

Faith

Key Verse

Hebrews 11:1 - Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Exploring the Bible

I. Some Definitions

A. What is Faith?

Hebrews 11:1 - Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Question: According to this verse what two things describe faith?

Answer:

What is faith? This is the Bible's definition of faith. Faith gives substance or assurance to things that we are hoping for and gives conviction or proof of things that are not visible. When God makes a promise to us, it provides hope. But it is faith that gives substance and assurance to that hope so that hope becomes reality. Faith brings proof or conviction of the reality of those things in the spiritual realm that haven't yet manifested in the physical realm. This allows us to stand firm, to walk forward, and to bring the Kingdom of God to this earth.

Faith is not a belief system that works to make me feel good and to get me through bad times. Faith is seeing spiritual reality in the heavenly realms so that one operates with confidence and assurance until it manifests physically on this earth.

B. What is Doubt?

James 1:6 – 7 - But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord;

Question: Someone who doubts is like what?

Answer:

Question: Will someone who doubts receive anything from the Lord?

Answer:

The word for doubt literally means to judge or to discriminate. We begin to bring a judgment on the validity of God's promise and soon our mind is divided. One part of the doubting mind believes God will do what he says while the other part of his mind does not believe God will do what he says. With a mind in turmoil like this, it becomes like the seed that is being driven and tossed by the wind. There is no stability in what this person believes. In their mind they are saying, "God will do it! Oh, God won't do it! I think God will do it, no, I don't think God is going to do anything!" As you can see, a person like this is not settled on what they believe about God and what He will or won't do for them. It is impossible for someone who thinks like this to tap into the things that God has promised to give.

C. What is Unbelief?

Mark 16:14 - Later Jesus appeared to the Eleven as they were eating; he rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen Him after he had risen.

Question: For what does Jesus rebuke the 11 disciples?

Answer:

Unbelief is simply refusing to believe what God says to us or what God has demonstrated for us. The disciples had been told by others that Jesus had risen from the dead. Jesus himself said that He would rise from the dead after three days. But the disciples refused to believe what Jesus said about Himself before He died, they refused to believe what the prophets had said about Jesus, and they refused to believe what eyewitnesses were reporting about Jesus. This is unbelief. In the light of all this testimony from both God and man they refuse to believe the truth.

D. What is Little Faith?

Read *Matthew 17:14 – 20*

Question: What was it that the disciples could not do (verse 16)?

Answer:

Question: According to Jesus, why couldn't the disciples perform this miracle (verse 20)?

Answer:

Question: How much faith did they need to perform miracles (verse 20)?

Answer:

Jesus gives a puzzling answer to His disciples when they asked Him why they could not bring healing to this little boy. Jesus tells the disciples that their problem was that they had little faith. Yet, in the next breath He says that if they have faith the size of a mustard seed they would be able to do great miracles. A mustard seed is extremely small in size. That means that in order to perform great miracles, it only requires a very small quantity of faith. Yet, Jesus had just rebuked them because of their little faith. It is obvious from this short discourse from Jesus that little faith is not referring to quantity.

Read *Matthew 14:27 – 31*

Question: What does Peter want to do (verse 27)?

Answer:

Question: What happened to Peter when he saw the wind (verse 30)?

Answer:

Question: What it does Jesus tell Peter when he saves him (verse 31)?

Answer:

In this story, we begin to get a clearer picture of what it means to have "little faith." Peter began by asking the Lord if he could come to Him on the water. Jesus invites him to come, and Peter gets out of the boat and comes. At this point, Peter is exercising faith. He believes that it is Jesus who invited him to come, and he believes that on the word of Jesus he will not sink. Peter is quite literally walking by faith. But when Peter sees the turmoil of the storm, he becomes afraid. At this point, he has taken his eyes off of Jesus and has stopped believing the invitation of Jesus to come to him. Peter begins to sink. We can only speculate how much time elapsed from the time when Peter crawled over the side of the boat to when he began to sink. Perhaps it was only a few seconds or maybe a minute. The point is that he did not

continue believing in Jesus' invitation until he reached Jesus. This is the essence of "little faith." It is faith that is "little" or "short" in endurance not size. The faith of Peter did not endure from the boat to Jesus. Part way between the boat and Jesus, Peter sees the storm, becomes afraid, and in his fear begins to question whether the invitation of Jesus will hold up until he gets to Jesus. In that moment, his faith became doubt and he began to sink. The essence of "little faith" is that through doubt one stops believing before the final result of the kingdom has manifested.

E. What is Great Faith?

Read *Luke 7:1-10 (NIV)*

Question: What does the centurion ask Jesus not to do (verse 6)?

Answer:

Question: What does the centurion ask Jesus to do instead (verse 7)?

Answer:

Question: What happened to the centurion's servant (verse 10)?

Answer:

Jesus says that the centurion demonstrated "great faith." Yet, Jesus has made it clear in other passages that the quantity of faith is never the issue. So, what is "great faith"? Great faith is not the size or quantity of faith but faith that comes from understanding how the Kingdom of God works. The centurion understood the concept of authority in the Kingdom and therefore demonstrated great faith. The centurion wasn't wondering, after he came to understand the authority that Jesus had, whether healing was God's will. He simply had heard how Jesus was healing people, realized He carried an authority over sickness, and realized Jesus could command sickness to leave from anywhere, and he acted upon that. Many times we understand something about God's Kingdom, then start wondering if it is God's will and lose our great faith.

II. Abraham, An Example of Faith

Read *Genesis 18:1-15*

Question: What was the promise made by the Lord to Abraham (verse 10)?

Answer:

Question: What was Sarah's response to this announcement (verse 12)?

Answer:

This passage is the story of the Lord's announcement of the conception and birth of the promised son Isaac. Both Abraham and Sarah struggled to grasp and believe the reality of what God was promising them, especially in light of their own physical shortcomings in the reproductive area. God kept His promise to them and by the next year Isaac was born. Let's look at what the New Testament has to say about this Abraham's response.

Romans 4:18 – 21 - In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, "So shall your offspring be." He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.

Question: How old were Abraham and Sarah at the time God promised to give them a child (verse 19)?

Answer:

Question: In facing the facts about his and Sarah's bodies, what did Abraham not do (verse 20)?

Answer:

Question: What happened to Abraham's faith as he faced the facts about his and Sarah's bodies (verse 20)?

Answer:

Question: How persuaded was Abraham that God would do what he had promised (verse 21)?

Answer:

Abraham is the father of all those who live and operate by faith. This passage summarizes what faith looks like in operation. In Genesis 18:1 – 15, God visits Abraham and personally delivers the message that they are going to have a son in one year's time.

Abraham faces the facts about the condition of his and Sarah's bodies to physically procreate on their own, and his conclusion was that their bodies were as good as dead. But Abraham doesn't let the facts before him weaken his faith, nor did he allow unbelief (outright not believing what God had promised him) cause to him to waver or doubt. Instead, he is fully persuaded of what God will do for him and Sarah based on God's promise, and through this persuasion his faith is strengthened. Out of this strengthened faith in the face of facts that don't match, Abraham gives glory to God. He overcomes doubt, unbelief, and little or short-lived faith through being fully persuaded in God's promise. This is what faith looks like.

Practical Exercise:

Declaring the Bible builds our faith, thereby releasing the Kingdom of God into our lives and into this world. Take one need in your life, or in the life of someone close to you, and find three verses in the Bible that speak the clear, positive will of God into that need and begin declaring those verses into that need or situation on a daily basis or more often if necessary. You will find that as you declare God's Word faith will begin building in your heart. This is what God's Word is designed to do.