
Understanding and Applying Faith

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Principle Scriptures: Mark 9:23; Luke 17:5-6; Romans 1:16-32; 3:22; 5:1-11; 10:14-17; 12:3-4; 1 Corinthians 16:13-14; 2 Corinthians 5:7; 13:5; Galatians 3:1-14; Ephesians 2:8-9; Colossians 2:6-12; Hebrews 2:4; 11: 1-6; 12:2; James 1:2-4; 2:14-26; 1 Peter 1:7-9; 2 Peter 1:2-9; 16; 1 John 5:4

We are called to learn and develop faith because faith is essential and of the utmost importance for every aspect of the Christian life. Without faith, we can do nothing! Although this study is aimed at pastors and church leaders, any Christian desiring to grow deeper in the faith will find it impacting and convicting because it is from the precepts of Scripture. As Christians, especially those who are responsible for the education and care of others, we are called to build our spiritual formation from the solid foundation of the Bible (Rom. 10:17; Heb. 11:6).

This essay is designed so that you might understand the basics of faith as determined from the precepts of the Bible. By understanding faith and what Christ has done for you, you will be able to hear His call and put into action real, effective Christian growth and action, by faith, for His glory and Kingdom! In pastoral ministry, there will be times of stress, uncertainty, and failure. We will be tired, tried, tested and go through setbacks, difficulties, and suffering. We need to understand faith in a real, heartfelt way so we can keep our eyes fixed upon our Lord. Faith will become even stronger and better through the afflictions we face. Faith must not be just an idea or a plan; it must be a reality. It must be working in you before you can be effectively used by our Lord.

For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "but the righteous man shall live by faith." (Romans 1:17)

What is Faith?

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

Christ is what we hope for; Christ is what is to be seen! Faith is the promise of God that gives us the hope and confidence so we can receive, act on, obey, and trust God's promises, because God is sovereign and trustworthy. We can trust God for the future because we can see what He has done in the past—from creation, to testimonies, to His infallible Word. Faith reassures us of God's love and grace and gives us direction and motivation for the Christian life. Faith looks to and is fueled by hope, it gives us optimism, builds our confidence, helps us be bold, to remain faithful, and persevere in the faith—all for the glory of the risen Lord and the building of His Kingdom!

Faith in and of itself will not save you or empower you; it is the object of the faith that does this. The Object of that faith is Jesus Christ as our Lord. Faith means that we are committed to Christ; it is our faith that puts us in Christ and keeps us remaining in Him (Rom. 1:17). Thus, we, as Christians, must live by faith (1 Cor. 1:22-30)! Faith is putting into practice our trust, assurance, hope, and conviction. Faith is not a force we obtain or manipulate or control. We cannot think that just because we believe in something, it must be true. If this were so, we could go to the supermarket and believe we are a cucumber, which would not make us a cucumber.

Christianity is not based on fairy tales or superstitions but on fact and reality. Faith is not subjective, based on feelings or personal ideas; rather, it is substantive, based on fact and reality! Faith is based on knowledge given by God. Our faith is based on historical evidence, logical reasoning, the confidence in who God is, and valid testimonies. We have a wide body of knowledge. Our Bible is a collection of 66 books written over a 2000 year period of time by dozens of authors all inspired by the Holy Spirit. Just consider the millions of personal testimonies and thousands of volumes of works by gifted authors and teachers. The Bible is reality and truth; the Bible tells us about faith. Faith is simple but not simplistic; it is not just simple belief, because even the demons believe (James 2:19). Faith is not blind trust, because we know the One who is leading! Faith is still trusting what is not seen and believing our God (Rom. 1:16-32; 5:1-11; 10:14-17; Gal. 3:1-4; Eph. 2:8-9; James 2:14-26)! It combines belief with trust; we are to believe in Christ—not just about Him. Faith provides the "substance" and "essence" of our relationship with our Lord, it looks to our future, and it is our hope. Faith is a two way street; we receive it from God, and respond it back as trust. It would be like a lake which has a source and an outlet. If we only have an outlet we would dry up. If we just have a source we become like the Dead Sea, lifeless and void.

Faith is the Instrument and not the Cause; Christ is the Cause.

Because we have confidence in God and in His plan and purpose for our lives, we can then act on faith. Faith is based on the faithfulness of our Lord, and not of our goodness, just as animal sacrifice in the O.T. was a means of forgiveness and surrendered attitude because of a loss of something precious, but not the cause of the Jew's salvation (Gal 2:15-16; 3:24; Heb. 9:11-15; 10:1-4). The reformers called this "meritorious ground for our justification," explaining that faith is the soil that the seed of justification is planted into. Christ was that soil, too. As we give our lives to Christ in faith, He, in turn, gives us His righteousness. Faith will generate real, impacting Christianity so we can become a committed disciple and build His Church. If you want to understand faith, you must be willing to understand our Lord. Your faith is as only as good as the object into which you place it. If it is in money or power, it will be weak and

lifeless. If it is in false teachings or personal ideas, it will be dead. Faith must be in our living God by way of His working in you!

The Theological Meaning of Saving Faith (Acts 13:38-39; Rom.1:17; 3:31-5:21; 2 Cor. 5:13-21; Gal. 2:15- 5:1; Phil. 3:4-14; 1 John 1:9)

In Protestant, Reformed, and Evangelical Theology, faith comes to a person by what is called “Justification by Faith Alone.” This was the rallying cry of the Reformation. This was the main point that caused Luther and Calvin to challenge the Catholic Church and its teachings. This is also the cornerstone of protestant theology that Christ, through His work, gave us a “pardon.” This pardon is from the penalty of death because of sin, and there is nothing we could ever do to earn this pardon. It is purely by His acceptance of us that we are saved (Eph. 2:8-9). There is nothing that we can add to it, such as good works or clean living. Justification means that, much like a blanket, God's righteousness is covering us from His wrath and punishment! It is like getting a speeding ticket, going to court, and having the judge declare you innocent, even though you were speeding. To God, you are clean, covered by “Atonement,” which is Christ's righteous covering over our sinful being; this is what Christ has done for you. This creates our reconciliation to God; as we were in perfect relationship to Him before the Fall, we now are, again, in harmony.

God has a righteous basis for our justification, through the sacrifice of His Son for our sins. Grace was not cheap for God. Christ paid a great debt by pleasing God's wrath, both in metaphysical pain and the human pain of the crucifixion (Lev. 16; Psalm 103:12). Our independence is a slap in His face, and He can do nothing in us until it is removed (John 3:5)! Let us pray to be cleansed by the atoning death of our Savior, who bore our punishment and lived out the Law on our behalf.

Some Jews take issue with this, saying it is unbiblical—that God cannot overrule His own Law, sighting Duet. 25:1 and Prov. 17:15. However, they do not realize that Jesus Himself is the righteous One and He lived a perfect life in our place, as a designated hitter in baseball.

The Catholic Church taught that justification was a process, achieved through the Sacraments and church, and that faith, as well as works, contributed to it. The Reformers said this act was done at once at our acceptance of His gift of Grace. The Catholic Church at the time of the Reformation was even “selling indulgences,” granting people a spot in Heaven for money, regardless of faith or even the Church. They did this to pay for the cathedrals they were building—and you thought bingo was bad! Although Catholic apologists say this was never an “official act” of the church, nevertheless, history clearly states this was a wide problem.

Fate & Philosophy vs. Faith & Doctrine (Romans 11:10-10; 11:11-36; 1 John 4:7-21)!

Fate is looking at what must be, what has been decreed by whoever is in charge, whether it is your boss or God's sovereignty. But, doctrine is what God has revealed for us to understand, not because it must be, but because this is what is best for us and on our behalf! Furthermore, since it is the best, then it obviously should and must be the best for us. Philosophy tells us that faith is blind; however, doctrine has eyes of love. Philosophy only looks to itself; doctrine looks to God. Philosophy has no compassion or liberty or impacting application to create freedom, faith, or to glorify God. Fate is without care, love, or understanding. Doctrine shows us our faith; it is the care and the love and the kindness that abounds because He first loved us! Faith and predestination are also the voluntary choices of the sanctified Christian, because God is working and foreordained it. This is not contradiction, as it transcends normal thinking.

Providence in Scripture means that God is in total control, and thus, we can trust our Lord completely, whatever unfolds before us. Providence fuels our faith; it does not obstruct it! The ultimate love of God is that He laid down His life for His enemies!

Faith Produces Hope (Luke 12:15-21; John 16:33; Acts 14:22; 1 Cor. 4:8-13; 2 Cor. 4:7-18; 5:6-8; Rom. 15:13; Phil. 1:21-24; 1 Tim. 1:1; 2 Tim. 4:7-8; Heb. 6:18-19)

Hope is eternal love. It is our forward outlook to be in Christ forever. This produces joy and strengthens our faith which Hebrews 11:1 tells us is "*the substance of things hoped for.*" Hope is our future with Christ in glory, in Heaven. The opposite of hope is despair and hopelessness. This is the rotten trait that keeps people oppressed, and stagnates, rendering them unable to grow and succeed in life and in faith. It only sees the problems and circumstances and not the Light of Christ. When we keep our focus on our circumstances, we will see little or no hope. We can only attain hope by being in Christ, and having our eyes focused upon Him. Christ is to be our anchor, our hope.

Hope calls us to patience and confidence for service in all aspects of life, from the great times to the bad. It keeps us fixed on Christ in times of adversity, so that we can endure suffering, and continue in His call (Rom. 5:1-5; 8:18, 25). Hope must be our focus—to us, and to others. It must never be phony or oppressed (1 John 3:3; 4:18)! Hope is the effect of faith, which grows our spiritual maturity and character through our obedience and trust in our Lord (Heb. 6:18.) If you have no hope, then you have no vision, no purpose, no trust, and no faith in the One who loves you. Hope allows you to live with the perspective of eternity, so you are not bogged down in your dire circumstances.

Faith Produces Faithfulness (Psalm 119: 89-90; Matt. 17:19; 25:21; Rom. 1:17; 5:1-2; 1 Cor. 12:9; Gal. 5:22-23; Heb. 11:1; 1 Thess. 5:24)

Faithfulness is the “gluing” fruit that will preserve our faith and the other characters of the Spirit, and identify God's will so we can be dependable and trusting to God and others. It is the one fruit that we give to God, whereas the others, such as love or humility, are a result of the Spirit working in us! Faithfulness is authenticity, the power and motivation for Christian living. Because God is trustworthy with us, we can be faith-worthy in Him!

When we are not exercising our faith, we will be consumed with doubt and distrust—the opposite of God's call and plan for us. We will lose our trust and hope that God is in control! When we do this, we will lose or miss out on seeing God come through with His promises.

Faithfulness is very difficult to have or hold on to, especially when applying it to our church, work, and relationships. We tend to lose our patience with God thinking He is just a blessing machine; and, when we do not get what we want, we leave Him because of our uncertainty. Yet, Faithfulness is the fruit that we give to God so He can change us—inside and out! It is the ability to take what Christ has done in us and, with loyalty and trust, be a blessing to others. Faithfulness goes against modern psychology and the thinking of society, as it requires us to move beyond ourselves. Psychology tells us to be egocentric, putting the “me” first, and rearranging the world to suit our needs, which creates self-destruction and broken relationships. We have to keep the goal of faithfulness in our minds always, as it will allow God to work deeper, and us to respond to His call! God has bigger things at stake that He wants you for, much more than the petty complaints we voice or the things we ask of Him!

Remember, God does not want our complaints; thus, He will not give us an answer for them. Rather, He wants our obedience so He can use us more and in better ways!

Faith Produces Optimism (Proverbs 4:23; Luke 21:18; John 16:33; Romans 8:25; 28; 15:13; Colossians 3:1-4)

Optimism combines hope and faithfulness into synergy (the combination supercharges and become more than just the sum of its parts) to be positive for Christ. It is a heartfelt confidence that everything will come out for the best, as Paul proclaimed, no matter what happens. It will help us to think the best of and be positive with people and in all situations, even if we are proven wrong.

When we are not exercising optimism, we will be pessimistic, give off cynicism to our family and friends, and operate all of our relations with distrust, doubt, and sarcasm. These are the opposites of God's call to faith! These bad characteristics will help us see and dwell on the fact that the glass is half-empty,

not that it is half-full! We will only recognize the negative, and look for the worst in people and situations. There are times when we need to be careful and cautious, but constant negativity will get us nowhere.

Faith is the foundation and rock on which we stand. Hope is the confidence and expectation that God's promises will be fulfilled. Optimism combines the two so our faith turns into conviction and enthusiasm, and our hope and faith turn into certainty! So, when we are filled with His Spirit and are true to the Word, we can put His call into action with passion. We will be motivated to seek training to hone our knowledge and prepare us for our call to better glorify our Lord. We will be filled with passion so we can stand longer in service for our Lord, even in times of stress and persecution. We will be motivated to seek justice and be fair. Real Optimism will help us sink our roots in the awareness and knowledge of who we are in Christ, and the power of His grace. Optimism is not just a wish, an academic thought, positive or hopeful thinking, nor is it just the confidence that everything will turn out all right. Rather, it is real and tangible.

With Optimism, we will be able to keep our faith on track and see what our Lord Jesus Christ has done for us. Then, we will be able to overcome any setbacks, disappointments, or suffering we may face, as the goal of being His child will outweigh all else. We will have no fear for what happens to our body when our soul is secured (Phil. 3:20-21a). Eternity is our goal, and our life here is a training ground to learn—a mere rehearsal of what is to come. When we are positive and optimistic, we will keep our interest on what is true, and seek His promises. Because Optimism puts faith into action, we will be able to be more confident that God's promises are real, true, and will come to us. That way, we can have a good attitude, be filled with zeal, and *keep our heart with all diligence* (Proverbs 4:23) even when times are harsh (Hebrews 10:24-25, 1 Peter 3:15).

