

Faith

It's what pleases God

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Contents

Chapter 1 Faith's First Priority

Chapter 2 Faith's Fundamentals

Chapter 3 Faith's Fountain

Chapter 4 Faith's Fullness

Chapter 5 Faith's Fitness

Chapter 6 Faith's Friends

Chapter 7 Faith's Foes

Chapter 8 Faith's Finality

Faith's First Priority

Jesus had a clear connection to God His Father in heaven. He taught us to pray in such a way that we too could enjoy a clear connection. Our faith connects us to God and His provision, protection and purpose in life.

All God's promises are available to us in Christ. We must be in proper relationship with God through Christ who mediates or stands in the gap between God and us. Our faith in Christ pleases God and gets His attention. Without faith it is impossible to please Him. No amount of religious zeal and activity will access God's grace. Only faith! Only the things that spring from a vital relationship with Christ amount to anything anyway, so why bother trying to impress God with your own spurts of spirituality. Relax, take a breath and listen to what God says through His word. That's where faith comes from. It comes by hearing what God has to say.

So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Romans 10:17

Faith doesn't come by praying for it, working harder, being more determined or even fasting...simply through hearing the Word on a continuous basis. Some may say: "I have heard that before." But having heard something once is no guarantee that you have got it deep down in your spirit where it really counts. True faith freedom comes and we hear the voice of God in our spirits. Yes, our minds have a part to play, but our thinking must be renewed so as to not hinder what God is trying to say.

He loves His children and wants to bless us. We receive His blessings; as we believe His promises, declare them to be so in our lives, and wait expectantly in faith for the delivery. Faith is a convinced trust that what God has promised He will do. Only that which we understand and assimilate into our thinking and speaking is going to work for us.

Faith is a Priority

We receive the life of God through faith. **Romans 1:17**

We enjoy salvation by grace through faith. **Ephes 2:8-10**

We receive the Holy Spirit by faith. **Galatians 3:2**

We receive healing through faith. **James 5:14**

We understand spiritual truth by faith. **Hebrews 11:3**

We please God by exercising faith. **Hebrews 11:6**

God rewards us when we believe in Him and seek Him diligently. It really is as simple as that. He has already moved on our behalf in sending Jesus to purchase our total freedom. So faith is like getting into a position to receive what God has already set in motion. When we position ourselves in humble submission to His word, then God can 'throw the ball.' He is honor bound to watch over His word to perform it in our lives. It is His word that drives any spiritual transaction. He speaks the word, we hear it, and speak it back to Him with expectation. That's faith in action. Our expectation is His invitation to deliver on what He has already promised.

When we **receive** His word, we stretch to **become** that which God has promised. Faith is therefore also an agent of growth and change. The word we receive into our hearts has the capacity to bringing about change, because God and His word are one.

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:

John 1:12

Faith's Fundamentals

The 'God Kind' of Faith

Faith may be defined as the ingredient of the heart that trusts in God through His Word. With faith we can receive God's provision, protection and purpose.

Trust is the resting of the mind on the integrity, veracity, justice, friendship, and sound principles of another person.

Faith is therefore a wholehearted trust in God's integrity, specifically His word. When we have faith, we believe that God will do what He said He will do. We lean towards what God says, even if it contradicts our own understanding at that point.

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
And lean not on your own understanding;*

Proverbs 3:5

Put another way, faith means to be fully convinced that God will do what He has promised. Abraham received a promise from God that in the natural scheme of things was impossible. He and Sarah were to have a baby in their old age. We're talking about 75 years plus! They first took matters into their own hands, and, in the custom of the day, a child was born to the servant Hagar through Abraham. This child was Ishmael, but not the son of promise. He was the son of their own human effort. God still wanted to provide them with their own supernatural son, and so in the years that followed Abraham (and Sarah) needed to be fully convinced. They certainly were not fully convinced to start with, but in time faith arose.

Perhaps in your own life you have heard something from God through His word, but nevertheless have still entertained some doubt. You want to believe, but you seem to waver. Take time to meditate on what you have heard. Go back over that territory, read, listen and consider God's word again and again on the matter. Then be fully convinced, but don't take 25 years over the issue like Abraham.

He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform.

Romans 4:20-21

In this passage Abraham is seen to be in faith, after he had been fully convinced. However before he became fully convinced, he had his moments of wavering! (See Genesis 15-21) That was not God's best, so let's learn from Abraham and shoot for the best!

