

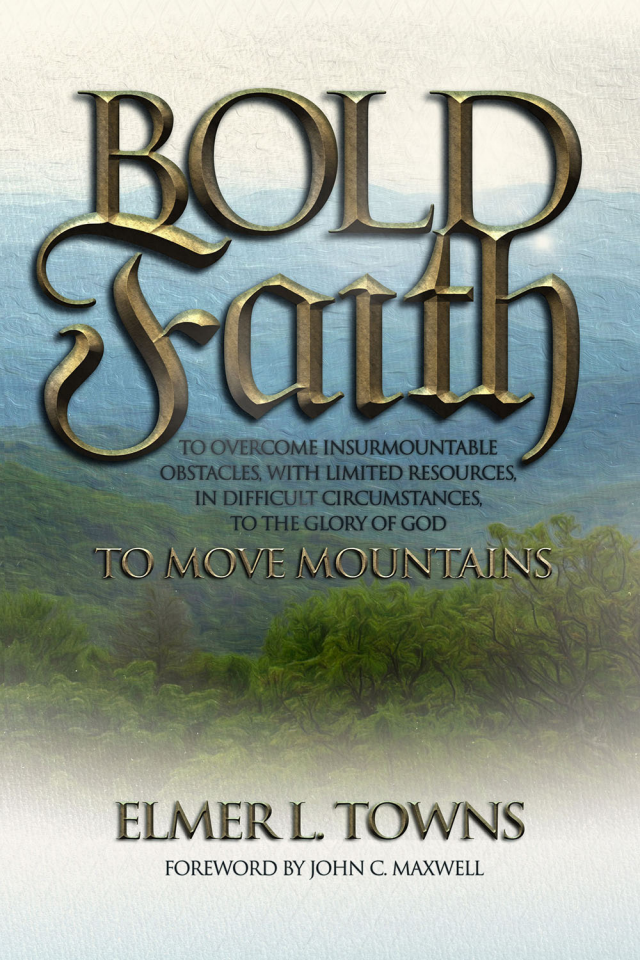
2013

Bold Faith

Elmer L. Towns

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BOLD Faith

TO OVERCOME INSURMOUNTABLE
OBSTACLES, WITH LIMITED RESOURCES,
IN DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES,
TO THE GLORY OF GOD

TO MOVE MOUNTAINS

ELMER L. TOWNS

FOREWORD BY JOHN C. MAXWELL

Bold Faith

To Overcome Insurmountable Obstacles,
with Limited Resources, in Difficult Circumstances,
to the Glory of God

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Verification: As one gets older, one tends to minimize his mistakes and glorify his accomplishments. In this book I’ve tried to be as honest as possible about both. In order to do that, I’ve had the following people read this manuscript to verify the facts of the stories included here: Macel Falwell (wife of Jerry Falwell); Jerry Falwell, Jr., and Jonathan Falwell (sons of Jerry Falwell); Yonggi Cho; Vonette Bright (wife of Bill Bright); John Cortis (past CEO Billy Graham Evangelistic Association); Ron Brown; Linda Elliott (editorial assistant to Elmer Towns); John Maxwell (founder of EQUIP and

INJOY Stewardship Services); Tom Mullins (pastor of Christ Fellowship, Palm Beach Gardens, FL); Steve Wingfield; Sunday Adelaja; Mark Grooms; Dino Pedrone; and Al Henson.

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Foreword

By John Maxwell

For more than 40 years, Elmer Towns has been a great encourager in my life. Through the books he wrote, he even encouraged me before I met him. *The 10 Largest Sunday Schools and What Makes Them Grow* opened my eyes to what God could do in the local church and broadened my horizons as a pastor and leader. Elmer made me want to grow and gave me ideas for how to do it.

Later, when I attended a conference where Elmer was a featured speaker, I spoke to him during a break. He was very gracious and, much to my surprise, he invited me to lunch. While we ate, he patiently listened to my questions, gave me advice, and challenged my thinking. He even rearranged his schedule after the conference to spend more time with me.

Through the years, Elmer and I have remained good friends. I enjoy his sharp mind, his depth of knowledge and experience, and his love for the Body of Christ. Imagine my delight when he told me he was writing a book on faith.

I believe you will find *Bold Faith* to be a fantastic resource. It offers teaching and principles that will help you to grow and develop your faith. And it contains wonderful stories. Elmer has known many great men and women of faith!

So my encouragement to you as you get ready to read this book is to enjoy what Dr. Towns can teach you, and become one of the many people, like me, who have been encouraged by him.

John C. Maxwell
Author and Speaker

*A leap of faith must be from a solid footing on the Word of God,
trusting the God of the Word for whom we leap.
While we don't know where we are going and how we will get there,
we know the God who sent us
will lead us and provide for us.*

Jerry Falwell

Introduction

Why This Book?

This book represents my personal growth in faith from my salvation in 1950 to the present. It tells of some victories and some defeats. As I write this at 84 years old, I'm still learning, and I've learned perhaps as much in the past two years as in any previous time of my life.

While my history of faith certainly demonstrates some universal principles, I don't think I can be a valid model for you or anyone else. I'm an author-teacher who loves to study, share, and teach. If you're a pastor, choose Jerry Falwell or Yonggi Cho as a mentor or model. If you're in evangelism, choose Billy Graham or Bill Bright to be your guide. Choose someone who has the same spiritual giftedness or calling as you.

I apologize for the abundance of stories about Liberty University and Jerry Falwell, but Lynchburg, Virginia, has been my faith boot camp for 39 years. I've learned more about faith here than at any other place.

I've written not to remind you of history, nor is this an academic or doctrinal book on faith. I want the stories to leap off the pages and burn themselves into your heart. I want this book to drive you to your knees to beg for the power of God in your life. That can happen if you make it your passion to know God and experience His presence.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Elmer Towns

From my home overlooking Liberty University

Summer 2013

Part 1

Developing Bold Faith

Faith is the greatest quality you can ever possess.

Love is a powerful relationship with another person. *Hope* gives power to optimistically face the future. *Courage* gives you power to navigate dangers and the unknown. *Patience* is the power to endure the present.

These are all wonderful, but *faith* is a relationship with God. And with God, you will find all the qualities you need for an extraordinary life and ministry.

Faith Is Relationship with God

Faith is believing the unreasonable, the impossible, and the unexplainable, because someone else, in whom we have absolute confidence, has said it was so, and upon His word we believe it, without asking any further proof.

M. R. DeHaan

Principle

The strength of your relationship with God determines the effectiveness of your faith.

Definition

Relationship. 1. the state of being related or connected; 2. a kinship by blood or marriage; 3. the association of those who have dealings.

Of all the people I've met on my Christian pilgrimage, Jerry Falwell had more faith than anyone else. Who else could build the world's largest evangelical Christian university, with 13,000 students on campus and more than 80,000 students in distance learning programs around the world? Think of it. A Christian university with nearly *one-hundred thousand* students. In 1973, Jerry announced in faith a goal of 50,000 students, 35 years before it happened. More than his ability to preach, administer, counsel – more than any other gift or skill – Falwell's faith was his greatest asset.

I watched him walk onto the chapel platform and cancel the planned program, then organize (on the spot!) a one-day prayer and fasting event for more than 5,000 students and faculty to ask God for the healing of Vernon Brewer, who had been

diagnosed with terminal stomach cancer. Vernon had been given six weeks to six months to live. I have phoned Vernon every April 25 *for 25 years* to rejoice with him for God's healing. (See chapter 21, "Healing Faith.") I watched Falwell cancel chapel to organize more than 5,000 students and faculty for a walk of faith around seven half-constructed dormitory buildings. He invited us to kneel in small groups of seven to ask God for \$5 million dollars to complete the dorms in six months. Today when I walk past those seven buildings, I praise God for a leader who stretched my faith. (See chapter 2, "Faith Is a Leap into the Unknown.")

When the prospect of bankruptcy loomed over Liberty University in 1996, Dr. Falwell fasted for 40 days, begging God for \$52 million dollars. God kept telling him, "Jerry, don't seek My pocketbook; seek My heart." At the conclusion of his fast the money hadn't come in, so Falwell made plans to face an accreditation team that would likely revoke Liberty's accreditation. He continued to pray every day, as we all did, but it wasn't until 25 days later that God told Jerry he could fast for the money. After a second 40-day fast – he lost almost 100 pounds – the check came from a benefactor for \$27 million. The same benefactor assumed the university's remaining \$25 million debt. (See chapter 3, "Brinkmanship Faith.")

I once asked Jerry where he had learned his great faith in God. He corrected me, "I don't have *great faith* in God. I have faith in a *great God*." I thought the conversation was over but he continued, "Let me tell you where I learned the greatness of God."

How Falwell Grew His Faith

When he was a freshman at Baptist Bible College in Springfield, Missouri, Falwell attended High Street Baptist Church. Before he went off to college, his home pastor told him to ask to teach a Sunday school class at High Street. That pastor knew Jerry would grow spiritually as he involved himself in the ministry of the Word.

Young Falwell met Dr. Bill Dowell, pastor of High Street Baptist Church, and told him what his pastor back in Lynchburg had said about serving in the church. Dr. Dowell replied, "Go see Max Hawkins. He's the superintendent of the junior high department, which meets in the auditorium below the sanctuary."

Falwell's first meeting with Max was strained because the younger man's manner was precocious: "Dr. Dowell told me to come see you and you would give me a Sunday school class." Max had the high cheekbones of an Ozark farmer, and a

deliberate way of speaking that told you he knew what he was talking about. He raised a suspicious eyebrow and said, "I'll see if I can find something for you."

Max strung up two curtains in the corner of the assembly room and gave Jerry Falwell a roll book. "Daryl" was the only name in the book—because Daryl was the only student in the new class. For three weeks Jerry taught Daryl, but he began to get a little discouraged because the class was not growing. Superintendent Max didn't send anyone else to his class, and Falwell's teaching didn't motivate his student to bring any friends. Between Sunday school and church on the third Sunday, Falwell caught Max in the hallway and said, "Here's the roll book; I don't think I'm cut out for this. Things aren't going so well." He offered the roll book to the superintendent.

Putting both hands behind his back in a firm gesture of rejection, Max glared at Falwell and said, "Yep, this is just what I expected. You're just a puffy-cheeked rich kid with your own car who thinks the world owes you a living." Max explained that he hadn't wanted to give Falwell a regular classroom because he thought the young man would fail or quit—or both.

Then the older man reached for the book, but Falwell jerked it back in defiance. "I'll keep the class, and I'll make it successful."

Max could only shrug his shoulders and walk away.

Stinging with defeat, Falwell returned to his dorm, determined that he would do something big with the Sunday school class. But he knew he needed supernatural help from God. He got a key to an empty dorm room, and every day for the next week he went into that room after lunch and stayed until 5:00 P.M.

Falwell told me, "There, I learned how big God really was." In that empty room, he read great classics of the Christian life, such as the biography of George Müller, an extraordinary prayer warrior. He learned how God supplied every need for Müller's orphanage, which cared for more than 2,000 children. Then Falwell read *Absolute Surrender* by Andrew Murray, where he learned he must be absolutely committed to God if he expected God to answer his prayer. Next he read *Power Through Prayer* by E. M. Bounds, and realized results in ministry come through constant prayer. Falwell learned intimacy with God by reading *The Normal Christian Life* by Watchman Nee and *The Christian's Secret to a Happy Life* by Hannah Whitall Smith.

"I didn't just read these books," he said. "I prayed through every chapter, every sentence, every word. I wanted to know how these great men and women of God got great answers to prayer. I found out the secret to faith is knowing God intimately, by spending time with Him." He continued, "In that empty room, I stretched myself out

on the springs of an army cot and begged God for His power and blessing. There was a holy glow in that room. I eagerly went in every day, because I knew God was waiting for me there.”

The following Saturday morning, Falwell picked up Daryl and said, “Let’s go find every fourth-grade boy in Springfield, Missouri.” They began knocking on doors, visiting playgrounds, and searching ditches in empty fields where boys played and hung out. As two o’clock approached, they went to the local movie house and asked every boy waiting in line if he was in fourth grade.

“Many of the boys promised to come, but I knew a promise was not enough. I wanted to make sure those fourth-graders got to church. I had three roommates and two of them had cars; mine made three. We wound our caravan through the streets of suburban Springfield, packing one car with boys and sending it back to the church, then packing a second car to do the same thing, and finally packing my car.²

“I went to the front door of every home to tell the parents we were going to church, and to let them know what I expected God to do in the life of their fourth grader.”

At the end of that year, Jerry’s fourth-grade boy’s class averaged 57 in attendance and occasionally topped 100. Thirty years later, Jerry and I went to High Street Baptist Church, where we met many of the parents and boys who had been saved through that Sunday school class. Old Max Hawkins was there to glow in the success of his now-graying protégé. Boys (now men) and parents told their stories about getting saved under the influence of Jerry Falwell. Some class members had even gone on to full-time Christian work.

Recounting the story to me, he said, “In that tiny dormitory room I met God face to face and heart to heart. It was there I learned what a great God I have, and there I learned that in relationship with God, a person can receive things from Him.” He went on, “Sometimes when I pray, I feel God stirring in my heart to ask for a big amount of money, or a large piece of property, or a new building. I believe it is God’s faith prompting me to ask for these big things.”

Faith Is Relationship

Because the Spirit of Christ comes to live in our hearts when we are saved, we can have the faith of Jesus Christ, not just our own faith. Paul declared, “It is no longer I who live,

but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2:20). This means we can let the faith of Christ—God’s faith—flow through us. We can trust the Father, through Christ’s Spirit, with the closeness and intimacy Jesus demonstrated in His earthly ministry.

Doesn’t this kind of faith demand relationship? Doesn’t it say that we must know the Father, that we must surrender our desires to His desires? We must let Christ’s faith flow through us to receive answers to prayer.

When we trust the Father through the Spirit of Christ, we can experience, like Falwell, the prompting of Christ’s faith to ask for big things. God is a good Father who delights to bless His children and meet their needs and requests. But to get big answers, you must come in the right relationship to Him. *Faith is relationship*. Asking for and receiving things by faith is like getting to know a successful business owner and then finding out she is hiring a position for which you are qualified. You have the right qualifications, but you are hired over other applicants because your boss knows you. You have a relationship. In a similar way, God delights to answer your prayers because of your relationship with Him.

Yes, *faith is relationship*. When we treat faith impersonally, it is not really faith at all. When we treat faith as a tool to get something from God, we’ve missed the whole point. Faith is getting to know God so well that we trust Him completely. When we trust Him, we sense His Spirit’s prompting to ask for and receive great answers to prayer.

Faith is not about us; it’s about Him. A relationship is always about the other person. You focus on the other person, and the other person focuses on you. You listen to the other person to discover his or her thoughts, emotions, dreams, and plans, and share yours with the other person. You celebrate together and weep together. You get to know him or her intimately, and learn to trust his or her heart.

Do you have that kind of relationship with God?

Do you relate to Christ as His bride, intimately and with joy?

Do you relate to the Father as His child, with total trust and love?

Do you relate to God as His friend, always with respect and never presuming upon Him? I believe lack of relationship explains why so many of our prayers go unanswered. We presume upon God. We don’t know Him very well; we are not close enough with Him to know what He does and does not want to do. If only we were friends with Him! If only we knew Him so well that we would ask for the things that are in His character to give.

The apostle James is matter-of-fact about the results of presuming upon God:

“You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures” (James 4:3, *NASB*). When our faith is about us, rather than about God, it is not faith. It is not relationship. It is a twisted attempt to supernaturally look out for number one, to get what we want instead of becoming the people God wants us to be. And that so-called “faith” will crumble at the first unanswered prayer.

We must learn faith’s lesson from the writer of Hebrews: “But without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6, *KJV*). The word “diligently” conveys the idea of doing something with your whole heart, with all your strength, with every last ounce of energy. When you seek God diligently, you have wholehearted faith. You have a relationship that ties you to God, and that ties God to you.

Faith Is Seeking God

Have you ever been on a cell phone and thought you were talking to someone, but you had lost the connection? You kept talking but no one was listening. To some, prayer is like that: a one-way conversation that doesn’t connect.

No one can see God, for He is Spirit (see John 4:24) – and for some people, that’s a problem. But faith is “being certain of things we can’t see” (Heb. 11:1, *ELT*). Moses, the one who led a million Jews out of slavery in Egypt, was a man who got answers when he prayed, “as though he saw the invisible God” (Heb. 11:27, *ELT*). Faith is seeing God with your heart when you can’t see Him with your physical eyes. Faith is talking to God in prayer even when you can’t hear His audible voice, confident He exists and hears your prayers. Faith begins by trusting God exists: “He who comes to God must believe that He exists and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Heb. 11:6, *ELT*).

Yes, God is invisible, but the person of faith sees Him with the eyes of faith. It is a different kind of seeing than physical sight, but just as real. With physical sight, we trust our eyes not to play tricks on us. With the eyes of faith, we trust God’s track record with us and with His people. God has a history, recounted in scripture, and we find through our study of the Bible that He can be trusted. More personally, we can look back on our own history with God to confirm He can be trusted. With confident, trusting faith, we know that God exists and that He hears our prayers. As we diligently

seek Him, our relationship with Him grows deeper and our prayers are answered.

Someone once asked me if there are rules for making faith stronger. No! You don't approach God on the basis of rules or laws. There are no rules in love. You don't start a relationship with rules; you start with mutual respect or love. The more you get to know the other person, the more you trust them. That's faith.

Rules are for my Blackberry, a cell phone far beyond anything I could have imagined. I can get a stock report, hear a tune, get sport scores, take pictures, read e-mails, keep a "to-do" list, write a memo, dictate an inner-office communiqué—almost anything I might need to do. . . if only I knew the rules to make it work! Click three times, hold a button three seconds, hold down Shift and press Delete. If I knew the rules, I could do just about anything.

Rules make my Blackberry work, but life is what I do with it. The rules are not the point. Yes, rules help me make the most of my relationship with my Blackberry—just as God's law helps me make the most of my relationship with Him. His law helps me know the limits and privileges of our relationship, but it is not the basis of our relationship. The basis is His love for me and my trust in Him. That's faith.

Likewise, the foundation of prayer is not rules; it is relationship. You relate to God and He relates to you. Prayer is the conversation that builds and deepens relationship. Rules don't make you fall in love. Rules don't keep you in love. When you're in love, you pour out your heart to the One you love and He does the same to you. Knowing the "right" way to pray will not make your prayers more effective if you don't have the right relationship.

Seek God in prayer to know Him, not to get things from Him. As your relationship grows, your faith will grow—and then the Spirit will lead you to ask for the big things the Father wants to give.

Notes

1. "Liberty University Quick Facts," Liberty University, <http://www.liberty.edu/aboutliberty/index.cfm?PID=6925> (accessed July 2013).
2. On the day I wrote this chapter, I happened to meet Harold Rawlings, one of Falwell's three roommates. His was one of the cars used to pick up fourth-grade boys. He verified the facts of this story.
3. I attended a reunion of Jerry's Sunday school class in the facilities of High Street Baptist Church in 1984. Max Hawkins was there, as well as many of the boys from the class. I heard one testimony

after another of those who were converted under Jerry's ministry, vividly illustrating to me the enduring influence of Jerry's act of faith.

Faith Is a Leap into the Unknown

A leap of faith must be from a solid footing on the Word of God, trusting the God for whom we leap, while we don't know where we are going or how we will get there, but we know the God who sent us will lead us and provide for us.

Jerry Falwell

Principle

To have effective faith, you must step out into the unknown on the principles of scripture.

Definition

Leap. 1. to spring free from, as a fish out of water, or to jump, as over a fence; 2. to pass abruptly from one state or topic to another, b: to act precipitously, i.e., "leap at the chance."

For many years, Jerry Falwell and I argued over the definition of faith. He often said, "Faith is a leap into the dark." I objected, insisting it is the opposite: "Faith is a leap into the light." I didn't realize then that Falwell viewed faith from the perspective of the *launch pad*, while I saw the leap from the perspective of the *landing*. As I look back now, we were both right.

Let's look at how the writer of Hebrews describes Noah: "By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen . . ." (Heb. 11:7, NKJV). His leap of faith was to build an ark when no one had ever seen rain or a boat. Then he took a second leap by

entering the ark and waiting for it to rain. It was a leap into the unknown.

Hebrews goes on: “By faith Abraham . . . went out, not knowing where he was going” (Heb. 11:8, *NKJV*). His leap of faith was leaving the civilization of Ur to live in tents in Canaan. It was a leap into the unknown.

“By faith Moses . . . refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God” (Heb. 11:24-25, *NKJV*). His leap of faith was identifying with Israel against Egypt. It was a leap into the unknown.

“These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off” (Heb. 11:13, *NKJV*). The heroes celebrated in Hebrews all took a leap of faith long before they received any tangible results.

Not everyone leaps. Instead, they wait for God to push them into action. This is not faith. Faith cannot be stumbled onto or fallen into. No, faith is a conscious, deliberate step forward, trusting completely God’s character and promises. Without faith, as Hebrews says, it is impossible to please God (see Heb. 11:6).

The biblical heroes of old are celebrated for their leaps of faith, but what does this jump into the unknown look like in our modern day? Let’s look at the early years of Jerry Falwell’s ministry for an example.

One Leap After Another

When Falwell founded Thomas Road Baptist Church in 1956 with a handful of fellow believers, he got the word out using the only method he knew: door-to-door visitation. On the back wall of the church auditorium, Falwell posted a large map of Lynchburg and surrounding areas; he then drew one-mile concentric circles around the church, reaching 10 miles into neighboring counties. And then he began a daily 12-hour routine of knocking on doors, inviting people to church, witnessing for Christ, and ministering to those he found at home. God blessed this tried-and-true method, used by most other Baptist churches at that time, and the church began to grow.

Three or four months after founding the church, Falwell went to see Mr. Epperson, owner of WBRG, a new 1000-watt Country-Western radio station in nearby Madison Heights. Epperson told Falwell he was looking for someone to start the program day with a devotional thought. Epperson convinced Jerry to purchase a 30-minute segment at the start of each day for seven dollars a day. The \$49 weekly bill would stretch the small church financially, but Falwell believed that God was leading

him to step out in faith. So he took a leap into the unknown. He didn't know where the money would come from, but he trusted God to provide. What happened? Many who heard him on the radio came to church. Attendance grew and offerings swelled more than enough to pay for the radio time.

Two or three months later, Jerry decided to preach the gospel on a medium new to his hometown: local television. Any rational person might have thought the church was too small or too young to host a TV program. At that time, there was not a single preacher of the gospel on national TV. Preaching on television was the unknown. But Falwell talked to the local ABC affiliate and purchased 30 minutes a week, from 5:30 to 6:00 on Sunday evening, for \$90 dollars a program. Once again, Jerry committed himself and the church to an expense they didn't have money to cover, and once again he trusted God to provide. He took a leap into the unknown.

It was a very simple program. Jerry's future wife, Macel, played the piano, a local Methodist layman sang, and Jerry promoted Thomas Road Baptist Church for 5 to 10 minutes, telling the viewing audience of conversions, answers to prayer, and numerical growth in the little church. Then he preached for the remaining time. At the conclusion of the program, he would say, "Grab yourself a glass of milk and a peanut butter sandwich. You've got time to get to Thomas Road Baptist Church for our evening service at 7 P.M. I want to see you there and shake your hand to welcome you." His friendly approach attracted hundreds and the church continued to grow. Once again, God used Falwell's faith to produce added income to pay for the television ministry, which eventually became *The Old Time Gospel Hour*.

In the fall of 1971, when Jerry and I made plans to launch what would eventually become Liberty University, he said, "Elmer, you set the academic curriculum, hire the professors and supervise the program; I'll recruit the students, raise the money, build the buildings, and pay for all the expenses." With that division of labor we began the college with not one penny in the bank.

At first, our vision was small: We wanted to build a college of about 5,000 students, perhaps a little larger than Tennessee Temple University in Chattanooga, which used church facilities for the college. They bought surrounding residential homes for expansion, and that's what we planned to do. Across the street from Thomas Road Baptist Church was Stewart Heights, a subdivision of 52 small, two-bedroom houses built right after World War II. One day Jerry and I drove through the neighborhood and agreed we should buy every single one to grow the university. I pointed to one house and said it would be the math department, and the house next door would be the

history department, and so on down the street and through the whole neighborhood. We were dreaming out loud about what we wanted to do for God.

We began purchasing the houses, one at a time. The first few cost around \$8,000, but then word got around in the neighborhood and the prices went up. Soon we were paying \$11,000, then \$12,000 for each house. When we got to \$13,000 Jerry decided there might be better ways of spending our precious few financial resources.

Just about that time, Jerry saw the quality of the young people in the new liberal arts college. This was not just a Bible college for preachers. There were extraordinary young people flocking to the school whose goals were to become educators, politicians, medical doctors, even lawyers. I was serious about building a quality academic program, and Jerry was impressed with the PhDs we were hiring to build an accredited university. I can still hear him saying, "One day we will have a seminary, a teacher's college, a law school, an engineering school." I thought he was kidding or thinking wishfully.

Jerry no longer talked about 5,000 students; he upped the goal to 50,000. We no longer planned to buy the houses across Thomas Road; we needed a mountain – a big mountain – to grow a big university.

Anatomy of a Leap

A "leap of faith" is a phrase commonly used to describe belief in something without, or in spite of, empirical evidence. The phrase "leap to faith" is attributed to Søren Kierkegaard, who felt faith was necessary to accept Christianity, because of its paradoxes. In his book *The Concept of Anxiety*, Kierkegaard explains that Christianity teaches Jesus is 100-percent man and 100-percent God.¹ Since neither logic nor reason can reconcile this doctrine, one must believe in opposites in order to be a Christian. To do that, one must take a "leap to faith."

Some believe it is a virtue to believe in something without scientifically verified evidence, while others feel it is foolishness. The opponent would call it "blind faith," belief that is sustained only by closing one's eyes. We answer that God has opened the eyes of our hearts to grasp a reality beyond what can be verified by our five senses or mathematics.

Too many who take a leap of faith, however, seem to believe jumping is all that is required. They take a leap, then sit back and wait for God to do the rest. They don't go

door-to-door for 12 hours a day, or get up in the wee hours every day of the week to do a radio show, or plan and produce a new television program each week. Just because we serve a supernatural God who still does miracles does not mean there is no work for us to do. In fact, we demonstrate our trust in the Father by working alongside Him, “laborers together with God” (1 Cor. 3:9, KJV).

This is how Liberty University was built: God’s blessings beyond what we could imagine, and more work than we ever dreamed.

In the summer of 1971, I gave Jerry a proposed budget for the first year: \$152,000. “I don’t have any money for the college,” he replied. “Let’s start raising it tonight.”

Jerry and I got into his Buick and drove to an evening church meeting about 100 miles away. There, it became clear how Jerry planned to raise the money.

Doug Oldham, a gold-record gospel singer, sang for half an hour or so, warming up the hearts of the crowd. Then I cast a vision for the new Christian college that would train young people to carry out the Great Commission. Jerry got up next to preach a gospel message, followed by an appeal for people to become “Door Keepers.” He said, “Would you hold open the door of the gospel so we can build a great Christian college to train young people to reach the world for Christ?” Then he held up a packet of 52 business-reply envelopes, one for each week of the year. Door Keepers, he said, would mail in a dollar a week to support the new college.

Nearly every evening that summer, we went to another small-town Baptist church where a crowd would be waiting. At each meeting, 50 to 100 people took a packet of envelopes, promising to send in a dollar a week. One evening at a little country church, more than 250 people took a packet of envelopes. Think about the math for a minute. We’re not talking about a \$250 one-time offering. No, 250 people each pledged to give \$52 a year: \$13,000 raised in one evening. As we drove home late that night, Jerry said, “If we could go to a church like that every evening, we could build the college of our dreams.” That summer we raised more than \$100,000 in pledges, one dollar at a time. God prompted people to give, but we had to show up and ask.

Those who pledged came to be known as “Faith Partners,” and the program evolved into a monthly, rather than a weekly, pledge. For a number of years, more than one-hundred thousand people gave \$10 to \$20 a month – together, \$26 million a year. Every dollar we raised meant more scholarships, more qualified teachers, expanded facilities, and more effective student recruiting. And very soon, we knew God was prompting another leap of faith into the unknown.

On January 21, 1976, Jerry Falwell took all of the students to Liberty Mountain.

They came by faith to claim the mountain by faith. A Liberty graduate and best-selling gospel singer, Robbie Hiner, stood in the snow and sang “I Want That Mountain.” The students cheered loudly and sang their prayer of faith, “I want that mountain!”

It did not snow as forecasted, and God shined His blessing on the day. Falwell preached and then looked into the camera: “Send \$100 today so we can stake a claim on Liberty Mountain.” As soon as he received \$100,000, he said, the earth movers would break ground. School would be held on Liberty Mountain that fall, a scant seven months away. People across *The Old Time Gospel Hour* broadcast audience responded, and \$100 donations poured in.

Each one-story dormitory would hold 38 students and cost approximately \$100,000. But along with dormitories, classrooms and other facilities, we had to build a complete infrastructure on Liberty Mountain, including roads, sewage lines, electricity, water lines, and phone cables – all while meeting environmental and local building codes. *In seven months*. Falwell told the contractors, “The rabbit can’t climb a tree, but when it has to, it can.” It was his challenge to do the impossible.

Engineers and architects partnered with the city to get permits. Construction workers labored around the clock. And in the fall of 1977, classes opened on Liberty Mountain. Students moved into Dormitory 1 and attended classes in two classroom buildings constructed on the new campus.

A leap of faith combines God’s prompting and provision with our hard work and dedication to the vision.

How to Leap

There are a few tried-and-true principles for taking a successful leap into the unknown. Before you jump, consider the following.

1. Leap from the Rock

Before you take a leap of faith, make sure you’re standing on the promises of Jesus Christ. When you try to jump from shifting sand, you will lose your footing. You must leap from the solid rock of God’s Word.

We are human, and humans change. One day we feel deeply our love for God, while the next our fluctuating emotions cast us into depression or doubt. It may be that sin has obscured our perception of God’s constant presence or goodness – no one

knows the depth of evil in her heart until she tries to serve God with all her being. Or it may be that circumstances seem greater than our trust in the Father. This does not mean God's relationship with us has changed: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Heb. 13:8, NKJV). We are changeable; He is reliable.

And so is His Word. When our doubts are at highest tide, we must cling to the rock of scripture. Before leaping into the unknown, we must ground ourselves in God's promises. We must seek His will in Bible study, prayer, and obedience. Faith needs daily nurturing. Like a flower that withers without water, or a body that dies from lack of food, faith grows weak if it is not tended, watered, and fed. Are you seeking God daily in prayer and study? Are you regularly worshiping and fellowshiping with other believers? Are you memorizing scripture so it is hidden in your heart when times get tough or when doubts arise?

Faith must not be grounded in itself. What do I mean by this? Some Christians seem to trust the *fact* that they believe more than they trust the *Person* in whom they believe. That is, they do the things meant to make faith grow – Bible study, prayer, corporate worship, spiritual disciplines – and believe those things will catch them when they jump. But the actions of faith are not ends in themselves; they are meant to deepen our relationship with God, who is the reason we leap and the One toward whom we jump.

Doubt and unbelief are facts of life. We are all sinners (see 1 John 1:8-10), and because of our sin nature we cannot have perfect faith. Even the disciples who saw Jesus on Resurrection Sunday were victims of doubt; Jesus later "upbraided them with their unbelief" (Mark 16:14, NKJV; cf. Matt. 28:17). Also, our minds are finite. We do not know everything; we certainly do not know everything about God. Yes, He has revealed Himself in creation, in scripture, and most fully in Jesus Christ. But He has revealed only as much about Himself as we are able to comprehend.

Making a leap of faith means jumping over obstacles such as doubt – but we do so wisely. We seek His will in prayer and fasting, Bible study, and counsel with mature believers. We start with and continually return to the scriptures. We ask hard questions. *Is our faith project biblical? Will it glorify God? Will it advance the cause of Christ?* Remember, some obstacles don't block the work of God; they block our selfish and self-centered plans. We must humble ourselves, recognizing our shortcomings and finitude, and say with the apostle James, "If the Lord wills" (Jas. 4:15, NKJV).

Make sure you're right with God before you take your leap of faith. Seek out what God wants you to do; then do it.

2. Leap Out of Obedience, not Desire

Before you leap, think critically about the difference between *need* and *want*. If God has called you to plant a church downtown and the only place to meet is the old theater you don't (yet) have money to buy, then you will likely have to leap. What else are you going to do? Obedience to God's call leads you to make a necessary leap into the unknown.

However, if there are a number of viable, affordable meeting places downtown and you've got your eye on the old theater because churches that meet in old theaters are "cool" – and you want to plant a "cool" church – then taking a leap may end with you in a heap. Ask, *Do we need _____ to be obedient to the vision God has given us?* If you can put your feet up instead of leaping and still do the job God has called you to do, the Father is likely calling you to trust Him instead for smaller things – for now. Don't leap because you want to. Leap because you need to obey.

As you pray and seek God for His leading, be clear-eyed about needs and wants. Survey all your options. Then, if obedience demands it, jump.

3. Count the Cost

Every leap into the unknown entails *unintended consequences*. Perhaps some church members will complain that the old theater costs too much. They might accuse you and other church leaders of poor stewardship. If the followers aren't willing to jump with you, are you willing to leap alone? Is it worth the risk? Ask, *Who will be reluctant to jump? Why? Are their reasons practical or spiritual? Do they have a good point? If so, am I humble enough to receive it? If not, how can I prepare and equip them to leap with me?*

What will your church be like after you get the money or resources you need? What will *you* be like when God answers your prayer? Consider how you will live with a successful leap. Some people don't know how to live with victory; they start to think the leap was the point, when, in fact, the leap was just God's way of moving forward with His purpose. Buying the old theater is not the point! The point is to plant and grow a thriving, Jesus-proclaiming, Spirit-led church that will extend God's kingdom downtown. Count the cost of the leap, but also count the cost of success. How can you prepare yourself and others for victory?

Make sure you don't expend so much energy on the leap that you can't move forward once you land. For example, too many churches spend two or three (or four or five) years raising money for a building. Then the building project itself takes a year or

two (or three), including zoning, permits, plan approvals, construction delays, unforeseen weather or supply problems, and so on. Before you know it, five (or six or seven) years have gone by during which the building project was the “main event.” Now what? Before they jumped, the leaders should have asked, *How will our church continue doing ministry and serving our community before, during, and after the building project? How will the project disrupt our ministries? How can we keep our vision front and center through the ups and downs of the process?*

4. Commit to the Leap

Of course, it is important to consider what you need to make a successful jump. If you were going to leap across a rocky, fast-flowing stream, you would consider how long a running start you should take, how high you need to jump, and how you will land on the other side. You would take a good long look at the opposite bank to see what hazards might prevent a steady landing. Taking all these factors into consideration is part of preparing for a successful leap.

Likewise, before leaping by faith into the unknown, you will consider what you need to do to be successful. How much money or other resources do you need to get started? Will you wait to begin your project until God has provided all the resources, or will you trust Him to provide along the way?

How do you need to prepare *yourself* to leap? How many hours a day will you pray? David Yonggi Cho, pastor of Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, Korea – the largest church in the world, with nearly 1 million members² – told me he spends two hours in prayer each day. John Wesley, founder of the Methodist movement and spearhead of a holiness revival that has continued to the present day, used to say he thought very little of a man who did not pray *four hours* every day.³ When was the last time you spent two, three, or four hours in prayer?

How long do you need to fast? One day? Seven days? I tell the ministerial students at Liberty that you don’t truly know yourself or your God until you’ve fasted 40 days. Some leaps demand it. Remember, the wider the stream – that is, the bigger your goal – the longer you must prepare to receive God’s answer to your prayers.

These considerations and preparations are your due diligence for leaping well and wisely. But once they are complete and you know you must leap to obey, *commit*. Don’t get a running start and then stop short at the water’s edge. Don’t try to change direction in midair. And don’t put your trust in anything other than God once your feet

have left the ground. Consider this scenario: Your church has an emergency reserve of funds. *If the capital campaign doesn't raise enough to buy the old theater, you think, we can fall back on the emergency fund to cover the purchase price.* Let's be honest: This is not a leap into the unknown; it is business as usual. There is no net under a leap of faith. It is not a leap of faith if you are trusting something other than our faithful God.

Commit to the leap, confident that the God you obey is more than worthy of your trust.

5. Do Not Let Fear Stop You

If there were no risk, it wouldn't be a leap of faith. Apprehension, reluctance, fear, and even bone-deep terror are all valid responses to risk. You may reach a point of emotional paralysis when you think about what God is guiding you to do. You can't pray; you can't think; the words of scripture offer no comfort. It feels as though your whole life is threatened by potential pain and loss.

What if the money doesn't come in? What if no one shows up? What if I make a mistake? What if I lose my livelihood and put my family at risk? What if those I ask for help say no? What if those in power stand in the way?

Sometimes a leap of faith feels like running into a burning building to save a loved one, knowing you might not make it out. It feels like swimming out to rescue a drowning person, knowing he could pull you under. The risk is enormous. You could lose your good reputation, your dependable paycheck, your promising future—even your life. That happens. Countless people have followed Christ into a life of faith-filled sacrifice and even to a martyr's death.

And on the way they have planted thriving churches; founded Bible colleges, orphanages, and hospitals; written life-transforming books; discovered medical cures that saved thousands of lives; interceded in prayer for the spread of the gospel; freed women and children held as slaves to the sex trade; fought to end oppressive systems of injustice; translated God's Word into new languages; negotiated peace where there had been only war and hatred; saved the lives of unborn children; shared food with those who had none; become fathers and mothers to children in need; and been caring neighbors to those in their community.

If God is calling you to leap into the unknown, don't let fear stop you. Acknowledge your anxiety, but then step into the unknown in faith. Even the faith of a fearful person can overcome insurmountable obstacles, with limited resources, in

difficult circumstances, to the glory of God.

Notes

1. Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, edited by Reidar Thomte (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980).
2. John Micklethwait, "Special Report: Religion and Public Life: O Come All Ye Faithful," *The Economist*, Nov. 1, 2007. <http://www.economist.com/node/10015239> (accessed July 2013).
3. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers, 40th Anniversary Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), n.p.
4. To learn more about fasting biblically, see Elmer Towns, *Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough: A Guide to Nine Biblical Fasts* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1996).

Brinkmanship Faith

There can be no faith without risk.

J. Hudson Taylor

Principle

When faced with a life-threatening obstacle or attack, you must risk everything to defeat the enemy.

Definition

Brinkmanship. 1. to push a situation to the limit in order to achieve victory. 2. to go the brink, i.e., the extreme edge, in order to gain a favorable outcome over one's opponent.

When there arises a crisis that threatens the existence of a local church or Kingdom-centered ministry, the person of faith must stand against it. He or she must go to extreme limits to confront extreme threats. Bold threats demand bold, extraordinary faith.

The word *brinkmanship* was coined during the Cold War, waged from 1945 to 1989 through a strategic arms race and geopolitical maneuvering, between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. Both nations went right up to the edge of nuclear war, but hostilities never broke out. Today it is generally recognized that all-out war was avoided thanks to the U.S. policy of brinkmanship. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, who advocated such one-upmanship against the Soviet Union, is credited with the phrase. In an interview for *Life Magazine*, Dulles defined brinkmanship as “the ability to get to the verge without getting into the war.”¹ The idea is to become a bigger threat to the enemy than the enemy is to you, even when it seems that doing so is risky.

When you exercise *brinkmanship faith*, you use every possible strategy, even to the point of total sacrifice, to win a spiritual victory over the enemy's threats. Brinkmanship faith means giving everything you have to gain a victory for the cause of God – it is a willingness to lose everything for a spiritual victory. You respond to the enemy's threats by deliberately creating a risky situation and trusting God to give you victory over the enemy.

Taking a Stand to Grow

Christ Fellowship of Palm Beach Gardens, Florida, engaged in spiritual brinkmanship with the city council over its future existence. The church began in the living room of Pastor Tom Mullins and found a home in a converted horse barn on Northlake Boulevard. In the late 1990s, Christ Fellowship attracted more than 4,000 people in five weekend services (two on Saturday night and three on Sunday morning).

The church owned 40 acres across the road from the horse barn, but the city council kept delaying their request for a zoning variation and building permit to begin construction on a new church facility. There was such opposition from the Northlake Boulevard neighborhood that the issue became a political hot potato. There were false claims that a megachurch would cause traffic gridlock and create dangerous turning lanes. But the six lanes of Northlake Boulevard were designed to handle much more substantial traffic to and from larger developments at peak times. The impact of the church's traffic, mostly on off-peak Sunday morning, was much less. The root of the issue wasn't traffic; it was something deeper.

The horse barn was packed to overflowing, and the endless opposition to Christ Fellowship posed a serious threat to the church's present vitality and future growth. Pastor Tom Mullins was convinced the church needed to build on the property they owned across the road, and resolved to face the challenge head-on with brinkmanship faith. He called the church to fasting and prayer. Mullins and his church family knew nothing must stand in the way of a work of God, including spiritual attacks masquerading as fabricated concerns about traffic. It was time for spiritual warfare to undermine the threat of the enemy, and they got down on their knees for all-night prayer vigils and even 40-day fasts. Mullins also called on pastoral friends and their congregations across the country to pray with Christ Fellowship against the enemy's attacks and for the city council to grant building permission. Pastor Mullins shared his

confidence that God would provide the land approval with anyone who would listen, boldly risking his reputation and his authority in the community.

In November 1997, the city council met and voted four to one to allow Christ Fellowship to construct a worship center, a youth center, and a children's ministry building. It was a major victory! The church didn't back down, but pushed to the verge – and God gave them victory. Tom Mullins and the church rejoiced in the vote, knowing it was God who worked in the hearts of the council members and neighbors. Mullins said, "If hundreds had not fasted and prayed, we would not have won this spiritual victory."

Today, the church averages more than 20,000 in on-campus attendance and 25,000 worshipers attending online.

Standing Against Government

The largest church in Europe is the Embassy of God in Ukraine, with more than 23,000 members in Kiev and another 75,000 across the country. The authorities have tried everything they could think of to get rid of the church. Because of its sheer size, Embassy of God is highly visible – and especially in its early days, many government officials and media pundits did not like what they saw. A Pentecostal church was a threat to national identity; they felt it would corrupt Ukrainian culture, which is rooted in the Russian Orthodox Church. A propaganda barrage was launched against Embassy of God. The pastor, Sunday Adelaja, has at various times been accused of being an agent of the CIA, practicing black magic, selling drugs, hypnotizing people, and leading a cult. The police seized Adelaja's passport and revoked his permission to preach as a foreigner. He is an illegal resident, but has stayed in the country for the past 18 years in obedience to God's call. The church has continued to grow. As of this writing, Embassy of God has planted more than 70 churches in Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, Moldova, Georgia, the United States, India, and United Arab Emirates. There is a pastors' training institute, as well as a school to train leaders for service in government positions.

Adelaja is a Nigerian man who went to Moscow in the 1980s, on scholarship from the Communist Party to be trained in journalism (propaganda). It was the intent of the Party to eventually send him home to Nigeria to lead a Communist revolution. Unbeknownst to them, however, Adelaja was a Christian.

He earned his BA and MA degrees from Byelorussian State University. When he

finished his education, a career opportunity presented itself in Kiev. A new television station needed a journalist who spoke Russian, so Adelaja moved to Kiev and began producing and scripting programs. Then God nudged him to start a church.

He began by trying to get “good people” to come to the church, but almost no one came. Only a few foreigners attended. For four years, not a single Ukrainian attended; all he could get were East Asians. There was an obvious ethnic barrier: He was from Nigeria and many white Ukrainians were prejudiced against black people.