Faith Produces Confidence (Proverbs 3:25-27; 14:26-27; Job. 13:15; Philippians 4:13; Heb 4: 14-16)

Confidence enables us to rely on the Lord for all things in our life. It keeps our faith focused and rooted on the object, which is Christ as Lord, and knows the obstacles of our feelings, circumstances, or issues. We can push forward in the direction that we are called because He is governing and He is sovereign. As we look to Him with trust, and not to others or ourselves, we have the God of the universe in us. Nothing is greater than that! We can live our lives in holiness and Christian character, and react to all the situations we encounter with the focus on who we are in Christ, as He is our confidence. Confidence also makes us realize we are not responsible for the results—only for the faith and obedience.

When we are not exercising confidence, our faith weakens and may fail. We will be overwhelmed with doubt, uncertainty, and disbelief. We will soon distrust people, our capabilities, and God's call. This is the opposite of God's call for faith! This will cause us to seek our limited thinking, placing confidence in

feeble, temporary abilities, and things that do not last and have little importance. Self-confidence will elevate us as godlike, becoming our principle authority and reason for life instead of Christ! Confidence will skew into pride. Pride is not a synonym; rather, it is a heinous mutation. We will lack confidence to serve the Lord, and engage in fear because our faith is limited to the situation, and not in Christ (Matt. 8:26). Our real confidence is in who we are in Him. This is our motivation in all of our life's pursuits—from relationships to decisions, how we are treated, how we respond to others, and how we exercise our faith.

A Christian is to balance confidence and esteem by the temperance of the other characters. Pride and arrogance are the very worst things a Christian can exhibit in the sight of God! Our confidence is to be sure and righteous—without pride. Pride elevates the “me,” whereas, Christian confidence elevates Christ and allows Him to empower us! Bad things become bad when we lack the confidence in Christ to endure and learn from them. Things get worse when we lack the faith and mental composure to deal with a crisis. It is our holding on to His holy love and grace that builds our strength and confidence, and gives us perseverance and more faith. Our Lord gives us the ability and strength to reach beyond our grasp!

Faith Produces Boldness (Genesis 6; 1 Kings 18; Proverbs 28:1; Isaiah 7:9; Daniel 3,6; 2 Corinthians 5:6-8; 7:16; Ephesians 6:13-14; Hebrews 13:6)

Being bold means our willingness to take our faith, venture out with it, and do the right thing at the right time, regardless of the barriers or fears we may encounter (1 John 7:17-19). This enables us to speak the truth, and perform a task without fear of the consequences or results because it is the right and Biblical thing to do. It is realizing that God is in control. He is there within us, beside us, and He will take care of us. Therefore, we do not need to fear what others can do; rather, we are to concentrate on our character and call, and do it with passion and conviction.

When we are not exercising boldness, we will become Christian cowards. This means we will be held back from what God has called us to do, miss His opportunities and our growth. We will be engulfed by fear, cynicism, negativity, discouragement, and pessimism. These negative traits create a negative attitude that is infectious to others. It causes people not to take the chance to go forward with what God is calling them to. The exercise of faith and the pursuit of relationships require risk and the willingness to be hurt, as people will hurt and betray us; only Christ remains true. This fear seriously hampers our faith. Thus, the person and/or church remains ensnared in fear, allowing obstacles to stop them so that the work our Lord has for them remains undone. Remember, God heals us and helps us move on; there is no reason to be held back by our fears.

Boldness comes from the confidence we have in Christ—who He is, and what He can do. This attitude directly affects how we respond to any given

situation. When we have confidence in our Lord, we can venture beyond our limits, abilities, and comfort zones to engage in the simple things of life—from talking to a stranger in a kind, encouraging way, or sharing the Gospel with a friend, to the big stretches, such as, church planting, teaching with truth and conviction, or going overseas to a strange and foreign land as a missionary. *I can do all things*, Paul said, not because he was this great and powerful man, but because he knew His God, and what He could do! We will not fear what others can do to us, just as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego demonstrated. They knew God *could* save them. They just did not know *if* He would save them. But, whatever God did, they trusted Him for it, even if the furnace took their lives away. So, they could walk into that furnace with confidence, whatever the results might be (Daniel 3:8-30). God chose to do a miracle. And, even if He had not, how we respond is more important than any miracle we may receive.

Our boldness does not stand alone. If it did, then it would be pride—the most heinous sin we could commit! Boldness has to be tempered by the other characters and fruits from our Lord, so it is synergistic and powerful because of whom He is, not for what we can accomplish! If meekness (strength under control), and gentleness are not accompanying our boldness, we will have “bully-ness” and not boldness. You will have a force of personality—not the Spirit of the Lord (1 Peter 4:7-5:8). *Boldness* works together with *cautiousness*; they balance each other out by helping us exhibit wisdom and passion for a better and godly approach to life.

Faith Produces Perseverance (Psalm 37:24; Romans 8:30-39; 1 Corinthians 16:13; 2 Corinthians 1:21-22; Colossians 2:7; Hebrews 2:1; 12:1-3; James 1:4; 25; 1 Peter 4:16; 5:8-9)

The dictionary definition of perseverance is, “To persist in an idea, purpose, or task despite obstacles” (Webster). In the Christian context, perseverance is to continue in a state of grace to the end for our eternal reward. It is literally fixing our eyes upon Jesus—period! In diversity, the call for the Christian is to keep on track, knowing He will take care of us because we belong to Christ. Whatever we face and go through, our Lord is there and we are in His arms. And, when we realize this fact, we can persevere through anything because our Lord, King, and Creator of the universe is there, carrying us through.

It is essential for the pastor and capable leader to be focused on the goal ahead and be able to carry the task and self through the tough times. Too many leaders get frustrated when things do not go as “they” planned or in their perceived way, and they either give up or neglect their responsibility. Their eyes leave Jesus and just focus inward on themselves.

Too many pastors feel they have to answer all of the “whys” in life, like the “whys” of suffering. It is not so much how we answer the question on the reason for suffering, but how we live out our lives and walk with Christ. Too many people

are stuck in the questions of it and never learn to trust and rely on our Lord, or learn to deal with it as a learning experience so to be better prepared as a servant of the Lord. Suffering is a natural aspect of the human experience, as we inherited a sinful nature that corrupted all of God's creation, including us. Suffering does not diminish our faith; in fact, it will strengthen it. When we accept Christ, we take on His righteousness as a covering; but the sinful nature is still there, and we must confront and fight against it all of our Christian life. As we battle on, we grow, and each instance becomes easier to handle as we grow in righteousness and sanctification. This is our spiritual growth, and the faithful and cheerful Christian is the one who perseveres, regardless of the circumstance.

Since suffering is a natural aspect of life, we need to realize this and guard ourselves from it, whether it is physical, mental, emotional, financial, or spiritual. The Bible tells us many times to expect it and to be persistent when faced with adversity. Faith is the key to make this happen; it is faith that allows the work of our Lord in us. Christ will give us the comfort and strength to press on; our reward is yet to come and our adventure in this life is very short compared to the eternity to come. So, we need to make the best of it as life deals us the curves; we are not to be overcome with frustration, but overcome with joy through the life we have in Christ. When things do not go our way, we need to make sure we are going His way!

How to Understand and Apply Faith Study

Below is a 24-week study on understanding and applying faith. This was originally designed to train pastors and church leaders; however, any Christian who truly desires to follow Christ will greatly benefit from it. It can be used for Bible studies, small groups, sermons, and youth ministry as well as for personal edification and growth.

Introduction: **Understanding and Applying Faith Article <add LINK>**

Lesson 1: Faith is Tactical and Practical

Psalm 15 and Philippians 4:4-9

As pastors and church leaders, we must come to the point that we allow the search and conviction of the Holy Spirit upon our lives to the very core of our souls (2 Cor. 13:5)! Once this happens, the result will be more faith and more use to Christ. The result for your church will be more focus upon His precepts and increased prayer, which will bring an outpouring of the Spirit and renewal! This will impact your neighborhood and the world in which you live. It all starts with

your determination to encompass the faith He has given you and obey! What is stopping you?

Psalm 15 is a crucial image of how we are to approach God. It tells us that He is indeed working in us; we are learning and receiving His Truth and are willing, able, and called to impart it to others. These are the traits of faith that will produce results. Faith will help, along with the Holy Spirit, to build maturity and character. If you are wondering if you have faith, or enough faith, the results will be:

- Walking with integrity and honesty, genuine and just to God and to others!
- Worshiping, rejoicing, and praising Christ as Lord!
- Teaching God's Truth with power, conviction, and clarity!
- Restraining the tongue that reflects the soul!
- Working and living for righteousness and truth!
- Modeling Christ's love to others!
- Always humble, generous, gentle and kind!
- Not over-worrying, and trusting in the Lord!
- Committed to the importance and practice of prayer!
- Speaking from the heart with love!
- No gossiping, slandering or lying—or even listening to it!
- Not doing evil or reproaching others!
- Despising of ungodliness!
- Honoring people who fear and respect the Lord!
- Not being influenced by power or position—of self or of others!
- Not being corrupt!
- Not extorting, manipulating, or using people for false gains!
- Not taking bribes or fighting against the innocent!
- Allowing the Holy Spirit to direct one's life!
- Swearing to one's own oath and keeping promises!

Those who do these things will never be shaken!!! These are the instruments to determine character and how one has taken in and used faith. These gauges do not lie. If these precepts are weak, not functioning properly, or not at all, then there is something definitely wrong and you need to get on your knees and into His Word! Without a real, working faith, you will not be able to be used by God to build His Church! Real faith will cause the above principles to work from you to those around you! A real, called church leader follows these principles, from the heart and a desire to please God, resulting from the work of the Spirit within him or her. A pretender or false teacher in the pulpit will not exhibit these characteristics!

Questions:

1. Discuss the "Introduction," and how faith has impacted you.

2. How can your growth in faith impact your church?
3. How well can you relate to these principles from Psalm 15? Are they realistic, practical for today, for you? Why, or why not?
4. Look at each of these “Principals” and answer the question, *how have you applied these to yourself, your family, your friends, your church, and people in general?*
5. How can you improve your spiritual walk so you can be the person who models Psalm 15?
6. Can you think of practical ways to demonstrate these principles in your life?
7. What about ways to demonstrate these principles to others around you so that it effects “who you are” in your personality and deeds? In doing so, you not only hear what God says, but truly listen and apply His “principles” in all that you do.
8. What happens when we are not following these or other godly principles?
9. Why would you or a church not want to follow these principles?
10. How will these principles be used to build your faith and church?
11. What would be the characteristics of a pretender or false teacher? Would he or she model the above precepts? How would you know?
12. Our focus must be on edifying and encouraging. So, what can your church do to make this a priority?

Listening and not doing is wrong; but, to obey what the Word of God reveals in Psalm 15 is being a *real* disciple! Because of Grace, we may be able to “dwell in the Lord’s Sanctuary” and place our home “on His Holy Hill,” but what good will it be if we do not show our gratitude and obedience for what He has done by living out His principles? “He who does these things will never be shaken.”

Let us use our lives for His glory so we point people to Christ with passion, integrity, and consistency!

Looking to Romans for our understanding of Faith: Romans is filled with theological knowledge so we can learn about real faith, to help us know it and apply it to our lives and church.

Lesson 2: The Main Theme of Romans is Faith!

Romans 1:16-17

This passage is the nuts and bolts of Romans where, in one sentence, Paul sums up his epistle and his life. Paul lived his life, not in theory, but in the fact that the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation, and shows the only way of justification! Paul was totally surrendered and poured out to God with gratitude and indebtedness that infused and permeated all that he was and did. Our faith and trust in Christ must infuse us also so that all we do is a reflection of Christ working in us! If not, all we have is a religion and a philosophy—and not righteousness and impacting faith. As Christians, we are to live out our faith with passion and conviction, being not ashamed of who we are in Christ.

- Our *Power* refers to the life-changing power of the Word of God—the Gospel—and of the Spirit to totally transform us as He did with Paul. Only this power can remove our stubborn nature that bonds us to sin and that refuses His grace. We cannot receive His grace without the *Power* that intervenes and removes our bond of sin. (Rom. 5:6; 8:5-9). Power is Salvation; it is by the work of Christ alone, through the Holy Spirit!
- We are not to be embarrassed of who we are as Christians, nor, are we to fear sharing our faith! Thus, we as Christians must live by faith as this is the smart thing to do (1 Cor. 1:22-30)!
- Faith is based on knowledge given by God.
- Faith is not just simple trust; faith is not blind trust either, because we know the One who is leading!
- Our faith is based on historical evidence, logical reasoning, and valid testimonies. Our life must be dictated and expressed by what Christ has done for us.
- Faith is still trusting what is not seen and believing our God (Rom. 1:16-32; 5:1-11; 10:14-17; Gal. 3:1-4; Eph. 2:8-9; James 2:14-26)!
- We did not earn our faith; hence, grace is the ultimate free gift.

- Every aspect of faith is built on faith, and nothing else; this is the corner stone of the Gospel (Hab. 2:4). This means we are to trust God and His promises and provision. In Habakkuk, those who survive the Judgment do so because of their faith in God. Faith in the O.T. meant to pledge one's life on the assertions that God gives (Jos. 24:15).
- Our response to faith is by godly living, and exercising out our faith with trust and obedience, whatever we face! It is not looking at our situation; rather, it is looking to God. God desires and deserves our whole-hearted loyalty, allegiance, trust, obedience, and devotion; so, what is stopping you?
- Have you realized that your debt has been cleared, your sin has been covered, and your dread has been replaced with wonder and eternity? Then, how has it affected your life? Do you obey His call and precepts? Does this transformed life impact others around you? Do you "get it" that everything you are is because Christ is in you? If not, why? What is in the way? Are you willing to go on your knees to seek His face and His righteousness for your life? Without it, you have nothing but debt and sin!
- Thanksgiving of faith; who Christ is and what He has done (1 Cor. 11:4; Phil. 1:3; Col. 1:3; 1 Thess.1:2; 2 Thess.1:3; 2 Tim. 3:1; Philemon 4).
- We are to Obey the Holy Spirit and submit to His precepts and Will (Rom. 8:13)! Not our will (Eph. 1:15; Phil. 1:9; Col. 1:9; 1 Thess. 1:3; 2 Thess. 1:11; 2 Tim. 1:3)!
- *Encouraged.* One of the chief purposes of the Church is to encourage and strengthen one another in faith for His service, something so few of us actually do (Eph 1:15; 4:15-16; Phil. 1:6-9)!
- Devout Jews in Paul's time would spend many hours a day in prayer—as do many dedicated Christians today!
- We have our plans; He has His. Guess what? His will win out!
- Paul's will was conquered with a sense of gratitude and indebtedness to Christ. Are you totally submitted to God's ways? Do you feel indebted, or do you feel owed (1 Cor. 6:19-20)? Being "poured out" means to take the focus off yourself and place it on others, as Christ did for us. Paul spent his life to express it! Jesus gives us the ultimate example of being poured out (Matt 26:28; Rom. 5:5)! Our response is John 3: 5; 30; Phil. 2:14-18!
- *Mutual faith* means encouragement, support, and using spiritual gifts, all working as a team. (Eph. 4:15-16) This is the strength of the church; without it, we will fail.

