

# LIVING BY FAITH, Part 1 of 3

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The early Christians were known as “believers”. Are *you* a “believer” who lives by faith? If you worry and fret, or one who needs to control every step of your life, you’ll want to hear this thought-provoking two part message. Part 1 *defines* faith, reasons *why* we must live by faith as well as why we’re not seeing many great signs and wonders today, and how boldly we can come before God, and more.

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There are several paradoxical scriptures describing “the Last Days” before Christ’s return. Some verses imply a time of strong business activity – marrying, building houses and so forth – and yet the people of God are pictured as sleeping spiritually (Matthew 25:1-6). God’s word also says the last days will witness the time of greatest trouble, called “The Great Tribulation”, the world has ever seen. In light of all this going on, we read what Jesus asks in **Luke 18:8**, halfway thru the verse, “...when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?” “Will my people”, Jesus asks, “be living by faith or even have faith, when I return?”

Brethren, the gates of hell are hardly trembling in our presence, the way we are right now. But we can change all that. The Church is also described as being cold in their love. You shall see as we go through today’s sermon, that it’s impossible to have strong faith without strong love. So it does all tie together. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> part message, we’ll really go into that.

Do *you* live by faith? Would God consider you a great man or woman of faith? Jesus implies each of us needs to evaluate where we currently are, on this topic. Each of us can grow in faith and our ability to live by faith in God.

In **Luke 17:5**, Jesus’ disciples, who were *never* commended for their faith prior to their conversion, at least ASKED Jesus to “increase our faith”. They recognized they needed more. We should do the same. Are you a worrier? I have been. Do you have to know what’s happening in your life, every step of the way, or else you’re anxious? Then this two part message is for you.

This part message: This first part will be *what* is Faith and reasons *why* we need faith. Part 2 will be about how to *grow* and develop godly faith so we are exceptions to Jesus’ question.

How can *I* speak on this? I’ll be very frank: because I recognize I have to grow in faith. A lot. I recognized, and have repented before God for what I’m saying to you, that I have sometimes been a man filled with anxiety about life, worries about my bills and health, fretful about just about everything. How can you and I be men and women of God – and be fretful, anxious, worried? I woke up thinking, “what a slap in God’s face to ever feel I have a right to worry, when HE is my Father, who loves me, has promised to always be there for me, and has all power and might to do all things.”

So I embarked on a several month pilgrimage, a journey, into faith. I plunged into a detailed study of it, prayed and fasted about it, and have saturated my mind in the topic – with much prayer begging

God to show me what faith is and to give me *His* faith. I want to share this study with you.

### ***WE NEED FAITH MORE THAN EVER***

Brethren, you and I may very likely live through a time of greatest trouble. When 8.5 and 9.0 Richter scale earthquakes are splitting apart our cities, demolishing our bridges and infrastructure. When vicious terrorists may in our lifetime be decimating (destroying) whole states and cities with dirty atomic bombs, chemical and biological warfare. We can live through a time when it could be dangerous to go to church, or to a shopping mall. God's word says the weather will also be horrendous – 100 lb hailstones, hurricane after hurricane, huge tornadoes everywhere – followed by warfare, plagues, famines, droughts, disease epidemics. God's people will live through much of that, even if there is a literal place of safety later. Our faith must be in God – not in a place of safety. I personally believe there is a place of safety, but my faith is not in that place apart from God.

Are you ready to be able to continue to live by faith in those circumstances? Will you be a rock of peaceful trusting when thousands are dying beside you? You and I won't just suddenly be able to be that faithful, unless we're exercising that faith now and growing in faith steadily.

**Psalm 91:5-11** “You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, Nor of the arrow that flies by day, 6 Nor of the pestilence that walks in darkness, Nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday.

7 A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; But it shall not come near you. 8 Only with your eyes shall you look, and see the reward of the wicked.

9 Because you have made the LORD, who is my refuge, Even the Most High, your dwelling place, 10 No evil shall befall you, Nor shall any plague come near your dwelling;

11 For He shall give His angels charge over you, To keep you in all your ways.”

Are you ready for the kind of faith it will take to go through times like that?

***God is serious about us resting completely in Him***, without ANY self-will, self-reliance. He is in the process of breaking us of any reliance on ourselves, so we learn to trust God, go to Him and live by Him and in Him. A man or woman of faith has learned that life is about fulfilling God's purpose for you and me. It's about bringing *God* glory, and glorifying *Him* in our lives. Our lives are not about us, nor is your life about you.

