

ADVANCING GOD'S KINGDOM: LIVING BY FAITH

Theme verse: *"The righteous shall live by faith."* Habakkuk 2:4; Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38.

INTRODUCTION:

The most amazing gift that anyone can ever experience is to become a child of God (Ephesians 1:3-8). To become a child of God requires a step of faith (Ephesians 2:3-8). Through faith, and only by faith, can one experience a righteous standing before God (Philippians 3:9). Having faith in Jesus and Him alone is the only way to experience complete salvation and eternal life (John 14:6.)

Praise God, through the death of Jesus on the Cross, His resurrection, and current intercession for us, we have every resource we need to live a holy and victorious life (II Peter 1:3-4). Sadly, however, so many believers fall short of believing the spiritual inheritance they have received through Christ.

I'm confident that each of you, or most of you listening to this teaching today, can fully affirm the simple truths stated above. However, the challenge for every believer is to **exercise their faith** so that what we believe in our mind will also be demonstrated in the life we live (Galatians 1:6-7). The Scripture also warns us to *"not throw away our confidence. It will be richly rewarded.....**but my righteous one will live by faith.** And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him"* (Hebrews 10:35-39).

The most exciting journey that a person can ever experience is the journey of faith!

The purpose or goal of this teaching is to:

A. **Briefly** look at and learn from the following themes:

1. Define faith
2. Know the importance of faith
3. Understand how faith is developed
4. Learn what hinders faith
5. Know the role of the Holy Spirit and faith
6. Give examples of faith
7. Know the importance of speaking faith
8. Understand how to respond when our faith is shaken

B. Motivate us to increase our faith walk in obedience to God's Word.

1. Faith defined

- a) Faith (noun) – (Greek = Pistis) means belief, firm persuasion, assurance, firm conviction, faithfulness (Wikibooks.org)
- b) Believe (verb) – (Greek = Pistueo) means to trust in and rely upon, commit to the charge of, confide in, have a mental persuasion. (Wikibooks.org)
- c) “It is the act whereby a person lays hold of God's resources, becomes obedient to what He has prescribed and putting aside all self-interest and self-reliance, trusts Him completely. It is an unqualified surrender of the whole of one's being in dependence upon Him. It is wholly trusting and relying upon Him for all things. It is not just mental assent to the facts and realities of truth, it must come from a deep inner conviction. – *“the demons also believe”* - James 2:19 (Wikibooks.org)
-"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not to your own understanding."
Proverbs 3:5
-"He that trusts in himself is a fool" Proverbs 28:26
- d) Hebrews 11:1 - *"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."*
- e) “Substance” (Greek = hupostasis) – means confidence, confident. Also means, “a standing under.” In other words, it's what is under or below what is visible, like the foundation of a building.” (Cambridge Bible)
- f) “Through faith, things hoped for become a reality. The believer is convinced that the things hoped for are real.” Example – promises of God; eternal life; salvation, etc. Hebrews 3:14 – *“We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end.”*
- g) Faith is the assurance that what the Bible says is true.
- h) “Faith is **not** positive thinking. Faith is the firm conviction that God will do what He says he will do.” John Pfeiffer
- i) “True Bible faith is confident obedience to God's Word in spite of circumstances and consequences.” Warren Wiersbe Examples: People suffering persecution, taking a stand for Biblical truths in face of what is politically correct.

For reflection:

-In dealing with everyday circumstances in life, do I find myself looking at what is visible (the circumstances) or do I generally go to what is invisible, my faith in God, trusting Him for peace, direction, and confidence?

-On a scale from 1-10 (1 extremely low and 10 extremely high), where is my faith level?

2. **Why is faith important?** - “Faith, then, is just as important as the air we breathe. While the oxygen in the air nourishes the body, faith nourishes the heart and the soul.”

- a) **Faith is necessary to please God** - Hebrews 11:6 – *“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”* It takes faith to believe in God that we cannot see. That pleases him.
- b) **Faith moves God to act** – Mark 2:5 – (Story of when Jesus healed a paralytic) *“When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven.’”* Later, Jesus told the man to take up his mat and go home. The man was healed. See James 1:5-7.
- c) **Faith gives us strength when faced with trials and tests** – James 2:3 – *“The testing of your faith develops perseverance.”* Because we live in a fallen world, we face many trials. Trials help to purify us (I Peter 1:7). The *“shield of faith”* enables us to defeat Satan (Ephesians 6:16)
- d) **Faith motivates what we do** – James 2:26 – *“As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.”* Picture a row boat with only one oar. It’s impossible to move forward. In life, we need both faith and works. (James 2:17-18)
- e) **Faith encourages others** – When people see our faith demonstrated, it becomes a means of encouraging them in their life. Colossians 1:3-4 – Paul was encouraged by the faith he saw in the church at Colosse. Paul was encouraged by Timothy’s faith. II Timothy 1:5 – *“I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in your mother also.”*

For reflection:

- Have you stopped to consider that “faith is as important as the air you breathe?” Why or why not?
- Can you think of a time when your faith helped you to overcome a major trial? How?