- Beware the failure to hear the call of our Lord because of the noise of our will. Being set apart for the Gospel is to be totally at the disposal of our Lord and master.
- Paul calls himself a "*bondservant*" (Rom. 9:3), the lowest form of a slave in Greek times who was totally at the master's disposal and even expendable; they rowed the boats of war with a whip at their back. This means totally surrendered devotion; the slave/disciple of the Lord has a will that has been sacrificed to God's will, and thus is totally at the disposal of our Lord! Paul's slavery is his freedom (Gal. 1:15; 2:20)!

Questions:

1. What does it mean to live by faith and express it? Make sure that you look for it in others to find a mentor for yourself. Not being ashamed of who we are in Christ is the key to the necessary courage needed for sharing our faith and building our church. Do you agree?
2. In view of the fact that we are free from sin, what are we going to do about it? How is it going to affect our lives and develop our purpose?
3. How does the Holy Spirit come into play with your courage?
4. Read 1 Cor. 1:22-30; what are your stumbling blocks?
5. How do you live out your faith with passion and conviction?
6. How can you live out your faith better with passion and conviction?
7. Are we, as Christians, focused on Christ and what He did for us, then showing that thankfulness back to Him and to those around us? Or, are we self focused, only caring about ourselves and giving God maybe a thought on Sunday? This focus will create our determination and purpose for our lives, based either on God or on our wrong doings!
8. Our response for what Christ did for us is godly living, and exercising our faith with trust and obedience in whatever we face! How have you done this? How can you do this better? What about when your life is crashing in all around you, maybe through a job loss, death or divorce of a spouse, cataclysmic sickness, or everything all at once?
9. Do you feel better, stronger, and more mature and ready to face things now that you have gone through adversity?

10. What can you do specifically to give God your whole-hearted loyalty, allegiance, trust, obedience, and devotion? What are the things that stop you?

Lesson 3: Hypocrisy Destroys Real Faith!

Romans 2:17-3:8

When we rest on who we are as Christians and then do nothing with our faith, we do like the Jews who reject Christ. We may have our salvation (which they do not), but what good is it? This is also the theme of James; faith without works is dead. You are saved, but no big deal if you do nothing with it! When you are teaching others, your first and primary task is to be instructed yourself! You cannot teach what you do not know or have not experienced.

Hypocrisy is heinous before our loving Lord, that is, teaching one thing and doing the opposite. This negates faith and dishonors our Lord! Hypocrisy is also one of the main causes of people being driven away from the church; it is so now as it was then (Rom. 2: 24). Hypocrisy is opposing faith and opposing Jesus!

God's Word was given to the Jews for the purpose of evangelizing the world. Their responsibility was to reach all the people groups on earth; all people and cultures traveled through Israel from up north and east into Egypt for trading (Gen 12:1-3). The Jews' responsibility, especially the Levites, was to be teachers of God, both to their fellow Jews and also to the Gentiles. However, the Bible rarely records the Levite's adherence to their call. So, the people were not properly instructed in the faith and they easily fell into idolatry because they did not know better; they did not have faith. The Jewish leadership failed in their responsibility for education and modeling faith. Do not fail to teach and model faith!

- Christian education is a priority—not just for children, but for adults, as well. People who are not grounded in the Word are not prepared to deal with life or grow in maturity. The Jews, as with many Christians today, placed faith in ritual and tradition, boasting in their privileges and neglecting their responsibility and call.
- C. S. Lewis has a skillful argument, based mostly on this passage in Romans, proving the existence of God on the basis of man's sense of moral absolutes (his sense that he ought to do some things, and ought not to do other things). "Only God could be the source of such universal belief and conviction based upon them."

- There are no secrets from God. So, are you prepared to face Him (Cor. 5:10)?
- God will be glorified and His justice will be vindicated to all! Never make up stories or testimonies, or use sin to please God or reach people; this is dead wrong!
- We cannot hide behind our faith thinking; *hey, I am a good Christian because I go to a church, or, I perform a certain task* there. Nor, can we think we are a mature, growing Christian if we do some sort of ritual. Such thinking cannot place us in God's good graces. We may think we are a real, practicing Christian, but in reality, these mindsets bring misunderstanding and confusion about Christ to the world. Christ must impact your whole being so you are a completely changed and revitalized person—from your old self to Himself!
- For many Christians, their faith has not transformed them. Their faith is only an external showing when it is convenient, such as on Sundays at 10 a.m., but on Monday, the faith is absent and the faith that should be internal is withered and dry. So, their mindset, attitudes, and how they relate Christ to the world tends to be more carnal than Biblical. This was Paul's message to the Romans; does it need to be God's message to you? I know I needed it to be for me at times. What about you? If so, what are you going to do about it?

Questions:

1. Have you or have you known people who placed their comfort and faith in the fact that they were a member of a particular church or movement?
2. When we rest on who we are as Christians and then do nothing with our faith, we are like the Jews who reject Christ. We may have our salvation (which they do not), but what good is it?
3. How is hypocrisy a heinous act before our loving Lord? Do you believe that hypocrisy is one of the main reasons that people are driven away from the church? Why, or why not? Can you think of an example?
4. Having a relationship with Christ has nothing to do with our ethnicity, yet people, still to this day, will fight with each other. So, why do some Christians act prejudicially toward others?
5. How can you walk in/with God with deeper trust and obedience and with more commitment?
6. How can you show your faith outwardly from having it inwardly?

7. Today, a lot of churches fail at truly disciplining their members. Most Christians who go to church on Sundays will only get a few minutes of preaching and just a little Biblical instruction. Some churches do not teach at all. How do you think God feels about that?
8. What are you going to do today, this week, to walk closer to Christ and less with hypocrisy?
9. Are you covering (hiding) your sin, or is God (redeeming)?
10. How much time will you be spending in prayer?

Lesson 4: Real Faith Realizes the Affects of Sin!

Romans 3:9-20

We humans have the natural tendency to play the blame game and refuse to accept responsibility for our actions, beliefs, and even our lives. We want to do as we please, so we do not, nor want to see the long-term consequences for our actions. We live for the "here and now" with our nose firmly planted in our desires and expectations. Then, we become unable or unwilling to see the big picture of what life is all about. Thus, when we experience life's traumas from our own misdirected decisions, we go to God and blame Him. We must learn responsibility; we cannot hide behind the church, or, for the Jew, the Law. We must come to the realization that it is all about what Christ has done for us; therefore, we need to live our lives in response to what He has done for us.

This passage is telling us that everyone is condemned because of sin; no one can ever escape it. No one since Adam and Eve was ever born right; that is why we have to be *born again* (John 3). We also have to see God as pure and just and ourselves as not even close to that. If you choose to live as you please, be aware that one day there will be an accounting, and all of your excuses that may have worked in the past will wither before His Presence.

- When we do accept Christ, we should have the desire to please Him and excel to benefit society and His glory. We have no reason or basis to complain. We tend to always focus on the "whys"—*why did God allow this or that to happen?* However, God desires us not to focus on the why, for He is sovereign. He wants us to focus on the "who" and the "what." The "who" is Christ, and the "what" is His will. When we focus our lives, beliefs, and will upon Him, then the "whys" fall away. Because, it is not a question of why bad things happen to us, but what we can learn from them, and how we can grow to be better in character, faith, and strength for His purpose.

- Our faith is not a cover over our sin and unrighteousness, Christ is! We are totally lost and helpless without Christ!
- We must realize the impact of sin in all aspects of society and all aspects of our lives. If we do not see sin, we will not see Christ. Because, we will fail to realize our need for His cleansing. We have to be cleansed before we can help others understand and undertake Christ's cleansing (Matthew 7:1-5). With this mindset, we will realize that we are all under the same tent of offence, all in the same boat named *peccadillo* (sin); we are all the same—in Christ or outside of Christ. There are no favorites. We will realize our hypocrisy and pride and how we come across to others.
- We have no basis for pride. We will see Christ as who He is and be so overruled that He affects all of us all of the time!

Questions:

1. What can we do to focus ourselves with the correct attitude?
2. When bad things happen, we tend to always focus on the "whys"—why did God allow this or that to happen, and so forth. Why do we do that?
3. How can we get over our distress by focusing only on the Way? What does God want us to focus on?
4. How do we learn when bad things happen to us?
5. How do we grow to be better in character and strength for His purpose? How would that affect your faith and church?
6. Why would some Christians place their confidence in their denomination or church, and reject the truth and practice of the faith?
7. Why must we not rationalize our behaviors or form excuses to cover our tracks?
8. What can you do to make sure your attitude is Christ-centered in regard to blame and responsibility? What does this have to do with your faith?
9. What can you do to be committed to the truth that there is nothing you can do to earn God's favor outside of Christ? How would that affect your witnessing and personal attitude toward life?
10. As a pastor, how would your having more faith benefit your church?

Lesson 5: Righteousness comes by Faith in Christ!

Romans 3:21-26

Propitiation simply means that God takes our place. We cannot be saved by our own actions. We cannot rely on our own efforts, skills, personal connections, family background, or our beliefs. Only Christ can wash us clean and declare us righteous so that we are saved from our sins (Eph. 2:8-9). Jesus led the perfect, sinless life on our behalf; thus, He took our place, in His perfection, in life and sin through death. His Atonement covered us from God's wrath and covered God (protected) from being affected by our sin. Knowing what Jesus did for you should help empower your faith! The promises of God will be of no use to us unless we have the understanding of God and are obedient to that understanding! We must not have a trace of self-interest in us if we are to call ourselves His disciples! Never say you cannot surrender yourself! Without surrender, you will have a very weak and meaningless faith!

- *Righteousness* comes by faith in Christ. Paul was accused of promoting sin, because he was teaching a Gospel by faith and leaving out works—thus, no accountability. However, those who are saved by faith should have no desire for sin; and, if they do, they are to confess it before forgiveness can be granted (1 Cor. 10:13; 1 John 1:5-2:1).
- *Fear of God* is respect and reverence, which turns into trust and obedience. Without faith and trust, we turn to atheism which requires more faith and more trust than what is conceivable and rational.
- We are *Reconciliation* to God. God has a righteous basis for our justification through the sacrifice of His Son for our sins. Grace was not cheap for God. Christ paid a great debt by pleasing God's wrath, both in metaphysical pain and the human pain of the crucifixion (Lev. 16; Psalm 103:12).
- *Pride* is our biggest barrier to knowing Christ and receiving His redemption. It is also the biggest barrier to our growth in and application of faith!
- God increases our faith when we develop more confidence in Him and less confidence in ourselves.
- We, by our fallen nature, tend to only seek pleasure for ourselves, and are unable and unwilling to seek God. We have to be awakened by the Spirit to see Him as Savior and to receive His redemption. Without being sought, we would never have the faith to see or receive Him. We would just remain in our pride and blinded to our situation of sin. This means we cannot achieve anything spiritually on our own efforts. We cannot be saved, we cannot grow,

we cannot worship, and we cannot even serve Him effectively. The great comfort is in knowing that He does the work; we only respond. But, if we say we are acceptable just by whom we are, that *I am OK; I do not need Christ for my salvation and or growth*, we have nothing but pride which will lead to our permanent death. Jesus Christ took your place and absorbed God's wrath, He paid your debt! So, be willing to allow Him to take you beyond your self, beyond your pride, so you remain in Him and increase your faith (John 3:5; 30; 15:5).

Questions:

1. What do you need to do to lead a righteous life by the power of the Holy Spirit, and the guidance from the Word?
2. How would you define faith? Now, how will you put it into practice?
3. How, and in what area has sin affected your life (yours and that of others close to you)?
4. What must the Gospel do to "wake us up," with passion and conviction, to the plight of other souls?
5. What happens when you and your church are not caring for others outside of your circle?
6. How can you best reflect His work in your life?
7. Those who are saved in faith should have no desire for sin; but, we do anyway. So, what are we to do?
8. What will you do today, this week, to confess your sin and seek His forgiveness (1 Cor. 10:13; 1 John 1:5-2:1)?
9. What will happen if you decide not to repent (Psalm 32; 37:23-24)?
10. The fear of God is respect and reverence. So, what can this insight do for you?

Lesson 6: Faith Builds Us and Others Up!

Romans 3:27-31

We are to shut our mouths and renounce our pride and arrogance so we are able to trust in our Lord. Being sinful creatures, we have no right to boast. Because, Christ lived the perfect life, on our behalf, by obeying His own law for us that we were not able or willing to do. He was both able and willing. Thus, the Judge, who is rightly able to condemn us for our sins, is now our Savior. Since we had nothing to do with our place in eternity, we have no reason to be prideful of anything, either because of our accomplishments or for our salvation. In like manner, we had no right to boast before our salvation because of our condemnation. Because, we are saved, and all that we are, and all that we have is from Christ alone, by His grace, and by no real or true effort of our own. Christ covered and protected us from the wrath of God, which we truly deserved!

The world may see pride as a sign of respect and dignity, that our worth as human beings is supreme, and that we deserve respect and even worship for ourselves. The world may take pleasure and satisfaction with pride because it represents achievements that we think we deserve. But, the source of pride is ourselves; it elevates us as a god when there is only One True God! Pride is conceit; when we are filled with conceit, we have a vastly exaggerated opinion of ourselves. We become the main show, and filled with self-righteousness; this is the result of our imaginations about ourselves, and not from the reality of who we are, or who and what we were made to be.