There must be *no* other gods in our lives. *When we need God, our focus must be on HIM – and not on our own abilities, reputation, contacts we have, or money to get us out of the trouble we're in.*

**Brethren, hear this: Psalm 78:41** says Israel “*limited* the Holy One of Israel (God)” and limited what He would or could do for them, therefore. We're doing the same thing, I feel, in the church today. If we'd quit limiting God's working in each of us, there's no telling what God would be doing in us, for us, and for His Work. ***God has called us to do things and to be the kind of people we never thought we ever could be. And the things God has in mind for you and me would be impossible normally for us – but if we live by faith, our lives will change in a GIANT way, and we're in for an exciting time.***

### **WHAT IS “FAITH”?**

## Let's define faith by turning to "The Faith Chapter" – Hebrews 11.

The Greek word used in the New Testament is "*pistis*" and it's translated "faith, faithful" (Titus 2:10), "*the faith*" (the set of beliefs and doctrines – Acts 6:7, 14:22, etc.) – depending on context. But it's all the same Greek word. It is **Strong's word # 4102**, and primarily means a "firm persuasion".

We'll focus on the mainly used meaning of "faith" and "faithful".

**Hebrews 11:1 NKJV:** "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

**New Living Translation:** "What is faith? *It is the confident assurance that what we hope for is going to happen.* It is the evidence of things we cannot yet see."

**NIV:** "Now faith is *being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.*"

**My own definition:** "*Faith is based in God, focused on what HE is doing, because we have come to know and love Him though none of us has ever literally seen Him. In faith, we have accepted His love for us. Faith is believing God and everything He says, and proving we believe Him as we live by His every word. We trust God because we know Him.*"

**True faith is tied inextricably with LOVE.** When you really know someone well, and love him deeply, and know that person loves YOU deeply, then you can trust each other. Faith is impossible without love. So that is why a lack of faith in the end time is associated also with a time when "the love of many will grow cold" (Luke 18:8; Matthew. 24:12). By the way, love grows cold "because lawlessness will abound." Faith and obedience also go hand in hand (Hebrews 3-4).

### Another aspect that is actually harder than you may realize right now:

Living by faith means we've unconditionally surrendered *control* of our own lives to God and to His purpose for us. We *want* His sovereignty and control over our lives.

### Please be turning to Matthew 8.

Brethren, we all love the feeling that we've got everything under control. We like to drive our own car, we like to know we've got a retirement fund in the making, we try our best to make things happen the way we want them to happen. We want to know our health is good, or what we can do to get it back to being good if it's not. **WE LIKE CONTROL.** We like being in control or in charge of our lives. A lot of that is OK – but we must let GOD be in charge of our lives now. ***And we don't like the feeling we get when we don't know what's happening, can't see how things will work out,*** and WE'RE *NOT* the ones *controlling our own lives, our own destinies.* We worry, we fret, and we get anxious when we can't do anything to heal our very **sick** children or other loved ones. When we can't land the **job** we want. When **relationships** at work or in our families go sour and are out of our control. When we can't find a man or woman to **marry** – and the clock is ticking -- we're getting older by the minute. Let's admit it.

True faith is believing God's word, without having to see Him literally right there.

**Matthew 8:5-10,13** “Now when Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, pleading with Him, 6 saying, "Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, dreadfully tormented." 7 And Jesus said to him, "I will come and heal him." 8 The centurion answered and said, "Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. **But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed.** 9 For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

[He's saying: "You don't have to be there in person. Your word is good enough for me. I believe your word, I trust you. Just say the word, and we'll live by it.]

Let's continue now in verse 10, 13

10 When Jesus heard it, He marveled, and said to those who followed, "Assuredly, I say to you, I have not *found such GREAT faith, not even in Israel!* .... 13 Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go your way; and as you have believed, so let it be done for you." And his servant was healed that same hour.

Similarly, you and I shouldn't need God physically right now in front of us when we are being anointed when sick. We know He gives the command from heaven, we're healed by His word (not by the minister) way up there in heaven – but we respect the chain of command and go through the minister, as we're told in James 5.

There are a lot of half-truths out there about faith. Statements we've heard over and over and have just taken for granted, because we've heard them often. We've often been told: "*faith is not a feeling. It's not something we have to work up.* It's just quiet, trusting in God". That's true *if* understood properly. But is it right to say there is *no* feeling when you have great faith?

When you are *sure* of something, you *feel* that sureness. When you *doubt* something, you sure feel that as well. But when faith is based in God, we shouldn't have to work it up or get psyched up for it – and yet there *will* be times you'll realize you *lack* faith and need to fast, pray and seek God to bolster it! To remove the doubts! And there will be times you *will feel* the peace of God that surpasses all understanding, and know God is there with you in your trial.

That's why we have to be constantly **monitoring the degree of faith** we have. I love this story where a man had a son with a dumb spirit whom the disciples could not cast out. He asks Jesus to cast out the demon. I'll pick up the story in Mark 9, verses 23 and 24.

**Mark 9:23-24** “Jesus said to him, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes." [believe, and nothing's impossible for you] 24 Immediately the father of the child cried out and *said with tears, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!"*

I pray his prayer often. “Help my unbelief”. God was gentle – and perhaps in spite of his lack of strong faith, still healed the young man. So pray for more faith. “Lord, help my unbelief.”

