

Foundations Lesson #13

Faith in God, Part 1

The author of the book of Hebrews writes, “Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment” (Hebrews 6:1-2). Two of these six foundational doctrines have already been covered in lessons 4, 5, and 12. The purpose of this lesson and of the three following lessons is to cover the remaining four of these foundational doctrines.

When we study faith in God, it's appropriate to start with what the Bible says about faith.

Heb. 11:1-2 Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for.

The whole rest of Hebrews 11 describes people who were sure of what they hoped for and certain of what they did not see. And because they had such a strong inner conviction, they not only changed the course of history, they were commended and memorialized as people who pleased God. I want to read some other Scriptures that help us understand faith in God.

Ro. 4:18-21 Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead – since he was about a hundred years old – and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.

Here, Abraham's faith is identified as his ***being fully persuaded*** that God would do exactly what he said. His faith was so strong that he didn't even waver through unbelief. That's quite remarkable, especially considering the circumstances. You can read what happened in Genesis chapter 15. We don't know exactly how old Abraham was when this incident took place, but three chapters earlier he was 75, and in the next chapter he's right around 85, so we know he was an old man. Either way, he was past the age of being able to father children. We also know that his name was still Abram – it was later changed to Abraham.

God comes to him in a vision. The LORD identifies himself as Abram's shield, his very great reward. Abram raises the concern that since the LORD has not given him any children, a hired man will inherit all of his wealth. God replies by saying that a son coming from Abram's own body would be his heir. Then God takes Abram outside, and he tells him to look up at the heavens and count the stars, if he could even manage to do that. We have no details here, but I imagine a beautiful Palestinian nighttime sky full of thousands of stars. Again we don't know if Abram actually tried counting them or not, but I picture that once Abram had sufficiently appreciated the ***enormity*** of such a task, once he was truly ***overwhelmed*** by the huge number of stars up there, God speaks five words to him. He says, “So shall your offspring be.” The next verse is one of the most incredible verses in all of the Old Testament. It simply says, “Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.” That blows my mind. Abram was told that something would happen which was humanly impossible, and yet he was fully persuaded, he was completely convinced that the events were going to take place just as he'd been told. That's absolutely astonishing to me.

I believe two factors contributed to Abraham's embracing God's message so wholeheartedly. First, I believe Abraham understood God to be a person of integrity. We've all known people who are unreliable. They say things haphazardly, they're not committed to keeping their word, they lie, so we know that what they say can't be trusted; we have no confidence in their words. I believe Abraham's

experience with God had been the exact opposite. I suspect that Abraham had a firm conviction that God did and would keep his word 100% of the time. Scripture backs this up.

Heb. 11:11 By faith Abraham, even though he was past age – and Sarah herself was barren – was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise.

Because Abraham **knew** and **trusted** the One speaking, he was able to believe what that One told him. What's so mind-boggling about that is that Abraham didn't even have the benefit of Scripture to know God's character. Today, we know unmistakably that God is faithful. Why? Because First Corinthians 10:13 clearly tells us that God is faithful. A whole host of other Scriptures tell us the same thing. But Abraham didn't have the benefit of being able to read the Bible to discover God's character. He had to find that out experientially. I want to digress here for just a moment to point out that we New Testament believers **should** have a faith that's much deeper and stronger than that of Abraham. Why? Because to whom much is given, much is required. We've been given far greater, more thorough, and clearer revelation into the nature of God than Abraham had because we have the Bible, which he didn't have. So our faith **should** be greater than his was. I pray that we live up to what we've received.

The second factor that I believe contributed to Abraham's great faith was that he understood the power of God. God can do anything. We know that because Luke 1:37 says, "For nothing is impossible with God," and in Matthew 19:26 Jesus himself says, "...with God all things are possible." But Abraham, without the benefit of having the written word of God, somehow **believed** that there was no problem for God to accomplish what he had told Abraham would take place. Again, this is substantiated by the Scripture. In the passage we read earlier, it says that Abraham "was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised."

So if you or I have understood from experience that someone's word is fully reliable, and we're completely convinced that they have the power to do what they claim, then we, like Abraham, would naturally have the firm confidence that what they've said will indeed take place. That's what faith in God is all about. Abraham's faith was unshakably anchored in the integrity, the power, the character, and the nature of God. The result was a very strong faith in God. What Abraham had, you can have, and so can I. In fact, we **need** to have this faith. If we want to please God, it's not optional.