Faith is the assurance and conviction we have in our hearts of things we hope for and cannot yet see with the natural eye. A person in faith believes in their heart that what they are hoping for, they will actually get to see. Faith 'reels in' that which we are hoping for. This kind of hope is not empty wishful thinking, but firmly based on the Word. The God kind of faith mixes with the God kind of hope to form a powerful combination. Both faith and hope are based on what God has promised in His word.

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Hebrews 11:1

The 'Thomas Kind' of Faith

Unlike the true 'God kind' faith, the 'Thomas kind' of faith wants to believe only after it has seen the end result first. Thomas wanted to see the Lord's pierced hands and side before he would believe that Jesus had risen from the dead. He had it backwards.

In general, we are conditioned to want proof before we believe. We are also quite skeptical of the word of another. Yet God chose to record His truth through ordinary people like you and me with human passions and frailties. Miraculously, God has been able to get truth down to us centuries later in a form that still has integrity and which is trustworthy and reliable.

Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord." So he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!" Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing." And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

John 20:24-29

The 'Thomas kind of faith' needs to see the end result first, before believing. This is not real Bible faith. Yet Jesus still ministered to Thomas and lovingly indicated His best to him: you are blessed when you believe, then you will see.

The 'God kind of faith' believes the promises of the Word first, before seeing the result come to pass. There is a divine order that cannot be violated. The integrity of God's word is at stake. When we walk with God and represent Him to the world, we need to accurately convey the trustworthiness of His personality, nature, character and ways. His way is to speak in faith and see the fruit of that thereafter. That separates God from everyone else. What He speaks comes to pass. His word always produces and returns to Him having accomplished that which He sent it out to perform.

*"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 comes down, and the snow from heaven,
And do not return there,
But water the earth,
And make it bring forth and bud,
That it may give seed to the sower
And bread to the eater,
So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth;*

*It shall not return to Me void,
But it shall accomplish what I please,
And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.*
Isaiah 55:9-11

When we follow God and walk in faith as Jesus did, we adopt His way of doing things. We are sent out in His name even as the Father sent out Jesus. We lean on His word's integrity in the same way that Jesus did in His ministry. We expect His word to come to pass in our lives when we believe it wholeheartedly. The key is to believe it with all your heart. However if you have doubt and unbelief in some part of your heart, you can be sure that your adversary the devil will exploit those area of reservation.

Be convinced, and guard your heart against doubt and unbelief.

Faith's Fountain

Faith springs from a relationship with God. We are called to walk with God, follow in His footsteps and grow into mature disciples or close followers. We do not follow Jesus from a distance, or even at our convenience. Disciples are committed and serve Him from conviction, not convenience.

When God speaks into our hearts, faith arises. It's a natural consequence of being in the Word. God speaks primarily to us through His written word and when we hear it proclaimed, read it for ourselves, study and meditate on its truth, faith will arise. God promises us that in His word (Rom 10:17). Faith will come! It is like a fountain of water. It has its source in God, and will flow to your heart as you open up to His word.

Faith is of the heart, not the mind. God speaks into our hearts first, our minds have to be play 'catch up' and be 'renewed' to spiritual truth. That is why it is possible to believe in your innermost being and yet still be bombarded by negative thoughts from outside. True transformation in your life comes when you begin to think in line with your heart which has been born again (Romans 12:1-2).

God and His word are one. His will is clearly expressed in His word, and without it we cannot have faith. His word conveys the 'spirit and life' of His heart motivations and will. It refreshes, cleanses, empowers, guides and instructs us in the faith. Jesus said that the words He spoke were 'spirit and life.'

The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.

John 6:63

When God speaks we are expected to obey. His word is not up for debate or question. His word springs from a heart of love and compassion. He delights in our well-being or prosperity. He wants the best for us, whether it is deliverance from sin, or being healed from sickness, or bought back (redeemed) from poverty. He cares about us, and wants us to 'feel' His heart and respond to Him in faith.

Our faith is a response to 'deep calling to deep': God's heart to our heart. Faith is not a product of reason, but rather of revelation as we hear God's heart beating for us.

Because faith flows to and from our hearts, we are to be sure to guard or protect (keep) our hearts from evil influences.

