



Pillars of Faith

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DEDICATED

To our loving Heavenly Father,
Whose children we are,
And to our most precious Lord and
Savior Jesus Christ.

And to my own dear wife Audrey,
Who was herself such a triumphant
Pillar of faith during her lifetime.

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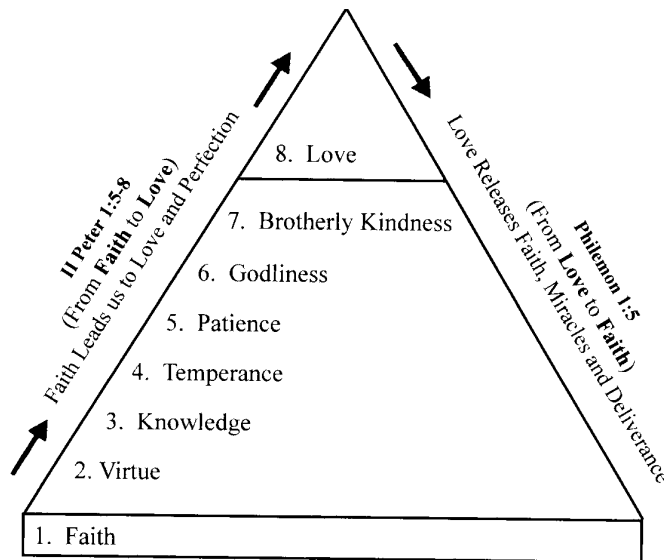
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INTRODUCTION

Faith is a basic foundation of the Christian life, without which it is impossible to please God or to receive anything from Him (Heb. 11:6). A life of faith is essential, because everything in our spiritual life stems from faith. Furthermore, there are many different aspects of faith. One cannot simply say “have faith,” because faith is multifaceted. The following diagram illustrates the role of faith, based on two principal passages in the Word of God—Second Peter 1:5-8 and Philemon 1:5-6.

Eight Steps to Perfection and Power:



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In Second Peter 1:5-7, the Apostle Peter gives us the eight steps to perfection and power. I want to look at these eight steps briefly because they are very important. Peter starts off in verse five by saying, “giving all diligence.” In other words, we must *strive* for perfection. We must also consider who is speaking. In this case, the speaker is the Apostle Peter—the premier apostle of the Lamb. This is evidenced by the fact that he was one of the three apostles who stood on the Mountain of Transfiguration with the Lord Jesus. Paul described Peter as one of the three pillars of the early Church (Gal. 2:9). Therefore, anything Peter wrote is of great importance. Peter’s second epistle was written just prior to his martyrdom, when he clearly understood that it would be his last opportunity to communicate with the churches which were under his apostolic covering. Therefore, what he wrote in Second Peter was the outrushing of his soul—the things that he considered to be the most important aspects of Christianity and the Christian faith.

Faith

Peter continues in verse five by exhorting, “add to your faith.” As we see in the diagram on page one, faith is at the bottom of the mountain of Christian perfection. *Faith* is the first step in our Christian experience. This is speaking of the faith necessary for salvation. In Ephesians 2:8 the Apostle Paul

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makes mention of this when he says, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.” It is through the grace and condescension of God that we are saved. The medium whereby we are saved is faith, and this faith is not of ourselves. It did not originate within ourselves; it is divine, and it comes from God. Faith is a gift of God. It is not the product of our emotions, our thinking, or our will. Faith comes from God and God alone.

Virtue

Peter then exhorts us to add seven virtues, or graces, to our faith. These next seven steps, or virtues, flow out of faith. They are actually products of faith. The next step up the ladder is *virtue*. Virtue is a fruit of faith. We are purified and sanctified by faith. Virtue basically means moral purity, and it is by faith that we receive a clean and pure heart. What I want to emphasize here is that faith is a gift, and all these other graces are received through the medium of faith. Therefore, a clean heart is the gift and blessing of God.

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Knowledge

The third step in the ladder of Christian perfection is *knowledge*. Knowledge is also received by faith. Knowledge does not just come through study. In fact, the Apostle Paul makes this very clear in Hebrews 11:3, where he states, “Through faith we understand.” Therefore, understanding and knowledge come through faith. They are not a product of our intellect. However, we must be disciplined and diligent to study God’s Word thoroughly and exhaustively. The study of God’s Word *must* be mixed with faith (Heb. 4:2).

