

Keys to Great Faith

*LAYING HOLD OF THE FAITH THAT
CAUSES JESUS TO MARVEL*

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My desire is that through this article you will be stirred to walk in a faith that causes Jesus to marvel, as did the Roman centurion in Luke 7. This kind of faith is what Jesus is looking for as He entrusts greater measures of His Spirit to the Church in this hour. Jesus' ministry on earth perfectly represented the presence of God "behind the veil." He needs clear channels through which His Spirit can accomplish this same perfect will. This kind of faith will leave Jesus unlimited as to what He can do in us and through us. Before you are finished reading this, may you be consumed with a passion for such a faith so that it arises within your heart and reveals the greatness of God in our generation.

In What Are We Placing Our Faith?

In the four Gospels, Jesus praised certain people for their great faith. One of those events was His encounter with a Roman centurion and his sick servant. (This encounter will set the stage for what the Spirit will unveil throughout this article.) The Jews obviously thought highly of the centurion: "And when they [certain Jews] came to Jesus, they begged Him earnestly, saying that the one for whom He should do this was deserving, (5) 'for he loves our nation, and has built us a synagogue'" (Lk. 7:4-5). In using the word "deserving" in this context, the Jews were saying that the centurion had earned or merited the healing of his servant and, because of that, Jesus should heal him.

In contrast, let us look at the report the centurion gave concerning himself. He said, "Lord, do not trouble Yourself, for I am not worthy that You should enter under my roof. (7) Therefore I did not even think myself worthy to come to You. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. (8) For I also am a man placed under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." What he said seems contradictory to the Jews' report. He did not deny the good report they gave concerning him nor made it an issue. He made *the truth* the one vital issue.

The truth was that no matter how good his reputation was among the Jews, he could not use it to manipulate Jesus to give what He was freely willing to give. Any attempt to do so would have

been an affront or insult to the great love and mercy of God. The centurion understood that his love for the Jews and the good things that he had done for them did not make him deserving of the miracle, so he threw himself entirely on the mercy of God. Herein lies the primary reason why Jesus said concerning him, "I have not found so great a faith, no, not in Israel" (v.9). The centurion's faith was not in his good works or in any attempt on his part to impress God. His faith was based solely on the revelation he had received of God's love and mercy as revealed through the life and ministry of Jesus the Messiah. Acts 10:38 declares that, "...God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him." The centurion's faith was in the goodness of God as revealed through Jesus and in the understanding that Jesus could and *would do* the same for Him.

This humble attitude formed the basis that enabled the centurion to understand not just earthly authority but also Kingdom authority.

- † He knew Jesus was also a man under authority as he was (v.8).
- † He saw that Jesus was only doing what His Father told Him to do and thus had His Father's total backing. The signs, wonders, and miracles bore witness to that.
- † He knew that the unseen power of Christ always produced the desired results.
- † He also had a deep sense of his own sinfulness (characteristic of him saying he was unworthy) and his need for the mercy of God.
- † Unlike many of the Jews of that day, he was not self-righteous but loved the praise of God more than the praise of men.

Because of this, he was rewarded, possibly, the greatest compliment that the Lord could give anyone.

This encounter along with some others in Scripture reveals some pitfalls that we must avoid in order to walk in such great faith that causes Jesus to marvel.

The Four Pitfalls

Four pitfalls to walking in great faith must be avoided. These pitfalls:

- 1) Were avoided by the centurion and other people Jesus likewise commended.
- 2) Are "high things" that we will need to cast down in order for us to walk in this kind of faith (2 Cor. 10:5).
- 3) Will keep us from truly hearing and valuing the word of God and His covenant promises.

Pitfall #1: False Humility – Pride in Disguise

Was the centurion's humility false when he stated that he was not worthy? It would have been *if* he had walked around with a long face saying, "I am so unworthy" as an attempt to manipulate the Lord to have pity on him. False humility uses a cloak or outward display of

humility as an attempt to impress God and get what is needed. Self-pity could also be included in that. God is moved only by a submissive and obedient faith.

Beloved, listen carefully, there is nothing we can do to impress God. He is only impressed with His own workmanship and our faith in it. Even our faith is enabled by God so He is not impressed with our mental attempts to comprehend, know, and have faith in Him.

Faith comes as the result of the truly humble heart of person receiving a revelation of the goodness of God. It causes us to cease from our labors and enter His rest. His written word teaches us His ways, gives testimony to His goodness, and is the report of the historical acts of His love and justice toward humanity. "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Ro. 10:17).

The centurion avoided the pitfall of false humility and this was one of the main reasons he had such great faith.

Pitfall #2: Offense – Hurt Feelings

A woman from Canaan was met with at least four formidable obstacles before she received deliverance for her daughter (Mt. 15:2). They were:

- 1) The contempt the Jews had for Canaanites.
- 2) The lack of concern shown by Jesus disciples (they saw her as a nuisance; Mt. 15:23).
- 3) Jesus told her that His God-given mandate for ministry did not include her nationality (v. 24).