Have you noticed something about this faith in God? It's highly relational. I've heard some people teach so much on faith that they miss the fact that this doctrine is identified as faith **in God**. That means it's faith in a **person**. In order to have this faith, the primary thing we need to understand, both intellectually and experientially, is **who God is**. The more and the better we know God, the more likely we'll have the strength of faith that Abraham had. So if you want to be a man or a woman of great faith, I'd encourage you to be faithful in prayer, because talking to God and communing with God will strengthen your relationship to him. If you want to be a man or a woman of great faith, I'd encourage you to be reading your Bible faithfully, because absorbing God's truth into your heart will give you more and more of a clear picture of who God really is.

Before going on to the next Scripture, I want to touch on one other area of this faith in God. It cannot be worked up. In other words, strivings of the flesh will not get us greater faith in God. I've heard one teacher say that faith in God is essentially our letting God convince us. That's a process which involves both information and experience, but ultimately, our yieldedness to him is what causes faith in God to reside within us. Again, the more time we spend in his presence and in his word, and the more yielded we are to **The Almighty**, the greater and stronger our faith in God will be.

2Ti. 1:12 That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.

Paul, who authored the book of II Timothy, writes here that he was convinced. So we see that our faith in God is a matter of being so fully persuaded, so completely convinced of the truth of who God is and what he has said, that we are sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. I want to say that again. Our faith in God is a matter of being so fully persuaded, so completely convinced of the truth of who God is and what he has said, that we are sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for, and you can be, too.

I'd like to give you a story which illustrates this truth. Hudson Taylor was the founder of an organization called the China Inland Mission. One Tuesday he was informed that the mission needed \$12,000 by noon on Friday in order to continue operating. This happened in the late 1800s, when \$1,000 was worth roughly one year's wages. So Hudson Taylor gathered the people at the mission together to pray. His prayer went something like this: "O God, we are grateful that you have always supplied the needs of this mission. You have never failed us, and we know that you will not fail us this time either. But because the secretaries have been so overworked recently, we ask that you provide us with the needed \$12,000 by noon on Friday in twelve gifts of \$1,000 each. Thank-you, God." By noon on Friday, twelve gifts of \$1,000 each had come in, and the secretaries only had to send out a dozen thank-you letters. How could anyone pray like that? Hudson Taylor was deeply convinced of the truth that God is faithful. Combined with that, he'd had many, rich experiences where God had faithfully provided for the work of the China Inland Mission. The truth of Scripture combined with his many experiences with ***The Almighty*** led him to be so fully persuaded, so completely convinced that God was going to provide for the Mission that he was sure of what he hoped for and certain of what he did not see.

People would often say to Hudson Taylor, "Hudson, you have great faith," to which he would always reply, "No, I simply trust in God's great faithfulness." I love his answer for two reasons. First, it shows us that Hudson Taylor was a man of great humility. Humble people don't want attention to be drawn to themselves. They have a great desire to see God get all the credit. I believe that it's quite true that Hudson Taylor was a man of great faith, but he desired the attention to be focused not on himself, but upon the incredible faithfulness of the God he loved so deeply. The second reason I so appreciate Hudson Taylor's answer is that it gives us a simple but workable definition of faith in God: trust in God's great faithfulness. As the old saying goes, "*God said it. I believe it. That settles it.*"

Next, from Roman Numeral number two on our outline, I want us to understand what faith in God is not.

Jas. 2:19

You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder.

Faith in God is not the mere belief that God exists. Even demons believe that, but they'll be in torment in the lake of fire for ever and ever. Faith in God is not a matter of intellectually just agreeing with certain truths. It's possible for someone to believe the virgin birth, the miracles of Jesus, his death on the cross, his rising on the third day, his ascending into heaven, the authority of the word of God and all the doctrines of the Bible, but still not to be saved. Agreeing with facts does not save us. Making those facts alive by joyfully choosing to submit ourselves to the facts God has revealed in his word does. If a man merely reads the word of God, or even memorizes it, that doesn't mean it's taken up residence in his heart. It's only in his mind. But if a man acts out the message of God in self-sacrificial service to others, his application of that truth causes the message to reside in not just his mind but also in his heart.