3. How faith is developed

- a) **By reading and studying God’s Word** – Romans 10:17 – *“Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.”* Satan likes to discourage people from reading or studying the Word knowing that their faith will be hindered. Example: When one opens a game that they’ve never played, it may seem impossible to accomplish the goal of the game. However, when one studies and learns the rules, confidence is built that the goal of the game can be achieved. Through reading God’s “Instruction Manual,” we learn the instructions and promises of God. These promises inspire and motivate us to take steps of faith in the journey of life.
- b) **By standing firm in our faith** – I Corinthians 16:13 – *“Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong.”* “Standing firm in the faith” means that we will not allow tests to shake our confidence in God. We will resist the temptation to give up. Each time we overcome tests and trials, a greater resolve to serve God faithfully grows within us.

Some tests that may shake our faith:

- Prolonged medical problems
- False accusations
- Unresolvable conflicts
- Uncertain times in which we live
- Financial stress
- Negative criticism

- c) **By exercising one's faith no matter how small it is** – Matthew 17:20 – *“Truly I tell you, 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.”* In the context of this verse, the disciples were unable to cast out a demon from a boy. It is very easy to see things in the natural realm as impossible. However, even if our faith is very small, we need to take steps of faith in order to develop our faith. Satan will always try to have us bound up in unbelief.
- d) **By reading about or observing others who have lived by faith** – Hebrews 11 shows us “Heroes of faith.” At the end of Hebrews 11, the writer describes many people who suffered and died for their faith while *“never receiving what had been promised.”* This shows courage and perseverance.

For reflection:

- Which of the four ways to develop faith as described above do you have the most challenge to do? Why?
- What major test of faith did you face? How did you overcome?
- Which of the four ways do you find to be a very normal part of your daily life?

4. **What hinders faith?** Hebrews 3:19 – *“So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.”* Tragically, the Israelites, because of unbelief and rebellion, were not able to enter the Promised Land until a whole generation died in the wilderness. Many things hinder faith from being developed in our life. (Note: Many of the points below are interrelated.)
- a) **Unbelief** – Numbers 13-14 describes the terrible story of unbelief and rebellion with the Children of Israel when they believed the negative report about the promised land rather than the faith report of Caleb and Joshua. Their unbelief resulted in huge suffering.
- b) **Doubt** – Doubt is the opposite of faith. Psalms 55:22 – *“Cast your cares on the Lord and He will sustain you; He will never let the righteous fall.”* Doubt may come when our circumstance go against human reasoning. Peter walked on the water but when he took his eyes off of Jesus and looked at the waves, he doubted (Matthew 14:28-29).
- c) **When we allow our feelings to overcome our faith** – Sometimes circumstances, temptations, or tests may overwhelm us. The result may be fear, feelings of inadequacy or unworthiness which lead to doubt. I Corinthians 10:13 says, *“No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are*

tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.” We must claim God’s promises and allow faith to overcome our fears.

- d) **It’s hard to see God in what is happening to us** – Some Christians grow bitter toward God and blame Him for certain negative things that happen in their life. Romans 8:28 – *“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have called according to his purpose.”* Faith allows us to trust God, even in the most difficult circumstance of our life.
- e) **Guilt from sinful actions in the past** – Some Christians wonder if God could ever forgive them for bad things they have done in their life. In John 8:44b, Jesus refers to Satan as a liar: *“When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”* By faith, we must claim the numerous assurances in Scripture that speak to the fact that faith in the cleansing blood of Jesus removes our sin (I John 1:9)!

For reflection:

- Is there any one thing above or something else that has hindered your faith at times?
- What did you do to overcome your doubts or struggles?

5. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in faith? John 16:13 says, *“But when He, the Spirit of Truth comes, He will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on His own; He will only speak what He hears, and He will tell you what is yet to come.”* It is impossible to grow in faith apart from the help of the Holy Spirit.

- a) **The Holy Spirit will encourage us to speak words of faith.** When we are feeling weak or insecure, He will remind us of the abundant life we have in Christ. John 14:26 – *“But the counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said.”* Once again, this reveals the importance of knowing God’s Word so that the Holy Spirit can remind us the special word that will meet our current need. Thank God for all of His promises!!
- b) **The Holy Spirit will change our thinking patterns.** I Corinthians 2:16 – *“We have the mind of Christ.”* Sadly, sometimes we are tempted to think negative thoughts that contradict who we are in Christ. The Holy Spirit will remind us of our spiritual inheritance. *“We are sons and daughters of God.” “He loves us with an everlasting love.” “There is nothing too difficult for God.”* For a believer that has been redeemed by the blood of Christ, there is no excuse for living with a negative attitude about our self or others. *“We are the temple of God.”* He dwells in us to constantly renew our thoughts. Additional references: Philippians 4:8; Romans 12:2; II Timothy 1:7; II Corinthians 10:5.

For reflection:

- When you are tempted with negative thoughts, how has the Holy Spirit come to your aid to help? Do you let Him help you?

-What does it mean to “speak words of faith?” Can we speak words of faith to our self? How can we speak words of faith to situations? How can we speak words of faith to others in ways that will encourage and NOT discourage them?

