

Study 7. Faith is Expectation

Growing Faith in God

Warm-up question: Were or are your parent's possibility thinkers or people that exhibited faith? Share a little about their beliefs with one another.

I grew up as a commercial fisherman in England working out of the port of Harwich, the busiest harbor on the east coast. From the age of six my father used to take me out occasionally on his trawler fishing boat, the Why Worry, fishing for Dover Soles, Plaice, Flounder, Cod, Skate, and Whiting. As a school kid, there were only a few tasks I could do, so I imagine the reason he took me out with him was to give my stepmother a break and get me out of her hair. He would take only one day off, Saturday, so now and then he would get me up early and take me with him on a Sunday. We had to get up at 2:30 in the morning to leave the harbor and set out to sea. We would finally get home at 5:00-5:30 P.M. During the weekdays, of course, I went to school. While at sea, my primary job was to make the tea and cook beans on toast for breakfast. (My American friends gag at the thought of beans on toast.) In my teen years, my father gave me more jobs that extended my skills to the point where I could take out his boat without his physical presence being there.□

There are lessons that I learned about faith from an early age while on the boat with my father, Tom Thomas. Every day we went out to sea, we would expect to catch fish. We couldn't see the fish, but we knew they were there and would tow our nets on the bottom for two or three hours at a time, trusting that we were catching something in our net. It was a beautiful thing when we found more in our net than we were expecting. My father was a risk taker. When a severe gale was blowing, he would still sail for the various fishing grounds where he knew we would catch fish. I used to hate the rough weather and the cold and snow in the winter. I wanted to be like most of the other warm-weather fisherman that would stay at home in strong winds, but my father's passion was catching soles, and Tom Thomas was one of the best at it on the whole of the east coast of England. He had an uncanny hunch as to where the fish would be, and he was rarely disappointed. Looking back, I know it was partly due to his experience, but I also am a firm believer that his expectation was an essential element in his success, as well as his determination and commitment. To a significant degree, faith is expectation.□

Different Kinds of Faith

We've said before, every one of us has faith to a certain degree. When we get in a taxi, we are putting our faith in the driver, trusting that he or she knows how to get to our destination safely. We don't ask them about their driving skills or training; we express faith in them. Likewise, when we go to the doctor, we show confidence in him that he knows what he is doing and that he has spent many years learning his profession, and if the doctor has to make a life or death decision he can be trusted. There are different kinds of faith, but only faith in Christ's finished work on the cross can save you:

1) Mental Compliance Faith.

Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven (Matthew 7:21).

Are the people that mentioned above true believers? Why or why not? Describe a true believer.

There will be many who have only mental compliance to the facts of the gospel only to be disappointed on the Day of Judgment. How sad! These people will have a form of godliness, but deny His power (2 Timothy 3:5). What do we mean by mental assent? There are those who have heard evidence of the facts of the gospel, what God has done in Christ, but they have never abandoned their sins or given up their lives to Christ. Their belief in Christ is of the mind, an intellectual understanding of what Christ has done, but no change of heart. Their inner nature is still that of habitually being a sinner. A true believer has given up his life into the hands of Christ. Christ is seated on the throne of his life, and now the person desires to be obedient to Christ as the lover of his or her soul.

Mental assent faith agrees with and admires God's Word, even admits the truth of it, but never receives the life of God for himself or herself. The Pharisees are examples of those with mental assent. Speaking to them, Jesus said, ³⁹"You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, ⁴⁰yet you refuse to come to me to have life" (John 5:39-40). They were people who knew the Word of God, yet they never came to faith in Christ to receive the gift of eternal life. A person with mental assent faith is dominated by a worldview that has no room for obedience to God; he continually shuts out the wisdom of God from his life. The throne of their lives is still occupied with self instead of Christ. A true Christian has given up all he has and all he is (Luke 9:23-26). Mental compliance faith sees it, admires it, and says it is true, but it doesn't work for them. They remain an observer, but not a participant.

2) Sense Knowledge Faith.

