

Understanding Faith

In the early years of both our marriage and faith walk together, we worked in a mission organisation and we were asked to establish a base of operations in the USA, aiming to recruit, train and send believers to the unreached world. Pip and I began to make preparations for a move to the US. We sorted out our possessions and sold the excess in order to raise money for our one way flights. Apart from our clothes and Pip's guitar we did not retain much. At that time there was a famine in Ethiopia. We felt God seemed say to us that we were to give the money we'd raised and sow it into this crisis, even though it would leave us short for our flights. However, we believed we had heard the Lord and so, in faith, we went ahead and gave the money away trusting God to meet our shortfall.

Aviation was very different in those days and the cheapest tickets were 'standby seats'. These were empty seats on a flight that were advertised and could be booked a day or so before departure. Before our departure date we found two standby seats on a particular airline and reserved them in the agreement to pay for the flights upon our arrival at the check-in-desk. We were still short of the full amount but went ahead with our journey to the airport, trusting God would provide. Pip had read a testimony in a book called 'Intercessor', by Rees Howells, of an occasion when he was taking a journey to speak somewhere but had no money for the ticket. He went to the train station and was standing in the ticket queue wondering how he'd get the money to buy the ticket. His turn to pay was rapidly approaching. Suddenly a person tapped him on the shoulder and gave him money and he bought his ticket. Here we were in the similar need and expectant for the same to happen to us! The day for the flights came but no money! Pip's brother drove us to the airport and gave us a bit of money for a cup of tea and enough money for the inevitable telephone call for him to pick us up when we failed to get a flight. We queued up at the airline's payment counter and knowing our shortfall gave our names. The attendant said, "Your standby tickets are on special offer today and saving you £32." Apparently because of competition between airlines over standby seats that very morning our airline had decided to reduce the cost by the exact amount of our shortfall. We were amazed! God knew all along how he was going to provide but it was not how we had expected. In fact, we were now richer to the amount of a cup of tea and a telephone call! We flew to America with that fresh testimony of faith in our hearts - the journey of faith continued and the work began.

The point in all of this is when you know you are doing the right thing the right way, trust God even when it looks impossible.

'Naturally impossible' is a good definition of faith. There is natural faith (for example, when you trust a chair to hold you without checking its strength) and there is supernatural faith. Faith in God is supernatural. In fact everything God does he does out of his supernatural power so when God answers your prayers of faith it is always a supernaturally charged event. When we trusted God would provide for those flights it was the operation of a supernatural substance in us. The bible clearly outlines that this is the nature of faith.

Hebrews 11:1 - 'Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the confidence of things not seen'

The things hoped for cannot be seen, but that does not mean they are not a reality. To God the future is just as much reality as the present. Having faith in God means that we also believe that!

We started off this teaching course looking at how we are justified by faith.

Romans 1:17 tells us that those justified by faith should live by faith: '*....the just shall live by faith*'

How does faith become a supernatural substance in us?

First you cannot earn it. It is a gift released to you and does not come by any form of striving. It is given by grace which means undeserved favour.

Ephesians 2:8

'For by grace you have been saved through faith and that not of yourselves it is the gift of God'

How do we receive this gift of faith?

It comes through hearing.

Romans 10:17

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

This means that a key to supernatural living is to 'become a good listener', a good listener of his word. God speaks his word into the ears of your heart by the Holy Spirit. Once this happens and you choose to follow his voice then supernatural faith will enable you to believe for supernatural outcomes. You see, all the activity of the supernatural God in and through your life will only be by faith. That is why Jesus said these words...

Matthew 9:29

'According to your faith be it done unto you.'

Let's go a bit further with this!

Because nothing is impossible for God and God works in us through faith, then everything is possible by faith. Jesus made the following statements...

Matthew 17:20

'for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain 'move from here to there' and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you.'

Mark 9:23

"Jesus said to him, 'if you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes'."

The opposite is also true; that where there is no faith then God cannot work. This was the experience of Jesus in certain places where he went.

Matthew 13:58

'Now He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief.'

In understanding the above you can see that all progress in the Christian life is only by faith. If a believer decides he is satisfied with his level of faith then he can make no more progress.

One of the reasons Jesus uses the example of a mustard seed is that the mustard seed starts out tiny but grows into a comparatively large tree. Our faith should be growing in our walk with God, as we get to know him and his nature better. As we trust God in small ways and see his provision and faithfulness, we then grow to trust him more. If we don't grow in our faith beyond the most elemental belief in his goodness, we will never become who God has created us to be. In fact God can do nothing more for that kind of person. The question that both a new and a mature believer will need to ask is 'am I satisfied with my level of faith?' Their answer will determine whether their faith will grow or not.

What competes with faith?

Pete: Before I received the Holy Spirit at conversion I lived according to the desires of my soul. I had no alternative. What I wanted, what I felt and what I thought was the framework that directed my decision making. At conversion the power of the Holy Spirit entered my life. Now I can make decisions from a different framework. This new framework is opposite to the natural course that my soul would take. It reads like this: - what does God want? How would God feel? What does God think? This was not only a conceptual change but also a spiritual one. In fact a deliverance had happened as this next verse describes,

Colossians 1:13

'He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love,

It was the power of darkness that infused mankind's soul with the 'I want, I feel and I think' framework of reference. Now that I have been delivered from the power of darkness I no longer need to make decisions that way.

Imagine being kidnapped by evil men. Then a powerful person who is vastly stronger than all your kidnappers appears and rescues you from their grip and takes you far away to a place of goodness. Now you are out of their grip, you are free from their control. However, even though you have been rescued you still have free will to go back to them. Looking at the situation in these terms, it's obvious that would be a stupid decision since all they want to do to is control and destroy you.

However, those kidnappers do not give up and they try to tempt you back by pretending they will be good to you. If you believe what they are saying to you and return to them you will only find that they have lied to you. You will then be back in their control and in their desire to destroy you.

This is what you will face as you live your new life of faith. The devil will tempt you to return enticing you with lies. But you have been delivered. Choosing to go back and make decisions from the old soul-centred framework will do nothing for you. Choosing to remain in your delivered status means the supernatural substance of faith can reign in your mind, your will and your emotions that make up your soul. **THIS IS WHAT IT MEANS TO LIVE BY FAITH.**

Faith gives us direction in prayer and we will look at this in the next session.

Suggested Further Study

Faith for Living