After several years, Sunday Adelaja took off his suit and tie and began going into the streets to meet drug addicts, alcoholics, and others who were considered the dregs of society. He preached the power of the gospel to transform lives. He focused on touching people with the love of Christ, visiting them in their homes. Soon Embassy of God’s attendance reached more than 1,000. And eventually, God brought middle class and elite Ukrainians to the church, attracted by the transformed lives of the “street people.” Today, more than a dozen members of Parliament call Embassy of God their church home, in addition to hundreds of civil servants at all levels of government. The mayor of Kiev is a member, as well as a Supreme Court justice and about 20 percent of government office-holders. **

Prayer and fasting have been central to Embassy of God’s ministry success. Twice a year, more than 2,000 leaders attend a 10-day retreat where they fast and pray for the work of God in Kiev. They spend 10 to 12 hours each day in prayer.

Early on, Adelaja established a personal week-long fast, a practice he continues to this day. Every month he goes to a private apartment without telephone, radio, television, or Internet, and spends a week in prayer. When I asked him why, he said, “Because I face the threat of imminent deportation, and the church faces many threats as well. I have to pray for God’s protection. We only go forward with prayer.”

He has received a number of death threats; funeral wreaths have been delivered to the front door of his home. Embassy of God lay workers testify that, on several occasions, assassins have come to services to murder Pastor Adelaja. Each time, the assassin was surrounded by intercessors who prayed for him throughout the service. On each occasion, the assassin left without making any attempt on the pastor’s life.

To the Verge Against the City Government

Several years ago, Kiev authorities decided to tear down the civic center where Embassy of God held its services, in hopes that demolishing the facilities would also

demolish the church. When the government announced the planned destruction, more than 20,000 people marched on the city center and surrounded city hall to pray in peaceful protest. They waved colorful flags. The choir wore blue robes and held hands, singing hymns. They chanted, “We’re Ukrainians, citizens of this country, we have rights.” “Let us build the buildings ourselves; please give us the opportunity.”

Many were afraid that tanks would come and machine guns would be lined up. Before the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the people would have been gunned down in the streets for such a protest. They wondered if it would happen again. But with prayer and fasting, they continued to wait for the mayor to come out and answer their demands.

They waited for four hours. When he finally appeared, the mayor told them he would give them the right to build a building. But Pastor Adelaja would not believe him. Years earlier, the mayor had promised to give the church the right to build a building – but never followed through with his pledge. Adelaja announced that 20,000 people would stay in the streets until they got a written guarantee. He said, “Earthly authorities respect only visible and tangible force, they will not give in easily.” The church finally got their document – signed – and 20,000 people went home.

But that day’s protest and victory paled in comparison to the extraordinary brinkmanship faith needed just two years later.

To the Verge Against the Communist Party

The “Orange Revolution” lasted for 17 days when more than one million protestors surrounded the Ukrainian parliament building, demanding that the Communist Party admit they had lost the election and turn the government over to the pro-democracy candidate, Viktor Yushchenko. Yushchenko represented more open, servant-hearted leadership for Ukraine and had won an overwhelming majority at the polls. But the Party leaders were trying to invalidate the results to stay in power.

When the newspapers and television news reported that the Communists had been reelected, people took to the streets and gathered in Independence Square, the main city square in Kiev. Hundreds of thousands of citizens left their jobs and homes to stand up for a free and fair election. They wore orange, symbolic of the coming spring and a new season of Ukrainian democracy. They didn’t threaten. They stood and sang hymns; many described it later as a great revival meeting. The people danced, lifting hands in praise to God, and some ladies inserted flowers in the rifle barrels held by the soldiers on guard around the parliament building.

While hundreds of thousands of people gathered around Parliament, 4,000 Embassy of God members banded together to fast and pray that a violent standoff would not happen. Members of the Russian Orthodox Church joined with members of Adelaja's church to pray for the protestors' physical protection, and that the hearts of the Communist bosses would be turned toward what was right.

People stayed in Independence Square day and night, giving speeches, playing music, chanting slogans, waving giant orange flags and flags of the Ukraine, and holding banners emblazoned with their demands. At night the Square was alive with candles and thousands upon thousands of people praying for a peaceful outcome. The conditions were terrible; it was below zero and available food was meager. Embassy of God members brought in badly needed supplies and set up dozens of tents: tents to give people access to food, tents to shelter the sick and cold, and tents for intense, ongoing prayer. Adelaja announced to the Communist leaders, "If you will not accept responsibility for this country, then I will." His words became a slogan, chanted by the people. If it hadn't been for the courage, determination, and generosity of Adelaja and the Embassy of God, the protest might not have been successful.

Seventeen days after the first protestors took to the streets, the Communist bosses gave in to the will of the people. In January 2005, President Yushchenko amazed the nation by beginning his first day in office with public prayer. The president, his wife, and his children bowed on their knees before an altar, with leaders from all the Christian denominations represented in Ukraine – included the Pentecostal churches, such as the Embassy of God, that had once been considered cults.

Yushchenko thanked the Embassy of God for the role they played in the Orange Revolution with a plaque, which hangs in the church building to this day: "Your conscientious work has become a considerable part in that victory. It was you who protected democracy in the Ukraine, standing for its high ideals, not considering your own interests. I am convinced that as long as there are people in the Ukraine who have the same civil position, dignity and spirit as you have, everything will be all right in this country."

The brinkmanship faith of Pastor Sunday Adelaja and members of the Embassy of God dared to take on the enemy's threats by risking it all. And God proved faithful to give them victory.

The Necessity of Brinkmanship

When a work of God is mortally challenged, the man or woman of God must trust God first and foremost: God exists, and has called his people to strive against evil. He responds in faith to defeat evil, knowing when he prays for the mountain to be moved, God will respond to his faith and remove the threat to his ministry (see Mark 11:23).

Brinkmanship faith involves going to extreme limits to thwart an extreme threat. When evil pushes, brinkmanship faith pushes back – but this push is more than merely holding a candle in the darkness. The person with brinkmanship faith counterpunches with the strength of a heavyweight fighter, knowing he must knock out evil before he is knocked down. He pushes the challenge to the limits, risking his job, his possessions, his home, even his very life. Moses gave up the prestige and safety of Pharaoh's palace to side with Israel in slavery. Esther risked her crown as queen of Persia when she concluded, "If I perish, I perish" (Esth. 4:16). Brinkmanship faith risks everything to turn the situation around so that the work of God can go on. Brinkmanship faith says, "I'll never give up and I'll never quit." Brinkmanship faith is ready and willing, like the heroes of faith celebrated in Hebrews 11, to "stop the mouth of lions, quench the violence of fire, face the edge of the sword . . . tortured . . . trials of mocking and scourging; yes, even chains and imprisonment" (Heb. 11:33-38, *ELT*).

The threat to a church or ministry is sometimes internal. Maybe a church board threatens to fire a pastor for preaching against the "polite sins" of the church's biggest givers. Perhaps a Diotrophes, whom the writer of 3 John warns against, threatens to split the church (see 3 John 9-11), or a heretical teaching begins to take hold on people's minds and hearts. Perhaps financial reversals in society, such as the recent worldwide recession, threaten to bankrupt a church. Or the threat may be as seemingly harmless as exploding attendance in a small auditorium with inadequate parking. After all, you can't pour a gallon of milk into a six-ounce glass.

At other times the threat is external. Perhaps government agencies try to hold back the work of evangelism or stop a church from building on its property. In the future, a political correctness campaign may lead the government to try to force a church or Christian ministry to hire a homosexual. Suppose the government threatens jail time for "hate speech" because a pastor says there is no salvation in Islam or abortion is murder. We must never take the right to free speech for granted, and do all we can to protect it.

When Jesus promised that the gates of hell could not stand against us (see Matt. 16:18), wasn't the Lord suggesting the necessity of brinkmanship faith? Wasn't Jesus using warfare terminology to suggest we bombard the enemy's defenses with truth,

invade the enemy's castle by prayer, and knock down its doors? Only deep conviction can do that. Only brinkmanship faith.

God's method to overcome obstacles in ministry is a Spirit-filled person – always has been, always will be – a unique leader fearless and driven to get the work of God done. God has always used people. That's His only method. It's His best method.

When the world tumbled into demonic darkness after Adam's fall and God knew He had to destroy the world with a flood because the satanic scourge was unstoppable, He didn't look for a technique or new method. God looked for a man who would obey Him and do His work, a man who would do the improbable and impossible. God wanted a man who would do what no man had ever done – build a 450-foot boat in the middle of dry land. God looked for a man who would announce a coming flood to a world that had never known rain. God wanted a man who would beg everyone to repent and come aboard the ark. God found a man who would put his reputation, his wealth, his family at risk to complete God's work.

God's to-the-brink man was Noah.

Later, when the world was plunged into the grip of idolatry, God needed a man who would separate himself from the evil influence of an idolatrous civilization, who would move his family into the wilderness to live separate from sin. God looked for a man who would leap into the unknown without knowing where he was going, trusting God to lead him and his family. God found a man who was not content in the idolatrous cities created by men, but who instead would wait – and wait, and wait – for a city whose builder and maker is God (see Heb 11:10).

God's to-the-brink man was Abraham.

A few generations later, God knew Egypt, the Middle East's breadbasket, would face a life-threatening famine. God needed a humble man who was more interested in telling the truth than in seeking the favor of the rich and powerful. God looked for a man whose integrity would survive betrayal, imprisonment, and false accusations. God found a man who could be elevated to the second-highest office in Egypt and implement a plan to put aside food for the coming famine, thereby saving much of the known world from starvation.

God's to-the-brink man was Joseph.

The Israelites who went to Egypt to save themselves from the famine were enslaved by slavery to the Egyptians. God needed a deliverer to lead them into the land of Canaan, promised long ago to their father Abraham. God found an adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter, a boy who was, in fact, an Israelite. The boy rejected the riches and

power of Egypt and stepped into the unknown to lead a rag-tag horde of rebellious slaves and teach them how to become a nation governed by God's Law.

God's to-the-brink man was Moses.

When God's people were beaten by the Philistines from pillar to post in the Promised Land, God wanted a man after His own heart to defeat the enemy and rule His people. God raised up a warrior-king from the sheep pasture. As a lad he killed a bear, a lion, and a giant. As a man he rid God's people of the Philistines and raised God's kingdom to splendor so that heathen nations praised the God of the Jews.

God's to-the-brink man was David.

Throughout history God found women and men who would go to the brink. Rahab helped God's people bring down the walls of Jericho and entered the Messianic lineage. Out of family loyalty Ruth chose to leave her land, and her leap of faith made her grandmother to King David. Deborah challenged the Israelite men to rid the Promised Land of the Canaanites, and is remembered as a prophetess and judge who led God's people to victory. Elijah stood against the priests of Ba'al on Mount Carmel. King Hezekiah prayed in the Temple for Judah's deliverance, and God answered by visiting a plague on the invading Assyrians – 160,000 died without a battle. Nehemiah undertook the doubtful job of rebuilding Jerusalem's wall, while Ezra led the reconstruction of the Temple in spite of overwhelming odds.

Every one of these heroes went to the brink for God.

Because he trusts God, the man of God does whatever it takes to get the job done. His trust centers on God, not on a method, a thing, a tool, or a technique. His faith does not depend on his courage or his vision, but on God Himself. When God's man faces difficult circumstances, inadequate resources, or insurmountable obstacles, he launches a project so risky that the only way it will succeed is by God's intervention. When the night is black, the way is fraught with dangers, and the enemy seems to have the upper hand, the man or woman of God trusts in God and God alone. He does not fear because he is doing exactly what God wants him to do. He knows it's the right time, the right situation, and the right place. So he puts God's reputation, and his own, on the line. He calls for all the world to see what God can do. He practices brinkmanship, pushing a dangerous situation to the limit. With total confidence and trust, he knows God will push back the enemy's advance and give him the victory. Why? Because God has led him to take the leap. He has no other choice.

The man of God has heard the Spirit's command whispered in the dark of night, and he will risk his ministry and life to obey. He knows what he must do because he

has heard God speak to his soul. He cannot go back, he cannot quit, and he cannot fail. He must take the leap of faith that will define his life and his ministry.

To-the-brink leapers never stoop to the self-gratification of “name-it-and-claim-it” faith. They don’t take a leap into the unknown for a Cadillac. They don’t plant a \$1,000 “seed-faith gift” in a television ministry to get rich or to get famous or to fulfill personal ambition. To a faith-leaper, self-aggrandizement is nothing compared to pleasing God (see Heb. 11:6).

Some take a leap of brinkmanship faith once in a lifetime – and only once – and are forever remembered for that magnificent leap. Others leap twice. They glorified God the first time they saw Him break through terrible odds to give victory, and that might have been enough for them – but not for God, who led them to leap a second time.

A very few go to the brink many times. They might be called habitual leapers, those who walk so closely with God that they have learned to be at ease when they leap because He always comes through. A true to-the-brink man or woman obeys God and walks fearless into battle again and again, unafraid to face the enemy. They look the enemy in the eye and do not blink or back down. Jerry Falwell leapt countless times; “Brinkman” could have been his nickname. He described himself as “one who practices the art of spiritual brinkmanship.”² Brinkmanship is what he had to do because it is what God wanted him to do. He walked point for the rest of us, risking to win the victory.

When you are willing to go to the brink, you know your Commander-in-chief and you report with joy for duty every morning. You also know your enemy, so you go out relentlessly to do battle. But you don’t fight with weapons of war. Spiritual battles are not won with worldly weapons. No, you engage in spiritual warfare, winning battles on your knees before you fight them in public. Remember, Sunday Adaleja fasts *one week* out of every month! When you are willing to go to the brink, you search for and find your marching orders in the Word of God. Remember the battle cry of Billy Graham: “The Bible says . . . !”³ When you are willing to go to the brink, you never give up hope that God’s work will be done. Remember the passion of Bill Bright: “fulfilling the Great Commission in this generation.”⁴

Will you, like these illustrious to-the-brink men, fix your eyes on Jesus and work for the expansion of God’s kingdom in the world? Will you go to the brink by faith to win victory over the enemy and bring glory to God? Brinkmanship faith is a natural response to a deep relationship of total trust. Do you trust Him enough to risk

everything?

Notes

1. James Sheply, "How Dulles Averted War," *Life*, 16 January 16, 1956, p. 70+.
2. Jerry Falwell preached a sermon titled "Spiritual Brinkmanship" from the pulpit of Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg, Virginia, on February, 19, 1995, in which he defined himself in this way.
3. Billy Graham, *Billy Graham's The Bible Says* (Minneapolis, MN: World Wide Publications, 1988).
4. Bill Bright, *How You Can Help Fulfill the Great Commission* (Wayne, NJ: New Life Publications, 2002).

Faith Priority

*You hoped for rich harvests, but they were poor.
And when you brought your harvest home, I blew it away. Why?
Because my house lies in ruins, says the LORD of Heaven's Armies,
while all of you are busy building your own fine houses.*

Haggai 1:9

Principle

Your leap of faith must mesh with God's priorities.

Definition

Priority. 1. the quality of being advanced, preferred, or before; 2. taking precedence, of higher or highest importance; 3. something given special attention.

Two churches in different areas of a mid-sized town needed new sanctuaries. The people in both churches came from similar social and economic circumstances and each congregation had a history of solid financial giving. All things seemed to be equal, but one congregation raised all the money it needed to build while the other's financial campaign failed.

Was it God's fault? No.

Did both pastors have faith? Yes.

What was the difference? While everything seemed equal on the surface, the *faith focus* of the pastors differed widely. The failed pastor based his campaign on the financial ability of members and emphasized the benefits of the new sanctuary to the congregation, including its beauty and acoustics.

The other pastor successfully challenged his congregation to reach more lost people than ever . . . they needed more space to get people saved! He pointed to the church's overcrowded services and warned that lost people wouldn't attend where there were no seats. His appeal was soul winning, not aesthetics.

Does God bless some leaps of faith more abundantly or quickly than others? Yes. But the hinge point is not a person's depth of sincerity or their intensity of prayer. It is a faith focus aligned with God's priorities. God blesses leaps of faith that jump toward His purposes. He is far more likely to bless a leap toward powerful, effective evangelism than a leap toward a state-of-the-art worship center. Why? Because God is not primarily interested in a church's or ministry's financial bottom line, or in the condition of its facilities. No, He cares about people. How many people are giving their lives to Christ? How many people are following Jesus into the waters of baptism? How many hungry people are fed, naked people clothed, thirsty people given something to drink, prisoners visited? These are God's priorities, and He answers some prayers more quickly than others because they align with His priorities.

This should not be strange to us. In healthcare, priority is given to those with life-threatening disease or injury before those with minor problems. In agriculture, priority is given to crops that are vital to the food supply before those, such as flowers, that merely bring enjoyment. In budgeting, priority is given to necessary expenditures over luxuries. A newspaper editor can't print every news item that comes across her desk. Priorities lead her to print news her reader must know, rather than filling precious column inches with entertainment.

God's Ten Priorities¹

How can you know your leap of faith is aligned with God's priorities? The following is a list of faith motivations that align with His purposes¹:

1. Seeking an intimate relationship with Him
2. Worshiping God for who He is
3. Loving God and putting Him first in your life
4. Sharing the gospel with the unsaved
5. Living a holy life to please the Lord
6. Loving and serving the Church

7. Using your gifts in ministry to other believers
8. Ministering to those in need outside the Body of Christ
9. Trusting God to meet your personal needs
10. Trusting God to meet your church or ministry needs

1. Seeking an Intimate Relationship with God

Some have sought an answer to prayer by faith but nothing happened. Why? Perhaps they forgot the most essential element of faith: relationship. Faith is not a *power* they possess but a relationship with the *person* of God. A growing, loving relationship to God changes your priorities to match His and leads to answered prayer – because you ask for answers He wants to give.

The more intimately a person is connected to God, the more powerful and effective their faith. Therefore, don't seek answers to prayer. Seek Jesus.

Furthermore, the more intimately a person is connected to God, the more powerful their faith. Therefore, don't seek faith, seek Jesus. Paul's passion to know Christ bleeds through every word of his letter to the Philippians: "But what things were gain to me, I have counted loss for Christ . . . that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection (Phil. 3:7,10, NKJV). Paul, of course, had powerful faith that led him to pray for miraculous things – but his effective faith was a result of his love for Christ.

What's the secret of faith that can move mountains? Seek Christ first. "That in all things He might have the preeminence" (Col. 1:18, KJV). And what must you do to get stronger faith? Do what Paul did: "For to me to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21, KJV). Then what happens? "I can do all things through Christ" (Phil 4:13, KJV). When your first priority is to know God, then God will reward your leap of faith. Are you growing your relationship with Him?

2. Worshiping God for Who He Is

Again and again, the Old Testament tells us God's people failed to make Him their priority. They worshiped Asherah, the pagan Canaanite goddess of fertility, and the local ba'als which the Canaanites believed ruled over various towns, hills, and shrines. They even worshiped the serpent Moses had made at God's command to rid Israel of a swarm of poisonous snakes (see 2 Kings 18:4)!

King Hezekiah brought revival to the people of Judah, beginning with the removal of every foreign god and idol. He ordered the Temple cleansed and then reinstated the blood sacrifices prescribed by the Law. There are two indications that the people were really repenting from the depths of their heart.

First, they urgently sought forgiveness of sins, performing the required blood sacrifices willingly. "So they killed the bullocks, and the priests received the blood, and sprinkled it on the altar" (2 Chron. 29:22, *KJV*). Remember, blood cleanses from sin and prepares us for service.

Second, they worshiped. "When they had finished offering, the king and all who were present with him bowed and worshiped" (2 Chron. 29:29, *NKJV*). And what was the result when they made worship of the one true God their first priority? Assyria, the powerful empire that sought to conquer and rule Judah, was defeated by God's hand (see 2 Chron. 32).

Has sin drained your spiritual power? Have you failed to make God your first priority, giving Him the honor and glory – the worship – He is due? Then repent and bow before Him in worship. Remember, it's not *how* you worship; it's *who* you worship. When you worship God, He becomes the all-encompassing priority for your life and ministry.

Have you been exercising faith, but don't receive what you seek? Maybe you have not been close enough to God to hear His whispered *no*, or maybe you've missed God's still small voice telling you *how* or *when* to ask by faith. Then bow before Him in worship. Intimacy grows through worship. When you are completely absorbed by God's goodness and beauty, His supreme worth, you don't make foolish "faith claims." You're too attuned to His Spirit to demand something He is not prepared to give.

Jesus said, "The Father is seeking . . . worship" (John 4:23, *NKJV*). He's looking for it. In the movie *Field of Dreams*, an Iowa farmer hears a voice that tells him, "If you build it, they will come." When it comes to life with God, "If you worship, He will come." The Father goes where He is worshiped. When He comes, you experience His presence. Have you felt the Lord drawing near when you pray? I call this God's *atmospheric presence*. When you open your whole heart to God, He comes to fellowship with you. Just as you feel a wet atmosphere before it rains, so you feel God's atmospheric presence refreshing your spirit and strengthening your faith.

God honors faith that worships. Are you giving Him the glory He deserves?

3. Loving God and Putting Him First in Your Life

“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength” (Deut. 6:5, *NKJV*). Jesus said, “This is the first and great commandment” (Matt. 22:38, *NKJV*).

Love is giving yourself to the one you love. What did Jesus say was the greatest love? “Greater love has no one than this, than to give one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:13, *ELT*). The apostle John, described in his Gospel as “the one whom Jesus loved” (John 20:2, *NLT*), wrote, “This is love . . . that God gave His Son” (1 John 4:10, *ELT*). Giving is at the heart of love. When you love someone, you give them gifts, time, attention, and affection. You give them *yourself*.

God honors faith that seeks to love Him more deeply and put Him in first place. Why do some people have difficulty moving mountains? Perhaps because they are not motivated first and foremost by love. They ask God to give without a willingness to give themselves to God. Are you willing to love God by giving yourself completely to Him?

4. Sharing the Gospel with the Unsaved

Winning lost people to Christ is a high priority for God. “The Lord is . . . not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9, *KJV*). God wants as many people saved as possible, and so the faith requests of those who are motivated to share the gospel go to the top of God’s priority list.

Think of Billy Graham’s motivation to preach the gospel to as many people as possible. How did God honor his faith? God gave him money, staff, resources, use of the world’s largest stadiums, and extensive exposure by the media – all so Graham could reach more lost people than any other person in history.

Think of Bill Bright, whose faith vision was to see the gospel shared with every person in his generation. God honored his faith by giving him the resources to build Campus Crusade for Christ into the largest Christian student organization on earth, with more than 25,000 full-time missionaries and more than 220,000 volunteers. The gospel is shared around the world because Bill Bright’s priorities aligned with God’s priorities.

Think of Jerry Falwell, who envisioned the impact of a world-class Christian university. He didn’t dream it as an educator; Falwell’s passion touched the evangelistic priority of God. He wanted all Liberty students, no matter their major or career interest,

to be soul winners, to saturate their towns and cities with the gospel. God honored his faith by giving the resources for Liberty University to become the largest Christian university in the world.

God honors faith that prioritizes evangelism. Are you obeying the Great Commission and making the spread of the gospel a priority?

5. Living a Holy Life to Please the Lord

When God repeats Himself, you can be sure He's saying something important! When revealing the Old Testament Law, He said, "You shall be holy; for I am holy" (Lev. 11:44). And through the apostle Peter in the New Testament, He said, "Be holy, for I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:16, *NKJV*).

Why should we be holy? Because God is holy, and we are made in His image. To be holy means to be set apart for God's purposes, and an important part of being set apart is keeping oneself from sin. "If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world" (1 John 2:15-16, *KJV*). We cannot claim that we are making God our priority when we are seeking our own worldly gratification.

Those who have a passion for holiness seek to be like Christ with the help of the Holy Spirit – and this means not just avoiding sin but also acting in love. Jesus did not spend His earthly life worried about all the things He shouldn't do; He was too busy healing, teaching, sharing a meal, spending hours in prayer, and preparing His disciples for their ministry! The writer of Hebrews assures us that "we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin" (4:15). Jesus was tempted to sin in every way, but set Himself apart for the Father's purposes. Those who seek by faith to live holy lives want to do the same.

God honors the faith of those who are holy. Are you keeping yourself from sin? Are you set apart for God's purpose?

6. Loving and Serving the Church

The Bible tells us, "Christ loved the church and gave up his life for her" (Eph. 5:25). Does that mean He gave up His life for a building full of pews and a 10,000 pipe organ? No. The Church is people, not buildings. God's people are the Church, which Paul calls

the Body of Christ (see 1 Cor. 12).

In 1972, I visited Antioch, Syria, where the first church of that city gathered for worship. The church in Antioch, which was made up of Jews, was the first to send missionaries to Gentiles (see Acts 11:19-30; 13:1-3). God loved that church and used them abundantly for evangelism – *and they met in a cave*. In 2005, I visited the Isle of Patmos where the apostle John, a prisoner of the Roman Empire, wrote the Book of Revelation. Other political prisoners gathered with John to worship as a church. They couldn't send out missionaries, but God loved the little church so much that Jesus appeared to John in their meeting place – *in a cave* (see Rev. 1:12-18). Buildings don't make God's people a church.

What makes a church a church is the presence of God's Spirit energizing a group of people to do the work of Christ; that's why Paul called the Church the Body of Christ. Those who seek to serve and grow God's people share Christ's love for the Church and are willing to give up their lives for her. They make people a priority.

If you haven't been able to move mountains by faith, check your people priority. If programs, traditions, buildings, or services are most important, you do not share God's priorities. God honors the faith of those who love and serve His Church. Are you strengthening Christ's Body to do His work?

7. Using Your Gifts in Ministry for Other Believers

After loving God, Jesus' "Second (command) is . . . 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Matt. 22:39, NKJV). The root of all we do for others should be our love for them. Did not Paul challenge us, "Though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing" (1 Cor. 13:2, KJV)?

As I wrote earlier, love is giving yourself to the one you love. A mother gives her strength and body out of love for her baby. A father brings home his hard-earned paycheck out of love for his family. Likewise, the believer must agonize in prayer, sacrifice time and pleasure, and offer his or her gifts in Christian service to sisters and brothers in Christ. That's an expression of faith that God honors.

God wants His people to succeed and promises to bless them: "'I know the plans I have for you,' says the LORD. 'They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and hope'" (Jer. 29:11). What do you have to do to succeed? Align your priorities with God's priorities. Devote yourself to serving and loving your fellow believers, blessing them with your gifts, skills, and talents. God's people are blessed to

be a blessing (see Gen. 12:1-3). Make it your mission to bless others, and God will accomplish extraordinary things through your faith.

8. When Believers Minister to Those in Need Outside the Body of Christ

God has always motivated His people to give to those in need. Over the centuries, Christians have founded hospitals, schools, orphanages, food banks, thrift shops, halfway houses, prison ministries, and clean-water wells. Countless of these ministries were begun on a shoestring (or smaller) budget, with faith as the only bottomless resource. But because they aligned with God's priority to care for those in need, God provided.

Some reckon George Müller, who founded a ministry caring for orphaned boys and girls in Bristol, England, in the 1800s, had the greatest faith of any man since the apostle Paul. They may be right.

When there was no food in the kitchen and the pantry was bare, Müller stood in the dining room to remind over 2,000 orphans that God had always provided one hot meal for them each day. Then he lifted his hands to pray, "Lord, thank You for good hot food to feed these children. I thank You for Your faithfulness to always provide for our needs."

The cooks looked around the bare kitchen and shook their heads. They wondered how Müller could thank God for food that wasn't there.

KNOCK-KNOCK.

A sudden pounding on the outside door ended Müller's prayer of thanks.

"My wagon wheel just shattered," a wagon driver announced, coming into the room. "I can't deliver my wagon full of pies. Could you use some pies?"

"Bring them in and serve the children," Müller instructed the cooks and the wagon master.

"But sir," the wagon master protested, "the pies are very hot! They were just taken from the oven."

"Yes, yes," Müller nodded with a smile, "we expected that. We just thanked God for hot food."

I probably haven't read enough to know who has the greatest faith in all of history. For that matter, it might be someone not remembered by history. But Müller's extraordinarily great faith, met again and again by a God ready to do miracles, was directed toward his humanitarian efforts to care for needy orphans. His great faith

aligned with God's priorities.

Why did God bless the faith of Jerry Falwell? In part, because he built Treasure Island, a summer camp for poor kids in Central Virginia. "Come for free," Jerry would say. "Just bring some clothes." When they didn't have clothes, Thomas Road Baptist Church provided them. More than 1,200 children came to camp each summer – for free.

At the height of the Sunday school busing movement, Falwell's church sent out 100 buses every Sunday morning – some over 50 miles, one way – to pick up children in Central Virginia. These were children from the poorest homes in the state. The average bus brought 27 riders, so about 2,700 poor children were taught the Word of God in children's church each week. On the way home, they ate Colonel Sanders' Kentucky Fried Chicken. For some of them, that was the biggest meal they ate all week.

Jesus had a lot to say about the poor (see Matt. 11:5, 19:21; Mark 12:42; Luke 4:18, 7:22, 14:21, 18:22, 19:8). We must minister to the poor because Christ expects it – not to get a tax deduction or the praise of others. We give to the poor out of obedience to Christ. A man once prayed, "Lord, give me a Pentecostal mouth to shout, a Presbyterian head to understand, Baptist feet to go, and Mother Theresa's heart to help the poor."

God will honor your faith when you minister to those in need.

9. When Believers Trust God to Meet Their Personal Needs

God has promised to provide for our needs. Jesus said, "Don't worry about these things, saying, 'What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?' These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs" (Matt. 6:31-32). Some of us in North America worry about necessities such as food and shelter, but if we're honest with ourselves, most of our worry goes far beyond our needs. We worry about luxuries. Many of us – and not necessarily the very rich among us – need a change of perspective on what is a need and what is a want. In fact, I have a millionaire friend who could be a model for all of us. He says, "I can only wear one suit at a time, eat one meal at a time, and sleep in one bed at a time." He lives far below his income level, while many believers in the U.S. live above theirs, going into debt to afford luxuries like giant TVs or brand-new cars. We need to reexamine our priorities

Faith in God's ability and willingness to provide for our needs (not our above-and-beyond wants) is fundamental. It's basic. How can we expect to trust Him for extraordinary things if we cannot trust Him for the ordinary? Paul wrote, "My God

shall meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19, NIV). Trust your heavenly Father to meet all your needs (not all your wants). Your faith will grow as you see Him work day to day to provide for you.

10. When Believers Trust God to Meet Their Church or Ministry Needs

When believers begin to trust God for ministry resources, it's amazing how Americans so often put buildings and staff at the top of their faith list. They pray for a new sanctuary, or a large piece of land, or new computer system, or other things that are purchased with money. Could it be that our focus reflects more of our cultural values than of God's kingdom?

We need to be clear-eyed and honest with ourselves about our motivations, and about the real needs of our church or ministry. For example, if your desire and aim is to grow in attendance, perhaps a larger, more impressive facility to attract visitors isn't what your church really needs. Maybe your church needs an outpouring of the Spirit for evangelism. Isn't it better to trust God for your ministry's real needs?

It's amazing how much *stuff* Jesus did without in His earthly ministry. It's also amazing how effectively the underground church in China ministers: without much property, without many sanctuaries, meeting mostly in house churches – yet current estimates put their number at more than 120 million believers – and growing.

Just like the student who flunked calculus because she had not taken advanced geometry and trigonometry, we must put first things first. Let's trust God to meet our ministry's most basic needs first – the Holy Spirit to guide and mature us in Christ, a vision to work for His kingdom in our community, willing and courageous hearts to follow where He leads – and then prayerfully consider further resources we need. Our faith will grow as we trust God to meet the real needs of our church or ministry.

Notes

1. You may disagree with the order of these priorities, but the larger point is that God has priorities, and is more likely to grant our requests in prayers when they align with what is most important to Him.

Faith Vision

See a vision. Share a vision. Own a vision.

Elmer Towns

Principle

Your step of faith must correspond to a vision from God.

Definition

Vision. 1. the act of power of seeing with the eyes. 2. the act or power to anticipate that which will or may come to be. 3. something seen or conceived under the influence of divine power.

In 1973, land developers, including two members of Thomas Road Baptist Church, bought an old rundown farm on 252 acres between the city of Lynchburg and Candler's Mountain. The farm had once belonged to Senator Carter Glass's family (he served as U.S. Senator 1920 to 1946). The property was covered in weeds, trash, and old abandoned cars. Rusted machinery was strewn across the farm. The roofs of the barn and stables all leaked. The buildings needed to be demolished.

It looked like a weed-infested junkyard. The developers, who attended Jerry Falwell's church, were ashamed to show it to their pastor, much less offer it to him for the future home of Liberty University. Yet he insisted on taking a look, so they drove with him to the highest hill on the farm. The two laymen sat in the car while Falwell surveyed the land, walked several yards in front of the car, and knelt to pray. He rose from the ground and returned to the car, excitement lighting his features. "I see it all. I see dorms over there . . . classrooms over there . . . I see an athletic field, gyms, parking . . ." He pointed into the distance, painting a vivid picture of the vision only he

could see.

Jim Moon, Jerry's lifelong friend, was also in the car that day. He had been saved at the same altar with Jerry on January 17, 1952, and was the Associate Pastor of Jerry's church. Jim said, "I don't see anything but weeds and junk."

The farm eventually became the home of Liberty University.

A New Way of Seeing

Faith vision is seeing what looks to others to be an insurmountable task, and seeing a way to accomplish it. Sometimes it's seeing a way to do something that has never been done before. Other times, it's seeing a new or better way to do something that needs to be done.

Bill Hybels and a few friends started Willow Creek Community Churchⁱ in 1975. Hybels's faith vision was to develop a seeker strategy that allowed an unsaved person anonymity to seek God and salvation. Willow Creek met in a building that looked like a civic center, not a church. They used drama teachings to attract interest, and contemporary music that was familiar to listeners' ears. Willow Creek became the largest congregation in America during the 1980s and '90s, and is still an influential force in the U.S. evangelical church.

In 2008, Hybels envisioned a video leadership training conference, called The Leadership Summit, to train thousands of church leaders.ⁱⁱ The goal of the conference was to transform leaders with an injection of vision, skill development, and inspiration for the sake of the local church.ⁱⁱⁱ In the 2013, the "videocast" was viewed by more than 14,000 churches across the globe, with over 170,000 people in attendance.

Visionary faith is the incendiary ability to see what God wants to do. God's leader sees first, sees further, sees more than those who are followers. Vision is the twin of faith; to give birth to one is to give birth to both. You can't have extraordinary faith without God-given vision.

When Jerry Falwell and I began Liberty University, we set a goal of growing a little larger than Bob Jones and Tennessee Temple Universities. Both reported an enrollment of about 4,500 students and were the biggest evangelical colleges we knew of. So we set a goal of 5,000 students. We'd greet each other holding up our two fingers, the pointer finger and thumb, with a small distance between them as if to say, "Liberty will be just a *little bit* bigger." My goal was to be a little bigger than the biggest

university I knew.

But that was not Falwell's goal.

Something happened around 18 months after Liberty began. I think he saw the quality of our students and the high level of Christian liberal arts education that was possible. This was not just another Bible college, and he saw first what it could become.

He announced, "We're going to have 50,000 students." Then he added, "We'll beat Notre Dame in football."

He had a vision.

Many leaders have proclaimed enormous goals in ministry – the biggest church in the state, raising millions in cash, doing great things that haven't been done. But in some cases, it didn't happen. Why did the faith of Jerry Falwell and of Bill Hybels have credibility, where so many other leaders failed?

Elements of Vision

We must examine the nature of biblical faith to see why many fail and only a few accomplish their goals. First, a leader must give attention to his *faith relationship* with God. A leader who is walking intimately with God is kept, by his intimacy with the Indwelling Christ, from bragging or making unrealistic goals (see chapter 14).

Then too, we must remember the principle of *faith priority* (chapter 4). God honors faith that is concerned with worship and soul-winning. When a leader has passion for people, God rewards her faith.

Next, a leader must have *convergence faith* (see chapter 6), in which his calling and spiritual gifts intersect with his faith. All of these factors also converge with his past service to God.

Until a leader has been tested in small *brinkmanship faith* encounters, she's not ready to win the largest battles of faith – brinkmanship victories (chapter 3).

That brings us to *faith vision*. Faith vision got Falwell up every morning to be in the radio studio by 6:30. Faith vision drove him to make 100 house visits each and every day. Falwell didn't begin with a vision to build the biggest church or the biggest evangelical university. He began with a faith vision to reach every lost person within 10 miles – to get them saved, baptized, and connected to the church. God saw the heart of a man in his young 20s who wanted to reach lost people for Christ. And God honored his faith. Faith vision is more than setting up objectives or planning aims; it's living

with a purpose to reach every lost person for Christ in your immediate area.

The writer of Proverbs says, "Where there is no vision, people perish" (Prov. 29:18, *KJV*). If a leader doesn't obey the initial faith vision God gives him, he will never have a larger vision to do more for God. If you don't act on the faith vision you have today, you won't be prepared for the faith vision of tomorrow. Just as automobile headlights illuminate the road for a hundred yards in the night, so you must drive the first hundred yards before you see what's next. Faith vision is walking in the light you have so God can give you more light. Those who leap from darkness (no light) to a goal of pastoring the largest church in the city, have probably attempted to jump beyond the reaches of their credibility.

Your faith vision grows as you meet God daily in your quiet time. The prophet Habakkuk said, "I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what he will say to me. . . . And the LORD answered me and said: 'Write the vision and make it plain on tablets, that he may run who reads it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time'" (Hab. 2:1-3, *NKJV*). Faith vision comes to the spiritually alert heart that is in perfect relationship to God.

The leader stands on his watch, alone with God in the tower. There he gets his battle orders. Just as troops getting ready to fight wait on orders from their commander, our Lord Jesus gives direction to leaders in relationship with Him.

God doesn't give faith vision to those who don't want it, or to those who don't seek it, or to those who haven't prepared themselves spiritually for it. Faith vision is not dropped from Heaven like a sheet, nor does it flash like lightning in the dark night. Faith vision enlightens those who are already practicing the mandate "to know Christ and make Him known."

You see, faith vision is not something you *get*; it's something that *gets you*. It's a vision *you become*. You must become in your heart the church you're trying to build. The vision of a conquering church must live in the victor's heart long before it captures the perception of followers. As a leader does ministry before his people, they will "catch" their own faith vision for what they can do within the church's larger vision.

Then what happens? Something called *faith transfer* (see chapter 7). When church members saw the passion of Jerry Falwell to win their friends and relatives to Christ, they bought into his vision. And what is the first law of leadership? *When followers buy into a leader's vision, they buy into his leadership*. The Holy Spirit is the agent of faith transfer. When followers see their pastor doing something for God, the Holy Spirit in their hearts inspires them to pray, sacrifice, and work with their pastor to accomplish

the same dream.

There comes a time when you must write down your faith vision on paper. God told Habakkuk, "Write the vision and make it plain" (Hab. 2:2, NKJV). Your vision becomes tangible evidence, inscribed in black and white, of what you see God doing and what you want to do for God. When you put dates, numbers, and locations to your vision, it becomes a passion that drives you in ministry. When you write out your faith vision, it becomes a part of you more than ever before. Technically, the message is not yours until you write it down. And remember: You must see the vision in your heart, then write the vision on paper, long before it happens in the streets.

Great vision is not dropped on us out of the blue. A leader must constantly pray for it. This involves passion, persistence, and begging God to make it happen. This is as it should be. Isn't persistence part of the faith vision? God told Habakkuk, "Though it (the vision) tarries, wait for it" (Hab. 2:3, NKJV). What does this mean? That the vision doesn't come complete, all at one time. God develops the vision slowly in the leader's heart as he works and prays for it. If he persists, notice what will happen: "It will surely come" (Hab. 2:3, NKJV).

The bottom line is that a vision is something supernatural from God. Notice the last part of what God told Habakkuk: "The just shall live by his faith" (Hab. 2:4, NKJV). Did you see the phrase "his faith"? When you get a vision, it's not your vision. It's God's vision. He has given it to you. It's *His faith*.

Walter Cronkite was interviewing Mrs. Walt Disney at the opening of Disney World in Orlando, Florida. Her husband had passed away before the amusement park was opened. It was a gala night, the opening of one of the largest theme parks in history. Cronkite said to Mrs. Disney, "I bet Walt Disney wished he could have seen this."

Mrs. Disney smiled and answered, "If Walt hadn't seen it first, you wouldn't have seen it tonight."

What do you see?

Convergence Faith

In convergence, God moves a leader into a role that matches his or her gift-mix and experience so that ministry is maximized.

J. Robert Clinton

Principle

Your step of faith is most effective when it converges with your calling, your spiritual gifts, and how God has led you thus far.

Definition

Convergence. 1. the degree or point at which objects intersect. 2. where things come together.

Tim LaHaye pastored Scott Memorial Baptist Church in greater San Diego, California, and built it to a megachurch of more than 2,000 in attendance. During the '70s and '80s this was a colossal achievement; less than 110 pastors in America had reached this goal.

But there was another real power in LaHaye's ministry that was not yet widely recognized, though the millions of readers who bought his books knew his strength. LaHaye was a bestselling author with several books that each sold approximately a million copies. One year at the Christian Bookseller's Convention, it was announced that Tim LaHaye had written more million-copy bestsellers than any other Christian writer.

He wasn't finished. LaHaye set out to do something new – something that had never been done. He, along with Jerry B. Jenkins, wrote a popular fiction series that imagined the events following the rapture. The series was called *Left Behind*. The convergence of LaHaye's faith with his calling and spiritual gifts produced the

bestselling series of all time.

LaHaye, the pastor, built a very large and thriving church—something only a hundred or so other pastors had accomplished. But when his faith converged with his talent, God allowed him to do something no one had done before. God blessed him abundantly, above all he could ask or think (see Eph. 3:20).

Faith to Build a University

I used to get down on myself for my lack of faith, especially when I compared it to Jerry Falwell's strong mountain-moving faith. He would announce a prayer goal for millions of dollars, or state that God would heal a person, or that Liberty University would get accreditation—and then these miracles happened. When I tried to do the same thing in faith, money wouldn't come in, or my prayer goal didn't happen. When Liberty University was scarcely six months old, Jerry Falwell announced to the church, "Next week, we're going to fast for one million dollars for our new college!"

I heard the announcement at the same time as everyone else in the auditorium. Jerry and I had not talked about the million dollars; we hadn't even talked about our need. My jaw dropped.

Then Jerry announced, "We're going to have 50,000 students one day."

That blew my mind. We had talked about 5,000 students. I could stretch my mind to see that many at Liberty—but 50,000? I just couldn't see it. And a million dollars? I didn't see how it was possible.

I went to him and said, "Why do we need a million? I've already put together a budget for this year of \$152,000." This was a very generous amount; I would have no difficulty ending the year within that budget. I reminded him, "I ran a college in Canada. I can finish this year within budget and with money left over."

It was then Jerry told me something about faith I have never forgotten. "Elmer, this college is going to be much greater than you and I ever conceived. God is going to do something so great that a million dollars won't begin to cover our needs."

I pondered Jerry's statement a long time, and then reviewed our original agreement. Jerry said, "If you will set the academic program and hire the professors, I will raise the money, recruit the students, and build the buildings." Then Jerry made a *faith statement*: "Together we can build the greatest evangelical college in history to touch the world with the Great Commission." (I had no idea then that Liberty would

one day actually be the largest.)

Fasting for a million dollars was the greatest prayer challenge I had ever faced.

I had gone without eating on many occasions, putting my work first. But I had never seriously fasted, in its technical biblical meaning, for a whole day (i.e., going without three meals). Jerry planned that first fast the same way the church had fasted on many succeeding occasions: not eating Sunday night, Monday morning, or Monday noon. When the sun went down on Monday, we would eat our evening meal. (This is technically a *Yom Kippur* fast, according to the Jewish practice of not eating on the Day of Atonement.) Our purpose was to pray during our mealtimes, in addition to other times during the day when we usually prayed.