This kind of faith is also inadequate if one wants to live a life pleasing to God. Sense knowledge faith requires evidence to believe. A person can see miracle after miracle but still have no faith in God. Biblical faith in God is not dependent on what we see or feel (Sense Knowledge), but is dependent and trusting God's Word. When Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, was visited by the angel Gabriel while he was ministering in the Temple, he was told that he was going to have a son by his barren and aged wife. He responded to the angel by saying, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years" (Luke 1:18). Zechariah became dumb until the child was born due to his foolish words of unbelief and doubt (Luke 1:19). There he was in the Holy Place of God wanting proof that what the angel was saying was true!

Thomas, one of the twelve disciples of Christ, learned that his sense knowledge faith was inadequate after the resurrection of Christ. When told that he had missed the Lord's appearance due to being absent, he wouldn't believe saying, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it" (John 20:25). What Thomas was expressing was his desire to walk according to his senses. He wanted to see and feel before he would believe and trust that Christ had indeed risen. How gracious the Lord was to him by coming into the room and letting him see and feel the nail marks in His hands. Not

all believers though will have evidence given to their senses. We must live by faith and not by sight. Jesus said to Thomas, "**Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed**" (John 20:29). The kind of faith that God is looking for is expressed by those who have not perceived by the five senses, but still, have believed. The African impala is a perfect example for sense knowledge faith for the animals can be kept in an enclosure with a wall only 3 feet high, even though they can jump to a height of over 10 feet and cover a distance of more than 30 feet with a single bound. The animals will not jump unless they can see where their feet will fall. Faith is the ability to trust what we cannot see and leap out of whatever barriers to our faith keep us bound to the realm of the senses.

Can you think of a time when you took a step of faith that involved an element of risk?

3) Faith in God.

God is delighted with the kind of faith that trusts even though a person has nothing in his sensory perception to give him reason to trust. This doesn't mean that God is displeased when a person searches out evidence as to the truth of the gospel. The book of Acts tells us of the Bereans who examined the Scriptures daily to make sure that what Paul taught them concerning the gospel, was accurate in accordance to the scrolls of the Tenach (the Old Testament). But there will always come the point when a man commits or steps across an invisible line of faith and gives himself in obedience to Christ. This is true faith in God. Committing all you know of yourself to all you know of God and reaching out sincerely to a Father who has loved you before the world began to bring you to Himself (Romans 8:29, 1 Peter 1:2).

This kind of faith, faith in what God has said concerning the work of Christ, is pleasing to Him. **Without faith, it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6).** We have story after story in the Bible of people that exhibited faith in God even though their senses told them it was impossible. Noah built a boat on dry land at a time when it had never rained (Genesis 2:5-6), and the nearest water was miles away. It took faith for Joshua and the Israelites to march around the city of Jericho for seven days. Don't you think that the soldiers in Jericho stood on the battlements laughing as the Israelites walked around the walls doing nothing? The seventh day was a time for Israel to laugh for with a great shout the walls came down, no doubt with the laughing soldiers still on the tops of the battlements!

When I was living in Israel, I visited the Jericho site. One of the tour guides told us that archeologists that have worked on the site of Jericho tell us that the walls fell outward. God had spoken to the Israelites, giving them instructions as to what to do to capture the city. They responded with obedience even though it did not make sense. Sometimes God will offend the mind to reveal what is in our hearts. God is honored by faith expressed toward Him based on His Word. Paul, the apostle, put it this way: **"faith comes from hearing the message, the message is heard through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17).** Our faith in God will grow to the same measure that we input the data banks of our mind with the Word of God. **The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit (Hebrews 4:12).**

When you read that the word of God is living and active, how would you explain this?

What does it mean to live by faith?

How Can We Grow in this Kind of Faith?

I am presuming that you have already received the life of God by trusting Christ. That is always the first step. You cannot grow in your faith without having Christ on the throne of your life and being obedient to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. What I am talking about in this series is going beyond faith for salvation to believing God for the miraculous and expecting answers to prayer going on in your day to day lives. Faith in God is like a muscle that only grows by exercise. Begin to take steps of faith every day. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you opportunities to express your faith. Take time each day to pray for those around you, asking God to open their hearts to the things of God.