Faith in God is not wishful thinking. Most people, to one degree or another, long for good things to happen. But just because we long for good things to happen doesn't mean that they will. God is in charge of the universe, not our pleasant desires. Our faith rests in a person. When I was growing up, one unsaved individual would often tell me, "Everything will work out fine. You just wait and see." That always annoyed me. I knew they had no foundation for the claim they were making.

Neither is faith in God a matter of denying reality. As we've read in Romans 4:19, Abraham ***faced***, not denied, the fact that his body was as good as dead. When I was in Bible school, I had a

roommate who was sick. When he told me that he was healed, I rejoiced and asked him to help me move some stuff. He told me he couldn't. I asked why. He said he was sick. So I asked him, "Which is it, are you healed or are you sick?" He wanted it both ways. Since he refused to acknowledge the contradiction of being sick and healthy at the same time, I finally gave up. Apparently, my roommate had been taught that he should confess with his mouth that he was healed. Although I didn't sense that he was at all persuaded or convinced in his heart that God would heal him – and let's remember that man looks at the outward appearance but God looks at the heart – he claimed healing with his mouth, denying reality, because of the teaching he'd received. I believe it would've been much better for him just to have been honest. If he'd said, "I'm sick right now but I'm asking God to heal me," I wouldn't have had a problem with that at all. Nobody in the Bible ever testified to being healed until after their body was made healthy. Similarly, if you or I would've had the opportunity to interview Abraham after God had made his promise to him, Abraham might have said, with a twinkle in his eye, "Yup, my body is past the age of fathering children. But God has given me a promise that my physical offspring will be as numerous as the stars in the sky. I know he's going to do that. How he does it is up to him. I just know that he's faithful, and that he has the power to do anything. He's gonna do what he said. You'll see."

It's also important for us not to allow our emotions to dictate what we believe. Our faith must be based on fact, not feelings. I once had a middle-aged man say to me, "God's never done nothing for me." Of course, I knew that wasn't true because he was breathing, he was walking, and he was talking, all of which we can only do because of God's goodness. But he said what he said because right then he was very discouraged. Unfortunately, he allowed his emotions to dictate what his faith was rather than the other way around. That's a mistake. When we're tempted to be discouraged, we should remind ourselves that God is in control of every detail of the universe, and that he does only good things. Just because our situation isn't pleasant or it's not what we'd hoped for doesn't mean that it isn't good for us. So let's not allow our feelings to persuade us who God is or what he will do. Our emotions can run wild like a roller coaster, but our faith should keep us steady.

Also, faith in God is not a matter of copying a specific action; it's not a matter of mimicking what somebody else has done. One minister in the South tells the story of how he was sick with a nasty stomach bug. Then he remembered how Kenneth Hagin had once had the same kind of sickness and he believed God to heal him, so he ate a bowl of chili – which is the worst thing you can do with that kind of a stomach bug – and he was just fine. So the minister figured that since God is no respecter of persons, if it worked for Kenneth Hagin, it would work for him as well. He ate his bowl of chili and got so sick that he thought he was going to die. In great anguish of soul he cried out to God, "God, you healed Kenneth Hagin when he ate a bowl of chili. Why didn't you heal me? I've never been this sick!" God spoke to him and said, "That's what you get for eating a bowl of chili on Kenneth Hagin's faith." Faith in God is not copying what someone else did, it's having an inner conviction.

Another pitfall that has to be avoided is that of presuming, because faith in God is not a matter of presumption.

Ps. 135:6 The LORD does whatever pleases him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths

Ps. 115:3 Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him.

God can do absolutely anything. There are some things he'll never do – like sin – not because he lacks the capability to do those things but because they would be so contrary to his nature that he has zero desire to do them. As the verses we just read declare, God does whatever pleases him. That has **a lot** of variety to it. When we believe that we know what he'll be doing, even though he hasn't told us what he'll be doing, we get into presumption rather than faith in God. Or when we operate purely on the basis of principles from the Bible, which have exceptions, we can also get into presumption rather than faith in God.