As we approached the day of fasting, I began to get scared. I thought to myself, *What if I faint in front of a class? Suppose I were to get sick and throw up in front of my students?* As I look back on my preparation for that first fast, it's not hard to see I was more concerned about my reputation and preserving my academic position than I was about God answering our prayers. I kept praying over and over, *Lord, help me get through this fast.*

I prayed so often that it was etched in my memory. My first one-day fast came and went successfully – and the only thing that happened was the thing for which I had prayed. I had made it through. (And I realized fasting was easy.)

Thankfully, many other people prayed for the money as Falwell requested. As the money came in, I was impressed with Jerry's victory in prayer, especially since I hadn't ever gotten those types of "rejoicing" answers. I had struggled through years of ministry when I had prayed for money. I have copies of my monthly prayer requests that go back to 1951. Often I prayed for money for the schools I attended, or the schools where I taught, but I didn't get "Amen" and "Hallelujah" answers.

The more I prayed with Jerry Falwell for money or buildings or recruitment, and saw his answers – the more discouraged I became about my lack of faith.

I began praying for more faith. Quite often I'd pray, *Lord, I believe; help Thou my unbelief.* But nothing significant happened. Praying for faith didn't seem to strengthen my faith.

Faith in Different Fields

After 37 years of ministry with Jerry Falwell, I came to a different conclusion. Some men

have the faith to trust God for money. Others don't have that faith, but they can have faith in another area. Some may have greater faith to trust God for winning souls, or to endure pain or martyrdom, or that God would use their gift of administration or their gift of mercy-showing or counseling.

I discovered my gift of teaching, and it dawned on me that my faith was effective to study, and to put together ideas or lectures. I had faith to write books, and discover new insights from scripture. I have faith like Paul who said, "I have the gift [to] understand all mysteries, and all knowledge" (2 Cor. 13:2, KJV).

Before coming to Liberty I was a tenured professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity Seminary, in Deerfield, Illinois. When I announced at a faculty meeting that I was leaving to help start a college called Lynchburg Baptist College, one of the faculty said to me, "Elmer, don't do it. You'll go to the hills of Virginia, bury yourself in a hillbilly church, and no one will ever hear about you again." I was stunned by that sarcastic slur, "hillbilly." The faculty member went on, "No one has ever heard of Jerry Falwell or Thomas Road Baptist Church. There have been hundreds of other small Bible institutes in the hills that never made it big. They all died, and so will your college."

If faith is a leap into the unknown, when I resigned Trinity and gave up my tenured position, I jumped. It was a leap to start a college that didn't exist. But because my spiritual gift is teaching and God led me into education, there was never a doubt in my mind that the new college would reach its goals. I knew in my heart God was calling me to start this college, and I knew it would make a great contribution to the cause of Christ. I didn't have faith for money or buildings, but I had faith that God would help me develop an academic program, that God would bring together a great faculty, and that our students would impact the world.

Focuses of Faith

Those with the most effective faith express it in keeping with their calling from God and their spiritual gifts. Their faith grows in keeping with the leading of God in their lives, and it is best expressed in the area of their greatest spiritual gift.

- Jerry Falwell, *the builder*: constructed 113 buildings for the world's largest evangelical college

- Bill Bright, *the businessman*: organized Campus Crusade for Christ into over 578,000 volunteers and full-time workers in the world's largest Christian organization
- Billy Graham, *the evangelist*: preached the gospel to more people and probably won more people to Christ than any other evangelist in history
- Yonggi Cho, *the church planter*: founded the Full Gospel Church in Seoul, South Korea, the world's largest church

As you read this chapter, look at the various focuses of faith. You will find some have faith that will absolutely chill your heart because you don't have their focus and can't imagine taking the leaps they have taken. But you may find several areas of faith that excite you when you imagine taking great leaps for God. It may not be considered a "great" area by others, but if it is where your gifts and calling converge, serve God there. Care more about what He thinks than what others think.

Look for the one category where your faith is strongest – that's how to grow your faith. Start in your strongest area and branch out from there. Don't try to develop faith where you are weakest. Rather, start with your strengths and make them even richer and more effective for God. Then you'll find that you begin to grow in other areas, like waves rippling out from a rock thrown in a pond. You can develop faith in areas you've never dreamed of.

1. Faith for Money: Resources for God's Work

Faith for money is a wonderful thing, and the work of God needs those who can pray for large amounts of money and get it. Think of Hudson Taylor raising thousands of dollars by prayer to send hundreds of missionaries to inland China.

Many think about the inspiring stories of George Müller trusting God for thousands of dollars to house, feed, and clothe more than 2,000 orphans in Bristol, England. Maybe someday you can do the things Müller did. But many are overwhelmed by these stories, because they know they don't have faith for money.

Why do some people have faith for money and some do not? First, let's look inward. Those who grew up very poor often have an internal meter that keeps them

anxious about money; their families were always worried where the next nickel was coming from, and now they have trouble praying for thousands because they can't overcome their historical poverty. Some can't pray for great amounts of money because they were taught to pray only for small amounts of money. Perhaps they were asked to pray for a million dollars for a new church building, but to them, a million might as well be a billion or a trillion – they just can't imagine praying for that much.

What should these folks do? Start praying, and start giving. Tithe 10 percent of all income as a first step of trust. Then stretch by giving a small gift over and above the tithe, trusting God to meet any need created by that sacrifice. As we are obedient in giving, God will prove Himself faithful to provide for our needs – and that is how faith for money is nurtured. If you grow your faith to give, you will grow your faith to receive. Start where you are and climb one step at a time.

Maybe that small beginning is what Jesus meant when He said, "If you have faith the size of a mustard seed" (Matt. 17:20, *NIV*). You know what happens when you plant a seed in the ground. It grows. Start with even the smallest mustard seed, and it will grow your faith to trust God for something bigger.

2. Faith for Property or Buildings: Growth of God's Kingdom

Why can some pray successfully for buildings or property? For some, it is because their request is absolutely necessary for survival. Maybe they can't do God's work without an automobile. When these people take a leap of faith toward four wheels and six cylinders, God is more likely to answer because they have utter urgency in their prayers. Their faith is motivated by what they don't have.

There are some people, however, who just don't have faith to pray for a new Christian education wing at their church, nor for other tangible resources for ministry. Why? It may be that they just don't have a great burden to pray for buildings, or automobiles, or other things. This person may be so spiritually minded that they only see the kingdom of God going forth in the hearts of individuals. This person might pray for spiritual victory, or spiritual growth, or for Christians to overcome their doubts, but not for tangible things. These people emphasize the kingdom of God growing within. It's not that they're against praying for buildings or things; it's just not their priority.

3. Faith to Present the Gospel to Lost People: Souls are Won to Christ

One of the first students at Liberty University was Steve Wingfield, a very energetic young believer from greater Lynchburg, Virginia. During the first academic year, Thomas Road Baptist Church had “Friend Day” when Jerry Falwell motivated everyone – college students and church members – to bring their unchurched friends to church. A brand new *Scotfield Bible* was offered to whomever brought the most guests. Many Christians were reluctant to invite just one to church, but Steve brought 49 visitors.

I saw more than a young student winning a Bible; I saw Steve’s passion for souls. Later God expanded his evangelistic crusade so that today his organization ministers out of an office in Harrisonburg, Virginia, with a staff of 10 full-time workers and a gospel tent that seats more than 5,000 people.

When Eastern Europe first opened up to the gospel after the Iron Curtain collapsed, Steve happened to be in Romania where thousands gathered in a large soccer stadium to celebrate their new political freedom. Some local leaders asked Steve to preach, and thousands received Jesus Christ. Steve Wingfield has faith for souls, and God gives him plenty of opportunities to leap.

4. Faith to Make a Decision for Christ: Walking in the Will of God

Some people have faith that prompts them to redirect their lives as they follow God’s will. On the other hand, some people find it very hard to make a great decision for God; it’s too much like taking a leap into the unknown (see chapter 2). Some are called into full-time Christian service, but they don’t have faith to surrender every part of their lives. Why? Maybe they want to hang on to their options, or their pleasures, or maybe family keeps them from that life-impacting decision. But in the same church service, a young girl goes forward to surrender all to Jesus Christ. She has faith that God has called her to full-time service. Her faith assures her that God will take care of her.

There are many other types of difficult decisions that demand faith. Some pastors can’t leave one church to go to another, because there are too many unknown factors. They can’t make a *faith decision* to launch out into the unknown. Why? Perhaps it’s fear, or lack of confidence, or they moved to a new church once before and it was a disaster; so they can’t make another faith decision to follow God.

5. Faith to Answer God’s Call: Expanding the Kingdom of God

I was converted to Christ on July 25, 1950, at a revival meeting at Bonna Bella Presbyterian Church, six weeks after I graduated from high school. I had won a scholarship to Armstrong State University (a junior college at the time), but I knew God was calling me into full-time Christian service. I knew I had to give up that scholarship and go to Columbia Bible College 150 miles away. This was a tremendous financial leap of faith. I had saved only \$237 and room, board, and tuition would be \$360 dollars a semester. It may as well have been a million dollars.

Since God's call to serve is God's call to prepare, I knew I had to get college training. I also knew where God wanted me to go, and I had a deep confidence that God would take care of my needs. So by faith, I enrolled in CBC. My faith also motivated me to stop spending my money on cold drinks and snacks. I washed my clothes by hand, and worked in the school's dining room washing dishes, and as the janitor in a chandelier shop.

God supplied in many different ways. I wrote a personal letter to every aunt and uncle (Mother came from a family of 11, Dad from a family of 9) telling of my conversion and call to the ministry. Most importantly, I shared the gospel and appealed to them to be saved. These long letters took several Sunday afternoons to write, but unbeknownst to me, these letters led to money for my first semester in college. Many relatives read the letters and sent money, which I then applied to my bill.

Shortly after arriving at CBC I received a check for \$25 dollars from the junior Sunday school class at Bonna Bella Presbyterian Church. The letter told how those young people had caught crabs in the saltwater creeks around the church, cooked them in a pot in the backyard of their teacher Mrs. Alcorn, and sold them door-to-door. I could almost hear them saying, "We're selling crabs for a nickel a piece to put Elmer Towns through Bible college." Many of the neighbors made donations over and above the nickel. When I read the letter, I locked the door to my room, spread the letter and check on the bed and wept before God. "Lord, I don't deserve this gift." I determined to be faithful to God because of the prayers and sacrifice of the junior Sunday school class.

I went home at the end of my first year with all my bills paid.

Mr. Al Aldridge, a businessman in Savannah, Georgia, heard of my commitment and asked me to give a testimony at his men's Sunday school class at Independent Presbyterian Church. For my second and third years, they paid my \$360 room, board, and tuition bills each semester at Columbia Bible College.

It's not only those going into full-time service who experience a *faith call*. A young 20-year-old woman went to pick up her younger brother from the nursery

department after church. The young lady had not been serious about serving the Lord; she was a self-centered party girl. But when she saw a teacher sitting at a table teaching some young children in the three-year-old department, it suddenly dawned on her, *That's what I want to do with my life. I want to work with young children and influence them for God.*

Based on what she saw and what she believed God was leading her to do, that young girl went to college and spent six years working her way toward a degree in psychology at a Christian college. The desire to help children from that one experience deepened her faith to carry out the challenges God gave to her.

6. Faith to Learn What is Unlearnable: Personal Intellectual Growth

Let's start with those who feel they can't learn. Perhaps they got poor marks in school, or they didn't like school, or they have always had difficulty with memory or comprehension. They might block out any attempt to learn new or different things. This person may be above average in intelligence and could learn, but they have convinced themselves that they can't.

On the other hand, there are believers who love the Word of God and search it daily. They're not just academically curious; they search the scriptures because they love the Author of the scriptures.

I spoke to the Southern Baptist Pastors Retreat at Hume Lake, California, in April 2008. I was asked to bring a series of messages on faith that I had given the previous summer at Glorieta, a Southern Baptist camp in New Mexico. Even as I was in the pulpit speaking about faith, I gained new insight. Even as I was explaining verses on faith, I realized I was learning new truths. When I came to the phrase, "From faith to faith" (Rom. 1:17, *KJV*), many ideas jumped off the page of scripture. I saw several different applications, from one kind of faith to another.

I announced to the audience, "I don't have the faith of Jerry Falwell; I can't trust God for money, property, or buildings." But then it dawned on me as I stood before those pastors, "Yes, I do have faith; but for different purposes." I realized, yes, I have deep faith in God, and I believe God answers my prayers, but the function of my faith is different from Jerry Falwell's. I began to list all the different purposes for which people express their faith. This chapter came out of that experience, when God taught me about faith as I was teaching others about faith.

I have faith to believe I can learn more about faith – and the more I learn about

faith, the deeper my faith becomes.

There are certain believers, usually with the spiritual gift of teaching, who are called to a life of study and sharing the Word of God. They are not called to build buildings, nor are they called to a life of evangelism, nor are they called to innovative types of ministry (rescue missions, age-graded ministry, counseling addicts, etc.). They are called to teach the scriptures, and they exercise faith every time they dig into the Word of God for new insight. They rely on their faith in God as they apply scripture to the many and varying needs of their listeners.

Don't get discouraged by comparing your faith expression with someone else's. The very person you admire may wish she could do what you do, that she had your faith focus.

7. Faith to Trust God through Illness: Believers Glorify God

God allows some believers to suffer more in sickness than others. Of course there are many natural reasons; some are sick more than others. Some are exposed to more bacteria. Some inherited illness from one of their parents. Some are ill because of wrong eating habits, lack of exercise, work demands, or many other environmental difficulties. We get sick for many different reasons, but doesn't God know about that? Doesn't scripture say, "All things work together for good" (Rom. 8:28, KJV)? The answer to both questions is yes.

To some God gives the "gift" of suffering to keep that person close to Him. A shepherd had a lamb that was always running from the flock. Like some believers, the little lamb had a rebellious streak. So the shepherd broke one of its legs and kept the lamb close to his side. The shepherd gathered the best of grass for the lamb and he drank from the shepherd's own cup. After it could walk, the healed lamb stayed closer to the shepherd, closer than any other sheep in the flock. Sometimes God allows us trouble so we will see His tender care and sovereign plan for our life. We become more intimate with the Lord. And what happens? Our faith grows.

Look at Job. His financial and physical problems were not sent by God; rather, they were devious plots by Satan to destroy Job and embarrass God. But even when God allowed Satan to punish Job, Satan could only go so far, for God told him, "You cannot touch his life" (Job 1:12).

The boils on Job's flesh were so painful that even scratching with broken pottery shards didn't bring relief. Yet in the midst of all of this pain Job could witness in faith,

“I know that my Redeemer lives, and he will stand upon the earth at last. And after my body has decayed, yet in my body I will see God!” (Job 19:25-26, *NLT*).

Paul prayed three times for God to take away pain in his life, to remove his “thorn in the flesh.” We don’t know what that thorn was, whether it was migraine headaches, painful arthritis, or malaria. Whatever the problem, Paul said, “I asked the Lord three times” – yet he didn’t get relief. What did God tell him? “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9, *NKJV*). So sometimes, the person in pain has faith to claim God’s grace to work through his suffering.

A woman going through the pangs of childbirth knows “this pain will pass.” Even when she feels she can’t stand another contraction, she looks beyond the pain in love to her child to whom she’s giving life. She knows her child will live because of her pain, so she endures willingly.

When a believer agonizes on a bed of pain, thinking he can’t go on for another five minutes . . . when the pain hurts so badly he prays to die . . . when looking at the clock is as agonizing as the hurt itself – then in faith he accepts his pain, knowing he is in the center of God’s will. He knows whether he lives or dies, by faith he glorifies God. Those who have never been in life-threatening pain will never experience the deliverance of faith to comfort them.

8. Faith to Endure Trials and Persecutions: Believers Learn Patience

James writes to suffering Christians, “My brethren, rejoice when you fall into various testings” (James 1:2, *ELT*). They were suffering for Jesus’ sake, so he exhorts them, “When you are tried, you shall receive the crown of life” (James 1:12, *ELT*).

Jesus taught us, “Blessed are you, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake” (Matt. 5:11-12, *KJV*). Faith is believing the words of Christ – when a martyr accepts persecution for Christ’s sake, he is responding in faith.

We in America have only soft persecution for our faith. People may make fun of us, or there may be some slight zoning restrictions, or we might not even be able to witness or pass out tracts in some areas. But we are not beaten, tortured, or thrown in jail. But think of the underground church in China or in some Islamic nations, where believers suffer life-threatening persecution for the name of Christ, or may be martyred if they take Christian baptism.

What should be our response when we are persecuted or tortured?

“Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to test you, as though some strange thing happened unto you” (1 Peter 4:12, *KJV*). Isn’t Peter telling us here to expect trials and temptations because we belong to Jesus Christ? On the night before Jesus died, He warned the disciples that, “If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:20, *NASB*). How does faith respond to persecution? Notice what Peter said: “But rejoice inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings” (1 Peter 4:13, *KJV*).

You get two results from suffering for Christ. First, “the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you” (1 Peter 4:14, *ELT*). Second, you should “glorify God in this matter” (1 Peter 4:16, *NKJV*).

9. Faith to Solve an Unsolvable Problem: Progress in God’s Work

Sometimes a believer has faith to claim God’s help to do something no one else can do. That happened in the 1980s in Washington, DC/Northern Virginia area. Several churches were trying to get zoning variances and/or approval to build new facilities. The Fairfax County Board of Supervisors and Board of Zoning Appeals resisted almost any church expansion in the area. The rapidly growing area was being politicized, and since church property was nontaxable, they didn’t want to give permission for any churches to be built.

Mark Grooms, a graduate of Liberty University, was pastoring Fellowship Baptist Church in Lorton, Virginia, which had purchased 5.35 acres of property. Other pastors and a Board of Zoning Appeals clerk told Mark, “You can’t get that zoned, and they won’t give you a building permit because it is in Fairfax County.” But Mark felt God wanted him to build so the little church he pastored could move forward in doing God’s work.

Mark has a very winsome way with people, and he went back down to the BZA office to make another application. This time a secretary for the BZA waited on him and Mark asked her, “Will you help me fill out this application?” She obliged and they went through the entire application together. The clerk knew the intricacies of the government; she told him how to fill out all of the questions – and Mark did.

Large, powerful churches couldn’t get their programs approved, but Fellowship Baptist Church, one of the poorest churches in the area with no political pull, got approval. Mark simply said, “I believed God wanted us to have a church, and I believed

God would help me through the red tape.” Whereas some people have faith for biblical insight, and other people have faith for money, Mark Grooms had faith to solve an unsolvable problem.

10. Faith for an Intimate Relationship with God: God Is Worshiped

Many who are saved feel Christianity is salvation for heaven and deliverance from hell. Many seem to focus on Christ’s death for their sins almost as “fire escape” religion. They don’t establish a deep, intimate relationship with Christ.

Yet God invites us to know Him: “When thou saidst, ‘Seek ye my face’; my heart said unto thee, ‘Thy face, LORD, will I seek’” (Ps. 27:8, KJV). God has invited us to know Him intimately and to spend time worshiping Him. Some believers have faith to seek God’s presence and they spend time fellowshiping with God and worshiping Him. It’s not a waste of time; it’s enrichment time. Is their faith the difference between those who know God intimately and those who don’t?

You might think that all believers exercise faith to know God, but they don’t. Some pray for things, for their projects, and for their jobs; but they don’t pray for more intimate fellowship with God. Paul did, for his prayer was, “That I may know Him, and the power of his resurrection” (Phil. 3:10, KJV).

There was a saint who washed dishes in a medieval monastery. He was not known for his great faith to pray for money or evangelistic efforts. He wasn’t known for his great faith to learn the mysteries of God or to become knowledgeable so he could be promoted to monk or priest—to be transferred out of the dish pit. No, none of that. Brother Lawrence had faith to meet with God over dirty dishwater. The title of his book is a reflection of the faith he expressed: *The Practice of the Presence of God*.

There are saints like Brother Lawrence who realize they can know God, and they have perfected a skill of communion with God that many other believers never obtain. What does that mean? They have faith to know God intimately; they have faith that others know nothing about.

11. Faith to Develop New Methods: Innovative Ministry

David Yonggi Cho pastored the Full Gospel Church in Seoul, Korea, building it to an attendance of 2,500 in the late ‘60s and early ‘70s. He built the church with hard work, long hours, and stressful ministry. When Cho had a heart attack one Sunday during the

church service, the elders gathered around to pray for his healing. Cho said later, “I wanted to demonstrate faith, so I got up and walked home, even though I was hurting terribly.”

He wanted to act in faith, so he came back the next Sunday to conduct the church services. While baptizing people at the end of the service, he had a second heart attack. This young pastor felt he had “lost face” before his people because he was sick. He wondered why God was allowing him to suffer.

As Cho was recuperating from his heart attack, he spent time talking to God about pastoring the church. God gave him a *faith vision* of pastoring the church through small groups – cells – throughout the city. When he was able, he gathered his board of elders to share his new insight with them. He planned to divide the city up into divisions, giving each elder one section for pastoral care over the members in that section of the city. Each elder was asked to divide his section into home cell groups.

“No, Pastor,” the board members told him, “we’re not called to do that. That’s your ministry.” They not only didn’t want to do it; several suggested that if he was physically not able to pastor the church, he should resign.

The world has been blessed because he didn’t listen to them.

Cho went back into the presence of God to pray for his new vision of cells. Since the board members wouldn’t help him, he asked some of the ladies to help lead cell groups. At the beginning, they thought he was just asking them to gather small groups of other ladies to minister to them. But to everyone’s surprise, men started coming to the meetings where ladies were in leadership. Why? Because they received spiritual ministry.

With this new innovation in ministry, Cho began organizing small cell groups to meet in living rooms, apartment recreational rooms, and laundry rooms – any place where people could meet together for ministry. Very early in the development of the cells, over 75 percent of them were led by women. But as the men of the church began to see what God was doing, many men came forward to lead cell groups as well.

Where does faith come in? Yonggi Cho had a great passion to build a church for the glory of God, and was using all of his strength to do it. When he could not physically do it any longer, he needed help. As he prayed, God gave him an idea of a new method that could extend the ministry. By faith, he implemented his new method.

In my first meeting with Pastor Cho in 1978, he said, “Most American churches grow by building new Sunday school classes for expansion, but constructing facilities limits their growth. A church can only build so many classrooms, and a city will only

allow a certain size church building.” Cho was explaining to me why many American churches were limited. Then he said, “By using living rooms of the homes of Christians, the space is unlimited, because as more people become Christians, more living rooms are available for cell groups.”

At the time of his first heart attack the church had 2,500 people. By 2007 the Full Gospel Church averaged 35,000 cell group meetings, with approximately 750,000 members.

Converging

The first time I preached on convergence faith, I got an email a day later from a lady telling me that my message had changed her life. “I will always be different,” she wrote. She was a Christian counselor with an MA degree who had been unsuccessful in praying for money, facilities, and things. She wrote, however, that she had faith to help people through problems, and she knew God had used her to transform lives. God had used her to put marriages back together and help people find freedom from addictions. She wrote, “You’ve forced me from the slavery of my ill-conceived expectations.”

The bottom line is that you should find your calling and spiritual gifts, then exercise your faith in keeping with God’s leading in your life.

This chapter has not covered every area where a believer could exercise his or her faith. We haven’t discussed the spiritual gift of administration or management, or the gift of giving. What about the spiritual gifts of prophecy, exhortation, hospitality, and so on? All of these are gifts God can use to grow your faith. Find your spiritual gift, then become comfortable doing what God called you to do. Then go and do exploits within the sphere of ministry God has given to you.

Faith Transfer

I do not believe we give church planters their faith; we simply provide the challenges and opportunity to grow their faith. Faith comes from the Word of God (see Rom. 10:17), and it grows as a young man actively applies the principles of scripture to his life and ministry.

Jerry Falwell

Principle

A leader imparts faith to followers, who then join their faith with the leaders to move mountains.

Definition

Transfer. 1. to carry from one person, place, or thing to another. 2. to cause to pass from one person to another, as thought, qualities, or power; transmit. 3. to imprint, impress, or otherwise convey (a design, pattern, etc.) from one surface to another. 4. to change from one vehicle (bus, train, etc.) to another.

How does a leader transfer faith to his followers? Is it a transfer of knowledge, so followers know the same content as their leader? Does the leader give followers certain ideas or facts so they learn what the leader knows? Some knowledge transfer is involved, but *faith transfer* is more than transmitting facts.

Is faith transfer communicating a leader's deep feelings about something, or deep emotions for a project? A leader stirs the passion of a crowd so they feel the same passion for a project as the leader. Some emotions are involved, but faith transfer is more than conveying emotion.

Does the leader call for his followers to make a decision to act? Yes, the will is involved, but faith transfer is more than followers deciding to do what their leader asks.

Faith transfer involves all of the above but also includes spiritual factors. The Holy Spirit makes a faith transfer happen, because He indwells the leader and also indwells the followers. The Holy Spirit is the agent who originally stirs faith in the leader; He is the agent who stirs faith in the follower. How does this happen? The Holy Spirit *transfers faith* from a leader to a follower. He uses the Word of God to build faith in followers, just as He uses scripture to build faith in any child of God.

Examine the following illustrations where faith transfer took place. Some of these illustrations involve spiritual faith transfer (Jerry Falwell); others include natural faith transfer (King and Gandhi).

Agreeing Together in Faith

I was waiting in the back room before chapel at Liberty University in 1985 when someone told me Vernon Brewer had stomach cancer. He had between six weeks and six months to live.

Oh, how awful, I thought.

Vernon was a vice president in charge of Student Life. He did a wonderful job of enforcing the rules, but the students loved him because he was a man of God.

“We can’t let Vernon die,” were the first words out of Jerry Falwell’s mouth when he heard about Vernon. Then Falwell announced a startling statement of faith: “We must fast and pray to change God’s mind.” (See chapter 3, “Brinkmanship Faith.”)

Yikes! That was hard for a marginal Calvinist like me to accept. I didn’t like to hear we could change God’s mind; He’s immutable, which means God is unchangeable.

Falwell instructed, “We’ll get all the students and faculty to fast and pray for Vernon’s healing.” Then he reminded us, “There’s value in the *volume* of prayer.”

Why does God answer the faith of many when they agree in prayer together?

Jerry Falwell’s faith stirred the faith of more than 5,000 students and faculty who prayed fervently – and God answered. (See chapter 21 on “Healing Faith” for the complete story of Vernon’s healing.) Falwell often said it was the united prayer of many that led to Vernon’s healing – but he was the one who planted the seed of faith in so many students and teachers. How was his faith transferred to so many?

I think I saw faith transfer at work in the ‘70s and I gave it the name “hot poker.”

After I wrote the book *The 10 Largest Sunday Schools and What Makes Them Grow*, many pastors asked me how they could build one of the largest churches in America. (I don't criticize these men, thinking it was just numbers they wanted; I believe they honestly wanted to do a great work for God). So I told them a hot poker is the secret: Just as a poker gets red-hot when thrust into the fire, so a person's faith gets red-hot when he or she is exposed to leaders who are taking leaps of faith for Christ. Leaders are the flame used by the Holy Spirit to fire up their followers.

Here is where faith transfer happens. When a person like Dr. W. A. Criswell had faith to build the great First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas, other pastors went to learn from Dr. Criswell and came away with greater faith to do elsewhere what Criswell had done in Dallas.

Dino Pedrone was pastoring a small Church of God of about 100 people in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, when he contacted me to ask, "How can I build one of the great churches in America?" I explained to him the hot-poker theory and gave him the names and addresses of the largest churches in America.

Dino visited . . . asked many questions . . . learned from them; then he changed the name of his church to Open Door Church – and they began to grow. I went back to dedicate the first sanctuary on an expanded campus outside the city. Then I went back to dedicate the second, third, and fourth buildings as the church grew to approximately 4,000 members. Dino is a testimony of faith transfer. His faith was set aflame by his proximity to other leaders; then his church members' faith was fanned to red-hot as the Holy Spirit used him to transfer faith to his followers.

Hope Transfer

Think of the faith transfer that happened when Martin Luther King, Jr. preached the "I Have a Dream" sermon in Washington, D.C. in 1963. More than one million people listened to King's message on the Mall that day. He had a dream, he said, that one day a little black boy and little white boy could play together harmoniously in the South, and that all people in America would be judged, not on the color of their skin, but the content of their character.

Many of the one million people in the crowd chanted "Amen!" Some yelled "Hallelujah!" But they did more than shout "Amen" and "Hallelujah;" they put feet to their faith. The doubters who heard Dr. King had no faith transfer, but his vision of

racial equality gripped most who heard him. They believed, with King, that in their lifetimes they would experience true freedom and equality.

The faith of King transferred to many marchers in many cities throughout the South. When the authorities turned dogs on them, they kept marching. When the authorities turned the fire hoses on them, they kept marching. When they were clubbed by deputy sheriffs, they kept marching. Why? Because they believed in the dream of Martin Luther King, Jr. Faith had transferred from leader to follower. The faith that began with leader became their faith.

And America was forever changed.

Confidence Transfer

Thirty years earlier and halfway around the world, another group of people had a taste for freedom. Mahatma Gandhi wanted to free India from British control. He believed India ought to be run by Indians, for Indians, on their own cultural terms – not by British colonialists. But how does a man without political power bring the earth’s largest ruling empire to its knees?

The British controlled the production of salt in India, and added vast taxes to the price so that very few Indians could afford to buy it. Gandhi first proposed a boycott on salt; then he led the Salt March, a 240-mile walk to the sea, where he broke the “salt laws” by harvesting salt from the shore. His act of protest inspired millions of Indians to engage in nonviolent civil disobedience, which led after several years to Indian independence. Gandhi was confident that this kind of nonviolent resistance was the key to overthrowing British rule without war – and his confidence was transferred to millions of his fellow countrymen. (Their confidence was natural faith, not New Testament faith, but their exploits illustrate the truth of faith transfer). Gandhi’s faith became their faith, and Indians have governed themselves since 1947.

Ingredients of Faith Transfer

Faith transfer begins with the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking to the leader. He knows what he hears and he knows what he must do. God has put a burden on his heart, and he will have no rest until the vision is carried out. It’s one thing for a leader to have a burden, but how does he motivate others to share it with him? How does he motivate

others to sacrifice for a project? It won't happen unless something special happens in the hearts of all who follow the leader. The seed of that "something special" is found in God's Word.

God speaks to the leader through the scriptures, and speaks to the followers through the same scriptures. The seed is often planted when the leader preaches the Word of God to his followers. Obviously, this makes it important for the leader to know what verses to preach, to interpret the passage properly, and then to apply the Word powerfully.

But a lot of preachers do that. They preach the scriptures weekly, but faith transfer doesn't happen. Why?

The leader must yield himself to the filling of the Holy Spirit, so that the Spirit can tell him what to say and how to say it. The leader must let the Holy Spirit speak through him. Then the Spirit must indwell the words of scripture to make faith transfer happen.

Remember, the Holy Spirit speaks through the words of the Bible. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Tim. 3:16, KJV). The Greek word translated "inspiration" is *theopneustos*, which means "God-breathed." As the authors were writing, God breathed His message into them. Today, God breathes His life into the words when they are read, studied, and preached under the Holy Spirit's influence. The Bible is sometimes called "the Word of faith" (see Rom. 10:8, KJV). This means the Bible is the instrument to communicate the content of faith, but also the means by which faith is imparted to the believer. The Holy Spirit is the initiator of this impartation.

Dr. King and Gandhi were both powerful examples to their followers – they practiced what they preached, suffering harassment, abuse, imprisonment, and much worse to carry out their visions. But faith transfer is more than the leader becoming an example. Jerry Falwell successfully got his followers to believe in the projects for which he believed. When he called on his followers to fast for a million dollars, or to pray for \$5 million to finish dormitories, or to fast for someone to be healed – God honored both Falwell's and his followers' faith. The Holy Spirit moved. Falwell's faith transferred. People expressed corporate faith, and God answered their prayers.

Faith Balance

Without God's work, you cannot.

Without your faith, God will not.

Elmer Towns

Principle

You must employ all your ingenuity, skill, and education to move mountains, while relying on God to accomplish the task.

Definition

Balance. 1. to hold in equilibrium. 2. to set one element equal with another. 3. to weigh opposing issues.

I was speaking at Glorieta Baptist Conference in New Mexico on the topic of faith, when I walked from behind the pulpit, lifted two arms in the air, and announced, "It takes two wings to fly." I spread my feet apart, pointed to them, and said, "It takes two legs to walk." Holding two hands together, I said, "It takes two terminal poles to get any power out of a battery to start a car."

I went back to my original picture: "No bird has ever flown with one wing, yet many people try to fly with one wing for God." I held up one arm. "The first wing is faith, which uses the power of prayer, intercession, and spiritual dynamics to do the work of God." I went on to explain that many churches emphasize only a spiritual aspect of the ministry – one wing – but ignore the rules of organizing and management. They have no effective program, nor anyone to supervise what they want to do for God. And their ministry never gets off the ground. They can't fly with only the wing of spirituality.

I held up the other arm. “The second wing is human work. We must work . . . plan . . . put together programs . . . and be ingenious with our organization and management.” Then I added, “The better we plan and the harder we work, the more we accomplish by faith for God.”

I then waved two arms in a “flapping” motion, as if trying to fly. “It takes two wings to fly. Your faith and your works must work together.”

There was a young lady in the audience who was gripped with the clarity of that visual lesson. She had been praying for money to attend grad school, thinking that it was her lack of faith that had not opened the door. She had good grades and had been accepted to Liberty University, but didn’t have money to attend. That sermon changed her outlook; it was not her lack of faith, but a lack of human initiative that had kept her out of grad school.

Bolstered with a new view of faith, she began to apply to organizations where scholarships were available. With human initiative, doors began to open, and she was able to enter grad school at Liberty.

Just because you attempt something by faith does not mean God will do everything to get it done. Doesn’t the scripture teach that we are “workers together with Him” (2 Cor. 6:1, NKJV)? This means we work at the same time God is working. “Flying with two wings” could also be called the *division of labor*: God does the work only God can do, and we do the work we must do.

When I was 19 years old, I pastored Westminster Presbyterian Church in Savannah, Georgia. The church met in an old Southern sanctuary with a steeple, four columns on the porch, and five stained glass windows on each side of the sanctuary. But the sanctuary was built on one small city lot. The property was so small that when it rained, water dripped off the eaves onto the neighbor’s property. There was no room for Westminster Presbyterian to grow.

Every time it rained, and many times when it didn’t, I looked out at four empty lots behind the church and prayed, “Lord, give us those lots.” The more I prayed, the higher my anxiety level. In frustration I would ask, “Lord, why haven’t you given us those lots?” I had lots of faith, but the church never got the property. After I left the church the lots were sold to individuals and four homes were constructed there.

I only had the wing of faith, not the wing of “works.” Many years later, I looked back on my frustration and laughed at my ignorance and lack of experience. Back then those lots cost only \$100 each. Today, because of experience gained in managing Christian organizations, I would get a real estate contract on each of those four lots by

nine o'clock tomorrow morning. I would walk into the service on Sunday morning, hold up the contracts and ask, "Who wants to donate a hundred dollars to buy a lot for our church to expand?" If I couldn't get four people to purchase a lot for \$100, I would organize a capital funds program to purchase all four lots. I might distribute pledge cards and ask people to make a financial commitment to extend our ministry.

I would rely on both faith and fund-raising ability. I would approach the problem with "two wings."

For most of my life I've struggled with the "two-wing principle," going from one extreme to the other. At times, I have felt as if I must do all the work. I must prepare the sermon, including humor at just the right time to move my audience to laughter, and a gripping story at just the right moment to bring them to tears. At the appropriate time I would invite people to respond to God.

At other times, I have gone to the other extreme. I fasted and prayed, asking God to use my sermon to move people. I didn't prepare properly, nor review my notes before I spoke. I wanted God to do everything.

Both extremes are wrong. It takes two wings to fly. It takes both *spiritual* preparation and *studious* preparation to put together a sermon that changes lives. If it takes two wings to fly – and it does – then I must pray and fast as I prepare a sermon, as well as spending hours on research and reviewing my notes so I can deliver my sermon accurately and artfully. I must activate the division of labor, doing all I can to prepare a sermon to move hearts and trusting God in faith to do a spiritual work only He can do in the hearts of those who hear me.

There was a time when I prayed for some of the books I've written to become bestsellers. As I look back, I understand that's a prayer God couldn't answer. Some of these books were pretty "thin" – that's another way of saying they were weak. God can't take a poor book and make it into a best seller. Now I pray for God to help me write a bestseller. If it's an outstanding book, sales will reflect my effort.

The two-wing principle is active in every aspect of ministry. When you begin to plan and dream about the things you want to do for God, make sure you plan and perform for excellence if you want God to do "exceeding abundantly above all you could ask or think" (Eph. 3:20, KJV).

Faith and Works

Flying with two wings is taught in James 2:14-26, under the explanation of faith and works. The following is my paraphrase, which I hope will help you see this truth through the eyes of scripture.

How effectively can the Christian fly? Who has the wing of faith, but not the natural wing of human effort? Can his faith-wing make him fly? If the one-wing believer sees a needy Christian and only blesses him in faith, has he done any good? No, his Christian friend is still needy. So a believer with only a faith-wing, without a practical wing, can't fly. A believer can't say, "I have faith-Christianity but you have practical-Christianity." If he tries to show faith without practical actions, he will not get off the ground. But if he demonstrates his faith by the things he does, he can fly. If you only have a faith wing and believe in God, what good is that? Devils also believe in one God, but they do something about it – they tremble. You are deceived if you think faith without being practical will work. As the body without the spirit is dead, so your faith is dead if you don't put it into practice with action" (Jas. 2:14-20, 26, *ELT*).

Your works are empty without faith. "Faith by itself isn't enough" (Jas. 2:17, NLT). This means when you pray for money to meet your bills, you must also work harder, longer, or smarter. You may have to work a second job, or even a third, to get the money you need. Do all you can do to make more money as you pray for God to provide for your needs.

Your faith won't fly without works. "If you only have a faith wing, and believe in God, what good is that?" (Jas. 2:19, Amplified). You have to add works to faith. You won't win an unconverted friend to Christ if you only pray for her. You must show her love, share the plan of salvation, and use all types of positive motivation to move her toward conversion.

Those who claim by faith what they desire must do more than pray. The depth of your faith is given credibility by the sincerity of your works. God works through people to accomplish His will, but His work is done by people.

Faith is a relationship that demands each partner fulfill his or her end of the bargain. God honors the faith of those who properly honor Him. The person who dares to speak for God and to God must be sure she knows God. She must know how He thinks, and how He speaks to people. She must never presume her will onto God's plan. Nor can

she assume that God will jump when she calls on Him or that God will give what she names or claims by faith. Instead, the person of faith must forge a strong bond with God, based on the blood-sprinkled way. It is a relationship of confidence and trust. The strength of the person's faith does not rest in the strength of her mind, but on God Himself. When we have strong faith, it is because of His strength, never ours!

Without God, the wing of works expends only pointless energy, motion, and flapping about. Some may build huge sanctuaries, sway vast multitudes and, according to Jesus, even produce miracles (see Matt. 6:21-23) – but Jesus said He never knew those who did such things. One-wing faith never leaves the ground. It doesn't fly. Some have gathered large congregations in the flesh. Others have preached on television or attained a PhD in theology. But without the faith of God, they haven't soared with God. Paul reminds us that some works are “wood, hay, or straw” and “their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work” (1 Cor. 3:13, NIV). This is scary because “if what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved – even though only as one escaping through the flames (1 Cor. 3:14-15, NIV). Our works will last when they are tied to faith, but without it they have the smell of burning wood about them.

Scrutinized Faith

*On a long, cold, dark winter's night, you learn that faith in God
is not only important in everything you do;
you learn God alone is all that matters.*

Elmer Towns

Principle

You must go through a season of intense private scrutiny
to reveal your trust in God alone to accomplish
the dream He has put in your heart.

Definition

Scrutiny. 1. a searching investigation or examination; close inquiry. 2.
close and continuous watching or guarding.

What is it about suffering, pain, and loneliness that build our faith in God? It may be that these afflictions do not make faith stronger; perhaps tribulations make our hearts softer to God. Just as the shovel digs up hard-packed soil, preparing it to receive the seed that will spring into life, so the pain of a long, cold, dark winter's night loosens the hard-packed heart to receive the Word of God that produces life-giving faith in us.

The "long, cold, dark winter's night" might also be called a desert experience. Both are lonely and cut us off from all but God. Both involve pain and suffering that drive us to God for relief. Both cut us off from worldly attachments and diversions so we hunger for God. Both terrify us. When we face certain death and are ready to seek God's deliverance, we cry out in desperation for His intervention in our lives.

Jerry Falwell was the darling of the executives at Baptist Bible College in

Springfield, Missouri, when he graduated in 1957. He had built a Sunday school class that averaged 57 fourth-grade boys every Sunday. Then, in another church, he built a young-adult Sunday school class to more than 100. But there was trouble in his home church, which belonged to the Baptist Bible Fellowship.

Jerry's home pastor had a moral lapse and was asked to resign. The Fellowship sent another pastor to take his place. The church leadership rejected him and demanded a church-wide vote to call or reject the replacement. The leadership lost the vote and 35 adults were voted out of the church.

"Organize us into a church." The suddenly churchless group asked Jerry Falwell to come and be their pastor, only 22 years old and a few weeks graduated from college.

"If you organize those rebels into a church, the Fellowship will have nothing to do with you or the church," Dr. W. E. Dowell, vice president of Falwell's alma mater, told young Falwell that he couldn't preach in their churches and no one from the Fellowship could preach in the new church, which became Thomas Road Baptist Church.

Falwell later confessed that this experience was his long, cold, dark night – when all his "heroes" of the faith turned their backs on him. "I got no phone calls from friends, no words of encouragement, no one to share church victories. Just silence."

R. B. Whittemore and his daughter, Ann, retired from St. Louis to a farm at Big Island, Virginia. When they visited the new church, which met in a bankrupt bottling plant with mismatched pews and loud window fans for ventilation, there was nothing that would attract them to return – except they felt the presence of God and Falwell's sermons had the power of God. Mr. Whittemore invited Falwell to spend a day out at the farm.

Whittemore and the young pastor talked about the deeper Christian life, about how a person must be crucified with Christ for his faith to move mountains. Whittemore described what had been taught at the Keswick Convention in England. This has also been called the "exchange life," meaning a believer must let Christ live through him.

"I made that trip to Big Island almost every week," Falwell said later. "It stoked my fire and deepened my life."

Meanwhile, he continued to be rebuffed by the Fellowship. He sent Harold Knolls, a personal friend, to attend Baptist Bible College because Harold had been called to full-time ministry. The college refused to admit him. The riff was deep and hurtful.

But the long, cold, winter's night strengthened Falwell. He was forced to fellowship with "other" Baptists. He invited a Billy Graham evangelist to preach at Thomas Road when the Fellowship was critical of Graham's cooperative evangelism with "liberals." Falwell invited I. E. Maxwell, president of Prairie Bible Institute (the largest Bible school in the world at that time) to preach in his pulpit, and sent youth to his Bible institute. God was using the long, cold, dark isolation to prepare this young man for a broader, larger evangelical world.

Joseph's long, lonely night prepared him to save the world from starvation. God had given Joseph dreams and prophecies when he was young, but he had used them wrongly with his brothers and parents. His parents didn't understand him, and his brothers hated him. He was sold as a slave to Egypt and ended up in prison. In Joseph's dark night, he became tender and tough – tender to forgive his brothers and tough to manage Egypt's grain storage for 14 years.