In my early days as a Christian, my central prayer was that God would help me to share Christ easily enough so that I could naturally speak to people on the streets. To me, that was a significant milestone in my life because of the way that I had become so introspective due to taking drugs. When you step out in faith, start where you are. Don't try to raise the dead as your early steps in growing your faith. Every step of faith you take will help you to believe God for the next situation. A belief in God that doesn't change your life at home is not a faith that will please and honor the Lord. Jesus taught us to take the beam out of our own eye before trying to help someone else with the sliver in his or her eye (Matthew 7:1-5). I am not saying to get your own life in order before helping others, but to be an example by your lifestyle. Live for God wholeheartedly, and the result is that people will take note of your lifestyle, and your words, and come to the Savior themselves. Pray that God will help you overcome things in your life that is hindering you in your faith walk with Him. The power of a godly life to affect others should not be underestimated. □

Can you think of a step of faith that you can take? What would you like to believe God for now?

John Wimber, a great man of God who is with the Lord now, used to say, "Faith is to a great part expectation, what are you expecting God to do for you?" I find myself arrested by the Holy Spirit occasionally when He will remind me of this. I pray, but do I expect to receive what I have asked of Him? Do I daily look for situations where God will answer my prayer? Do I believe that God has heard and is going to answer my prayer?

There is a story of a pastor who was working at his desk preparing a message for his church when his three-year-old daughter came into the office seeking his attention. She kept tugging on his arm asking him if he would build her a dollhouse to keep her dolls. He didn't like to be disturbed and blurted out anything that would get her to go away and not mess up his concentration. He answered her question with a "yes." A little while later he heard his daughter playing in the yard getting her dolls together ready for the dollhouse. The pastor left his work and began building the dollhouse because his daughter had trusted his word and was acting in faith in what he had said. God acts in proportion to our faith just like the father of that little girl did. When you believe and act on your belief, this is faith. I remember when I had spent time in the Christian bookstore as a young Christian; I came across a Dake's Annotated Reference Bible.

This Bible was full of notes alongside the text. I began to pray and ask God for it. While I was in prayer, a strong thought struck me, which I knew to be the Holy Spirit. He said, "Do you believe that you've received it, even though you don't yet see it? I answered in the affirmative. The thought came back to me, "What would you do if I showed up right now and put it into your hand?" I answered that I would be so full of joy. The thought came back, "Well, why don't you rejoice then if you believe you've just received it as you've prayed." I knew that the Spirit had spoken! I knew it was on its way, so I sang and rejoiced in my bedroom to the Lord. Sure enough, some days later, I was given a box on my birthday from a few friends of mine who were in a singing group. When I opened up the box, there inside was my Dake's Annotated Reference Bible for which I had prayed. God is so good! I had prayed and believed that what I had prayed for, I would receive. What I am talking about is an expectation that the prayer will be fulfilled. Are you expecting the answer to your prayer? This desire to see faith and expectation by the Lord is why Jesus on some occasions asked people about their faith to believe that He could heal them:

²⁷As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, calling out, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" ²⁸When he had gone indoors, the blind men came to him, and he asked them, **"Do you believe that I am able to do this?"** "Yes, Lord," they replied. ²⁹Then he touched their eyes and said, **"According to your faith will it be done to you;"** ³⁰and their sight was restored (Matthew 9:27-30).

If Jesus knew that two blind men were following him stumbling around together, why did he go indoors?

How important do you think it is for us to believe that God can and will do something for us?

Can I stop and make a distinction here on the matter of faith? Faith in God is not expressed by believing that God can do something, but that God *will* do something. Lots of people believe God can do anything He wants to, but many don't think that He will. These two blind men were expressing their faith that Christ would heal them if only they could get to Him. The longing of our God is that we would seek Him out and ask Him for our personal needs, overcoming every obstacle to our faith. He deliberately made them come and find Him. Jesus went indoors to the house hoping that the blind men would pursue Him. So many people never seek the Lord for their needs. According to your faith in pursuing Him and His ability to meet your need, will it be done to you!

How about you, do you believe He will answer your most intimate prayer? Do you find it difficult to believe that God will answer your prayer?