Mt. 4:5-7

Then the devil took him [Jesus] to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'"

Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

Chapter 4 of Matthew's gospel records three temptations of Jesus by the devil, of which the one we just read is the second. Here the devil even quoted Scripture in a twisted manner to entice the Son of God to make a show of himself. The psalm Satan quoted, Psalm 91, contains many wonderful promises of protection from ***The Almighty***. So if we find ourselves in trouble we can call upon the Lord, relying on those promises to protect us. But that doesn't give us license to throw ourselves into trouble and then expect God's saving help. That would be presumption, not faith in God. Jesus resisted Satan's temptation by quoting Scripture properly. The issue was that doing what the devil had suggested would be putting God to the test, which Deuteronomy 6:16 clearly says that we shouldn't be doing.

Many years ago in Korea, several young people wanted to attend some powerful meetings on Samgak Mountain, but when they got close to their destination, they had to cross a river. Because it had rained heavily, the river current was stronger than usual. When they saw no way of crossing the river, they became discouraged. But three girls decided that since Peter walked on the water, they could walk on water, too. So they knelt down in prayer, believing that they could walk on water as Peter did. When they tried, they were immediately swept away by the current and, tragically, three days later their dead bodies were found in the ocean.

These three girls certainly had not lacked courage. They were also careful to pray before they proceeded. But they failed to realize that Peter walked on water because Jesus spoke a clear word to him, telling him to come, not because of a mere principle he believed in. Peter was able to walk on water because the Lord himself had invited him to do so, saying, "Come." If the Lord had spoken similarly to these girls, the outcome would have been very different. We cannot defy the natural elements and expect God to rescue us on a principle alone. That is presumption and not faith in God.

Foundations Lesson #13

Faith in God, Part 2

Roman Numeral number three on our outline deals with the importance of having faith in God. Certainly, a person's eternal destiny is determined by their faith in God.

Eph. 2:8-9

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.

Rev. 21:8

But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.

Jn. 3:16

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Jn. 3:36

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will

not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.

One author has said this:

QUOTE

We are only reconciled or restored to right standing through the work of Christ, as by faith we identify ourselves with Him. This faith is based on a thorough turning from self-reliance and dead works to a complete trust in the work of another. We only have faith toward God to accept Christ's work for us, to the extent that we have repented of dead works. Instead of working to merit righteousness, we agree with God that this is impossible. Then we accept His alternative which is to credit us with the righteousness of Christ.

Besides someone's eternal destiny being determined by their faith in God, we see that their true identity in this life is also determined by their faith in God.

2Co. 6:15 What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?

Of course, that's a rhetorical question, with the obvious answer being that they have nothing in common. The Bible also instructs us, several times, that we need to live our lives by faith. That's simple to understand. If we believe that God is the Judge of all things, and if we believe that we'll have to stand before him and give an account to him of everything we've ever done while we were in the body, then we will strive, with every decision, with every attitude, with every thought, with every word, to please him. That's called living by faith.

Ro. 1:17 For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

Heb. 10:38-39 But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him." But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.

2Co. 5:7 We live by faith, not by sight.

Gal. 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Our faith also makes it possible for us to please God.

Heb. 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

Ro. 14:23 But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.

God desires to be believed. He knows that he's true in everything he does and says. So when we humans choose not to believe him, he is saddened, because we've not believed what is true and because of our choice, we'll lose out on whatever we would've had if we'd believed him. One of our Bible school professors told us a story to help us understand this truth. In the mornings he would shave his face and his daughter, who was two or three at the time, would enjoy sitting on the sink watching daddy shave. But she was fascinated by the hot water running out of the faucet, and she would often want to touch it. He would have to tell her, "No honey. Don't touch. Very hot." After several weeks of this, he one day decided he would help her learn. He saw the fascination in her

eyes as she longingly looked at the very hot water. He said nothing. She moved her hand closer. He just continued shaving. Finally, she couldn't stand it any longer and put her hand under the stream of water. Sure enough, she immediately pulled her hand back saying, "Ouch. Daddy, hot!" He told us that there was a part of him that felt like saying, "No kidding. What have I been trying to tell you for the last three weeks!" but he didn't. He held her and said, "Oooh. Did that hurt? Daddy kiss it and make it better."

