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February 2016 "Eight Critical Elements of Faith"

Dear Friends,

In my years as a Christian I have heard numerous sermons about faith. Some have been very good; others have been tremendously misleading. Some preachers make it seem as though faith is all about getting more money and things. The truth is, faith is all about living daily by God's Word and His life in us. This month I am sharing some aspects of faith the Holy Spirit helped me see in scripture. I hope it helps you understand more clearly what it means to live by faith.

1. WHAT DO WE BELIEVE?

²⁷And when Jesus departed thence, two blind men followed him, crying, and saying, Thou Son of David, have mercy on us. ²⁸And when he was come into the house, the blind men came to him: and Jesus saith unto them, Believe ye that I am able to do this? They said unto him, Yea, Lord. ²⁹Then touched he their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it unto you. ³⁰And their eyes were opened; and Jesus straitly charged them, saying, See that no man know it. (Matthew 9:27-30)

The blind men cried out for Jesus to have mercy on them. But Jesus did not address the issue of mercy, He addressed what they believed. We can cry and pray and plead all we want, but if there is no true belief in what God has done for us through Jesus, we probably will not receive what we're asking for. We know what we need and want, God knows what we need and want, but what do we believe? The success of our faith is not based on how much we pray and ask, but on what we believe.

2. ARE WE READY?

During gym class in high school one year we were allowed to go to the weight room and work out. I had never lifted weights in my life, so a friend helped me. He put 100 pounds on the bench press bar and I began my workout...rather, I tried. I was so skinny and weak, I couldn't bench press 100 pounds and the bar just sat there on my chest no matter how hard I tried to push it up. My friend just shook his head with a sad look of sympathy on his face and helped me escape my embarrassing predicament. As time went on, 100 pounds was just a warm-up before starting my work-out.

Romans 10:17 tells us that faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. Jude 1:20 states that we build ourselves up on our most holy faith by praying in the Holy Ghost. The question is not if we have faith; the question is, have we developed enough faith to accomplish what has been set before us? If we try to accomplish more than we're ready to take on, it won't work.

3. ARE WE CONVINCED FAITH WORKS?

¹²And on the morrow, when they were come from Bethany, he was hungry: ¹³And seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find anything thereon: and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for the time of figs was not yet. ¹⁴And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever. And his disciples heard it.

²⁰And in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots.

²¹And Peter calling to remembrance saith unto him, Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away. (Mark 11:12-14, 20-21)

When Jesus spoke to the fig tree, He had no initial evidence in the natural that anything was happening. Even so, He did not stand around questioning what He had done and whether or not it would work. He went on His way as if the results were guaranteed. The only people who seemed surprised at the withering away of the fig tree were the disciples.

Wondering if our faith will work is proof that we are not convinced that faith will truly get the results God has promised. The more we develop faith, the less we will doubt the reality of its power. Faith believes that faith works.

4. OUR WORDS AND OUR FAITH

²²And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God. ²³For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. ²⁴Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them. (Mark 11:22-24)

When Jesus spoke, He did not speak things which were opposite to the will of God or counterproductive to producing results. When people told Him of their afflictions, He did not join with them in declaring their sickness. Instead, He only spoke what God wanted, which was their healing.

The way many Christians talk about themselves and their lives, they are severely hindering their ability to receive anything from God. I never cease to be amazed at how many talk more about their sickness, poverty, anxieties, fears and inadequacies than they do the promises of God. Then, after reinforcing and taking ownership of the very things they do not want in their lives, they talk about how faith doesn't work or that they don't know why God isn't moving. The truth is, if our words do not line up with what we are believing for, we may never receive what faith can actually produce.

5. THE FOCUS OF OUR WORDS

²³For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. (Mark 11:23)

This is very similar to the previous point, but with a very critical aspect. Jesus said whosoever shall say **UNTO** this mountain. Jesus spoke **TO** the fig tree. Jesus spoke **TO** devils. Jesus spoke **TO** the storms. Jesus spoke **TO** the people wanting healing. Jesus did not speak **ABOUT** the fig tree, devils, storms or people needing healing.

Christians may have strong faith. But strong faith will speak the word and the will of God, not just about a situation, but to a situation. We can talk about wanting and believing for change all day long. But until we start releasing scripture-based words of faith **TO** what needs to be changed, the change may never come.

Yes, it is correct to talk about the completed work of Jesus and all God has made available to us as His children. However, the pattern established by Jesus is that change manifests through believing **AND** speaking to what needs to be changed. Many Christians are critical of the idea of this kind of confession. But if we are going to look unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2), we cannot ignore the example He has given us of speaking to those things that need to change.

