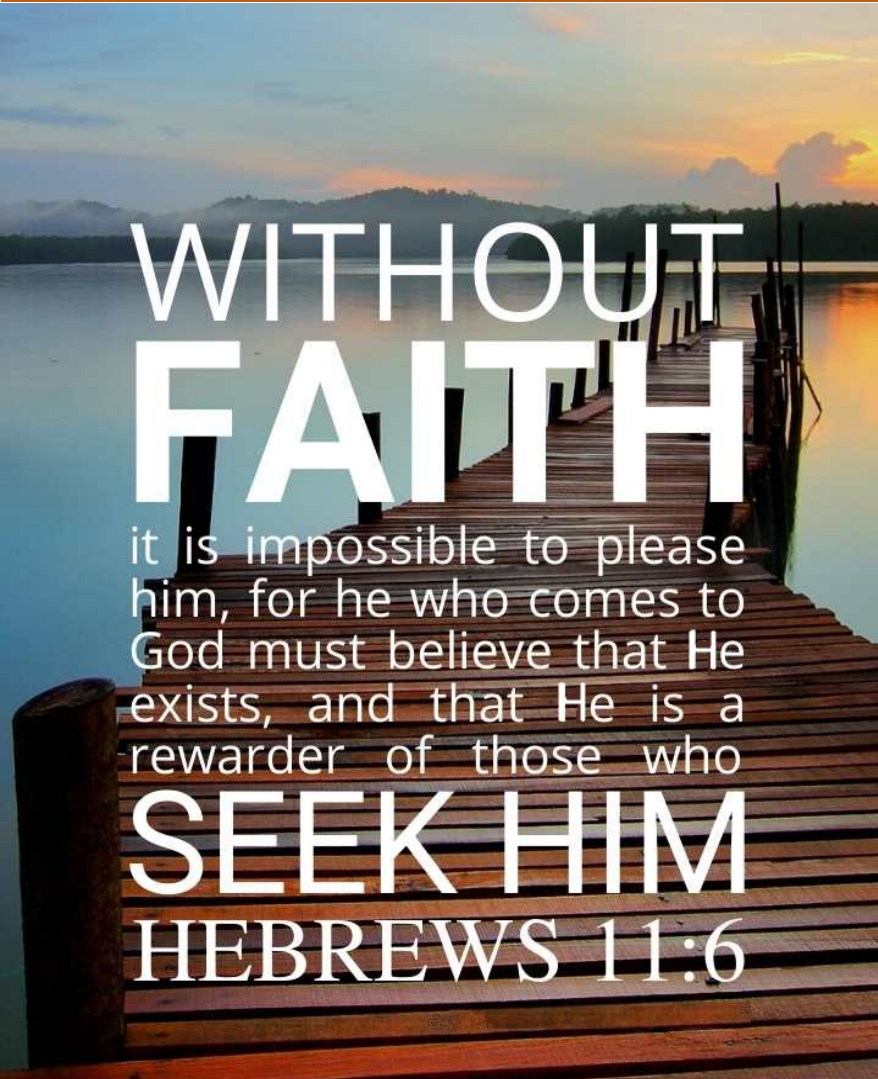


The Christian Life Series—Book 8

The Believer's Walk of Faith



WITHOUT
FAITH

it is impossible to please
him, for he who comes to
God must believe that He
exists, and that He is a
rewarder of those who

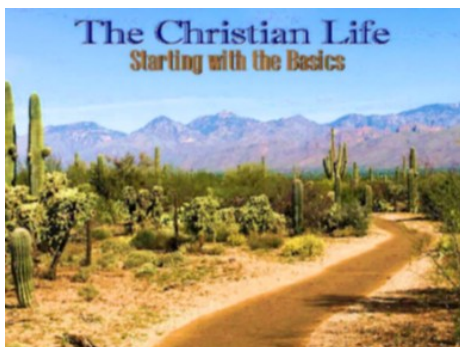
SEEK HIM

HEBREWS 11:6

Alaska Christian Ministry to Seafarers

Foreword

This will be our final topic in this *Basics* series, and it gives us a high note on which to end. The believer's walk of faith is an essential part of every portion of the Christian life—from salvation to glory. Not only are we, as lost sinners, called to respond to the Gospel in faith, but, once saved, we are to stand in faith, walk by faith, and live by faith.



In fact, even at the close of our lives, it would seem that our goal should be to look back and be able to say:

I have fought the good fight (of faith), I have finished the race (of faith), I have kept the faith. . .

II Timothy 4:7

To our common goal, I trust you will find this publication a helpful reference.

In His grace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kevin Redig". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping "K" and a long, horizontal stroke.

Kevin Redig, Pastor-Teacher

All Scripture quotes have been taken from either the NKJV (1992 edition) or the NIV (1984 edition).

The Believer's Walk of Faith

We have called this series of lessons on *The Christian Life—Starting with the Basics*. This is not to imply that the topics are easy or can be overlooked by those wishing to *get on with* the Christian Life, for our spiritual development is no more solid than the foundation upon which it rests. The eight topics in the *Basics* series that we will have covered at the completion of this booklet are fundamental and foundational truths which must be understood and appropriated by faith in order to begin the process of advancing to spiritual maturity.

There are no short cuts or abridged versions when it comes to spiritual growth. With that in mind, let me open our final lesson on faith with this thought: The believer's walk of faith is fundamental to one's becoming a Christian and then living as a Christian each day afterward until the Lord calls the child of God home. In this *Basics* series we are just beginning our journey toward spiritual growth. It is my intent to come back in the future and write the next increment of booklets on the Christian Way of Life. When I do, you can be certain it will include delving deeper into today's final topic—that of faith.

So, let's get started in our first effort at discovery. The best way to handle such a broad topic is to break it down into manageable pieces. Here is the outline that we will follow in this booklet:

1. An Introduction to Faith
2. The Bookends of Faith
3. The Relationship Between Trials and Faith
4. The Rest of Faith
5. The Choreography of Faith

Now that you know where we are going, let's begin with an introduction.

