

THE BIBLE ON FAITH

Faith Requires Action

Faith occupies a preeminent place in the Bible. Without it, pleasing God is impossible (Hebrews 11:6). Exploring faith's dimensions helps us understand it more fully. Our faith needs ongoing attention.

My mother who died in 1956 used the same aluminum vegetable blanching pot seventy years ago that I used in 2023. I feel a connection with her when it is on the stove. It has received no maintenance other than washing after each use.

Our bodies aren't like that. They automatically adapt to keep from overheating when they are surrounded by air that is 100 degrees Fahrenheit.

Scientists use the word homeostasis to describe this self-regulation. It includes maintaining our body temperature, pH, fluid balance, blood sugar levels, and other variables even though our diet, environment, and activity level vary.

I won't bore you with the details. Frankly, I don't fully understand them. Suffice it to say that an awesomely wise God created us with all these regulatory abilities in place. If scientists created life that couldn't regulate itself, it wouldn't last long.

Unlike my blanching pot, our faith needs attention. Unlike our bodies, faith can't regulate itself.

First, let's consider faith as a noun. In Philippians 1:27 the Apostle Paul identified "the faith" with the Good News. It describes

the gospel of Christianity as a package. It includes what Christians must believe and how they must live.

“Be on guard. Stand firm in the faith. Be courageous. Be strong” (1 Corinthians 16:13 NLT). “The faith” describes the Good News in Acts 14:22; 1 Timothy 1:2, 3:9, 6:21; 2 Timothy 2:18; Titus 1:4, 13; Philemon 1:10; 1 John 2:13, 14; and Jude 1:3.

Faith is used as a noun more than a verb in the Bible. It means to trust or believe in something so thoroughly that it affects every area of life. I believe in the value of back-strengthening exercises and do them regularly.

Since I believe back exercises are important, I do them. Biblical belief allows no contentment with a profession and practice disconnect. Admittedly, living the gospel is a lifelong pursuit to become more like Jesus, and none of us has yet arrived.

“Belief” that downplays the importance of godly conduct lacks a foundation of repentance. It is just mental agreement with the facts of the gospel but no commitment to the changed life the gospel produces. “Faith” that doesn’t transform doesn’t save either.

Strengthening our faith is a cooperative effort between us and God. Like water in a glass, our faith will evaporate over time if we ignore it and take it for granted.

We nourish it with God’s word, prayer, Christian fellowship, and telling others how God has changed our lives.

Faith Comes from God

Where does faith originate? Do our hearts generate it? Is it some innate instinct that turns us toward something bigger than ourselves?

Faith is mysterious. It suddenly appears like a deer at midnight in the headlight ahead on the road. Yesterday I didn't think much about God, seek Him, or trust Him. Today I do. What happened?

One fall day in 1968 I had no assurance I was right with God. The next day I did after God's grace visited my dormitory room.

Grace and faith are both God's gifts. "God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it" (Ephesians 2:8–9 NLT).

We don't earn God's favor by the good things we do or by manufacturing faith from an internal factory. God gives us the ability to believe.

God gives faith in varying amounts. "In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out with as much faith as God has given you" (Romans 12:6 NLT). We measure ourselves by the faith God has given us (Romans 12:3). Not by scales, tape measures, or mirrors that reflect our images.

Since faith is essential to please God (Hebrews 11:6), we must combine it with the gifts God has given us to do certain things well. For example, without faith teaching God's word accomplishes nothing of lasting value.

Great faith is a gift the Holy Spirit gives to some (1 Corinthians 12:9). Some excel in faith (2 Corinthians 8:7). That is their spiritual gift.

Faith is also a gift from Jesus. We can't separate it from the saving righteousness of Jesus that God credits to our account when we put our faith in Jesus (2 Peter 1:1). Faith and love come from Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 1:14).

Faith and God's word are vitally connected. Faith springs to life from hearing the Good News about Christ (Romans 10:17). The assurance I first felt in 1968 sprung from 1 John 5:11–12.

Faith and hope in God are based on Jesus' resurrection which God's word describes. "And if Christ has not been raised, then all our preaching is useless, and your faith is useless" (1 Corinthians 15:14 NLT).

Faith Is a Major Player in God's Universe

Repenting from evil deeds and putting our faith in God is fundamental (Hebrews 6:1). When we do, God forgives our sins and makes us right in His sight by faith in Jesus (Luke 7:50; Romans 1:17, 3:22, 3:27, 3:28, 3:30, 5:1, 9:30, 10:10; Galatians 2:16, 3:24; Philippians 3:9).