***Don't we often feel we'd have more faith if we could just talk and walk with GOD?*** If He would

just talk to us in person? If we could see Him, or see a great miracle? But that's going by sight, and not by faith. **Think of the multiple thousands who experienced and saw the Son of God personally** – thousands ate His loaves and fish that multiplied, hundreds were directly healed, thousands more watched those healings, thousands heard Him preach, over 500 at one time actually watched him RISE to heaven, but how many were left, on the Day of Pentecost, when it counted? **One hundred twenty.** What does *that* say about the impact of actually *seeing* God in person, or seeing His wondrous works?

What about the millions of Israelites who walked across the Red Sea – and then often *still* doubted? And we're not much better. We'll experience a definite healing, and then doubt all over again the next time around, right? We've got to let faith work in us much stronger and consistently than that.

***In a way, you and I HAVE seen God. Romans 1:20*** says God is clearly evident by His creation.

Have you heard a baby cry? Have you exulted in a symphony of crickets chirping on a warm night, or have you delighted in coyote howling overtures from a distant hill? Have you never lost your breath as you feasted on God's sunset masterpieces, or has your heart not erupted in praises as you peered over Niagara Falls or cast your eyes across the vast expanse of the Grand Canyon? *Then you've seen God through* His creation. That is one reason I love "Animal Planet" TV channel. I learn so much about the wonders of God's creation and marvel at my maker and Creator.

Never question that again! Know He's there. Believe and *trust* in Him as never before. And now learn to love, obey and submit to Him as your King and master.

Remember what Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4:17-18 "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, 18 while we ***do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen.*** For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal." *Ultimate life is not about THIS life anyway!*

There is a human saying that God hates: "***Seeing is believing***". But Jesus told Thomas, "***Blessed are those who believe, though they have not seen***" (John 20:29). In fact **2 Corinthians 5:7**, Paul – who could *see* all kinds of troubling things around him, and in his own body going on, says "***We walk by faith, NOT by sight***". Please turn to Romans 4.

**Abraham** set a great example of that same thing – of not considering what he could see, but what God had promised.

#### **Romans 4:19-22**

"And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. 20 He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving ***glory to God, 21 and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform.*** 22 And therefore "it was accounted to him for righteousness."

God will test your belief by taking your faith to the limit, past the normal deadlines. God's solutions are often illogical to the human mind. Even crazy.

How “crazy” was the idea to a human mind that God would lead the whole nation of Israel to be blocked by mountains and the Red Sea – and then lead them across dry land through the Red Sea? Or the stories of Gideon, or the conquering of Jericho? Or to tell thousands of people to sit down and get ready for dinner, when ALL you could SEE were 5 loaves and 2 fish. Or to come walk on out to Jesus, who was then walking on water – and just walk on out on the waves like Peter, all will be fine.

**One of my new favorites of the *unseen* things of God – because I see humor in this story – is found in 2 Samuel 5:22-25.** David is asking God for a battle plan to defeat the Philistines. Imagine David’s generals hearing of God’s plan. Be sure to read it, as it’s amusing. They are to wait til they *hear the sound of marching in the tops of the mulberry trees* before they’d advance.

But still, I think we limit God, as ancient Israel did (Psalm 78:41).

### *MOVING MOUNTAINS – Is it HAPPENING?*

#### **Matthew 17:19-20**

“Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, “Why could we not cast it out?” \_20 So Jesus said to them, “Because of your unbelief; **for assuredly**, I say to you, **IF you have faith as [tiny as] a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it WILL move**; and nothing will be impossible for you.” Was Jesus kidding? Did He not mean what He said?

I’ve heard members and ministers alike explain away why we’re not seeing mountains move. It is true I’ve never heard of anyone, not even Christ while on earth, moving a mountain into a sea.

Here’s my take on this: Christ meant what He said. He even said, “**ASSUREDLY I say to you..**”. He meant it. However Jesus often was speaking *spiritually* but used physical illustrations, such as beware of the leaven of the Pharisees”, and “I have food you know not of” – but He was referring to spiritual concepts. Same thing here.

Listen. I’ve seen mountains move. And perhaps you have too, if you have the spiritual eyes to see! I’ve seen *mountain-size problems* be eliminated with the word “Amen” after a faith-filled prayer. I’ve personally been involved in tumors disappearing within the time of a prayer. I’ve heard audible clicks in a man’s back in Fredericton, New Brunswick (Canada) that was so bad he couldn’t move at all, then he jumps up and does jumping jacks and bend overs. That happened another time with a woman in Edmonton. And here in the Northwest, a tiny 3 pound severely premature baby was healed, when the doctors all said she’d most likely die.

