through, the disciples *followed*. In the same way, we may question and falter, but we must never stop following Jesus.

Jesus called out to them, "Come, be my disciples, and I will show you how to fish for people!" And they left their nets at once and went with him.

A little farther up the shore Jesus saw Zebedee's sons, James and John, in a boat mending their nets. He called them, too, and immediately they left their father, Zebedee, in the boat with the hired men and went with him.

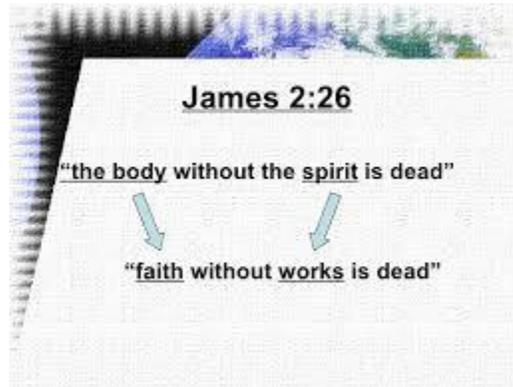
What motivates does your faith have?

'Luke 3:7

Here is a sample of John's preaching to the crowds that came for baptism: "You brood of snakes! Who warned you to flee God's coming judgment?"

Some people wanted to be baptized by John so they could escape eternal punishment, but they didn't turn to God for salvation. John had harsh words for such people. He knew that God values reformation above ritual.

Chapter 4



The relationship between faith and deeds.

Luke 3:8-9

Prove by the way you live that you have really turned from your sins and turned to God. Don't just say, 'We're safe—we're the descendants of Abraham.' That proves nothing.

God can change these stones here into children of Abraham. Even now the ax of God's judgment is poised, ready to sever your roots. Yes, every tree that does not produce good fruit will be chopped down and thrown into the fire."

Phil. 3:2-3

Watch out for those dogs, those wicked men and their evil deeds, those mutilators who say you must be circumcised to be saved.

For we who worship God in the Spirit are the only ones who are truly circumcised. We put no confidence in human effort. Instead, we boast about what Christ Jesus has done for us.

Selfish ambition can ruin a church, but genuine humility can build it. Being humble involves having a true perspective about ourselves (see Romans 12:3).

It does not mean that we should put ourselves down. Before God, we are sinners, saved only by God's grace, but we *are* saved and therefore have great worth in God's kingdom.

We are to lay aside selfishness and treat others with respect and common courtesy. Considering others' interests as more important than our own links us with Christ, who was a true example of humility.

James 2:1

My dear brothers and sisters, how can you claim that you have faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ if you favor some people more than others?

The book of James was one of the earliest letters, probably written before A.D. 50. After Stephen was martyred (Acts 7:55-8:3), persecution increased, and Christians in Jerusalem were scattered throughout the Roman world. There were thriving Jewish-Christian communities in Rome, Alexandria, Cyprus, and cities in Greece and Asia Minor. Because these early believers did not have the support of established Christian churches, James wrote to them as a concerned leader, to encourage them in their faith during those

James 2:18

Now someone may argue, "Some people have faith; others have good deeds."

I say, "I can't see your faith if you don't have good deeds, but I will show you my faith through my good deeds."

At first glance, this verse seems to contradict Romans 3:28, “man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.” Deeper investigation, however, shows that the teachings of James and Paul are not at odds. While it is true that our good deeds can never earn salvation, true faith always results in a changed life and good deeds.

Paul speaks against those who try to be saved by deeds instead of true faith; James speaks against those who confuse mere intellectual assent with true faith. After all, even demons know who Jesus is, but they don't obey him (James 2:19).

True faith involves a commitment of your whole self to God.

James 5:20

You can be sure that the one who brings that person back will save that sinner from death and bring about the forgiveness of many sins.

The book of James emphasizes faith in action. Right living is the evidence and result of faith. The church must serve with compassion, speak lovingly and truthfully, live in obedience to God's commands, and love one another.

The body of believers ought to be an example of heaven on earth, drawing people to Christ through love for God and each other. If we truly believe God's Word, we will *live* it day by day. God's Word is not merely something we read or think about, but something we do. Belief, faith, and trust must have hands and feet—ours!

2 Peter 1:9

But those who fail to develop these virtues are blind or, at least, very shortsighted. They have already forgotten that God has cleansed them from their old life of sin.

Our faith must go beyond what we believe; it must become a dynamic part of all we do, resulting in good fruit and spiritual maturity. Salvation does not depend on good deeds, but it results in good deeds. A person who claims to be saved while remaining unchanged does not understand faith or what God has done for him or her.

1 John 2:28-29

And now, dear children, continue to live in fellowship with Christ so that when he returns, you will be full of courage and not shrink back from him in shame.