An Introduction to Faith

The place to start our investigation of this broad topic is with a definition.

What Is Faith?

If we turn to our English dictionary, we will find a definition similar to the following:

Faith (n): a strong trust in someone or something



If we turn instead to a Greek lexicon for the words most commonly translated faith we will find the following:

. . .belief, conviction of the truth of something or someone, to be persuaded about something

As you can see, there is no issue in terms of translation from Greek to English—the Greek and English words are very close in meaning. However, there is one reasonably significant language issue to which I would like to draw to your attention:

- The Greek noun *pistis* is typically translated *faith*.
- The Greek verb *pisteuo* is typically translated *to believe*.

As you can see from the transliterations, the Greek noun and verb have the same root. They do not differ in meaning, they differ only in whether they are speaking of *faith* as a noun or a verb. I mention this so that you will not be led astray by someone trying to make a theological difference between the words faith and believing. There is no difference in the Greek language. To say one has faith and another has belief is to say exactly the same thing, as are to believe and to exercise faith. As we turn to different Scriptures, please realize that we will typically see the word *believe* to translate the verb form and *faith* to translate the noun form of words with the same meaning.

Faith in Salvation

Let's look at some examples of faith as it applies to the salvation of a lost individual—our transfer from hell to heaven as shown in the diagram. Although our focus in this series is on the Christian Life, it will help us to grasp the simple nature of faith by seeing it applied to salvation.

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God—and not of works. . . Ephesians 2:8

Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household. Acts 16:31

In Ephesians 2, we have the noun *faith*. In Acts 16 we have the verb translated *believe*. Both share the common connection to salvation. The point of our grammar discussion should be clear. The root of the verb translated *believe* is the word translated faith. That's how closely related they are.

Putting this all together in order to be persuaded to the point that you are willing to put your trust in Jesus as both the Son of God and the Savior who died for us is what is necessary to obtain eternal salvation. John tells us this is exactly the reason he wrote his Gospel account:

. . .but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name. John 20:31

Just to make the point one last time, anyone who does *believe* in Jesus as the Christ and Son of God has been saved by *faith*!



Faith in the Christian Life

Now let's move to the emphasis of our series—the Christian Life—the days we are given from the time of our salvation until He takes us home, as illustrated below.



Consider two passages from Paul's epistles:

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him, rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught. . .

Colossians 2:6-7

Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.

I Corinthians 16:13

How did we receive Christ as a lost person? We saw in the previous section that it was by faith. Now we are being told to continue in that same faith. In fact, the Colossians passage not only tells us to continue in the faith, but also, as a growing child of God, we are to be strengthened in the faith. Let me suggest this refers to the ongoing process of sanctification as we mature spiritually.

Then the passage at the close of I Corinthians reminds us to "*stand firm in the faith.*" It would seem that we are to start with faith, continue in faith, be strengthened in that faith, and, when resistance comes, stand firm in faith. In short, trusting in God and His Word seems to be an essential part of living the Christian Life.

Having said that, take another look at the previous Scripture passages. Does anything about the way these Scriptures are phrased lead you to believe that faith is automatic for the Christian? Actually, no! This looks much more like direct guidance in order to make sure we don't fail to do what we should. In other words, Paul is worried enough about those to whom he has ministered to warn them to continue, strengthen, and stand firm in the faith—lest they fail to do so!

What Is the Biblical Definition?

Does the Bible itself give us a definition of faith? That's a good question! We have something very close to a definition in the Book of Hebrews:

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

Although we start out on a helpful note, "*Now faith is. . .*", what follows is abstract in nature. There are two things that can help us improve our understanding of this Biblical definition. First, some language study. Greek scholar A.T. Robertson explains that the word translated *substance* carries the idea of the ownership of something tangible. It goes so far as to equate it to *holding title*. Further, the word translated *hope* refers to that in which we have confidence.

The second thing that is very helpful in understanding the definition of faith is to connect it with this verse:

So then, faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. Romans 10:17

Putting both of these together: The believer's faith is to have as its object the Word of God. Once we get hold of a portion of truth from the Scriptures, what we actually *hold title* to, is the way things really are. When we grasp this reality, we can most certainly have confidence—whether these things are visible or not.

Let me give you an example from Jesus as quoted in the Book of John:

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in Me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with Me that you also may be where I am." John 14:1-3

After studying and pondering this passage, I have reached the point that I believe it. I have put my faith in what the Word says. As a result, I am confident that:

- Heaven has ample room for me.
- Jesus has, or is, preparing a place for me in His heaven.
- One day He is going to come back for me in order to take me to be with Him.

I am confident this is the case—even though I can't see any of the behind the scenes activity going on. In fact, I am so confident that what Scripture says is true, it is like I am *holding title* to that truth! That's what it means to have faith in the person and promises of God.

We need to take this one step further: What happens if I start to have doubts about the above truth, or any other truth from God's Word? Does that mean they are not really true? No, it means that I am in the process of moving from faith to unbelief. Perhaps you can see why it is so important to spend time in the Word, sit under good teaching, and have fellowship with other believers. We need to



hear the Word of God taught and shared as well as reading it with our own eyes. That contact with the Word stimulates our faith because faith comes from hearing the Word of God. (Romans 10:17) That, in turn, allows us to confidently *hold title* to His truth!

What Faith Is NOT

It can be helpful to clarify one's understanding of faith by understanding what it is *not*:

- Faith is *not* a response to a feeling! On the contrary, it is a response to the truths contained in God's unchanging Word.
- Faith is *not* a belief in that which seems to be the most likely outcome. In other words, it is not a function of probability, but rather the reliability of our promise-keeping God.
- Faith is *not* a force we exert in order to get something to happen! In other words, God is not asking us to rely on the power of our positive thinking or will. Instead, He expects us to rest in the power of His ability to do all that He has said He will do.

In contrast to what faith is not, I have often found this description of faith to be exceedingly helpful:

Faith is dependence upon God. And this God-dependence only begins when self-dependence ends. And self-dependence only comes to its end, with some of us, when sorrow, suffering, affliction, broken plans, and hopes brings us to that place of self-helplessness and defeat. And only then do we find that we have learned the lesson of faith. . .