Before going to obstacle number four, let us answer these questions. Would you agree that the first obstacle was enough to turn most people away? How did she ever overcome the first three? Verse 25 states: "Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, "Lord, help me!" She decided that in spite of what He might do, she would give Christ His due honor—worship and prayer. *She overcame by maintaining a heart of worship.*

...and now the final obstacle:

- 4) Jesus answered her with an insult: "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs" (v. 26). He addressed her with a term that was used metaphorically in referencing "unclean" people.

What was her response? "He hurt my feelings...I'm never asking Him for anything again. Jews are snobs!"? No, she responded with humility, confessing her uncleanness, by referring to herself as a "little dog." *But...*she referred to herself as a little household dog who would happily and wholeheartedly appreciate any crumbs from her master's table (v. 27). What an excellent response. Jesus' delight with her was proven by His response:

"O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire. And her daughter was healed from that very hour" (v. 28).

How does this apply to the difficulties you are facing?

Pitfall #3: Pride or Boasting in Ourselves

The centurion could have come to Jesus and said, “You know the things that the Jews are saying about me are true. So I agree with them that it makes me worthy of getting my servant healed.” This is what I would call the “God owes me one” mentality. Many of us have come to God not realizing that we had this mindset and have wondered why we went away with our needs unmet. How often have we prayed, read our Bible, and done many other Christian duties and services not realizing that our motive was to try to impress God or our fellow man? Is this not being self-serving?

What about the times when we came before the Lord with our “great faith” on display, only to end up with disappointment, because we were not healed or we did not receive the answer we needed? If we come before the Lord boasting about how much faith we have, we will end up quite disappointed. Hear what the Bible itself declares on this subject: “Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith” (Ro. 3:27).

Faith does not draw attention to itself. It already has its commendation from God because it comes from Him and therefore will only glorify Him. True faith does not struggle, but it rests in a place of thanksgiving, praise, and adoration unto God. If we are struggling to believe, then we are not in true faith. True faith overcomes all things because it is the *victory* that overcomes the world (1 Jn. 5:4). There is no defeat with true faith.

Pitfall#4: The Cain Syndrome

Abel’s offering was accepted by God but his brother Cain’s was not. Why? Can an *unsuitable* offering ever be given to God when true faith is present in the heart? Can a *suitable* offering ever be given without true faith in God? What does God require of us, not just in offering, but as a condition of our heart? He requires faith from a pure heart. True faith is proven by confession from our mouth and actions of surrender and obedience to the directives of the Holy Spirit. It *always* receives the necessary experience from God as defined in covenant promises.

Abel understood what God required—that anything offered as a product of “the sweat of a man’s brow” (good works that do not flow from faith in God) would be unacceptable.

Abel’s acceptable offering invoked and caused God’s favor to abide upon him. Because of his wickedness, it also provoked Cain to offence toward God and jealousy toward his brother—to the point of murder. (This defines the enmity that exists to this day between Christ-centered religion and those that are man-made.) Before murdering his brother, Cain was warned by God: “If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin crouches at your door; its desire is for you, but you must master it” (Gen. 4:7; AMP).

What must we learn from this? The self-willed efforts and “good-intentions” of fallen humanity will always fall short of God’s glory. This will always cause enmity between those who truly

know, honor, and follow God's ways and those who think they are doing what is right. To invoke God's full favor upon our lives, we must make sure, as did Abel, that we know what God requires and honor His ways above ours or anyone else's. True faith, therefore, must begin with its knee bowed completely in adoration and surrender to God's Lamb of sacrifice who has taken away our sins and not bowed to our ways, understanding, and self-willed efforts.

May this be our consuming cry: *Father, burn self-will out of me. Help me to overcome the offense of Your not accepting "my" best efforts. Forgive me for becoming envious of those who have entered Your rest—those upon whom your favor rests. I desperately long to cease from my toil. Remove from me anything of the Cain Syndrome. Jesus, you are the only acceptable offering, including the thanksgiving and good works that flow from me because of Your indwelling life (Heb. 13:15-16). In Jesus' wonderful name, I ask this. Amen.*

Practical Faith

Faith will rise within our hearts when Jesus shows up, even as it was when He walked on earth. He is the Living Word of God. Through His word, spoken or written, He reveals Himself to us. Our faith comes from Him alone—by hearing His word. Every time we read the Bible, Jesus desires to step out of those pages and be just as real as He was during Biblical times. An encounter with Jesus, the Word of God, is what it takes to cause faith to arise in our hearts. We encounter Him primarily through His Spirit speaking to us through the written word. Therefore, we must be careful how we hear and respond to what He says because he only gives grace to the humble. He may tell us to go dip in a certain river seven times. If we are not careful, we will be like Naaman was at first and miss our salvation. Thank God, his servant convinced him otherwise (2 Ki. 5).