God prepared Moses to deliver Israel from slavery in Egypt with 40 years of isolation in the wilderness. He was Jewish-born, yet raised in the palaces of Egypt. Moses tried to deliver Israel his way: He murdered a man, then ran away to hide in the desert for 40 years. During his long, dark night, Moses learned patience and leadership by herding sheep.

Elijah was called "the Tishbite," a word that, among other possible translations, means "alone." We first see him alone in the wilderness being fed by ravens, then as a stranger in the alien culture of Zerephath. We then see him alone at Mount Sinai, complaining to God. Out of his long, dark night comes Elijah miracle worker and bold spokesman for God.

David was chosen by God and anointed by Samuel as the next king of God's people. He defeated a giant that no one else would challenge; yet God permitted David to be chased by executioners for 13 years in the desert wilderness. Every day could have been his last, but in God's time David became the greatest king of Israel because of the lessons he learned in the wilderness.

Jesus called John the Baptist "the greatest man born of woman" (Matt. 11:11, *ELT*). He spent his life alone in a desert wilderness, emerging only to preach and baptize.

What about Jesus? He fasted 40 days in the wilderness (see Matt. 4:1-2).

It's not clear how long Paul stayed in the wilderness to prepare for his church-planting ministry (see Gal. 1:16-18). But it is clear that his desert experience was an indispensable season of God's preparation.

Anatomy of Preparation

1. Allow the Prospect of Death to Drive You to God

It's not only darkness that changes people. Out there in the blackness is a menacing peril. Young David, on the run, knew that out of darkness Saul's army might attack at any moment. Yet people of faith do not wither when the darkness threatens because they face it with God's presence. They know God's call is on their lives. They know God is with them. They know God's purpose will be accomplished. Whether God uses them or someone else to accomplish His will, they take confidence in the promise of Hebrews 11:6: "He who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (NKJV).

How does the person of God face death? Is she terrified as she awaits the inevitable? Does she cry out against pain and curse her fate? Does she close her eyes to the inevitable and, without a whimper, accept its punishment? No, the person of faith submits her soul to God and agrees with Paul: "While I am going through all these trials . . . whether I live or whether I must die . . . For to me, living means opportunities for Christ, and dying—well, that's better yet!" (Phil. 1:20-21, *TLB*).

Joseph seemed to tumble from one dark night to a darker one. He was thrown in a pit to die of thirst, then sold as a slave into a foreign country where he didn't know anyone. He was falsely convicted and thrown into a prison. But Joseph had God's call on his life. God gave him a dream in which "the sun, the moon and the eleven stars bowed down to me" (Gen. 37:9, *KJV*). Joseph endured the threatening blackness of death because "the Lord was with Joseph, and showed him mercy" (Gen. 39:21, *KJV*).

When the federal government brought suit against Thomas Road Baptist Church in 1973, accusing its leaders of selling church bonds illegally, Jerry Falwell was also accused personally of fraud. The integrity of his ministry was threatened. Falwell stood before Judge James Turk and argued, "There is no one in this court room to testify they have lost a penny."

Judge Turk asked how he could pay back over \$6 million in debt when the church's assets did not cover the indebtedness. Falwell answered, "When the bonds come due, God will provide."

Judge Turk found Falwell and the church innocent, but charged a six-man committee with oversight of all ministry finances. George Rogers, president of a local business, was chairman of the committee. Early in 1977, the committee reported every penny had been paid and the committee was disbanded. Falwell's faith through that

second awful night of isolation was vindicated. God motivated individuals to donate enough money to pay off the debt and to keep the ministry progressing at the same time.

2. Despite Your Fear, Turn to God for Victory and Vindication

Some feel they are in a pit and God is not there. Some feel as if they are starving to death in a desert with no escape, or in a dark room with no windows or doors. When they pray, they feel alone; when they cry out to God, He doesn't seem to be listening.

Many who encounter seasons of darkness retreat into *introspective prayer*. Instead of reaching upward, they turn inward. They complain. They gripe. But mostly, they blame themselves. As a result, they end up feeling even more hopeless, discouraged, and depressed than they did before.

Job is perhaps the best example in the Bible of a person who prayed introspectively. Job did nothing wrong; he was a victim of violence, theft, and bankruptcy. He experienced incredible hardship and suffering – his sons and daughters were killed in a raid; his sheep and servants were killed in a fire; other servants were killed and his camels stolen in a different raid (see Job 1:13-19). Time and again, Job cried out to God for deliverance.

Notice how fear gripped Job's life. After Job's health was also taken from him, Job cried out, "For the thing I feared has overtaken me, and what I dreaded has happened to me. I cannot relax or be still; I have no rest, for trouble comes" (Job 3:25; 6:11, *HCSB*). Fear focuses on self-blame and self-pity. When Job looked at his situation, he complained, "My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and are spent without hope. Oh, remember that my life is a breath! My eye will never again see good" (Job 7:6-7, *KJV*). Job's wife expressed much the same sentiment when she said to Job, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die!" (Job 2:9, *NASB*).

You may be tempted to believe you have been abandoned by God and to lose hope. But the truth is, you are never alone. Jesus promised, "I will never leave you, nor forsake you" (Heb. 13:5, *KJV*). The *prayer of faith*, rather than the prayer of introspection, in the face of fear produces one incredible benefit: self-knowledge. It's a wonderful gift to understand what we *can't* do in this life; it's an even better gift to know what we *can* do. Blessed is the man or woman who knows the limits of his or her spiritual abilities!

If introspective prayer is the only way we pray when we face trouble, we will soon end up in deeper trouble. We will feel defeated because we are tangled up with

our fear. We will feel discouraged because we only see our failures. We will punish ourselves for actions we have taken or decisions we have made. When we honestly look within ourselves, we will not like what we see. Paul looked at his life introspectively and cried out, “For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me” (Rom. 7:19-20, *ELT*). We should never let our fear drive us to self-introspection alone.

When we face our fear, we should show it to God so that we can see what He wants us to experience. The Psalmist said, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me” (Ps. 139:23-24, *ELT*). When we become fearful, we need to look at ourselves through the eyes of God. Why? Because God reveals to us what we need to see and shields us from things we shouldn’t see.

For our own good, God doesn’t show us every wicked thing in our hearts. If He did, we would be overwhelmed. Paul took that journey and concluded:

I don’t understand myself at all, for I really want to do what is right, but I don’t do it. Instead, I do the very thing I hate. I know perfectly well that what I am doing is wrong, and my bad conscience shows that I agree that the law is good. But I can’t help myself, because it is sin inside me that makes me do these evil things (Rom. 7:15-17).

How do we feel when we reach the depths of our failure? Usually discouraged or depressed. Paul expressed this feeling when he cried out, “O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Rom. 7:24, *KJV*). What should we do instead, when our fears leave us down in the dumps? When the Israelites sinned, they brought a sacrifice to God, and we can do the same thing. We can bring our lives as a sacrifice to God and allow the blood of Jesus Christ to cleanse us from all sin (see 1 John 1:7). Our fear can bring us to the place of cleansing. And cleansing is the path to power. Cleansing grows our trust in God, our confidence in His work, and acceptance of the people to whom we minister.

3. Cry Out to God When You Are Desperate

Sometimes there comes a dark night or a barren desert that makes you desperate. This

may be a situation in which you experience a crisis and need an immediate answer from God. This could be a crisis in your spiritual life, when you are empty, spiritually weak, and starved for fellowship with God. When you can't do anything else, what can you do? Give up and commit spiritual suicide, or turn to God and Him alone. That's where God wants His children to be. That's where God will help.

Matthew 14:24-30 is a vivid example of a black night of desperation. Peter was in the ship with the disciples when a life-threatening storm arose. The disciples pulled on the oars as hard as they could but made no headway toward the shore. Then, through the blowing wind and rain, they saw someone walking toward them . . . on the water! "It's a ghost!" the disciples cried out in fear.

Of course it was not a ghost, but Jesus who was coming to their aid. "It's all right!" Jesus said. "It is I; do not be afraid" (Matt. 14:27, *ELT*).

Peter, a man of action, immediately called, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water" (Matt. 14:28, *HCSB*).

"Come," was Jesus' reply.

So Peter jumped out of the boat and began walking on the water – something a human had never done. At first, his eyes were fixed on Jesus and he walked on the surface of the waves. But then Peter took his eyes off Jesus. And when "he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out saying, 'Lord, save me!'" (Matt. 14:30, *KJV*).

This was a time for *desperate prayer*. Peter was sinking fast in a stormy sea and didn't have time to form a proper petition to his Lord. He didn't have time to confess the mistake that caused him to sink. He didn't even have time to think about what he was doing. All Peter could do was cry out to God because he was scared to death. He knew that the Lord is "a very present help in trouble" (Ps. 46:1, *KJV*). He also knew Jesus had the power to save him.

Jerry Falwell often said, "There are more bad days than good days." We all encounter situations in which the threat is so immediate and overwhelming that all we are able to do is cry out to God in desperation. Like Peter, we see the storm raging around us and feel the water begin to rise, and the first thing that comes to our mind is to turn to God for help. Desperate prayers spring from our desperate hearts. "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16, *KJV*).

Sometimes, God allows His servants to encounter trouble. Why? Because He wants to get their attention and help them learn to call on Him in their time of need. He

wants to draw them into His presence so that they will abide in Him and worship Him. “In the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me” (Ps. 27:5, *ELT*).

The secret to having prayers answered by God is to put complete trust in Him. When the person of God is absolutely terrified because there is no one to help and nothing to prevent destruction – when all hope is gone – he cries out sincerely with his whole heart and trusts in the heavenly Father. Fear strips away all pretenses and enables him to cry out in sincerity from the depth of his heart. In desperate conditions, he can’t trust anyone else or anything else besides God, because everything else has failed. In these moments, God has his full attention.

4. In Your Loneliness, Turn to God Alone

No one had more of a right than David to complain about loneliness. Although he had been anointed to become king over God’s people, the current king, Saul, sought his murder. God told David he would be king, yet seemed to do nothing to remove Saul from power. David prayed, but his prayers seemed to bounce back.

It’s lonely to feel abandoned by God. Perhaps David expressed this feeling best when he exclaimed, “Every day I call to you, my God, but you do not answer. Every night you hear my voice, but I find no relief” (Ps. 22:2). Have you ever felt the same? Have you prayed with the psalmist, “Why have You forgotten me? Why do I go mourning?” (Ps. 42:9, *ELT*).

Maybe the truth is that God hasn’t forsaken His servants, but they have forsaken Him. It’s kind of like the little boy who runs outside and wonders where his mother has gone. She is sitting at the kitchen table, but the little boy is so busy looking everywhere else that it doesn’t dawn on him that he needs to come *inside* to find his mother. When we feel abandoned by God, we need to look for Him in the right places.

Or maybe the reason why we haven’t heard from God is because we have blocked Him out with our chatter. God may stop talking to get us to be quiet. When we become still before God and listen for His voice, we have a better chance of hearing Him. Only when everything is quiet can we sincerely search our hearts and uncover anything that might be blocking our connection with the Lord – such as any sin that we might have buried there.

In a similar manner, God may “forsake” us so that we examine our motives to determine if we are praying for the wrong reasons. When the motives behind our

requests are wrong, we are not sincere with God and are not asking in faith. God's absence may be an indication that He wants us to examine our hearts.

Of course, our feelings of abandonment might also stem from wrong ideas about God. Maybe we think that God will always answer any prayer the way we want at any time. We cannot control God, and He doesn't always answer just because we call. Sometimes God knows that what we need is to spend a lonely night by ourselves so that we will draw closer to Him.

5. Ask God for Forgiveness and Transformation

Joseph was God's chosen deliverer long before people needed deliverance. God gave him dreams, evidence of His call on his life. But Joseph handled his knowledge of God's calling in the wrong way. He became arrogant and bragged about his dreams to his brothers. "And his brothers said to him, 'Shall you indeed reign over us? Or shall you indeed have dominion over us?' So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words" (Gen. 37:8, NKJV).

Apparently Joseph didn't learn from this first failure. "Then he dreamed still another dream" (Gen. 37:9, NKJV). He probably had an arrogant attitude about the treasure God gave him. Joseph's parents rebuked him and "his brothers envied him" (Gen. 37:11, NKJV). Because of his arrogance, Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery and he ended up in prison. In that dark cell, he was probably tortured by the memory of the privileged position he had lost. Did he beg God for forgiveness? Did he forgive his brothers? The Bible doesn't tell us what went through his mind. But Joseph's later forgiveness of his brothers reflects the transformation of his attitude toward them.

Search your heart. Is it possible your own pride or folly has brought you into this dark night?

We have lain all night in a bath of fire; we have suffered almost to the limits of sanity; we have gone down to the depths of the ocean of grief; and we have raised our weary eyes to God, and asked the reason of discipline so searching, his answer has come back to us in the memory of some *hidden sin* or *neglected duty*. —F. B. Meyer, *Moses*.¹

6. Be Prepared for Testing

A teacher gives a test at the end of the semester not to flunk students but to determine what students have learned. By means of a test, a teacher finds out which students are faithful and prepared to go on to the next level of classes (or the next test).

God sometimes allows the enemy to test us, as He permitted Satan to test Job. Job successfully endured a long, dark night of anguish and went on to serve God through a good, long life. “After this Job lived one hundred and forty years, and saw his children and grandchildren for four generations. So Job died, old and full of days” (Job 42:16, 17, *ELT*).

Sometimes God gives difficulties to test us, to see if we will be faithful to Him. At other times, trials and problems come to keep us humble or to keep us trusting God. The apostle Paul was given an extreme infirmity for this reason: “And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure” (2 Cor. 12:7, *KJV*). We don’t know if Paul’s “thorn in the flesh” was a disease, a physical weakness, or a recurring trial. We do know it was troubling: “Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me” (2 Cor. 12:8, *ELT*). But in the end, Paul realized God’s overarching plan for his life. He learned from Jesus that God’s grace “is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9, *ELT*). God sends a cold, dark night to humble us, or to keep us from presumptuous attitudes, or to exhibit His all-sufficient grace.

When we yield in prayer on the long, cold, winter’s night, we become completely yielded, completely abandoned, completely transparent before God. We quit caring what the world thinks of us and focus instead on what Jesus thinks of us and what we think about Jesus. Yielding ourselves does not mean we act out a role or seek to do something noteworthy to prove our sincerity to God. It means surrendering ourselves to God and allowing Jesus to act within us – by allowing Christ to “play out” His role in our lives.

7. Build Your Endurance

Some give up under the pressure of adversity, but the person of enduring faith is made stronger, like the long-distance runner who constantly pushes herself to strengthen her leg muscles and build up her lung capacity. But the opposite can also happen. Some people get weaker through the long march and their self-discipline is destroyed. What’s the difference? Vision! Those who dream of winning the race endure through grueling

practices. They see adversity as an opportunity to learn and grow stronger.

Jerry Falwell had a dream of building a world-class Christian university of 50,000 students, so he began to plan and work toward that goal. There is a history of moral failure among some Liberty leaders, but Falwell didn't give into discouragement, nor was he tempted to give up.

At one time the university used abandoned school buildings for classrooms and slept students in old hotel rooms, old hospital rooms, and old motel rooms – and held chapel in a giant tent on Liberty Mountain. Never once did Falwell give up the dream of 50,000 students; he always kept the dream of training champions to be world conquerors.

When the sexual sins of Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart became public knowledge, many Christian television ministries collapsed, and great ministries like those of Billy Graham and Robert Schuller of the Crystal Cathedral almost went under because of the backlash. Financial giving to the ministries of Jerry Falwell went from \$27 million a year down to \$2 million. Liberty University ended up \$52 million in debt, and it looked as though the university would be lost.

SACS (the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools) threatened to pull accreditation if the financial problems were not solved. Falwell realized that if we lost accreditation, we would lose the students. We would lose everything.

Another long, cold, dark winter's night descended and he went on a 40-day fast, begging God for \$52 million. God kept whispering, even when the night was blackest and no one stepped up to help, "Jerry, don't seek My pocketbook; seek My heart."

Falwell wasn't seeking to know God. He was not searching for spiritual intimacy. He was desperately banging on the windows of heaven for money.

When he realized God was not going to intervene, he began to get ready for an accreditation visit by doing everything SACS demanded. After 25 days of preparation, when God saw the integrity of Falwell's heart, He said, "Now you can seek My pocketbook." He immediately went on a second 40-day fast.

He said later, "The first 40-day fast was physically delightful, but inwardly dark because I was asking God for money, and there was no sign of light. The second 40-day fast was physically torturous and I felt at times that I just couldn't go on. I couldn't quit, but I just couldn't continue. If it wasn't for the promises of scripture and the inner knowledge that I'd get the money, I wouldn't have endured to the end of the second 40 days."

A few weeks after the dark night of fasting, Jerry received word that a huge

check was on the way. The check for \$27 million was applied to pressing debt, and the rest of the loan notes and outstanding debts were transferred to various other companies owned by a Liberty benefactor. The debt was paid off.²

Endurance was the key.

When Darkness Falls

What is it about darkness and deserts that equip a person for a greater ministry? Many have been broken by the torture of darkness or the desert. It is torturous to be absolutely alone with no help . . . no encouragement . . . no hope. Darkness and desert experiences are sometimes more powerful than an individual. They have many insidious allies to wear down the strongest prisoner. And even if some believers tough it out and live through the pain, they are not prepared to meet the challenges posed by humankind. Some lessons can only be learned by interacting with people in community.

But other lessons are only learned in isolation with God. You can survive the desert and emerge with a scrutinized faith, stronger and clearer than ever before. Remember three things as the darkness falls: 1) God is with you through your tribulation. 2) God has a purpose for your suffering that will help you carry out your calling. 3) Allow God's Word to strengthen you and rely on God to deliver you.

Notes

1. F. E. Meyer, *Moses: The Servant of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 1900).
2. Falwell tells the full story of his two 40-day fasts in *Fasting Can Change Your Life* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1998).

Faith's Failure

Whom God would use greatly, He will wound deeply.

A. W. Tozer

Principle

In failure, you learn three things:

- 1) what doesn't work;
- 2) what may work in the future; and
- 3) your personal limitations.

Definition

Failure. 1. an act or instance of proving unsuccessful. 2. the cessation of normal functioning; breakdown; a fracturing or giving way under stress. 3. an insufficiency, shortage, decline, or loss.

Sometimes just speaking "words of faith" is not enough to move mountains. Sometimes success doesn't come from what we know about God, or what we know about the ministry, or what we know about the Bible. Sometimes the effectiveness of our faith is directly tied to what we know about ourselves.

We must know that success in ministry comes when we realize it is "not I but Christ" (Gal. 2:20). God's work is not completed through self-effort, expert ability, or anything else within us. Successful ministry comes from God alone, and God works through us when we are empty of self-reliance and ego-fulfillment. And how do we get to that place?

Failure!

God permits us to fail in our strength so that we will trust Him even in our

weakness.

We must go down before we rise.

We must be emptied before being filled.

We must die before we live.

Moses seemed all set for success. He encountered God at the burning bush at Sinai (see Exod. 3:1-10). He took off his shoes in God's presence. He bowed in reverence and yielded himself, "Here am I" (Exod. 3:4, *KJV*). What more is needed for success?

God reminded Moses, "I am the God of your fathers . . . I have surely seen the oppression of My people . . . I know their sorrows . . . I have come down to deliver them" (Exod. 3:6-8, *NKJV*). Then God commanded, "I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt" (Exod. 3:10, *NKJV*).

With that backing, who could fail? Moses!

Moses entered Pharaoh's royal palace to announce, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel, 'Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness'" (Exod. 5:1, *NKJV*). Don't preachers also boldly proclaim God's Word in their pulpits each Lord's day? The trouble is that bold pronouncements rarely move the unbelieving heart. Bold pronouncements don't always move mountains!

Pharaoh met Moses' boldness with dominance reflective of his power: "Who is the LORD, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, nor will I let Israel go" (Exod. 5:2, *NKJV*). Do you hear Pharaoh choking on the word "obey"? Isn't he just like many who hear you preach the Word who have no inclination to "obey" you?

Did Moses' view of *his* authority get mixed up with *God's* authority? Might Moses have been more successful if he had negotiated a "worship release" with the most powerful ruler in the world, rather than making demands? Whatever the answer might be, Moses failed in the task God gave to him.

So what did Moses do about his failure? He did what most of us do: he blamed God. "Why have you brought all this trouble on your own people, Lord? Why did you send me? Ever since I came to Pharaoh as your spokesman, he has been even more brutal to your people. And you have done nothing to rescue them!" (Ex. 5:22-23).

But once he acknowledged his failure, Moses died to his self-importance, and perhaps even to his view of himself as "deliverer." His dream of kingdom building and miracle working also died. There was Moses with his face to the ground, wishing he were back in Midian, learning the brutal, necessary lessons one can only learn from failure. His failure brought Moses to the end of himself. Even though he complained to

God, the bigger point is that he returned to God's presence. Moses asked for the deliverance of Israel. Notice God's words: "Now you will see what I will do" (Exod. 6:1). Not what *you* will do, Moses. *What I will do.*

After Moses failed and came to the end of himself, God began to work miracles. God was ready to act when Moses came to the point of his lowest self-confidence. When the children of Israel were delivered from Egypt, there would be no confusion about Who was responsible.

"I will do." God will not work as long as our hands control the shovel. God can't use earth-moving equipment as long as our hands don't leave room for His hand to work.

Failure Teaches Us to Die

When a group of Greeks came to meet Jesus before His death, He told them, "The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified" (John 12:23, *NKJV*) – but not the way many people were expecting. He explained that death must come first, then abundant life and fruitfulness. "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain" (John 12:24, *NKJV*). Only by dying would the Son be glorified. But not only He must die: Those who serve him would have to follow Him into death in order to gain eternal life (see John 12:26).

Dying is not an easy thing to do. Death comes with agony and struggle, and no one wants to die. We fight death with our last ounce of life. But life comes from death, just as many ears of corn emerge from the death of a kernel. Paul wrote, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20, *KJV*).

A seed is planted in the dark soil, which tears its waterproof sheath away. The heart of the seed disintegrates, out of sight, deep within the earth. The seed cannot spring into new life until it dies – but after its death, a slender blade reaches through the soil toward the light of the sun. That's us! That's the person who would exercise great faith. When she dies to herself, she brings forth fruit – hundreds upon hundreds of new seeds, which may then die to produce even more. Death leads to much fruit.

Now we see why just reading the Bible will not move mountains. Saying mere

words of faith will not budge them. A dead seed, however – the new life that springs from a dead seed can crack open a concrete sidewalk, eventually turning it upside down. Only new life does that, not empty pronouncements.

How do you die? You die when you try to win souls and no one responds. You die when you plan a campaign and no one gives. You die when you schedule a service and no one shows up.

Roscoe Lilly went to greater Albany, New York, to begin NorthStar Church in 2008, sent by Liberty Baptist Fellowship for Church Planting. He had the tradition of Liberty church planters behind him; some of the most successful church plants in America have come from Liberty. Roscoe sent out 30,000 invitations, made 400 front-door contacts, and did everything imaginable to make the first service a success.

But on that first Sunday morning, only Roscoe, his wife, and family were present. It was humiliating. A failure like that will kill you – or, rather, in faith terms, a failure like that will crucify you.

Roscoe kept trying, kept knocking on doors. On the second, third, and fourth Sundays, still no one showed up. God was letting Roscoe fail so he could learn how to succeed – or, more accurately, so he could allow God to succeed through him.

Roscoe returned to Lynchburg and humbly relearned the techniques and best practices of 21st-century church planting. Then he went back to Albany and started again. Today, NorthStar Church is a solid community of more than 300 believers. God is bringing life out of death.

Failure Teaches Us About Being Earthen Vessels

Paul describes the servant of God as an “earthen vessel” (2 Cor. 4:7, NKJV). Why does God put His glory in clay pots? So that “the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us” (2 Cor. 4:7, NKJV). Moving mountains is all about God’s power, not about anything we do.

When the servant of God fails in small ways, he is doing what everyone else does. No one is perfect! But some servants of God repent at conversion and separate themselves from all outward sins. They become “legalists” by keeping the law, trying desperately to keep every small point. In doing so, many are blinded to their small failures. In their eyes they may be perfect, but by God’s standards, they fall short – as everyone does. But those who want move mountains are prone to thinking they do it by

keeping close to God, or by keeping away from sin, or by personal obedience. It's not our faith that moves mountains, however; it is God.

How do we learn to depend on God? What does it take to point us completely to God? Failure. When we stumble over some great sin or trip over some small expectation, we are reminded of our humanity. Failure makes us realize we're not perfect. Only God is perfect.

Expect Spilled Dirt

If you want to be in the mountain-moving business, expect spilled dirt. Watch a large dump truck moving a mountain of dirt. The front-loader spills dirt as it fills the truck. As the truck pulls away with its load, the dirt settles and spills in transit. Then, when the load is dumped, not all the dirt goes where the driver aims. Some spills to the left or right.

Spilled dirt is inevitable in the business of mountain moving.

The good news is that failure—spilling dirt—is a very good way to learn three important things. The first is how not to move mountains. It's always a good idea to know what doesn't work so you won't keep doing it! Failure brings to light what you should avoid in the future.

The second lesson failure teaches is what might work when you try again. Just as life emerges from the death of a seed, so do the life-giving methods for success emerge from failure. If what you tried the first time did not work, that's one less wrong method to try next time! Realize why you failed, and never do it again. Find out why you did it wrong, and then be smart enough to do it differently next time.

The third, and most difficult, lesson failure teaches is to acknowledge and accept your personal limitations. No one is perfect. You are not perfect. You cannot do everything perfectly every time without exception. Reconciling yourself to this fact of life can deepen your trust in God, who *is* perfect and perfectly trustworthy.

Make your failure a point of strength. They say the spot where a broken bone mends is stronger than the unbroken areas on either side of the fracture. Allow God's strength to infuse your shortcomings and bring His power to bear on the exploits you want to do for His glory.

You will see yourself differently after a failure, and you will see God differently. You will fail, but failing doesn't make you a failure. If you see yourself as a failure, you

probably won't have the inner strength to trust God to move a mountain. On the other hand, if you see yourself as one who failed but learned how to trust God to overcome, you are on your way to moving mountains.

Part 2

Biblical Expressions of Faith

The Bible uses “faith” in six distinct ways. Each aspect of faith has similarities, such as trusting God, leaning on God, and relying completely on Him, but each way has distinctives as well.

The first biblical expression of faith is a doctrinal *statement of faith*. Whenever the definite article “the” is used with *faith* in scriptures, it refers to doctrine. Doctrinal faith is the written expression of God found in the Bible.

The second biblical expression is *saving faith*. In Greek, the noun *pistis*, “faith,” is translated into an active verb by *pisteuo*, “I believe.” When the Philippian jailer cried out, “What must I do to be saved?” the answer was, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31, NKJV). When a sinner expresses the action of belief, the observer describes conversion with a noun: “He has faith.”

The third biblical expression is *imputed faith* or *justifying faith*, which is non-experiential faith because it’s an action by God upon a person. Paul taught the doctrine of justification by faith, whereby God declares a sinner righteous by faith.

The fourth is *indwelling faith*, which is God’s faith that indwells the believer. It is the faith of Jesus Christ given to us (see Gal. 2:20). When Christ comes to dwell in a child of God, He makes His faith available to him or her.

The fifth biblical expression is *living faith* or *daily faith*. Paul explains, “We walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7, NKJV). When a Christian is living by faith, she is trusting God by living according to the scriptures on a daily basis.

The sixth biblical expression of faith is the *gift of faith*, which is a spiritual ability or spiritual gift given by God to His children to serve Him. God supernaturally gives some believers the ability to exercise faith to benefit the Body of Christ (see Rom. 12:7).

The Statement of Faith

*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand:
repent ye, and believe the gospel.*

Mark 1:15 (KJV)

Principle

The Christian faith is the unchangeable, non-negotiable truth about the Father, the Son Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Word of God in scripture.

Some people think they can find faith if they search hard enough for it or if they grunt hard enough to believe. They see faith like the little girl who wanted it to stop raining so she could go outside to play. Her mother told her, “If you wish hard enough, it will stop raining.” Yet, no matter how hard the little girl “wished,” it did not stop raining. She tried to believe that it would stop raining, but her self-effort did not get results. Instead of believing *that*, she should have tried believing *in*. When you believe *in* rain, you know it will rain sometimes – but you also know it will stop raining eventually.

There is a difference between “believing that” and “believing in.” A person may say, “I believe that it will rain,” which means he has a personal opinion – a feeling, a hunch. But his feeling may turn out to be wrong. Another person may say, “I believe in rain,” which means he has experienced rain before and has good reason to think he will again. When a man believes *in* his friend, he has experienced his friend’s trustworthiness in the past, giving him good reason to trust his friend now and in the future.

Doesn’t this tell us something about faith? When a person believes *that* a thing is true, it involves her opinion. But when she says, “I believe *in*” a thing, it involves a commitment to information. Her belief speaks to the credibility of the thing in which

she believes.

When a person “believes that” a thing is true, it involves only his mental acquaintance. When a person “believes in” something, it involves his determination to act on what he knows is true.

When the Bible uses “trust” in the Old Testament or “believe” in the New Testament, it is most often connected to the preposition *in*, such as “trust *in* the Lord” or “believe *in* Jesus Christ.” Hence, the emphasis is not on the person’s ability to have faith. Everything rests on the object of faith: Jesus Christ.

Faith, in this understanding, is an external foundation upon which inner faith is grounded. In previous chapters, we looked at faith as a relationship. Here, it is an objective fact. Earlier, we saw that faith can grow. But here, faith is objective and unchangeable. Previously, we have used “faith” as a verb. In this chapter, it is a noun preceded by the definite article: *the faith*.

The Bible identifies “the faith” as the content of Christianity. This is similar to the doctrinal statement of a church. As such, “the faith” is a church’s theology, sometimes called their “confession of faith.” Because “the faith” is the content of Christianity, it is also the substance of salvation: “Faith is the substance of things hoped for ”(Heb. 11:1, *NKJV*). When Jude exhorted, “Ye should earnestly defend the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3, *KJV*), he was charging his readers to defend the doctrinal content of Christianity. Today, we accept his charge by defending the faith against attacks from rationalists, evolutionists, and liberals who reject the inspiration and inerrancy of scripture.

Nothing can be added to objective faith, nor can anything be taken from it. Paul warned against those who shall “depart from the faith” (1 Tim. 4:1, *KJV*). Later he identified some as having “denied the faith” (1 Tim. 5:8, *KJV*) or “erred from the faith” (1 Tim. 6:10, 21, *KJV*), and those who are “reprobate concerning the faith” (2 Tim. 3:8, *KJV*). In these warnings, Paul is referring to the doctrines of Christianity. As Paul faced death, he testified, “I have kept the faith” (2 Tim. 4:7, *KJV*); he had not changed his beliefs about or his attitude toward the truth of Christ or the truth found in the scriptures.

Christians are told to “stand fast in the faith” (1 Cor. 16:13, *KJV*), because sound doctrinal faith is the anchor of their souls (see Heb. 6:19). Paul described it as “the word of faith, which we preach” (Rom. 10:8, *KJV*), and exhorted the Colossians to continue living in faith (see Col. 1:23).

What is the relationship between the *noun* faith and the *verb* faith? The writer of

Hebrews argued that when the message of Christianity (the noun) is preached, it should be mixed with subjective faith (the verb). "For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them [the unsaved], but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it" (Heb. 4:2, *KJV*).

The Bible is more than words. The scriptures are alive with the Spirit of God, who gives believers life and victory. First, the message was delivered by the Holy Spirit: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Tim. 3:16, *KJV*). The word for inspiration is *theopneustos*, which means "God-breathed." Inspiration means more than an accurate record we can trust; God the Holy Spirit breathes His own life into the words of scripture. And when we believe the words of scripture, we take the Holy Spirit into our life. This is what Jesus meant when He said, "The very words I have spoken to you are spirit and life" (John 6:63). That's why Peter responded and called the words of Jesus "words of eternal life" (John 6:68, *ELT*).

When a person mixes the Word of God with faith, it produces the life of God in his heart. The written Word of God is inspired by the incarnate Word of God, and both bring life to anyone with faith. Jesus, the incarnate Word of God, gives life (see John 1:1; 1:14), and the inspired Word also gives life (see Heb. 4:12; James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:23). When we express faith in the person of Jesus Christ as revealed in the Bible, our faith is given life and grows as we learn more about Him in the scriptures. When we believe the scriptures, we take the message of salvation into our hearts, and it gives us faith. "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10: 17, *KJV*). At the moment of salvation, objective and subjective faith are linked together; they are not two separate things, but become one. We get faith in the incarnate Word when the Word is written on our hearts.

The Fundamentals

Doctrine is found in all 66 books of the Bible. It takes the whole revelation of God to assemble a complete statement of faith. If we leave out even one of the books of the Bible, a portion of God's revelation will be missing and we will not have a complete statement of "the faith."

As we look at the Bible, we find that God did not reveal His message in a single theological statement called a "confession of faith." He did not give us theology in a creedal statement because people would study faith as they study mathematics and

miss the heart element of faith. If God had spoken in a theological formula, people would treat His Word as they do an algebraic formula. Yet God does not want us to know dead orthodoxy or mere memorization of a creed. He wants to give us His life so we can live for Him.

God has left it up to Christians to study scripture and formulate a doctrinal statement of faith. In the process of time, people have formulated a Presbyterian statement of faith, a Lutheran statement of faith, a Wesleyan statement of faith, and so on. The purpose of this chapter is not to determine which is right or wrong. Rather, there is a core of truth in most of these statements of faith, which is commonly called "the fundamentals." This core faith is that irreducible statement that is taught in scripture. Man cannot take away or add to the fundamentals and still call what is left "the faith." These fundamentals are the objective faith upon which Christianity rests and upon which we build our inner faith.

The Fundamentals of the Faith

- The verbal plenary inspiration and inerrancy of the 66 books of scripture.
- The virgin conception and deity of Jesus Christ. He was fully God when He was born of a virgin and fully man when He died for our sins. Jesus is the God-Man.
- The vicarious substitutionary death of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, dying in my place.
- The physical resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead in the same body in which He was buried.
- The bodily return of Jesus Christ at the end of the age to bring all who believe in Him into the presence of God.

When we attempt to determine "the faith," we immediately realize that certain words we presently use are not found in the Bible, such as *Trinity* and *rapture*, for example. If the truth of these doctrines is taught in the Bible, we might ask, how did these words come to be commonly accepted? How do we find out what they mean? And most importantly, how do we arrive at a doctrinal statement of faith since God did not give us one?

First, we must study all the scriptures. We take one doctrine, such as the doctrine

of Christ, and examine all the verses that say anything about Him to see what the full revelation of scripture says about Him. We must be careful not to “proof text,” which means to hang all of our doctrine on one verse or use scripture to support foregone conclusions. We should look at all the scriptures to find out what God says about Christ, or the Trinity. After men had examined everything in God’s Word about the Godhead they used the word “trinity” because it best explained the Bible teaching of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit: equal in nature, separate in person, yet submissive in duties to one another.

Second, we must interpret and integrate all the facts of scripture. This means we must find out what God says about a doctrine, not what we think about it. In doing this, we should not spend all of our time explaining away difficult verses, nor try to make a verse fit our doctrinal statement. Rather, we must be willing to change our preconceived theologies in favor of biblical faith.

Third, we should attempt to write a statement that reflects the facts we have studied. Here we compare scripture with scripture and fit them together into a complete statement. We should be careful that we do not spend more time on what we reject than on what we believe. When we study the Bible we should never base one doctrine solely on an isolated text. Many cults have done this and arrive at false doctrines. We must make sure that all the verses on a topic relate to one another and that all our doctrines are interrelated. Our personal faith must be grounded in correct doctrine.

We should place emphasis where the Bible places emphasis. The Bible says much about sin, salvation, and the Savior. If our personal faith is not concerned with these truths, we may be sincere in our faith, but our faith is sincerely misplaced. We must beware of getting caught up on tangents or minimizing any Bible truth.

Good doctrine must be rational to our intellects; God rarely violates the rational natures He has given us. God is a rational Being and, since we are created in His image, we are also rational beings. Therefore, God will use the channel of reasonable thought to communicate with us. “‘Come now, and let us reason together,’ says the Lord” (Isa. 1:18, *KJV*). God will not speak gibberish, nor will He make us become psychotic or irrational mystics in order to know Him. God will never ask us to believe in a square circle, nor believe that a door has only one side. He may ask us, as He did childless Abraham and Sarah, to believe Him for miracles, but He deals with us in rational terms.

How We Study

There are several attitudes we must take to study the Bible well. These attitudes will guide us to arrive at faith in God that is faithful to the witness of scripture.

First, we must recognize that the human mind is limited. God says, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways . . . For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa. 55:8, 9, *KJV*). We must approach biblical study with humility.

Second, we must recognize that God has not revealed everything to us. We know the essential things but less important things He has not made clear. The Bible is silent on some topics. Jesus told his disciples, "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter" (John 13:7, *KJV*). There are certain things about our faith that we will not understand until we get to heaven. We must approach biblical study ready to learn what God wants to reveal, rather than what we demand to know.

Third, we must acknowledge the inadequacy of language. Paul described "unspeakable words," meaning our words cannot adequately describe God (2 Cor. 12:4, *KJV*). Because the nature of God is loftier above men, our words can never fully describe Him. We must approach biblical study recognizing human limitations.

Fourth, we do not have all facts that are knowable. Because our knowledge of the Bible is incomplete, we must pray with David, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law" (Ps. 119:18, *KJV*). The Bible tells us that our understanding is darkened because of sin, "In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not" (2 Cor. 4:3-4, *KJV*). This simply means we cannot comprehend everything because our minds are distorted by our sin nature. Unbelief will always be natural for us. Therefore, we must approach biblical study striving for a complete faith that is strong and growing.

Fifth, we must trust the revelation of God over the discoveries of men. Whereas a scientist may say two facts are disconnected, from God's point of view there may be harmony. At one time, scientists taught that 92 elements made up the physical universe. Now they say there are 118 elements in the world. In my lifetime, scientists have continually found more of what they call "basic elements" from which the world is made. So, when science disagrees with the apparent teachings of the Bible, withhold judgment until all facts are known. We must not let a scientist shake our faith because of incomplete human knowledge.

Basis of Faith

When trying to identify the basis for faith, watch out for the basic causes of wrong doctrine. Realize that sin in our lives produces unbelief (see John 5:39-40). And recognize that, if you have only half-knowledge or ignorance, you will have a rotten foundation for a superstructure of faith.

We must watch out that we do not build doctrine on feelings. If we have too much heart and not enough head, we may reject hell because it seems unloving, or reject the written record of Christ's miracles because they seem impossible. Intellectual pride can destroy faith; any effort to make doctrine palatable to the unsaved will do the same. Some aspects of Christianity are hard to swallow, but we cannot change them to make them acceptable.

Sometimes the doctrines of Christianity are questioned because of the collapse or corruption of established churches. Institutional Christianity tends to always drift from its heritage. At one time the family, business, and even government were outwardly based on Christian principles. Now many are searching for original Christianity. Is secular humanism driving people to evangelical reality? Will they find answers to the ultimate questions of life?

People know they do not have the answers within. When they ask questions, they look without. Are they are looking for God Himself? Will they look to traditional religion or the institutional church? People are searching, not always knowing they are searching for God Himself. They will not arrive at personal faith until they arrive at a correct understanding of *the faith*.

The scriptures call orthodox Christian doctrine "the faith," and urge that effective personal faith must be grounded on correct doctrinal faith. To have mountain-moving faith, we must purge false doctrine and wrong interpretation of scripture. We must study "the faith" to learn how to be saved by saving faith. Then we must walk by faith before we can stand on a mountain that is taller and firmer than all the obstacles we want to move out of our lives and ministries. Faith must be grounded on the Bible to be effective.

Saving Faith

*Faith is a gift bestowed upon us by the gracious God,
the nature of which is to lay hold on Christ, that God afore did give
for a ransom to redeem sinners.*

John Bunyan

Principle

A person will be saved when they know God's plan of salvation, their emotions focus wholly on God, and they choose to repent of sin and put faith alone in Christ.

My mother met my father at a dance in Savannah, Georgia, and she married him even though she knew he was a heavy drinker. She believed she could change him. But instead, she drank with my father. As a small boy, I went with them to speakeasies and roadhouses, where they drank and danced. My father drank heavily and died an alcoholic.

When I was five years old, Jimmy Breland knocked on my mother's door, selling Jewel Tea coffee door to door. The Depression was still on and jobs were hard to find.

"Where do you go to Sunday school?" Jimmy asked me.

"What's Sunday school?" I asked him.

When he told me all the things they did in Sunday school, I said, "Mom, I wanna go to Sunday school." But Mother was skeptical; Jimmy was so enthusiastic about church, she thought it must be a cult. She asked him what church it was and he answered, "Eastern Heights Presbyterian Church."

As a girl, Mother had attended a small Presbyterian church in South Carolina, so she told Jimmy I could go with him to Sunday school—but I would not be allowed to go until I went to public school. I entered the first grade in September 1938, and the next

Sunday I was scrubbed clean and dressed in starched white short pants with a white shirt and tie, waiting on the front porch for Jimmy Breland.

It was misty and raining when Jimmy's black Jewel Tea truck came splashing down Wagner Street through the mud puddles.

"Don't get in the rain until the truck gets here," Mother instructed. Then she told me about the gold pin and bars that children get for perfect attendance. She warned me not to go outside to play, but to be marked "present" and listen to the lesson. "I want you to get a gold pin like those rich people who live on Victory Drive Boulevard."

It was a warning I heeded carefully. I knew from personal experience my mother's temper, so I didn't miss Sunday school for 14 years. Perfect attendance, and I still have the attendance pin and bars.

Jimmy Breland was the greatest Sunday school teacher I've ever known. He told Bible stories and passed on a treasure trove of Bible knowledge. We memorized every list in the Bible, it seems to me: the 12 disciples, the 6 days of creation, the 10 plagues of Egypt, the 12 sons of Israel, the 7 judges and, of course, all 66 books of the Bible. We memorized the golden scripture text each week and the Westminster Children's Catechism, plus a whole bunch of other stuff.

On Easter Sunday 1944, I joined the church. There were 14 other young people who were also joining. We set in a large circle in the pastor's office, where he asked each of us a question. I was about sixth in the row, so he asked, "Do you believe in the virgin birth?"

"Yes."

"Do the rest of you believe in the virgin birth?"

"Yes," they all said in unison.

Frank Perry was the last in the circle, and he got to answer the last question, "Do you believe Jesus is coming again from heaven?"

"Yes," he said.

"Do the rest of you believe Jesus is coming again from heaven?"

Everyone said "yes" but me. I think I mumbled the words because I didn't want to be embarrassed or left out. But I thought, *If Jesus comes today, I'm not ready. He'll leave me behind.*

Over the next five years I thought often about that day. I'd be riding my bike, delivering newspapers, and break into prayer, "Lord, come into my heart; save me." But I knew I was not saved.

During those years, I was a typical kid in school. I picked up cursing, but was

careful not to curse around my folks, or around any adult who might tell my mother.

Bill and Burt Harding, who were brothers, became pastors at Bonna Bella Presbyterian Church in 1950, between their junior and senior years at Columbia Bible College. Revival was poured out on that small waterfront community about seven miles from my home. I define revival as *God pouring His presence on His people*.

Betty Farthing phoned to get my buddy, Arthur Winn, and me to take her and a girlfriend to hear Burt Harding preach. Art had a car. This was amazing! She had turned me down two or three times when I asked her for a date, and now she was asking *me* to go with her! I didn't mind being "used" for transportation that evening.