James McConkey

This might seem to be easy enough, but in truth, replacing self-dependence with God-dependence is often much more difficult than it might seem.

The McConkey quote speaks of learning *the lesson of faith*. Let me suggest the *lesson of faith* that must be learned by the people of God can be summarized as:

The results from God-dependence are so much more spectacular and provide so much more of a blessing for those who trust God, that what is available from any other option pales into insignificance. In short, what God really desires, from the Garden of Eden forward, is a people who are willing to depend upon Him—in every circumstance!

Faith Is Essential to the Christian Life

Faith plays an essential role when it comes to the Christian Life! Let me reinforce exactly this point by walking you through three Biblical passages:

And without faith, it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.

Hebrews 11:6

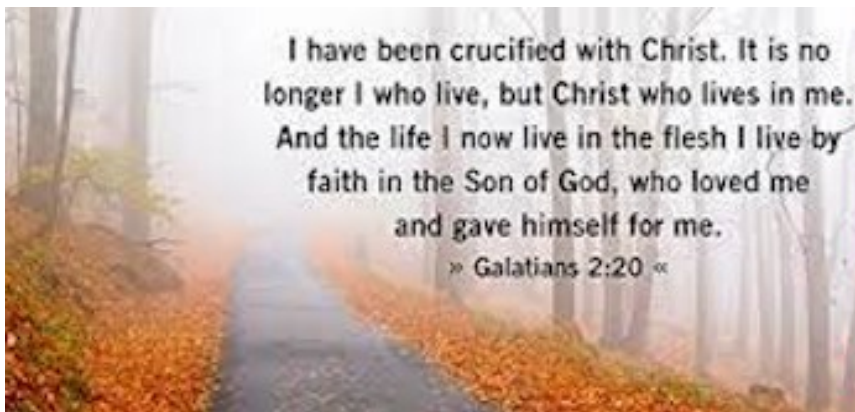
. . .but the righteous will live by his faith.

Habakkuk 2:4, Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, Hebrews 10:38

The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.

Galatians 2:20

First, we are not going to please God apart from depending upon Him. Furthermore, living by faith is so self evident for the child of God, that not only are we clearly told in the Old Testament that God's righteous ones will live by faith (Habakkuk 2:4), but this very same truth is then referenced three times in the New Testament. As I said earlier, from the Garden of Eden forward, God has always wanted those who are the work of His hands to depend upon Him and Him alone. Finally, lest we think that faith has some kind of spiritual limitation upon it, Paul sets us straight in Galatians 2:20. The life Paul lives—from the time he gets up in



the morning until he lays his head down at night—he lives by faith in the Son of God. Why would he do this? He does it because if Jesus is for you (and He is), then who can be against you? (Romans 8:31)

While we are at it, let's address the issue of *faith's duration*. In other words, let's answer the question: When can I set aside my need to daily live by faith?

For in the Gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

Romans 1:17

At this point I am sure you are not surprised by the answer. We enter God's plan of redemption, changing our eternal destiny from one in the Lake of Fire to one in heaven, by means of placing our faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Then, from that point forward, we are to live every single day by faith—right up until we draw our last breath! That's why faith is said to be from first to last! In fact, if you wanted to point out that you think we are going to spend eternity in dependent trust upon the God we then know face to face, I would be happy to agree with you!

This concludes our introduction to faith. Let's continue on to *The Bookends of Faith*.

The Bookends of Faith

The Old Testament provides us with two accounts that provide what we call *The Bookends of Faith*. The first bookend is the children of Israel in the desert and the second is the story of David and Goliath.

The First Bookend of Faith

We find the first bookend of faith in Exodus Chapter 14:

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Tell the Israelites to turn back and encamp near Pi Hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea. They are to encamp by the sea, directly opposite Baal Zephon. Pharaoh will think, 'The Israelites are wandering around the land in confusion, hemmed in by the desert.' And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them. But I will gain glory for myself through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord."

Exodus 14:1-4

Note that whatever happens next is first of all expressly according to the plans and purposes of God. Second, note that God intends this to be a *teaching moment*! I would suggest to you that it is intended to teach not only the Egyptians something but the fledgling nation of Israel as well. Further, by its inclusion in the Word of God, it is also meant to teach us!

Before we continue in Chapter 14, it might be helpful to recall the events of the past few chapters. These include: God's promise to the Jews to redeem them out of



Egypt, the ten plagues, the Passover, the Exodus from Egypt, and God's leading by a pillar of fire at night and a column of smoke by day.

Now let's read the *rest of the story*:

The Egyptians, all Pharaoh's horses and chariots, horsemen and troops, pursued the Israelites and overtook them as they camped by the sea near Pi Hahiroth, opposite Baal Zephon. As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the Lord. They said to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians?' It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!" Moses answered the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still."

Exodus 14:9-14

These are the essentials to glean from the text:

- This was really a hopeless situation. On one side you have a group of newly-freed slaves, on the other side the most powerful army in the world—with chariots.
- God doesn't ask the people to do anything other than trust Him. In fact, the division of labor is very clear. The people are told to stand still and watch, while it is God who does the delivering.

That is our first bookend of faith: There are times when all God asks of us is simply to stand still in dependent faith, and let Him deal with our circumstances. In short, we are to stand firm and trust!

The Second Bookend of Faith

The second bookend of faith is illustrated in I Samuel Chapter 17. This is the well known story of David and Goliath. Here is a bit of the backstory:

Then the Philistine (Goliath) said, "This day I defy the ranks of Israel! Give me a man and let us fight each other." On hearing the Philistine's words, Saul and all the Israelites were dismayed and terrified.

I Samuel 17:10-11

When David arrives on scene, he has a completely different response:

Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?

I Samuel 17:26

Not surprisingly, this comment draws the attention of the king. Read below the excerpt of the dialogue between King Saul and David and see what evidence you can find of David's faith in the Lord. Keep in mind that at this time David is probably in his late teens.