God cleanses our hearts through faith (Acts 15:9) and counts us who believe as righteous (Romans 4:11, 22, Galatians 3:6). Even if we are Gentiles, we still qualify (Galatians 3:8)!

We who are saved openly declare our faith (Romans 10:10). With confidence and joy, we look forward to sharing God's glory (Romans 5:2).

Faith transfers us from the kingdom of darkness to Jesus' Kingdom (Colossians 1:13). We become God's children (Galatians 3:26) and Abraham's real children too (Galatians 3:7). Jesus said faith is one of the more important aspects of the law along with justice and mercy (Matthew 23:23).

Faith confidently expects God to keep His promises even though we have never seen Him (Hebrews 11:1). It believes He rewards those who sincerely seek Him (Hebrews 11:6). Faith spurs risky, God-pleasing actions believing He keeps His promises (Hebrews 11). Such faith isn't common on earth (Luke 18:8).

We gain life through faith (Galatians 3:11) and continue to live by faith (Hebrews 10:38). We understand God's creation of the universe through faith (Hebrews 11:3). We receive the Holy Spirit through faith (Galatians 3:14). We overcome seemingly impossible circumstances through faith (Mark 5:36, Luke 8:50).

How God Responds to Faith

A rheostat changes the flow of electric current by increasing or decreasing resistance to its flow. That decreases or increases the brightness of a light bulb. Similarly, increasing faith increases the flow of God's grace. What applause is to a performer, faith is to God. It greatly pleases Him.

Jesus responded positively to those who had boundless confidence in His authority over disease (Matthew 8:10, 9:2, 9:18, 9:22, 9:29, 15:28; Mark 2:5, 5:34, 10:52; Luke 5:20, 7:9 8:48, 17:19, 18:42; Acts 3:16). He emphasized what faith without doubt can accomplish (Matthew 21:21, 22; Mark 11:22; Luke 17:6).

Prayer united with faith heals the sick. (James 5:15). Through our faith God powerfully protects us until we receive salvation in full (1 Peter 1:5).

God Stretches Our Faith

We are God's faith-building projects. We need marathon faith, not sprint faith—faith that doesn't quit when the going gets tough. Jesus initiates and perfects our faith (Hebrews 12:2).

God Tests Our Faith

Like we harden and temper steel to increase its strength and reduce its brittleness, God uses the heat of our troubles to test our faith and fortify it with endurance (Genesis 22:1; Psalm 81:7; James 1:2–4). God values enduring faith. Trials test faith and reveal its backbone. When it remains strong amid trials, it brings praise, glory, and honor to the one believing when Jesus is revealed to the world (1 Peter 1:7).

How Faith Grows

Demonstrations of God's mighty power nourish faith (Exodus 14:31). His parting of the Red Sea evidenced His faithfulness to the Israelites, increasing their faith in Him.

Other people nourish faith as well. Jonathan encouraged David to remain strong in his faith (1 Samuel 23:16).

Paul and Barnabas encouraged believers to continue in the faith (Acts 14:22). Judas and Silas encouraged and strengthened the faith of believers (Acts 15:32). Paul sent Timothy to the Thessalonians to strengthen and encourage them in the faith (1 Thessalonians 3:2). God's proven trustworthiness and human encouragement are to faith what a leaf blower is to a fire.

Why Faith Must Grow

Stagnant faith is unhealthy. Long static faith is as serious an illness as long COVID. Jesus expects more than just a little faith in His followers (Matthew 6:30, 8:26, 14:31, 16:8, 17:20; Mark 4:40; Luke 8:25, 12:28).

Faith can have gaps that need filling (1 Thessalonians 3:10). Some believers are weak in faith (Romans 14:1).

The goal is to be strong in the faith and not settle for less (Titus 1:13; 1 Peter 5:9). Abraham's faith didn't weaken (Romans 4:19) but grew stronger (Romans 4:20).

Some people are full of faith (Acts 6:5). They trust God without any doubts.

The shield of faith stops the devil's fiery darts (Ephesians 6:16). Christians defeat the evil world through faith (1 John 5:4). Those with a stagnant faith are as vulnerable as knights without armor or nations without armies.

Why Faith Is Vulnerable

Not everyone who professes faith has it. Not all faith is genuine (2 Corinthians 13:5; 2 Timothy 1:5).

Some people let faith slip away like a greased pig from their grasp. Some turn away from the true faith (1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 2:18).

Faith can fail (Luke 22:32, John 16:1). The love of money causes some people to wander from the true faith (1 Timothy 6:10). Others follow foolishness (1 Timothy 6:21).