There were 13 people at prayer meeting, so we all sat in the choir loft behind the pulpit. Burt wrote the outline of his message on a chalkboard as he spoke. I had never seen a Bible lesson so visually portrayed, and I paid careful attention. I didn't know the Spirit of God was working in my heart.

Burt erased the chalkboard at the end of his lesson and asked for prayer requests. Then he wrote each prayer request on the chalkboard. I had never experienced anyone praying for specific things in my life. This irritated me; it was not the way I had been taught to pray. Praying for specific things was not my way of doing it.

Almost everyone in the meeting prayed. I faked it.

When they finished praying, gnats and mosquitoes were buzzing around us. The windows were left open during those hot days, allowing the insects in as darkness fell.

"We need screens," someone said.

Burt wrote "screens" on the chalkboard. "Go count the windows," he said.

"Seventeen," was the answer. When I saw him write "17 screens" on the chalkboard, my irritation grew.

"There are no places in the Bible where they prayed like that," I argued.

"Let's kneel and ask God to supply 17 screens," Burt said, ignoring me. So we all knelt, including me. This was convicting, for it was the first time I'd knelt in a public meeting. I was uncomfortable with kneeling, and I disagreed with praying for things. *God doesn't do things like this*, I fumed. But I kept my thoughts to myself.

The following Sunday during announcements, Bo Adams, who owned the local convenience store, stood to say, "Revival meeting is being planned and we need screens if we're gonna have meetings at night. I own the corner store and I can get new screens wholesale for about \$4.50 each. I'll buy two and donate them." Then he sat down.

Mrs. Alcorn spoke up, "Bo, can I buy two at that price?"

"That's what I meant," he answered, "but I will donate only two screens."

When several more people volunteered to buy a screen, Burt interrupted and went to the chalkboard to write each name so he could keep count. When they got close to the goal, I put my hand up, "I'll buy two." Nine dollars was the most money I had given to God up to that time, but it seemed a small amount when I thought about being a part of God's answer to our prayer. My annoyance with specific prayer turned to wonder. *God does answer specific prayer.* I sensed God was doing something in my life.

Bill and Burt Harding had begun an early-morning prayer meeting on the screened porch of the garage apartment where they lived. One brother would meet people from 5:00 A.M. till 6:30 A.M. and pray with them, then the other brother would meet people from 6:30 A.M. till 8:00 A.M. Many people stopped to pray on their way to work. No one stayed the whole time.

I never attended the early morning prayer meetings. If I had, I would have seen a typed list of about 60 names of people for whom they were praying. Daily they prayed for the salvation of Elmer Towns . . . Art Winn . . . Betty Farthing . . . all the youth from my church.

Bill and Burt had invited Joel Ortendahl, a Baptist friend of theirs from college, to preach a revival meeting the third week of July 1950. Every night, five or six people came forward to get saved. God's presence was felt in the church.

About the fifth night of the revival, the area letter carrier went forward to be saved. As the meeting was concluding, he stood to testify, "Each day as I come down DeRenna Avenue toward this church, I feel a glowing heat coming from the building. As I passed the church, the heat goes away. God's in this place, I can feel it." He continued, "I've been a Baptist all my life. I've sung in the choir, I've taught Sunday school, and I've been a deacon. But tonight I got born again."

His testimony challenged me. Can a person *know* they've been born again?

Because of the success of the revival, it was extended a second week. People were getting saved every night, until July 25, Thursday night. It was as though God had abandoned us or someone sinned – no one came forward to be saved.

Bill Harding stood in front of the communion table to give the benediction and said, "Someone is here who should have come forward to be saved." He said that person was hanging onto the pew in front of them and wouldn't let go. I looked down to see my white knuckles hanging on to the pew. I quickly let go. "Here's what you must do," Bill said to us – or, rather, to me. "Before you go to sleep, kneel by your bed, look to Jesus in heaven and say, 'Lord Jesus, I've never done it before. Come into my heart and save me.'"

I determined to pray that when I got home. Around 11:15 P.M. I knelt in the back bedroom of 107 Wagner Street, looked out the window into heaven . . . but I couldn't pray, "Lord, I've never done it before."

I thought, *I've said this prayer many times*. So instead I prayed the Lord's Prayer sincerely emphasizing every phrase. I did not realize Satan was fighting for my soul to keep me from doing what God wanted me to do. When I got into bed, I couldn't go to sleep. I tossed and turned in conviction because God was speaking to my soul, urging me to make a complete commitment to Him.

I got out of bed but still I couldn't pray, "Lord, I've never done it before." I kept telling myself, *You've done this but it didn't work*.

I prayed sincerely, "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep," a child's prayer I had learned when I was young. I got back into bed, but continued to toss and turn. God wouldn't let me go to sleep.

Finally I got out of bed, looked out of the window into heaven toward Jesus, and prayed, "Lord I've never done it before." When I said that sincerely, I felt the horrors of hell. I felt I was already in hell. I prayed in fear, "Lord Jesus, come into my heart and save me!"

He did come in, and I instantly knew that I was saved. As a matter of fact, I've never had a doubt about being saved since I prayed that night for Him to enter my heart.

I knew I had to read the Bible, so I turned on my night light and looked up Romans 1:16, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation, for everyone who believes." I memorized it and determined to give a testimony in the revival meeting the next evening.

Power to Change

Saving faith begins with looking to Jesus Christ for salvation. Salvation involves every part of your personality – your intellect, your emotions, and your will. Salvation involves *knowing* the gospel in your head, sincerely trusting God with all the *feelings* of the heart, and responding to His grace by an act of the *will*. When you look to Jesus with saving faith, you do so with your whole being.

Dwight L. Moody, the famous evangelist, proclaimed that faith was the greatest power in the universe. He preached that simple belief in Jesus Christ could transform

anyone in any kind of circumstances. Belief in Jesus could make a drunk sober or take the bitterness out of a failing marriage.

A man came to Moody and said, essentially, "What you preach is absurd. You preach that if a man only believes, the whole course of his life will be changed." The man disagreed. He did not think belief was that powerful.

"I can change your mind in less than a minute," said Moody.

"No, you cannot."

Moody said, "Let us make sure that we understand each other. You say that belief will not change a man's actions?"

"Yes," said the critic.

"Supposing," Moody said, "a man should put his head in that door and yell that the auditorium was on fire. What would you do?"

"I would immediately run out the door," the critic answered.

"Yes," replied Moody. "When you believe the house is on fire, you take a new course of action."

Moody had made his point.

Belief is the foundation of Christianity. For nearly 2,000 years the greatest transformation of human life has occurred through faith. Lives have been changed, financial disasters have been averted, and families have been reunited. Of all the influences in the world, belief has been the greatest influence on the greatest number of people over the longest period of time. The action of belief results in faith. Yes, faith is the power that unleashes God's power.

Saving faith is both simple and complex. On one hand, saving faith is complex: It sets in motion all the judicial machinery of heaven. On the other, faith is as simple as a drowning man reaching for a rope, a child taking a step, or a sinner looking to Jesus Christ. Faith is simple belief that Jesus will save you.

But eternal consequences are not gotten as easily as an impulsive purchase at the discount department store. To be saved a person must have proper *knowledge of God* and the plan of salvation; a proper *expression of emotions* that demonstrate her sincere faith; and a proper *decision of the will* to believe and receive salvation. So not everything that is called faith is proper biblical saving faith. Why? Because some think academic knowledge will save, but their emotions are never touched. Others think it's what they do, or what they decide while they ignore the facts of scripture. No! All three aspects of personality are involved in salvation.

For some, saving faith is easy – easy, because it takes no energy to believe. For

them, saving faith is as easy as resting in a chair: You no longer hold yourself up, but simply let the chair support your weight. That's how some people get saved; they rest on the Lord for salvation.

For others, however, saving faith feels like work. They struggle to bring their intelligence in line with their hearts, and their hearts in line with their wills. They pray with deep sincerity and repent to God with intensity. They love God with all the passion of their hearts, and let nothing stand in their way of salvation – even if the journey to saving faith is long and hard fought, as it was for me.

God's Word for Salvation

John stated clearly, "But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name" (John 20:31, *KJV*). God would not offer salvation to a human being if she did not have the ability to receive it. This verse shows how God handles this dilemma. God has given us His Word to enable us to believe: "These are written, to help you believe" (*ELT*). Humans need help because the natural heart rejects God and rebels against salvation. Faith that transforms your life is a gift from God's Word (see Eph. 2:8-9).

So when a person says he cannot believe, we should tell him he is correct. Then we should take him to the scriptures, which is the instrument by which God implants faith in his heart (see Rom. 10:17).

Crying out to God is not enough. Some people cry out to God because they are scared of dying or because they have cancer or because they lost their job. Fear is not a basis for faith, but fear can motivate a person to find saving faith to turn his whole life over to God on the basis of His Word.

Justifying Faith

Justification is an act of God's free grace unto sinners, in which he pardons all their sins, accepts and accounts their persons righteous in his sight; not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but only for the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ, by God imputed to them, and received by faith alone.

Westminster Longer Catechism

Principle

When you are saved, God imputes the righteousness of Jesus Christ to you. Through Christ, your relationship with God is perfect (even if you don't experience it that way), and it motivates you to exercise mountain-moving faith in life and ministry.

Among the myriad forms of faith, we exercise *interventional faith* to solve a problem, *confident faith* for inner assurance of salvation and *mountain-moving faith* to partner with God to do an extraordinary thing in His work. These are all *experiential* forms of faith, but there is also a non-experiential faith—and it is foundational to all other kinds of faith. It is *justifying faith*, wherein God declares us righteous in His sight.

Justifying faith is best explained by the apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans: "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1, KJV). When God justifies us, our record in heaven is declared perfect and God declares we are as righteous as Jesus Christ.

Martin Luther, a Roman Catholic priest in the late 15th century, searched for God with all his heart but could not find peace. He sincerely followed the teaching and practice of his church but could not find the peace for which he was searching. He was crawling up a set of stairs in Rome on his knees, trying to do things to please God, when

suddenly he remembered the truth of “justification by faith.” He stood up and stopped trying to please God by his good works. He found the peace he sought when he understood that justification is received through faith alone.

Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement “the just shall live by faith.” Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy, God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise.¹

Luther’s understanding of justification by faith led to the birth of the Protestant Reformation. Justification was and is a foundational truth for the Lutheran and Presbyterian churches, but Luther’s reforming ideas also inspired and informed other church groups.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the conversion of John and Charles Wesley, founders of Methodism. William Holland, a friend of the two young men, wrote that on May 17, 1738, he was “providentially directed to Martin Luther’s *Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*.”² According to his diary, he shared his findings first with Charles.

I carried it round to Mr. Charles Wesley, who was sick at Mr. Bray’s, as a very precious treasure that I had found, and we three sat down together, Mr. Charles Wesley reading the Preface aloud. At the words, “What, have we then nothing to do? No, nothing! but only accept Him who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption,” there came such a power over me as I cannot well describe; my great burden fell off in an instant; my heart was so filled with peace and love that I burst into tears. . . . My companions, perceiving me so affected, fell on their knees and prayed. When I afterwards went into the street, I could scarcely feel the ground I trod upon.³

Four days later, Charles Wesley was also converted because of what he had learned about justification by faith from reading Martin Luther. He wrote, “I spent some hours this evening in private with Martin Luther, who was greatly blessed to me, especially the conclusion of the second chapter. I laboured, waited and prayed to feel ‘who loved

me, and gave Himself for me.”⁴

Three days later, his brother, John, was converted when he went to Aldersgate and heard someone read from Luther’s *Introduction to Romans*. Once again the truth of justification by faith gripped a seeking soul. John Wesley had performed works for salvation; he had studied, preached, fasted, and prayed all night. Yet in his heart he had not experienced the new birth. He recorded the Aldersgate experience in his diary:

In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther’s *Preface to the Epistle to the Romans*. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death. (May 24, 1738)⁵

These mighty men of God were transformed through a proper understanding of justification by faith—and so we can enter into peace with God by understanding justification through faith.

Justified by Faith

Abraham is the first person in the Bible described as having been justified by faith. This is not to say he was the first person to be a child of God, but he was likely the first to understand it. “[Abraham] believed in the LORD; and [God] counted it to him for righteousness” (Gen. 15:6, *KJV*). God made a promise to Abraham, who then trusted in God as though His promises were already received. As a result, Abraham “staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that, what [God] had promised, he was able also to perform” (Rom. 4:20-21, *KJV*).

The secret to Abraham’s faith was his conviction that God would do what He had promised. God had promised that Abraham would have a son, which seemed, to everyone but Abraham, an impossible promise to fulfill. His wife was beyond childbearing age. Yet Abraham “considered not his own body now dead” (Rom. 4:19, *KJV*). He accepted the promise of God, despite the appearance of impossibility; the Bible

says Abraham “believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead” (Rom. 4:17, KJV).

Justification and righteousness are linked in scripture, in that both come from the same Greek root (*dikaioo* means “righteousness” and *dikaio* means “to justify”). When we express saving faith in Christ, God adds Christ’s perfect righteousness to our record in heaven – that is, He *justifies* us. Since *justification* and *righteousness* are biblical words of common origin, we can distinguish between them by noting that God is the active source who makes us righteous, and we are the passive recipients, who are made righteous.

A double transference happens at salvation. First, our sin is transferred to Jesus Christ. He becomes our sin, taking our punishment on our behalf. Christ died *for* us (see Gal. 2:20). He gave his life a ransom *for* many (see Matt. 20:28). He gave himself *for* the sins of the world (Rom. 5:8). This is important. The preposition “for” means *substitution*.

Second, Christ’s righteousness is transferred to us. When God looks at us in judgment, He sees the perfection of His Son. “For God hath made [Christ] to be sin for us (first transference), that we might be made the righteousness of God in him (second transference)” (2 Cor. 5:21, KJV).

If I speed on the highway and get a ticket, a judge declares I am guilty under the law. When I pay the fine, I go free – except the state’s computer records now show that I have a moving violation and my insurance premium will go up. I paid the fine, but I cannot avoid the punishing consequences of breaking the law. However, should the judge acquit me of the crime, I am not guilty. My record has no mark or violation against it. Acquittal means my record is as clear as if the crime never happened.

Justification goes even further than acquittal. Justification declares that I am a perfect driver, the safest driver in the state. The record of the best driver in the state is credited to me in the state’s computer. If the governor presents me with a trophy for being the safest driver in the state, I know – and others know – I do not deserve it. We all know I have been caught speeding. But the official record shows I am perfect. God takes this same type of action when we are justified by faith. We are clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ; in the Father’s view, we are just as perfect as God’s Son. We know we sin (see Ps. 116:11); yet our record in heaven is perfect.

“Justified” is a legal standing in which the Christian enjoys perfect relationship with God (see Rom. 5:1-11). The Christian no longer has to worry about incurring God’s wrath and judgment. She has peace with God because of justification. She knows God has graciously accepted her into His family. And by faith, she *acts on* the account that has already been settled in heaven.

A person being justified by God is similar to an immigrant being declared a citizen by a government. The moment the immigrant is pronounced a citizen, nothing happens to him internally. His thought processes remain the same, as does his personality and his pattern of speech. The only actual change is his legal standing. But as he becomes aware of the benefits and blessings of being a citizen, he may shout, cry, or break into a grin. His emotions react to his changed legal status. In the same way, justification changes our legal papers in heaven. We become a child of God. When we become aware of the benefits and blessings of our citizenship in God's kingdom, we may cry, rejoice, or stand in silent gratitude.

Justification makes a person perfect in God's sight – but she is not perfect on earth. Only her position in heaven has changed. In this way, justification is “non-experiential” – the justified person does not experience the reality of her perfection until she joins God in heaven. On earth, her new nature struggles with the old desires of the flesh. But in heaven the Father accepts her, because He sees her just as perfect as His Son, Jesus Christ.

Perhaps the best way to tie together a person's legal position in heaven and his daily walk on earth is by accepting and applying the truth of Habakkuk 2:4: “The just shall live by his faith.” This was the verse that changed Martin Luther's life as he crawled up those steps in Rome as an act of religious penitence. He stood to his feet in repudiation of Rome's legal requirements for salvation. He accepted the truth of justification by faith and rested in the salvation provided by Jesus Christ. For the rest of his life, Luther shared what he had discovered in the scriptures, and the world has never been the same. When believers realize God has declared us righteous, we should serve the Lord with the same fervency.

Since you are a “perfect” son or daughter of the heavenly Father, ask for anything God has promised to give His children. Exercise your gift of faith in powerful ministry for God. Say to the mountain – the obstacles standing in life or ministry – “be removed.” And it will move. The fact that you are justified by faith should motivate you to exercise bold faith.

Notes

1. Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1956), 65.
2. Henry Carter, *The Methodist Heritage* (Peterborough, England: 1951), 24.
3. *Ibid.*

4. Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 13.

5. Albert C. Outler, *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 51.

Indwelling Faith

*The doctrine of the indwelling of Christ in the heart is revolutionary.
When accepted as an article of faith, and realized as a matter of experience,
an uprising of the prostrate powers of the soul takes place;
the outworks of the flesh surrender one by one to the thorn-crowned King.*

James M. Campbell

Principle

When Christ enters your life, He transforms you into His image.
By yielding to Him, you can move mountains
in your life and ministry.

On Easter Sunday 1951, I experienced a special communion with God that I had never previously felt. I sensed Christ's presence in my life as never before.

I was a freshman at Columbia Bible College. I taught each Sunday in Capital View Community Chapel, a small Presbyterian mission outside Columbia, South Carolina. My ride was about 30 minutes late to pick me up that morning. It was the first warm day of spring; the daffodils were pushing their buds through the packed winter soil. This new life in nature made me think about the new life I had in Christ.

That first Easter following my salvation, I was meditating on the phrase, "Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). I meditated on the miracle that Christ had risen on the first Easter and now lives in my heart. I rejoiced in His fullness, and for the first time I experienced the *indwelling faith* of Christ in me.

As I stood in the warm sun waiting for my ride, I willfully yielded myself to God. I asked Jesus Christ to give me victory by living through me. He had never doubted His trust in the Father, while I often doubted God's provision. I wanted faith that could trust God not only for money—I wanted to trust God completely.

I did not kneel in prayer, nor did I close my eyes. I simply talked to Jesus and yielded everything to Him. I asked Him to live His life through me. That morning, for the first time in my Christian life, I fully experienced the resurrection life. The previous Easter, I had still been unsaved; Christ's resurrection on Easter had merely been a historical fact. But on this glorious morning a year later, I talked with the One who was raised from the dead to sit at the right hand of the Father in heaven. Christ was alive in my heart. Little did I know that the presence of Jesus Christ in me would be tested. But that morning I did not have a care in the world. I had the indwelling faith of Christ.

That Sunday morning I experienced what millions of others have experienced: the promise of Jesus, "Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14, *ELT*). Christ lived in me, and I felt I could take on the world and beat it! Even if I was overzealous, that was how I felt. The fact that Christ indwelt me was, I knew, the greatest thing in life.

That knowledge led me to another truth: because Christ dwelt in me, I had His strength, His encouragement, and His faith. I read it in Galatians 2:20: "I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." I didn't have to live by *my* faith. I could have *His* faith – the faith of Jesus. He had told His disciples, "Have faith in God" (Mark 11:22, *KJV*). The *King James Version's* translation of this verse obscures what Jesus was telling them. Jesus said, "*Ekte pistin theou*" is more correctly translated "Have (the) faith of God." The secret of spiritual power was not my faith, but the faith of Christ living through me – *indwelling faith*.

One of the foundational verses about faith in the Old Testament is, "The just shall live by his faith" (Hab. 2:4, *KJV*). The faith spoken about here is *God's faith*, not men's faith in God. Indwelling faith is Someone Else's faith at work in us. We cease all efforts to please God; we give up our natural faith and let the faith of the Son of God work in us. Paul taught, "A man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ" (Gal. 2:16, *KJV*). This means that the faith of Jesus Christ must be planted in our hearts – that is, Christ's indwelling faith. Faith is not our endeavoring to live for God. Biblical faith is the indwelling of Christ's faith in our hearts.

Some authorities have questioned whether the phrase the "faith of Christ" should be translated this way. They interpret the original language *pisteou Iesou Christou* to be an *objective* genitive, meaning "through faith in Jesus Christ." Those who would translate it this way make it our faith in Christ, implying that He is the object of our faith. But other authorities insist we should translate the phrase "the faith of Jesus

Christ” as a *subjective* genitive, making it the faith that belongs to Christ. The best scholars, in my view, translate the phrase in light of Paul’s Hebrew background. They translate *pisteou* to mean “the faithfulness of Jesus Christ.” In this meaning, we are not describing Jesus’ faith but *His faithfulness*.¹

Sinners are saved through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. “The righteousness of God is manifested through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ to all who believe” (Rom. 3:22, *ELT*, see *KJV*). Because Jesus Christ was faithful through His life and even unto death, God’s righteousness is revealed to us through Him. “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faithfulness of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ in order to be justified on the basis of the faithfulness of Christ” (Gal. 2:16, *ELT*, see *KJV*). We are justified by faith because Jesus Christ was a faithful sacrifice for our sins. “The scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise which is based upon the faithfulness of Jesus Christ might be given to them who believe” (Gal. 3:22, *ELT*, see *KJV*). Christ was faithful to fulfill all the promises in the Old Testament, so that we can believe in Him today.

Again Paul says about our salvation, “Not having my own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faithfulness of Christ, the righteousness of God which is by faith” (Phil. 3:9, *ELT*, see *KJV*). According to this verse, we are not saved by our good works or our faithfulness; we are saved through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. All salvation depends on Him. We can pray and approach the throne because of the faithfulness of Christ, “in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through his faithfulness” (Eph. 3:12, *ELT*, see *KJV*).

Thus we have the faith of Jesus Christ, who was faithful in all things. T. F. Torrance explains it this way:

Jesus Christ is thus not only the incarnation of the divine *pistis* (faith), but He is the embodiment and actualization of man’s *pistis* (faith) in covenant with God. He is not only the righteousness of God, but the embodiment and actualization of our human righteousness before God.²

The Crucified Life

Another aspect of the faith of Jesus Christ is this admonition of Paul: “If . . . we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be

saved by His life" (Rom. 5:10, *KJV*). The phrase "His life" refers to Christ's earthly life of obedience, *and* His risen life of ministering to the disciples after His resurrection, *and* His standing in heaven as the seal of our faith before the Father. The life of Jesus Christ is our assurance of salvation.

Certain rights are available to Americans because of their citizenship. They can vote, hold office, express opinions and, of course, enjoy the protection of the Constitution, which guarantees their rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. In the same manner, if one is a Christian, there are certain rights available to him. He can have victory over sin. His prayers can be answered. He can walk in peace and enjoy holiness and communion with God.

A foreigner can never enjoy the benefits of being American without becoming a citizen. In the same way, a sinner can never enjoy the benefits of the Christian life without being born again. Jesus told Nicodemus, "Ye must be born again" (John 3:7, *KJV*). When Christ went to the cross, He died for our sins. When He went into the grave, He separated our sins from us. When He was raised from the grave, He gave us new life. Our old nature was judged on the cross; a new nature was imparted to us through His resurrection. His death and resurrection allow us to be born again into new life.

Many Americans do not take full advantage of the privileges of citizenship. Some do not vote. Some commit crimes and are incarcerated, forfeiting their right to liberty. The fact of citizenship does not automatically give a person all the advantages of being American; if she does not take advantage of her citizenship, she only has herself to blame. In the same way, many Christians do not take advantage of their heavenly citizenship. They allow Satan to defeat them or they give in to the flesh. They are miserable and defeated. Having Christ in their lives should give them victory, but they experience only defeat. Without the indwelling faith of Christ, they find themselves unable to live as full citizens of heaven. And they only have themselves to blame.

How can we experience the indwelling life? We identify with Jesus Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection.

We need to take a new look at the redemptive work of Christ. Our blind eyes must be opened to the renewed meaning of Jesus on the cross. We must humbly bow before Him and lift up our eyes to see Christ as our divine sin-bearer. Ask yourself, *Why have I not seen Him before?* The answer comes back: *The loathsome thing called my sin nature has blinded my eyes.*

We need to see again that Jesus' death is the basis of victory over the domination

of our old nature. We do not need a new work of grace or a second work of grace. We need to go back to Calvary and reckon our sinful selves dead with Christ on the cross (see Rom. 6:11).

Our sinful selves were put to death positionally (see Rom. 6:6), but they remain active in our lives (Rom. 7:15-23). What we need to do is sign the death certificate and not give it authority to control us (see Rom. 6:13). We need to realize that Christ not only died for us as sinners, but we, as sinners, positionally died with Him. Our old natures were put to death and we have been given new natures. We can have victory over sin because we have a powerful, victorious new nature by the indwelling of Christ (see Eph. 4:24).

We experience victory as we participate in the crucified life. We must go again to Calvary where we asked Christ to come into our lives with His power to put sin to death. While the cross signifies pain, shame, ignominy, and death, it also saves. It separates all our sin in the past from all God wants to do for and through us in the present and the future.

The cross is not divine magic. The cross is the life of Christ substituted for our sin. The cross is the life of Christ transferred to us. The cross is the life of Christ living within us. Our sin is placed in Christ and His life is placed in us. This is the greatest transfer in life (see 2 Cor. 5:21).

It is folly to talk about any type of spiritual victory apart from our participation in the cross of Jesus Christ. Too many times Christians have tried to be saved by the cross, but continue to live by their own effort. But all victory begins when we renounce the old life and lay hold of the new life. By faith we identify with Christ in His death and His resurrection.

The key to victory is a moment-by-moment dependence on Him. If we surrender our desires to Him, we no longer agonize over temptation. We do not strive against the flesh. We let the death of Christ overcome the old life and the resurrected life of Christ impart new life within us.

Too often we neglect God's teaching through nature around us. Every time spring comes around, we realize life grows out of death. There is not a tree or plant that did not grow from the death of a seed. First the seed must be planted in the ground to die. And if it dies, it springs forth into new life. In the same way, we receive new life in Jesus Christ. He had to die so our old lives of sin could die with Him. Now He dwells in us so we may live the new life God intends for us.

Life in the Heavens

The Bible teaches that the Christian enjoys life on two planes. First, he lives on the lower plane: this earth, where he is not perfect. He must continually strive against temptation. He is limited by his physical body, tempted by his fleshly nature, and subject to the embarrassments of earthly life.

But on an upper plane, the Christian lives “in the heavens” (Eph. 1:3, *ELT*). On this plane, the Christian is justified before the Father. He is in Christ, who stands at the right hand of the Father. He possesses the new life of Christ and is declared perfect in His righteousness. The Christian on this plane is just as perfect as Jesus Christ.

The lower plane is his *state* on this earth; the higher plane is his *standing* before God. When Paul announced to the Ephesians that God has “has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ” (Eph. 1:3), he is telling us that we are rich in heaven, even though we seem poor on this earth. So our faith must see the blessings promised to us. We must appropriate these blessings by prayer. Faith is the door that lets us see into heaven.

By faith the Christian may sit with Jesus Christ in the heavens and enjoy all of the benefits of His status before the Father. This does not mean the mind of the Christian dwells in the heavens but her body dwells on earth. No, the Christian life is not schizophrenic. God wants us to realize our heavenly citizenship is the basis for our life on this plane. “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” (Rom. 8:32, *KJV*). I’ve heard this called “the throne life.” Even though the Christian treads the dust of this earth, she sits upon a heavenly throne.

Some may say, “I cannot understand this teaching because it is a mystery.” At the heart of every doctrine there is mystery, something we do not understand – something we must accept by faith.

The earthly life of Jesus Christ illustrates our physical earthly life. While Jesus walked on this earth, He was subject to its limitations. Yet He said, “No man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven” (John 3:13, *KJV*). Did you catch where Jesus said He was located? As He was talking to His disciples on earth, Jesus said that He existed, at that moment, in heaven. Here was a miracle that the people did not understand. Jesus was preaching and the crowd saw Him with their physical eyes. Yet while He was on earth He spoke of “the Son of man which is in heaven.” Since we live in Christ, we can be on earth at

the same time we dwell in the heavenlies.

When we live in the heavenlies, we are set free to do God's will. It does not mean we are perfect, or that we live without our sinful flesh, or that our bodies do not get sick, or that our businesses never fail. We are all subject to the limitations of this world. But our heavenly life—the indwelling of Christ in heaven—should help us overcome our earthly obstacles.

We must live with Christ in the heavenlies even while we are still alive on this earth. We take His wealth to pay our spiritual debts. We claim His victory to overcome the emptiness of this life. We let the faith of Jesus Christ dwell in us so that He wins the victory for us.

Notes

1. Richard N. Longenecker, *Paul, Apostle of Liberty* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1976), 149.
2. T. F. Torrance, "One Aspect of the Biblical Conception of Faith," *The Expository Times*, Vol. LXVIII, No. 4 (January 1957), 11-14.

Living by Faith

Faith is the fountain, the foundation, and the fosterer of obedience.

Charles Spurgeon

Principle

Living by faith means obeying God's commands.

The Bible makes it clear that we should *live by faith* (2 Cor. 5:7), but how does that work? Some think it means to stop cussing, stop getting drunk, stop smoking, stop lying – and many other *stops*. But living by faith is not keeping rules – it is not avoiding sin – but those who *live by faith* will live pure lives separate from sin.

When I went to Columbia Bible College, I wrongly came to believe that *living by faith* meant trusting God to supply finances. That's because CBC was a "faith institution." Like most other Bible colleges, they were not financially supported by a denomination or other outside sources. I joined prayer groups to intercede for money to pay faculty salaries, because when gifts were not sent in the faculty didn't get paid. There are also some independent foreign mission boards that are known as faith institutions because the missionaries' financial support is not guaranteed or paid by a denomination. Missionaries go to the field by faith, trusting God to supply their needs. Most of these faith institutions operate by the motto, "Full information without solicitation." They send out prayer letters asking readers to pray for money or salaries and projects. As courageous and trusting as this may be, *living by faith* is not just trusting God for money. It's something far bigger.

Living by faith is introduced in Habakkuk 2:4: "The just shall live by his faith" (KJV). Paul continues the theme: "The just shall live by faith" (Rom. 1:17, KJV). Paul's great theme in Romans is justification by faith, and he uses an unusual Greek preposition to tell us how to live. Most translations read, "live by faith," but the original

Greek reads *ek pistis*, which means out of our faith we are declared righteous. We must live for God because God has declared us perfect.

Living by faith is living by God's principles. That includes separating ourselves from sin, but it's a whole lot more. It may involve a missionary trusting God for money, but it's more than that. All who live by faith live by God's principles.

God has given us the scriptures to guide our lives. The principles for living by faith are not always easy to find, but when a believer wants to know how to live for God, he will find God's will in the scriptures. "Anyone who wants to do the will of God will know" (John 7:17).

The Bible is filled with stories, historical details, biographies, poems, and doctrinal explanations. Many of these contain examples of people who live by faith. Their stories show us, by example, how to live for God.

The Bible also contains explicit instructions about how to live for God. These principles include what God wants us to know and do. He has used these principles to lead His people in the past, and they are the principles by which He will lead us today. Therefore, study the Bible to find God's principles and apply them to your life. This is living by faith.

As an illustration, one principle found in scripture is that God wants us to have pure minds and not think filthy or rebellious thoughts (see Matt. 5:27-28). We apply this explicit instruction by choosing not to watch pornography or look on a woman to lust after her. The more biblical principles you discover and apply to your life, the more you live by faith. And the more completely you apply God's principles to every area of your life, the better you live by faith.

Paul tells us, "We walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7, KJV), which means we must not follow the principles of people on this earth. Instead we must live by God's principles, which the world can't see or understand.

Let's just look at a few of the principles that help us live by faith.

1. Believers find and do God's will for their lives.

Between my freshman and sophomore years at college, I worked for the summer at Ben Lippen Camp outside Asheville, North Carolina. As part of my job, I had to get the facilities ready for camp before anyone else arrived. Late one night, I was washing down the dining room floor with a hose and mop. As I slogged my way to the middle of the room, I stopped to see a blue sign tacked to a center post that read: *God has a plan for*

your life.

I laughed to think God's purpose for me was to wash floors and do general maintenance.

Then the weight of the sign hit me. The God of the Ages was interested in the way a college boy mopped floors! I was overwhelmed that the eternal God had a plan for my life. I bowed my head on the top of that mop handle and yielded myself to find His will for my life and to do it. That night I learned, "For it is God who works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13, *KJV*).

I determined to discern "what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Rom. 12:2, *CSB*). In one sense it was a blind leap into the unknown, for I did not know what God wanted me to do. But whatever it was, I trusted Him and I would do it.

2. Believers yield control of their bodies to God.

Paul begins the practical section of Romans with the instruction, "I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think" (Rom. 12:1-2, *NLT*). God wants outward control of your outward body so people will know He controls your inward life.

Another reason to yield your body to God is because God's Spirit lives in your body. "Do not let any part of your body become an instrument of evil to serve sin. Instead, give yourselves completely to God" (Rom. 6:13).

3. Believers must rightly apply God's principles to their lives.

Paul had to deal with a situation in the new church at Thessalonica. The Christians believed Christ was coming soon. This was an accurate principle, but they wrongly applied it to their daily lives. They quit working and went out to wait for Jesus' return. Maybe they quit working for love of Christ. Maybe they were lazy. In any case, they were wrong. Paul rebuked them, "Stay away from all believers who live idle lives" (2 Thess. 3:6). Then he pointed to his own example: "We worked hard day and night so we would not be a burden to any of you" (2 Thess. 3:8).

There are some Christians like the Thessalonians. They don't work. They pray for money and depend on "mailbox faith," hoping money will come in the mail. There are

others who have “lottery faith” who pray for God to help them win the lottery. They could also be called “big-boat Christians:” they are waiting for their boat to come in—and they want a big boat. They want a boat big enough to carry all the money they will win in the lottery. But a Christian must learn to work hard and gain a healthy identity from the job he does well. God’s plan is for people to work to supply their needs.

What about missionaries who live by faith? When they work hard, win souls to Christ, and plant churches God will raise up supporters who want to help them. Is Paul an example to follow in supporting missionaries? Remember, he worked to support himself on the field (see 2 Thess. 3:6-10; Acts 18:3). But Paul also received money from Philippi, the first church he planted in Europe (see Phil. 4:15-19). The overriding principle given by Paul is, “The Lord has given orders that those who preach the Gospel would be supported (financially) by those who accept it” (1 Cor. 9:14, *ELT*).

Jerry Falwell received critical letters because he wrote to the public to ask for money to support his telecast and Liberty University. He often asked me to answer these critical letters. Sometimes the critic would quote George Mueller, whose remarkable faith helped to provide food and shelter for orphans, with claims that Mueller only prayed but never asked for money. I’d write back to the critic that Mueller may not have asked for money up front, but he did send out a quarterly journal that detailed miraculous answers to prayers for supplies for the orphanage. He asked for money by implication. Also in his journal, Mueller described planned projects and various needs, asking readers to pray for financial supply for those needs. In my view, Mueller asked for money in a backhanded way. He was polite and subtle—but he asked.

Jerry Falwell could ask for money because he worked hard to build a world-class university. He was not asking for money for himself. People gave financially because they wanted to be a part of a successful work of God.

4. All believers must live by faith, not just pastors and missionaries.

Three times we’re told in the New Testament, “The just shall live by faith” (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38, *KJV*). In Romans, the emphasis is on *justification*. In Galatians, the emphasis is on *living*. In Hebrews, the emphasis is on *faith*. So, every part of that sentence is important for all believers. Everyone who has been justified—every believer—must live by faith.

Living by faith does include trusting God for money, so all pastors and all lay

people must trust God daily for daily bread. But living by faith includes much more than money. It touches every part of your life. Live your whole life by the principles found in God's Word. Those who do so have the greatest foundation to move mountains by faith. When you live by faith, you live every day, in every way, by God's principles.

The Gift of Faith

The gift of faith is the ability to envision what needs to be done and to trust God to accomplish it even though it seems impossible to most people.

Mark Driscoll

Principle

If you have the spiritual gift of faith, your life and ministry will be most effective when you operate in your gift.

Charles Hughes, a student at Liberty University, was a powerful young evangelist who traveled to preach at weekend revivals. In February 1978, he was involved in a tragic head-on collision with an 18-wheeler on the interstate near Carlisle, Pennsylvania. His head was crushed. For 13 days, Charles hung precariously between life and death. Because there was so much brain damage, the doctors gave little hope of recovery.

After Charles had gone through a number of emergency surgeries, the doctors were ready to give up, saying he was brain dead. They approached his father, Dr. Robert Hughes, dean of Liberty University Baptist Theological Seminary, for permission to harvest his organs for people needing transplants.

“No!” Dr. Hughes said boldly, in contrast to his usual meek manner. “God gave us young Charles and he is to preach the gospel. I will not give him up.” He broke away from the doctors and ran to the small hospital chapel to pray.

Jerry Falwell had been summoned to the hospital where Charles teetered on the brink of death. He overheard the medical team ask for his organs.

The following evening, Falwell announced to the congregation at Thomas Road Baptist Church, “Charles Hughes will preach the graduation sermon for Liberty Baptist College.” It was an extraordinary declaration of faith.

A little over three months later, in May 1978, Charles Hughes stood before a

large audience on Liberty Mountain to deliver the graduation sermon. Some wanted Charles to keep the bandages around his scarred head to show evidence of his accident. But he removed the bandages in the backroom and mounted the platform to shouts of “Hallelujah!” and “Amen!” Perhaps not many in attendance remember now what Charles said that day, but no one who was present can ever forget the supernatural answer to prayer who stood before them to bring a word from the Lord.

God honored the faith of his father, Robert Hughes, and his pastor, Jerry Falwell. Did they accomplish a great feat by faith because they had the *gift of faith*? Can others do similar, mountain-moving exploits because God has given them the gift of faith?

To answer these questions, we first must discover what the gift of faith is and who has it.

The gift of faith is a spiritual gift—specifically, it one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit that helps a believer do the impossible. Paul describes it this way, “And though I have all faith, so that I can remove mountains” (1 Cor. 13:2, *KJV*).

Yet it seems as though only a few can move mountains.

Some people obviously have more faith than others. Did you see what Paul said about *all* faith? What do you think Paul meant by the word *all*? Did he mean he had all of the different kinds of faith? Or did Paul mean he was using all the faith available to him at the moment? Or was Paul describing the spiritual gift of faith?

Reading the Bible, we see some people accomplish gigantic tasks by faith. By faith, Moses led Israel out of Egypt. By faith, Joshua won victory after victory over greater armies. By faith, David defeated Goliath. Was their faith a gift from God, given so they could accomplish great things?

When the children of Israel were attacked by Pharaoh from behind, hemmed in between mountains and the Sea of Reeds, what did they do? Moses told them, “Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will accomplish for you today” (Ex. 14:13, *NKJV*). By faith, Moses knew God would deliver them. He lifted his rod over the water and the sea parted for the Israelites to cross on dry land to the other side.

We must admit, this extraordinary expression of faith by Moses is unusual for many of us. In the same position, we might throw up our hands and say, “This situation demands more faith than I’ve got.”

Spiritual gifts are a person’s ability to accomplish the work of God. In our day, these are usually called “serving gifts” — that is, gifts that, when used biblically, serve the Body of Christ. Some of the gifts named in scripture are preaching, teaching, helping people, counseling, leading, and administering or management (see 1 Cor. 12:8-

11, 28-30; Eph. 4:11; Rom. 12:6-8).

These are “serving gifts” given by the Holy Spirit. But there seems to be another one, according to Paul: “to another [is given] faith by the same Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:9, *KJV*). Is this a reference to saving faith or to the spiritual gift of faith?

In another letter, Paul pairs the gift of faith with the gift of preaching (prophecy): “Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith” (Rom. 12:6, *NKJV*). Some scholars are not sure whether “faith” in this verse describes the preacher’s belief in God, which brings effective power to his preaching, or faith that is a special gift, independent of the gift of preaching, which nonetheless affects the preacher.

If faith is independent of preaching, a person with the gift of faith can serve God by trusting Him to supply money for buildings, or for spiritual results that surpass expectation, or for people to be saved during a soul-winning campaign—or any number of other mountain-moving exploits. Let us again look at what Paul says: “And though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains . . .” (1 Cor. 13:2, *NKJV*). Mountains come in all shapes and sizes. What does your mountain look like?

I have often said that Jerry Falwell had more faith than anyone else I knew. The faith of Bill Bright, Billy Graham, and Yonggi Cho has impressed me, as well. I believe these men had the supernatural gift of faith. This does not mean that those of us who do not have this particular spiritual gift are not gifted, however. The Bible teaches that anyone can grow whatever gift they have (see 1 Cor. 12:31).

We must understand that there are different kinds of gifts given to different people (see 1 Cor. 12:4-6). “Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us” (Rom. 12:6, *KJV*). The spiritual gifts are *qualitative* in usefulness, which means that two people may have the same gift, but one person has a greater use of the gift than the other. As an illustration: some with the gift of teaching are more effective than others. The spiritual gift of teaching is not measured by how many pass or fail a course, but how deeply lives are changed. Paul described the effectiveness of a spiritual gift as “the manifestation of the Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:7, *KJV*). When the spiritual gift of teaching is properly exercised, the Holy Spirit manifests Himself in the lives of the hearers by the fruits of the Spirit, such as love, joy, and peace (see Gal. 5:22-23).

Perhaps some people have greater results in serving God than others because they have given a greater part of themselves to be used of God. So where does that leave us? How can we understand the gift of faith?

Three Interpretations of the Gift of Faith

There are three different approaches to understanding and interpreting the gift of faith.

First, some see the gift of faith as an instrument to be used in Christian service just as one might use the Bible, the gift of administration, or the gift of preaching to accomplish the work of God. This is the *instrumental* view, which appears to be the traditional or historical view. It is listed first because of its historical priority.

Second, some understand the gift of faith as the ability to see or perceive what God desires to accomplish. The person with this expression of the gift of faith sees what God wants them to do, and finds every resource available to complete the project. This is called the *insight* or *vision* view because the gift of faith is seeing what God can do in a situation. This second view seems to be the recent interpretation held by most evangelical Christians writing on spiritual gifts.

Third, some understand the gift of faith as an ability to move God to divinely intervene so that He accomplishes what the person of faith says will happen. This is called the *interventional* view.

The three views of the spiritual gift of faith reveal differences in interpretations of the biblical data. But in all three, power comes from God and the accomplishments come from God.

Three Views Compared

View	Initiation	Vision	Power	Accomplishment	Available
1. Instrumental	God	God	God	by God	to all
2. Insight	God	person**	God	by God	to chosen
3. Interventional	person*	person**	God	by God	to chosen

*God is the source of all Christian work, but by exercising the gift of faith, the man of God senses his responsibility and uses faith to carry it out.

**God gives a vision through His Word for all Christian work, but in the exercise of the gift of faith, the man of God perceives a particular project in time and place.

Let's look more closely at these three views of the gift of faith.

1. The gift of faith is an instrument.

In Ephesians 6, Paul describes the Christian who fights the enemy with faith and other instruments. She uses truth (v. 14), righteousness (the knowledge of imputed perfection, v. 14), the gospel (v. 15), the helmet of salvation (v. 17), and the sword, the Word of God (v. 17). She defends herself with the shield of faith (v. 18). All of these are instruments for God's service.

Howard Carter writes, "The gift of faith can be defined as faith imparted by the Spirit of God for protection in times of danger, or for divine provision, or it may include the ability to impart blessing."¹ This definition does not include special insight from or the intervention of God. Instead, the gift of faith includes the ministries God has already promised, such as protection, provision, and blessing. Later, Carter describes the gift of faith with more intentionality: "This remarkable gift brings into operation the powers of the world to come; it causes God to work for you."² The instrumental gift of faith is, in this view, available to all believers, not just a few gifted individuals who build large churches or accomplish great projects for God.