*Keep your heart with all diligence,
For out of it spring the issues of life.
Put away from you a deceitful mouth,
And put perverse lips far from you.
Let your eyes look straight ahead,
And your eyelids look right before you.
Ponder the path of your feet,
And let all your ways be established.
Do not turn to the right or the left;
Remove your foot from evil.*

Proverbs 4:23-27

Practically speaking, we must watch what we expose ourselves to, think and say. If we speak contrary to what we are believing God for, we negate our faith. If our thoughts (eyes) wander from looking straight ahead, this loss of focus on God's promises will work against us.

The way we conduct ourselves also plays a part in either supporting our faith or hindering it. The paths of our feet (lifestyle) are to be free from evil. God expects His children to walk in holiness. When we obey God's word, and make correct choices, our hearts are protected. Play your part in keeping the 'fountain of your faith' pure.

Faith's Fullness

Some people seem to be full of faith, whilst others struggle with the little faith they have. On one occasion the disciples sensed their need and asked the Lord to 'increase' their faith.

And the apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith. "So the Lord said, "If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you.

Luke 17:5

Jesus taught that faith the size of a very small mustard seed, if used, was sufficient to do remarkable things. He did not focus on the size of their faith (quantity) they already had, but how much of it they were using (quality)! He drew attention to the fact that the measure of faith they already had was dormant or inactive.

Any farmer will tell you that a seed has to be planted in soil and watered for growth to happen. It cannot sit in a seed bag on a shelf somewhere. God wants you to know that you already have the 'seed' of faith as His gift to you at the point of your salvation. But this 'seed' has to be planted or put to use. The 'secret' to activating your faith is to take God's promises in His word that apply to the particular situation you are facing, believe them and speak out what you believe!

So faith has a voice that must be heard. If you are facing a problem in life, you have to speak the will of God over it. Boldly declare in faith the *solution* to the problem, and do not verbally rehearse the problem itself. Speaking *about* the problem is no good; anyone can do that, and most people are stuck right there. God wants you to speak *to* your mountain, commanding it to come in line with His will.

The essence or spirit of faith is that we believe therefore we speak!

And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I believed and therefore I spoke," we also believe and therefore speak,

2 Corinthians 4:13

Remember it all begins when we receive the 'measure' of faith.

...God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.

Romans 12:3

This measure can be 'increased' from little faith to great faith as we exercise it or apply it to the problems we already face. It is no use asking for more faith when we have not used what we already have. Very often, what you really need is not more faith, but simply to effectively and consistently use that measure of faith which you already have!

Much like an athlete exercises so as to achieve greater results, we exercise our faith to grow stronger in our ability to trust God and see results.

When Jesus heard it, He marveled, and said to those who followed, "Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!"

Matthew 8:10

The centurion's 'great' faith, stands in contrast to the 'little' faith we saw earlier on in the disciples. What prompted Jesus' commendation of the centurion? The centurion had come asking the Lord for help in healing his servant. He only wanted Jesus to speak the word, not even come under his roof. He understood authority and how it is was expressed: through words. He operated in this as a centurion leader himself. He exercised the authority given to him from his superiors by giving commands. He spoke and it was done! So when he applied this key principle to his relationship with Jesus, it caught Jesus attention. He was rewarded for his great faith. He recognized that Jesus was also under command from above, and all that was needed in this situation was to speak a command and it would be done.

It works the same way with us. When we understand the authority of our commission and the power of our words when we submit them to God's command, we will speak words in faith that will produce results. When we speak in Jesus name, believing that what we now speak will come to pass, faith is released. When we use the faith we already have we play our part in ensuring that God's promised provision for our need is on its way. Christianity is sometimes called the 'Great Profession.' Profession begins in the heart and finds expression in the mouth! Open your mouth and confess Jesus as Lord in every area of your life!

You lose what you don't use. The faith you use increases from little to great, but the faith you don't use, does not produce anything. In effect you 'lose it.'

Some Christians I know continually use their faith for small matters like favor when they go shopping. They constantly keep themselves spiritually fit by training this way for matters of greater importance. I know of people who instead of taking a headache pill, will first believe God to relieve the headache. Someone said that the fool waits till the morning of an afternoon race to feverishly go into training. It is usually too late to prepare. Preparation for life's big challenges occurs when we take on the smaller challenges that crop up daily.

Faith should be exercised in the small things as well as the large. Don't think that the Lord is not interested in what you consider to be small matters. He is! If he knows the number of the hairs on your head, he surely is interested in every detail of your life, small and big!

Faith is a lifestyle of trusting God in everyday matters, and not just in some great moment of crisis.