We, like our professor's daughter, would do best just to believe God. He wants to be believed, just like human parents want to be believed. The difference between us and him is that he's right all the time. But God in his goodness knows how to teach us, even if we don't believe like we should. Going that route isn't as easy or as pleasant, but God knows how to make it effective. Our professor told us that his daughter never again had the inclination to put her hand under the hot water.

Next we see on our outline that faith in God is powerful to see prayer answered, the miraculous released, and the things of God opened up. Over and over again, Scripture shows us that **God responds to our faith**. Let's look at some of those verses.

Mk. 11:22-24 "Have faith in God," Jesus answered. "I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it and it will be yours.

We see clearly in these verses that there's a part that belongs to God and there's a part that belongs to us. Our part is to believe that we've received what we're asking for; faith pleases God. God's part is to do for us what we can't do for ourselves. Let's remember, though, that even though God loves to give good gifts to his children, he will deny our request, if that's what's best for us.

Ac. 14:9-10 He [the crippled man] listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed and called out, "Stand up on your feet!" At that, the man jumped up and began to walk.

Mt. 9:22 Jesus turned and saw her. "Take heart, daughter," he said, "your faith has healed you." And the woman was healed from that moment.

Mt. 9:29-30a Then he [Jesus] touched their eyes and said, "According to your faith will it be done to you"; and their sight was restored.

This Scripture reminds me of the verse where Jesus said to the centurion, "Go! It will be done just as you believed it would." That's Matthew 8:13.

Lk. 17:5-6 The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" He replied, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you.

Jn. 14:12-14 [Jesus speaking] I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

So we see in all of these passages that God is pleased with faith and that he responds to faith. We can also see from Scripture that God does **not** respond to doubt, especially when we ask him for things.

Jas. 1:6-8 But when he [the man who lacks wisdom] asks, he must believe and not doubt,

because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

The Bible also lets us know that our faith in God is a great defensive weapon.

Eph. 6:16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

1Pt. 1:5 ...who by faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

The devil doesn't play fair and he doesn't play by the rules. If you've ever had the thought come into your head that you aren't **really** saved, even though you've committed your life to Jesus as your Lord and Savior, the devil's just trying to get you to doubt, because he knows how powerful faith is in the Kingdom of God. Fortunately, the shield of faith has the power to extinguish all the flaming arrows – or, in this case, suggestions – of the evil one. It is by faith that we are shielded by God's power.

Lastly, there are consequences to not having faith in God.

Lk. 1:19-20 The angel answered, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you [that is, Zechariah] and to tell you this good news. And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their proper time."

Zechariah was unable to speak for about a year because he didn't believe the message of God as the angel Gabriel had delivered it to him.

Jde. 5 Though you already know all this, I want to remind you that the Lord delivered his people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe.

Mt. 13:58 And he [Jesus] did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith.

Heb. 3:12-13 See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

There are consequences for not having faith in God, but we can avoid them. Let's believe wholeheartedly!

Turning over to the back of our outline, Roman Numeral number four addresses the subject of growing into greater faith in God. The Lord has not designed our faith to remain stagnant. It's supposed to be growing, expanding, reaching new levels.

2Co. 10:15b Our hope is that, as your faith continues to grow, our area of activity among you will greatly expand,

2Th. 1:3 We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing.

Just as we humans have been created to grow in wisdom as we get older, so we believers have been created to grow in faith as we continue to walk with God. Fortunately, the Bible gives us some indication of how this works and what we can do to help, rather than hinder, the process of the healthy growth of our faith in God.

Ro. 10:17 Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

Faith can not only be born in our hearts, it can also continue to grow in our hearts as we hear the message of God. Having said that, I want to remind us that just hearing the message of God doesn't guarantee that our faith will grow. Jesus, at the end of the sermon on the mount, clearly instructed us that when we hear his words we have to put them into practice if we're to receive any benefit. But if we **accept** the message of God, allowing the truth of that message to shape and mold our lives, then it has the power to cause our faith to expand, to enlarge, to grow. That's healthy; it's the way God has intended it to function.

