

The Mystery of Faith



INTRODUCTION

- Out of all of God's creation only humans are capable of having faith. What is faith?
- We want to believe there is more out there than just what we can see, feel, touch, taste and smell. We have a pull for meaning that originates outside of ourselves.
- All humans have a lingering appetite for the eternal.
- "Drink of this water", Jesus said, "and you will thirst again, but drink of the living water I will give you, and you will never thirst again". John 4:14. This is what makes humans different than every other living creature—we have a hunger and thirst for something we can't see.
- We may think the power lies in our ability to believe, or have faith, in something we can't see; but there's actually no power in an ability to have faith, there's only power in the source of what we place our faith in. Faith, in itself, has no power. All power exists in the source of our faith. That source is Jesus.

THREE KEYS TO UNDERSTANDING THE MYSTERY OF FAITH

- For a Christian, our faith begins and ends with Christ. If you remove Jesus out of the faith equation, the whole equation becomes meaningless.
 - In Hebrews 12:2 the Bible says Christ is the author and the finisher of our faith. That means the substance of faith that exists on the earth today was created by the life, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus.
 - Does this substance I'm calling faith exist outside of Jesus? Sure, the Dalai Lama, Buddhist Monks, even Islamic extremist are tapping into this substance of faith. They believe strongly in what they're taught. They're actually gaining strength and courage from that belief. For some, that strength might appear as a miraculous power.
 - ◇ But remember, the power of faith will always be limited by the source of what, or who you put your faith in.
 - ◇ That's why I acknowledge that there's incredible evil in the world today, but I never focus on what I call a lesser power. Jesus said it this way: "In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world". John 16:33.

- ◇ The greater your understanding of faith, the greater ability you will receive to pray, believe, and see God act on your prayer and on your behalf.

KEY #1: Know Who You Are Placing Your Faith In.

- Faith in God is much more than simply having faith God exists. True faith means you know Who you're placing your faith in.
 - You don't have to understand how God did everything He did, you just have to believe He did it. I don't always understand God, but I do trust Him. I make a conscience decision to trust God even when I don't understand Him.
 - When you limit the greatness of God to only what you can logically grasp, you're limiting His ability to answer your prayers. Even the simplest of prayers require a supernatural intervention from God into your life.
 - If you are asking God for something like a miracle, a good place to start would be to at least believe God still performs miracles.
 - This Jesus, who we place our faith in, is the same Jesus who told His disciples: "greater works than these will you do, because I go to the Father" John 14:12. Your job is to have faith in Him and His Word. The Word of God tells us what Jesus did; and it tells us what Jesus said we would do through Him. To do this, we need to go beyond reading the Word of God to practicing The Word of God.

KEY #2: Don't Just Read the Word of God, Apply the Word of God to Your Life.

- Apply the Word of God like you would apply medicine for healing. Apply it like you would sunscreen for protection. The Living Word of God can stir up your faith like nothing else. So, whenever possible, read it out loud. If you have a favorite Scripture verse, memorize it and speak it out over your life and circumstances. Don't just read the Word of God, speak it; let it fill the room and reverberate. Let the truth resonate and marinate within your bones.
- "So faith comes by hearing, and hearing through the word of God". Romans 10:17.
- The Bible, the Word of God, is the ultimate source of our faith. There's something extraordinary about audibly reading Scripture, then applying it to your personal situation. I pray my favorite Scriptures out loud because it stirs up my faith; and it actually changes the atmosphere around me. Sometimes I'll even insert my name into Scripture, just to personalize it more.
- The Bible is more than a book that needs to be read— it's a map, it's a tool chest, and it's a weapon for spiritual warfare. This mysterious substance called Faith and the Word of God are eternally attached at the umbilical cord. If you're having a crisis of faith, the first place to turn is to the Word of God.

- The power of God is made perfect in our weakness. The Word of God is the strength we need when we feel our faith is weak.

KEY #3: Grow to Appreciate the True Power of Faith.

