

Joke about the man who falls down the cliff and hangs for hours on a limb. “let go!” (Is anyone else up there?)

The character of Faith.

1. First, let's look at faith from the reverse angle...from **what faith isn't**.

a. Faith is not denial.

- i. You have heard that Denial is not a river in Egypt haven't you?
- ii. Denying the existence of an obstacle is not faith.
 1. Imagine someone running around saying, “the door isn't there” “the door isn't there” as they run into it. That is not faith.
 2. When a crisis is in your life, trying to say it doesn't exist is not faith. To deny the reality of a tumor is not faith. God gets no glory for removing a tumor that was never there in the first place.
 3. Mary Baker Eddy (Scientology) ignores the fact that we are here, that life or death even exist. She can deny they exist, but she is still very dead right now.
- iii. Faith is required when the obstacle is so big that we realize we have no resources to move it.

b. Faith is not a positive attitude.

- i. Norman Vincent Peale's books made it sound as if somehow a positive attitude would be the answer to everything.
- ii. A Positive Attitude would be like someone saying,
 1. “I am going to beat this cancer.”
 2. Or “I am going to find a way to make enough money to meet my bills.”
- iii. This is hopeful thinking, and while it is positive, is not the same thing as faith.
- iv. While people of faith tend to be optimists, optimists are not always people of faith.

c. Believing is not even the same as faith.

- i. Belief is mental assent.
 1. I can believe that the chair will support my weight but I don't exercise faith until I actually sit upon it.
 2. I can believe God exists, but until I trust Him for my future, my present and my past, I have not exercised faith.
 3. The bible says, “...I will show you my faith by what I do. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that and shudder.” (James 2:18-19)
 - a. You see, the demons even believe God exists. But that belief is useless. It cannot become faith.
 - b. You might believe God exists, but that isn't worth much. Because....
 4. Faith is action.

d. Faith doesn't have to be blind – faith is an action based upon information. It is a conviction based upon some information. *If there is no information, it is not only blind, it is stupid!*

- i. You believe in G. Washington, even though you have never seen him. But you have been told enough information about him to consider the claims about him to be true and to acknowledge that he was in fact our first president.
 - ii. You believe your parents are your parents even though you didn't in fact witness your own birth. Because of the information you have gathered during your life that affirms that conviction.
 - iii. Our faith is not to be gullible. Discernment is a part of faith, testing what we hear to see if it is true or not.
 - iv. True faith is INFORMED FAITH.
 - v. John 20:31 " But these (things) have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name."
- e. **Faith is not an intellectual exercise.**
- i. It is an act of the will of TURNING TO GOD.
 - ii. The brain is not the only organ of knowledge. When it is hot out, we feel it. Feeling is a source of knowledge.
 - iii. When a young man falls in love with a young woman, how does he know it? He doesn't read an encyclopedia in order to base his love on reason. He trusts his feeling.
 - iv. Faith is similar, but is a "knowing that surpasses knowledge."
- f. **"Sorta Faith" isn't faith.**
- i. Sorta faith is the kind of faith that sits on the fence.
 - ii. Sorta faith is the kind of faith that sorta believes that God can do something, but never believes He will.
 - iii. Sorta faith is typical of the "hope so" kind of living that many people live today.
 - iv. It isn't grounded in a knowledge of truth, but rather it is founded in feelings that change with every emotional up or down.
- g. **Faith in Faith isn't faith**
- i. If I believe that I can walk across a 2x4 across a chasm, safely, and I believe with all my heart that my belief in this 2x4 will hold me, will it indeed hold me?
 - 1. There are some who say yes. They would say that faith is the vital ingredient, as if faith, in itself, as a character of human quality, is capable by itself of holding the molecules of this board together.
 - 2. That is new age bunk. That is faith in faith.
 - 3. Water can only rise to the level of its source.
 - 4. Faith is only as valuable and strong as the object it is placed in.
 - a. A.W. Tozier, "it is not enough to believe, we must believe the right thing about the right one."

2. So, who exercises faith?

- a. Actually, every one of us exercises faith in every action we take. For us to move, to start our car, to flip on a light switch, takes faith. Not much faith (unless your car was like my last car with

204,000 miles on it). You don't understand auto mechanics, yet you believe that your car will start with the turn of a switch. You place your faith in the engineers, mechanics and technicians who built your car to have done what it takes to allow your car to operate as they said it would. Your faith is expressed through the action of your turning the key.