Another important manner in which our faith can grow has to do with our remembering the works of God in the past. When I'd been saved for about three months, I met with some friends who had learned of my new faith in Christ. They asked me questions, challenged me, and overall, I felt the conversation had not gone well at all. When I got home, being in great turmoil of soul, I knelt at the side of my bed and prayed. Being a new believer and therefore knowing so little about Christianity, I honestly wasn't sure if I'd pleased God, completely blown it, or anything in between. At first, I didn't even know what to say to **The Almighty**, but after talking with him for a minute or two, I finally said, "Lord, if I did anything right, would you please just give me peace?" Instantly, the peace of God absolutely flooded my soul. There was a night-and-day difference in my heart within a split second. I'll never forget that moment as long as I live. It remains to this day a dramatic testimony of the power and the kindness of God to me.

As wonderful and amazing as that moment on that December night over 40 years ago was, I believe God intended for that act to have an impact on me not just for right then, but also for the rest of my life. As we recall the acts of God's care, love, and faithfulness in our lives, our recollection of what God did for us in the past is supposed to help us have faith for the circumstances we're facing today. God does not change. He's the same yesterday, today and forever. What he does in our lives changes, because as we grow up spiritually our needs change. But even though what God does may change, who he is never changes. When God does things for us that reveal his character to us, it's **our** job to remember those testimonies of his love and power.

Dt. 7:18-19 But do not be afraid of them; remember well what the LORD your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt. You saw with your own eyes the great trials, the miraculous signs and wonders, the mighty hand and outstretched arm, with which the LORD your God brought you out. The LORD your God will do the same to all the peoples you now fear.

1Chr. 16:12-13 Remember the wonders he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced, O descendants of Israel his servant, O sons of Jacob, his chosen ones.

Ps. 77:11 I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago.

Ps. 143:5 I remember the days of long ago; I meditate on all your works and consider what your hands have done.

So let's be careful to remember the acts of God in the past. That should strengthen our faith for the present, and it should also help us become the thankful people we are called to be. We see from other passages of Scripture that this is not just a good idea, but that **God expects it**.

Mt. 16:8-10 Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked, "You of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread? Do you still not understand? Don't you remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? Or the seven

loaves for the four thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered?

Jdg. 8:33-34 No sooner had Gideon died than the Israelites again prostituted themselves to the Baals. They set up Baal-Berith as their god and did not remember the LORD their God, who had rescued them from the hands of all their enemies on every side.

Ps. 78:40-43 How often they rebelled against him in the desert and grieved him in the wasteland! Again and again they put God to the test; they vexed the Holy One of Israel. They did not remember his power – the day he redeemed them from the oppressor, the day he displayed his miraculous signs in Egypt, his wonders in the region of Zoan.

Ps. 106:7 When our fathers were in Egypt, they gave no thought to your miracles; they did not remember your many kindnesses, and they rebelled by the sea, the Red Sea.

There are great consequences for our not remembering the wonderful acts of the Lord as we should. Then also, our growing into greater faith in God is accommodated by our prayer life, our seeking God, our being intimate with him. We read in Exodus 34 that after Moses had been in the presence of God, his face would be radiant, so he'd put a veil over his face. Then, when he returned to the presence of God, he'd take the veil off. Similarly, when we have genuine, intimate encounters with the Lord, some of the atmosphere of heaven rubs off on us. You've probably never had to put a veil over your face like Moses did, but if you've earnestly sought God's face, you've been changed whether your countenance reflected it or not. Perhaps the changes have been so minor that you never noticed, but God does change us, often incrementally, in his presence. As Second Corinthians 3:18 tells us,

2Co. 3:18 And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

We also see the effects of prayer and intimacy with God in the Garden of Gethsemane. On the night he was betrayed, Jesus spent much time with the Father in prayer. We know the first block of time he prayed was an hour long. Then, we don't know the duration of the next two blocks of time he spent in prayer with the Father. Perhaps, they were also an hour each. The disciples, for the same amount of time, were resting and sleeping. When the time came to act decisively, they all deserted him and fled, acting in fear rather than in faith. But Jesus went on to provide us with the most powerful ministry ever to take place on planet earth – the cross. I believe there's a degree to which we can say that the victory of Calvary was won in the Garden of Gethsemane. Our intimacy with God powerfully helps us to become the people of faith we're called to be.