***I’ve seen mountain-size roadblocks*** in my job picture, and financial picture move when I trusted in God. I saw it recently with my son-in-law Tom Beohm’s job picture. Mountains *are* moving! Let’s open our eyes and praise our God for those mountains moving, at least here and there.

### **ARE “SIGNS AND WONDERS” A THING OF THE PAST?**

But we like to excuse away some sincere promises Jesus gave His people. Let’s look at a few that many of God’s people believe don’t really apply to us today! God forgive us! Let me set the stage first by going to Matthew 12. Some feel we’ll not see signs and wonders today – except by the two witnesses who will be coming on the scene - - because signs are a bad thing. Because signs were for

the early church, not for now. Because signs bring on persecution. Partly true, but there's more.

It's true Jesus said in **Matthew 12:39** "*An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign*, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah." It is true that *false* ministers can *also* do signs and wonders so they're not a determining factor by themselves. But I do want you to notice:

In context, Jesus is answering a sarcastic question (v.38) posed by the hypocritical religious leaders of His day. But this same Jesus says His own church would *indeed* have signs and wonders *if we believe*:

**Mark 16:14-18** "Afterward He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen. 15 And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. [we believe this, right?] 16 He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. [*we also believe this statement, right? So why not believe the rest of what He says?*]

**17 And these signs WILL follow those who believe:** [Stop for a second: *signs will follow, but first there has to be belief. Belief by God's people precedes signs which subsequently follow. So the signs do not cause the faith, but are there because of already existing faith. "These signs shall surely follow." –and apparently as a sign that He is behind, backing up, this group of people, as a sign for unbelievers to see] In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; 18 they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and *they will recover*."*

So *did* those signs happen? Let's keep reading:

**Mark 16:19-20** "So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. 20 And they went out and preached everywhere, the LORD working with them and *confirming the word through the accompanying signs*. Amen."

Look who did the signs: THE LORD did.

**At the end of Matthew 28**, Jesus said He would be with His followers – not just for the first century church – but "*to the end of the age*" (**Matthew 28:18-20**). Jesus worked endless miracles, signs and wonders back then and with the early believers. *If this same Jesus is still with us, has JESUS lost His ability to give signs and wonders!* He is the one doing them, after all, not us, not any believers. So if we're not seeing numerous signs and wonders, rather than acclaim that Jesus has changed His method, or changed His mind about being with His people to *the end of the age* – then maybe we, the people of God, have changed! Maybe we aren't so believing, so close to God, so trusting, so faithful, so full of faith – and therefore there are no signs and wonders. Belief comes **FIRST** – then the signs. "These signs shall *surely* follow those who *believe*...", remember? (Mark 16:17). This is more *my* belief.

But I'm hearing other ministers trying to assure brethren that there is plenty of living by faith going on

in the church. Yes there is in some areas of our lives. Indeed it is true that it takes faith to keep the sabbath, to tithe, to put your job on the line to obey God, to apply the sermons we're hearing. But that's one level of faith, and that is good as far as it goes. But it *could be* much, much more.

**Acts 4:29-31** – context: the disciples had been ordered to quit preaching in Jesus' name, or they would be severely beaten and threatened. With one accord, the church prayed this prayer, and look at what they asked for and what happened:

29 "Now, Lord, look on their threats, and *grant* to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, 30 BY stretching out *Your* hand to heal, and ***that signs and wonders may be done*** through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus." 31 And when they had prayed, *the place where they were assembled together was shaken*; [a SIGN] and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness."

I believe, if we will pray the same believing prayer, we too will have signs and wonders and the hall we are meeting in could also shake as a sign to us that God has heard us. I may just refer to some of these next passages for time's sake – but please study them carefully with the transcript you can download from the website [www.lightontherock.com](http://www.lightontherock.com).

**Summarize Acts 5:12-16** 12 "And through the hands of the apostles ***many signs and wonders were done*** among the people 14 And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, 15 so that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, *that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them*. 16- multitudes were healed.

**But signs and wonders were not limited to just the apostles or ministers.** Remember Jesus had said that signs and miracles would, or could, follow "those who *believe*". That's not limited to the ordained ministry, brethren, and now let me prove that to you.

**Acts 6:8** "And **Stephen** [a deacon], *full* of faith and power, did *great* wonders and signs among the people." There is no record that the apostles were upset or jealous about a deacon doing all this.

**Acts 8:4-8** "Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word. [Signs and wonders will, and does, bring on persecution!] 5 Then **Philip** [not a minister – just another deacon] went down to the city of Samaria and *preached Christ* to them. 6 And the multitudes with one accord **heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did**. 7- many were healed.

**Acts 9:32,35-42, especially verses 35 and 42** – tell us that because of what onlookers saw, many were added to the body of believers. Because of the signs, it says. After God heals the lame man **Aeneas** through Peter, it says in Acts 9:35, "So all who dwelt at Lydda and Sharon saw him *and turned to the Lord*." After that, **Dorcas** is resurrected from the dead by Peter, and Acts 9:42 says that story spread throughout Joppa and "*many believed on the Lord*". That's a good thing!