- We cannot hide in our pride as we cannot hide in the church from God's wrath. We cannot boast, because of our condemnation. Once we are saved, we still cannot boast because it was not a result our effort.
- Legalism is to elevate our traditions and ideas onto the same level as God's Law. Thus, it blinds us to the fact we have been freed by Grace. Legalism also serves as a power and control over others! Legalism opposes real faith!
- Beware not to have a trace of self-satisfaction left in you! We have to realize that just having knowledge puffs us up; but, the demonstration of love and care—put into action because of the knowledge we have in Christ—builds us and others up!
- God increases our faith when we develop more dependence in Him and less dependence upon ourselves.
- We must ask ourselves if our deepest desires and pleasures in life are dedicated to please Christ. Can we take a hard look at our life and see how others see us, how God sees us? Are our actions in life the result of our will, our desires, our inspirations, and our motivations; or, are they the result of living our lives to please God? Is there a distinguishable reality of the Lordship of Christ, versus the menagerie of living the lie of our desires? We must be set apart to be promoters of our Lord's Kingdom and Grace, to live

that life of distinction, a life that honors Christ and motivates and encourages others.

Questions:

1. Why should we shut our mouths and renounce our pride and arrogance?
2. What gets in the way of our trusting in our Lord in this passage? How does pride affect your faith?
3. Does it surprise you that you are still under sin's nature? Why do most Christians assume we are washed clean from sin? If we were washed clean, why would we still sin? Is this just semantics, being washed versus being declared? (Being washed would mean being cleaned from; therefore no sin nature will remain. Being declared means God sees and judges us from the perspective that we are clean, because of Christ's work.)
4. We cannot hide in our pride any more than we can hide in the church from God's wrath. Where have you hidden yourself?
5. Why should we not be boasting?
6. What difference does justification have on you in your faith and walk with Christ (2 Cor. 5:21)?
7. How is our independence a slap in His face?
8. Why can Christ not do anything significant in us until pride is removed (John 3:5; 30)?
9. How does Legalism distort the church and its reputation in the community?
10. What can you do today, this week, to demonstrate a life that has been cleansed by the atoning death of your Savior, who bore your punishment and lived out the law on your behalf?

Beware not to have a trace of self-satisfaction left in you!

(For more information on pride and hypocrisy, see the series of articles on "Legalism" on the *Church Leadership* page under the *Problem Solving* channel)

Lesson 7: The Response of Faith!

Romans 4:1-25

The Jewish Christians were teaching the Gentile converts they had to be circumcised and follow the law. Paul addressed them by showing in the OT the promise was by faith and not of works. Abraham was saved by faith, not works, a prelude to God's grace before he was circumcised (Gen. 15:5, 6, 16; 16:1-3; 17:1; 10, 23-27; Ac 10:47; 1 Co 7:18- 19; Gal. 5:6; ; Gal. 3:11 6:15; James 2:21-26). Faith, not works, provides righteousness, faith, not ritual or religion, nor is it wages we earn that we can brag about (vs 7:18).

- Faith is not a feeling or an emotion, nor can it be defined in subjective ways.
- Faith is not passive, but a response by knowledge and belief through agreement and trust, demonstrated by obedience and commitment.
- Faith involves our will being surrendered to God's will, involving all of our being, heart, mind and soul; all sealed by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 10:14).
- Abraham, without a Bible and past history to rely on, believed in God's promises.
- Faith is directed to a real and personal God who loves us first.
- Faith is not just obedience, nor is it in an object or idea. It is through faith we receive Christ.
- Faith excludes all other means of obtaining righteousness. The world believes that through pious acts a person can earn their way, because God is love and will not reject the good. The Bible tells us we have no good. God had Abraham wait for his child of promise to remove the "human quotation" and strength so only reliance on God was left.
- The response of faith is developing the fruits of character (Isa. 40; Gal 5:22-23).
- Faith is not sanctification, for this is a result thereof, not a cause. The promise of salvation is by what Christ has done through our faith. If when we go to God by our works, we try to cheat grace and nullify its purpose and greatness.
- David's redemption (2 Sam .11; Psalm 32) was by repentance and then forgiveness, yet there was the consequence (2 Sam. 12).
- Our salvation is by believing by faith as Abraham did. Abraham looked toward the promise, we look back. Faith and promise go together as bread and

butter, as law and works. When we have a right relationship with God, our natural response will be to do as He pleases us to do out of our love and gratitude for what He did (2 Cor. 5:14).

- Our service must be motivated by our love, not obligation or some kind of payback, or barter. Abraham is our spiritual father, as he is the father of the Jewish nation (Matt. 3:7-9). He did not flounder at God's promises (Phil. 4:19). He ignored his abilities and wealth and possible actions, and trusted God (Isa. 55:8-9). He praised God and believed, before God did anything for him (Isa. 40:15; Eph. 3:20). He is our example!
- Since we have been given faith, we must live it out and not let it fall lifeless (Gal 5:6; Eph. 2:10).
- James 2 is not expressing works righteousness as Catholic doctrine teaches; however, it is the expression of the proof and response of faith that it has been received. Our works are only accepted by God because of what Christ has done on our behalf (Gal 5:17)
- Being prideful and arrogant is a slap in the face of our good and great God! We are to exercise humbleness and reset ourselves to the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, to His example of goodness. We may not understand God's plans and purposes, but we can rest assured in His love that He is there loving us even when we do not feel it or see it; He is there! Glorious times will come, if not in this life, then in the life to come. Paul even in his sufferings adores the depths of God's wisdom, and the glory of His persevering love. God's judgments are pure and perfect, He is sovereign, so we have firm reason to trust Christ and cast away our anxieties and fears.

Questions:

1. Faith, not works, provides righteousness, so why does the world place the emphasis on being a good person and doing good works?
2. Is there a difference between boasting and being glad of your position and communicating it to others?
3. When do we cross the line from confidence into pride?
4. Faith is not a feeling or emotion, so how can it be defined without using subjective (feeling based) answers?
5. How can you make faith not passive, how can you demonstrate it?
6. Faith involves our will being surrendered to God's will, so how can you do this?

7. Abraham, without a Bible and past history to rely on, believed in God's promises. How does his faith compare to yours? (Remember you have a track record to look to in the Word and others testimonies!) Why would Abraham a rich and prosperous man feel he needed God and His promise, why would he bother?
8. Abraham did not flounder at God's promises (Phil. 4:19). So what can you do to take to your heart and mind God's goodness even when your world is crashing down?
9. Paul is writing about hope and faith in the mist of horrible persecution, wars, diseases, church strife and chaos we can barely comprehend. So how can you capture that passion for your life and ministry?
10. Abraham ignored his abilities and wealth and possible actions, and trusted God. What do you have to ignore? Abraham praised God and believed, before God did anything for him. What has God done for you that you can praise Him for?

Lesson 8: Faith helps us Surrender our Pride and Self-Determination!

Romans 5:1-11

It is God's abiding love that keeps us attached in grace and purpose for His glory. Because we alone would quickly fall away into our sin, and forget who we are in Christ, just as the Israelites did throughout the OT, especially in Judges 2. The Holy Spirit is the glue who keeps us sticking together. Justification means that not only has God forgiven and accepted you, He has covered you with the righteousness of Christ. Therefore you are pleasing to God. We who are justified by faith now have peace with God. Thus we are to rejoice in our hope (of what He did for us and Heaven to come), and rejoice and glory in troubles. The abundant love of God is shown to us when He reconciled us to Himself by the death of his Son, while we were still unworthy sinners and His 'enemies'. And to top it off God assures us of our salvation, and motivates us to rejoice and glory in Him, no matter what happens or what we go through. Because He has gone through more.

- As pastors we must know what it means to rejoice in suffering (Phil. 3:10f; Rom. 8:28; I Cor. 10:13; James 1:2-4)! We must be able to surrender our attitudes and experiences to Christ, whatever the cost, even if it means suffering. We must be committed to surrendered prayer bringing all problems,

joys and concerns to the Lord. We must be willing to be mentored by a more mature and experienced Christian.

- Surrender your pride and self-determination. This will help give us the desire to grow and mature in the faith, and know that Christianity is not a spectator sport.
- Repentance does not save us; repentance is only the realization of our salvation. We must place our focus on the cause (Christ) not the effect (what we do), then the effect will flow from a natural desire and create growth and maturity.
- We need not be frustrated when we have Christ. Our confidence is in Christ and His character, not self-esteem, but "Christ-esteem"!
- True service is doing what we do not like to do for others (2 Cor. 12:15). Christ no longer will hold our sins against us. Our identity is who we are in Christ, and nothing else.
- Once we fully realize that the love of Christ has been poured out in us, then we can identify ourselves in Him. We will be able to identify Christ's interests in others over against our own interests (John 15:3; Rom. 9:3; 1 Cor. 9:22).
- Our faith must not be guided by our desires or our needs. When we think we are important and special and others are not, we are of no use to Him. All we do is isolate ourselves when God calls us to be salt and light. Our goal is not to serve, but to be His child, and that devotion will lead us to serve. To keep our eyes on Him, to keep our mind on Him! Trials work in favor for us (Rom. 8:28) and not against us. They actually promote spiritual growth!
- Trials build faith and character, allowing us to be better used to glorify God. Trials are not a personal attack against us, but rather they allow God to work in us in a deep way to be of better use to Him, for others.
- Faith helps us love! Love is that Christ died in our place. All this happened in God's timing (John 17:1; Acts: 2:23; Gal. 4:4), thus we need to trust God in His timing and not ours.
- Christ will meet us in our deepest need. The love that flows from us is not from us, but from God through His Spirit (1 Cor. 13). We cannot prove love, we can only respond and obey it. Love is not from our nature, but from the work of the Spirit within us. The response is to put Jesus first (John 15:12; 21:17; 2 Pet. 1:5-7; 3:9; 3 John 7) and let Him work in our lives. Thus, God will bring us to people and situations we do not like for us to learn true love. Love is also disciplined, constant, and spontaneous.

- Discipleship is our response to His love, to be passionate and obedient to our Lord.
- We must be careful that our faith is developed from God's nature and not ours!

Questions:

1. What frustrates you in life? How will faith help you not be frustrated?
2. How can you show that faith and obedience is a fruit and proof, not the instigator of the Christian life?
3. Our confidence is in Christ and His character, not in self-esteem. So how do you apply this "Christ-esteem"? That your self-worth is not about who you are; rather who you are in Christ!
4. How can you identify Christ's interests in others over against our own interests? How does faith help you in this?
5. A lot of Christians think bad things happen only to those in sin or those that have little faith. That if you have enough faith you will be blessed only. Is this Biblical, if so why, if not why? Consider Scripture not peoples teachings!
6. How can you see that trials and problems as a means to allow God to work in you in a deep way to be of better use to Him, and for others? What do you gain when you have gone through a trial?
7. Why does God need to use suffering to build us up?
8. The response of love is to put Jesus first, so how can you do this?
9. How can you learn to be better and have more character by acknowledging and learning when God brings you people and situations you do not like?
10. We must be careful that our faith is developed from God's nature and not ours! So how can you do this?

Lesson 9: Exercising our Faith!

Romans 6:15-23

When we exercise our faith we may still have struggles and setbacks, but the general underpinning and drive is to seek Christ and yield to Him as our Lord. Then we respond to Him and others because of what He has done for us. We do this with seeking righteousness, this will translate into virtue, morality, justice, decency, uprightness, and honesty, which we will do completely. Not once in a while or when it is convenient, as the cross was not convenient to our Lord! Then we will see sin as unproductive and reprehensible and be able to see its destructive nature to us and those around us. When we refuse to yield to Christ we will earn the wages of death!

- As a pastor you must know the desires that feed sin; be able to confront others in love to bring them back to the church.
- As a pastor you must be committed to wisdom and seek discernment, do not rely on feelings, innuendos, and half-truths, go to more mature Christians and to prayer.
- As a pastor you must be committed not to allow sin to reign in your life or your church.
- The liberty of the Christian life is by surrender, as it gives us: Freedom from law (Rom. 3:19; 6:14; -15; Gal. 3:23-25), Forgiveness, acceptance and access to His presence (Rom. 5:1-2).
- We do not have to base our acceptance on our performance (Rom. 7: 7-11; 10:3).
- We have been freed from sin, and declared cleaned (John 8:34-36; Rom 3:19; 6: 3-23; I Cor.15: 16; Gal. 3:10-20; 4:21-31)!
- Christ and the Holy Spirit gives us the power to overcome and the motive to go in the right direction.
- Always remember we are not obligated to do anything with our faith, but what good would it be? Self-interest only serves to place us on the wrong path with the bad boss and bad wages.

Questions

1. When you are facing struggles and setbacks, how do you or how can you see the Lord at work to motivate your faith and determination?
2. What do you think of this; “we cannot be full of ourselves when we are full of Him?”

3. What do you need to do to fully trust in Christ and yield to Him as your Lord, and not to your problems?
4. How can you not only see yourselves as God's willing bondservant, but also devote yourself to Him. How would your life, faith and behaviors change? If they are not His, expel them!
5. How is sin not worth the effort?
6. Read Gal. 3:23-25, what has Christ changed in you?
7. Who is faith directed to? How can you make sure faith is a real and personal?
8. Why is faith not just obedience? Why is faith not just an object or idea?
9. What does the effect of church leadership, or parents, or godly friends have on you when they are developing the Fruits of the Spirit and character (Gal 5)?
10. God allows us to choose, what choices are you making? What choices do you need to make?

Lesson 10: Faith helps us with our Hope and Guidance!

Romans 8: 18 – 30

Even in the mist of dire circumstances as with Paul in II Corinthians 11: 23-29 we can have hope beyond hope. We can have God Himself direct our path. Because this life is a small wrinkle in time, a mere rehearsal to what is to come in the vastness of eternity. We are made for Heaven and our life here is a classroom experience to learn and grow closer to God and those around us, to be our best for His glory. So our true life is what we have not experienced yet, what is still to come. Thus, we should not get frustrated or lose faith. God has given us His Spirit to be our comforter and guide. In doing so we can have greater trust and perseverance through good times and bad, as long as our eyes are upon the Lord!

