

#48 “May God Increase Our Faith”

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A fascinating word study to do is on the topic of faith. Actually, it's a very convicting study to do because of the vastly important role of faith in the life of the believer. Faith is how a person is justified, that is, made righteous in God's sight (Romans 3:28). Faith, we learn, moves mountains (Matthew 21:21). Faith is how we walk, rather than by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). Faith is how we please God in our lives as believers. Hebrews 11:6 says, "Without faith it is impossible to please Him." Romans 14:23 echoes this truth when it says, "Whatever is not from faith is sin." As we go through life, we will have many important decisions to make. Each day, in fact, we must choose how we will live and whom or what we will serve. To do things of eternal value and that amount to true spiritual fruit, we must live by faith. God's will for us will always be the road which requires faith. To rely upon ourselves or to not allow God to stretch us beyond where we are comfortable and in control demonstrates a lack of faith and should be understood to be sin. This hurts even to say because it cuts us all to the core, which God's Word is excellent at doing (Hebrews 4:12). We could all use an added measure of faith, and we should pray that God would increase our faith where we lack it.

God has a way of stretching our faith so that it can be increased. He does this by giving us things which make us uncomfortable, which challenge us, and which try the faith which we possess. Tests and trials are ordained by God for our good. They are not malicious as if God delights in seeing us struggle, strain, and suffer. But like a coach or physical trainer pushes an athlete beyond his limits, even to the point of feeling sick, God allows trials to come our way to make us stronger (James 1:2-4). His purpose is good, and He causes all things to work for our good as we are made more and more into the image of Christ (Romans 8:28). So let us not be surprised if we desire to grow deeper in our faith, even asking God to revive our hearts, and then we experience difficulty. In order to strengthen us and teach us to lean only upon Him, God often takes away all that we rely on so that we rely only upon Him. God's call is that we trust Him with all of our hearts, not some of our hearts and not even most of our hearts. He wants total faith, faith which doesn't doubt, fear, shrink away in shame, or waffle. He wants to see faith under fire, as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego demonstrated literally. Their confidence was that God would deliver them, and they were bold, confident, hopeful, and strong. Yet they were not presumptuous, saying that they would stand firm in their faith even if they were consumed in the fiery furnace (Daniel 3:16-18). They knew their God loved them, and they were going to serve Him no matter what, trusting His plan and purpose to be the best for them. When we endure under trial, we will be able to see the work of proven character which God has accomplished in our hearts and lives. The more our faith is stretched and the more we endure, the more like Christ we will become. Additionally, our hope will increase because we will continue to see the power of God in us, for we will know without a doubt that He has been there for us, supporting us, encouraging us, and

enabling us (Romans 5:3-5). There is great hope to know that God will allow us to escape temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13) and that He is our portion each day (Lamentations 3:24), granting us the mercy we need.

So it is good for us to suffer and have our faith stretched. It is good for us to be pushed beyond what we think God can do so that we worship a God Who does even beyond what we can ask or imagine (Ephesians 3:20). It is good for us to see the shallowness of our faith so that we ask God to increase it. And how good it is when He does just that, and we learn to rest in His provision and power even more.

Peter feared when he thought he was going to perish in the storm while he and the disciples along with Jesus were at sea (Matthew 8:26). Yet Jesus calmed the storm, rebuking Peter and his brethren for having little faith. Some time later on, Jesus was walking on the water, and Peter asked Him to command him to come to Him on the water. Peter learned, and He was putting His faith to work. He did start doubting as he looked at the waves around him, but Jesus was there to save him. Yet what an increase in faith he demonstrated, and such was clear evidence of God working in Peter's life. In the first instance, he doubted as if there was no hope. Later, he didn't fear but wanted to challenge the fierce waves by faith. And as long as he kept his gaze fixed on Jesus, he walked on the water, something truly miraculous.

It is not good enough to wait for the calm before we act in faith and engage the enemy, following Jesus in service. We must be willing, like Peter, to believe that Jesus can work and that He desires to work through us, even in the most dire of times and even when we feel the weakest. Peter didn't presume on Jesus and just step on to the water. He asked permission, and once He knew God's will, He acted in faith. We need to find what God wants us to do, being unafraid and totally expecting God to work, and then we need to do it, keeping our eyes fixed on Christ and not looking at the difficulties around us.

Stepping out in faith is a vulnerable thing in one sense because it means that we can't control our circumstances fully as we would like. We can't eliminate risk, and others might call us fools. Yet without faith, we cannot please God. To stay as we are and not to grow is sin. We must be willing to let God increase our faith, and He will orchestrate the circumstances of our lives perfectly to do just that. And the great part is that we will please Him, and it doesn't get any better than that.