Faith is not just believing in something as in healing. Many people believe in healing but some do not attain the faith to receive it. Faith hears the voice of God concerning a given situation and fully cooperates with Him. *Faith does not flow out of works or obedience, but works or obedience flow from faith.* It is the spiritual means imparted within our heart (not our mind) by God by which we can see and appropriate those unseen things made available to us freely in Christ. That inward and unseen certainty becomes our victory that overcomes all things. The very character of the One from whom they come secures these things, absolutely, for us. This reality always accompanies true faith. When faith rises within our heart, then we have what we ask for. It is the *title deed* for things unseen (Heb. 11:1).

Faith is not something we conjure up. It is not a product of our positive thinking, our ability to quote Scripture, to count something as being done, and of our mentally assenting to the truth of Scripture. It does not consist in our frantically going about saying, "I am healed. I am healed." It is a deep realization imparted within our hearts by God that it is done! It is first our coming into agreement with the unseen and sure provision of God.

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; (7) and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Php. 4:6-7).

“And the effect of righteousness will be peace <internal and external>, and the result of righteousness will be quietness and confident trust forever” (Isa. 32:17; AMP).

Faith may have to seek God seven times (perfection) in order to see God’s provision. Our souls must be brought into perfect (seven times) submission to Christ’s light and easy yoke (Mt. 11:25-30). Elijah went to the brow of the hill seven times before he heard the sound of abundance of rain in the Spirit. He heard the sound with his spiritual ears before it began to rain (1 Kings 18).

Faith brings God’s reality into our impossibilities. It waits for Jesus to reveal Himself in the manner in which we need Him. This is its intended goal. In the early 1990s, I was playing Church league softball. During one game, I became so weak I could hardly function. I was sweating profusely and could hardly breathe although the game was at night and had just begun. Later I determined, according to the symptoms, that I was in the beginning stages of a heart attack. While in the outfield, I began to pray in the Spirit and a passage of Scripture came to mind: “But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you” (Ro. 8:11). I spoke that verse as faith arose in my heart. Then I felt something like electricity start at the top of my head and go through the rest of my body. When that happened, I became a different man. I finished that game with more energy than I had in any other game and have been healed ever since. God has often come through for me in similar ways, although sometimes not as quickly. His yoke and burden are truly easy and light.

Why did Jesus not find such great faith in all of Israel?

The answer to that question is simply this: in varying degrees, the Jews had put their faith in their lineage as descendants of Abraham rather than in God. Both John the Baptist and Jesus pointed out this fact. John told them not to say within themselves that they had Abraham as their father (Lk. 3:7-8). By taking refuge in such thinking, they disqualified themselves as heirs of the righteousness that comes through faith (Ro. 3:9-31). *They thought that they deserved anything from God because of being the offspring of Abraham.* In contrast, remember what the centurion thought concerning himself in spite of what anyone else said.

Their claim to entitlements from God could not be based on *the fact* they were descendants of Abraham, but only on true repentance. Jesus told them that if they were true children of Abraham that they would do the works of Abraham (Jn. 8:39). Abraham’s works flowed out from his faith in God. Both Jesus and John rightly labeled them (the Jews who they were addressing) as a brood of vipers (Mt. 12:34, 23:33, & Lk. 3:7) because of their stubborn self-righteousness.

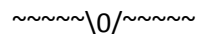
Paul made it clear in I Corinthians 1:26 that not many wise, mighty, or noble according to the flesh are called. The word “noble” means to be *wellborn* or, more specifically, *those who boast in their lineage*. Paul goes on to say that God chose the foolish, weak, insignificant, lowly, base, and nothings. These categories of people are those whose hearts are devoid of boasting in their own wisdom, their own strength and ability, their wealth and lineage, and anything else in which the world would boast.

If the Jews of Jesus’ time had admitted that they were truly a brood of vipers, they could have had that same great faith in Jesus as did the Roman centurion and Canaanite woman. If we will agree with God’s assessment of us, then we too will find the path that leads to great faith and to limitless provision from God.

Do we take comfort in our own proud arguments against the truth that we have labeled as humility? Are we trying to impress God with a self-made righteousness and thus shutting ourselves up in unbelief as did many of the Jews during that time?

How convinced are we of this one truth: all that we have in Christ is continually available and immediately accessible because our Great High Priest sits at the right hand of God ever living to make intercession in our behalf? That His great love secures all things in our behalf and expects no payment in return? That according to I Corinthians 2:12, these things have been freely given to us by God. The only thing that He desires from us is whole-hearted surrender to and dependence on Him.

Jesus alone is the author and finisher of our faith. We must cast off every proud argument against His word that has taken our hearts captive and completely surrender to Him. As we surrender to Him, we will find the peace and joy within our hearts that will cause us to receive the *finished* product of faith that only He can give—a faith that is the evidence or title deed of things not seen—a faith that cannot be distinguished from the manifestation and experience that we need from God.



Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotes are from the New King James Version of the Holy Bible.

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