The instrumental approach takes a passive view of the person with the gift of faith. It sees both the person and his gift as channels or vehicles used by God. God has placed power within the scriptures (see Heb. 4:12; James 1:17; 2 Pet. 1:4) through the Holy Spirit. Power, including the gift of faith, is not resident within the human, for he is an earthen vessel (see 2 Tim. 2:21); power is of God, not man. The Christian accomplishes the work of God through the Word of God, by the Holy Spirit who indwells him. In this manner, the person is an instrument to accomplish what God has promised.

Perhaps those who hold the instrumental view see God controlling the destiny of this world; therefore, they reject the interventional view because they believe man cannot change by his faith the predetermined order of events. To them, faith is only instrumental, and they leave the results to the will of God. Thus they are not often aggressive (interventional) in overcoming obstacles or doing the supernatural and may lack initiative in the work of God.

Others may view the gift of faith as instrumental because they see it in relationship to other ministries. That is, they believe the gift of faith is given in addition to other gifts: preachers, teachers, evangelists, and so on (see Eph. 4:11). God works through people identified by their gift: prophets have the gift of prophecy, teachers have the gift of teaching. But there is no ministry identified with the gift of faith, such as a "father." Therefore, they see God working in the world through secondary sources, such as through His laws, the influence of His Word, and the Holy Spirit. They do not

see the gift of faith as an intervention by God to do extraordinary things.

2. The gift of faith is insight or vision.

This second view describes the gift of faith as the Holy Spirit giving the Christian the ability to see what God desires to perform or is able to perform in a given situation. After the Christian perceives what can be accomplished, he dedicates himself to its accomplishment. Perhaps the best-known definition is from Peter Wagner, who writes, "The gift of faith is the special ability that God gives to some members of the Body of Christ to discern with extraordinary confidence the will and purposes of God for the future of His work."³ Kinghorn supports this second approach: "The gift of faith is given to some Christians as a special ability to see the adequacy of God and to tap it for particular situations."⁴ And Flynn adds that the gift of faith not only sees potentials, but also overcomes obstacles: "The gift of faith is a Spirit-given ability to see something that God wants done and to sustain unwavering confidence that God will do it, regardless of seemingly insurmountable obstacles."⁵

The insight view recognizes God as the source of all Christian work, but also believes the person with the gift of faith senses a responsibility to carry out the project. This view places a high degree of responsibility and accountability on the person of faith. This view implies that God's work is accomplished in relationship to the ability of the worker, including his or her knowledge, wisdom, motivational powers, leadership ability, and so forth.

Wagner points to Robert Schuller, former pastor of Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove, California, as a man with the gift of faith. He describes Schuller's vision of a building larger than Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, of 10,000 pieces of glass shaped like diamonds, and fountains of water down the center aisle. Wagner says, "Before I heard about his vision, I had already come to the conclusion that God had given him the gift of faith."⁶ But Schuller didn't just sit back and expect God to make it happen. No, he got to work to accomplish what God wanted to do.

Perhaps a problem with the insight view is that it too easily makes faith synonymous with vision, which is a passive gift. But faith, in contrast, is active and is used by God to change circumstances. The gift of faith, in the insight view, incorporates vision, but also prompts the person of faith to work to bring about the vision.

3. The gift of faith is intervention.

This third view of the gift of faith is the ability to move God to intervene divinely in a crisis or change the expected order of events so that His work goes forward. This view holds that the gift of faith is active; the person of faith responds, but God is the source both of the gift and of what is accomplished. Traditionally called the gift of miracles, it focuses on miraculous divine interventions.⁷

When operating in her gift, the person of faith usually has divine certainty that God will intervene, and so she makes an expression of faith. Gee explains:

The spiritual gift of faith is a special quality of faith, sometimes called by our older theologians the “faith of miracles.” It would seem to come upon certain of God’s servants in times of special crisis or opportunity in such mighty power that they are lifted right out of the realm of even natural and ordinary faith in God – and have a divine certainty put within their soul that triumphs over everything. It is a magnificent gift and is probably exercised frequently with far-reaching results.⁸

Underwood’s definition is not as long, but implies the same elements: “This is extraordinary wonderworking faith for a particular occasion.”⁹ Horton indicates that the initiation of moving the mountain begins with the person exercising the gift of faith: “The Gift of faith is a supernatural endowment by the Spirit whereby that which is offered or desired by man, or spoken by God, shall eventually come to pass.”¹⁰

The verse often quoted in connection with the interventional view links speaking and exercising faith: “Whosoever shall say unto this mountain, ‘Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea’; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith” (Mark 11:23-24, KJV). Three times Jesus admonished his disciples to say exactly what they wanted to happen, promising they would get the results they sought. Years ago, I coined the phrase “Say-it Faith” to express this aspect of the gift of faith.¹¹

Observations on Interventional Faith

1. Interventional faith is more than prayer.

Interventional faith is involved in intercessory prayers, but is “abundantly more” than

God answering prayers. Those who exercise interventional faith pray, but the gift of faith is more than a prayer of faith (see Jas. 5:14) or to “ask in faith” (Jas. 1:6). God seems to give those who have the faith gift unexpected results because they exercise faith whether or not they pray. Sometimes interventional faith is exercised through prayer; at other times, the Christian gifted with interventional faith accomplishes results merely by saying to a mountain, “Be thou removed” (Mark 11:23, KJV).

2. Interventional faith is more than living by faith

When a Christian lives by faith, she applies the principles of the Word of God to her life with the result that she lives a godly life pleasing to the Lord (see Hab. 2:4; Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 11:38; 2 Cor. 5:7). Living by faith involves the *personal life* of the believer as she exercises trust in the Lord. In contrast, the interventional gift of faith involves *Christian ministry*. The Christian exercises faith to change the circumstances (solve a problem, supply a need, stop a force, overcome an obstacle) so that the work of God goes forward.

3. Interventional faith is beyond the norm.

God has provided certain principles to be followed in Christian ministry, such as preaching to people (see Mark 16:15); being a witness (see Acts 1:8); gathering people together (see Deut. 31:12); and praying for God’s blessing on the ministry (see Acts 4:31). These and other principles are available for all Christian work, but there are times and circumstances when the work of God is halted. When the normal principles of Christianity are applied, the barriers or problems (called *mountains*, see Mark 11:23) continue to thwart the work of God.

At this time, a person with the spiritual gift of faith can exercise it to remove the problem or to change circumstances. At times, the gift of faith is exercised simultaneously with other ministries and the outside observer may mistakenly think something other than faith has solved the problem. For example, a person may first exercise faith that causes a church to grow. The person may then preach powerfully to motivate people to invite their neighbors to attend church. The attendance problem is solved, but the primary solution came through the exercise of interventional faith. The secondary solution came through motivational preaching.

4. Interventional faith relates to circumstances that need change.

A pastor may exercise faith to build a new auditorium, yet the congregation has no apparent finances available. God could give the church a large gift or someone could die and leave the church enough in the bequest for construction of new facilities. There are many illustrations whereby God used ordinary circumstances in response to the exercise of faith, so that unexpected timing or unexpected sources provided solutions to the problems in a church. In each case there was an unusual intervention by God, even though He used secondary sources.

5. Interventional faith can alter circumstances dramatically.

God may solve a church's problem through such an outstanding display of events that observers may interpret the solution to be supernatural or miraculous. However, the miraculous is only perceptual. This could be the outpouring of money from such a large number of people (including those not expected to give) that the supply is labeled "a divine supply."

6. Interventional faith goes beyond, but works with, the means of grace.

The "means of grace," as they are sometimes called by sacramental churches, are the influence of the Bible; the Holy Spirit's work (conviction, illumination, guiding, filling, empowering); the influence of a godly life; the ministry gifts (preaching, teaching, counseling); the church offices (pastor and deacons); baptism and the Lord's Table; and involvement in a community of faith through worship and fellowship. Yet a leader with the gift of faith does more than obey the Lord in the employment of the above named "means of grace." The exercise of the gift of faith is an intentional effort above and beyond these church "norms" to change circumstances or solve a perplexing problem.

7. Interventional faith is not dependent on accurate doctrine.

I have interviewed the pastors of the 10 largest churches in America and the 10 largest in the world.¹² I reported my conversations with Dr. Yonggi Cho, pastor of the Full Gospel Church in Seoul, Korea, and with Dr. Jack Hyles, pastor of First Baptist Church in Hammond, Indiana. Dr. Cho told me the primary reason for the spectacular growth of his church was the baptism of the Holy Ghost, resulting in an enduement of power, eradication of the old man, and speaking in tongues. Dr. Jack Hyles, on the other hand,

denied Cho's interpretation of the Pentecostal experience and did not believe that tongues are for this dispensation. Who is right? The answer to this question, along with the correct view of other controversial issues, does not seem to be a factor in the exercise of the gift of faith.

I believe Dr. Cho and Dr. Hyles were both filled with the power of the Holy Spirit and that God blessed both churches in spite of the fact that they radically disagreed in their understanding of the Holy Spirit. Both men believed the fundamentals of Christianity; Dr. Cho built the largest church in the world and Dr. Hyles built the largest Sunday school in America.

The term "blessability" justifies the apparent conflict. God blesses those who place themselves in a positive position to God's formula that brings success in church work. God does not limit their workers, nor annul their usefulness for wrong doctrine until their variance negates their positive influence. God blesses those who put themselves into a place to be blessed.

Those who have the gift of faith transcend denominational boundaries. As a matter of fact, God's blessing is not based on being doctrinally literate, correct, or complete. The new babe in Christ can exercise faith and "move mountains;" all she needs is "faith as a grain of mustard seed" (Matt. 17:20, KJV).

However, the greatest display of faith comes from those who have grown in their exercise of faith and who are more mature in Christ. Of course, maturity is dependent on growth in doctrine and understanding.

Then, too, there is probably a limit to God's tolerance of false doctrine. Perhaps God condescends to those who hold differing doctrines until a person accumulates too much doctrinal static or interference for him to be identified as a Bible Christian and his doctrinal weakness limits his effectiveness for service. Probably God has a "point of counter-productivity" such that when a person crosses an invisible point of no return, God no longer responds to the person's exercise of faith. Considered in God's denial of this person's faith is his yieldedness to truth, pursuit of truth, and relationship to God.

8. Interventional faith is not dependent on separation from sin.

Those who feel that God's blessing depends on a total separation from sin are often perplexed when they hear that a person they believed was a Christian has engaged in something they call "sin." Yet from God's perspective, no living person is ever completely separated from sin. As soon as a yielded Christian deals with one sin in his

life, God seems to reveal another issue to deal with. The Christian life is continual sanctification, which leads to continual victory over sin. This being the case, does it really make sense to ask, “At what point does a person become pure enough to exercise interventional faith?”

Obviously, there is no point at which the gift of faith begins operation. When a person begins her ministry, faith may be exercised in a small capacity. She may grow in the gift of faith as the Holy Spirit prunes old habits and sins. Even though the two actions—sin and exercise of the gift of faith—are separate, they have a correlation through maturity and cumulative experiences.

God does not bless a person’s ministry because of legalism, nor does a person have the gift of faith because she cleaned up her life. Some may claim that repentance of a particular sin is a criterion for God’s interventional activity in their ministry work. They are wrong; it is *faith*, not repentance, which motivates God to intervene in challenging circumstances. Obviously, repentance can lead to greater faith, but repentance is not what moves God to work. God is pleased by faith (sometimes expressed in repentance) and blesses a ministry because of faith.

9. Interventional faith is related to Christian service.

The spiritual gifts are for spiritual ministry; they are the manifestation of the Holy Spirit (see 1 Cor. 12:7). Some believers take a step of faith in their business, praying for God’s blessing on their company. But many good Christians have worked hard and yet their businesses have failed. Is it because they didn’t have enough faith?

What is the relationship of a Christian’s personal life or business life to the gift of faith? If he lives in obedience to the Bible, he is living by faith—and his obedience gives him added help in his business life. But God gives the spiritual gift of faith for the benefit of the Body of Christ and the work of God, not for business success. Paul advised the Ephesians that some gifts are given “for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:12, *KJV*). It is questionable whether the gift of faith can or should be exercised in relationship to secular activities. If it is interventional faith, we might question whether God would intervene in secular business, even if a Christian owns it. However, the relationship between sacred and secular business is sometimes a gray area. Also, since gifts build up Christians, God might use the exercise of a gift in business to edify a Christian. Thus a Christian may exercise faith in his business, and as a result, his business may grow.

Applying the Gift of Faith

The gift of faith must now be analyzed for its practical implication, especially its influence on ministry. The following observations are made on the basis established previously that the gift of faith is ministry-oriented, can grow in power and usefulness, and is exercised in relation to human responsibility.

1. Announce a solution to problems facing the ministry.

Jesus advised His disciples, "Say unto this mountain, Be thou removed" (Mark 11:23, *KJV*). Since a mountain is a barrier or obstacle to the work of God, a first step in removing problems in the Lord's work is to say what is desired.

Paul stated on several occasions that God would solve problems. He announced that the boat should not leave Crete: "Ye should have harkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete" (Acts 27:21, *KJV*). He further and announced the results he expected from God: "I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you" (Acts 27:22, *KJV*). Finally, Paul attached a statement of faith to his public announcement: "For I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me" (Acts 27:25, *KJV*). This illustration is not explicitly named as an exercise of the gift of faith, but it surely implies it. The situation has all the characteristics of one who exercises the gift of faith to announce a solution to the problem.

2. Set goals or announce specific plans for the ministry.

Exercising the gift of faith involves three steps. First, rely on the principles of God and the means of grace to accomplish ministry; second, have vision to see what God wants to accomplish; and third, trust God by faith to intervene so the work will prosper. These three steps are practically applied when the leader sets goals for church growth or makes specific plans to prosper the ministry or overcome obstacles.

Paul planned to visit the churches in Greece to receive an offering and take it to Jerusalem. "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye" (1 Cor. 16:1, *KJV*). There was no qualification in the plan such as "if you have the money," nor did Paul have a contingency plan "if the money doesn't come in." No, he relied on God's principles, saw what God could do to meet the needs of the Jerusalem church, and trusted God to provide the money through the Corinthian and Galatian churches.

In seeking church growth, a pastor must align his goals with scripture, have a vision for what God wants to do, and then publicly announce with confidence what can be expected. George Barker Stevens notes in *The Theology of the New Testament*, “Now faith is a firm confidence with respect to the objects of hope, an assured conviction of the existence of invisible realities.”¹³

The illustrations of faith offered in Hebrews 11 portray those who made plans and acted on them. Noah built an ark (v. 7); Abraham went into an unknown country (v. 8); the parents of Moses preserved his life (v. 23); and Moses rejected Egypt to choose life with Israel (vv. 24-27). Stevens identifies these illustrations with intervening faith:

For our author [of Hebrews], faith is no mere intellectual faith. It is a living and intense conviction of the supernatural which evidences in conduct. Its most characteristic effort is heroism. It is faith which “moves mountains” of difficulties and improbability.¹⁴

Of course, ministries prosper on occasion when people do not set goals, make specific plans, or exercise faith. Such was the case when God delivered Peter from prison. Apparently, the people were not praying in faith because the church seemed surprised and even doubted that Peter was released (see Acts 12:15). In such cases, God seems to work in spite of Christians’ lack of faith.

Also, Paul announced at least one goal that may not have been accomplished: “Whensoever I take my journey into Spain” (Rom. 15:24, *KJV*)—a journey he may not have been able to take before his death. (There is no biblical record of such a journey.) Given this, a leader should observe caution when exercising the gift of faith to announce goals or solutions to problems. Paul may have spoken out of his own desires, rather than from a vision of what God wanted to accomplish through him. Likewise, some who set goals for their ministry may do so from human motives, not under divine guidance.

On the other hand, the gift of faith may work through the leader’s desire concerning ministry goals: he articulates *what* God desires to accomplish, though the specifics of *how* God will accomplish it are unknown. Perhaps the goals are accomplished through someone else, or later in the leader’s life, or even after the leader dies. For example, if Paul was unable to go to Spain, history makes it clear that the gospel was carried there nonetheless. The leader must, in humility, never assume his omniscience. James warns, “Go to now, ye that say, Today or tomorrow we will go into

such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain" (Jas. 4:13, *KJV*) and recommends, "Ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that" (Jas. 4:15, *KJV*). When a leader, through the gift of faith, states a goal or announces specific plans, he must do so with humility and total trust in the will of God.

3. Minister with faith, hope, and trust in God.

When a leader exercises faith in the proper way, she has confidence in God. The writer of Hebrews observes, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1, *NKJV*). When this attitude is carried into Christian service, leaders minister with confidence similar to Paul's, who writes, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13, *KJV*). This confidence is based on the power of Christ, and is not explicitly related to the gift of faith. In another letter, Paul confidently notes, "Thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ" (2 Cor. 2:14, *KJV*). In both of these references, there is not a direct cause-and-effect relationship between the gift of faith and confidence.

When a leader exercises the gift of faith by stating a goal or solution, she must not doubt God. She may doubt herself, for this is a part of staying humble. But doubting God is inimical to trusting in Him. Doubt is the opposite of confidence or the opposite of faith. Jesus tied faith and confidence together: if a person "shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith" (Mark 11:23, *KJV*).

4. Recognize the human factor in exercising the gift of faith.

The gift of faith is not the same as the gift of miracles. In a miracle, God is the source and channel that produces a supernatural intervention or transcending of the natural laws of the universe. In the gift of faith, God works through a human instrument, limiting Himself by the human expression of faith. God is the source of the accomplishment, while the human is the channel through which He works.

We noted earlier the illustration of Paul's statements about the shipwreck as a possible exercise of the gift of faith. Paul said what the humans involved should do: remain in Crete (see Acts 27:21), remain with the ship (v. 31), and eat (v. 33). With the statement of faith and God's providential care, the people were responsible for certain duties. They ate, rowed, swam, and were generally responsible to carry out the

deliverance provided by God.

The gift of faith is a special ability to see and understand what God can do in a certain project, to trust Him to bless the work so that a project is accomplished and, on some occasions, to move Him to intervene in the natural flow of circumstances so that problems are solved, goals are reached, and protection is given to those who need it.

Questions About Spiritual Gifts

While some believers have great understanding about spiritual gifts in general, not many understand much about the gift of faith. Answers to the following questions will help you understand spiritual gifts in general, the gift of faith in particular, and how to apply both to your life and ministry.

1. How many gifts may a person have?

Do not think of spiritual gifts in a singular capacity, even though this chapter deals with the gift of faith. I am suggesting that the gift of faith will be exercised in concert with other spiritual gifts. Note the plural designation of spiritual *gifts*. The church should be a body where many gifts (plural) are operative (see 1 Cor. 12:4), and there are several lists of multiple gifts (see Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:8-12, 28-29; Eph. 4:11). Some authors, including Gene Getz, do not refer to a plurality of gifts in the individual, but suggest there is a plurality of gifts in the church: "God's plan is a multi-gifted body, a body made up of people who could all contribute in a special way to the building up of the church."¹⁵ Getz then suggests that churches have a leader who is a "multi-gifted man."¹⁶

In Jesus' parable of the talents, the first servant was given five talents, the next was given three, and the final servant was given one. Jesus said, "To every man according to his several ability" (Matt. 25:15, *KJV*). The first two servants represent multi-gifted individuals, while the final servant represents those who have a single spiritual gift.

In Jesus' day, a *talent* was a very large unit of money, but the passage is interpreted today as a gift or ability. Here, Jesus distinguishes among people with regard to their abilities and to the powers and opportunities their abilities may offer. He requires each servant – that is, each of His followers – to occupy themselves with making the most of whatever gifts they are given. The number of talents is not the point; the point is the investments we will make for the growth of God's kingdom with

the talents we have been given.¹⁷

But what about the person who seems to be less gifted, as some may appear, or without a gift?¹⁸ Even though the word for spiritual gifts appears in the plural in Paul's letters (see 1 Cor. 12:4, 31), some people may have only one gift. The apostle Peter implies as much: "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another" (1 Pet. 4: 10, *KJV*). The number of gifts is irrelevant. What matters is ministering to one another.

2. What is the relationship of the gift of faith to natural ability?

A spiritual gift is not an augmented natural ability, nor is it innate talent. From the biblical use of *phanerosis*, we know that a spiritual gift is the evident and manifest work of the Holy Spirit through the Christian. Leslie B. Flynn explains:

Talents instruct, inspire, or entertain on a natural level. Gifts relate to the building up of the saints. Something supernatural happens in the one who is ministering when a gift is exercised. Nothing supernatural happens in one who is performing when a talent is displayed.¹⁹

Some may confuse a natural ability to speak or teach with the spiritual gift of preaching or teaching – but speaking well in public is not a spiritual gift. And the spiritual gift of faith, likewise, is not the augmented "natural faith" of a trusting person or a person who is generally optimistic. The gift of faith is not the power of positive thinking or "self-confident psychology."²⁰ No, the gift of faith is a supernatural ability whereby a person is able to advance God's work or gain a greater spiritual victory that could happen naturally.

3. When does a person receive a spiritual gift?

Because every Christian receives the Holy Spirit when he is saved (see Rom. 8:9), I believe spiritual gifts come with the presence of Holy Spirit in the believer's life. The Bible teaches that every Christian has a spiritual gift (see 1 Cor. 7:7; 1 Pet. 4: 10), and that the work of the Spirit regenerates a person at conversion (see John 3:5; 1 Pet. 1:23). Hence, it seems likely to me that believers receive their spiritual gifts at the time of conversion.

But in at least one letter, Paul seems to imply that spiritual gifts were given earlier, at the resurrection of Christ. "When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that He ascended, what is it but that He also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? . . . that He might fill all things" (Eph. 4:8-10, *KJV*). Here Paul implies that gifts were given positionally to the believer at the resurrection of Christ. We might say that God *supplied* the gifts at Christ's resurrection, but *applies* them to believers at individual conversions (see Rom. 4:25; 6:4-5).

Some suggest that God gives His gifts without partiality and that every person has the potential to develop every spiritual gift. After all, every believer has the Holy Spirit, who provides spiritual gifts. As such, every believer has a responsibility to develop all of the gifts; he can have as many gifts as he takes the initiative to develop.

However, in my reading of scripture, it is more likely that those who seem to "develop" spiritual gifts later in their walk with Christ are actually manifesting gifts that have lain dormant since they were saved. They have not "developed" spiritual gifts through their own initiative, but become mature enough in Christ to use their God-given gifts. For example, there was a gap between the time when Paul was converted (see Acts 9) and the time he was sent by Antioch as a missionary church planter: "For the work whereunto I have called him" (Acts 13:2, *KJV*). Paul was not ready, immediately upon his conversion, to manifest the gift of apostleship. But the Holy Spirit gifted him to be an apostle from the moment of his salvation.

4. Is the gift of faith greater in some than in others?

Not all people with the same spiritual gift manifest that gift with the same power. When it comes to the gift of faith, some people trust God for greater workings of the Holy Spirit than others. Also, some exercise the gift of faith more often than others. Whether this involves provoking more people to receive Christ, raising more money, or trusting God for greater results in church planting, the gift of faith appears to be stronger in some than others.

A spiritual gift is ministry (*diakonia*) (see 1 Cor. 12:5), and greater faithfulness in ministry leads to greater effectiveness (see Matt. 25:23; Luke 19:17). The person who ministers more faithfully with his gift will be more effective and have greater results. Paul exhorts, "Covet earnestly the best gifts" (1 Cor. 12:31, *KJV*), implying that desire (*zeloute*) results in a Christian's receiving the best gifts (*charismata*). Here the word *gifts* is plural, suggesting that a Christian can manifest more than one gift. Faithfully

exercising one or more gifts leads to a greater manifestation of those gifts.

Some interpret “covet earnestly the best gifts” (1 Cor. 12:31) differently. They believe Paul is speaking to the Corinthian *corpus* (the church), not to individual believers. To prove this, they refer to the context, provided a few verses earlier: “Now ye are the body of Christ” (1 Cor. 12:27, *KJV*). Together, the church should “covet earnestly” the best gifts.

Whichever interpretation is accurate, the manifestation of spiritual gifts is achieved by human responsibility. When properly exercised toward the proper goal, the Christian can grow in his number (quantity) of gifts and in the effectiveness (quality) of his gifts. The parable of the talents clearly implies that the Christian who faithfully exercises his spiritual gift of faith will grow in his ability to accomplish things for God. It also teaches that a person can lose the effectiveness of his spiritual gift through disuse or unfaithfulness. Some lose their spiritual gift altogether.

The gift of faith can grow in effectiveness as it is exercised, but it can also lead one to discover spiritual gifts previously unknown. While exercising the gift of faith for church growth, a leader may discover the gift of evangelism so that people can be won to Christ.

5. Can one seek the gift of faith?

As we have seen, the question of discovery and growth of spiritual gifts has no simple answer. According to Paul’s first letter to the Corinthian church, spiritual gifts are sovereignly given by the Holy Spirit (12:4), yet he claims in his letter to the Romans that he could play some part in communicating spiritual gifts to the Christians there: “For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift” (Rom. 1:11, *KJV*). He also challenged Timothy, “Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of hands” (1 Tim. 4:14, *KJV*). “By prophecy” here means “by means of,” suggesting that prophecy or preaching was the instrument that communicated the spiritual gift (*charismatos*) to Timothy. In Paul’s command for Timothy to “stir up the gift of God” (2 Tim. 1:6, *KJV*), the word for “stir up” literally means “fan the flame.” Here we can envision the Holy Spirit developing a spiritual gift in one person by using another faithful person to minister with his own gift. Timothy manifested his gift of preaching as he sat under the influence of Paul’s preaching.

This transaction has been called the “hot poker dynamic.” Just as a fire transfers heat to an iron poker laid in the coals, a young minister is fired to win souls as he

associates with a man of God who is on fire to win souls. Both divine and human factors are evident in the communication of gifts. Charles Ryrie reinforces this view:

Although gifts are supernaturally bestowed, Paul indicates that they may be developed by the person to whom they are given. After listing some of the gifts in their order of importance he says that believers should covet the best gifts (1 Cor. 12:31). This means that an individual may be ambitious to exercise certain gifts, which ambition can only be fulfilled by study and work. Paul himself, even though he was reared on the Old Testament, needed three years in Arabia to develop his gift of teaching.²¹

In Romans 1:11, Paul indicates that he hopes to have a part in developing the gifts of the believers in Rome (cf. 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6). Clearly, mature leaders may have a part in bringing younger, less mature believers' gifts to maturity and full use (cf. Eph. 4:7-12).²²

6. Is the gift of faith a prominent gift?

Even though Christian leaders have the potential of being multi-gifted, the Bible seems to teach that each person has a prominent gift – that is, a spiritual gift at the very center of her ministry, and by which she identifies herself and is identified by others. New Testament examples are Agabus, identified as a prophet (see Acts 11:27-28; 21:10), and Philip, called an evangelist (see Acts 21:8). Paul seems to refer to their most prominent or unique gift by his use of the word *idion* (“proper”): “Every man hath his proper gift of God” (1 Cor. 7:7, KJV). From the word *idion* we get “idiomatic,” which means “unique to one’s own person.” A *proper* gift is a person’s unique spiritual ability. Every person has his own peculiar talent. One person excels in one thing and another in another thing. A person’s proper, or most prominent, gift distinguishes him from others.²³

So, can the spiritual gift of faith be a proper or prominent gift? Clearly, the New Testament does not designate an office to the person with the gift of faith. Nowhere does scripture call someone a “faith man” the way it names Agabus a prophet or Phillip an evangelist.

Several modern theologians understand the gift of faith as foundational to all the other gifts, which is different than being an independent gift unto itself. To say the gift

of faith is foundational for all spiritual gifts, such as preaching, teaching, administering, showing mercy, and so on, is to say that it must be involved in the exercise or manifestation of all the other gifts.

Donald Gee, writing from a Pentecostal perspective, maintains this view. He writes, "It is significant that faith comes in this group [gifts of power] as being fundamental to the other gifts of power."²³ Gee believes healing and miracles are exercises of the gift of faith, which also is a power gift.

John of St. Thomas, writing from a Roman Catholic orientation, indicates there are seven gifts, which he describes as a "plurality of gifts."²⁴ He does not attempt to prove that a person may have more than one, arguing, "Since Scripture asserts that the gifts are actually more than one, no further proof is needed."²⁵ He then contends the gift of faith is foundational to all the others: "For through faith, the very existence of these gifts is made known. . . . For faith attains to very many things."²⁶ He does *not* say faith is the same thing as the other gifts, nor does he make faith a part of the other gifts; faith is separate from the other gifts, but functions through and with them:

Faith can no more perform the functions of the gifts of wisdom and understanding than they could accomplish those of faith. Each operates within its own sphere. Faith believes in God revealing without involving itself in inquiry or judgment. . . . It performs no operation other than that of believing, although it may be concerned with more objects than some of the gifts and fewer than others. . . . Each gift taken separately extends to many objects but not to the exercise of the function of any other gift.²⁷

There are other theologians, however, who are convinced that the gift of faith has a function other than acting as a foundation for the other gifts. Most Pentecostals recognize Harold Horton's *The Gifts of the Spirit* as the classic on this topic that represents their point of view. He states:

The gift of faith is erroneously regarded as the basis of all the other gifts of the Spirit. This is to confuse the different kinds of faith. Faith (what I have above called "general faith") is certainly necessary to the operation of all the gifts, even the operation of the gift of faith; but the gift of faith is a supernatural endowment quite distinct from this "general faith," and equally distinct from the other eight supernatural endowments of the

Spirit.²⁸

7. What is the relationship between a church office and the gift of faith?

A spiritual gift is not the same as an office of the church. Most Protestant churches recognize two offices, pastors and deacons (see Phil. 1:1), but some recognize such offices as prophets, teachers, bishops, and so forth. A spiritual gift is a supernatural endowment or ability given by the Holy Spirit, while an office is a position conferred by God, through the church, on someone called to be set apart for special ministry.

Just as a person can desire more gifts (see 1 Cor. 12:31), he can also desire an office in the church: "If a man desire the office of a bishop" (1 Tim. 3:1, *KJV*). Paul's pastoral letters reveal that those who seek an office in the church must have certain qualifications, presumably so the congregation may recognize those who should be placed in the office.

There is a relationship between spiritual gifts and office, that is, between ability and position. The person in the office of bishop/elder should have the gift of pastoring or shepherding (see 1 Tim. 3:1-10; Eph. 4:11). The person in the office of deacon should possess the gift of serving or ministering (see 1 Tim. 3:11-14). We get the title "deacon" from the Greek word for serving, *diakonia*. Those groups who believe in the office of the prophet (see 1 Cor. 12:10) and those who advocate the office of evangelist (see Eph. 4:11) should require that the people in those offices have the gifts of prophecy and evangelism, respectively. Flynn summarizes this view:

Naturally, a person with an office should have the gift corresponding to that office; otherwise his office will be in name only . . . summing up, a believer would not hold a divinely appointed office without possessing the corresponding gift.²⁹

However, the opposite is not always true; that is, a person may have the spiritual gift without the office related to it. Flynn says, "Many Christians possess a gift without appointment to that office."³⁰ This might be a person with the gift of serving (*diakonos*) who does not serve in the office of deacon, or a person with the gift of shepherding who does not serve in the office of pastor. Or, as another example, "A Sunday school teacher is the extension of the pastor's responsibilities into the Sunday school class. . . . Everything a pastor is to his flock, the teacher is to his/her class."³¹ Those who

shepherd a Sunday school class exercise the same gift as those who shepherd a congregation, without the pastoral office.

The spiritual gift of faith does not have a corresponding office. There is no one uniquely called to exercise the gift of faith in the church; there is no such office identified by scripture. No such office has arisen in the church over the years, nor is there a unique, identifiable ministry of faith, as there is a ministry of preaching, teaching, or evangelizing.

8. What is the relationship between ministries and the gift of faith?

Flynn suggests, "Gifts are not ministries."³² He identifies a ministry as "an outlet for employment of a gift."³³ A ministry may be associated with an age group, such as a "minister to adults," a "minister of youth," or a "children's minister." It may be associated with a medium of communication, such as radio, television, or a college classroom. It may be association with a place, such as a foreign mission field, an inner-city environment, or a prison. It may be associated with a specific activity, Flynn suggests, such as music, writing, or linguistics.³⁴ But all of these ministries are outlets for believers to exercise their spiritual gifts, not gifts in and of themselves. Ryrie agrees:

Neither does Paul suggest that there are special gifts for specific age groups. There is no gift of young people's work, for all ages need teachers, pastors, helpers, etc. (cf. Titus 2:1-8). The gift is the ability, according to Paul's thinking, and not the place or age group in which that ability is used.³⁵

There is no unique ministry attached to the gift of faith, just as there is not unique ministry attached to any of the other spiritual gifts. Flynn concludes, "The specialty sphere, or area in which a gift is exercised constitutes a ministry. There a ministry is not a gift."³⁶

9. What is the relationship between the fruit of the Spirit and the gift of faith?

"The word faith is listed both as a spiritual gift (Rom. 12:3, 6; 1 Cor. 12:9) and as a fruit of the Spirit."³⁷ A spiritual gift is a God-given ability to be used in service to His work, while spiritual fruit is an outgrowth of a Christian's character. It is possible to have

spiritual gifts to serve God but be lacking in spiritual character. (The Corinthians, for example, had several gifts, but were guilty of envy, divisions, and fleshly sins; see 1 Cor. 3.) According to Paul, it is possible to have enough faith to move mountains, yet lack in love (see 1 Cor. 13:2). Flynn states, "Possession of gifts does not indicate godliness of life."³⁸ Similarly, it is possible to have a mature and Christ-like character, yet not manifest many or all of the spiritual gifts: "Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles?" (1 Cor. 12:29, KJV).

But what about the relationship between the spiritual *gift* of faith and the spiritual *fruit* of faith? They are not the same, even though they both probably come with the baptism of the Holy Spirit (see 1 Cor. 12:13) and have the Spirit as their source. But the spiritual fruit of faith is a believer's heart attitude of living daily by faith: "For we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7, KJV). All believers can cultivate the fruit of faith to live the Christian life, while the spiritual gift of faith is a Spirit-given ability to specific believers in order that they may serve the church.

There is, however, congruence between the gift of faith and spiritual fruit, even if there is no direct relationship. Those who live a godly life (spiritual fruit) are closer to God and may trust Him more fully than those who are less mature. Godly people often have a clearer vision of what God wants to perform in a certain situation, because sin blinds or dulls the spiritual vision. Those who bear healthy spiritual fruit can better exercise the spiritual gift of faith in conjunction with other spiritual gifts.

To summarize, spiritual fruit:

1. is given to all believers
2. produces spiritual character
3. is singular (fruit is singular, meaning one's character is a unit)
4. is permanent (see 1 Cor. 13:8-10)
5. grows internally

Spiritual gifts, in contrast:

1. are spiritual abilities given to specific believers
2. produce spiritual service
3. are plural (Flynn lists 19; Wagner, 27³⁹)
4. will cease
5. operate externally

10. What is the relationship between living by faith and the gift of faith?

The scholars whose work informs this chapter agree that the spiritual gift of faith is not the same as living by faith.⁴⁰ As Kinghorn observes, “While all Christians possess the grace of faith, not all Christians possess the gift of faith.”⁴¹ Koch separates the gift of faith from justifying faith:

When faith is mentioned in the list of gifts of the Spirit, this does not mean the justifying faith that everyone must have who believes for eternal life. The faith that comes as a gift of the Spirit is the daring and conquering faith that “removes mountains.”⁴²

Carter laments the consequences of confusing the gift of faith with something else: “The gift of faith is a wonderful gift that has not been fully understood, we fear, because it is generally confused with ordinary faith, or serving faith.”⁴³ Underwood notes that the spiritual gift of faith “is not the ordinary faith of the believer.”⁴⁴ Gee agrees: “The spiritual gift of faith must be distinguished from ordinary faith.”⁴⁵ And Flynn concludes, “The gift of faith, listed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:9, is more than saving faith.”⁴⁶

While they may not agree on every particular, each has concluded that the spiritual gift of faith: 1) is not synonymous with saving faith; 2) is too often confused with saving faith, but 3) is more than saving faith; and 4) is exercised most powerfully when accompanied by daily faith.

The spiritual gift of faith has been described as “faith of miracles”⁴⁷ by Gee, who quotes older theologians; “special faith”⁴⁸ in *The Living Bible’s* paraphrase of 1 Corinthians 12:9; “wonderworking faith”⁴⁹ by Underwood; “daring faith”⁵⁰ by Koch, and “the gift of prayer”⁵¹ by John MacArthur. Although differing in understanding and emphasis, each of these indicates that the gift of faith is extraordinary. As Friesen describes it, “The gift of faith is a rather special God-given ability.”⁵²

Your Gifts

Identify and examine your spiritual gifts. It may be that you have the gift of faith and are not exercising it properly. Paul exhorts, “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant” (1 Cor. 12:1, KJV). Do not ignore your gift, or what God

wants to do through your exercise of your gift. The proper use of your spiritual gifts will lead to greater usefulness, so you can have a more profitable life for God by faithfully doing the small thing today. And since Christians grow because of victories, so you will grow “from faith to faith” (Rom. 1:17, KJV).

Notes

1. Howard Carter, *Spiritual Gifts and their Operations* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1968), 37.
2. *Ibid.*, 42.
3. C. Peter Wagner, *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow* (Glendale, CA: Regal Books, 1979), 158.
4. Kenneth Cain Kinghorn, *Gifts of the Spirit* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1976), 65.
5. Leslie B. Flynn, *Nineteen Gifts of the Spirit* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1974), 141.
6. Wagner, *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow*, 159.
7. Donald Gee, *Concerning Spiritual Gifts* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1972), 43.
8. *Ibid.*
9. B. E. Underwood, *The Gifts of the Spirit* (Kansas City, MO: Advocate Press, 1967), 31.
10. Harold Horton, *The Gifts of the Spirit* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1975), 31.
11. Elmer L. Towns, *Say-it Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1983). This book chronicles several instances in the ministry of the Jerry Falwell when he said publicly that a crisis will be solved or that an unbelievable project would be attempted and completed.
12. Elmer Towns, John Vaughan, and David Seifert, *The Complete Book of Church Growth* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1981) and *The World's Largest Sunday School* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1974).
13. George Barker Stevens, *The Theology of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1899), 515.
14. *Ibid.*, 518.
15. Gene A. Getz, *Sharpening the Focus of the Church* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1974), 127.
16. *Ibid.*
17. Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament, Matthew-Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1949), 267.
18. Charles C. Ryrie, *Biblical Theology of the New Testament* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1959), 196. In this volume, Ryrie implies that every Christian has only one spiritual gift. However, when I took a course in Pauline Theology from Dr. Ryrie at Dallas Theological Seminary in 1956, Ryrie maintained that every Christian has the gifts of serving, giving, and encouraging.
19. Flynn, *Nineteen Gifts of the Spirit*, 22.

20. Robert Schuller, *Your Church Has Real Possibilities* (Glendale, CA: Regal Books, 1974). Schuller has popularized the term “possibility thinking,” suggesting that one take a positive approach to ministry. He does not base his positive thinking on the gift of faith. Schuller believes if one “finds a need and fills it,” a person's ministry will find a reception and be successful. Also, Schuller teaches that a person should use up-to-date methods of organization, marketing, and outreach. All of this, if done with faith in God, will prosper a church. As such, Schuller does not believe in the interventional, but the instrumental, approach to the gift of faith.
21. Ryrie, *Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, 196.
22. Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament, 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1949), 267.
23. Gee, *Concerning Spiritual Gifts*, 42.
24. John of St. Thomas, *The Gift of the Holy Spirit* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1951), 243.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. Harold Horton, *The Gifts of the Spirit*, 131.
29. Flynn, *Nineteen Gifts of the Spirit*, 24.
30. Ibid.
31. Elmer Towns, *The Successful Sunday School and Teachers Guidebook* (Carol Stream, IL: Creation House, 1980), 177-178.
32. Flynn, *Nineteen Gifts of the Spirit*, 24.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid., 25.
35. Ryrie, *Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, 196.
36. Flynn, *Nineteen Gifts of the Spirit*, 24.
37. Ibid., 25.
38. Ibid.
39. Flynn, *Nineteen Gifts of the Spirit*; C. Peter Wagner, *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow*.
40. I designate six expressions of faith in the devotional book *Say-It-Faith*: 1) doctrinal faith, 2) saving faith, 3) justifying (imputed) faith, 4) indwelling faith, 5) daily faith, and 6) the gift of faith. A chapter is given to explain the meaning and use of each
41. Kinghorn, *Gifts of the Spirit*, 65.
42. Kurt E. Koch, *Charismatic Gifts* (Montreal, CAN: The Association for Christian Evangelicals, 1975), 90-91.
43. Howard Carter, *Spiritual Gifts and Their Operation*, 37.
44. B. E. Underwood, *The Gifts of the Spirit*, 31.

45. Gee, *Concerning Spiritual Gifts*, 42.
46. Flynn, *Nineteen Gifts of the Spirit*, 140.
47. Gee, *Concerning Spiritual Gifts*, 43.
48. *The Living Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale 1971), 924.
49. Underwood, *The Gifts of the Spirit*, 30.
50. Koch, *Charismatic Gifts*, 91.
51. John MacArthur, Jr., *The Church, The Body of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1973), 144.
52. Harold Friesen, "A Model for a Church in Ministry by Employing Spiritual Gifts Resulting in Spiritual and Numerical Growth" (D.Min. dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1979), 138.

Part 3

Faces of Faith

Faith is a relationship with God in which you totally trust Him to do what He promised. But when different people apply faith to their lives, it doesn't always look the same. Two different people may be trusting God to do different things in different ways for different purposes.

In this section, read about a man walking in *barefoot faith* around property to claim it for God, and another using *blue-chalk faith* to rally 70 people to paint a weather-beaten church building. Read about seeing God's purpose in the *crucible* of pain and martyrdom, and witnessing God's *healing* for cancer.

Faith in faith is faith in the wrong thing, and too many religious people have their own heart-rending stories of failed faith. Only a person in right relationship with God can exercise *mountain-moving faith*, claim *victorious faith*, and take a *faith-leap* into the unknown.

Faith has as many facial expressions, and people exercise their faith in many different ways, putting God to the test and showing that He keeps His promises. Enjoy meeting some of them.

Barefoot Faith

For we walk by faith, not by sight.

2 Corinthians 5:7 (KJV)

Principle

Sometimes faith requires a physical pledge,
not just a spiritual commitment.

Lighthouse Baptist Church got its home when Pastor Al Henson took off his shoes and walked around 24 acres of land next to the Interstate to claim it by faith. The church in Nashville, Tennessee, was one of the first churches planted by a Liberty graduate to reach 1,000 in weekly attendance. But let's start at the beginning of the story.

When Henson was first a student at Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, he wanted to put God to the test. "I wanted to see a miracle in my life so I would know God's provision would be available in starting a new church." He came to Lynchburg with \$1,057 in his pockets. He paid a \$17 water bill, bought \$40 in groceries, and gave \$1,000 to his church. Then he waited to see what God would do.

A couple called Mom and Pop Morris felt led of God to help a student through school. They invited the Henson and his wife to move into their home, giving them a place to live rent-free and helping them buy food. Henson figures the Morrises gave he and his wife more than \$7,000 in rent and groceries, seven times the amount of his \$1,000 gift to God.

While at seminary, Al Henson fasted every Wednesday for the church he planned to plant back home in Nashville. His wife joined him in the prayer chapel where they prayed for two hours each Wednesday after his classes.

After finishing his coursework in December 1977, the Hensons moved to Nashville and rented a small place in the Bavaria Apartments with the stipulation that

they could use the recreation room to start a church. He, his wife, and associate pastor Ken Collins knocked on 3,000 doors the first month.