David said to Saul, "Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him." Saul replied, "You are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him; you are only a boy, and he has been a fighting man from his youth." But David said to Saul. . . "Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God. The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." Saul said to David, "Go, and the Lord be with you."

I Samuel 17:32-33, 36-37

Now it is one thing to talk a good story before the king, but how about before a nine-foot-tall warrior?

Here are David's final words to the giant Goliath, and the outcome of their combat:

David said to the Philistine, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will hand you over to me, and I'll strike you down. . . All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord's, and He will give all of you into our hands." As the Philistine moved closer to attack him, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet him. . .

I Samuel 17:45-48

Why is this the other *bookend of faith*? In Exodus 14, all the people could do—in fact, what God wanted them to do—was to stand still and trust in God to deal with the circumstances. However in I Samuel 17, we find a completely different situation. In this case, the appropriate faith response that God is looking for, displayed by only one man—really a teenager—is to charge the problem.



It would seem that sometimes the proper faith response is to allow God to act on our behalf, while at other times it is to allow Him to work through our actions. Let's investigate this further.

Practical Application

At this point, I trust we can agree that God wants us to face each and every circumstance in our lives by trusting Him. We can't please Him if we don't, nor are we likely to see His hand at work in our lives. But we still haven't addressed the issue: What does God want us to do as we face life's trials?



Let's make application from the two *bookends of faith* we just discussed:

- **What is the same in both cases?** The answer lies in taking note that it doesn't matter if you are hemmed in at the Red Sea or facing a giant. The victory belonged to the Lord in both cases. To come at it from another angle, God delivered those who trusted Him out of two very different sets of circumstances.

- **What is different between the two cases?** The difference lies in what those who are responding in faith do. In one case, they simply stand still and let God work. In the other, the contrast couldn't be any greater, the response is to charge a giant.

The take-home lesson for us is this: *Faith wins the day!* Faith is what God wants from His people—whether we are trapped by circumstances or facing a giant. Notice how clearly the book of Hebrews, a great treatise on faith, makes clear that it was a faith response on the part of God's people that carried the day:

By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry ground, but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned.

Hebrews 11:29

God is more than capable of making a way through any obstacle or overcoming any giant, but what allows Him to work in our lives is faith!

Understanding God's call to faith is not without its own challenges. Here is the big one for me, and I suspect it is a question on your mind as well: How do we know when we are to:

- Stand and allow the Lord to deliver?
- Charge and trust the Lord to deliver?
- Some combination of the two?

At this point, I trust we would all agree, in any case, it is going to be THE LORD WHO DELIVERS! Let me suggest that discerning what the Lord would have us do is not as hard as it might seem. It just takes faith and a bit of persistence! First, we must distrust our own natural tendencies. What the flesh feels led to do is rarely the right answer. Second, our confusion over this matter is mistakenly thinking that the Lord is trying to keep secret what He wants us to do. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Rather, He is just waiting for us to seek His will—in faith.

If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea. . . That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does. James 1:6-8

There you have it—God will generously give wisdom when we ask. What is the only caveat? Don't doubt! Don't trust Him one minute and then race off in fleshly wisdom the next, for to do so, would make us *double-minded*. Being double-minded is wavering between belief and unbelief whereas our goal should be to grow to the point where we too can say:

. . .the life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.
Galatians 2:20

In closing this section, let me leave you with several thoughts. First, I have labeled the examples from Exodus 14 and I Samuel 17 as the *bookends of faith* because they are really the two extremes of the way God might desire that we respond. These two extremes are certainly Biblical, as I have shown.

Second, in many cases, as we seek the Lord's will, we are likely to find ourselves somewhere in between these two extremes. That is completely okay! We are already much further along by just asking God, "Is this a time to stand and watch you deliver, or to take action and watch you deliver?" than we would be trying to solve things in our own strength.

Finally, in seeking His will, we are in a good place to be led by the Spirit to take those actions He desires while leaving the rest up to Him.

The Relationship Between Trials and Faith

In seeking to avoid or escape the trials that will come our way, we often miss their significance in the context of what God is trying to do in our lives. It is certainly true that trials often consist of things that are *bad*. They are bad because we live in a fallen world. Further, because Christians are called to be God's ambassadors in a fallen world, trials are sure to come our way. Here is the point we must grasp: God is going to use those trials—those bad things that come our way—for our good, and that good is directly related to our topic of faith! How so? In this section, I will cover three ways God uses trials in our lives.

Trials Develop Perseverance!

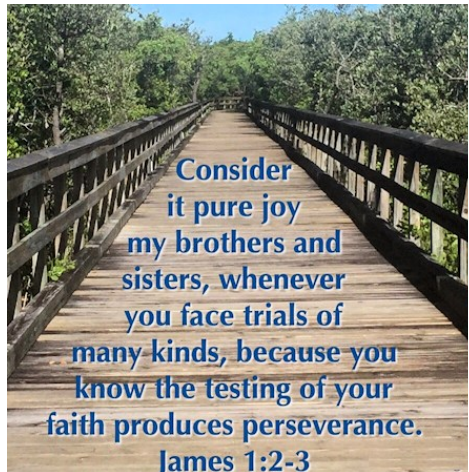
Trials are one way we can develop our ability to persevere in the faith. James addresses this directly in the following passage:

**Consider it pure joy,
my brothers, whenever
you face trials of many
kinds, because you
know that the testing
of your faith develops
perseverance.**

James 1:2-3

Notice first of all that James doesn't say, "If trials come." On the contrary, he says: "*whenever you face trials of many*

kinds. . ." Not only are we going to face trials, but they come in all kinds of shapes and sizes.



**Consider
it pure joy
my brothers and
sisters, whenever
you face trials of
many kinds, because you
know the testing of your
faith produces perseverance.
James 1:2-3**

And, what does James mention as their purpose? They are meant to develop character—in particular, the character trait of perseverance in the face of difficulty—something we often refer to as perseverance in the faith!