Chapter 5

Faith's Fitness

Faith is an active force, and must be exercised or set in motion. Merely sitting back in the rocking chair of passivity, waiting for God to make a move on your behalf is not faith. Faith is a response to what God has already done. He has made His move by sending Jesus to pave the way for all our needs in life. It is now up to us to respond.

As we have seen in the last chapter, faith is activated when we believe in the Word of God and speak out the promises as they apply to our needs. We then adjust our actions according to what we now believe and speak. We match our words with corresponding action led by the Holy Spirit.

...Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe--and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?

James 2:17-20

Understand that in order to fully exercise faith we must speak God's will (which is His word), then follow up with corresponding actions in the direction of our faith.

For example, demons believe that there is one God, but do not actively trust Him. They may acknowledge His existence, but do not give themselves over to His Lordship to obey Him. They continue to disobey.

When a person believes in God through Jesus, he believes and confesses to receive salvation. Then practical steps are taken to demonstrate this: he gets baptized in water, gets involved in a church, reads the Bible, and witnesses to others, and prays to God. These are all expressions of a faith that now resides in the heart. These may be described as corresponding actions that now spring from a new life within!

Let's focus on prayer again for the moment. With the 'God kind of faith' we learn to speak and pray the Word expectantly before we even see the desired result. Faith-filled prayer believes that the words spoken at the time of prayer will come to pass.

So Jesus answered and said to them, "Have faith in God. For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will come to pass, he will have whatever he says. Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.

Mark 11:23-24

Prayer is our lifeline to God in heaven. We receive His provision and protection through prayer. His will is done through trusting Him in faith to deliver that which He promises in His word. Notice in the above passage that we are to speak *to* the mountain believing that it will be cast into the sea. It is what we *say* in faith that counts. We have to believe and say. One without the other is not enough. When we commit to what we believe by speaking it out, a spiritual transaction takes place, and the answer to our prayer is on the way.

While it is on its way we 'stand in faith', and hold fast to what we believe, lest anyone or anything try to convince us otherwise. Of course we must base our requests firmly on God's promises. It is presumptuous to expect something from God that He has not promised.

The time to believe you receive is when you pray, not when you get the desired result. You believe it so much that you are prepared to stand by your profession of faith and call those things that are not yet apparent, as if they are!

When we exercise our faith like this, we are copying our Father God who 'calls those things that do not exist as though they did.' We are His children, and children are raised by their parents to do things they do. God wants to raise you up to fulfill certain things He has called you to do. So it is very important to understand how He too operates in faith! After all He is the source of our faith. So He must abide by His own rules and operate in faith as well!

Notice that Bible faith is not a matter of calling those things that are, as if they are not, but rather the other way round. If you have broken leg, you don't say, 'I do not have broken leg.' Rather you say in faith, 'My leg is healed in the name of Jesus.' There is a difference.

Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all (as it is written, "I have made you a father of many nations") in the presence of Him whom he believed--God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did;

Romans 4:16-17

God's modus operandi is revealed: He calls things that are not as if they are! Things are **called** into existence before they exist. Abraham is the 'father' of our faith, and he even called things that were not yet manifest into existence. His faith was expressed in words of agreement with the promise of God that he would have a child through Sarah.

His physical body was 'dead' in the sense that he could not produce a child at age 100, yet he became fully convinced that it was possible with God. He believed God, and was rewarded for His faith when Sarah conceived at age 99 and produced Isaac. Remember, when God spoke to him about Isaac, Abraham was only 75 years old. At this point God 'called those things that were not as they were!' It took Abraham 25 years to get it down into his spirit that God was able to deliver on His promises. He finally got it, so did Sarah, and the rest is history.

Apply the principle of corresponding action to a situation of sickness. How does a person exercise their faith when they are sick? Do they simply wait for God to do what He has promised to do, or do they activate their faith in some way? I believe the answer is found when you consider what the Word teaches is our responsibility: 'responding to His ability.' Use the following checklist to find out where you stand on this matter, or any other area of need in your life.