All through the book of Acts, the stories of miracles and healing continue. Acts 14:1-3. We also read of Jesus appearing to Paul on board the doomed ship to tell him directly that they'd be saved. On and on. Miracles, deliverances, all because of faith.



**Wouldn't it be great to see powerful faith at work again the church?** Frankly, right now we're *not* seeing a lot of great healings, or miracles out of the ordinary – and I think a lot of the problem lies with our *unbelief*. Miracles and signs are not the most important thing – but we could be having them.

*I also feel our lack of dramatic miracles also lies with the superiority feelings each of the factions of God's church has.* And there are factions. "I'm of Paul. I'm of Apollos". And Paul says when we say those things, when we tout our little group, or our minister over others, *we're still very carnal!* (**1 Corinthians 3:3-4, 21-23**). We even have ministers *forbidding* believers from visiting other believing groups. How can that be, brethren? In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul says they weren't seeing a lot of healings because of the way they were treating one another. This DISunity literally was making the body of Christ sick. *Think about it. We're the ones limiting the Holy One of Israel.*

**Don't misunderstand me.** I realize Abraham, John the Baptist and others did no miracle either. I realize there can be great faith going on even when we see no miracle. So we can't make blanket judgments one way or another, but when we see *so little* in the way of healings and miracles among so broad and widespread a group as God's people, I believe our faith is probably lacking!

### **WHY WE NEED MORE FAITH**

**Let's now cover WHY we need more faith. I won't cover all the points. I can't. There are too many. I came up with more than 10 points, but we'll look at just a few.**

**1) ROMANS 1:17** says "The just shall LIVE by faith." *And that's the first reason we need to be growing in faith, for we are supposed to LIVE BY faith.*

"Living by faith" was a quote from Habakkuk 2:4. He repeats it again in Galatians 3:11 and Hebrews 10:38.

***What does it mean to "live by faith"?*** I used to think – and I think many think this – that faith is something we have to either drum up, or exercise when we need God's intervention. When we're in trouble. When we need a healing or answered prayer. Sure you need prayer then. But not just in those times, but 24/7, all the time.

**For God's children, "living by FAITH" is a way of life.** *"Living by faith" is another way of saying "walking with God" I feel.* We're in *constant* contact with God throughout the day. We *commit* our ways to God, our plans, our hopes, and seek *His* will, *His* guidance and blessing in *everything* we do (**Psalm 37:3-7**), *before* we do it and as we do it, throughout the day. We wake up each day thinking "*this* is the day HE has created for me, let me *rejoice* in it" (**Psalm. 118:24**), regardless of what God has in store, and then not fret when God sends us on unexpected detours.

*If you're not doing what I just said, you're really missing out.* We often mistakenly conclude we don't have time to pray, to commit things to God. On our own strength and abilities, certain things will get done, but not with the blessing we could have had if we had lived by faith and committed every single thing we're doing into God's hand, for his blessing. Have an important call to make?

Commit it to God. Are you hoping to spend quality time with your teenage son? Commit it to God first. Oh, the countless times I WISH I had asked for God's blessing, before doing things on my own ability. I've even experienced struggling with a paper or report for my business, then when I stop and commit it to God – how easily it just flowed after that. ***Living by faith becomes a way of life.***

My son-in-law Matt told me he thinks we may lack faith largely because we are taught constantly the notion of total **self-reliance**. He's right! Faith is NOT *self-reliance*, but reliance on God, looking to God for answers, help, advice, power, encouragement, etc. So I think Matt hit that nail on the head!

***“LIVING by faith”*** – is living by faith in *everything* we do, all the time. In fact, ***anything*** we do that is done without faith, without a good conscience, is considered **SIN (Romans 14:23)**.

Faith is NOT, should not, be an event-by-event experience. *In practice though, even the greatest men and women of faith often did NOT have 24 hr a day/ 7-days a week (24/7) faith. For example, the same Elijah* who in great faith called down fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice on Mt. Carmel, ran in fear the very next day from his nemesis Jezebel, when she threatened to kill him! (**1 Kings 18; 19:1-4**).

***I'll cover more points on the “HOW to grow our faith” in the 2nd message, Living by Faith part 2.***

**NOW GET THIS VITAL point:** *We like to think of great faith as being the times we can point to where God did a great miracle because of someone's faith. But is it possible to have great FAITH and not be seeing the kind of answers and deliverances we want? YES, yes! And perhaps that can even be greater faith.*

We love the faith of DANIEL in the lions' den. But what of the many Christians who *were* torn apart and devoured by lions in the Roman Coliseum whom God *didn't* deliver? Were they lacking in faith? NO! Every single one of the apostles, except perhaps JOHN, apparently died *brutal* deaths. But these were signs to unbelievers what we believers will do as a witness of our faith in our God.