Think of athletes. In order to develop their abilities, they must go through a rigorous training regimen that causes them to push their limits. As they do, they will develop the endurance of their physical muscles. In the same way, God is going to use trials to develop our *spiritual muscles*. By *spiritual muscles* I mean our ability to persevere in the faith come what may. God is not looking for a faith that is there only when times are good, but faith that holds firmly to Him when things get difficult. In other words, God wants our faithfulness perpetuated through time.

Trials Refine Our Faith!

Trials will test our faith in order to determine its quality. They will also refine our faith in order to get rid of everything that is not centered in God Himself and His promises to us. This is the message clearly communicated in the following passage:

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

I Peter 1:6-7

In what is Peter's audience rejoicing? The verses lay it out very clearly. Peter tells them to rejoice in an eternal inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade. But while we are waiting for our inheritance to be realized, what is going to come in the meantime? All kinds of trials!

Why do we have to suffer trials? The next part of the passage is very powerful by way of explanation, but we will

need to do a bit of Greek language work. The Greek text says that gold perishes (is loosed) *through* the fire. There is no word for refining in the Greek text, the translators just assume that is what is going on. So, let me suggest that what the text is trying to communicate is this:

Trials have come so that your faith may be tested and proved to be genuine.

In the world, gold is of great value; in the spiritual realm, it is replaced by faith. And just as gold is loosed through fire, so trials serve the same purpose with respect to our faith.



Now where does this interpretation come from? Our English translation implies that gold eventually perishes, even though it has been refined and, in contrast, our faith is meant to be more enduring. Our faith most certainly is of great importance, but I don't believe the text is teaching that eventually gold will perish. Instead, it is using the treatment of gold as a means to help us understand how God develops our faith. You see, high quality gold ore is very valuable but nowhere near as valuable as refined gold. The ore is made more valuable, first, by crushing and then by heating. Although the ore *perishes* through the crushing and heating process, the resultant purified gold that has come *through the fire* is of much greater value after all of the dross has been removed.

How does this relate to our spiritual lives? One way to look at trials is to consider them as our own *passing through the fire* with the result that our faith is purified. How so? Reliance on ourselves and our resources is replaced with reliance upon God alone.

Every trial is really a test of the genuineness of our faith. Is our faith in God and His promises or in something else? If it is something else, it is dross that needs to go. As the passage in I Peter teaches, if we grow to the point that our faith is consistently in God and His promises, it is going to result in *"praise, glory, and honor when Jesus is revealed."*

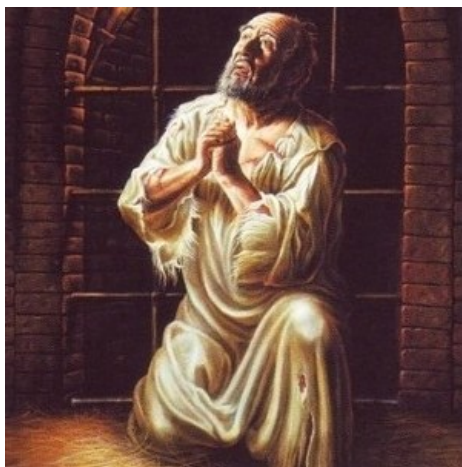
Trials Can Display God's Power

There is one final purpose for our trials that we need to consider. Paul has a physical malady that was interfering with his ministry. He naturally pleaded with God to remove it. Look at God's answer to the Apostle Paul who was, without question, a great man of faith.

"My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness."

II Corinthians 12:9

If we are weak then we lack capability. Paul's physical trial clearly highlighted his lack of capability, which is why he prayed to God. God's answer was in effect, "Good! Now I have you right where I want you. All results from here on are clearly going to be attributed to Me and not to you!"



You see, Christians, most especially committed ones, desire to do good works for the Lord. At the same time, they may mistakenly think that it all depends upon them to bring those works to fruition. God wants us to depend upon Him and His power, not our own. When this occurs, the glory is His for what is accomplished, as it should always be. This is a very important lesson for us to learn up

front, so that God does not have to reinforce it by making us weak in order to learn it!

This is not to say that the Christian Life is one without power. On the contrary, it is just as important to make clear that our work is to be in *God's power* and not our own. How do I know this? Look at Paul's response to God's declaration that His power is made perfect in weakness:

Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

II Corinthians 12:10

Now that we understand the role of trials in developing our faith, we are ready to learn how to enter God's place of rest—even in trials!

The Rest of Faith

The choices we make in life have consequences, and this most certainly includes those associated with whether or not we choose to respond in faith to the provision of God and the will of God. This is easily demonstrated with respect to a lost person and their response to God's provision of the gift of salvation. There are clearly consequences for the way every human being responds, on a personal level, to the salvation available in Jesus:

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.

John 3:36

When it comes to the Christian Life, whether or not we choose to trust in the promises of God has equally clear consequences—a few of which can be seen in the passages below. As is clearly communicated, if we want to please God, be commended by Him, and share the abundant life

He offers, we have to trust Him. If we do not trust Him, the consequences for our choices are the loss of all three. So you see, there is much at stake with respect to the choices we make as highlighted in these verses:

And without faith it is impossible to please God. . .

Hebrews 11:6

Well done, good and faithful servant. . .

Matthew 25:21

We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly to the end the confidence we had at first.

Hebrews 3:14

In addition to understanding that choices have consequences, let's make sure we understand that God has provided everything we need to live the high quality of life to which we are called. This truth underscores the reasonableness of trusting Him in every circumstance of life. The completeness of His provision is nicely summarized in the first chapter of II Peter:

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness. . . He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

II Peter 1:3-4

An Old Testament Example

As a contrast to the idea of consequences, I want to introduce God's provision of *the rest of faith*. This concept is very well illustrated with a negative example in the redemption and subsequent failures of the Exodus generation to walk by faith. You might find it strange to illustrate the concept of *the rest of faith* by means of failure, but this is a powerful way to communicate to us the need to keep from repeating the same mistakes made by the Exodus generation.