Since we know that God is always right, we also know that all who do what is right are his children.

Our faith must go beyond what we believe; it must become a dynamic part of all we do, resulting in good fruit and spiritual maturity. Salvation does not depend on good deeds, but it results in good deeds. A person who claims to be saved while remaining unchanged does not understand faith or what God has done for him or her.

New believers can share your faith too.

Mark 2:14-15

As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at his tax-collection booth. "Come, be my disciple," Jesus said to him. So Levi got up and followed him.

That night Levi invited Jesus and his disciples to be his dinner guests, along with his fellow tax collectors and many other notorious sinners. (There were many people of this kind among the crowds that followed Jesus.)

The day that Levi met Jesus, Levi held a meeting at his house to introduce others to Jesus. Levi didn't waste any time starting to witness! Some people feel that new believers should wait for maturity or training before they begin to tell others about Christ. But like Levi, new believers can share their faith right away with whatever knowledge, skill, or experience they already have.

Faith of the royal official

John 4:48

Jesus asked, "Must I do miraculous signs and wonders before you people will believe in me?"

This miracle was more than a favor to one official; it was a sign to all the people. John's Gospel was written to all mankind to urge faith in Christ. Here a government official had faith that Jesus could do what he claimed. The official believed; *then* he saw a miraculous sign.

Our faith affects others.

Luke 5:18-20

Some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a sleeping mat. They tried to push through the crowd to Jesus, but they couldn't reach him. So they went up to the roof, took off some tiles, and lowered the sick man down into the crowd, still on his mat, right in front of Jesus.

Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the man, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

It wasn't the paralytic's faith that impressed Jesus, but the faith of his friends. Jesus responded to their faith and healed the man. For better or worse, our faith affects others.

We cannot make another person a Christian, but we can do much through our words, actions, and love to give him or her a chance to respond. Look for opportunities to bring your friends to the living Christ.

Why some may resist your faith.

John 3:19-21

Their judgment is based on this fact: The light from heaven came into the world, but they loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil.

They hate the light because they want to sin in the darkness. They stay away from the light for fear their sins will be exposed and they will be punished.

But those who do what is right come to the light gladly, so everyone can see that they are doing what God wants."

Many people don't want their lives exposed to God's light because they are afraid of what will be revealed. They don't want to be changed. Don't be surprised when these same people are threatened by your desire to obey God and do what is right, because they are afraid that the light in you may expose some of the darkness in their lives.

Rather than giving in to discouragement, keep praying that they will come to see how much better it is to live in light than in darkness.

Faith is often proved through persecution.

Matthew 5:11-12

"God blesses you when you are mocked and persecuted and lied about because you are my followers.

Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted, too.

Jesus said to rejoice when we're persecuted. Persecution can be good because (1) it takes our eyes off earthly rewards, (2) it strips away superficial belief, (3) it strengthens the faith of those who endure, and

(4) Our attitude through it serves as an example to others who follow.

We can be comforted to know that God's greatest prophets were persecuted (Elijah, Jeremiah, Daniel). The fact that we are being persecuted proves that we have been faithful; faithless people would be unnoticed. In the future God will reward the faithful by receiving them into his eternal kingdom where there is no more persecution.

Faith alone brings eternal life.

Matthew 7:21-23

"Not all people who sound religious are really godly. They may refer to me as 'Lord,' but they still won't enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

The decisive issue is whether they obey my Father in heaven. On judgment day many will tell me, 'Lord, Lord, we prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name.'

But I will reply, 'I never knew you. Go away; the things you did were unauthorized.'

Jesus exposed those people who sounded religious but had no personal relationship with him. On “that day” (the day of judgment), only our relationship with Christ—our acceptance of him as Savior and our obedience to him—will matter. Many people think that if they are “good” people and say religious things, they will be rewarded with eternal life. In reality, faith in Christ is what will count at the judgment.

Galatians 1:6

I am shocked that you are turning away so soon from God, who in his love and mercy called you to share the eternal life he gives through Christ. You are already following a different way

Some people were preaching “a different gospel.” They were teaching that to be saved, Gentile believers had to follow Jewish laws and customs, especially the rite of circumcision. Faith in Christ was not enough.

This message undermined the truth of the good news that salvation is a gift, not a reward for certain deeds. Jesus Christ has made this gift available to all people, not just to Jews. Beware of people who say that we need more than simple faith in Christ to be saved.

When people set up additional requirements for salvation, they deny the power of Christ’s death on the cross (see Galatians 3:1-5).

References:

Holy Bible: King James Translation

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Additional comments and charts are taken from: *Life Application Study Bible*. Illinois: Tyndale House 2007. Print