6. Examples of faith – Biblically, Hebrews 11 is probably the best place to find examples of faith, often called “Heroes of faith.”

- a) **Noah** – One can hardly comprehend the degree of faith it took for him to accomplish the task of building an ark (Genesis 6-9). Ark – 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high. He was over 500 years old when he started to build and it took approximately 55-75 years to complete.
- b) **Abraham** – Genesis 15:5 – When he was already an old man, it took faith to believe that his descendants would be as numerous as the sand of the sea and the stars in the sky. Hebrews 11:8 – He obeyed God and went even though he didn’t know where he was going. Genesis 22:2 – Abraham’s faith was severely tested when he was called to offer up his son Isaac as a sacrifice (Hebrews 11:17-19).
- c) **Moses** – Hebrews 11:23-30 – He chose to identify with the people of God rather than enjoy the pleasures of Egypt. The whole journey of crossing through the Red Sea and guiding the Children of Israel through the wilderness was one of faith.
- d) **Persecuted believers in today’s world** – Some facts: (Open Doors)
 - 1) 1 in 9 Christians experience high level of persecution world wide
 - 2) 14% rise in persecution from 2018 going into 2019
 - 3) On average, every month 345 Christians are killed for faith-related reasons
 - 4) Monthly average, 105 Churches and Christian buildings are burned and attacked
 - 5) Monthly average, 210 Christians are detained without trial, arrested, sentenced and imprisoned.
- e) **Pastors and leaders** – Every day they struggle with issues that have to be met; people problems; finances; preparing sermons and teachings; dealing with conflicts---all of this takes faith.
- f) **Everyday Christians** – Every day, believers face all kinds of trials; conflicts; financial issues; medical challenges; family issues; insecurities --- all of this takes faith.

For reflection:

-What have I learned about faith from examples in the Bible or otherwise that have helped me in my walk of faith?

-What issue am I facing right now that is taking a lot of faith to overcome?

7. The importance of speaking words of faith

Proverbs 18:21 says, “*The tongue has the power of life and death.*” Through the words we say regarding situations or to people can either build faith or hinder faith. Words can

encourage or discourage. Words can heal or hurt. A person that is growing in faith will exercise caution in the way they speak.

- a) **Necessary for salvation** – Romans 10:8-10 – *“But what does it say? The word is near you, in your mouth and heart”-that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, that if you **confess with your mouth** Jesus as Lord, and **believe in your heart** that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the **mouth he confesses**, resulting in salvation.”*
- b) **Speak to mountains in our life with faith** – Mark 11:23 – *“...if anyone says to this mountain...”*
- c) **Speak what we believe** – II Corinthians 4:13-14 – *“It is written, ‘I believed, therefore I have spoken.’ With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak because we know that the one that raised Jesus from the dead will raise us with Jesus and present us in His presence.”*
- d) **Example of Paul speaking words of faith over Corinthian church** – I Corinthians 1:4-9

For reflection:

- What may cause negativity in how we may speak about situations?
- What is the connection between speaking words of faith regarding a situation and believing?

8. Understand how to respond when our faith is shaken

There are many times in the Christian life when what we claim by faith or speak by faith or are trusting God go unanswered. We prayed for a healing and a person dies. We trust God for finances but struggle. We pray for a person to be saved or delivered but no response. What is our faith response in these faith shaking circumstances?

- a) **Believe and proclaim the numerous promises** that God is with us, no matter what the circumstances. (Isaiah 43:1-2; Isaiah 41:10; Philippians 4:12-13; Psalms 46:1-3)
- b) **Know that trials can serve a valuable purpose** (II Corinthians 4:7; James 1:2-4, 12) Philippians 3:10; Luke 14:27)
- c) **Resist the lies of Satan.** During times of crisis, Satan will whisper that we don’t have enough faith, that something is wrong with our life, that we will never get an answer, etc. Like Jesus, we must resist Satan’s lies by declaring God’s promises by faith. (James 4:7; I Peter 5:8-9; Psalm 91:1-4; II Thess. 3:3; Ephesians 6:11-17)
- d) **Be honest and admit to God your frustration.** He will not be shaken. The Psalms is full of David’s laments of God seemingly not coming through for him. (Psalms 3:1-6; Psalms 42:9-11). Note that when David complained to God, he often would conclude with praise to God—in faith, fully trusting God.
- e) **Reach out to someone else that is suffering.** Sometimes when we reach out to another in their grief or struggle, we ourselves will be encouraged.

For reflection:

- What have you discovered is the best way to overcome doubt when your faith is shaken?
- What would you suggest as additional ways to respond when our faith is shaken?

CONCLUSION:

The journey of faith will have its struggles, doubts, fears, and challenges all along the way. However, by drawing on God's grace, abiding in His Word, and resisting Satan's tactics to defeat us, we will overcome. Matthew 24:12-13 says, *"Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved."* Let's resist the tactics of Satan and the flesh to hinder our faith. Let us live as overcomers. When we do this, we will grow in our faith and God's Kingdom will advance!