They did not pray for hundreds of attenders. The goal: "We prayed for one family a week to join the church." As a matter of fact, the whole church joined them in praying for a new family each week. Sometimes when a family visited the church, a member told them, "You're the family we have been praying for." During the first year, 53 families joined the church.

When the church was only two months old, Henson drove by 25 acres on Interstate 24, not far from the apartment building where they had been meeting. "As I drove past the property and saw the empty old farm house, I knew inwardly the property could be purchased."

When he first contacted the owner, the man refused to sell because he planned to will the property to his daughter. When Henson called on the owner a second time, the man gave another emphatic "no."

And so, Henson took off his shoes to walk the property line and pray for the land. He did it more than once. On several occasions, he returned with his wife and knelt on the property to ask God to give it to them. By faith, he believed God would intervene and give the land to the church.

One weekend, Henson fasted and prayed for God to touch the owner's heart, and asked the church to pray with him for the property. After the Sunday church service was over, Henson went again to the owner's house, determined to share his burden to reach the city of Nashville, and knocked on the front door. No one answered. Then Al heard voices coming from the backyard. When he went to investigate, he stumbled on a family cookout. When the property owner saw Al coming, he blurted before telling him hello, "No, I won't sell."

Henson shared his burden for church he planned to build, and then asked as he was leaving, "Will you pray about selling the property to us?"

Before the owner could speak, the man's wife said, "I'll see that he prays about it."

The next morning at 6:30 while Al was shaving, the phone rang. "The Lord spoke to me all last night," the man said. "I couldn't sleep. I have never had God speak to me before. I know that God wants you to have this property." The purchase price was \$90,000, but the owner explained, "If you will come up with \$29,000 for a down payment, I will loan you the other \$71,000 to buy the property."

Al and Lighthouse Baptist Church had 90 days to raise the down payment.

Slowly, money came in. But six days before the deadline, the church had raised only \$5,000. A Christian friend of Al's, Malcolm Barrett, who was not a member of the church, told him, "I have been listening to you on the radio. Let's get on our knees right now and pray about this money." After they prayed, he said, "Come by tomorrow and I will get \$24,000 for the property." Barrett loaned the church the money at no interest for an indefinite period, and the little church had its new home.

Over the next 10 years, Lighthouse Baptist Church constructed five buildings to house itself and a Christian school attended by 725 students. Henson also founded the Lighthouse Baptist College to train young people for ministry. The church has helped plant 15 new churches in 5 states, and at one time had more than 25 Liberty graduates working for the church or as evangelists and church planters. Liberty University honored Al Henson with the Doctor of Divinity degree in 1983.

Henson explains faith as "allowing God to move supernaturally into a situation. Faith is determining what God's will is, then stepping out in interventional faith to carry out His will. What God orders, he supplies. If it is God's will for the church to go forward, we can trust Him to overcome any barriers or to supply any need."

Blue-Chalk Faith

*Faith is the Christian's one possible receptive attitude,
that in which he brings nothing so that he may receive all.*

Handley Dunelm

Principle

An outward action of faith can help followers see and believe what God wants to accomplish.

I was 19 years old, too young to be pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church in a decaying neighborhood of West Savannah. The year was 1952 and I was a junior at Columbia Bible College.

Rich people had previously lived in the neighborhood because it was just a short buggy ride from downtown, but over time they had moved away, leaving their large two-story Victorian houses to laborers who worked mainly in the rail yards just south of the neighborhood.

I knocked on a lady's door on First Avenue to invite her to church, telling her the doors were once again opened and God was sending revival to the little congregation. She stepped out the front door, wiped her hands on her apron, and chuckled. "Your church doesn't need revival. It needs a paint job."

I was embarrassed. She was right. The old white paint was cracked and dusty. The sills at the bottom of the stain glass windows were rotted by years of water damage. The housewife continued, "There is a hole in the front porch. I might break a leg if I came to your church."

I felt defensive for my church. I loved it because it was mine. I loved every rotten board, every foot of peeling paint. The Bible calls the church a bride, and a pastor feels this metaphor deeply about his first church. Just as a grown man never forgets his first

date, first kiss, and first love, a pastor never forgets the love he feels for his first church.

That night I prayed for God to paint the church. I didn't have much faith that He'd do it. The price of painting the building would be high, and the church barely got \$20 in offerings a week. They paid my \$5 train fare from Columbia, South Carolina, and \$5 for salary. I really didn't expect it to get painted, but I wanted it done. I prayed hard, but I didn't see any human way to get it done. And, honestly, I didn't have much faith that God would supernaturally get it done.

The next Sunday morning, during the opening assembly before Sunday school, I informed the small congregation of about 15 adults and 15 children how the woman had criticized our beloved church building. I tried to persuade them to get the church painted, but I used the wrong technique. I fussed at them.

My mother was a fusser. She fussed at me to do what she wanted done. She fussed and it worked – so, when I began my ministry, I did the same thing. I fussed. But it didn't work with that handful of people. They folded their arms tight in rejection. They didn't care for being fussed at.

I could see rejection on their faces and it irritated me. I dismissed the small congregation to Sunday school, and went to teach the junior boys' class. I tried to write on the chalkboard, but there was no white chalk – just a small piece of blue chalk.

I groused, complaining under my breath about a church that wasn't interested in fixing itself up or even buying white chalk. I wrote with the blue chalk during class, then slipped it in my coat pocket, forgetting it was there.

During the offertory in the church service, I fumbled in my pocket and came across that piece of blue chalk. Then a great idea hit me over the head. If I had been older I might not have been so impetuous, but 19-year-old preachers are impulsive. As soon as the offertory was over, I rushed to the pulpit, and held up the blue chalk to announce, "With this piece of blue chalk, I'm going to paint the church on Saturday."

I had asked them to paint the church, but they wouldn't do it. So I told them I would paint the church, using this little piece of blue chalk. Right on the spot I made up a motto: "With this piece of blue chalk, I can paint the *whole* church in a *whole* day."

That's catchy, I said to myself, and waited for my announcement to sink in.

I looked down at Mr. Miller in the second row. He had been the neighborhood's biggest fall-down-in-the-street drunk, but he got saved the first Sunday night I preached in the church. Now I told Mr. Miller, "I need your help. Saturday morning I'm going to start at the front door on the porch and pace 10 feet from the front door, where I'll draw a blue line and write the name 'Miller' on the bottom board with this blue

chalk. I want you to scrape off all the dead paint in that 10-foot section, from the bottom board to the rafters, and then paint it.”

“I’ll do it,” he yelled.

I smiled, “You can’t paint over your name until you get to the bottom board.” There had to be some accountability for his work.

Then I turned to Mrs. Silla Hair, the lady who had a key to the empty church so she could sweep it out and teach Sunday school for the neighborhood children. I told her, “I’ll write the name ‘Hair’ with this blue chalk on the bottom board of the next 10-foot section.”

“We can do it!” She had two boys, one in high school and the other in junior high.

Mrs. Smith was my third target. She was a faithful worker in Sunday school. She had a husband who was always working around his house; he had the best garden in the neighborhood. When I told her I’d write the name “Smith” in the third section, she volunteered and said her husband would help her.

I had three 10-foot sections committed. Everyone could see what I was doing. My dream of painting the whole church in a whole day was becoming their dream.

My idea became their idea.

Like a sky filled with lightning during a summer storm, the small congregation bristled with electricity. For the next two or three minutes, I continued to explain the project—but no one was listening. They were whispering to one another, and I wasn’t sure if they were rebelling or supporting my idea.

Mr. Seckinger raised his hand, which was the custom in this small church at announcement time. “I got a two-story extension ladder, but we’re going to need a lot more than one ladder.” He pointed out that, if everyone was going to paint at the same time, we would need 20 extension ladders. I had not thought about the ladders. “I’ll get the ladders,” he said.

“We need to get the ladies organized for a picnic dinner,” said Mrs. Smith. This was a different Mrs. Smith; three Mrs. Smiths attended the church. This Mrs. Smith was in charge of Ladies Auxiliary.

“Who’s going to get the paint?” Mr. Strickland asked.

He was a contractor and understood what it meant to buy supplies for workers. I had not thought about paint. Then he volunteered, “I’ll get the paint and the brushes and the thinner. There will be a lot of things to get ready before Saturday.” I had not thought about supplies.

Earlier in this book, I called this phenomenon *faith transference*. The vision had captivated them. They jabbered amongst themselves. The buzz of whispered conversation was not disrespectful, nor was it rebellious. It was like pouring milk into a bowl of Rice Krispies and listening to snap, crackle, and pop. They all had ideas, and they were all telling someone else how we could do it.

Saturday morning, I rode up to the church on my bicycle at about 10 minutes to 7:00; it was already a beehive of activity. Cars surrounded the church. Pickup trucks and a contractor's truck had backed up on the sidewalk to the front porch. Although not a member of the church, a contractor who attended another church said, "It's too dangerous for someone to try to paint the ceiling of the porch and the steeple; it's two-stories tall." So he and his crew constructed scaffolding and did the dangerous work in two hours. Dozens of gallons of white Dutch Boy paint waited on the front porch; Mr. Strickland had received a donation from a local paint distributor. Blankets were spread everywhere on the lawn and covered with babies, diaper bags, and teenage girls playing with little ones and changing diapers.

I sent a couple of the junior boys scurrying through the church to gather everyone to the front porch for prayer. People whom I had never seen in my life had come, captivated by the idea of "painting the *whole* church in a *whole* day."

Many forces I did not understand were at work that day: community pride, friend's helping friends, fathers helping because their children attended our Sunday school.

"Let's get on with it," one middle-aged father yelled. "I still want to get some fishing in today."

"We need to pray first," I announced from the front porch to the crowd standing on the grass. Lifting my hand as if in pastoral benediction, I prayed, "Lord, this is Your house. Bless our efforts as we paint it."

"Amen!"

"Start the marking," someone yelled immediately, "we're burning daylight!"

Holding the blue chalk in my hand, I began marking at the front door and worked my way down the front porch to the right. After stepping off 10 paces, I wrote "MILLER" in caps, indicating the Miller family would paint this first section. After 10 more steps I wrote "HAIR," for Silla Hair and her boys.

Immediately after I drew the blue line, a ladder was thrown against the building, and I heard squeaks as someone climbed to the top. Then the noise began: *scrrrr* . . .

scrrr . . . scrrr.

The scraping had begun and powdered paint puffed into the morning breeze like dust rising off a dry country road.

Like a swarm of ants, the people of West Savannah scurried over the walls of Westminster Presbyterian Church with enthusiasm and pride, the likes of which I had not previously seen in any church in my life.

I heard yelling, talking, laughing and teasing from one group of workers to another. After about 45 minutes, someone broke into song, an old-fashioned hymn. To this day I don't remember what they sang, but it was uplifting to hear the people who were surrounding the church building with care also surround the building with their voices. They sang old hymns that church people and unchurched people knew, and everyone joined in.

By noon on that Saturday morning, most of the painting was done. Those who finished early helped those who didn't have as many family members. And by 12 o'clock, the white building glistened in the noonday sun. We had painted the *whole* church in *half* a day.

When I began pastoring, I did not understand leadership principles or how to delegate tasks to people. When I challenged them to "paint the *whole* church in a *whole* day," I learned the power a leader has to motivate people to serve the Lord. All I had to do was to give them a vision. That day, I learned the First Law of Leadership: *When followers buy into your vision, they buy into your leadership.*¹

As I lay on a blanket in the church's front yard, eating a fried chicken leg, I was amazed that we had completed the job so quickly. I thought, *This is the greatest thing I've ever done. I'll never do anything like this again.*

I was wrong. Three years later I pastored Faith Bible Church in Dallas, Texas, and held up a piece of blue chalk and challenged the congregation, "Let's paint the *whole* church in a *whole* day."

When I was 27 years old, I became President of the second-oldest Bible college in Canada. I stood in chapel with a piece of blue chalk and challenged the young students, "Let's paint the *whole* college in a *whole* day." It took two Saturdays.

A leader with a believable vision can motivate a group of followers to do the unbelievable. All he or she needs is a piece of blue chalk and some faith.

Note

1. Elmer L. Towns, *Eight Laws of Leadership* (Lynchburg, VA: Church Growth Institute, 1992), 21-34.

Crucible Faith

*A refiner's fire does not destroy indiscriminately like a forest fire.
A refiner's fire does not consume completely like the fire of an incinerator.*

*A refiner's fire refines. It purifies.
It melts down the bar of silver or gold,
separates out the impurities that ruin its value, burns them up,
and leaves the silver and gold intact.*

John Piper

Principle

Hardships prepare us to trust God for bigger things in the future.

You can move mountains by faith, but that doesn't mean you will always get rid of the problems in your life or ministry. Some have been deceived into thinking there is a secret formula for riches and prosperity: all you have to do is claim it, name the dollars you need.

Don't be deceived by get-rich schemes, even so-called "Christian" get-rich schemes. Look at the total teaching of scripture on faith. The Bible has much to say about *poverty faith* and *suffering faith*, and *trials of faith* (see Jas. 1:3). For every verse on victory by faith, you'll find another that challenges you to persevere in *suffering faith*.

The very nature of faith invites us to have great expectations. When your ministry is blocked, you can expect to move mountain obstacles by faith. When you need to preach to the masses, you can expect money to buy TV time, or bigger sanctuaries, or salaries for more missionaries. You should expect victory because Christianity is a faith of hope. We "rejoice in hope" (Rom. 5:2, KJV).

But we must also become familiar with the suffering we can expect. Jesus warned, "If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you" (John 15:20, KJV). If He

suffered – and we know from the Gospel accounts of the crucifixion that He did – we should expect the same. He promised, “Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake . . . when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely” (Matt. 5:10-11, *KJV*).

Peter also tells us to expect trials. “Dear friends, don’t be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you” (1 Pet. 4:12). Our faith teaches us to expect things from God, and we should expect problems as much as we expect victories.

Let’s look at what type of victory we can expect. John tells us, “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4, *KJV*). First, God promises victory over the evil world system. Second, He promises victory over the temptations from our old nature or flesh (see Rom. 7:24-25). Third, God promises victory over Satan (see 1 Pet. 5:8-10). Therefore, God promises that, by faith, we can be victorious over three attackers: the world, the flesh, and the devil. We must not transform these promises of victory over evil into promises for bigger cars, bigger salaries, or bigger houses. If we do, we corrupt God’s Word and make our faith slaves to our lusts rather than to God.

We must not read into scriptures the things we want; rather, we must search to find the message God has there for us. Most of the victories promised to us are internal. For example, God promises victory over sin (see 1 John 5:4). He makes us conquerors over persecution (see 2 Cor. 2:14). He will take us triumphantly to heaven (see Isa. 25:8; 1 Cor. 15:34). “Thank God! He gives us victory over sin and death through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15:57).

We are promised internal victory when we suffer outward trials – not victory over our tormentors. James writes to suffering Jewish believers: “When your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing” (Jas. 1:3-4). This is the victory we are promised: perfection, completion, maturity.

Peter prays “that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold . . . though it be tried with fire” (1 Pet. 1:7, *ELT*). God wants us to be “gold,” which means He allows trials and hardships to make us stronger and purer. The goldsmith throws impure gold ore, tainted by dirt, rubbish and other cheaper metals, into a crucible and turns up the heat. The fire burns away the rubbish, and cheaper metals float on top of the dense molten gold. The goldsmith skims away impurities in order to purify the gold. In just such a way God, the ultimate goldsmith, allows the fires of persecution and suffering to burn away our sins and character flaws. God’s purpose: to

make us pure gold.

In 2004, I was speaking in a basketball arena to 8,000 mostly Pentecostal preachers in Mar del Plata, Argentina. I reminded them of the financial devastation they had weathered after Argentina lost the Falklands War to Great Britain. They understood financial trouble, I knew, because they and their people had suffered in poverty.

I talked about God burning away chaff and impurities with financial pressures. The arena was deathly still. It seemed not a pastor would even breathe; the message had sucked the breath out of them. Their eyes hollowed with convicting truth. They understood God was using poverty to purify His church in Argentina. Then I concluded with a shout: *"What must we do?"*

The hungry faces begged for an answer. They deeply felt the sting of poverty. *"Here's what we must do: we must fall on our faces before God."*

There was a terrible roar and rumble. People everywhere began dropping to the floor, lying prostrate in the aisles, under benches, some kneeling, some with arms uplifted to heaven. This was not "slaying in the Spirit." This was the convicting power of the Holy Spirit. People fell to the floor to pray before the Lord, our purifying God. I heard a wail of prayer in that building like I had never heard before. As one, they cried out for the spiritual purity only the God of Heaven can give.

All high-quality products are tested to prove their worth. Likewise, faith that overcomes the world must be proven in the heat of trials. This testing is not done to destroy our faith, but to make it stronger. Many yearn for great faith, others pray for it; but few want to go through trials in order to get it. Yet to be the heavyweight champion of the world, a boxer has to get in the ring with every challenger and beat each one. In the same way, you can bet those with heavyweight faith constantly overcome daily trials and, when the best opponents come against them, they beat any and all comers. *"This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith"* (1 John 5:4, KJV). But, just like the boxer, the faith-filled take some hits along the way. They don't escape the ring unscathed.

If you ask for faith, God may send trials. When you successfully pass the first test, He may send second and third trials—even more difficult—to teach you important lessons about faith, or to give you necessary experience to build on later.

Sometimes, however, the Lord doesn't immediately answer your request for greater faith. He waits to see if you mean what you pray. Such was the story of a Syrophenecian woman whose daughter was possessed by a devil (see Matt. 15:21-28).

Surely her daughter's affliction was her trial, her thorn in the flesh. Because of her persistence, Jesus told her, "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire" (Matt. 15:28, *ELT*).

Some other people desire faith to overcome trials such as poor health, lack of money, or opposition from an enemy. But the trial from which they seek deliverance may be the trial sent to grow their faith. Trials drive us to Jesus Christ, and there we find faith. I've heard it said, "Trials are the messengers of God to deliver the package of faith."

Peter offered six principles to the suffering Christians in Asia. First, don't be surprised when you suffer. Why? Because, second, we "are partners with Christ in his suffering." Third, when we suffer, the Spirit of God rests on us and we are blessed. Fourth, suffering should not make us feel ashamed because, fifth, it is an honor to suffer for Christ's sake; it brings Him glory. And finally, when we suffer, we should entrust our lives to God, confident that He never fails (see 1 Pet. 4:12-19).

Too many believers are focused on getting "gold." They pray for gold, while God's desire is make them gold. We think we need more prayer, or more intensive prayer, or more group prayer, to get the gold we think we need. We add fasting and after everything else fails, we think "say-it faith" or "claim-it faith" will get for us what other methods failed to produce. But read Peter again:

These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold – though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world (1 Pet. 1:7).

Faith is not about getting gold; it's about becoming gold. When we become pure gold, we reflect the brilliant glory of Jesus Christ.

Too often we treat faith like a bucket to scoop up food from a garden, or to scoop diamonds from the mine, or to scoop new clothes from the sale bins. We treat faith like a method to get something we want. But faith is not a bucket.

Jesus came to the woman at the well to ask for water. The woman missed what Jesus was offering because she was concerned with how to get it: "But sir, you don't have a rope or bucket" (John 4:11). Like that woman, too many of us are looking for a bucket when what we need is water. We're trying to use "faith" as a bucket to scoop up

treasure. We miss the water – Jesus – who is the only one who can satisfy our thirst.

Jesus answered, “If you only knew . . . who you are speaking to” (John 4:10). Next time you go seeking faith, or trying to grow your faith, or trying to use your faith to get something from God, remember the bucket is not the important thing. Jesus, the Water of Life, is the important thing. Seek water. Ask for water. Drink water.

In the crucible of suffering, where fiery trials test our mettle and refine our faith to pure gold, it is Living Water we need most.

Faith In Faith

Unbelief within the heart is responsible for the apparent silence and inactivity of our wonder-working God.

Barclay Burton

Principle

When you do not follow the biblical principles of faith, you will fail to achieve the objective for which you pray.

Four Korean teen girls were attending a Christian camp. They wanted to go to a nearby town to buy some candy, but the stream that separated the camp from the town had flooded.

They knew the Bible story of Peter walking on water, so they decided to kneel and ask God to help them walk on water. As a seal of their confidence, they told their friends – *say-it faith* – they were going to walk on water. They clasped hands together and stepped into the rushing water.

Was their faith naive? Yes! Was their faith based on the Word of God? No! They were sincere, but their faith was not based on God's Word, but only on their sincerity. They had *faith in faith*, which is not biblical faith. When the floods subsided, three bodies washed ashore downstream. One girl had, at the last minute, held back and refused to step into the torrential stream. She told the story.

The girls' faith in faith was ignorant, and their story is a sad commentary on people whose faith failed them. On top of the senseless loss of life, national newspapers printed the story on the front page, mocking Christianity. In a culture much concerned with "saving face," the church was humiliated in the eyes of the unsaved.

Before coming to Liberty, I directed a Bible college on a very tight budget; we had very little money for the operating budget. Three people came to see me: the

Director of Music, the Director of Christian Service, and the college's business manager came to talk with me about purchasing a van so the women's ensemble could travel among churches in the summer to recruit students and raise money. They wanted to purchase a used van that had transported customers from a rental counter in the airport to their rental cars. It was an off-brand vehicle and I said no.

The three came to me a second time, pressuring me to buy the van.

"No," I told them emphatically, just as before.

"Will you pray about it?" they pressured. Of course I would pray, so we all knelt in my office and did just that. Their prayers were so sincere and heartfelt that I said yes when we got up.

Three blocks from the rental dealership, the van caught fire and burned up. Fortunately, the business manager had phoned our insurance agent to secure an accident policy. Unfortunately, the off-brand vehicle didn't have parts in America, so we had to wait four months for the parts to be shipped from overseas. As the mechanic screwed in the new windshield, he cracked it. It took another four months to get a replacement.

The college lost eight months' use of its money and the girls' ensemble didn't travel that summer. I had to take money from another project to pay for the van.

I thought I was taking a step of faith, but in fact I was putting my faith in faith. Swayed by the sincerity and good intentions of others, I leapt when I should have stayed put.

Some have convinced themselves that all they want is God's will for them; the more they pray about something, the more convinced they are that they will get it. They have great faith in what they think is right, and so they take a step of faith – trusting in their faith, not in God.

Not all faith is *faith*, by which I mean not all the steps of faith will get you where you want to go. Not all the prayers offered "in faith" will be answered. Sometimes good people offer heartfelt prayers and take sincere steps of faith only to fail.

Jerry Falwell usually prayed for the sick and anointed them with oil in the church auditorium at 5:45, right before the evening service. Since I had many Pentecostal friends and had anointed with oil and prayed for the sick before joining him in ministry, I usually did the actual anointing. (Falwell had grown up in a church where this was not done, so he had me take the lead.)

This is how we did anointing at Thomas Road Baptist Church: Falwell usually had the sick person sit in one of the pulpit chairs on the platform, and then would

announce, "If any pastor or deacon has faith to pray for this person to be healed, please come to the platform." Falwell and the other pastors and deacons who came forward would surround the sick person who was sitting facing the audience, and lay hands on his or her head.

I would take the bottle of oil, place a little oil on my index finger, and touched the top of the person's head. I was the only one to anoint. Each in the circle would pray, and finally, Jerry prayed in conclusion. In this way, we saw a number of people healed, some quite miraculously and against all odds.

Then one day a deacon requested that Pastor Falwell anoint his wife and pray for her healing. She had cancer. But Falwell hesitated and didn't call for the healing service. One of the other pastors talked to the deacons, and they arranged an anointing service at a different time during the week. They printed flyers with the wife's picture and distributed it throughout the church. Many gathered to pray. She eventually went to a cancer clinic in Mexico that offered "miracle" treatments. But sadly, she died.

Later I asked Falwell why he didn't get involved in the healing service for the deacon's wife. He told me, "I just didn't have the faith that God would heal her."

I had a similar experience a couple of years later. I had written a best-selling book, *Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough*. A lady in the church read it and told me, "If I had read your book 10 years ago, I wouldn't have terminal cancer; I might have lived." (The book suggested that eating proper food, as in the Daniel fast, and abstaining from poisonous things like cigarettes can prevent disease.) "If I had eaten properly, quit smoking, and fasted," she said, "I wouldn't be facing death."

Her husband insisted on a time of prayer and anointing for her before the evening service on Sunday. I came, but when Jerry Falwell asked for pastors with faith to come to the platform, I remained in my seat. I knew what she had told me, and I didn't have faith to pray for her healing. When they got ready to anoint her, Jerry looked around and didn't see me on the stage. He said, "Dr. Towns, I want you to come to the platform and anoint with oil."

What could I do? I went forward and anointed her head with oil. When it came time for me to pray, however, I still couldn't pray in faith that God would heal her. Instead, I prayed, "Lord, we commit our sister to You. Lord, You are the Great Physician. You are Jehovah-Jireh. Give the doctors wisdom to handle this cancer. Use the chemo and radiation treatment. We commit her to Your will. May Your will be done."

I didn't pray in faith for God to heal her; I didn't want to be a hypocrite. I didn't

have faith, so I prayed as honestly as I could.

How many times has someone prayed in confident faith for God to heal? Yet the person for whom they prayed died. Could it be they had, not biblical faith, but *faith in faith*? Perhaps the person exercising faith did not properly understand God's conditions for faith.

There was a Baptist preacher in Alabama whose church was averaging around 100 in attendance in the early 1970s. He came to a conference at Thomas Road Baptist Church and heard amazing stories of growing churches because of Sunday school bus ministry. He bought school buses when he got back home and announced a goal of 3,000 in Sunday school – but there were only 300 people in his hometown, and only a handful of other small towns nearby.

Three thousand is a great faith statement. He led the people to work hard, and they reached 300 in church attendance. To me, this was a phenomenal accomplishment – 300 in a church in a town with a population of 300!

After a couple of years of plateaued growth, the pastor got disillusioned because he couldn't push attendance past 300. Discouragement led to depression. And one day they found his clothes on the dock of a nearby lake, along with a suicide note. He just couldn't live with the failure after his bold faith statement.

They used dragging hooks in the lake, but couldn't find his body. Eventually, they gave up the search and held a memorial service, where the whole town turned out to mourn his loss. Then, right in the middle of the service, their pastor walked down the aisle to the front, where he confessed his sin. His "suicide" had been a ploy to avoid the humiliation of failure, and here at his memorial service, he asked forgiveness for all the agony the people had suffered because of his *faith in faith*.

He is still in ministry as I write this; I talked to him nine years ago. After his failure, a pastor friend hired him as a Bible teacher for the Christian high school associated with the friend's church. He has remained there all these years.

Failed Faith Goals

How do you deal with faith goals that are not met? Do you get mad? Give up? Resign? Commit suicide? What can you do when you set a goal by faith and it doesn't happen? Before we answer, let's look at reasons why there are failed faith goals.

1. Wrongly Reading the Circumstances

Of course God can do anything, but God will not go against Himself, nor against His laws. God can't make yesterday not happen, and He can't make a rock so big He can't lift it. How could a pastor believe he could attract 3,000 to a church in a town of 300 people? God can't get people saved in a town if the people are not there, so this faith goal was illogical, impossible, and ill-conceived.

The bottom line: have a good grasp on reality before you make faith statements.

2. Weak or Insufficient Faith

Several times we prayed for projects at Liberty for which I did not have faith while Jerry Falwell had great faith. My faith was weak or non-existent. After Charles Hughes, the Liberty student I introduced in an earlier chapter, was in a severe accident, Falwell asked all the faculty and staff to pray for his healing. I didn't have faith for Charles's healing. As a matter of fact, I had just read *Coma*, a mystery-murder novel about comatose people, and I was sure Charles would not wake up. The doctors had removed the top of Charles' skull to allow his brain to swell without being crushed to jelly. As far as I knew, there was no coming back from that kind of injury.

When Jerry announced Charles Hughes would speak at graduation at Liberty University, even while the young man lay unconscious in a hospital bed without the top of his skull, I almost fell off my pulpit chair. I couldn't believe my ears.

But Charles did speak at graduation that year. I was like those disciples Jesus accused of having little faith (see Matt. 19:31), or like the Romans whom Paul accused of having weak faith (see Rom. 14:1).

The bottom line: be honest. If you have weak faith, don't promise what your heart is not sure will happen.

3. Basing Faith on Wrong Information

Jacob had 12 sons, and Joseph was his favorite. Jacob even gave Joseph a luxurious coat woven of many colors. Ten of Joseph's brothers hated him for arrogant things Joseph said—but also for that coat of many colors. A day came in the wilderness, where Father couldn't see, when they saw "The Coat" coming toward them. It was just too much for them. They threw Joseph in a pit and planned to kill him, but later sold him as a slave to a caravan headed for Egypt.

They took the hated coat of many colors and dipped it into an animal's blood, then showed it to their father. Jacob was deceived and cried, "A wild animal must have eaten him. Joseph has clearly been torn to pieces!" (Gen. 37:33). The brothers must have laughed inwardly; Jacob never once suspected them. Jacob grieved for the next 20 years, all because he believed wrong information.

Two decades later, the 10 brothers went to Egypt and discovered Joseph, who was then the Minister of Agriculture over all Egypt. When the brothers tried to tell their father Jacob that Joseph was still alive, old Jacob refused to believe. They insisted, "Joseph is still alive, and he is ruler over all the land of Egypt!" Yet Jacob still could not bring himself to believe them (see Gen. 45:26).

Sometimes we are like Jacob: we have been so hurt, so deeply deceived, so discouraged, that we can't believe.

What changed everything for Jacob? What turned his unbelief into belief? What rekindled his hope? Joseph sent wagons to get Jacob and "when [Jacob] saw the wagons . . . their father's spirits revived" (Gen. 45:27).

The bottom line: belief in the wrong thing is a faith-killer, and faith cannot be restored until we "see the wagons" – that is, until we see God working actively in our circumstances.

4. Basing Faith on a Wrong Interpretation of Scripture

When we claim a promise of God, let's make sure we properly understand what God has promised. Peter walked on water, but is Jesus saying to us today, "Come," just as He said to Peter? Can we walk on water today? No! That passage is *descriptive* of a miraculous event in Jesus' life, not a *prescriptive* promise for us to apply today. The Bible is descriptive of many one-time-only events, and God never intended these to be prescriptions for us today.

We don't roll back the waters of the Jordan as Joshua did or strike a rock with a walking stick to get water as Moses did. We don't rub mud on the eyes of a blind man to heal him as Jesus did or ask starving widows to give us their last bit of food as Elijah did (see 1 Kings 7-16). In fact, if we follow the description of Elijah's dealings with the widow of Zarephath as if it is prescriptive, we will disobey numerous biblical prescriptions to provide for widows.

The bottom line: we must read and interpret the Bible wisely if we are to exercise biblical faith.

5. Sin Blinds, Then Binds Us

We must realize that sin is never eradicated in our lives (see 1 John 1:8, 10). Even when we yield ourselves to do God's will, our old flesh lurks in the shadow of our heart to ask doubting questions and tempt us to fear the consequences of our actions. The world, the flesh, and the devil will always challenge a person who is ready to take a step of faith. Satan will always tempt a spiritual giant not to leap in faith into the unknown.

Sometimes God doesn't grant our faith request simply because it is not His will for us. Sometimes God wants us to fail in order to test us, but it does not mean He isn't worthy of our trust. "Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death?" (Rom. 8:35, *LB*). The answer is no!

What is God's purpose when we fail, or our project fails, or things go against us? Paul writes:

Oh, how great are God's riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us to understand his decisions and his ways! For who can know the Lord's thoughts? Who knows enough to give him advice? And who has given him so much that he needs to pay it back? For everything comes from him and exists by his power and is intended for his glory. All glory to him forever! (Rom. 11:33-36)

You won't get everything you claim in faith, because you're human and you're dealing with a God who has a plan that is greater than your plan. When you make a faith claim, ask yourself the following questions:

- Am I sure this is God's will?
- Does my faith project fit biblical norms?
- Is there any self-gratification in the project?
- Is there sin in my life?
- Will God be glorified in this endeavor?
- Will this project advance the kingdom of God on earth?

Even a yes to all the above questions will not guarantee the success of your faith project. But at least you will have answered important questions that will make you

think of issues beyond your present concerns. You will have looked at faith from God's point of view and not your own.

The bottom line: Sin distorts our vision of what God wants to do. Walk humbly with God, knowing He sees further and more clearly than you can imagine, and can be trusted to do what is best for you and His kingdom plans.

When You Fail

What will you do when you meet with failure? Will you, like the pastor in the town of 300 people, fake your death? Probably not. But you would be wise to think now about how you will handle future faith disappointment, before it happens.

Just as a bridge must be anchored on the opposite shore, so your faith must be anchored in God's Word – not in faith itself, or your ideas about faith – if it is to be *faith*. Faith grounded in anything but trust in God and the truth of His Word isn't faith at all.

Healing Faith

Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

James 5:14-16 (KJV)

Principle

Not everyone for whom you pray will be healed;
but God heals when your prayer practices
follow scripture's principles.

On April 24, 1985, I walked into the small back room where the Vice Presidents gather for chapel at Liberty University and was greeted with the bad news: "Vernon Brewer has stomach cancer and only has six months to live."

That was a shock! Vernon was the Vice President in charge of student relations; he enforced the rules for Liberty. But he was fair and students knew it. Rather than hating Vernon, students loved him – because he loved them and was a godly man whom they respected.

When Jerry Falwell heard the news he told us, "Vernon's too important to lose; we've got to fast, pray, and change God's mind."

He went straight to the chapel pulpit to tell a student body the shocking news, and then cancelled the sermon. "We will have a prayer meeting instead."

Before we prayed, Falwell began making plans on the spot for a 24 hour fast. "We need someone to make a sign of a huge clock and hang it on that wall," he said, pointing to an empty wall. "It has to show all 24 hours and have enough space for every

student to sign up. Everyone should pray for one hour for Vernon.” He urged us not to count prayers at the beginning of class or when exercising. “I want you to go to the prayer chapel to pray for one hour. Didn’t Jesus ask His disciples, ‘Could you not watch with me one hour?’” (Matt. 26:40, *KJV*). Falwell suggested we start a few minutes early and continue a few minutes longer, to make sure we prayed at least one hour.

“We’ll close the University’s food service,” he went on. “We’ll follow a *Yom Kippur* fast, beginning with this evening’s meal, and continue fasting tomorrow through breakfast and lunch. Spend your mealtimes in prayer.”

Someone – I don’t remember who – whispered in Falwell’s ear and he changed the announcement: “Some are diabetic or have other physical problems and must eat. We’ll leave one serving line open.” And then he added, “It’s not right to force prayer on students who don’t believe in fasting. God wouldn’t honor the fast of unbelief.”

He urged unity in our fast, quoting Jesus: “If two of you agree concerning anything that you shall ask, it shall be done” (Matt. 18:19, *ELT*). Falwell then repeated once again his oft-repeated slogan, “There’s value in the volume of prayer.”

He finished his instructions and called on someone to lead the 5,000 students in prayer. I was standing next to Vernon. The Holy Spirit urged me, “Lay your hands on Vernon’s head to pray.” But I didn’t respond in faith; I made an excuse to God, which was really an excuse of unbelief. I said, “No, Lord, they will think I’m Pentecostal.” I had so many Pentecostal friends that some already believed it.

I was immediately convicted of my unbelief. I was more concerned with what people thought of me than I was with praying for Vernon! I prayed, “Lord, forgive my unbelief,” then I placed my hands on Vernon to identify with him in prayer.

As I prayed, I got an overwhelming confidence that God was going to heal him. I experienced what the apostle James calls “the prayer of faith” which “shall save the sick” (Jas. 4:15). Praying in faith with 5,000 students, staff, and faculty, I knew Vernon would be saved.

Vernon was healed. God used chemotherapy, radiation, and an operation to remove a five-pound cancerous mass from his stomach. Each year on April 25, I phone Vernon to remind him, “Ain’t God good?” It’s not proper English, but it’s great theology. Then Vernon and I rejoice again in God’s healing power.

Last year on April 25, I left a phone message because Vernon was out of the country traveling for World Help. If God had not healed him, Vernon could not have built a \$250 million Christian humanitarian organization with over 100 Liberty students employed full time.

You Healed Yet?

I learned a valuable lesson on faith healing from Mrs. Gladys Rudder, a member of my early Sunday morning prayer group. (She is now with the Lord.) I had bursitis in my left shoulder, centered right in the ball joint of the socket. Every time I moved my left arm, a pain shot down my arm and I winced. When I flinched, it distracted my Bible teaching in the Pastor's Bible Class at Thomas Road Baptist Church.

Mrs. Rudder said, "We've got to pray for God to heal you so you can teach the Bible." I remember she prayed simply, but direct, because she was that type of person, "Lord, heal Dr. Towns."

I prayed conditionally, "Lord, if it be Your will, heal me because You're the great physician," etc.

"You healed yet?" Mrs. Rudder asked when I returned to church that night for the evening service.

"You healed yet?" she asked again when I didn't answer.

Wow, I thought, she expects results. I had just hoped for results. That week, I carefully examined my heart and found I didn't have faith for healing. Since that time, when I pray for healing for someone, I'm very careful about the attitude of my heart. I ask myself, *Do you really believe God can do this, or not?*

By the way, that happened 20 years ago and I haven't had any trouble with bursitis since that day.

God's Prescription

God heals the sick according to His prescription in James 5. Often when someone is sick, they follow the doctor's prescription to get well. The following is God's prescription for healing.

1. Acknowledge the sickness.

James introduces the topic of healing by asking, "Is any sick among you?" (Jas. 5:14, *KJV*). The word translated "sick" here describes the physically ill. He is not referring to healing for mental or emotional problems, though God can also heal those afflictions, of course. But this verse talks about physically hurting people, those with the most fundamental of needs: to survive their illness and return to health. If God is too busy to

concern Himself with the painful sickness of His people, how can we believe He is concerned about healing us from anxiety, fear, or shame? God's willingness to involve Himself in our basic, physical needs points to His willingness to heal us from mental and emotional illness as well.

Sometimes God gets the attention of a believer by allowing her to get sick. If a person is wandering in sin, or even just ignoring God, pain has a tendency to return her attention to God. Why? Because she hurts and can't heal herself. She may also be afraid of dying. Before she can move forward with God's prescription for healing, she and her faith community need to acknowledge her illness.

2. Call for the elders to pray.

When you're sick, you want God's healing touch, and you need someone to pray who can touch God in prayer. James tells us the best people to pray are the elders of the church (see 5:14).

It takes faith to call for the spiritual leaders of your church, but you call for them because you know they can pray effectively. They should be the first people you ask for prayer. Spiritual leaders may be the last people you want to ask for prayer, perhaps because of sin in your life, or because you're a prodigal far from God. Call them anyway. Your call is an exercise of faith and may be your first step of repentance.

A faith-healer may come to a city's civic center or set up a tent and then call for the sick. That's reading the prescription backward. God wants the sick to call for the elders of the church. A sick person's church leaders know his spiritual condition, which is even more important than his physical condition. They know and love him, and likely have already been praying for him.

Oftentimes the traveling faith-healer is concerned first with the physical sickness, but James tells us, "Confess your faults" (5:16, KJV), suggesting that physical healing begins with spiritual restoration. His local church's leaders are more likely than a visiting healer to know about problems in the sick person's spiritual condition. Many times the traveling faith healer never even deals with spiritual problems.

3. Confess to one another.

As we have seen, God sometimes uses sickness to call straying believers back to Him. Physical healing, for these folks, is tied to spiritual restoration. That's why James

includes the instruction, “And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed” (5:15, *ELT*).

If a sick person were about to die, wouldn't it be best for him to pass into the presence of God in perfect fellowship with Him? Before we pray for healing, let's make sure the sick person is in good health, spiritually speaking.

The Bible doesn't tell us to confess our sins to a priest or minister, but *to one another*. Confession should come from both the sick and the intercessor. They both must strengthen their faith by confessing their sins before they pray for healing.

With confession done, both the sick person and the intercessor have reestablished their relationship to God. Isn't that what faith is all about? Isn't our relationship to God the paramount thing?

3. Lay hands on the sick person.

On many occasions, Jesus laid His hand on someone to heal that person. He was the Son of God and could have healed without touching – so why did He so often reach out for the afflicted? He may have touched them to inspire their faith or to communicate His love and care.

Physical touch symbolizes God's touch. James tells, “Let [elders] pray over him” (5:14, *KJV*), which implies laying hands on the head of the sick person. Why do we do this? Is it to ignite the sick person's faith? To ignite the faith of the one praying for the sick person? Or perhaps to communicate God's love and care?

My refusal to lay hands on Vernon Brewer to pray for his healing came perhaps from my fear of ridicule or the influence of my tradition. When I finally reached out to touch him, it was a leap of faith into the unknown or at least a leap over my inhibitions. Whatever it was, God honored our obedience and Vernon was healed.

4. Anoint the sick person with oil.

A person doesn't need anointing to be healed. Think of the many healings in scripture when oil was not used. So why is the New Testament church instructed by James to use oil? (see Jas. 5:14, *KJV*).

In his commentary on James, John Calvin suggests one of the elders might be a medical doctor who will use medicinal oil for healing, perhaps to wash away bacteria

and or clean out infection.

But most Protestants understand the oil is an emblem of the Holy Spirit, who does the work of healing in the body. Oil is an outward symbol of an inner work by God. God loves symbols because they stir our faith. I believe anointing with oil can stir faith in the sick and in the intercessor.

What kind of oil should be used? Some think only olive oil should be used today, similar to what was used in Bible times. Others have used all types of oil because healing comes from faith, not from using the “right” kind of oil. I heard of an occasion when a minister was in the home of a sick person and the only oil available was motor oil. He used it to anoint the sick person, and I say, “good for him!” Oil is oil, and that’s all oil means.

5. Pray in faith.

James tells us, “And the prayer of faith will save the sick” (5:15, KJV). This may mean that the intercessor is so confident God will heal that in fact God honors his faith. Let me add some cautions.

It’s not your faith that heals; it’s God. The intercessor simply believes God will heal, and so it happens.

The intercessor can have faith when he has met all of God’s requirements, so God heals. That means before the elder of the church prays, he deals with sin in the sick person’s life. Now with sin properly forgiven, there is a basis for God to work physically.

Both the intercessor and the sick must agree that God does the healing. They have both done what God requires to be done. But even then, healing is not the decision of the intercessor. The intercessor cannot bring healing to someone if it is not God’s will.

The fact that the intercessor is absolutely positive in his heart that the sick will get well is not the issue. Remember, faith is relationship. Faith finds credibility in its object, who is God. It’s not what you believe; it’s *who* you believe.

There are some faith-healers who believe they have a spiritual gift to overcome sickness or pain; they have an exclusive gift to heal sick people. I don’t believe anyone has that exclusive gift of healing today, but I’m not denying God uses people to heal. On the contrary, I believe every believer can heal through the prayer of faith; it doesn’t take a special gift or a special person. Everyone can pray in faith for a sick person to be healed. All anyone has to do is meet the requirements of James 5:14-16.

Availing Much

The passage in James ends with the exhortation, “The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (5:16, *ELT*). Who can successfully pray for the sick? Any righteous person will avail much when he follows God’s prescription laid out in James 5:14-16.

The righteous person is right with God. Because all believers are declared righteous – justified – we stand perfect before the Father (see Rom. 5:1). That’s a great place for intercession to begin, but we must have *practical righteousness* in addition to our *positional righteousness*. We must be walking daily with God if we want our prayers to avail much.

One more thing about effective prayers that avail much: James says we must pray *fervently*. What does that mean? We must pray with all our heart, with all our knowledge of scripture, with lots of other interceding believers, and with a lot of time spent before God’s throne.

Continue praying in the Father’s presence until you get an answer. That’s fervent.

Part 4

Growing Your Faith

Many want to grow their faith but don't know how. They have the same requests as Jesus' disciples: "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1) and "Lord, increase our faith" (Luke 17:5, KJV).