- Faith helps us with the Spirit's guidance to know what sin is.
- As a pastor you must know what is meant and apply "being an offering." As a pastor you must know what it is to be a conqueror. Do not just know that God is sovereign, but believe and live it!

- Real faith will help us to see what God is trying to accomplish in our lives and through us for others. We will be able to see where He is kindling and be the person that the Holy Spirit uses to fuel it on, so to create a roaring fire for His glory!
- We are to see the world by what its potential is, not just by the suffering we experience and see. This is where we apply our faith. Since we are His heirs we should accept the responsibility and the inheritance (Matt. 19:28; Acts 3:21; 2 Cor. 4:17; Rev. 21:1).
- The world may live in sin and desire its evil, but there is a longing for order and a better existence; hence the "felt" need to receive order and the Holy Spirit's role to reveal Christ that can fill that need.
- We must not remain in our ignorance and infirmity, by receiving mercy yet, never giving it.
- When we lose hope we lose desire to serve Him, and receive His blessings.
- One of the Holy Spirit's roles is to reveal the deeper things of God. He wants not only to live through us, but work through us. He gives us the tasks and the strength, will we just accept it (John 14:16-26; 15:26; 16:7-15; 1 Cor. 12:4-13; 2 Cor. 3:18; Gal. 4:6; 5:16-23)? He will carry us through all that we could ever face, from sufferings and sorrow to joy and jubilation (Luke 11:2-4). By the way, the deeper things of God will never contradict the Word of God!
- God turns our faith into reality (Matt. 6:33; John 14:9). Allow Him to do so!
- The goal of faith is not the work we do, but to allow Him to do His will in us! There is no such thing as chance, this is God's providence. We may not understand, all we can do is hang tight and trust Him.
- Beware not to try to run ahead with your desires or distractions ahead, or behind, of God's timing. Faith is not an excuse to do what you feel and desire or want. It must be focused on Christ alone!
- The Bible gives us the precepts and the plan, the Spirit enables us to follow!
- We are made for prayer, and not just for our needs. Prayer is not a tool to get our way and will. Prayer is to bring us closer to Christ. Prayer and faith work together!
- Never waste time with God seeking what you cannot have. Just as the role of the Holy Spirit is to intercede for us, we are called to do the same with each other (Mark 11:16-17; 1 Cor. 6:19; Heb. 7:25). So, do we? The Holy Spirit will "turbo boost" our prayers. He will fill in the areas that we do not understand

and fill in the information we do not have. This is no excuse to be lazy in our prayers! We always need to know as much as we can and pray as specifically as we can!

- Faith helps us with patience as God will continually place people in our lives that we do not like. Our desire is to put them down or avoid them. Unless we are truly worshiping God we will miss crucial learning and growth opportunities, if we persist He may allow us to fall apart! When we are callous to one another it is a slap in the face of God! Let us keep His temple undefiled!
- We must continue to fight against our pride and selfishness that gets in the way (Eph. 6:13-18). That is, we are to wrestle before God against our nature and never wrestle against God (Gen. 32:24-25), unless you desire to be crippled!
- God's purpose and plan is to make us His children (1 John). He is the good parent who guides His children and protects them, at the same time does not over protect them so they lose out on life's opportunities to please Him, to the ultimate good. Here we are temporarily looking to the hope we have now and to come. Christ will see us through, if we trust and obey to be on His way.

Questions:

1. Do you have a problem receiving suggestions from others regarding your decisions? If so why?
2. What is it that Scripture calls us to do in those times of hardship?
3. What is it that you need to do so you can have greater trust and perseverance?
4. How can your church as a community of believers demonstrate a greater trust and perseverance to each other? If they did, what difference would it make?
5. How can you accept the responsibility and the inheritance of being His joint heirs?
6. When we lose hope we lose our desire to serve Him, and receive His blessings. Do you think this is true? Have you seen this demonstrated by your life or others? What do you need to do to grow beyond your fears to embrace hope?
7. One of the Holy Spirit's roles is to reveal the deeper things of God. So what are the deeper things of God? Remember these deeper things will never contradict God's Word if they do they are not from God!

8. How can God turn your faith into reality to allow Him to do His will in us?
9. What happens when we try to run with our desires or distractions ahead, or behind, of God's timing?
10. Why do some Christians think that prayer is a tool to get our way and will? What is prayer's true purpose?
11. What is it that you need to do to have hope beyond hope?
12. We should not get frustrated or lose faith, so what do you need to do to listen for God Himself to direct your path?

Lesson 11: Do not allow your desires to disrupt your faith!

Romans 9:1 – 13

Paul is deeply grieved and disturbed emotionally to the point it cuts to his soul because of the stupidity of his fellow Jews. They rejected God and replaced faith in Him with meaningless trivialities and pride. At the same time, Paul lets us know of God's obligation to not do anything! We are not owed, nor do we deserve His grace, yet by God's grace we receive blessings even though we may not see them. Remember faith looks to Christ not to what we experience or know. The Gospel is the powerful demonstration of God's saving grace, because it is through faith in Christ that a New, Eschatological Israel, composed of Jew and Gentile, is established in fulfillment of the promises made to the fathers!" This is the magnification of God's grace and the exaltation of His sovereignty. Faith knows we are eternally secure!

- Christians, pastors and churches fail not just because of sin but because we place our desires over God's direction and plan. Do not let your pride and desires destroy the work of God or your church!
- We must abandon ourselves to Him, and never hold back with reasoning and logic, nor hide in our theology or our ignorance. Our drive must be to follow His character and not our own or our cultures.
- My interests must be surrendered to His, His interests must be mine (vs. 1:1; Gal. 1:5)! So that doing what we do not want to do is sheer pleasure because it is serving Him (John 15:13; 1 Cor. 9:22; 2 Cor. 12:15). This is a clear and unequivocal instance of Christ being called God, "*the eternally blessed God*".

- We have no right to fight against God, or to complain and ask why. We cannot fit God in our extremely limited knowledge and reasoning ability and pass judgment on Him! God is righteous in all of His decisions, and we must trust Him in them, even when we do not like them or understand them. We must see our sin and weakness, and be humble before the Holiness of God. The result is we have no right to ever be bitter, so dig out the root of bitterness so it does not bear the rotten fruits of the self!
- Real faith will build in times of stress and confusion, whereas just having confidence without faith will diminish us (1 Pet. 1:7).
- Remember that Pride is one of the biggest barriers for us to hurdle (Phil. 3:1-11).

Questions:

1. When have you been deeply grieved by something other than a tragedy or death? How did faith in Christ help you?
2. What happens when moral awareness comes from our ideas and not from the Word and Spirit?
3. How can Paul's passion and sorrow be an example for us to follow today? Does your heart become sorrowful for others? If not, what is blocking you from God's call?
4. Passion, conviction and emotion all are part of the Christian experience, so why do so many Christians seem to lack it today?
5. In what ways have you quenched the Spirit? Or your passion?
6. How and why do Christians fail when they place their desires over God's direction and plan?
7. How can you abandon yourselves to Christ?
8. How can we follow His character with passion and not our own will or our cultures?
9. How can we place our interests as surrendered to His, how can His interests be ours?
10. Why would God's plan not be thwarted?

11. God did not fail to work out His purpose with the Jews, nor will He fail to work out our purpose! How can this fact give you greater assurance in your faith and trust?
12. How can you dig out the root of bitterness so that you do not bear the rotten fruits of the self?

Lesson 12: Faith helps us Trust in times of Uncertainty and Confusion!

Romans 11:1-10

Even when we mess up, God is there with His grace and His persevering love. If you ever have thought that God has left you out, then you have thought wrong! When we do fall astray and mess up, we will have consequences to our actions, but our salvation is secure in Him when we are genuine in receiving His grace through faith. Thus, we should respond with a life where fear and anxiety are extinguished by the trust and fear we have of Him. Fear as in respect and reverence; trust in times of uncertainty and confusion. Because we are deeply loved and pursued by the only eternal and wise God!

- Never lose sight of who you are in Christ, and the magnitude and wonder of the gift of your salvation!
- Never lose the promises of God, and that He is God and you are not! That God is omniscient, omnipotent, that is all knowing and all-powerful; this means His incredible greatness. This applies to us. No matter what we are going through, God is there through the valleys and the mountaintops, and the roads between.
- When we have a healthy grasp on God's power and authority, it gives us a correct confidence to persevere through battles and difficulties, as well as to stay firm in Him when things are going great (Col. 3:2).
- God is our strength, and heartbeat, and vision for life, regardless of our understanding. This all translates into our testimonies. Testimonies are the proof text to God's power working in people!
- It is never as bad as it seems! We tend to want to give up, but God does not give up (Zech. 12:10-13:1; 14:4; Acts 1:11; 9; Rev.1:7).
- Our greatest comfort is that God does not reject us, even when we reject Him. God is active in us, even we are not active in Him; this is a classic human

sociological pattern through our entire history (Duet. 29:4; Isa.29: 10-13; Psalm 69:22-23).

- Spurgeon said of vs. 5-6; *"This is the gospel in a nut shell. He who remembers these distinctions is on the right road to sound theology."*
- When we just know things about God and do nothing with them, is like having eyes, but unwilling to see, having ears, but refusing to listen, while Satan uses you for his glory.
- The goal of Bible study and worship is to develop His character, and follow His will. It is not just about the gaining of knowledge, but the indwelling of His love. Everything about life, thought, deed, and meaning is all about God, God is everything (not pantheism). Our service is because He first loved us, and our love back to Him.
- As pastors it is essential that we know how to build and apply a value system to last a lifetime. Know the value of God's love and allow it to effect us and flow to those around us. That we are living in response to His love, in the value of love.

Questions:

1. Have you ever had the thought that God has left you out? If so what did it take to shake you out of it? If not, what keeps you focused?
2. As a pastor what fears do you or have you had? How do you feel that you have been deeply loved and pursued by the only eternal and wise God? How does God's pursuing love affect your daily activities?
3. What are the promises of God that you take to heart?
4. How can you take comfort in that no matter what you are going through, God is there through the valleys and the mountaintops, and the roads in between?
5. Why would a healthy grasp on God's power and authority, give us confidence to persevere through battles and difficulties, as well as to stay firm in Him, when things are going great?
6. What is your understanding of God's strength? Why would God's strength be important for our spiritual growth? How can God's strength give you the heartbeat, and vision for life, regardless of your circumstances?
7. Are people in your church relying on their good works, their performance and what they or their family has done or by grace, their trust and faith in Christ?

8. Life is never as bad as it seems! So how can you live your life knowing all things will work out (Rom. 8:28)?
9. When you go through distressing times, by your own wrong choice, or not, God is there. Do you know this to be true? If not what do you need? How can your greatest comfort be in the fact that God does not reject you, even when you reject Him?
10. God is omniscient, omnipotent, that is all knowing and all-powerful; His incredible greatness is proclaimed throughout the universe, just look at the pictures from the Hubble Space telescope. How does this apply to you? How can you never lose sight of the magnitude and wonder of the gift of your salvation?
11. How should you respond in a life where fear and anxiety are extinguished by the trust and fear we have of Him?
12. When we say the fear of God, it is not what is under a child's bed; rather this fear is respect and reverence. So how can you trust Christ in times of uncertainty and confusion?

Lesson 13: Taking Faith to the Streets!

Romans 12: 1-2

We are to take faith to the streets in how we live to ourselves, to others and even to our enemies. Yet, most Christians respond with a rear end firmly planted in a pew that goes nowhere in service or in glory to Christ. They hold on to a will that will not allow conviction or change to enter their routine or life. Thus, church is just a club for comfort and not a huddle to play the game and receive orders from the Coach. For many pastors the church becomes a place of power and control. A pastor must allow the Spirit to transform them beyond their comfort zone and remove any fears of conviction; if not how could or why would God use them?

- *Living Sacrifice* refers to the fact that we belong solely to God, not to ourselves or anything else. (Rom. 3:25; 6:12-17; 8:13; John 15:13-15; 37-38; 1 John 3:16) His shed blood paid for us!
- *Do not be conformed...*" means that our minds and our thinking must be based on Christ and Scripture, through which the Spirit guides us. (2 Cor. 4:18; 1 John 2:17). If this is not so, the culture and pleasures of life will sweep us away from God's best for us. Our faith will become neutered!

- *Renewing of your mind* is changing our false mindset away from our selfish nature to His character and call. We accomplish this by reshaping our minds to conform to God's Word. Until we do this, the deeper things of God's Will cannot be available to us. (Rom. 8:5-9; 13:11-14; 2 Cor. 4:18; I John 2:17)
- Being renewed and conformed is our Christian life and purpose! Our standing before our Lord is solely upon His mercy, thus we are to reciprocate it. Since God forgave us, we need to forgive others. Do not just ask God to use you, but, rather give yourself to Him to use!
- The opposite of your being obedient is not just your being selfish or lazy, but, rather, by creating *your own* opportunities with zeal, instead of the Lord's. In other words, it involves placing your passion on the wrong things. (I Sam. 15:22; John 7:17; 13:17)
- We are to cling to His highest standard, not compromise to the flow of the group with whom we hang out (peer pressure). Will you obey?
- When we allow God's standard to be our "carrot on a stick", then our paths will be straight so that every aspect of our life will be governed by our Lord, in perfect harmony. When we debate with God and refuse His guidance, we lose sight of His path, and fall on rocky terrain. Stop, drop to your knees, and wake up to Him. (Eph. 4:30)
- The question is, will we be dedicated to our Lord or to ourselves (I Cor. 6:19; 9:27; Gal. 2:21; Phil. 2:12). Being freed from sin, we must show a response and a responsibility. So, what is yours?
- We can only build our trust as far as we know something for certain. The more you learn and know about our Lord the more you can put your trust in Him! The knowledge we gain from the Bible of our Lord builds our intimacy and our faith (John 17:3)!

Questions

1. Have you ever taken a Biblical stand and been persecuted by other Christians for standing in the faith?
2. What is the barrier that keeps you from being convicted?
3. What needs to happen in your life to move you from complaint to faith?
4. Why would Pastors who are in charge of the care for other Christians elevate their desires, goals, and aspirations over anyone else's, even the Lord's?