### **Hebrews 11:32-40**

***“And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: 33 who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. 35 Women received their dead raised to life again. Others [still in context of those with great faith] were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. 36 Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented -- 38 of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. 39 And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, DID NOT receive the promise, 40 God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.”***

*A person who has great faith is not always delivered, healed or protected, but they must have steady faith nonetheless.* He/she may be sawn in two! May be martyred. May be tortured. But just because that person was not delivered does not mean they lacked faith. This is NOT however, what I think is happening in the church today. We're not really seeing very many great miracles and mind-boggling answers anywhere. I'm just *clarifying* that in periods when we *are* seeing God's intervention here and there, and sometimes He *isn't* intervening, there could be great faith also in those places.

We may never see God in this life, never see his healing for us, never have the promises today, but – we must continue in faith. **Hebrews 11:13, 39** say that the great men and women of faith *never received* the promises, but died believing God anyway! They knew it wasn't about *this* life, at this time, but for a future life in the resurrection, in the Kingdom of God. They all DIED never having seen or receiving the promises. That's faith. They understood their true life in the Kingdom lay ahead.

We're so quick to judge that someone going through a long series of trials is being punished by God. That is so wrong, so spiritually immature reasoning. It can be that, but there were thousands of God's deeply converted children whom He allowed to go through one trial after another – like Paul, like His own Son Jesus, like all the apostles and most of the Godly prophets – just for starters.

**Be turning to Daniel 3:13. Great faith is based on knowing God, not based on knowing, or hoping for a particular outcome – and knowing God is a loving God and is doing what He knows is best – and having faith *in God*.**

*I love what Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego said, when they refused to bow down to Nebuchadnezzar's idol, with the threat of death for refusing. Let's read it.*

**Daniel 3:13-18**

"Then Nebuchadnezzar, in rage and fury, gave the command to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. So they brought these men before the king. 14 Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the gold image which I have set up? 15 Now if you are ready at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, and psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, and you fall down and worship the image which I have made, good! *But if you do not worship, you shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?"*

16 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. 17 **If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. 18 BUT IF NOT**, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up."

WOW!

**Great faith is not faith in an answer we want – but faith in God and His love -- and knowing our**

loving God will do what God needs to do. **God will fulfill His purpose for us.** And we'll see later, on the *other* hand, how we must be careful not to use the phrase "if God wills" *as a cop-out!* But still, in this case, their *faith* was strong, they were delivered, but they said, "***even if we're not delivered***, we will still have faith in our God".

Of course **JESUS Himself** – *asked three times* for the cup to be taken from Him, if possible, and if it fulfilled God's will, in the Garden of the Olive Press (Gethsemane).

**ESTHER** – I love *her* faith too. Turn to Esther 4 please. To approach the king unbidden could result in her death (Esther 4:10-14). But she *had* to ask her husband the king to do something for her and her people, who were about to be the victims of ethnic cleansing! Mordecai had just told her that perhaps to save her race of people, was the very reason God had put her as the emperor's wife:

**Esther 4:15-16**

"Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai: 16 "Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which is against the law; ***and if I perish, I perish!***"

What's she *saying*? "I'll do all I can to beseech God, to pray and fast – and then I'll have to trust God. He can hear us – or perhaps He will decide that my witness as a martyr will be what He wants. I don't know. But I know GOD, and I can have peace with the outcome." It's not what I'll later in this message call "Negative faith". This is different. But brethren, either way, Esther in this case is also demonstrating *great* faith. We now know how great a miracle God brought on her behalf, but if God didn't – *even if* there was no story to the book of Esther as we now know it, it *still* would be a great story of faith.

So yes – there's great faith in stories we can tell of deliverance and answered prayers. **But there is also great faith to be learned from those of you who lost your jobs over the sabbath and were unemployed for months because of it.** There's great *faith* in the story of Joseph's many years of imprisonment because he chose not to have easy sex with his master's wife - - and suffered her wrath and consequences for many hard, unjust years. So keep that in mind. Many of you know of people who were not healed of their cancer, and died, but you know their faith in their God remained *strong* through the pain, through the suffering, even though in their case they were *not* healed. What *faith* that is too! And *their* faith has inspired countless people too!

**2. ANOTHER REASON TO GROW IN FAITH: Because of Hebrews 11:6 – it's impossible to PLEASE God without SEEKING HIM DILIGENTLY in FAITH.**

**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."

The reverse of that must be true too: that WITH faith, we are VERY pleasing to God. I want to please God, and I'm sure you do. That means we must have, and live by, faith.

"A REWARDER of those who *diligently* seek Him!" How many of God's REWARDS are

we NOT seeing, partly because we're not diligent enough? Let's see this more closely.