Checklist of your Faith

- Hear and understand the Word concerning the situation or need. In this case faith for healing will arise and come to your heart as you hear the word and promises on healing. **Romans 10:17**
- Take the time to allow the Holy Spirit to convince you so that you fully believe that God has promised to meet your need. Faith begins where the will of God is known through a revelation of His promises. God watches over and backs up only that which He has promised, not any vague wishes or human hopes. **Jeremiah 1:12**
- Bring your requests (not your problems) to God in prayer. This is your first act of faith. **Philippians 4:6**
- Be sure to declare in faith the desired end result (that is your healing.) Pray in faith according to, thanking God that it is done according to His promises. **Mark 11:23-24**
- Act on what you heard as God leads. **James 1:22**
- Ignore any contrary circumstances that negate what you are trusting God for. We walk by faith and not by sight, and do not make our decisions based on the circumstances. We fight to maintain our position and hold fast to our confession of faith in the face of adversity. **2 Corinthians 5:7**
- Receive, enjoy and testify to God's goodness when you receive the manifestation of your desired healing. **Psalms 34:8-9**

Faith's Friends

Faith does not operate in a vacuum and must be exercised with cooperating spiritual postures, attitudes, and associations. Faith is not a simple cure all. We live and walk by faith as a foundation, but we also need to walk in the light of the following spiritual forces. The foundations of a house are critical, but for a house to be complete, there must also be walls, a roof, electrics, plumbing etc. In the same way our faith does not stand alone.

Faith and Hope

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Hebrews 11:1

Faith and hope work together. Faith provides substance to the confident expectation that God will stand true to His promises. This is Bible hope. This type of hope is not uncertain or mere wishful thinking that "maybe God will, maybe God won't, but I sure hope so."

Bible hope is confident that God will back up what He has said in His word. Hope's focus is on a future reward and is needed for faith to find an attachment. Like two legs that alternate and work together as a person walks, faith and hope serve each other. Faith stretches towards hope and receives the promise. Our walk with God is forward looking, and it is important to have something to look forward too.

We must be convinced that our present circumstances are subject to change through faith. God is the God of hope and He conveys His hope through His word and by His Spirit. He is unchanging, yet everything else is subject to change. Countless Christian testimonies point to the comforting fact that things change for the better when a person mixes hope and faith together by trusting in God's promises.

Faith and Love

...but faith working through love.

Galatians 5:6

Faith does not work by praying harder or louder or any other such spiritual effort. Faith works when we walk in love towards God and our fellow man.

God is love, and if we walk in love we close the door to the enemy, who seeks to undermine our faith through strife, envy, bitterness and unforgiveness. If we give the enemy place through our disobedience we come under condemnation and guilt and cloud our relationship with God. God seeks our cooperation in releasing His love towards unlovely people. He set us the example when He first loved us even in our miserable, unsaved condition.

When we got born again and confessed Jesus as Lord, the Holy Spirit came to live in our hearts. A key result is that God's love was deposited in our hearts in 'seed' form. Like anything else we receive

from God this love seed has to be cultivated. Our part is to allow the love of God to flow freely in our relationships. This is a matter of choice and not something we do only when we feel like it. We are commanded to walk in love. We don't have an option, as far as God is concerned.

If however, we allow our feelings to govern what we do, we will be bound to 'feel-good circumstances' only, and not the conviction of God. Our love walk will be based on convenience and not a commitment of obedience. Yield to God's love in you, and take steps to walk in love and forgiveness.

Now hope does not disappoint, because the Holy Spirit who was given to us has poured out the love of God in our hearts.

Romans 5:5

Fear cuts the flow of love. If we fear rejection, or failure in a situation, we dam up the God kind of love from flowing freely towards others. Human love is based on a favorable response, and will always at some time fail, but the God kind of love that is secure in God's acceptance, will break through the hardest opposition.

The love if God is deposited in us. We possess that spirit already. Let us learn to cooperate with it.

For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

2 Timothy 1:7

Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.

1 Corinthians 13:4-8

Love is the central nature of God: He is love. When we walk in love towards God first, and then with God's capacity in us towards our fellow man, our faith will never fail. When we meditate on the love of God and build it into our way of living, it will become a natural expression of who we are and stand in support of the faith we have.

Faith and Patience

...that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Hebrews 6:12

There is a danger that having asked God for His promised provision in faith, we become impatient when we do not immediately see the outcome of our faith. It is possible that while the answer is 'on its way', we become sluggish waiting for the manifestation of God's promise.

Sluggishness implies slowing down and becoming unresponsive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit who is constantly positioning us to receive God's gracious provision. Standing in faith and patient waiting is thus an active thing! We are constantly 'moving' towards the final outcome of our faith. We are not passively sitting on our 'blessed assurances' waiting for God to perform magic! We may have

started out in our faith right, but we need to finish up right too. Faith supported by patience is a powerful combination, and absolutely necessary if we are to see the desired outcome of our faith.