Foundations Lesson #13

Faith in God, Part 3

Roman Numeral number five on our outline deals with evidences of having faith in God. Faith in God is something intangible; it's something invisible. You can't taste it, smell it, feel it, see it, or hear it. You can't measure it with a micrometer or weigh it on a bathroom scale. We can't use those methods to see how small or great someone's faith in God is, but genuine faith will be evidenced by what that person does. Which means for us who have faith in God, that people should be able to see

it by the way we live.

Jas. 2:14-26

¹⁴What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? ¹⁵Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? ¹⁷In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

¹⁸But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds."

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.

¹⁹You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder.

²⁰You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?

²¹Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? ²²You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. ²³And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend.

²⁴You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.

²⁵In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? ²⁶As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

When James says that it's dead, we can picture that: six feet under pushing up daisies. James identifies faith without deeds as being "no good" (in verse 14), "unable to save us" (also in verse 14), "dead" (in verses 17 and 26), and "useless" (in verse 20). James' point is that if anyone has genuine faith, it **will be** evidenced by the way they live, by their actions. Like the Kentucky preacher once said, "The love of God is like grease on a brown paper bag. If ya got it, it shows!" In the same way, faith in God is like grease on a brown paper bag. If you've got it, it shows. Galatians 5:6 puts it this way,

Gal. 5:6

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

This verse makes it clear that our actions, our deeds, are simply an **expression** of our faith. They **reveal** the faith inside of us that can't be measured or quantified. With that in mind, I want to direct your attention to the 11th chapter of the book of Hebrews, which is sometimes referred to as the Bible's "Hall of Faith." I won't read it now, but I do want to encourage you to read this chapter carefully some time soon. In it, many godly people are mentioned. The format chosen by the author is that he writes, for most of them, "by faith..." then he gives their name, and then he describes what they did. We know that they were men and women of faith **because of what they did**.

I also invite you to notice that what each of them accomplished was unique – no two are identical. The Creator of the universe is **not** a one-size-fits-all God. With him everything is custom made. If you live your life by faith in joyful and passionate submission to **The Almighty**, your life will not look the same as that of anyone else who has the same heart. It's a great idea to be inspired by the things others have done by faith, but it's not good for us to copy what they did. God's plan for each life is unique. Each of us has to follow God and hear from God about what **he** would want us to do.

On our outline, some of the people in this chapter are listed with their deeds that were inspired by their faith in God. Abel gave offerings that God spoke well of. Genesis 5 tells us that Enoch walked with God. One author attributes the following words to Enoch, and I quote:

QUOTE

"The more I sought Him, the more He became my joy. Then the time I spent with Him became more desirable than anything in this world. Being with Him was on my mind night and day. He became my life. All that I desired was to be with Him."

[from The Path by Rick Joyner]

I have to admit that I've often been challenged by those words. Anyone who hungers and thirsts after God with that kind of passion is sure to find him and is sure to please him.

Our outline lists more people mentioned in Hebrews 11 along with a brief description of what each of them did by faith, but I'd like to move on to talk about two people who were identified by Jesus Christ himself as people of **great faith**. Interestingly enough, neither of them were Israelites. The first of these two, a Roman centurion, is written about in Matthew's gospel, chapter 8 beginning in verse 5. It says,

Mt. 8:5-13

⁵When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help.

⁶"Lord," he said, "my servant lies at home paralyzed and in terrible suffering."

⁷Jesus said to him, "I will go and heal him."

⁸The centurion replied, "Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. ⁹For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

¹⁰When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, "I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. ¹¹I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. ¹²But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

¹³Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go! It will be done just as you believed it would." And his servant was healed at that very hour.

Earlier in this lesson when we examined Abraham's faith, we tried to discover what it was that caused him to be so fully persuaded, so completely convinced. I'd like to do that with the centurion from this story as well. Being a military man, I imagine he understood authority and submission far better than most people do. In the military, obedience to orders is absolutely essential, and the consequences for disobedience are severe. What makes the centurion's faith so extraordinary is that he was able to take what he knew about authority and submission and correctly apply those truths to the unseen realm. When the centurion said to Jesus, "For **I myself** am a man under authority," he somehow seemed to recognize that Jesus was under the authority of the Father, and that he also had authority to command things in the unseen realm. Understanding that, it was a simple matter for him to see that – because of the nature of the unseen, supernatural realm – it wouldn't be necessary for Jesus to be physically present in order for the healing to take place.