The tempter can get the best of us and destroy our faith (1 Thessalonians 3:5). If we don't cling to it tightly, we can become shipwrecked (1 Timothy 1:19). Please don't take your faith for granted.

Signs of Growing Faith

In the soil in plastic cups in mid-March, I plant tiny tomato seeds. They germinate and grow under lights in my basement. I transplant them outside around May 10th when they are about twelve inches tall.

They continue to grow. They produce blossoms. Small green tomatoes appear. They increase in size. They begin to ripen in July. I start picking them in mid-July.

Faith is similar. Faith's seed is God's living, eternal word (1 Peter 1:23) planted in the soil of our hearts. God intends that growing faith will bear lasting fruit (John 15:16).

Not like tomatoes which eventually rot if they aren't eaten or processed. But eternal fruit and changed lives of people in our webs of relationships and beyond through our influence.

So, what are the signs of growing faith? Faith varies a lot. Some are young in faith and others mature (1 John 2:13) Some are full of the Holy Spirit and strong in faith (Acts 11:24). But the faith of others, like a mirage, is counterfeit (2 Timothy 3:8). As fish are associated with water, genuine faith has associations.

Growing love demonstrates flourishing faith (Galatians 5:6; 2 Thessalonians 1:3). Love pours from a pure heart, clear conscience, and genuine faith (1 Timothy 1:5). Self-sacrificial love (1 Corinthians 13) and patience are the fish in the waters of sound faith (Titus 2:2). So are generosity (Philemon 1:6), listening to God (Hebrews 4:2), and not showing favoritism (James 2:1).

Living, and saving faith produces good deeds (James 2:14, 17, 18, 24; 2 Thessalonians 1:11), demonstrating that we are right with God. Serving well makes us more confident in the faith (1 Timothy 3:13). By contrast, Wrong behavior denies true faith (1 Timothy 5:8).

Faith should lead to knowing the truth and living a godly life (Titus 1:1). Faith should be visible through our patience, love, and endurance (2 Timothy 3:10). Jesus is watching us and looking for these qualities (Revelation 2:19).

Marching in faith's parade are moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, patient endurance, godliness, brotherly affection, joy, and love (Philippians 1:25; 2 Peter 1:5–7).

Those with faith in God talk about it (2 Corinthians 4:13). Christians testify about their faith in Jesus (Revelation 19:10).

Grow Your Faith

Before I pick ripe tomatoes, I must spend weeks fertilizing, watering, and weeding my tomato plants. Likewise, we have responsibilities to produce lasting fruit.

We can't just sit down, prop our feet, sip a cold drink, and expect God to handle everything. We must pursue faith (1 Timothy 6:11), like bargains in the market. Faith requires our full attention.

We must stand firm in the faith and be courageous and strong in the rocking boat of life's ups and downs (1 Corinthians 16:13; 2 Corinthians 1:24). We must maintain our faith in Jesus (Revelation 14:12) as we do our homes and vehicles.

Jesus' disciples asked Him to show them how to increase their faith (Luke 17:5). The key is maintaining a vital connection with

Him. “Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness (Colossians 2:7 NLT). That’s how we remain in Him (John 15:4).

Grow Others’ Faith

Faith isn’t a private matter like personal finances. If we only care about our faith, it’s probably stillborn. That’s not biblical faith.

Paul worked to safeguard the faith of others (Philippians 3:1). “When we get together, I want to encourage you in your faith, but I also want to be encouraged by yours” (Romans 1:12 NLT).

Help people live a life of faith in God (1 Timothy 1:4). How? “Be an example to all believers in what you say, in the way you live, in your love, your faith, and your purity” (1 Timothy 4:12 NLT). Build each other up in the most holy faith (Jude 1:20).

The Bible refers, not to individuals, but to churches that were strong in the faith. Such churches grew (Acts 16:5). The Ephesian, Colossian, and Thessalonian churches were described as strong in the faith (Ephesians 1:15; Colossians 2:5; 1 Thessalonians 3:7). The Roman Christians’ faith in Jesus was talked about all over the world (Romans 1:8).

Defend the Faith

The Gospel is a message about faith and truth (1 Timothy 2:7). Truth matters. What we believe matters a lot. Ground yourself in the truth. Then defend it (Jude 1:3).

Some upset others’ faith by teaching error (Romans 16:17). Those who understand the gospel are anchored solidly against the pull of the current of the river of false teaching. They won’t drift

away with it. Instead, they fight for the true faith (1 Timothy 6:12) in the army of believers (Philippians 1:27).