- b. I can still recall one of our daughters when she was eight years old. We went to McDonalds and she had seen us buy our food dozens of times. Now, after we were done eating, she wanted an ice cream cone. We gave her the money and told her to go get it. She had never done it before. All she had to go on was the belief that her parents had given her enough money and that Mcdonalds would honor their word and give her an ice cream in exchange for the designated money she had. She was unsure of herself, looking back and forth, to see if we were there, looking at the clerk in the eyes, hoping, wanting to believe that she was taking the right steps to get her ice cream. Sure enough, she came back to the table grinning from her first transaction. It worked. She believed she could exchange money for food by herself! She had "faith" in her parents and in the promise that the fast food restaurant had made that it would exchange an item of food for a specified amount of money.
- c. A person from darkest Africa coming to the city, and never seeing electricity or artificial light, might think you were crazy if you told them that by moving a little plastic lever in the wall that the sun would come out in the middle of the night and illuminate a room. They might do it if they really believed you.
 - i. He did not need to know where the electricity comes from, how it is produced or even how the light switch worked to operate the light switch. He only had to follow the instructions, which required sufficient faith in the one giving the instructions. .
 - ii. The first time is real faith, the future actions are less based upon faith and more upon experience

3. Why do we need faith?

- a. Hebrews 11:6a "without faith it is impossible to please God."
 - i. Nothing else counts if faith is missing. There is no other foundation for Christian living, no matter how much of self-effort or energy we spend, it is meaningless without faith.
 - ii. Nothing touches the Father's heart more than his children trusting him with wholehearted, simple faith.
- b. Hebrews 11:6b **... for the one who draws near to Him must believe that He exists and rewards those who seek Him.**
- c. Hebrews 4:2 "because they were not united by faith with those that heard the message."
- d. Hebrews 11:3 "by faith we understand."
 - i. We believe so that we CAN see.
 - ii. The Greek words in this short statement are about *perceiving with the mind* and not the *senses*.

4. What exactly is faith?]

- a. Hebrews 11:1
 - i. “Faith is the substance, assurance and foundation of things we are waiting with joy and full confidence for, the evidence (like a math proof) and conviction of things which are unseen.”
 - 1. Faith is the persuasion of the mind that a certain thing is true and therefore worthy of trust.
 - a. Faith is able to take action because it acts upon UNSEEN information of which it is totally confident.
 - 2. It is an act of the will in addition to the understanding. It is both a moral and intellectual act.
 - 3. ...things we are waiting for with joy and full confidence for (confidence of things hoped for)
 - a. This “things hoped for” is not a wishy, hope so kind of action. It is a confidence that influences how you react and act.
 - b. Ice Skater – last skate, last program, leading by a large margin.
 - b. Faith is relational – to God not to a system of religion.
 - i. Faith in a religious system has no life or power.
 - c. Faith is only as good as the object it is placed in.
 - i. What is important is not the size of our faith but the size of our God.
 - ii. I may believe in a tip from a stock broker or an insider at a company. But the tip is only as good as the one who gives it. If he is unreliable, no matter how much I trust him, my faith is useless and will not make his bad tip good.
 - iii. My faith in your words is a reflection of what I believe about you.
 - 1. If I dis-believe you, what does that say about how I think about you?
 - 2. It says that I do not trust you or your character.
 - 3. But if I believe you, I acknowledge that your character is trustworthy and your word is worthwhile to believe.
 - iv. Imagine doubting God! What does that say about what we think of him?
 - d. Faith is essentially an act of TRUST. It is taking REFUGE in the ability of another.
 - e. To live by faith means to depend upon God alone. It means to voluntarily abandon the defense that so often fail us. The one who is destitute of his own devices and at the end of his rope will seek what he needs from God alone. We can know ourselves such that we realize our efforts to earn God’s approval are futile; and that we are dependent up upon His love alone.
 - f. Faith is a total dependence upon God that becomes supernatural in its working
 - g. People with faith develop a second kind of sight.
 - i. They see more than just the circumstances; they see God, right beside them.
 - ii. Can they prove it? No.
 - h. But by faith they know he is there.