As we have seen, it took 25 years for Abraham and Sarah to finally enjoy God's promise of a son. Abraham was promised a natural heir through Sarah at age 75. The fulfillment of that promise took place at 100 years of age. During this time we know he became impatient, took matters in his own hand, and produced Ishmael, causing a lot of trouble in the family at that time.

Many folk today are tempted to give up after a few hours, days, weeks or months of 'waiting in faith.' Of course God is not in the business of making us wait unnecessarily. Most often delay has more to do with some adjustment needed in our lives, than God finally getting around to delivering on His promises.

Of course there may be some fiendish opposition to His provision getting through to us. Man's disobedience and satan's hindrances do slow things down, so patience is a vital spiritual discipline that stands in support of your faith.

The prophet Daniel stood in faith for 21 days, before his answer came through. The angel of God was 'hindered' by satan during that time. God was not holding out on Daniel. On the contrary, Daniel's prayer had been heard the first day, and the angel dispatched immediately. So it is important to realize that satan will try to delay answers to prayer (see Daniel 10:1-14).

Supporting Virtues

Faith is also 'supported' by moral goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. These virtues provide the environment in which God moves, and it is our responsibility to supply them. Our obedience and identification with God's nature and operations facilitate faith.

but also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.

2 Peter 1:5-7

Commitment to consistent Christian character keeps us 'connected' to God's provision. For example, when we are tempted to 'fly off the handle' self-control comes into play. When we realize that we can maintain an even temper, we restrict the room or space the enemy has to move. He operates or functions in the realm of waywardness, ungodliness, ignorance, hate and fear. Our disciplined lifestyle opens the door for faith to work and closes the door to fear.

Faith's Company

Your faith is also encouraged when you keep company with people of 'like' precious faith who will agree with you and not work against your faith.

Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

2 Timothy 2:22

Gather people who stand in agreement with you, because unbelief in those that you keep company with, can undermine your faith. You are blessed when you don't expose yourself to the counsel of ungodly folk. They sometimes may be well meaning in their conversation, but still full of doubt and unbelief! When you submit yourself to the company of people who speak doubt and unbelief, their negative spirit can undermine your faith. Be sure therefore to stand in the counsel of Godly people. There is increased power in their agreement (See Psalm 1 and Amos 3:3).

For example, I knew a woman in South Africa who received her healing from God, miraculously improved in health, but afterwards went back into a circle of so-called 'friends' who subtly questioned the validity of her healing testimony. Sad to say they were Christians ignorant of God's covenant of healing. She began to believe that maybe she really was not healed, and the symptoms came back on her with a vengeance. She could not stand against this satanic counterattack because of the company she chose to keep. Her faith had been undermined.

In Jesus ministry we even see how important the 'spiritual atmosphere' is. On one occasion we are told that He **could** not perform mighty miracles there because of the prevailing atmosphere of unbelief! It was not that He **would** not, rather He **could** not! It was His own country, and it seems as the locals kept him in their 'historical box' – the way they used to know Him. They knew Him as the carpenter's son, and it seems as if they wanted to keep it that way. They couldn't receive Him as an anointed prophet. Their unbelief stifled the miraculous – even in Jesus ministry!

*Then He went out from there and came to His own country, and His disciples followed Him. And when the Sabbath had come, He began to teach in the synagogue. And many hearing Him were astonished, saying, "Where did this Man get these things? And what wisdom is this which is given to Him, that such mighty works are performed by His hands! Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?" And they were offended at Him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country, among his own relatives, and in his own house." Now He could do no mighty work there, except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them. And He marveled because of their unbelief. **Mark 6:1-6***

Familiarity can be a bad thing, and even loved ones can sometimes hinder your faith. Be wise in what company you keep. Why have close fellowship with those who weaken your faith and keep you captive in confusion?

On the other hand we have an encouraging picture of faith being stimulated with people in agreement with and obedient to the will of God.

Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

Acts 2:4-47

These people gladly received the word, were obedient to it, continued steadfastly in the things of God, maintained unity, and were rewarded for their faith with favor and fruit. The spiritual atmosphere was charged with the presence of God as they praised Him, a generous spirit was prevalent, and miracles were many. It is wise to have fellowship with like-minded believers that encourage your faith. Not only will you be blessed but also there will others who are encouraged in their faith by your company. See yourself giving support to others in their need. As you do, your own needs will be met. If you ever get in trouble, run to your own company, not away from them.