In the year 1907, John G. Lake, the American healing evangelist, had been reading about the explorations of David Livingstone and Henry Stanley's missionary trip to Africa. The Spirit revealed to him that he would leave the next spring with his family to minister the grace of God in South Africa. In January of 1908, he began to pray for the needed finances for the trip. His friend, Tom Hezmalhalch, decided that he would join him and also started praying. Together they determined that it would cost them \$2000 to get both families to South Africa by ship. They had been praying for a while when Tom got up, saying, "Don't pray anymore, John. Jesus told

me just now that He will send us that \$2000, and that it would be here in four days.” Exactly four days later, Tom returned from the post office and threw four \$500 drafts on the table. They bought their tickets, but John had no extra money for when they got to South Africa. They would have to trust God to meet their needs when they got there. All John G. Lake had in his hand by the time the ship reached Africa was \$1.50. The immigration laws of South Africa required each family that arrived to have at least \$125, or they wouldn’t be permitted to leave the ship. As they pulled into the port, Lake had no money. His wife, Jenny, looked at him and said, “What are you going to do?” Lake responded, “I am going to line up with the rest. We have obeyed God this far. It is now up to the Lord.”

As he stood in line, ready to explain his dilemma, a fellow passenger tapped him on the shoulder and called him to the side. He asked Lake a few questions, then handed him two money orders totaling \$200. “I feel led to give you this to help your work,” the stranger said. They had also been praying about a home where they should stay, after all, he and his wife had seven children. When they disembarked, they noticed a lady wandering around looking at everyone. When she found the Lake family, she asked how many were in their party. “My wife, myself, and our seven children,” Lake said. The lady suddenly looked ecstatic and shrilled, “You are the family!” Then she went on to explain how God had directed her to meet their boat and that on it would be an American missionary family consisting of two adults and seven children, and that she was to give them a home.¹ If you have heard God speak, then step out in bold, aggressive faith. If God can meet every need of the Lake family, why can He not you take care of you?

Believing Prayer

Let's look further into this vital topic of believing that God will answer our prayer. Faith is very much involved in our believing:

²²"Have faith in God," Jesus answered. ²³"I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' **and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen**, it will be done for him. ²⁴Therefore I tell you, **whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours** (Mark 11:22-24).

If you believe, you will **receive** whatever you ask for in prayer" (Matthew 21:22).

How is it possible to expel doubt from our hearts?

Our hearts are programmed from an early age to operate only on what we perceive with our five senses, but God wants us to live by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). Faith and spiritual power impact the spiritual realm that intersects with the physical world. We are given power along with being seated in a position of authority in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:

And God raised us up with Christ **and seated us with him** in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:6).

¹ Roberts Liardon, *God's Generals*, Albury Publishing, Pages 178-179.

Our position in Christ is due to the finished work of Christ on the cross, not because of anything we have done to earn us such a place of authority; it is all by grace. Our feet may be firmly in this world, but God has given us positional authority in the spiritual realm around us. We can choose to believe, even if the sense evidence says that it is impossible. I have seen many answers to prayer but am still in a learning mode and always will be! I often remind myself of God's Word, is there a scripture that I can hold on to and believe against all evidence to the contrary?

I notice in the Mark 11 passage above that Jesus referred to the expression from the mouth. He said "if anyone **says to this mountain,**" and also, "**does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen**" they will receive the very thing that they have asked for and believed that they have received. Words of faith impact the spiritual realm. An example of this is when Jesus was asleep in the back end of the fishing boat of one of the disciples. A storm came up that was so bad the disciples were afraid they would lose their lives. What did Jesus do? He didn't get up and trim the sail. He stood up on the rocking, heaving boat and **spoke** to the winds and the waves. "**Quiet! Be still!**" (Mark 4:35-41). My prayer for you and me is for us to see the power of the spoken word that is on the tongue of a godly Christian, walking according to the Spirit. Scripture says that "**the tongue has the power of life and death...**" (Proverbs 18:21). Have you ever spoken to something inanimate like that? We can speak to our doubts to depart. Our words are an expression of our faith. The mouth expresses what the heart believes:

⁸But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: ⁹That if you **confess with your mouth**, "Jesus is Lord," and **believe in your heart** that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and **it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved** (Romans 10:8-10).