- In Hebrews 11:1, faith is described as “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” That’s true, but it’s also the substance that connects the physical world we can see with the spiritual world we can’t see.
 - Faith is the understanding of how the system of Heaven works. It works by faith and it works because of faith.
 - Faith is the understanding of how the visible and invisible worlds co-exist. Faith says: “God is in control, and although I don’t understand it all, He does”. And I daily choose to put my life in His hands. When I do that, the power of faith kicks into gear.
 - Faith also works like a catalyst—a supernatural change agent—that transforms prayer from merely words to action. We may think it’s our words that direct heaven, but really it’s our faith.
 - “For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you.” Matthew 17:20.
 - The word faith should mean something completely different to you and me than it does to anyone who does not believe in Jesus.
 - ◇ To the world, faith is a way to describe a belief in something you can’t see. To us, faith is faith in Jesus. Faith is the understanding of how the system of God’s Kingdom works. It only works through faith in Jesus. So to simply say you are a person of faith is an incomplete statement. You have to know and understand the source at the other end of that faith.
 - ◇ To the world, seeing is believing. To Christians, believing is believing. That’s not to say that you and I don’t have real experiences that we take as proof that God exists and that the Bible is true. But that proof wouldn’t hold up in court. Not because it isn’t valid, but because it was spiritually discerned. The wisdom of God will always seem foolish to those who don’t know Him. It’s no different with faith. Faith in Christ, the Cross and the Resurrection, faith in the entire Bible as the infallible Word of God—all of this takes a different kind of belief. It has to be supernatural.
 - To simply say you have faith isn’t really saying anything at all. Faith in what? Faith is more than just believing the plausible—it’s believing the impossible.

- ◇ An example:
 - It doesn't take faith to believe that roughly 2000 years ago a man named Jesus from the small city of Nazareth led a peaceful rebellion that caused uproar among Jewish and Roman society and ultimately was put to death on a cross. And that his death and his rumored resurrection caused this man named Jesus to become a martyr. The details of that martyrdom became the basis for what we call Christianity today. It doesn't require faith to believe that. That's just a slice of history. That's entry level faith at best.
 - Faith requires believing the entire Bible, including the parts that are difficult to understand. That's just intermediate faith.
 - Where faith really gets tested is when you are now asked to believe that those difficult-to-understand, supernatural events of the Bible can still happen today. Oh, and by the way, you're supposed to be instigating some of that. The great commission takes mature faith to accomplish.

THE PARABLE OF THE SEED AND THE SOWER.

- In the parable of the seed and the sower, Jesus describes the Kingdom and the Word of God as a seed that a sower tosses to the ground in hopes that a harvest will come.
 - Not all seed that meets the ground will produce fruit. The problem does not lie with the seed. The soil represents the hearts of those who hear the Word of God. Not every person who hears the Truth of Jesus will genuinely accept it. There's good soil and there's bad soil.
 - ◇ Good soil means all the conditions exist for the seed to breakthrough, to grow, and to eventually bear fruit. Good soil requires this mysterious substance of faith. Faith protects the seed as it grows. Faith is not shaken in times of drought. Faith knows that the seed, the Word of God, will accomplish the very thing it was sent to accomplish, regardless of the storms that pass through or the provision withheld.
 - ◇ Building faith will require us to examine our soil. What's in it? What are we putting in it? Maybe a better question: "What aren't we putting in it?"
 - What do you believe? What do you believe about God? What do you believe about the Bible? Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God, died on a cross and was resurrected on the third day? That's great. That's enough faith to get you into heaven. Is it enough faith to pray for miracles?

- ◇ What happened to the seed that fell on bad soil?
 - The first was the seed that fell by the wayside. It represented those who heard the word, but did not fully understand it; and Satan stole it from them.
 - How is your faith affected when you don't understand what God is doing? Or what He's allowing to happen? Does your faith require you to understand God every step of the way? If that's the case, then it's going to be pretty easy for your faith to be shaken.
 - * There will be times when you don't understand what God is doing.
 - * "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it." Isaiah 55:8-11
 - * God's Word—His Logos—the written Word of God, and his Rhema—the Holy Spirit-inspired revelatory Word—both have been given with a precise plan in mind. That's what "God's ways are higher than our ways" really means. God has a plan for you regardless of your circumstances. When our faith remains tied to His Word and not our circumstances, our soil is prepared; and the limitations are removed for God to work in our life.