To give you a bit of the backstory, we can jump in at Exodus 6:

"I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgement. I will take you as my own people. . ." Exodus 6:6-8

So there you have the promise, and in Chapter 12 we see its fulfillment:

Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, "Up! Leave my people, you and the Israelites!" . . . The Egyptians urged the people to hurry and leave the country. . . Now the length of time the Israelite people lived in Egypt was 430 years. At the end of the 430 years, to the very day, all the Lord's divisions left Egypt. Exodus 12:31-41

So what do the people have by way of personal knowledge of God? They have a promise of redemption. In the ten plagues, they have multiple manifestations of the power of God to perform that which He has promised. They have



the fulfillment of the promise on the night of their departure from Egypt. It would seem that God has demonstrated His trustworthiness on a national scale!

But, what happens after Israel leaves Egypt?

- The Israelites are miraculously delivered from the Egyptian army by passing through the Red Sea. (Exodus 14:10-28)
- The Israelites face a no-water situation in which God miraculously changes bitter water to sweet. (Exodus 15:22-26)
- The Israelites face a no-food situation in which God miraculously rains food from heaven—and thus begins a daily practice for 40 years. (Exodus 16:1-5)
- The Israelites face another no-water situation in which God miraculously provides water from a rock. (Exodus 17:1-7)

A Pattern of Repetitive Unbelief

I could keep going, but by now it should be clear that God is more than capable of providing everything the people need to move forward and into the Land of Promise. That is one pattern we must understand: Our God is a promise-keeping God.

However, if you read the above Scriptures in context, you will also note another pattern. In every single one of these cases the people of Israel failed to trust God, and instead *melted down* into a pattern of complaint, blame, and fear. They even, at times, contemplated a return to slavery in Egypt! In short, the people of Israel are acting in *repetitive unbelief*! This does not bode well for them!

The Exodus's pattern of unbelief reaches a crescendo in Numbers 14. After roughly one year of travel in the desert, they are on the border of the Promised Land. Spies have been sent out, and the land is indeed flowing with



milk and honey, just as the Lord had promised. But, there are also people occupying the land, and Israel once again defaults to unbelief:

That night all the people of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron. . . "If only we had died in Egypt. . . Why is the Lord bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? . . . We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt."

Numbers 14:1-10

Truly, it is as if the people have learned nothing. After being redeemed by the hand of God out of the most powerful nation on earth and being fed daily for a period of almost one year, they have no faith that God can do what He promised and bring them into the Land. How does God feel about this?

The Lord said to Moses, "How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in Me, in spite of all the miraculous signs I have performed among them? I will strike them down with a plague. . ."

Numbers 14:11-12

Now Moses pleads on behalf of the people, and amazingly, God forgives them. As we learned above, that does not mean there are no consequences for their choice of

unbelief. In fact, look at the judgment that God has pronounced on His people:

The Lord replied, “I have forgiven them, as you asked. Nevertheless, as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the Lord fills the whole earth, not one of the men who saw My glory and the miraculous signs I performed in Egypt and in the desert but who disobeyed Me and tested Me ten times—not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their forefathers. No one who has treated Me with contempt will ever see it.”

Numbers 14:20-23

The Lord is certainly judging His people for their unbelief, but has He cast them aside? The text clearly says they are forgiven. Furthermore, who is going to provide daily food for those under discipline? Who provides water in the desert? Who protects them from armed marauders and poisonous snakes? The answer to each question is: God does! God hasn't quit on them nor has He forsaken them, they are just receiving the consequences of their unbelief.

Make no mistake about it, the Exodus generation has persistently chosen unbelief in the face of every opportunity to trust their God. Let me suggest at this point that we realize how important it is for us to avoid their example, lest we too live out our lives in a spiritual wilderness of our own making!

From a Saved People

Before moving on, I want to leave no doubt about this question: Does the Exodus generation consist of saved people? Because of their failure to enter the Promised Land, many will say No! In doing so, they equate the Promised Land with heaven. However, the Biblical text is very clear on the status of these people and what the Promised Land is. The Promised Land is not heaven, instead, it is the place of abundance and rest that God is so desirous of providing for His people—then and now.

Let me show you:

- We have already seen that the people were forgiven. (Numbers 14:20)
- All of these people came out of Egypt under the blood of the Passover Lamb who is a type of Jesus Christ. Are the lost covered by the *blood of the Lamb*? Of course not.
- Then consider this New Testament reference:

For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. . . They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them. . . I Corinthians 10:1-5

If you have eaten and drunk, synonyms for belief, from the Lord Jesus Christ, then you are a saved individual. So, why wasn't God pleased with them? We know the answer, and we can sum it up in one word—unbelief! They were saved, but they were not walking in belief.

Now note very carefully one more thing it says just following the above passage in I Corinthians:

These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us. . .

I Corinthians 10:11



This is a very simple lesson that we can take from the Exodus generation:

Do not persist in unbelief as did the Exodus generation, or you too will come under judgment for your unbelief!

New Testament Teaching

This brings us to Hebrews Chapters 3 and 4. You will find that knowing the backstory in Exodus and Numbers is very helpful when it comes to following the teaching in Hebrews 3 and 4. To start, read Hebrews 3:7-11 and see if you can determine what kind of heart is a problem when it comes to our spiritual walk? The answer is found in Verse 12:

See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. Hebrews 3:12

Now, read Hebrews 3:15-19, and consider these questions:

- Who was able to enter God's place of rest? Why, it was the Exodus generation as the context has made clear. The place of *rest* that God has promised them was a land flowing with milk and honey. For the New Testament Christian, we will see there is still the promise of a place of *rest*. For us it is the *abundant life* which is available in Jesus Christ.
- What kept the Israelites from entering the *rest* God had prepared? Did He somehow not keep His promise? This verse tells us the *why*:

So we see that they were not able to enter, because of unbelief. Hebrews 3:19

Unbelief always keeps us from God's blessing. Remember, God kept His promise, for He is a promise-keeping God. The children of those who came out of Egypt entered the Land of Promise. But, because of their unbelief, the

Exodus generation did not enter the land. You see, unbelief can be very costly. In this instance, it led to the forfeiture of the blessing that could have been theirs.