5. If Satan were to sit down in a counsel of demons to implant a strategy to tear down your church, all he would need to do would be to place a few key individuals in each church to spread gossip and rumors. Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not? What are you going to do about it?
6. Do you believe that as Christians, we have the responsibility to act as the Disciples of Christ wherever we are and whatever we do?
7. How do you influence others?
8. Are you putting on a performance or are you genuinely focused on the Lordship of Christ so that He flows to those around you?
9. For you as a Christian, the time must come when the reality of who you are in Christ will hit home in power and conviction. Has this happen to you? If so, how? If not, what would it take to make this happen?
10. What can you do to build your trust up with Christ more?

Lesson 14: Faith brings Maturity and Growth!

Romans 14: 13b-23

This passage urges us to pursue peace and harmony and not let the childish and petty things of life divide us. We are not to cause people to stumble by our actions or inactions. Our faith and actions are monitored closely by God as well as by other people, and we must realize that our actions are more influential than our words. We will either lift people up or bring them down!

Maturity and growth in Christ is by the work of the Holy Spirit. It is also a choice we receive (Phil. 2). This is called *sanctification*, or the Holy Spirit working in us. We are to never let our immaturity make us jealous of those who are mature. Do not seek an easy way to maturity. It takes years of discipline. Even Paul was disciplined for three years by Barnabas before he went on his missionary journeys, and Christ Himself directly interdicted Paul!

- Paul was overcome by his liberation in and by Christ (Mark 7:18-19). He stressed that we must behave and be responsible in the correct manner. We many enjoy our freedom, but freedom does not entitle one to do anything one wants, just as living in a “free” county like the US does not.

- *Consecration* is the work we do to tear down the barriers of our self-will and pride that block the work of His sanctification!
- Our human tendency is to persuade others to agree with our views. God's purpose is to get us in line with His views. Yet so many Christians spend all of their time as pursuers of argumentation and not pursuers of holiness! There are times when we need to take a stand for correct doctrine and virtue with His Word, and there are times we need to separate childish, petty things from real things.
- A true Christian will never destroy another person's faith so they can have their own way!
- Our freedom must not bring dishonor, division, or disrepute to the church. We must not argue with people out of our petty presumptions and feelings. Rather, we are to let Biblical convictions and the core truths of our faith infuse us so we can maintain and model them!
- Conviction is the role of the Holy Spirit (John 14:17; Acts 1:8; 4:31; 10:45; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 3:16-17; Heb. 13:5-6). We must never we allow ourselves to be swayed from our convictions (ones that are Biblically based) by peer pressure!

Questions

1. What do you think it means to behave and be responsible?
2. Why do so many Christians spend all of their time and efforts as pursuers of argumentation and not pursuers of holiness? What do you suppose is their rationalization? How does faith come into play here?
3. There are times we need to take a stand for correct doctrine or virtue. What are examples of this?
4. Why is fellowshiping with one other regardless of the level of maturity and faith important?
5. Why would a *true* Christian destroy another one's faith so that he could have his own way?
6. What does *freedom in Christ* mean to you?
7. What have been some of the petty presumptions and feelings you have observed among some Christians? What about you?
8. How can you not allow your freedom in Christ to be a detriment to others?

9. How can you let Biblical convictions, the core truths of our faith, infuse you so you can maintain and model them?

10. How can your church pursue peace with one other in Christ?

Lesson 15: Your Faith is Important!

Romans 16:1-24

This passage in Romans is often just glanced over. You may never see a sermon or Bible study on it, because it is seen as just a list of names. But, is that all it is? Many people, especially we pastors, often forget those who contribute to the ministry, not necessarily out of callous disregard, but out of our hurriedness of the moment, our focusing on ourselves and our needs over those of others. Paul cuts across cultural barriers and arrogance, and commends publicly, acknowledging many. We should be careful to always be people who honor and acknowledge others!

- No one in the Lord is unimportant! There are 27 names listed who were Paul's friends and who helped him. Many of them, nine, in fact, were women. This is a testimony to the importance of personal relationships, of cooperation, (working together for a unified vision and purpose,) and the value of encouragement!
- It has been said that the service we give to others is the rent we give to live on this earth!
- Paul wholeheartedly and passionately warns that divisions will destroy the church! Paul admonishes us to discern between standing for truth and causing unrighteous divisions, confusing people's faith, and relationship to God.
- Nothing will destroy a church or ministry quicker than strife, competition, dissension, and gossip, all of which eventually lead to divisions in a church. True faith will not allow this (Rom.13: 13; Gal. 5:19-20)! Such dissension causes "*offenses*," that is, it becomes a snare or stumbling block to others (v.14: 13).
- Many people call Christ, "Master and Lord," but they are far from serving Him. They serve only their carnal, sensual, worldly interests. That is, a "what is in it for me" attitude and mindset! They corrupt the church by deceiving its heart and the people with misdirected and corrupted passion.

- Those who seed strife and make divisions in the Church are not doing Christ's work, but are attempting to gratify their own selves. They cause people to follow a person and not the Person of Christ! Contentious, divisive people will cause others to stumble, so they must be avoided, and disciplined, which means removing them from fellowship if they persist (1 Cor. 5:9–13; 2 Thess. 3:6; 2 Tim. 3:5; Titus 3:10)!
- This is a stern warning against false teachers, including those in and out of the church. Paul says to "turn away from them!" They must not be tolerated in the church, or on TV, or anywhere else! False teaching promotes false faith!
- Divisive people destroy the peace and unity of the church, but *God*, who is the source of *peace*, will *crush* this work of *Satan* through the wisdom and obedience of believers. (v. 8:28).
- If truth is abandoned, unity and peace will not last long. We must keep our hearts open to the Spirit with passion, and guard against that which is contrary to God's Word and plan with all diligence. This is so you are not deceived. Pledge yourself defiantly not to be deceivers.
- Faith will grow and prosper in times of affliction and sorrow only when we face Him and not the situation! God allows tough stuff to happen to us to grow us better and for us to be a better use to others around us. It is to increase our trust and dependence upon Christ; this will fuel our need for Him and move us away from our self.

Questions

1. How can you be better at honoring and acknowledge others?
2. How would you react to someone giving you "chastising" as well as encouragement? How you handle this points to your faith and maturity in Christ, how much maturity and faith do you have?
3. How would you feel if the church leadership came to you and told you that what you had said or done could hurt the church?
4. How does order apply to running a church?
5. Would you feel secure and more comfortable in a church that quickly put down division? Why?
6. What happens to the people when a false teacher gets in a church or a ministry? Why was Paul so passionate about removing false teachers?

7. How can your church be more open to people of different backgrounds?
8. How does the “me first” attitude and mindset affect the your faith and the church?
9. How can you and your church keep your hearts open to the Spirit with passion, and guard with all diligence that which is contrary to God's Word and plan?
10. How can you find hope and encouragement in phrases such as, *approved in Christ, chosen in the Lord, the God of Hope* (v. 15:13) and the *God of Peace* (v.15: 33)?

Lesson 16: Obedience is the Willingness to go all out in Faith!

Matthew 3:1 -12

Obedience, willingness to go all out in faith, and a willingness to endure extreme persecution for the Lord characterized John the Baptist. He was the road builder laying the path for the Lord. He removed the rocks of sin by tearing them up and exposing them, without fear of reprisal by the arrogant and prideful hypocrites. He was indeed extreme, and was needed to show a corrupt religious system its errors and point to the truly Righteous Messiah. I wonder if such a person would be welcomed in a church today? Such extreme commitment is considered foolish amongst the world, and even with many Christians. We may not be called to eat bugs and curse pious frauds, but we are called to obedience, in our heart, mind, and actions! In addition, this does take an extreme stand!

- *Repentance* was not just sorrow or emotion, but an actual change (Matt. 4:17; 27:3)! This change would then allow us to feel the *sorrow* of the hurt we cause not only ourselves, but also the people around us, and even God (2 Co 7:10-11)! When one serves the Lord or has repented, the fruits will be manifested. If not, something is very wrong. Therefore, if a leader is gossiping, or a Christian is acting one way on Sunday and another on Monday, something is very wrong! (Gal 5)
- All that you do in life must be a reflection of a life surrendered to Christ. If you are so self-willed there can be no room for the living Christ, this may mean that others will use you, take advantage of you, get mad at you, ignore you, go around you, ridicule you, and persecute you! But remember, what they do to you, they do to Him! Make sure you are not the one persecuting the Lord!
- Keep your eyes on God, not on people! If you only seek God for your needs, you will never understand God or yourself, or His wonderful plan for you

(John 17:22)! Your faith will be on your terms only. How sad that would be!
How much you will lose (Gal. 2:20-21).

- Our motives, obedience, and persevering will be the key! Be in love with Him. Seek His presence, and be persistent in your prayers. If you fear you will ask Him for the wrong thing, remember, we all do that. As you draw closer to Him, you will learn the right things to ask. Prayer is persistence and learning!
- Obedience is not in words but in deeds that demonstrate our words through practice and action (James 1:22-25)! When we read and/or hear the Word of God we will have the desire and heed the call to put it into action. There will be times we do not feel like it, but our obedience will override our feelings so we do remain steadfast and secure (1 Thess. 2:23).
- By our obedience in faith, we may suffer temptations, trouble, persecution, and condemnation from the world. It may seem our foundation has shifted by that consent beating, but He will remain steadfast in us when we remain steadfast in our faith! Keep your faith real, valuable, and practical on His solid Rock. He will not leave you, nor forsake you (1 Cor. 3:11; 10:4; Eph. 2:20; 1 Pet. 2:4-6; Heb. 13:5). So, let Him be the Rock-solid foundation of your life (Matt. 7)!

Questions

1. Do you think that John's message is still needed and required today?
2. What does obedience mean to you?
3. How have you been obedient?
4. Is the Word of God sharp and is it penetrating you, so that your life shows it?
5. We are called to obedience, in our heart, mind, and actions! Moreover, this does take an extreme stand! Have you heard His call, and have you responded to it? Have you made a stand?
6. Are you showing true acceptance of Jesus as your Lord? You can know this by.... (Luke 6:46)?
7. Prayer is persistence and learning! What does this mean and how do you put this in your life and your church?
8. How can you speak and model to others so they may be inclined to accept the authority of Jesus Christ?

9. What needs to happen in your life to keep your faith real, valuable, practical, and squarely on His solid Rock? What needs to happen in your church?
10. God's desire is for all Christians to have, and use, great faith. What do you need to do to make this more of a reality in your life and in your church?

Lesson 17: Faith Builds Intimacy!

Matthew 7: 21-29

Even though we have a special intimacy with God because of what Christ has done, we have to be careful that we do not rest in this intimacy. The intimacy is important, but God is most concerned with what we do with what He gives us. The intimacy is the frosting; the cake is to do His Will. True intimacy with God is not found in our feelings, works, or deeds, or the saying of creeds, or even having the right theology in mind. Rather, intimacy is a deep affection and knowledge of Christ that is generated by our real heartfelt devotion, commitment, and trust, and is demonstrated by our willingness and the action of moving forward in our journey of faith.

- When we profess Christ as Lord, or make a public testimony, we are declaring that Jesus Christ has a hold on our life, from now through eternity that transcends human understanding. We are no longer of this world, but belong to Him as His child--saved and redeemed.
- Do you feel your faith is distant and cold? Do you desire to have more intimacy with Him? Then seek His Will! Seeking to do God's Will is God's Will. It is striving further into the depths of our relationship with Christ, as LORD over all. By the surrender of our will (John 3:5; 29-30; Gal. 2:21-21), and the courage to make Him known to those around us (1 Cor. 8:2-3), we will gain closeness and more intimacy!
- If your faith is not practiced, it will not last. It also serves as a true sign that you never had it, or you have not let it dive deep enough into you to create the transforming action from the fallen, sinful state, to redemption in the blood of the Lamb. These things are not up to our judgment. They are His. Your fruits will tell the true story to others around you.
- It is useless to call ourselves Christians unless we practice what He has taught us, which we are to believe and also teach.
- To achieve more intimacy with and function for our Lord, we must be willing to take a look at ourselves to see where we are and on what foundation our lives

are built. This passage tells us where we lay the foundation for our life. What is it that moves, stimulates, and inspires us? Will we be able to weather the storms of life, or will we be washed away? Is our life built on shifting sand, the ways of the world that distract us and lead us away from Him? Does everything we consider to be valuable and important just wash away from the stresses, chaos, misdirected deeds, and bad decisions of life--from SIN? Or, do we build on His foundation and from the precepts of His Word where we remain steadfast and secure?

- When we build on the rock, we are securing a firm foundation with our obedience and trust in what Christ has done, as we put it in all aspects of our life. So, our motivation is based on who we are in Him. This is not done by our proclamations and speeches, it is manifested by taking the knowledge of our Lord and His work, and the relationship we have with Him so it becomes the transforming force to motivate us. If all we have is knowledge, we have nothing. If we do works in His name without the knowledge of who Christ is, we have nothing.
- To weather the storms of life and to please and glorify God we must be real, authentic Christians, whose lives are transformed and built on His foundation. As we will be tested in life in preparation for eternity, being only a “fair-weathered” Christian who has never struggled or who has never taken seriously his/her faith may soon find out that he/she had neither faith nor a relationship with Christ as Lord! So, do you?
- To be His disciple means personal, passionate devotion that contains the humbleness to surrender our will to Him and the boldness to proclaim Him. This will result with the response of our love and gratitude, glued with the faith to make it real, powered by the Holy Spirit so it is impacting upon you and flowing to others around you (Luke 14:26-27; 33; Rom. 5:5).

Questions

1. How are you devoted to our Lord?
2. If your faith is not practiced, it will not last. Why would this be so? How long do you think you can go before breakdown?
3. How can you take Jesus' sermon more seriously?
4. What more can you do to take to heart in a deeper manner the fact that your true treasure is the knowledge that God knows you, and you can know Him?
5. How can you make the finding of God's Will and rule the number one priority for your life? What is in the way of this?

6. Are you doing the Father's Will?
7. How can you be sure that you have built the right foundation in the right place for your life to withstand the storms?
8. What can you do to prepare for that knock/storm?
9. What do you need to do to approach Jesus with humility?
10. What do you need to do to be bolder in your faith?

Lesson 18: Faith must have Humility!