Some of these truths are a little more difficult for people who don't live in a monarchy to comprehend. We need to understand that when God set out to establish his government in the world, he did not establish the Democracy of God; he did not even establish the Republic of God; he established the Kingdom of God. In a kingdom, **all** authority flows from the top down, one hundred percent of it! In a kingdom, the "checks and balances" that are so prevalent in a democracy simply do not exist. Jesus is the King of Kings. Unless we see, as the centurion did, God's absolute authority in the unseen realm, we'll never bow before him rightly as the great King he actually is. Let's remember well the words of Scripture: "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:28-29). In my country, citizens are generally horrible at understanding authority and submission, and it's getting worse. May God help all of us to understand the authority of the Kingdom well.

The other person that Jesus said had **great faith** was a Greek woman born in Syrian Phoenicia. Her story is recorded by both Matthew and Mark. I'm reading from Matthew 15, starting in verse 21. It says,

Mt. 15:21-28

²¹Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. ²²A

Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession."

²³Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us."

²⁴He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."

²⁵The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said.

²⁶He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs."

²⁷"Yes, Lord," she said, "but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."

²⁸Then Jesus answered, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

It seems to me that the woman in this story had every reason to be discouraged or upset. At first, Jesus didn't even answer her. Then his followers encouraged him to send her away. After that, Jesus identifies his mission as not even including people of her nationality. When she persists despite all those obstacles, Jesus compares her to a dog. What gave her the tenacity to continue asking? Certainly, she cared greatly for her demonized daughter. But, more than anything, she displayed the quality of being **unoffendable**. She didn't argue. She didn't get upset. She didn't say, "Who are you calling a dog? Well, I **never!**" storming off, accusing that foreigner Jesus of being rude and insensitive to the first person she met. She didn't do any of those things. If she had, I'm certain she wouldn't have received the blessing her daughter so desperately needed.

May God help us to be unoffendable people. I think that's far more important than we realize. Scripture tells us that we, the followers of Jesus Christ, are to deny ourselves, take up our cross daily and follow him. A cross is not a burden to bear, it's a place to die. We're clearly called to live our lives being **dead** to self. Dead people don't get offended. I've never seen a corpse complain about how someone dressed them in the casket. One preacher quipped that it seems glorious to be called to be a servant like Jesus was until somebody treats us like one, but if we're truly dead to self, being treated like a lowly servant won't even bother us – not in the least. Scripture says that our lives should be living sacrifices unto God. It's possible to be so dead to self that we're actually unoffendable. That's what God has called us to, and that's what the woman in our story modeled for us.

There are quite a few other evidences of having a genuine faith in God.

Gal. 3:14 He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit

Promises are received by faith. Patience is also needed, but promises are received by faith.

Mt. 6:30-31 [Jesus speaking] If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'

If we have faith in God, we won't be worrying about things. After all, worry is simply faith in bad things happening rather than faith in God. The good news is that if you're a worry wart, you have faith. You need to learn to channel that faith in the right direction, but you have faith. As you re-direct your faith from having faith in bad things happening to having faith in God, you can please **The Almighty** greatly and deeply.

Mt. 8:26 He [Jesus] replied, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm.

If the disciples would have had more faith in God, they wouldn't have been so afraid. Then, Galatians 5:6, a verse we've already read, says this:

Gal. 5:6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

In closing this lesson, I'd like to read the last four Scriptures on our outline:

- I John 5:4 – *This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.* **You** are destined to be a world changer, but if you're going to be that, you have to be a person of strong faith in God. *This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.*

- Mark 9:23 – [Jesus speaking] *“Everything is possible for him who believes.”* Don't ever look at a circumstance with wishful thinking and say, “Well, that's impossible.” Why? Because everything is possible for him who believes.

- II Chronicles 20:20 – *“Have faith in the LORD your God and you will be upheld.”* I'm declaring to you today, just as Jehoshaphat did of old, have faith in the LORD your God and you will be upheld.

- Isaiah 7:9 – *If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.* So let's **believe** God. Let's be so fully persuaded, so completely convinced of the truth of who God is and what he has said, that we are sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

Amen. God bless you all.