Knowledge is not simply secular knowledge, although at times secular knowledge is also released by faith. Many of the great scientists throughout the ages have credited knowledge and science to God. Thomas Edison, a believing Christian, said that knowledge comes by inspiration. Scientific knowledge and discoveries come by inspiration as well as by study. Thus, we can see that our study must be coupled with faith. It is faith that releases the truth and knowledge of God’s Word, and it is faith that allows us to rightly and correctly interpret the scriptures.

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Those who have studied literature know that a significant key to the study of literature is to understand what the author meant and what he was thinking when he wrote any given passage. Since I am English and grew up in England, I had to study Shakespeare. My English teacher used to say quite often, “Now, by this phrase Shakespeare means this and this and this . . .”

When we read and study the Word of God, we have to know what the author means when he uses certain phrases; otherwise we will err in our interpretation. Who is the author of the Bible? The Holy Spirit is the author of the inspired scriptures; and it is by faith that we receive the correct interpretation of what He has written.

Temperance

The fourth step in our Christian walk is *temperance*, or self-control. So often people ask, “What is the will of God?” In First Thessalonians 4:3-4 we have a very important aspect of God’s will for every believer: “For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour.” Temperance is the ability to possess and properly control our vessel in sanctification and honor.

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Christian perfection and self-control are linked together. The Apostle James describes perfection in this way—“If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body” (Jas. 3:2b). How do we control our mouths and our bodies, our words and our actions? It is by receiving faith! Faith produces self-control and temperance in our lives because temperance is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:23). Temperance is not human; it is divine.

Patience

Patience is the fifth step. Patience is mentioned many times in the Word of God. James 1:4 says, “Let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, [lacking] nothing.” Where does patience come from? Romans 5:3 tells us that patience is produced in our lives through trials and tribulation. This word *tribulation* implies enormous difficulties and pressures. It is impossible to pass through the valley of tribulation unless we have God’s faith. Without His faith, we would give up and quit. Patience is produced through tribulation. However, we can only go through the valley of Baca (Psa. 84:6), the valley of tears and sorrow, if we have faith. Faith sustains us in our trials and carries us through victoriously.

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Patience in the original Greek means “endurance.” The Apostle Paul exhorts us in Hebrews 12:1 to “run with patience the [course] that is set before us.” Patience is an inner strength of character that never gives up, but plods on straight ahead, hurdling every obstacle along the way. Patience (or endurance) is a divine quality; it is a product of faith.

Godliness

The sixth step is *godliness*. In the English language we could say that godliness means “Godlikeness, or being like God.” Well, what is God like? In order to know firsthand what Christ is like, we must have a progressive and ever-deepening revelation of Him. Paul said that if any had known Christ in the flesh, they must no longer regard Him in that way (II Cor. 5:16). Paul was saying that it was not good enough simply to have known the Lord when He was living on this earth. Everyone needs to have a fresh revelation of the risen Christ. It is not sufficient to have once met the Lord and given our heart to Him. We must have an ever-increasing revelation of Him. The light of Christ should shine brighter and brighter in our heart unto the perfect day.

In the Song of Songs, the Shulamite Bride had a progressive revelation of the Bridegroom. This revelation continually unfolded more and more of the character of her Beloved unto her. A

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progressive revelation of our Heavenly Bridegroom is the key to becoming like Christ and developing godly character. The Apostle John stated, “When [Christ] shall appear, *we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is*” (I Jn. 3:2b).

Being like Jesus is dependent upon seeing Him just as He is. We must have a clear and undistorted revelation of the person of Christ. Second Corinthians 3:18 shows us an important truth: “We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” We must realize that as we behold the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same exact image of the Lord Jesus. This is the key to godliness. To the degree which the Lord is able to reveal His character to us, it is to that same degree that we are changed within. Thus, it is important to seek Him in order to find Him. We must have a soft, humble heart that attracts the Lord and causes Him to manifest Himself to us.