Does the Promise Remain?

Did God's promise of a place of *rest* end with Israel's eventual entry into the Land, or does such a promise still remain? The answer is clear and emphasized by means of repetition in the New Testament. Consider these three verses from the Book of Hebrews:

Therefore, since the promise of entering His rest still stands. . .

Hebrews 4:1

It still remains that some will enter that rest. . .

Hebrews 4:6

There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God. . .

Hebrews 4:9

To make sure there is no confusion, this place of rest is no more heaven than is the Promised Land.

Moses did not enter because of his own sin, and it is simply not possible to make the case that Moses is unsaved. Instead, what we are slowly unfolding is God's place of spiritual abundance and rest for those who will live the Christian Life in dependent trust upon Him.

How Does It Work?

We have laid the groundwork in terms of principle: God is calling us to trust Him fully because unbelief has terrible consequences. Let's look at some of the mechanics



associated with entering His rest, which as we shall see, is *the rest of faith*:

- What do we need to combine with every promise of God? As you can see, even the best of promises must be combined with faith in order to be realized in our lives!

...the message they (the Exodus generation) heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith. Hebrews 4:2

- To drive the point home, what still remains for every child of God?

There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from His.

Hebrews 4:9-10

So this promise of a rest remains for the *people of God*. Most certainly in our day the *people of God* would be speaking of the Church. In other words, God has a place of rest for those who make up His Church. Note carefully what must be done *first* before we can even think about entering God's rest: We must cease from our own efforts. We must stop trying to manipulate people, circumstances, and resources in order to *work things out* and, instead, trust God to do so.

The Admonition

We must also consider the admonition that we find in Hebrews:

Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.

Hebrews 4:11

I have chosen the King James version because it so clearly establishes how contrary it is to human nature to enter that which God has prepared. You see, we have to stop

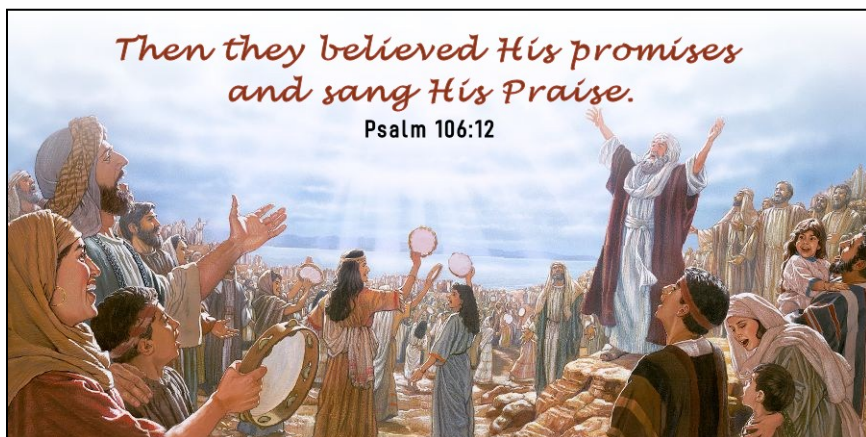
trusting in ourselves. If we don't, we are going to fall into the same pattern of unbelief as those who came before. Further, shifting our trust from self and our own resources to trusting in God and His promises is something at which we are really going to have to "*labour!*" It may seem like an oxymoron to labor to rest, but when it comes to entering that place of ceasing from our own efforts and steadfastly trusting in the promises of God, we are going to have to work at it to get there and to stay there!

Remember that it is the teaching of many to dismiss the Exodus generation as lost people because their struggles with faith are so clearly documented. If we do that, we remove the power of the admonition found in Hebrews 3 and 4, as if entering God's rest of faith is somehow automatic. Look at the actual record of Scripture:

**He (God) rebuked the Red Sea, and it dried up;
He led them through the depths as through a desert
. . . Then they believed His promises and sang His
praise. But they soon forgot what He had done. . . in
the wasteland they put God to the test.**

Psalms 106: 9-14

The problem with the Exodus generation is not that they were unsaved. The text clearly says they believed! Their problem was that they forgot the promises and capability



of their God! Then in unbelief they put God to the test. As a result, their bodies were scattered in the wilderness!

I hope at this point you are thinking what I am thinking, "Thank you God for the warning, I sure don't want that to be me!" And, while we are at it, "Thank you God for Your Word which reminds us and Your Spirit who enables us!"

A Clarification

Now, let me see if I can really clarify for you this idea of the *rest of faith* by taking a closer look at the Greek in the verse we have been discussing:

Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.

Hebrews 4:11

There are these things to note:

- The word labor actually has a range of meanings, including to be quick, to be diligent, and to work hard at something.
- There is a concept missing in Verse 11, although it has been a focal point since Hebrews 3:7, and that is faith vice unbelief. In other words, our labor is to come to the point of faith and that is the door through which we pass to enter God's rest.
- Putting these two concepts together, we can better understand what we have to do:

When we face challenging circumstances of any kind, we are to be quick to the Word and diligent to see what it has to say, so that we would appropriate the truths of God's Word into our lives and thereby enter the rest of faith.

Do you see it? There is a sequence:

Labor. . . Faith. . . Rest!

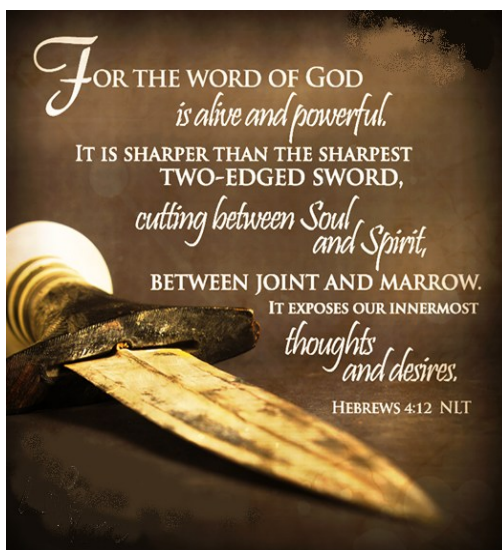
This is an absolutely essential component of the Christian Life. How much better would things have gone for the Exodus generation if, at each *no water situation* and every other problem along the way, they had been quick to claim the promises of God by faith and thereby enter His rest. Why, the Exodus Generation would have marched right in-to the Promised Land and conquered as the Lord provided!