MAINTAINING FAITH

- Reading my Bible is like a faith maintenance plan.
- Faith needs to be exercised like a muscle. Renew your faith every day. Remind yourself of Who God is every day.
- The disciples struggled with faith. They were with Jesus every day witnessing miracle after miracle. You would think that they would have had the most faith in Israel; not the case. In fact, Jesus nicknamed them "Little Faiths." They were constantly forgetting what they just witnessed Jesus do. They watched bread and fish multiply right in front of their eyes as Jesus fed the 5000; and later that evening they feared the storm had come to drown them.

- If the disciples—who personally witnessed the miracles of Jesus—experienced their faith disappearing in the face of a storm, don't feel bad that yours does. Everyone's faith requires a maintenance plan. It's not just how wide your faith is, it's how deep your faith is.
 - Let me give you an example.
 - ◇ I would assume all Christians believe Jesus was raised from the dead. Essentially, that's what makes us a Christian—believing the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. But the Bible tells us something happened at the same time, that to some, may seem a bit far-fetched.
 - ◇ At the same time Jesus was raised from the dead the Bible also says many righteous men and women arose from their tombs and walked around Jerusalem bearing witness to what Jesus had just done in Sheol.
 - ◇ Three days earlier, when Jesus gave up His Spirit, the temple veil was torn in two and a great earthquake struck Jerusalem. As a result of that earthquake, the tombs were broken open. My point is that the Bible is full of faith-stretching portions of Scripture. Every word of the Bible is the inspired Word of God which means every verse of every chapter of every book has a divine purpose for being recorded.
- To believe in the Cross but not believe in the other supernatural elements of the Bible limits your faith. When your faith is limited, God is limited.
- The parable of the seed and the sower also tells us there were seeds that fell among the thorns and thistles. These were the cares of the world. When it comes to faith, thorns and thistles represent our cares and concerns, our thoughts, our logic; it's us trying to figure things out.
- Fear versus faith.
 - Fear of not being in control. Fear that we might be wrong about what God can and can't do. Fear that He won't act on our behalf.
 - Fear and Faith are the same thing. They're both the belief that something that hasn't happened will happen. Faith is the belief that something good that hasn't happened will happen. Fear is the belief that something bad that hasn't happened will happen.
 - The Word of God restores our faith by replacing the fear and the cares of this world with the timeless truth and promises of God.

CONCLUSION

We don't truly appreciate faith until it is tested. Many of you are going through a crisis in your life and you're asking God, "Why? Why haven't you changed my husband? Why haven't you removed my cancer?" You want to know why God doesn't just step in and remove the pain, fear and uncertainty.

None of this happened because you just didn't have enough faith to prevent it. That's not it at all. It happened because there's evil in the world that wants to cause you pain. It wants to steal, kill and destroy. John 10:10. And it also wants to attack the very thing in you that can stop it: Faith.

What does it take to have the kind of faith that can change the world? It looks like Abraham, the son of an idol maker, who's told to just start walking; and he does. It's the most fearful man in all of Israel, Saul, who climbs out of his favorite hiding place to lead his people to victory. It's the prostitute; it's the deceiver; it's the least likely; it's the spotted and speckled. It's the weak who are made strong. God also has another name for people like this: He calls them Heroes of Faith.

Faith is more than a belief in something you can't prove. Faith is the understanding of how the system of Heaven works. It's the power of the Creator that He chooses to place inside imperfect vessels.

You may think you're not qualified to pray for somebody and watch them healed. But I'm here to tell you this: you're overqualified. That's what I see when I look at Hebrews 11 which is often called God's Faith Hall of Fame. I see each of you there. Your faith may be weak. Great! God's power is made perfect in your weakness. Why? Because He receives glory when you do what you can only do through faith in Him. That's why He created you.