

Has there come a time in your life when you went all in? What was the outcome?



Is there any of the three statements that your struggle with? Is there any you are good at? If so why?



The Least of These Ministries
"A Works of Mercy Ministry"

By Faith



In Short:

- Faith increases with trusted obedience
- Faith is strengthened by trusting God
- Faith is in connection to our relationship with God

Having faith is about believing the things that God says, trusting that his word is true, believing no matter what happens, and holding on to the hope that one day the things we cannot see will be brought into the light for all to see.

Enduring The Race Through Faith

Our life comes with many distractions, failures, and difficulties. These challenges can interfere with our ability to win the race of life. Yet, with faith we are motivated to not only run the race but win it.

"Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us."

Hebrews 12:1

The statement "a cloud of witnesses" is saying in effect 'Look at all the testimonies of our great God!' There is emphasis on the witness provided by their living by faith in chapter eleven.

This faith that is used to win the race is described by three modifying statements.

- 1) *Laying aside every weight*: The things that weigh us down are not inherently wrong, but for the diligent runner or the faithful Christian they must be removed.
- 2) *Laying aside entangling sin*: This entangling sin may be different for each individual. This is a sin that a Christian is struggling to let go of. This recurring sin is what defeats a Christian and it needs to be laid aside for them to run the race successfully.
- 3) *Run the race with endurance*: There will come difficulties as we put forth strenuous effort in life. But, we are told to pace ourselves and bear the pain with patience.

Going Forward

"But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him."

1 Corinthians 8:3

The Greek word used here for "known" is *ginōskō*, *ghin-océ-ko*; In The New Testament this word frequently indicates a relationship between the person "knowing" and the object known. This verb is also used to convey the thought of connection or union, as between a man and woman.

As Christians it's important to remember that it's not only us who are actively seeking a relationship. God is also actively seeking a relationship with us. The closer relationship and more experiences we have with God is the stronger our faith will become. Building upon those experiences through trusted obedience is an important step within our faith. Because our faith with God comes in connection to our relationship with Him.

By faith we will experience the joy, confidence, and hope God promises. Having faith shows that we trust the things that He says, trust His word is true and trust in Him no matter what happens.

Our faith confirms itself by deeds of love as we help the people around us. We should focus on the things in this life that have an everlasting value. God's formula for our success is that we develop a relationship with him as we faithfully serve him.

In your spiritual journal write what God is saying to you on your heart. Write about how important your relationship is to him and why or how he would like to build your faith through that relationship.

What Is Faith

"Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

Hebrews 11:1

In The New Strong's Concordance it states that the Greek word used here for "Faith" is *"pistis, pis'-tis;* various applications: faith...conviction...reliance... assurance... Pistis is used of belief with the predominate idea of trust (or confidence) whether in God or in Christ, springing from faith in the same. ... " (Strong, 2010, pg. 202)

Having faith comes by being in relation with God and that relation/act of faith is our assurance of the things hope for.

Try to look at it this way:

- The "substance of things hoped for" relates to 'fruit of penance' or what we understand as an 'act of faith.'
- The "evidence of things not seen." relates to having a personal relationship with what is not seen.

Faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see. It's not that we need more faith. The bible tells us that if we just had the faith of a mustard seed we can move mountains.

Do you have faith?

What does that faith stem from?



The Debate Of Faith With Works

For critics there is much debate on Paul's and James teaching of salvation through faith and works. Paul's doctrine is of salvation by faith. For him faith practically equals salvation.

"Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness."

Romans 4:5

James's teachings reflects neither a negative nor a positive response to Paul's teachings. For he sees two kinds of faith: saving faith and professing faith.

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

James 4:17-19

In effect James is raising the question does professing faith simply by talking about it show that a person really has faith? He is pointing out that the kind of faith that does not produce works is not saving faith. As Calvin said: "Faith alone saves, but a faith that saves is never alone."

So the question still stands: Does the teachings of Paul and James contradict each other? There are several factors that demonstrate that they do not. (They both use the word faith with different meanings, they use 'justified' in different senses, and they give different illustrations though Abraham.)