Do you see the difference between learning to enter God's rest and failing to do so? It is the difference between entering the place of blessing, and dying in a spiritual wilderness of your own unbelief.

Now if you were to continue in the fourth chapter of Hebrews, you might be tempted to think that the writer is on to new topics in Verses 12 and 16. I don't believe he is. Consider the following with me:

For the Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to the dividing of soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Hebrews 4:12

How did we go from the *rest of faith* to the Word of God? As we have already learned:



So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. Romans 10:17

It is the Word that stimulates our faith. That is why we are to be quick to the Word and diligent to see what it has

to say when we are struggling to trust God. The truths of God's Word, as revealed by the Spirit of God, will prompt a faith response! Looking for answers in ourselves, or in this world, will only lead to fear and hopelessness.

Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. Hebrews 4:16

If, in the midst of a crisis, we are struggling to enter that place of God-dependence, how is it that we are able to come before the very throne of God? It is because of our position in Christ, for we are already seated with Him in the heavenly realm. (Ephesians 2:6) But we can only come if we believe in our heavenly position. We can only come if we have the faith to rest in the truth that we are accepted by the Father because we are in the Son.

So, to enter the rest of God in the face of each new problem, we have to start from resting by faith in our current position in Christ and thereby come before His throne for grace and mercy to continue forward. The concepts of faith and rest touch everything, don't they?

A Summary

How do we handle challenges—trials—in the area of health, heartache, and happenstance? Let me say it again:

*By being quick to the Word, diligent to uncover truth,
so that we might appropriate those truths by faith
and thereby enter God's rest of faith*

Over and over and over again we will need to do this until the Lord calls us home, for faith is the *modus operandi* of the Christian Life. How do I know? The Lord has told us:

"My righteous ones will walk by faith."

Habakkuk 2:4, Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, Hebrews 10:38

The Choreography of Faith

In its most common usage, the word choreography refers to the sequence of steps in dance. This is one way to grab your attention in order to show you that our life of faith also has a sequence to it. Let me show you. First, ponder the spiritual significance of the following sequence of steps:

- We are to stand in the faith.

Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong. Do everything in love.

I Corinthians 16:13-14

- Next, we are to walk by faith.

We walk by faith, not by sight.

II Corinthians 5:7

- Then we are to live by faith.

The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

Galatians 2:20

Now to be sure, I am taking a certain liberty with the above quotes by not looking more closely at context. But, given what we have studied, do you see that there would appear to be broad Scriptural support for the following:

Every moment of every day, no matter what circumstances come our way, we are to trust the Lord—that would be to stand. We are then to perpetuate that God-dependence into a moment-by-moment walk of faith. With that being the case, it should be our goal to look back one day so that we might be able to say, "That was a life lived by faith." And, should that be accomplished, we are going to hear:

"Well done my good and faithful servant. . .!"

Matthew 25:21

Let me provide additional support for this choreography:

- We are to persist in faith until the end—right up until the Lord calls us home. In doing so, there is most certainly to be an expectation of reward graciously given for such perseverance:

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us. . .

Hebrews 12:1

I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 3:14

For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.

Hebrews 10:36

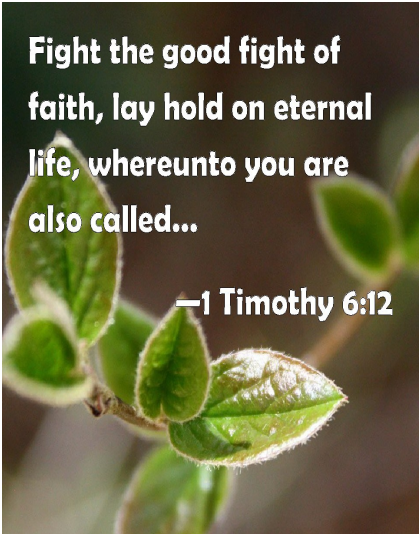
- We are to fight the good fight of faith:

Fight the good fight of faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called. . .

I Timothy 6:12

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

II Timothy 4:7



Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto you are also called...

—I Timothy 6:12

Interestingly enough, Paul once again connects the ideal of reward with having successfully *kept the faith*, for he goes on to say:

Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for His appearing.

II Timothy 4:8

The last part of this verse should be very precious to us. For it is not just the amazing Apostle Paul who has a crown in store, it is all those who have fought the good fight of faith! That is something every one of us can do! Not in our own strength, of course, but as we are guided by the Word of God and enabled by the Spirit of God.

Indeed it would seem that there is to be a certain rhythm and flow to faith's presence in our lives. From our initial response to every new circumstance, perpetuated in daily habit, until we have navigated the many trials of this life and come safely into the presence of the Lord, trusting Him all along the way. Of course, being the fallen creatures that we are, unbelief will often need to be dealt with along the way. But, we know how to deal with unbelief—agree with God that it is sin and confess it.

Once back in fellowship, we seek to be quick to the Word, diligent to see what it has to say, that we might appropriate it by faith. Further, we see that a persistent walk of faith is only possible by means of the Holy Spirit, for one of the fruits of the Spirit-filled life is *faithfulness*. What a gracious God we have—one who calls upon us to trust Him, and then provides the object of that trust (the promises of His Word) and the means to trust (the enabling power of the Holy Spirit).



I trust you have been challenged by this introduction to this great practice of the Christian Life: turning to God in faith in every trial that comes our way and trusting what He has to say in His most precious Word.

Further, I trust that you have found this series on the Christian Life a blessing. Return to it as often as needed. More importantly—share it with others. May God bless you as you grow and advance in the Christian Life.



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