6. HOW WE GET FAITH

³⁵And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. (Matthew 9:35)

Notice the order of what Jesus did: teaching, preaching then healing. This pattern is revealed in other places within the four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Jesus first delivered the message of the Kingdom, then He began ministering to the needs of the people. The reason for this approach is revealed in Romans 10:17, *So then, faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*

I have encountered numerous Christians over the years who say they are living by faith, but the faith they are living by is based on what their pastor or favorite television preacher has said. To be very clear, sermons in and of themselves **DO NOT** produce faith; only God's Word causes faith to come. Sermons should be based on an unaltered, contextual use of scripture. Even at that, sermons are essentially just information. Until there is an application of the information there will be no transformation.

Yes, sermons can definitely impact faith *if the sermons are filled with the Word of God.* But God has made it explicitly clear that faith comes by hearing His Word. Faith does not come just because we trust in God and believe the Bible is pure truth. If we do not focus on scripture, read it, hear it read and sow it into our spirit, faith does not come.

7. ARE WE BEING EXHORTED TOWARD FAITH?

⁵³And it came to pass, that when Jesus had finished these parables, he departed thence. ⁵⁴And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works? ⁵⁵Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? ⁵⁶And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things? ⁵⁷And

they were offended in him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honor, save in his own country, and in his own house. ⁵⁸And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief. (Matthew 13:53-58)

²²And he cometh to Bethsaida; and they bring a blind man unto him, and besought him to touch him. ²³And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town; and when he had spit on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, he asked him if he saw ought. ²⁴And he looked up, and said, I see men as trees, walking. ²⁵After that he put his hands again upon his eyes, and made him look up: and he was restored, and saw every man clearly. ²⁶And he sent him away to his house, saying, Neither go into the town, nor tell it to any in the town. (Mark 8:22-25)

As I was reading the above passage from Mark, the Holy Spirit drew my attention to the fact that Jesus led the blind man out of town before ministering to him. Then, the passage from Matthew reveals a startling fact: Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was hindered in what He could do because of the unbelief of the people. What if He had led some people in Matthew's account out of town before ministering to them?

The point the Holy Spirit was making is that some Christians are going to have to "leave town" before they start seeing powerful faith results. In other words, some are going to have to separate themselves from their current church, circle of friends, favorite preachers, etc if they are going to be able to truly live by the faith described in scripture and exemplified by Jesus. This is not always an easy thing to do. It can be difficult to leave a church you've attended for years. But if you are surrounded by conversation that is filled with complaining, murmuring, unbelief and is contradictory to the Word of God, that atmosphere will have an impact on your faith life.

In Hebrews 10:23-25, God instructs Christians to assemble themselves with other Christians who will hold fast to their profession of faith and exhort one another in their faith. No matter how large the church, how apparently successful its programs and how nice the members, if that church does not create an atmosphere of genuine faith, it is not the right church for a Christian who is striving to follow in the steps of Jesus.

8. THE FOUNDATION FOR OUR BELIEVING

⁶By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth. ⁹For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast. (Psalm 33:6, 9)

⁴But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. (Matthew 4:4)

Everything in this natural universe originated from God's Word as He spoke it all into existence. The principles of the Kingdom of God and His general will for all Christians are revealed in scripture. What this means is that everything we are believing for must first be established in scripture.

I have heard of Christians believing for outlandish things which cannot be supported in any way by God's Word. You cannot use faith to exact revenge on others. You cannot use faith to obtain other people's possessions. You cannot use faith to confess someone to fall in love with you and

marry you. You cannot file bankruptcy and then claim your faith delivered you from financial struggles. This kind of foolishness goes on and on.

No matter what you ask God to do or what you're believing for, the answer will always have its foundation in the Bible. God works exclusively with His Word, for His Word is the only eternal truth we have. The moment you try to use faith for something that is not supported by scripture is the moment God removes Himself from your request. This is why it is so important that we study to show ourselves approved unto God, rightly dividing the word of truth (see 2 Timothy 2:15).

God has instructed us to live by faith. But the faith we live by must be according to the pureness of His Word and the standards contained therein. God has promised that faith works and produces results. Living by the faith of the Son of God (Galatians 2:20) will bring into being everything God desires for our lives!

In His Grace,

Jim

P.S. - To receive a CD of the sermon on which this month's letter is based, use the order form below.

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