We must also take into account the context of each statement. Paul is seeking to prove that the Gentiles can be saved apart from the works of the law and James is seeking to prove that true faith confirms itself by deeds of love. James and Paul are not face-to-face fighting each other they are back-to-back fighting opposite foes!

What is your opinion about faith and works?



Increased Faith

"And the apostles said to the Lord, 'Increase our faith.' So the Lord said, 'If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you. And which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and sit down to eat?' But will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink'? Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not. So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.'"

Luke 17:5-10

In this reading Jesus is clear that human obedience to God does not put God in debt to man. Jesus gives a clear, precise expression in few words that without the right state of mind or feelings in our service to God then we are merely hirelings.

Our faith often increases as we step out in trusted obedience. The key to our faith is not merely in a mental sense, but also in the sense of active faithfulness.

What do you suppose is your duty to do as Christians? What are some things you can do to go beyond your duty? What is trusted obedience?



The Parable Of Strengthened Faith

"There is a man who lives next to a horse ranch. He had watched a young colt grow up to become a great looking race horse. The man knows a lot about the horse.

He knows that the horse comes from a line of champions, what the horse eats, how old he is, who his jockey is and how well his jockey performs. He even knows how fast the horse can run!

After watching the horse practice for an upcoming race the man went to speak with the owner of the horse.

"I've been watching your horse and I can see he is preparing for a race. When will you be racing him?" He asked the owner. "That horse races for the first time next week." The owner replied.

That next week the man brought with him \$1,000 to the race. He walks up to the ticket booth to place a bet on the horse, but they told him that his horse won't race until the second race.

So the man goes down to the stands and watches the horses who are preparing for the first race.

He sees the horse numbered three and believes that that horse can win. Because the horse looks like a good horse compare to the other horses. But, he doesn't know anything more about the horse.

He goes back to the ticket booth and puts down a \$100 bet on number three.

Now if this man is willing to place a \$100 bet on a horse that he knows nothing about: How much of that remaining \$900 do you suppose he will place on the horse that he knows everything about? He would be willing to go all in! Right? And that is what it's like to have strengthened faith!"

Our faith is strengthened through wisdom and wisdom is gained by acuteness and experience. Like it was for the man in this parable our faith is strengthened by being able to trust God through our relationship with him. Our trust is gained by the wisdom that is supported by the evidence of what we can't see.

Can you relate to strengthened faith through relationship? What evidence stands out to you within your own relationship with God?



Going All In

When genuine faith is tested it brings glory to God and works for the good of the believer. There are many examples when someone had gone all in within the Bible. But the two examples I want to show you is when two women went all in even when they both were in desperate situations.

After all the pain they had to endure these two women still showed genuine faith that God would look out for them in there time of need. Although their outcome looked hopeless they both showed faith that had moved the mountain standing in their way.

The first example is when a widow woman had gone all in by helping another person when she herself was in desperate need. (1 Kings 17:8-16)

Elijah was sent by God to a widow of Zarephath in the land of Sidon. The widow was out gathering sticks when Elijah asked her for a morsel of bread. But, the woman only had a handful of meal in a barrel and a little oil. Elijah had told her not to fear. That the LORD would sustain her and her son if she would do what Elijah asked. The widow believed him and God made it that her barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Elijah.

This widow had shown her genuine faith by going all in. She had given all she had to live on to Elijah and God made sure she was taken care of.

The other example I would like to point out to you is the story of the healing of the hemorrhaging woman.

"Suddenly, a woman who had a flow of blood for twelve years came from behind and touched the hem of His garment, for she said to herself, 'If only I may touch His garment, I shall be made well.' But Jesus turned around, and when He saw her He said, 'Be of good cheer, daughter; your faith has made you well.' And the woman was made well from that hour."

Matthew 9:20-22

The woman probably lived as an outcast for twelve years and still trusted that God would heal her. Being unclean this woman took a great risk by pressing in on the crowd. She had gone all in to be healed.

These two examples of genuine faith is able to teach us that often God's blessing on our behalf is in proportion to our willingness to trust him. We all have a longing to be sustained or cured. When we show our faith by going all in for God He will give us the fulfilling and healing power we have all been longing for.