5. Saving faith or Momentary faith?

- i. On the battlefield, it is common for a person to say, “Oh God, if I live through this I will serve you” and the prayer is forgotten once out of danger. Many of us have made statements like that. Those comments are not made of faith.
- ii. Momentary faith is as opposed to real faith as a jolt of current is compared to the continuous flow of AC current.
 1. Electricians know that AC is alternating current, 60 cycles a second. A/C wont work without the other end. It needs both poles because the current flows back and forth between the two poles. It is the same with persevering faith. It lasts because you are continuously experiencing the flow of God’s love and your response to Him.
 2. *Momentary faith will not save you because it will not change you.* True saving faith is a faith that perseveres.
 3. *Momentary faith is one that temporarily looks to God but does not turn His face to God.* Once the crisis is over, he turns his back on God.
- iii. Saving Faith is so called because it is where we rely solely upon Jesus Christ and rest in him alone for our salvation. We put our lives in his hands and trust his work.
 1. Acts 16:30 tells a story of a jailer, who asked the Apostle Paul...
 - a. ***"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" 31 So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved--you and your household." 32 Then they spoke the message of the Lord to him along with everyone in his house. 33 He took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds. Right away he and all his family were baptized. 34 He brought them up into his house, set a meal before them, and rejoiced because he had believed God with his entire household.***
 - b. ***Saved meant "to be made whole" and "set at right relationship with God"***
 2. Saving Faith is an act of faith through which a person appropriates the promises and person of Jesus Christ.
 3. Saving Faith is the state of mind in which a person, convinced of his sin and separation from God, flees from his guilty self to Christ the savior and rolls over the burden of sins upon him.
 - a. It is called the “great exchange.”
 - b. Where our sins are exchanged for His righteousness and salvation.
 4. Saving faith requires that we believe everything that God has said about himself and also everything he has said about us.
 - a. Until we believe we are as bad as God says we are we can never believe that he will do what he says he will do for us. (Tozier)
- iv. Have you experienced momentary or saving faith?

6. Where does faith come from?

- a. From evidence God gives us Romans 1:19-20
 - i. ***since what can be known about God is evident among them, because God has shown it to them. From the creation of the world His invisible attributes, that is, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what He has made. As a result, people are without excuse.***

- b. From the word of God
 - i. Romans 10:17 “Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.”
 - ii. Jn 20:31 “But these are written so that you may believe Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and by believing you may have life in His name. “
 - iii. .

7. How do we exercise/use our faith?

- a. We speak it out: Homologia – via confession (step two)
 - i. Means to speak of the same thing that is in our heart.
 - ii. Cf. Luke 12:8
 - iii. Cf. Matthew 12:39 “For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart”
- b. Confession (speaking) propels faith into reality. It takes what is in our heart and brings it out into the open through the pro-active action of words.
 - i. Romans 10:10: “For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified
 - ii. And it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.”
- c. Jn 12:42-43 “Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not *confess their faith for fear* they would be put out of the synagogue, for they loved praise from men more than praise from God.”
 - i. They would not confess or SPEAK OF THEIR FAITH IN JESUS.
 - ii. Their faith never changed them. It was DEAD faith. It only existed in the realm of their mind. It would not take on reality unless it was spoken.
- d. Have you publicly confessed your faith in Christ?
 - i. Jesus said, “if you confess me before men, I will confess you before the Father, but if you deny me before men, I will deny you before my Father.”
 - ii. Public speaking of our faith in Christ completes the transaction of faith –
 - 1. Nabisco story.
 - iii. Trusting God enough to speak out what we believe is our act of “picking it up at the baggage counter.” Confession is an act of watering the seed of faith.
- e. Obedience is the final step. (step three)
 - i. 2 Cor 9:13 “Men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the Gospel of Christ.
- f. Remember George Mueller, who I talked about last week?
 - i. George Mueller’s primary motive for establishing faith run orphanages was not just compassion for orphans, but the clearly defined desire to show the world that God would honor the faith which would take him at his word, and depend absolutely and only upon him.
 - ii. He exercised his faith....by not allowing himself to be placed in a condition where he *could not* exercise his faith at all times and in all places.
 - iii. He preferred the eternally and supernatural experience of God’s presence and provision over the momentary and fleeting feelings of false security.

8. Why do we have weak faith sometimes?

a. Undeveloped (little) faith:

- i. The King James version says, *"And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief..."* (Matt 17:20). In the original Greek, that word is not 'unbelief' but rather "little faith" or "undeveloped faith."
 1. Undeveloped faith is faith that has not grown in its knowledge or trust of God.
 2. It is "neglected faith"...as the disciples in Mt. 17:20 were dealing with a situation where they could not drive out a demon. Other parallel passages tell us that "this kind only comes out by prayer and fasting." The undeveloped faith essentially is faith that has not been fed with the Word of God and Prayer.