**Sometimes answers don't come with the first time we ask. Even the mighty Elijah** – who stopped the rain on his word, who also in one prayer called fire down from heaven to consume the sacrifice on Mt. Carmel – awesome displays of Elijah's faith and God's power. But on the same day all that happened, Elijah announced the drought would end. So he went to pray to God to let it start raining after the 3 year drought. Notice 2 references to this. The one in James 5:17-18 makes it sound like Elijah just prayed and boom – it started raining. After all, one little prayer and the fire came down from heaven to devour the sacrifice and altar, remember?

But when we read **1 Kings 18:41-44**, we see that Elijah had to pray *seven times* for the drought to end, and for his announced heavy rain to start. I think we give up way too soon.

*But now let's bump this notion of persistence and diligence, up a notch.*

**When we look at Luke 18:8 – where Jesus asks “will He find faith on the earth?”, what was the context?** The parable just beforehand, of an example of what one speaker *called “shameless persistence”!* We'll look at this familiar story briefly for some salient points you may, or may not have, known or thought about recently, but first let's look at another story in Luke 11:1-8.

#### **Luke 11:5-8**

“And He said to them, 'Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at *midnight* and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; 6 for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; 7 and he will answer from within and say, 'Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to you'? 8 I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, *yet because of his persistence [KJV: importunity]* he *will* rise and give him as many as he needs.’

***It would be the height of rudeness***, in that society at that time, *not* to help your neighbor in need, no matter the hour, but this hardnosed man got up and helped - - not because it was the right thing to do – but because of the man's *persistence*. In verses 9-12, Jesus makes it clear that though we, being evil, will do good things for our kids and friends, how much more will *God* give His spirit, or do good things for those who ask Him. Combined with THIS story, we may have to be shamelessly persistent.

Why do I say “shamelessly persistent?” Because the word in Luke 11:8 translated “*importunity*” in KJV and “persistence” in NKJV, is rich in meaning. In the Greek, it's a combination of 2 root words that makes it meaning *be “without shame”*. It can also almost mean “*impudence*”.

***With that in mind, we can see another story of a persistent widow, in this case – and what happens. And notice the context now of the question: “will the Son of man find faith on the earth?”***

**Luke 18:1-8** “Then He spoke a parable to them, that men *always ought to pray and not lose heart*, [this was Jesus' “specific purpose statement” – what I'm going to say is to help you *not lose heart* when you pray”] Then Jesus goes into the well known story of the widow who kept coming to the unjust judge, demanding his attention and justice. Finally he relents and answers her. Picking up in verse 6:

6 Then the Lord said, "Hear what the *unjust* judge said. 7 And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, *though* He bears *long* with them?"

**So what have we learned from this “persistent widow”?** She never gave up, kept asking, making almost a pest of herself, and we find God-Jesus *commending* that as an example for us! But many of us feel we can’t do this, because we’ve already asked, or we cop-out and assume because we didn’t get an answer – that it could not be God’s will—so we give up. Jesus says, “NO! Learn from this widow.” THIS is the context of Jesus’ question in verse 8:

***Luke 18:8 “I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?”***

So what Jesus is *really* asking in verse 8, when taken in context, is “will my people at the end of the age not just have faith, but will they *have persistent, bold, shameless faith*? Or will they be quitters and not persistent?”

#### THE POTENTIAL COP-OUT

**I’ll remind you of examples of “shameless persistence”....and I do, because I think too many of us use the formula of “according to God’s will” sometimes as a cop-out.** Now hear me out. I *know* the verses that say we should ask according to God’s will, and not our own will. I KNOW Jesus Himself in the Garden prayed, “but not MY will, O LORD, but THINE be done.” I know the sample Lord’s prayer has in it, “Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”. I KNOW those verses, and so do you. But now watch some of these I’m about to remind you of – and you can study the passages in depth later as a deeper Bible study for yourself, or you can download the transcript from the website [www.LightontheRock.com](http://www.LightontheRock.com)

So here are a few examples of this Shameless persistence, and I ask you to slowly study them on your own time afterwards to get the DEPTH from your own study:

\* We all know the story in **Exodus 32:4-32** of how Moses faced up to God when He tells Moses HIS will, God’s will, was to OBLITERATE Israel and start over with Moses. God says, in verse 11,

“Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation.” That was God’s *stated will* at that point. But you know what happened. Moses didn’t just meekly say “thy will be done”. He protested, prayed for God to think differently about it, and God relented. What boldness. What candor. What shamelessness.

\* **Another, lesser used example: Moses telling Aaron to stand up to God** during a plague, where God’s stated will was once again to obliterate much of Israel.

**Numbers 16:41-50** For background, some of you may have to read the first 40 verses. This is the well known story of Korah’s rebellion. Korah was a cousin of Moses and Aaron and wanted more involvement and position and led a rebellion against Moses. In short, God killed Korah and 250 leaders who followed Korah. So then we pick up the story.