Matthew 8: 5- 13

Jesus sees the value of faith as paramount over anything else; faith is lifted up as the most important thing we have or do. Yet, all too often, we do not seek faith, but rather just what we can get. This can and will distort our thinking and direct our actions in the wrong direction. Faith encourages humility and gives us the realization of who we are in Christ. Without humility, we cannot come to the Lord, because we will never admit our need, surrender our will, nor be able to grow in faith. We will not be able to serve others, because we will think them unworthy, just as the people did toward that soldier's servant.

- The more you find God in the midst of your problems the more your problems will disappear or seem irrelevant (Col. 3:2).
- Obedience, willingness to go all out in faith Prayer is persistence and learning! How can you speak and model to others so they may be inclined to accept the authority of Jesus Christ?
- *I am not worthy.* The Centurion realized his depravity and the fact that he did not even deserve for Jesus to go to his house (Luke 7:1-10). He did not have only faith, but also humility--rare qualities for a powerful soldier and leader, qualities essential for the Christian, and vital for the Christian leader. The Centurion knew that a Jewish leader would not go to his house, but Jesus was willing to, anyway. Here is where faith comes in. He probably witnessed miracles of Jesus first hand with others, and, with Jesus being there physically realizes Jesus' authority and discipline, and, that perhaps He can just say *the word* as a command, as he, as a soldier, commands others. This was a thought not even considered by Jesus' closest disciples. Later, at His trial, Jesus is flogged (whipped) by Centurions. (Matt. 27:26). Just imagine the compassion Jesus must have had knowing what his "friends and

colleagues” would do to Him later! As Christians, we must realize that we, too, are unworthy. That is why grace is so special and faith is so vital to overcoming our sin and depravity. Even though we do not deserve Christ and His grace, we can boldly ask and have fellowship with Him, and have the confidence that He is there listening and working in our best interests all of the time (Romans 8).

- Faith is paramount. It is the most important possession you have and the most important thing you do. Faith is what we take for granted, assuming that all Christians have it, although the Bible says no, not all do have it (Mark 4:40). Some have just a little (Matthew 6:30), while others we do not observe having great faith, as in this passage (vs. 8:10 and Matt. 15:28).
- Faith does not mean we say the word and do nothing. Christ did not do “nothing.” He healed the servant. We are still to work while still relying, a synergistic blend, because if we do not, we will think of faith as a vending machine, and never get off our couch and into life, as our Lord demonstrated for us to do.
- God’s desire is for all Christians to have and practice great faith! He tells us faith is to be planted, grown, and cultivated, as one does a seed (Matt. 17:20). So, it is something we are initially given, but it is up to us to make it grow. We cannot sit around, put it under the couch, and expect great things to happen. Faith requires action.
- John tells us that our feelings will lead us astray, but faith will be the foundation to give us victory to be the Christian God wants us to be (1 John 5:1-5).

Questions

1. Read Romans 10:17; James 1:1-8; 1 Pet. 1:1-9 and 1 John 5:1-5: How can God’s Word also empower Faith onward?
2. What needs to happen in your life to keep your faith real, valuable, practical, and squarely on His solid Rock? What needs to happen in your church?
3. God’s desire is for all Christians to have, and use, great faith. What do you need to do to make this more of a reality in your life and in your church?
4. What is in the way of your being fully assured in Christ and His Lordship over your life so you can put your faith, trust, and cares upon Jesus! How can you then teach this to others close to you?
5. Why do you think many preachers never take the time to do *real* ministry, and exercise faith, they do not follow the example that our Lord has given, but they just love the pulpit?

6. God responds to faith, not position. How have you seen this so in your spiritual journey and/or that of others?
7. Why is humility an essential quality for the Christian? What happens when we do not have it, or we refuse to acknowledge it?
8. Why, as a Christian, must we realize that we, too, are unworthy? What happens when we refuse to do so?
9. Have you ever taken Faith for granted, assuming that all Christians have it? How do you feel knowing that the Bible says, "No, not everyone has it?"
10. Why do you think God designed faith, so it is up to us to make it grow? Why not just give it all to us in one, big, lump sum?

Lesson 19: Faith is relying on God's Power!

Matthew 8: 23-27

This passage is about relying on God's power. The Disciples believed and saw some incredible events, but somehow what they had observed and participated in firsthand did not create in them an ability to trust. We will see this theme tested within ourselves when the storms of life buffet against us. This includes the tempests of frustration, the chaos of stress, the gossip from toxic people, the daily grind of life, wrong choices, people conflict, and, of course, sin. How we deal with this is paramount to our ability to trust God. If we prepare to trust in Christ, we will be taken safely across. If we do not, we may sink.

There will be times when we are afraid. Sometimes we will be just a little nervous; sometimes we will be outright panic-stricken, as the disciples must have been. We will see the storms of life come against us, causing us to feel overwhelmed and frustrated. Even those who have been through them before and have grown and matured will become tired and wearisome. The danger is when our faith breaks down into fear so we do not venture out with it. We become stuck, and refuse to learn and grow.

He may even take you through the storm to the very edge of your breaking point to get your attention. But, the only thing that will be broken will be what must be broken, our will, the rest of us will become stronger. Just as most fisherman were unwilling to venture past the coastline (for good reason for them, not for us with faith), if you do the same with your walk in Christ you will sink in those shallow depths. As you will not realize that Jesus is there to take you through it, all you will see is the storm and not the growth and fruits that it can

bring you. You will not develop true confidence in our Lord nor will He be able to take you where you will learn the most and do the most good.

- To help our faith and relationship with Christ and others to grow, and for Him to work in our lives, especially to touch others, we also have to be willing to trust and obey Christ as Lord over all things--including our lives.
- A common theme in the Gospels is that hearing the Word is not enough; you have to obey it (Luke 8:8, 18, 21-25).
- We can stay close to the shore of our comfort in the Christian life, and never take risks, or exercise real impacting faith. To pursue the Christian life and make an impact requires us to venture where we may not want to go, but we only do this by His leading, and only move by His empowerment. We merely trust and obey. This is also the pattern for life. We do not see what is ahead. We do not see how our choices, sin, and events may collide, causing sudden and violent storms of stress, chaos, strife, pain, and suffering.
- Sometimes we feel Jesus is asleep, as life overwhelms us, but rest assured. He is still there, caring and carrying us. Even if He was asleep (He does not) and our troubles keep multiplying (and they will at times) we are still safe when we remain in the boat--in Him (John 14-15)!
- Jesus was relaxed during the storm, a picture of faith for us to emulate. We can rest under His cover, and still be tranquil in composure and free from our stress (2 Kings 6:16-16, 32; Psalm 4:8; Prov. 19:23).
- *You of little faith.* What a sting those words must have been to the worrisome disciples, as they realized they had messed up again. The secret to remaining joyful in the face of adversity is our faith, our confidence and assurance that He is there in the boat with us. Jesus will not let the boat capsize. But, even if it did, He is still there.
- Jesus is Lord over creation, but you have to exercise your will to move it out of the way so He can be Lord over your life. He will rarely bully His way over you; you have to reach out to Him by faith, even though He reached out first to save you. It is by faith alone we receive His grace that has been offered to us.
- These miracles over nature helped the disciples to develop and increase their faith in Jesus. (Mark 4:41)
- The key to unlock the fear so it opens into contentment is our worship and prayer time. Sometimes that is all we can do, but it is not a last resort it is our front line and most important defense. It is to be our preparation for the weathering of a storm. It will help you build your relationship with Christ so

your faith, confidence and courage grow. Then those storms and crises will make you stronger and help you help others through them too. When we fully learn to trust, then we can obey and it will build our confidence so we will sail across those storm tossed seas of life in confidence as Jesus Christ is there beside us manning the helm!

Questions

1. Why are you afraid at times? What causes your faith to get wet from the storms of life?
2. What do you do when the storms of life buffet against you? Such as, frustration, chaos, stress, gossip, toxic people, the daily grind of life, wrong choices, people coming against you, and of course sin?
3. How we deal with the stress of life is paramount, it shows us what our faith is made of, made from God or from our self. So how should you deal with stress?
4. It is one thing to believe in something and quite another to trust and even more to obey an idea, plan or cause. To follow Christ requires all three. Why is this so? How have you seen this evident in your life?
5. Big problems sometimes creep up to us without warning hidden behind mountains. What are the mountains for you? Such as pride, not looking at a situation carefully, not looking at things long term....
6. What can you do to prepare yourself for the storms of life?
7. It is easy to can stay close the shore of comfort in the Christian life and never take risks or exercise real impacting faith. What is your comfort and reason for not venturing out further in your faith?
8. What can you do to be willing and able to pursue the Christian life with more vigor and make more of an impact?
9. Real faith will be shown when the storms come, what would your faith show now?
10. Storms are a part of our lives in a fallen world. Either you are in a storm, or you just got out of a storm or you are headed into a storm, so are you prepared?

Lesson 20:

Matthew 9: 9-13

Jesus was calling His follows to *Follow Me!* In so doing, He called the common laborers of Jewish society, such as fishermen, and then He sought after the most hated person in Jewish society at that time, a tax collector, who collected duties and fees like a troll under a bridge. Jesus comes to we who are sick to heal us in ways we cannot fathom. He seeks us out, and we sinners become His friends by His offering us fellowship, and an invitation to turn our sickly selves to healthy, and be robed in His righteousness.

Matthew responded to Jesus' radical command to leave all and follow Him. He could never return to his job, as he would be viewed as a traitor. For us, as well as for them, it required steadfast faithfulness, obedience, and trust to undertake His path. Matthew actually got up and followed! A man, with so much to lose by the world's standards, left it all. Yet, he gained so much more. Matthew showed great faith by being willing to leave his prosperous position, to follow Jesus to a life of the unsecured and unknown-from his perspective. In reality, there is nothing more secure than following Jesus!

Jesus saw Matthew, and called him with two simple words, *follow me*. Two words, when powered by the Spirit, will change a person to the core if he makes the response by his faith. Matthew made such a response, and showed great faith to permanently leave his prestigious job, and with overwhelming gratitude, throw a big feast in Jesus' honor so his friends could see for themselves this most incredible God-Man.

The Pharisees were puzzled by Jesus' excellent teaching, and by His bizarre behavior of hanging out with sinners. They did not realize He was the Great Physician, who came to heal, and that one cannot heal another without seeing and touching that person.

Since this is the Gospel that bears his name, and he compiled it without any superfluous words to describe himself, we see that he was also a humble man and did not want to draw attention to himself. He rather pointed to the One who deserved the attention. How many authors do you know who would do that?

Jesus makes it clear that the sinners are indeed sick (Psalm 14:1-3; Mark 7:1-8), and need redemption, but ignoring them does them no good. The *healthy Pharisees* (Luke 18:9-14), refers to the health in their own minds, not in reality. Jesus is breaking down the works-earned righteousness philosophy of the Pharisees, and giving us a glimpse of Grace (Psalm 51:1-18; Luke 19:9; Rom. 3:22).

I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners. This is a retort that a self-righteous person will not realize their need for salvation, because they are too full of themselves to see a need. However, an admitted sinner will see their depravity when the Spirit points it out.

Follow me are two very powerful words, yet are so easily blocked when we are too puffed up with ourselves. If you think you do not need a Doctor, you are very mistaken, for you would be the sickest of all. Jesus did not come for the righteous, because there are no righteous people. There are only those who think they are. Their invitation to join His Kingdom will never be opened and read, because there is too much of them in the way, so the words cannot be seen; the faith to respond will never grow in the shallow soil of pride.

Questions

1. What is it about Jesus' words, *Follow me*, that cause some to respond with passion, and others to flee in anger?
2. What do you think motivated Mathew to show great faith by permanently leaving his prestigious job?
3. What requires steadfast faithfulness, obedience, and trust, for you to undertake His path? How will this affect your faith?
4. What is in the way of your responding to the *Follow Me* call?
5. Matthew actually got up and followed! What is the cause and motivation for you to get up and follow Christ?
6. What do you see as important in your life that you just could not lose? Compare your list to the world's standards, versus God's.
7. Do you really believe, with confidence, that there is nothing more secure than following Jesus? What does secure mean to you, considering eternity versus the material?
8. Have you ever made a big response of gratitude for what Jesus has done for you? If so, what was it? If not, what could it be?
9. Matthew saw what he was to gain! What did you see when you came to Christ?
10. Why do you suppose that most people only see what they will leave behind? How does this impede your faith?

11. How can you be the influencers of godly character to those around you who do as they see fit, without your also doing as you see fit? What about in your church?
12. *Follow me* are two very powerful words, yet are so easily blocked when we are too puffed up with ourselves. How can you make a commitment so this will not happen to your faith?

Lesson 21: Be Determined in your Faith!

Matthew 9: 27-34; 10: 34-42

God calls us to be earnest, that is, to be pursuing a serious, deep rooted and determined faith. It is a call to persist in our faith and determination, regardless of obstacles--physical limitations, spiritual depression, spiritual warfare, or our circumstances. If everything came to us instantly, there would be no growth, no appreciation, no maturity, and no faith. Faith requires resistance and struggle to make it flourish and grow. God is not the One Who always holds us back; it is usually our refusal to reach out and seize the opportunity. It is we who refuse to exercise our faith and grow. It is we who speak just a simple prayer with no earnest thought behind it, with no zeal or realization of God's mercy and grace. We get so caught up in our own struggles that we do not look past the crowd to call His Name. We do not realize that He will stop, look, and listen--just for us!

- What we ask for in prayer is usually determined by our will and desires, do not let it be; rather be determined to seek His will by faith!
- When our eyes are on obstacles rather than the possibilities, on self and not on Christ, we may miss an opportunity as Christ walks on by, not responding because we do not have the faith to call out. We will miss His call, as our eyes are too preoccupied with the junk of life, or the busyness of our own will.
- What we seek can be wrong, and even be an insult to the One who created and loves us. We need to see with a vision that goes beyond our eyes, a vision of faith and determination, based on His Word and precepts rather than what we desire and think we need. Be the one who looks up and sees who the Lord really is, and be willing to call His Name. Be willing to surrender all to Him, as LORD!
- John tells us that He must increase and we must decrease (John 3:29-30). If we refuse this vital call, God just may allow those hardships to come our way, breaking us down so we will yield and grow as His child. Just as a good loving

parent will discipline his child, we, too, will receive discipline. But, this is not a personal attack; rather it is a way we can grow and be better used by our Lord (1 Cor. 1:30; Col. 1:27; 1 Thess. 4:3; 5:23-24; 1 Pet. 1:5).