b. UNBELIEF

- i. Oligo-pistas: The word doesn't just mean "little faith" it is actually a term that indicates "negative faith"; or commonly "unbelief."
 1. Unbelief talks to itself instead of to God.
 2. Unbelief hides itself behind a façade of "being smart"
 3. Unbelief is trust in oneself rather than God.
 4. Unbelief exists because we trust what we see instead of what is unseen.
- ii. We do not read and study the word of God
- iii. We do not have a willingness to submit to God's will
- iv. Our faith will grow in proportion to our willingness to respond to and obey God's plan

9. How do we build/grow our faith? Actually, we don't so much grow our faith as our knowledge of God.

- a. 2 Thessalonians 1:3 says, "we...thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more."
- b. Faith is a gift from God.
- c. And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith." When Jesus said to them to forgive their brother over and over again, they exclaim..."add to our faith!"
 - i. The disciples had met a problem that was bigger than their faith. Jesus, their master, gave them an answer how their faith could grow.
 - ii. Luke 17:6 "And the Lord said, If you had faith as a grain of mustard seed, you might say unto this sycamore tree, Be plucked up by the root, and be planted in the sea; and it should obey you."
 - iii. He basically says, "your faith only needs to be small...its enough!:"
- d. As I read the scriptures, I did not find instructions about GROWING our faith. I looked at Abraham, Moses, Noah, Paul...and in every case I did not find faith that had grown.
 - i. What I did find was faith that CONTINUED or PERSEVERED.
 - ii. What I found wasn't that the emphasis was on their growing faith
 - iii. But on their increasing knowledge of God and His goodness and care and provision.
- e. It was through their knowledge of God that was experienced through faith, that they grew their capacity to trust God for more. It wasn't their faith that grew, it was their knowledge of God that grew.
 - i. The infinite One, the One who cares for us like a father
 - ii. The one who is creator and sustainer
 - iii. The one who pays the price for our sins

- iv. The one who provides for our needs and makes it possible for us to love others with His love.
- f. Our faith will not grow by talking about it or learning about faith. Even this sermon really isn't geared to cause you to decide to grow your faith in God...**but it is geared to getting you to ACT upon your faith in God.** It is only through your deciding to TRUST the INFINITATELY TRUSTWORTHY ONE that you will ever experience lasting peace and joy.

10. Application

- a. Churches regularly pray, "O Lord, send us a vision of what we should be doing!"
 - i. And then when they get it they say, "Sorry, Lord, but we can't afford that vision."
 - ii. Or "We don't have the people or resources."
 - iii. Or "That vision means we will have to change"...
 - iv. ...**How bout a different vision that leaves us comfortable, okay?** (kinda like "is there anyone ELSE up there?")
- b. Listen very carefully to this: A vision that is within our ability to accomplish it will never glorify God.
 - i. Because if we can do it on our own, why would it require supernatural power?
 - ii. The vision that comes from God will require His people to obey His voice when He says, "let go!"
 - iii. We must allow God to give us a vision so great that it CANNOT BE ACHIEVED unless HE INTERVENES
- c. Let's put our faith into action.
 - i. Next week, a team of us will be calling a number of you to consider ministering in areas that might require you to stretch.
 - ii. In fact, we hope that you will look at what it requires and say, "I can't do this in my own natural abilities."
 - 1. You may have never done anything like it before.
 - 2. You may lack experience or confidence or even the skills necessary.
 - 3. You may even doubt your own ability.
 - iii. But at the same time, we hope that you will also say, "I am willing to do it if the Lord will empower me to do it."
 - iv. You will be asked to make a difference
 - 1. in a child's life
 - 2. in a youth's life
 - 3. in a adult's life
 - 4. in a visitor's life
 - 5. in someone's life who is homebound...

11. Response

- a. Is your faith in a religion or a system or in yourself?
- b. Is your faith in something other than the God who revealed himself in Jesus Christ?

- i. If so, you can turn to God and ask Him to become your source of life, your future and your saviour.
- ii. The very act of turning to him and giving Him your will and your heart is an act of saving faith.
- iii. Speaking out what you are doing is the next step.
 1. Confessing, speaking out what is in your heart.
 2. The bible says that “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you shall be saved.”
 - a. You have an opportunity to make that step of faith today. You can step out of your chair and walk up here to me and let me know that you want to turn to God in faith. That you want to say “Yes!” to Jesus. That action is a step of saving faith and will change your life!
 - b. Won’t you do that now? Don’t be embarrassed. Every person here has done it once in their lives when they gave their heart to Jesus. Others are praying for you to make this most important decision, to trust Jesus in faith and to take the step of faith.
 - c. Won’t you let go?
- c.
- d. Faithful Christians don’t depend upon what is SEEN for their decision making.