Faith's Foes

Our faith pleases God, and this frustrates the enemy of our souls who seeks to undermine our faith. There is therefore a 'fight' to faith.

Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

1 Timothy 6:12

God wants us to win this fight. It's a good fight that God will reward. Do not think that faith is simply swooning back into the arms of Jesus and somehow, somehow, He is going to make it all work out! I know of too many Christians where it does not work out in their lives. They have given up and are merely surviving. There is effort involved in the fight of faith. But thank God, we have His strength and His weapons which are mighty enough for victory.

The following pointers will help you walk in victory over faith's foes.

Know Who you are In Christ, and What to Do

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

If you don't know who you are in Christ, then how can you with confidence do what expects of you. There will always be an underlying uncertainty that satan will exploit to his advantage. Know that you are forgiven, reconciled to God and are expected to play your part in reaching out to bring reconciliation to others.

Deal with Doubt and Fear

Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away. And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there. But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary. Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were

troubled, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out for fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid." And Peter answered Him and said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." So He said, "Come." And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!" And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased.

Matthew 14:22-31

Peter had stepped out onto the water on the basis of one word only: "Come!" As he made his way to Jesus he **became** 'afraid', doubted, and **began** to sink as he shifted his eyes from Jesus to the waves (circumstances) that raged around him. The Lord's commentary on what happened in that moment was that Peter had little faith and had succumbed to doubt! Before you castigate Peter in your mind try walking on water yourself, even when the nearest swimming pool is calm! Nevertheless, Jesus still said Peter had 'little' faith. So I suppose we have some way to go!

Keep your eyes on Jesus and do not be swayed by circumstances that contradict the promises you are standing on. Look to Jesus, according to Hebrews 12:2 where Jesus is shown as the author and finisher of our faith. Once we get started on our faith journey we can expect contrary circumstances to buffet us. Be prepared for the 'waters' to get rough, but press on, and keep walking in faith.

Realize too, that when you start to walk by faith, you attract both God's attention and the enemy's too. He does not want you to make a habit of it, and will seek to undermine your faith right at the beginning of any new steps you take in trusting God. Be warned but not fearful. God will sustain you.

Take negative thoughts 'captive' to the Word

Another way in which the enemy will contest your faith is by attacking you in the thought realm. He will bring a stream of negative thoughts that contradict what you are trusting God for. For example let's say that you are trusting God for a healing. You have put your faith into motion, have prayed and are standing in faith. Then along comes the thought: "What if I don't get healed?" Or "I wonder whether I have done everything right, maybe God won't honor my faith because...?" If these thoughts are received and entertained, your faith is in danger of being undermined and nullified. You will begin to worry or be anxious, and allow the enemy to 'choke' the flow of God's provision in the matter. The negative thoughts will set themselves up as a stronghold against the knowledge of God and His promises that you started out with.

For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ,

2 Corinthians 10:4-6

Remember, faith is activated when you stand on what you believe and declare out of your mouth. If you begin to doubt, and then start expressing your doubts with words, you effectively undo your faith.

It is important to replace negative thoughts of defeat, depression and despair with positive affections towards the Word of God: its promises and encouragements. Learn to recognize the pattern and do not 'take' delivery of any negative thought by saying them, even if it is to yourself in your mind.

Choose to speak out loud the promises of God- even if you are experiencing challenges! The words we speak are powerful carriers of truth or even lies. Jesus taught that His word conveys life and spirit. Choose to speak out only the truth as He sees it. We are called to step up to God's ways of thinking, saying and doing, not sink back into the realm of doubt and unbelief.

Hold fast to your 'confession' of hope by speaking out what you are standing in faith for. Refuse to speak out negative thoughts that do not line up with the will of God revealed in His word.

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.

Hebrews 10:23

Faith acts as a shield against the enemy of our souls as we stand on God's promises. Hold it up in the spirit by guarding your heart, mind and tongue. We have the power to choose what is acceptable in our lives and what is not. You don't have to take everything that comes your way. When you meditate only on things that are edifying, you leave no place for negativity to keep its hold. Choose to think on things that are pleasing to the Lord.

Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy--meditate on these things.