- We have to be willing to be identified with Him no matter what the cost, as the rewards will be far greater than we could ever imagine! So, are you willing to reduce yourself to the real you? The person as you are called by Jesus Christ to be? So that He is greater in character and precepts in your trust and faith, and in your obedience and application of life? And, so you become less in your will, aspirations, lust, and sin? If not, what is in the way of God working in you?
- A step of faith is easy to do when we can see, but, in a storm, we usually cannot see. We cannot wait until it clears up; we have to step out and obey His precepts, regardless of the weather or what others say. Do not let doubt and fears adjoin to the storm; see Jesus cut across the storm, so you can see His hand (Matt. 14: 22-36)! We must obey with joy (John 2:5)!

Questions

1. Read John 3:29-30. What does God want you to do with this passage?
2. What do you need to do to initiate that He must increase and you must decrease? What would that mean and look like?
3. Why is it hard to be willing to be identified with Him no matter what the cost?
4. What can you and your church do to help facilitate you to yield and grow as His child?
5. Are you willing to reduce yourself to the real, called by Jesus Christ "me"? If not, what is in the way?
6. What can you do to be more earnest, that is, to develop a more serious, deep- rooted and determined faith?
7. What can your church do, collectively, to keep all eyes on the possibilities and not the obstacles? (First, you may need to define what the obstacles are, and what the possibilities could be.)
8. What is the secret to remain joyful in the face of adversity? What can you do to make sure this does not remain a secret?
9. How can Jesus' work, power, and purpose help you through desperate times of waiting, confusion, and hurt?

10. What can you do not to let doubt and fear adjoin to the storms of your life so they become worse? How can you see more clearly that Jesus cut across the storm?

Lesson 22: Growing through the Crises of Faith

Matthew 11: 1-19

Take a look at Isaiah 35:4-6, 50:10! We will all experience crises of faith as some point, where our experience and expectations converge, yet do not meet. This will happen when we venture beyond our comfort zone into His service and we find our circumstances challenging our faith (Phil. 4:19). We will wonder if our life has been meaningless. Did I do the right thing? How come, even though I have been faithful, I have experienced such suffering and disappointment? This is what the book of Habakkuk is all about. Habakkuk starts out cursing and complaining to God. God reveals Himself; Habakkuk repents and ends with worshiping God even though his circumstances did not change. His perspective and outlook changed!

When a crisis comes, do what John the Baptist did, go tell Jesus! Get in His Word and allow His Word to give you assurance and peace. Allow God to refresh you and give you strength; He will come and save you. Turning back in defeat, distrust, or disillusionment is no real answer. Realize that your faith needs to be challenged so it can grow, and glow (Heb. 13:5-6)!

- What we think we know pales in comparison to who Christ is and what He does for us. When we feel we are wise, we are like a four-year-old thinking he knows better than his parents. How far can a four-year-old carry himself in life?
- How far can we carry ourselves in life without Christ? We may think we are doing well, but when we look back, with eternity as our guide, our ways are revealed as very pathetic indeed! We need to allow God's truth to reign in us, and hold on to that reign with trust and obedience. When we do this without worry, and with trust, we grow, and real wisdom will flow to us and through us to those around us. Just be aware that God will not give you more faith or more wisdom or gifts until you have mastered what He has already given you (Luke 16:10; 19:17; John 7:17; 14:12; Heb. 12:6)!
- *Come unto me* (Matt. 11: 28) is a promise of wisdom and the offering of God's strength, and perhaps the most endearing words uttered by our Lord! It is so simple for the humble to see and accept, yet so hard for a mind preoccupied with the pride of self. Without humbling ourselves to acknowledge Him, we

cannot receive the Savior. Rather, we get a need unmet and a soul empty. Jesus' load is heavy and requires our fullest for His Highest; yet, it is easy when our eyes and faith are on Him (1 John 1:7)!

- Believing something does not mean you live it. Faith must be real and invoke a response from within you. It cannot be just academic!
- People then, as people today, differentiate people by their words, and more importantly, their actions. What do your actions say about what is in your heart? To confess one thing and do another was what Proverbs and the Jew would heartily say was a *fool*! Thus, our faith will produce our actions, but our actions (Duet. 6:4; Matt. 12: 22-37; Mark 12:29).

Questions

1. We will all experience crises of faith as some point. So, what do you need to do to prepare your mind, Will, and faith to expect and accept whatever comes, then turn it into a learning and faith-building experience?
2. How can you become stronger through harsh and difficult experiences such as suffering or disappointment?
3. How can God's Word give you assurance and peace in all situations?
4. God is more concerned with our obedience than our knowledge. This is so essential for us to understand and apply! What do you need to do to make this real in your church?
5. What can you do to make sure your Faith is real? What would invoke a response from within you?
6. Most Christians have a faith that is mainly academic; that is, they may believe and know, but do little or nothing with it. What can be done to show them that their faith needs to be real, and their actions say what is in their heart?
7. In what manner do you practice Confession about God? How would this improve your spiritual and emotional maturity? If you do not already, what do you need to do to start this vital aspect of declaring your faith and honoring who Christ is and what He has done for you?
8. Complacency is the evil of our will that does not see what He has done before, so, we do not look ahead and trust Him. What can you do so complacency does not rule in your heart?

9. What do you need to believe and do so that you are able to forget your will, forget your past, and forget what you may not be able to see, and reach out and take His hand in life?
10. What do you need to do to keep your eyes on important matters, such as His Word and how to apply it, rather than following the latest trends?

A crisis comes. How often we forget how Jesus got us through the last one. We always need to see where we came from to see where we need to go; we need to see how He guided us before in order to have the assurance that He will guide us through again. They did not wait for Jesus' intervention; the Disciples jumped into the crisis without Jesus (Psalm 106:13; Matt. 14:22-33). We have to see where He has led us before so we can know He will help us again. Each problem that is solved in our life is an increase in our faith storage; let us use that storage and not keep it so tightly shut that we do not even remember it when we need it again. How can you know when you are unable or unwilling to apply God's Word into your life? How can this awareness help you apply His truth?

Lesson 23: How God Multiplies our Faith

Matthew 14: 13-21

We, as a Church, tend to forget the impossible; we leave out faith and trust; we hoard what little we have; we fail to surrender to His Lordship or precepts. Regardless of this mindset of ours, Jesus stands at the door that we have closed in His face. He could just kick it down, but, He does not. He lets us live with what little we have when we could have so much more—5000 times as much!

This passage is about letting go, giving to Him, and allowing His multiplication to be glorified! This passage has a powerful lesson for us on faith and surrender. All too often, we in the church are much better at sending people away, stemming from our own misdirection. We forget that Christ is the One who calls us to Him. He says, *bring what you have to me*, while we focus on, *what can you do for me?* It is about how we can serve and glorify our Lord. Out of our poverty He seems to use us the most, because, we are emptied from our pride and trivialities and are able to focus upon Him. We are to give Him all we have so He can meet our needs. When we do this, Jesus will multiply our efforts and we will be able to be used so much more effectively, giving the glory back to Him. Allow Him to do the miracle; then, you distribute it! Remember, Jesus begins where we are and uses what we have. Then, we can grow more and He can use

us more! So, let us give what we have, along with our faith, talent, time, and treasures, so He can make more with it!

- Jesus is our High Priest who intercedes for us. We do not need to worry about His busy schedule or if we are interrupting, He is there for us; He is there for you (Heb 7:23-28)! This passage demonstrates how much God loves and cares for us (Num. 27: 15 -17).
- We can also demonstrate His care by showing hospitality and the proclaiming of His Word in truth. It has been said, *people will not care what you say until they know you care* (1 Cor. 5:8; 2 Cor. 4:2; Col. 1:3-8)!
- Jesus forsook His own needs! This is not just concern, as in sympathy. It is, rather, a deep, heartfelt awareness that leads to action (Nub. 27:15-17; Psalm 23:1; 53; 77:20; 78:52, 70-72; 80:1; Ezek. 34:11, 14-15; Matt. 20:24; Mark 1:41; Luke 7:13).
- Mark adds *sheep without a Shepherd*, meaning a reflection of abandonment by unfaithful leaders who chase their own whims, forsaking God and His people (Jer. 50:6).
- We may think we do not much to work with, but, we have to remember—it is not what we can see we have; it is what He is able to do!
- The disciples must have known that Jesus was powerful enough to meet their needs, but, did not consider it in this situation. How much is this like our spiritual lives—that we do not consider Jesus when we need Him, and, especially when we do not think we need Him? They quickly switched to the normal way of their culture, unaffected by the One whom they had with them!
- Jesus challenges the disciples to care and then become the care equippers, ministers of His provision. Christ is looking for hands that can pass His basket, clean hearts, and a will focused on His.

Questions

1. Most churches forget the impossible, leaving out faith and trust. What are the things some churches—perhaps yours—horde? What do they need to do?
2. Read Hebrews 7:23-28. What would it mean to you not to worry? What do you worry about? What can you do about it? What can Jesus do about it? Remember, His schedule is not busy; we cannot interrupt Him; He is there for us; He is there for you! How does this make you feel?
3. How does this passage demonstrate how much God loves and cares for us? What are some other passages that testify to this?

4. It has been said, *people will not care what you say until they know how much you care*. What does this mean to you; how can you be better at modeling care? How does care reflect your faith?
5. Why do you suppose that the disciples only considered the “normal” way to feed the group? (Keep in mind the other miracles prior to this!)
6. Most Christians only look at what *they* can do. But, in Christ, it is not what we see we have; it is what He is able to do! Are you limited by your vision and thinking?
7. Why do you suppose the disciples, who must have known that Jesus was powerful enough to meet their needs, did not consider Him in this situation? How many times do you fail to consider Jesus when you need Him, especially when you do not think you need Him?
8. How is Jesus the Host, Caregiver, and the Provider for you?
9. Why is Christ looking for hands that can pass His basket, clean hearts, and a will focused on His? Will you be His hands?
10. Why is it that out of our poverty, Christ seems to use us the most? What is poverty? What would it mean for you?
11. We are to give Him all we have so He can meet our needs. What must take place in your heart and mind and your church to make this a reality?
12. How, where, and when can you allow Him to do the miracle, then, you distribute it! What miracle do you need? What stops you from distributing it?

Lesson 24: Faith Learns Trust and Reliance

Matthew 17:14-27

After seeing God's glory, the Disciples had to learn trust and reliance. Jesus brought the Disciples from their incredible emotional mountain top experience directly into the valley of daily life where they were met with opposition and failure. The valley was filled with unbelief, Jesus' coming suffering, and taxes. The Disciples put into practice what they saw and learned, and quickly hit a wall of opposition. They saw that taking both what they had learned and their experiences, then applying all of it takes more than merely an attitude of, "Just do it." Jesus had already given the Disciples the power to

exorcise demons; they were perplexed that for some reason they were unable to follow though (Matthew 10).

- The Disciples sought to do an exorcism under their own power, neglecting God's power as well as prayer. After trying to do the work of God without prayer or trust, they had to learn to take their knowledge and make it real and impacting in their life.
- We can never just stay in the glory of great experiences and insights, of worship and growth. There has to be a time when we take what we have learned and apply it. When the reality of Christ's power and purpose hits us, we must also realize that others will not have the same beliefs and experiences. We will face the daily trivialities of life that seem to take a toll on us. We will face people who will reject us. We will try to put into practice what we have learned and we may fail. We can become frustrated and give up unless we focus, learn, and do not give up. We can best get through by our prayer life, and by our trust and reliance on His work!
- Do not let your lack of willingness to grow in the faith rob you of His plan for you. We can enjoy the mountain top, but we also have to get busy in the valley where we live. When we do succeed, we need to be sure it is His success that is motivating us.
- Enjoying success and blessings is not a result of faith or what faith is about. Faith helps our relationship with God by bringing us closer to Him so He can use us more. Our experiences and ideas tend to get in the way, so God has to sometimes knock us off our stool of pride so we will look to Him (Job. 13:15; 2 Cor. 5:7).
- The disciples had confidence, and seemed to be surprised that their exorcism did not work. They could have also taken for granted their position and not exercised trust. Confidence cannot precede faith; confidence must come from faith and one's growth in Him. Confidence without faith is pride—a heinous sin!
- Submissiveness to God shows faith more than any deed (Mark 9:29).
- We have to be on guard that we do not overlook how God is working. We can be so busy serving and trying to please Him that we do not bother ourselves to know Him through prayer. Nothing God calls us to do is impossible when we are focused on Him with our faith, trust, obedience, and mindsets.
- A person's personal prayer life is key to being used by God and to using God's power (Mark 9:29).
- Christians should always focus on His truth and not our rights.

Questions

1. If you could do literally anything with your faith, what would you do? What stops you? How have you learned trust and reliance?
2. What do you still need to learn?
3. What have been the realities of your daily life, such as, what troubles and tempts you?
4. What do you do when you face unbelief and frustration? What can you do? What should you do?
5. Why is it outside of God's will and plan to have confidence without faith?
6. How is a person's personal prayer life the key to being used by God and using God's power? Can you give an example?
7. How would the Church and society benefit if Christians always focused on His truth and not our rights?
8. Has it hit you that with faith, nothing is impossible, that you can stretch beyond your own ideas and experiences? What would that mean to you? What would your life look like if you lived by this kind of faith? How has this happened to you? If not, what do you need to do to make this happen?
9. There has to be a time when we take what we have learned and apply it. Yet, most Christians including most pastors will never really apply their faith. Why is that?
10. What can your church do to motivate and encourage its people who moan and object to a stretch in their faith?
11. What can you do to avoid becoming frustrated and giving up with your faith when faced with the realities of daily life and/or failure?
12. What are you going to do so you do not let your lack of willingness to grow in the faith rob you of His plan for you?

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

Developed by Richard J. Krejcir Into Thy Word Ministries

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