Simply put, your faith will grow as your relationship with Christ grows. When you do the things a Christian is supposed to do, your faith grows.

That answer doesn't deal with all realms of faith, obviously. There are "grandmother-types" in our churches who intimately know God, who walk with Him in deep devotion—but they've never taken a great leap of faith into the unknown. They've never done exploits by faith.

When I'm in an ordination service, I ask the ministerial candidate questions about Bible knowledge, his prayer life, and his history of serving God. I believe a candidate for ministry ought to have "grandmother religion." Since pastoral leadership implies leading the godliest person in his church, a prospective pastor ought to know as much Bible as the average "spiritual grandmother" in his congregation, and be able to exercise as much spiritual discipline as the typical prayer warrior.

But I also believe that, further down the road, God will call him to take a leap.

How do we grow into "faith-leapers" who do exploits for God? You begin where the grandmother Christian ends and go further.

Analyzing Your Faith

The more we try to figure out whether or not we have faith, the more likely we are to weaken any faith we have. Focusing on faith to get more faith is like focusing on sleep to go to sleep: the more you work at it, the less it will happen.

Strong faith doesn't call attention to itself.

Elmer Towns

Principle

Strong faith is not built by analysis but by applying the principles of scripture to your life.

I always thought George Mueller had the greatest faith of anyone since the apostle Paul. Maybe I thought so because Mueller could do what I couldn't do: pray for money to support 2,500 orphans and expect it to show up. But then I did my doctrinal dissertation at Fuller Theological Seminary on the gift of faith and, in my reading, discovered Mueller denied having the gift of faith.¹

I also thought Bill Bright, founder and president of Campus Crusade for Christ, had great faith. So I asked him at a committee meeting for the Conference on Prayer and Fasting if he had the gift of faith. Like Mueller, Bright said he didn't have it.

When we wrote *Stepping Out on Faith* together I interviewed Jerry Falwell and asked him to evaluate the strength of his gift of faith.² He too said he didn't have great faith.

What did I learn? These men, whose ability to use their faith to get great answers from God so impressed me, did not focus on the strength of their faith. They focused on serving God, and their faith grew accordingly.

The more we try to figure out whether or not we have faith, the more likely we are to weaken any faith we have. Focusing on faith to get more faith is like focusing on

sleep to go to sleep: The more you work at it, the less it will happen. Strong faith doesn't call attention to itself.

Look at sports. When going into the biggest game of the season, the athlete with fewer jitters – or less consciousness of her jitters – is most likely to win. It's the same with faith. The less focus we put on trying to get more faith, the more likely we are to develop faith. I sometimes worry that the more I write on faith, prepare sermons on faith, or even think about faith, the weaker my faith will become. But worrying about it is exactly the wrong way to solve that problem!

As a matter of fact, the Bible does not tell us much about how to grow our faith; it only acknowledges that faith can grow. And how is that?

Our faith grows stronger as we go deeper in our relationship with the Lord. As we've seen, *faith is relationship*. The most important thing is to properly relate to the Lord. Faith is the experience of connecting with God. Therefore, it is not the *quantity* of faith that is important; rather, it is the *quality* of our relationship with the Lord

So let's stop taking the temperature of our faith to determine if our faith is healthy or unhealthy. Maybe the more attention we give to the health of our faith, the more likely we are to smother it to death. As a matter of fact, the sooner we quit thinking about how much faith we have and simply trust the Lord, the more potential we have to do something for God. Our focus must be on God Himself, not on how our faith connects us to Him.

The most faithful believers don't focus too much on faith itself. We may think they are always studying faith, or chasing faith, or reading about faith, like someone reading a how-to book to get better at something. But you don't get faith by analyzing it, praying about it, or even studying people with great faith. These actions may help, but you only get stronger faith by strengthening your relationship to God.

People who flitter about trying to get more faith are like gnats flittering about on sticky summer days. They irritate everyone they touch and do little good. Those who are always studying faith are more likely to have an academic faith, not an active faith. It only helps their understanding *about* faith. They may get an "A" on the exam, but they are not drawn closer to God.

Jesus sat with children in the midst of His disciples and told them God's kingdom belongs to little children (see Matt. 19:13-15). If we want to be part of God's kingdom, shouldn't we have child-like faith? A child connects simply and profoundly to his parents, because his parents do everything for him. The child knows he can trust his parents to love him and meet his needs, and in response has faith in them as strong

as steel. *Relationship.*

When you try to question a child about his relationship to a parent, he does not analyze. He just loves his mother or father. He may be unable to put the relationship under a microscope, but he is still enthusiastic about it! The love of his parent is, to him, like breathing: it just *is* – totally dependable, always reliable, wonderfully trustworthy.

God is our Father and we are His children. Let's enjoy our relationship to Him without worrying about the mechanics of connecting with Him.

When a father holds the two hands of his child to help her learn to walk, the child does not ask her father which foot to move or how to balance herself. She does not analyze how her father is holding her or offer suggestions for how he could do it better. A child does not focus on the process at all. She simply puts one shaky foot in front of the other and trusts her father will not let her fall.

Faith is knowing the Father will hold you steady while you learn to walk and pick you up if you happen to fall. When you're hanging onto the hand of God, quit trying to analyze what you are doing and put your trust in the One who is holding your hand.

Faith is your relationship to God; it is the way you connect with Him. It doesn't matter whether you have a little or a lot. How softly do you have to touch God to be touching Him? It doesn't make any difference whether you hold tightly or barely hang on to His little fingers – your connection to Christ is a fact.

Don't analyze faith too deeply. Get your eyes on Jesus and run – or walk – with patience the race that is set before you (see Heb. 12:1-2). Look to His example and wait for His commendation, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant" (Matt. 25:23, *KJV*).

When you do that, the fog around faith will begin to clear up. You will be interested in Him. You will want to please Him. You will focus on Him. And your faith will grow, unobserved.

Think about it. The more you analyze your faith, the more you focus on yourself. No one grows faith by human effort.

The more you learn about God, the more you can trust Him – and trusting grows your faith. The more you learn about His greatness, and put your trust in His greatness, the greater your faith experience will be.

Do you see that phrase *faith experience*? Faith is not an isolated fact found in a dictionary or encyclopedia. Faith is found in life as we experience God, relate to God, follow God, serve God, and talk with God. The more we serve Him, the stronger our faith. The longer we talk to Him in prayer, the stronger our faith. "Faith is the certainty

that we will get what we ask from God, faith is confident, because of our relationship with God who we cannot see" (Heb. 12:1, *ELT*).

What's the bottom line? To have great faith, you must experience a great God. The more you know about God, the more faith you can have in Him. You probably don't need more faith. You need a bigger God.

Notes

1. Elmer L. Towns, "An Analysis of the Gift of Faith in Church Growth," dissertation presented to Faculty of The School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary (Pasadena, CA, January 1983).
2. Jerry Falwell and Elmer Towns, *Stepping Out on Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1984.)

Natural Faith

*Faith consists, not in ignorance, but in knowledge, and that, not only of God
but also of the divine will.*

John Calvin

Principle

We experience faith naturally when we relate intimately to God
and follow the principles of His Word.

An evangelist wanted to teach his small son something about faith, so he placed him on the table and backed up three or four feet. Then he told the little fellow, "Jump."

The boy shook his head. "Papa, I'm afraid."

"Jump and I'll catch you," the evangelist told his son. "Trust me."

The little fellow seemed ready to jump, but then he looked down at the floor and cried again, "I'm afraid!"

"Didn't I tell you I would catch you, son?" the evangelist said. "Would Papa deceive you?"

The little fellow shook his head, "No." So he got ready to jump for a third time, but again he froze. "I'm afraid," he whispered.

He was afraid to do something he had never done before.

The father asked, "Have I ever hurt you?"

"No!"

"Then look me right in the eye and do what I tell you. Will you obey me?"

"Yes. "

"Now jump!" the father held out his arms.

The little boy leaped into his father's arms. The father caught him in a big bear hug, and they both laughed.

Immediately the little boy said, "Let me jump again!"

His father put him back on the table and he jumped, again and again and again. The father could move back a few steps and still the boy jumped.

The boy had learned *natural faith*. Faith is obeying the command of the Father and trusting in His promises. And just as the boy's confidence in his father grew each time he jumped and was caught, so our biblical faith grows each time we obey God and take a leap of faith.

The scriptures describe such confidence this way: "Anyone who accepts his [Christ's] testimony can affirm that God is true" (John 3:33). Those who believe in Christ know that God is trustworthy. Unbelief says, "I can't." Faith says, "I will."

Faith Is Like . . .

Receiving a Gift

If a person is in prison and the jailor brings him a pardon, he has to receive the pardon to get out of prison. The pardon is valid because the governor signed it, but it isn't *enacted* until the prisoner receives it and walks out of his cell. Saving faith is simply receiving God's pardon for sin, accomplished by Christ on the cross. Forgiveness, like all spiritual reality, cannot free you from sin unless you receive it. Therefore, faith is receiving God's forgiveness.

Sitting in a Chair

When you sit down, you put all of your trust in the chair. You rest in the strength of the chair. If you suspend yourself above the chair and keep all your weight on your legs, you are not sitting; you are standing very awkwardly. In order to sit, you must put your faith in the chair. Faith means letting go. Faith is resting completely in the chair, knowing it will hold. In the same way, when you rest completely in Christ, you put your faith in Him.

Switching on a Light

You know you'll get light when you flip the switch on your wall. But the light's source is not the switch; it is the electricity flowing across a wire connected to the power plant near your town. If your house is not connected to the power source, you can flip

switches all day and nothing will happen. Light comes from the generating plant, not from the switch on your wall.

Some mistakenly put their faith in outward actions, such as singing hymns, reading the Bible, or praying. When they turn on the switch, the light of faith does not go on. They have faith in faith or faith in their good works. But the only way to get results is to have faith in a power outside yourself – God.

Back in the '70s, a missionary visited at Liberty University and told a story about building a wood home in Africa. All the people in the surrounding villages still lived in grass huts. The missionary brought in a gas generator to create electricity for his home and strung wires from the generator to light bulbs in every room.

The missionary decided to have some fun, so one evening when the sky darkened, he invited the villagers to his front porch. He told them he was going to create light, like a fire, in a glass bulb. He blew on one of his fingers and with the other hand, switched on the lights.

“Ooooooohh . . .” the villagers gasped. They had never seen a glass bulb light up with fire! They jumped back in astonishment.

Then he blew on different finger, each time switching the electricity on or off.

He didn't string the villagers along forever. That very evening, he told them about the electric generator on the back porch – but they had not been around machinery and did not understand how it worked. They still thought blowing on a finger created “fire” in the glass bulb.

Then the inevitable happened. One day while the missionary and his family were gone, a villager sneaked into the missionary's house and stole all the light bulbs and sockets. He ran home, excited to show his new treasure to his tribe. He strung up the sockets and bulbs around his hut and waited for night to fall. Finally, when it was dark, the man blew on his finger while his family and neighbors waited with baited breath.

Nothing happened, as you have already guessed. He repeated the action several times, blowing on a different finger each time, but still no light. He knew the missionary prayed, so he tried that. Still no light.

The villager had faith in the method he had seen – blowing on a finger – instead of in the source of power that could bring light to his hut.

In the same way, our faith has power only when it is plugged in to God. But even then, we must turn on the switch to get illumination.

God is the source of faith. But God is much more than a generating plant. He designed the system, built it, and keeps it running. When it comes to faith, God is

everything. God even created the switch—faith—that we flip to get light.

Some ridicule our faith because they flipped the switch, so to speak, and didn't get light. Because they read the Bible or did some other Christian acts and nothing happened, they concluded it "doesn't work." But light does not come from the switch. One must put faith in the whole system, including the generator.

But we must flip the switch. Remember, there are conditions to faith, just as there are conditions to getting light in the room. When all of the conditions are properly met, and the switch is turned on, there will be light. There may be a generating plant, wires, a light socket in the ceiling, and a switch on the wall. But to have light, someone must turn on the switch. Faith is the link between the riches of God and our spiritual poverty. The spiritual lines are humming with power, but we will remain in the darkness if we do not act in faith.

The Hebrew word for faith, *emunah*, is usually translated in the Old Testament as "believe in." It means that a person has examined and experienced the truth and has a basis for his belief. God is real to him; he has heard the voice of God. *Emunah*, which occurs 152 times in the Old Testament, demands total reliance upon the Lord: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart" (Prov. 3:5). *Emunah* is connected linguistically with *amen* and the Hebrew word for truth, *emeth*. When we *emunah* in the Lord, we say *amen* to the truth and then we exercise faith.

Just like the little boy and his evangelist daddy: He believed in the father, said yes to the truth of his word, and jumped.

Growing Faith

True faith is the most active power in the whole world. Faith, which worketh by love, works all sorts of marvols; and where there is this true faith, it will prove its reality by its practicalness.

Charles Spurgeon

Principle

Your faith can grow continually, in uneven spurts, differently from other believers, or following a common path.

The point is, it can grow.

No one takes a giant leap before they take a running start. And no one is able to get a running start until he stands on his feet. Then he walks. And, finally, he runs. The Olympian in the broad jump triumphs at each level of competition before she wins the gold. Your faith must also conquer graduated lessons of growth if you hope to move mountains.

You stand to your feet of faith when you hear from a friend about a great answer to prayer, or read about David killing Goliath, or your pastor challenges you in a sermon to trust God. Whatever it is, something inspires you to rise and stand on wobbly legs, holding on to God's hand for dear life but determined to go somewhere with Him.

Your first step of faith is tied to spiritual yearnings. Maybe you hurt and want God to do something. Perhaps God has told you to do something and you know you must do it. And so you take a step.

You long to get somewhere, so with God's help you free yourself from the confines of immobility and *walk*. Yes, walking is freedom. Walking enables you to go where you want to go, when you want to go, at the speed you want to go. Walking

makes you the master of your fate. You can do things for yourself or something for God. Remember that word *freedom* – it begins with Christ: “If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed” (John 8:36, *ELT*).

When it comes to walking, gravity is both good and bad. Gravity is good because it keeps you and other things from flying around. Everything stays in its place; you don’t want rocks or chairs flying off to hit you, or hinder you, or hurt you. Plus, you need gravity to keep your feet on the ground! But gravity is also bad. When you’re learning to walk, you may trip and fall down. If you lose your balance, you could spill everything in your hands, tear your clothes, or even tumble down some stairs and hurt yourself.

Likewise, every step of faith offers both risk and reward. Every time you take a step of faith, you take a chance that you might trip and fall, or even hurt yourself. Paul tells us, “For we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7, *KJV*). Every time we walk forward in faith, we take a chance on stumbling, whether in ignorance, which can lead to doubt or unbelief, or in sin. Gravity pulls us back, but the joy of a new step propels us onward.

Certain fears are normal in the walking-by-faith business. We’ve fallen before and we may fall again – and no one enjoys taking a tumble. Look at the face of a baby who’s learning to walk: both joy and fear are in his eyes. There’s the joy of doing something new, something he has never done, something he has wanted to do. We may think it’s no big deal to walk, since we’ve been doing it for years, but it’s a big deal to a baby! Similarly, it’s a thrill for a young believer to trust God for money, whether it’s \$100 or \$1,000. To older believers, it may seem like no big deal – but it is!

Part of walking is seeing where you’re headed. A baby may start taking steps without looking, but he quickly learns this won’t do. Then he goes where he looks – just as you will go where you look. Where are you looking? God-given vision, spiritual perception, must be a part of your first leap of faith.

Motive is another reason a baby begins to walk. He does it because he has an internal ticking clock; walking is the next natural milestone of his growth, and that makes him want to take the first step. But biology aside, *the baby sees something he wants*. He’s tired of standing around when the person or thing he wants is across the room, so he walks across the room to get it. And isn’t that why most believers take our first step of faith? There is Someone over there, and we want Him. “Come to Daddy,” our Father beckons, and we obey.

And that’s why some take giant leaps of faith: they know God wants them to do

it. When Jerry Falwell led the whole student body to pray for \$5 million dollars to finish seven half-built dorms in 1979, he did it because he felt God wanted him to do it.

When you take a step of faith, it must be for a purpose. You don't just take a step of faith to see if you can do it. You don't pray for a miracle gift of \$1,000 just to see if you can get it. No. God is involved in a relationship with you and you don't put God on the spot just to see if He will do it. We are obedient to His call to leap, not the other way around.

Growth spurts

Children do not grow at the same rate from month to month, nor at the same rate as other children their age. Some kids grow faster than others, which is why 12-year-olds come in all shapes and sizes.

And isn't that like faith? At Liberty, there are many young people in freshman Bible classes who want to serve God as pastors, missionaries, musicians, teachers, and so forth. Some will grow faster in their faith during their college experience; others will grow more slowly. Why? It may be a difference in Bible knowledge, previous faith experiences, or yieldedness to Christ. This does not mean that those who are "behind" will always lag in faith; it only means their growth spurt has not started yet.

Some young people begin growing into adolescence earlier than others. We can mark a young woman's entrance into adolescence by the onset of her menstrual cycle. Some girls begin menses much earlier than others, just as some boys begin growing pubic hair and strong muscles much earlier than their peers. There's a peewee in every ninth-grade class, and right next to him is a brute. And yet, five years down the pike, they may be the same size.

And isn't that like faith? Some young Christians are born again and immediately begin to grow in their faith relationship to God, while others are born again and then seem to stagnate. There are few outward evidences of maturing faith. And yet, there may be an awakening period five or ten years down the road. One day, the Holy Spirit works in their heart, or they go through a crisis, or a romantic relationship ends, or they move across the country. There are many factors why people begin to grow their faith when they do. And nudged into a step of faith, they begin to trust God for bigger and better things than they've ever done before. While we can't understand or analyze others' faith from the outside, the Holy Spirit, who knows the hearts of all people, calls

faith into action according to divine providence.

Some kids get control of their muscles before others – that is, they are more coordinated than others. Child development experts tell us that large muscles grow first to give strength to a child, but the smaller muscles that control coordination may take many years to refine. Some children are natural athletes from the moment they can run, graceful and easy in their movements. Other kids trip over their own feet walking down an empty hallway.

And isn't that like faith? When a young person is first saved, she has a very clear and large perspective on God. Since God has saved her, He must be awesome and mighty. Just as the growth of the large muscles give strength, her growth in faith to know God gives her strength as a new believer.

Then, when the big muscles of faith are in place, the small controlling muscles begin to develop, giving her dexterity and coordination in her life of faith with God. Some believers begin this development right away, and they make it look easy. But others of us are clumsy for a while before we get the hang of things. The more we learn from the Bible, the more we know how to apply this great faith we have in God. The more we experience praise and worship, the more we know how to properly apply our requests in prayer. The more we learn of God's work in the local church body, the more we understand how we fit into God's plan and the more we have faith in God to use us in His work.

So what happens when our coordination begins to control our faith? We find ourselves gravitating into areas where our faith is best utilized. Some become teachers, using knowledge (small muscles) to control their teaching-faith in ministry to others. Some become evangelists, with faith to believe God will use them to win souls, and their small muscles steer them to share Christ with others. What about mercy-showers? They develop sensitivity to others and their small muscles coordinate their faith into a counseling or helping ministry.

Let's consider the mental growth of the developing child. When a child is first born, she can't communicate with words that others understand, nor can she understand the words others use. The part of her brain that controls speech has not finished developing. She will spend her first two or three years making connections between what she experiences with her senses and the words her parents use to describe those experiences. For example, a baby does not know what "bath" means. But when she experiences warmth and wetness and then hears the word "bath" again and again, she makes the connection.

And isn't that like faith? The young babe in Christ often has a tough time making sense of God's Word. But as he begins to connect scripture with his experiences – the life he is living – he begins to understand. As he grows in understanding, his faith to trust God's Word also grows.

Once a child becomes verbal, he also begins to *remember*. There's something wonderful about a small child who is so pleased to remember names, words, places, and best of all, to memorize Bible verses. Children in Sunday school can memorize Bible verses much more easily than their grandparents. Why? Because the child's mind is wired to take in everything and store it away.

And isn't that like faith? Our faith grows with our ability to *remember*. This includes memorizing scripture, but also great experiences of faith along our own walk with God. We remember when the church prayed successfully for money, and our faith for the present need is strengthened. Or we remember a great Billy Graham crusade when the lives of thousands were saved and transformed, and our faith for the coming outreach event is strengthened. Or we remember when God providentially protected us from danger, and our faith for a loved one's illness is strengthened. The greater our "faith storage" of memory, the greater our access to past lessons that we can apply to our faith today.

But not only memory is important. "Bright" children are able to make associations between the world around them and the facts that reside in their memory. This is called *insight*, or some psychologists call it the "Gestalt factor." Like the bright kids, we must recall, then interpret and understand the facts we have memorized. We memorize the scripture, and then one day we see a connection between what we know of the Bible, and how it works in daily life. We may give God credit, "The Spirit gave me insight!" Or we exclaim, "Wow! I never saw that before."

The philosopher Archimedes (c. 287-212 BC) had a long day and decided to take a hot bath. He had been trying to measure the cubic displacement of different objects, but he just couldn't figure out how to do it. Upon submerging himself in the bath, he saw water flow over the side of the tub. He jumped up and shouted, "*Eureka!*" He had discovered that water displacement could be weighed and measured no matter the size of the object.

The moment of insight comes many times like a flash of lightning on a dark night. We see something we've never seen before and we're ready to leap out into the unknown. As Peter stood on the edge of the boat, watching Jesus walk by on the water, all of his past memories of Jesus the Miracle Worker flashed across his mind. With a

flash of insight, Peter yelled out, “Lord, if it’s really you, tell me to come to you, walking on the water” (Matt. 14:28).

Jesus tested Peter’s faith with one command: “Come.”

Is one command all you need to take the leap?

Healthy Faith

To grow your faith, understand how growth happens. Yes, physical growth takes place within the parameters of God’s predetermined pattern for nearly every young person. Yet there is always the student whose physical growth exceeds all the others in the class. Why don’t you be the one who excels in faith? And of course, there is always the student who is last to grow, and the last to master a skill. But “late bloomers” still bloom.

Of course, there is healthy growth and unhealthy growth. What about the kid who stuffs himself with candy bars, drinks an overabundance of soda, and takes double and triple desserts at every meal? He’s bloated, bigger than everyone else, and some might even call him fat. If he grows too big, his health is put at risk.

Are there some people who stuff themselves on one ingredient of faith to the exclusion of all others? Yes! This is the person who only knows prophecy from the scriptures, but not much else. This is the person who only knows soul winning, but refuses to help the hurting person standing in front of him. This is the person who loves to worship on Sunday morning but never has time to serve her brothers and sisters in Christ.

This may even be the person who appears to have great faith because he has a multimillion-dollar ministry, a private jet, and a house with 10 bedrooms. Can you measure faith by the amount of money a leader can raise? No! That same leader might have started a hamburger franchise business and made a ton of money. What some people call “faith” is really just natural business savvy and personal charisma. It’s not faith at all. The world says, “All that glitters is not gold.” We say, “All that looks like faith is not faith.”

Don’t get fat by gorging yourself on one aspect of the Christian life. Instead, feed your faith a balanced diet of pursuing God. Do this through scripture study, prayer and worship, serving, sharing the gospel, and seeking a deeper connection with God. Running after Him will keep you healthy.

Steps to Grow Your Faith

*A little faith will bring your soul to heaven, but
a lot of faith will bring heaven to your soul.*

Dwight L. Moody

Principle

Faith is not separate from the rest of your life.
It is part and parcel of all you do.

When I was a sophomore at Columbia Bible College, I also was a 19-year-old weekend preacher at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Savannah, Georgia. I didn't know much about church polity or even much about the Christian life. But with great enthusiasm I jumped into the privilege of preaching the Word of God. One night my faith received a great jolt.

Grow Your Faith Through God's Word

One Saturday night around 11:00, the telephone woke me. It was Mrs. Van Brackle, an 84-year-old widow who was slowly going blind from cataracts.

Over the phone she told me the story of going to visit a famous faith healer that afternoon in Charleston, South Carolina (120 miles away). She told me about being interviewed and getting a card to appear on the platform. She waited in line. Finally, the faith healer laid hands on her head, prayed for healing from blindness, then bopped her on the forehead and yelled, "Heal!"

Then he asked, "Can you see?"

"No," she said.

The faith healer went through the same procedure two more times, praying for

Mrs. Van Brackle to receive her sight – but it did not come.

Then he announced, “Woman, it’s your lack of faith.”

When I heard her story over the telephone I was immediately intimidated. I knew I didn’t have faith to heal her. But she insisted, “Come see me right away.”

I put on my suit, tied a tie on a starched white shirt, slipped my Bible behind my belt buckle, and rode my bicycle across town – seven miles – to Mrs. Van Brackle’s home.

“God help me,” I prayed all the way there. I was scared to death. I hadn’t taken Healing 201, and I’d never prayed for the healing of anyone.

Mrs. Van Brackle lived in a shotgun house common to the poor of Savannah (in a shotgun house, you can stand at the front door and shoot out the back door without hitting anything). I walked the straight hallway to the back porch, which had been made into a room. The two grandsons who had taken her to the faith healer and seen the spectacle had come home with her to spend Saturday evening drinking beer. They were halfway to drunk, and they followed me into Mrs. Van Brackle’s bedroom. They wanted to see whether I could heal her. That scared me even more.

Mrs. Van Brackle rose up in the bed to ask a different question than I expected. I expected her to ask me to pray for her healing, but instead she asked, “The man says I don’t have faith, how can I have more faith?”

(Isn’t this the question this book is trying to answer?)

In panic, I prayed silently for help, *God help me, I don’t know what to say*. I wanted to encourage Mrs. Van Brackle, but I also didn’t want to be ridiculed by the half-drunk grandsons.

God immediately brought to my mind a verse I had memorized: “Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God” (Rom. 10:13, *KJV*). So I held my Bible out to Mrs. Van Brackle from the foot of the bed and said, “Mrs. Van Brackle if you will get into the Bible, and let the Bible get into you, you can have more faith because faith comes from the Word of God.”

But I knew that was a very academic answer. Students in Bible college could understand it, but how could I make it real for Mrs. Van Brackle? I held out the five fingers of my hand, as I had seen a chapel speaker do that semester. I explained, “It takes five fingers to grab a tool, such as a hammer, to drive a nail. In the same way, it takes five fingers to grab the Bible and make it a part of your life.”

Then I explained that the first finger is *hearing the Word*. I quoted, “Blessed is he who hears” (Rev. 1:3, *ELT*). Then I grabbed my Bible with my little finger (the pinky)

and tried to hold it, demonstrating that you can't do a very good job holding the Word with one little finger. "Hearing the Bible is not enough to build your faith," I said.

Then I explained that the second finger is *reading the Bible*, and went on with the same verse, "Blessed is he that reads" (Rev. 1:3, KJV). (This is a preposterous scene: a 19-year-old preacher boy is telling an 84-year-old woman who is nearly blind to read the Bible. The angels who saw this from heaven must have laughed.) Then I demonstrated that holding my Bible with two fingers is completely inadequate to the job.

"You must both hear and read the Bible to have faith, but they are still not enough," I said.

Then I explained the third finger is *studying the Bible*. If she wanted more faith, she would have to study to know the Word of God. I quoted, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God" (2 Tim. 2:15, KJV). Again I picked up my Bible, this time with three fingers, and told her that even with three fingers it's hard to drive a nail with a hammer, or hold a Bible.

The fourth finger was my index finger, and I explained that it stands for *memorizing the Word of God*. If she wanted more faith, she needed to do as the psalmist, and I quoted, "Your word I have hidden in my heart" (Ps. 119:11, ELT). I explained that, with four fingers I could pick up my Bible, just as I could probably drive a nail, but I couldn't do it *well* without my thumb.

Then I explained that the fifth finger—the thumb—stands for *meditating on scripture*. If she wanted to have more faith, she needed to make the Bible a part of her daily life, constantly reflecting on the truth of God's Word. I reminded her that Paul told Timothy, "Meditate upon these things" (1 Tim. 4:15, KJV). Then I held out my Bible to her with five fingers, demonstrating my strong grip on God's Word, just like I could get a strong grip on a hammer. I was ready for my big finish. "When we use all five ways at getting the Bible into our life, we strengthen our faith and are able to trust God—"

"Will you pray for me?" Mrs. Van Brackle interrupted.

Isn't that why she had phoned me to come and see her in the middle of the night? So I walked around to the edge of the bed near her head and got ready to pray.

"Will you pray that God gives me sight?" she asked. This was a difficult question that challenged me to my core. I knew that Jesus had healed blind people, but I had never experienced anything like that in my entire life. I didn't know what to say.

Then she asked, "Would you lay hands on me?" That's what the faith healer had done to her in the revival tent in Charleston. But I had never done it in my life, and the

only people I had heard about doing it were Pentecostal and I didn't want the people in my Presbyterian church to think I was going Pentecostal. I hesitated, panicking and thinking to myself, *What will I do?* Then I decided that, if Jesus had laid hands on people, it was probably fine for me, too.

So I laid my hands over her eyes (a leap of faith for me!) and prayed for God to give her sight—but of course I added what I had heard Presbyterians pray, "If it's Thy will." It was certainly not a prayer of strong faith to heal her. I didn't even know James 5:15 was in the Bible: "The prayer of faith shall save the sick and the Lord shall raise him up."

I prayed a safe prayer: "If it's Thy will." Why do I call this safe? Because if God didn't heal her, my lack of faith was not to blame. I could blame God; healing her was not "God's will."

I finished up praying, went home, slept soundly, and the next day I preached the sermon I had prepared. I don't even remember if I asked the congregation to pray for Mrs. Van Brackle's problems with cataracts.

The next weekend when I came home, a young boy came running to the church. "Mrs. Van Brackle wants to see you." It was only a block away, so I walked down to her shotgun house and went to the back porch, where she was sitting up.

"Hand me your Bible, I want to show you something," she commanded.

She began reading a portion in Isaiah; I don't remember where it was. But she read an entire chapter. I wondered why she was reading that chapter in Isaiah. Then she said, "Don't you see, you healed me?"

When she said, "You healed me," I went into a spiritual free fall. I didn't think about her, I didn't think about what she told me . . . I knew I didn't heal, I didn't have faith to heal, and I didn't want anybody to hear her say it.

Rather than rejoicing with her and praising God, I was more concerned about my reputation. I was more ego-centered than I was concerned about an 84-year-old lady, or about glorifying Christ.

I botched the situation. What should have been a glorious celebration at God's goodness and healing mercy was a confusing jumble instead.

But here's what matters: Mrs. Van Brackle took my borrowed object lesson to heart and grew her faith through God's Word—and He healed her. It takes the Word of God to grow our faith. The scripture comes into us in five ways (five fingers): hearing, reading, study, memorization, and meditation. When the Bible controls us, we can have the faith of God in us to believe Him for great and mighty things.

Grow Your Faith Through Prayer

When Jesus gave a sermon His disciples didn't understand, they asked, "Lord, increase our faith" (Luke 17:5, KJV). They were asking for the ability to understand and apply what He was teaching. To grow your faith, do the same thing. Ask for more faith.

When I first left seminary, I began teaching in a small, struggling Bible college in downtown St. Louis, Missouri. It was a faith institution, meaning they lived by faith, trusting God to send in money to take care of the college's needs. (The college didn't get financial support from a denomination or group of churches.) Many times money didn't come in, so the faculty went without salary. As I look back on my personal prayer request sheets that reach back to that time, I find that I was often praying for money.

When I became president of Winnipeg Bible College in Manitoba, Canada, it was a similar situation. Much of my life was focused on raising money to pay salaries and bills, raising money to build classrooms and improve facilities.

When I came to help Jerry Falwell begin Liberty University, again I found myself thrown into a situation where we were constantly praying for money to expand property. As I said earlier, Falwell had great faith to get these things from God. And in light of his great answers to prayer, I wrongly compared my faith to his and found mine inadequate. At times I became discouraged because I couldn't pray to receive answers as Falwell could.

So I added to my prayer list, "Lord, increase my faith." But praying for more faith didn't seem to make a difference. We're not talking about an occasional prayer for faith or a wistful prayer of faith; I prayed diligently, long, and continually for faith. I even fasted for faith, but didn't find God answering my prayer. So I just gave up, saying, "Let Jerry have the faith; I'll enjoy teaching the Bible."

Then one day the thought occurred to me, *There are many different things for which I pray and get answers, things different from what Jerry receives.* I came to the conclusion that God rewards my faith in a different way than He rewarded Jerry Falwell's faith. I couldn't pray successfully for tangible things, but when I have prayed for insight into God's Word, some of my best books have come in answer to my prayer of faith. To increase my faith, God opened my understanding to new truths from His Word.

God answered my prayer for more faith, but He gave me a different focus in faith than He gave Jerry Falwell. He will answer your prayer for faith, too. Begin praying for faith and watch what God does for you. He may give you faith, but not the kind of faith for which you ask. God will give you faith in keeping with His calling on

your life and with your spiritual gifts.

Grow Your Faith Through Obedience and Exercise

People with weak muscles need exercise to strengthen their legs and lungs to be able to run farther and faster. What about those with weak faith? Didn't Jesus tell His disciples, "O you of little faith" (Matt. 14:31, *KJV*)?

How do we make weak faith strong? The same way we make weak muscles strong: through exercise. The faith of Abraham is described as "not weak" (Rom. 4:19, *KJV*). He was approaching a hundred years of age and his wife, Sarah, at 90, was way past her childbearing years. Abraham had failed in his faith on other occasions. But not in this promise: "He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief" (Rom. 4:20, *KJV*). God promised 99-year-old Abraham he would have a child – and he believed it. This verse goes on to say that Abraham "was strong in faith, giving glory to God" (Rom. 4:20, *KJV*). So it's possible for a person to grow from "weak faith" (Rom. 14:1, *ELT*) to "strong faith."

No man becomes the heavyweight champion of the world unless he is victorious over his opponents, all of them. He must win every fight, climb over every obstacle, from victory to victory, to get the ultimate prize. Just so, we must climb over obstacles and hang on until God gives us a victory.

God "gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did" (Rom. 4:17, *ELT*). Abraham was unable to have children – but God did a miracle. Sarah was past the age of childbearing – but God did a miracle. So if we want to grow in faith, we must believe God can deliver the things He promises in scripture. Abraham had faith when circumstances were against him, "Who, contrary to hope, in hope believed" (Rom. 4:18, *ELT*). Lest we think the promises of God were only for Abraham, David, or other men of the Old Testament, Paul states that faith is available "for us also" (Rom. 4:24, *KJV*).

There are many descriptions of faith. Perhaps the most explicit is, "Faith is obedience to the Word of God." Jesus came walking on the shore of the Sea of Galilee toward His disciples who had fished all night. He commanded, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some" (John 21:6, *KJV*). In obedience to the command of Christ, the disciples cast their net on the other side and caught 153 fish, plus some they could not even get into the boat. Their obedience to the command of

Christ produced success. When the disciples obeyed the words of Christ, they exercised obedient faith.

Grow Your Faith by Seeking the Lord

The doctrine of seeking the Lord is not emphasized enough today. Maybe it is because we live in a day of “instant everything.” We have instant messages, instant replays, and often in the morning I eat instant oatmeal or instant grits—just add boiling water.

Some think they can get instant spirituality. People want their religion fed to them by the Internet, television, seminars, or blogs. As a result, we do not see many people seeking God or seeking a relationship with God. It takes too long. It’s just not fast enough.

You obey God when you search for Him. “When You said, ‘Seek My face,’ My heart said to You, ‘Your face, LORD, I will seek’” (Ps. 27:8, *ELT*). Our faith grows as we seek God, because when the soul seeks God, it gets a clearer view of its own weakness. That is, we come to grips with the issues that keeping us from growing in faith.

As a believer seeks God, she identifies her self-exaltation and lust for things. And just as in salvation, she has to get lost before she gets saved. As she seeks after God, she uncovers all that is keeping her from Him, and repents.

When she seeks God, she is looking for a deeper and more intimate relationship with their Maker. She needs more than a theoretical understanding of God. She needs to know Him on an experiential level. The Christian who seeks God continually asks, “Is my all on the altar?” because she doesn’t want anything to stand between her and God. In the Old Testament sacrificial system, the priest laid the animal sacrifice on the altar. In the New Testament, the cross of Jesus Christ is our altar and we must make sure that every sin is forgiven. Bringing our sins to the cross is the first step in seeking God.

Grow Your Faith by the Cleansing Blood of Christ

God constantly cleanses the Christian through the blood of Calvary: “But if we walk in the light as He is in the light . . . the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7, *KJV*). Daily cleansing makes possible continued fellowship with Jesus Christ that leads to strong faith.

Our position in heaven is established. We are justified by faith and declared

righteous by God. But on earth, sin can disrupt our fellowship with God. When that happens, we must recognize sin each time it occurs and confess it for cleansing and restoration to fellowship with God. Why? "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9, KJV). When you recognize sin in your life, you rid yourself of its hindrance by confession.

Sometimes confession requires apologies and restitution. Not only must we deal with sin between God and ourselves, we must also deal with sin that hinders our fellowship with other Christians. Since confession of sin is a constant experience, so the Christian will constantly grow in his faith as he constantly relies on the Lord's forgiveness.

Grow Your Faith by Yielding to His Will

The Christian must constantly surrender his life to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. You do this once when you are saved and your life is dedicated to Jesus Christ. But there are also later times to surrender to Christ. You do this each time a crisis or problem arises in your life. And every time you yield your life to the Lord, you grow in grace and faith.

Surrender is an unreserved *yes* to the standards of Jesus Christ. When you were first saved, that act of surrender was called *repentance*. Since you were saved, the act of surrender is called *consecration*, *dedication*, or *yieldedness*. In this act, the Christian abandons both his sin and his allegiance to his flesh. In that act of surrender, he takes on the life of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are not talking about sinless perfection or total eradication. The act of surrender is simply allowing the Lord to be ruler of your life at that moment. Paul made the appeal, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1, NKJV).

Growing in faith means you are trusting God more every day. You are trusting God for usefulness in service and intimacy in worship. When you surrender, you reexamine your motives in everything. You are not looking after the needs of your flesh; you are attempting to obey Jesus Christ.

Here it should be noted that the life of faith is not a life of asceticism. Also, faith is not just a negative denial of self, but a positive desire to manifest the Lord Jesus in every part of your life. Therefore, just as a person works hard for a better salary and

advancement, it is possible to grow your faith by being diligent in your Christian life. When faith is looking at the Lord Jesus Christ, then no matter whether a Christian gets wealth or gives up wealth, he looks to the Lord in everything. Wealthy Abraham was one of the greatest examples of faith in the Bible. Possessions can blind our spiritual sight, but if we focus on Jesus, they are irrelevant.

Yielding to God is a difficult transaction. It is elusive, like trying to pin down quicksilver, because the heart is deceitful (see Jer. 17:9). We cannot trust our feelings or our inclinations. We can only trust the Word of God. Yielding is nothing more than making a complete commitment to Christ.

Many people want to diet to lose weight. They dream of losing weight, they talk of losing weight, and they buy special diet books on losing weight. Even though they have these desires, they do not lose weight because they never make a life-changing commitment to changing their diet. But those who lose weight are those who make a commitment to pay the price. In the same way, those who walk by faith are those who pay a price to God. *You don't have the power to follow God until you make a choice to obey God.*

There are many today who want to be holy. They read books about prayer, hear sermons about Christian living, and attend lectures about how to attain the deeper life. But they cannot experience a life of faith because they have never made a choice to walk by faith. The life of faith begins when a person yields the very core of his life to Christ.

Grow Your Faith Through Communion with God

If you want growing faith, you must develop constant communion with Jesus Christ. As you drive down the expressway, you can talk to Christ without closing your eyes. As you work in the kitchen, you can sense His presence without seeing Him with your physical eyes. The life of faith is the life of communion with the indwelling Jesus Christ (see Gal. 2:20).

The path to communion with Christ is simply talking to Him as you go about your daily activities. The medieval monk Brother Lawrence called this “practicing the presence of God.”

Grow Your Faith by Not Trusting Yourself

Sometimes it is difficult to tell who is exercising faith and who is kidding himself. When it comes to living by faith, some people actually experience communion with God day by day and are actually living by faith. Others deceive themselves, believing they are living by faith when they are simply feeding off the atmosphere of their church or Christian friends. As in self-hypnosis, they have convinced themselves that they have what others around them have. In the future, these people will probably give up when they face a difficulty.

Those who have self-hypnotized faith are not hypocrites. They desired to have God's best and they jumped for it – but it wasn't toward God that they leapt, or because He called them to leap. Out of desperation or a hope that lightning may strike, they continue the charade, merely pretending to have bold faith, like the old farmer who incorrectly said, "Faith is believing what you know ain't so."

Faith is never blind faith. At least *biblical* faith is not blind. Biblical faith believes the God portrayed in the Bible. God doesn't bless ignorance. Since faith is grounded in the Bible and is directed by the Holy Spirit, our faith must be established on the facts of God's Word. You cannot have blind faith in God and walk in fellowship with Him.

There *will* be occasions when you do not understand your circumstances or see the results you seek. In those times, it may feel as if you are exercising blind faith. Paul testifies, "We walk by faith not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7, *KJV*). But we shouldn't call it blind faith, because that may mislead an untaught Christian. Our *faith* is not blind, only our vision of what lies ahead.

The secret to the Christian life is not your faith, but the indwelling faith of Jesus Christ. "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live . . . I live by faith in the Son of God" (Gal. 2:20, *NASB*). Jesus lives within you! And because He is the Son of God, Jesus has the greatest faith known to man. His faith is available to you. Don't trust yourself. Trust Him.

Grow Your Faith Through Gratitude

One condition for growing faith is also a result of faith: thanksgiving. Paul reminds us, "So walk in Him . . . established in the faith . . . with thanksgiving" (Col. 2:6-7, *ELT*). Faith and thanksgiving are tied to one another; each keeps the other in focus. The more we trust in God, the more thankful we are for His blessings. And the more we thank God for His blessings, the stronger our faith grows. When we lack faith, we are

ungrateful to God. Ingratitude weakens faith.

Why does thanksgiving strengthen faith? Because faith grows when the believing soul wholly forgets himself and turns all his worship toward God. When we are grateful without reservation, we express New Testament thanksgiving, entirely occupied with God who will reward our faith.

When we examine our unbelief, we see our lack of love, our insincerity, our weaknesses, and our sin. But there's something deeper than sins of avarice: there's the sin of selfishness. Our self-centeredness makes us turn our back on God. But we begin to break our self-centered attitude when we express gratitude for all He has done for us.

Gratitude is the least remembered of the virtues, but it is the fuel that fires our love for God. And loving God grows our relationship with Him.

First, thank God for the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ. Then thank Him for the gracious promise of eternal life. Next, thank Him for His guidance and protection for your life. Even in failure and defeat, thank God for His mercy and forgiveness.

Thanksgiving will teach your spirit to trust calmly in God. By rendering gratitude to Him, you revive your soul and strengthen your faith. Why? Because praising God and faith in God are two sides of the same coin.

Everything that has life can grow. Babies can grow, seeds can grow, and new Christians can grow. So can your faith. The very nature of life suggests growth. How alive is your faith?

But growth is not automatic. Babies need food, hydration, clean air, and loving touch. Seeds need water, nutrient soil, and sunshine. Young Christians need scripture, prayer, fellowship with other believers, and exercise in godliness and good works.

What does it take to grow your faith? In summary: the Word of God, prayer, obedience to God, exercising, seeking God, the blood of Christ, yieldedness to God's will, communion with God, gratitude, and not trusting yourself. While this list may not say everything a person must do to grow his faith, it is a good place to start.

My last suggestion to grow your faith: Begin where the needy heart starts. "Lord I believe, help my unbelief" (Mark 11:24, *ELT*).

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