Philippians 4:8

How to Respond in a Time of Trial

Your faith can and will be tested by trials. Trials do come in the walk of faith, and if we do not guard our hearts the enemy can lie to us during a trial. Our lives are founded on a living hope that will produce a final reward. Our eternal inheritance in heaven is secure and kept for us in Christ by the power of God. This side of heaven, the enemy will try to distract and discourage us with trials. Be careful to rejoice in the midst of trials and maintain your joy. Joy provides strength to our inner man and our faith.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith--the salvation of your souls.

1 Peter 1:3-9

Genuine faith stands up under trial. If yours has failed, then be honest with yourself and reexamine the 'faith' you claimed to have. Perhaps there was a measure of foolishness or presumption mixed in. Or maybe it was not supported or held up by patience, did not work because of unforgiveness, or was not really based on God's promises. (See previous chapters).

Foolishness and Presumption Oppose Faith

Foolishness and or presumption both stand in opposition to God's faithfulness towards us. When we are faithless, God remains faithful so the problem is never with God. God is never to blame for anything that goes wrong, whether in a trial or otherwise. Be clear on that.

*As for God, His way is perfect;
The word of the LORD is proven;
He is a shield to all who trust in Him.*

Psalm 18:30

The key to telling the difference between living and walking in faith, foolishness or presumption is this: we are in faith when we have a definite promise from the word to stand on. It is foolish and presumptuous to step out and act on impulse and do things without knowing God's will in a matter. Faith begins where God's will is known.

Human hope without God's perspective really amounts to wishful thinking. God moves according to His word and our faith. If we are ignorant of what He has promised in a situation, and still go ahead with our plans, then we are acting with presumption. In this scenario we cannot then turn around and blame God for letting us down when we fall flat on our faces. We need to be both convinced and precise in our understanding of God's promises.

Chapter 8

Faith's Finality

For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world--our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

1 John 5:4-5

When you accept Jesus as Lord you are born of God into a position of sonship. You have overcome the world with its ways and false counterfeit systems of belief. Your trust is now in the one who can truly save and prosper, the one in whom your eternity is secure: Jesus. This in itself is a huge victory and it is all because of faith! Believing that Jesus is the Son of God is the foundational platform from which every victory in life is won. Everything we are, believe, say and do is now backed by the promises of God.

Be sure not to shift your focus off the Lord. He is the author and developer of your faith.

Some misguided Christians whole focus is on battling satan, leaving little time or energy to devote to the Lord. Our battle is not with satan himself. We are in a faith fight – to hold fast to our confession. The Bible teaches satan is already defeated and has only lies left at His disposal to deceive us. So keep your eyes on Jesus and not on the enemy.

...let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith,...

Heb 12:1-2

Guard that faith, protect it by watching what you think say and do. Apply your faith to the different areas of need in your life: health, provision, protection, wisdom, friendships, and even your witness. Faith always has a direction of application. Be adventurous and trust Him to take you places you have not been before, and do not let anything distract you from enjoying the abundant life that Jesus came to give you. Walk with Him in faith that the good work He begun in your heart he will see to completion.

...being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ;...

Philippians 1:5-6

Look forward to the time when He rewards your faith filled service with these words:

'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'

Matthew 25:21

If you have never accepted Jesus as your Lord

God has made it possible for you to get into right relationship with Him.

He sent His Son Jesus into the world to live, die and rise again from the dead so that you could be forgiven of your sins, live a life that pleases Him, and joined to Him forever in heaven when you die.

God expects you to **acknowledge** your need for His forgiveness, **believe** that He raised Jesus from the dead, and be prepared to **confess** Jesus as Lord before witnesses in the world you live in.

Accept His free gift of eternal life today. Turn away from your sinful past, wholeheartedly put your trust in Him today. Pray this prayer out loud from your heart, you will be giving your life back to him, and He will love, protect and provide for you all the days of your life.

Dear God in heaven,

I accept that I need your forgiveness for my sin.

I repent and acknowledge that I cannot save myself.

I believe that you raised your only begotten son Jesus from the dead.

I ask you to come into my heart right now and be my Lord.

I confess you Jesus as the Lord (master) of my life.

I promise to serve you all my days.

Thank you for saving me. I am now your child, accepted into your family.

In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Friend,

Now that you have prayed this prayer, get into a good Bible believing church that focuses on Jesus and His word, read your Bible starting with the gospel of John in the New Testament, and tell someone that you have accepted Jesus as Your Lord. Pray to your new heavenly father every day, and look to God to help you in every area of your life.

God bless you.