**Numbers 16:41-50** “On the next day *all the congregation* of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, saying, “*You* have killed the people of the LORD.” 42 Now it happened, when the congregation had gathered against Moses and Aaron, that they turned toward the tabernacle of meeting; and suddenly the cloud covered it, and the glory of the LORD appeared. 43 Then Moses and Aaron came before the tabernacle of meeting. 44 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 45 **“Get away from** among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment.” [*that* was God’s stated *will* – “get away from them”. But what did Moses and Aaron do? Did they obey that? Or, in this case, as representatives of the “wife” of God, did they not do something *different*? A *very bold move* when you think about it. You don’t try this unless you are *really* close to God. God must have looked at Moses’ motivation, and the love he was showing for his fellow-Israelites.]

*And they fell on their faces.* [OOPS! Why weren’t they obeying and getting away from the people?] 46 So Moses said to Aaron, “Take a censer and put fire in it from the altar, put incense on it, and take it quickly *to* the congregation [wrong direction!] and make atonement for them; for wrath has gone out from the LORD. ***The plague has begun.***” 47 Then Aaron took it as *Moses* commanded [but *not* as God had commanded], and **ran into the midst of the assembly** [brethren, note this is exactly the *opposite* direction from what God has *said to do*! But in this case, they were standing up to God himself!] and already the plague had begun among the people. So he put in the incense and made atonement for the people. 48 ***And he stood between the dead and the living; SO the plague was stopped.*** 49 Now those who died in the plague were fourteen thousand seven hundred, besides those who died in the Korah incident. 50 So Aaron returned to Moses at the door of the tabernacle of meeting, for the plague had stopped.”

*God, who looks on the heart, saw their forgiving, loving heart for their countrymen – not a rebellious heart, and God honored them though they did NOT obey God’s stated will in their case.*

\* **The friends of the paralytic who tore up a roof and ceiling!**

### **Mark 2:1-5**

“And again He entered Capernaum after some days, and it was heard that He was in the house. 2 Immediately many gathered together, so that there was no longer room to receive them, not even near the door. And He preached the word to them. 3 Then they came to Him, bringing a paralytic who was carried by four men. 4 **And when they could not come near Him because of the crowd, they uncovered the roof where He was. So when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying.** 5 When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic,

“Son, your sins are forgiven you.”

*Would you and I be so bold?* Well, they were rewarded for their diligent perseverance. Remember: “Men ought always to pray and not faint, *and not lose heart or give up*” – Luke 18:1.

\* **The Syro-Phoenician woman** and the story of bread not given to dogs. – a great story of

shameless persistence. You can read it in Matthew 15:21-28.

**Matthew 15:21-28** “Then Jesus went out from there and departed to the region of Tyre and Sidon. 22 And behold, *a woman of Canaan* came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed."

23 *But He answered her not a word.* And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, "Send her away, for she cries out after us."

24 But He answered and said, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." [this appears to be His stated will, right?] 25 Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, "Lord, help me!" [shameless persistence in action!]

26 But He answered and said, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs." [Most of us would have been horribly offended... but not her! She doesn't QUIT!] 27 And she said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table."

28 ***Then*** Jesus answered and said to her, "*O woman, GREAT is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire.*" *And her daughter was healed from that very hour.*"

So does this kind of SHAMELESS beseeching of our GOD in heaven have its place? YOU BET! How many prayers AREN'T being answered because we're not PERSISTENT enough? Or PASSIONATE enough – letting God KNOW our heart-felt feelings, from the heart!?

**\* Jacob wrestling with God – and *not* letting go, even though God *told* him to! You can read of it later in Genesis 32:23-29 if you're unfamiliar with the story.**

**My point:** men and women of God were not afraid to contest God's stated will, in prayer and faith. Those who were told "no", had faith, as much faith, as who were given their wish. Are we going to develop this kind of *diligence* in faith (for I don't think we have it in the church right now!)

I asked earlier: "How many of God's *rewards*, answered prayers, miracles, healings, close union with God -- are we NOT seeing, *partly* because we're not shamelessly diligent enough?

**For time's sake I have to end it here, but we'll go into the last 2 points of why we NEED faith, to start the 2<sup>nd</sup> message titled "Live by Faith, Part 2".** I encourage you to look up the words "faith" and "faithful" in the New Testament especially, and pray about them on your knees. We don't have to be the people who lose their love, or lack faith, or are sound asleep, when Jesus returns.

Please hear the conclusions – and some very thought-provoking points – in Part 2. You won't want to miss it. After two more reasons of why we need faith, ***I will spend most of the time in the 2<sup>nd</sup> message talking about HOW TO HAVE more godly faith; what the difference is between godly and human faith; and time permitting, we'll also go into the devastating power of doubt - and how we must vanquish all doubt. We CAN and must grow in faith!***

***Until next time, this is Philip Shields signing off for now. God bless you and be with you.***