One can choose to believe in God in the midst of every bit of sense evidence to the contrary. John G. Lake expected that God would help him even as he got in the line to show the officials his \$125. Notice that there has to be an expression of faith for it to become real. It is with a person's mouth that confession is made, crystallizing their faith. The challenge is to step out in what you believe and begin to trust God expecting Him to act even though our senses tell us it is impossible. Sense knowledge will always seek to quench any faith when a person expects something from God. There is another excellent example of this found in Luke's gospel:□

¹¹Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. ¹²As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance ¹³and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" ¹⁴When he saw them, he said, "**Go, show yourselves to the priests.**" And **as they went, they were cleansed.** ¹⁵One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. ¹⁶He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? ¹⁸Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" ¹⁹Then he said to him, "**your faith has made you well**" (Luke 17:11-17).

What can we learn about faith from this passage?

All these leprous men were told by Jesus to go to the Priests for the ratification of their healing. Think of it! Each man went on their way to see the priest for permission to be granted to enter society again, even though they still had their leprosy. They took Jesus at His Word. They were outcasts from the Synagogue and every socializing because of their disease and deformities. Don't you think that they began wondering about their condition when they set out to the Temple to see the priest? It was apparent when they left the presence of Jesus that they still had leprosy. How ridiculous it would seem to ask for a clean bill of health from the priest!

At what point along the journey they were healed we do not know, but it was sufficient distance that put off nine of them from coming back to thank Jesus. The healing only happened as they went on the journey believing and trusting God even though their senses told them their healing had not taken place. Their faith was expressed by their obedience to God's word, even though the evidence of the senses told them they were not yet healed! It was their faith and trust in Christ's Word and their obedience in acting on His Word that healed them. There was a level of expectation in their hearts that if they trusted and obeyed, Jesus' word would come true for them.

So, how can we believe God for something even when our senses tell us something different? Are we trying to con ourselves into belief? There are two ways that we are given faith according to the scriptures. There is the fruit of faith (Galatians 5:22) and the gift of faith (1 Corinthians 12:9). One is an impartation from God; John Wimber calls it a supernatural gracelet from God that gives one a faith that is unshakable for something they are asking God. The Spirit of God imparts a "know so" to the heart that is outside the realm of the senses (Romans 8:16). When one receives this grace from God, there is inner peace, a witness of the Spirit. An awareness that God has heard and that the answer is on the way. The other way that faith is expressed is that of growing and maturing in your faith by listening to the Spirit and acting on what He tells you to do. This kind of faith is known as one of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22) and grows over time, whereas the gift of faith is a divine impartation that is not affected by time or maturity. This gift of faith is what Jesus was talking about in the passage about having faith as small as a mustard seed:□

¹⁹Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, "Why couldn't we drive it out?"

²⁰He replied, "Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, **if you have faith as small as a mustard seed**, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and **it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you**" (Matthew 17:19-20).

When God drops a gracelet of the gift of faith on you, it is a divine "yes" that tells a person that God will back up a person's expression of faith by His power. I still remember being in my bedroom and hearing God's voice about the Dake's Bible. How did I express my trust and confidence that I was going to get exactly what I had asked for? I went out and bought one of those bar magnifying glasses that one can put on the text to make it larger. It was my faith expression that I was confident that it was on its way. Just like the little girl acted on her faith in her daddy's word for a dollhouse, so the child of God takes action on the word of Abba. It is not your faith that you have to muster up; it is a faith that one receives from God. Without Him, we can do nothing, but with Him, we can do all things. All things are possible to him who believes (Matthew 19:26; Mark 10:27).

Prayer: Father, thank you for loving us and sending us Jesus to die in our place to cleanse us from all sin. You who spared not your own son, how shall you not, with Him, give us all things (Romans 8:32). Grant us confidence and faith in your word.

Keith Thomas

Website: www.groupbiblestudy.com

Email: keiththomas@groupbiblestudy.com