Why shall we be like Him? John says that we shall become like Christ because “we shall see Him as He is.” This is one of the fundamental laws of life. The Psalms tell us that those who worship idols become like the idols they worship (see Psa. 115:8, 135:18). Over a period of time, we become like the object we worship. To the degree that we worship Christ, to that same exact degree we are

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changed into His likeness. Therefore, let us seek to be genuine worshippers who worship the Lord in spirit and in truth (Jn. 4:23-24).

A number of years ago while we were in Israel, my wife and I went to visit the garden tomb of Christ. After our tour group had seen the tomb, I went back inside and cried out to the Lord, “Lord, what are You like?” Then across the tomb I saw the word “meekness” written. Meekness is only one aspect of the Lord’s character, but it is a part of Christ’s nature that is constantly stressed in the Word of God. Even Christ’s description of Himself was this: “I am meek and lowly” (Mt. 11:29). Therefore, we should seek His meekness and never be abrasive or vengeful.

We must strive to be like Christ in every aspect of His nature. Therefore, the key to godliness is to have a progressive and unfolding revelation of His person and nature. This revelation comes by faith. We must see Christ by faith. Sometimes we are privileged to see the Lord literally, but other times we must see Him through the *eyes of faith*. This involves having a revelation of His whole nature and person. When the Lord reveals Himself to us, He reveals a certain aspect of His character which He desires to impart to us. Thus, godliness comes through faith as we have a continual revelation of the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Brotherly Kindness

The seventh step in the Christian life is *brotherly kindness*. This seventh step is relative to the second commandment of Christ, which tells us to love others as we love ourselves (Mt. 22:39). To love our brother as ourselves, we must first of all love and appreciate ourselves and all that God has done for us. So many people have problems with low self-esteem. Low self-esteem is a result of self-rejection. We must not despise ourselves, because in despising ourselves we are rejecting the creation of God. We were created by Christ; therefore, we must accept what He has created. We must have the humility of heart to accept ourselves as He made us.

The need to have self-acceptance and a godly love for ourselves was strongly impressed upon me while we were in Switzerland, where I was the assistant director of a Christian work. Among the various facets of the work, we had an outreach to the blind. The director of this outreach was also blind. We may think we have struggles with despondency and depression, but we should consider for a moment how blind people feel. At times it becomes overwhelming for blind people not to be able to see the wonderful and vivid world around them.

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One day the director of the outreach to the blind was going through one of those valleys of despair. While she was in her study room, she became so desperate that she went over to the wall of her study, ran her fingers over the Braille Bible, and randomly came across the cry of Moses in Exodus chapter four. Moses complained to the Lord about his inadequacies in Exodus 4:10, saying, “O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue” (NIV).

The Lord replied to Moses in Exodus 4:11, “Who hath made man’s mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the Lord?” As this lady read those two verses, she said to the Lord, “Thank You, Lord, for making me blind.” The Lord then replied to her, “You were born blind so that you could understand those to whom you minister.”

Truly, it is God who creates the blind and the handicapped, as well as those without any physical disabilities. He is the Maker of them all. Most people are dissatisfied with their physical abilities and appearance. We are unhappy with our height, weight, skin, eyes, and hair. To illustrate my point, this story comes to mind.

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When I was on the faculty of another Bible college, I saw one of the girls ironing her hair. I said to her, “What in the world are you doing?” She responded, “I have curly hair, but I want straight hair. So I’m ironing my hair to make it straight.” Perplexed, I said to her, “Dear girl, all the other girls in the school go to the beauty salon to have permanents which are very expensive. They have straight hair, yet all they want is curly hair like yours. You have what they want, and you have it without the expense of paying for a permanent.” Her response was very matter-of-fact, “Yes, but I want straight hair.” Very few people are satisfied with the way God made them. If God creates people with straight hair, they want curly hair; and if they have curly hair, they want straight hair. Thus, we see the need for meekness, humility, and acceptance of God’s will for our lives.

We need a holy acceptance of ourselves and our circumstances. The Word of God tells us to acknowledge every good thing that is in us in Christ (Philem.1:6). It is a spiritual truth that we will accept and love others only as much as we love and accept ourselves. We are to love others as we love *ourselves*. This means that those who have bitterness and hatred in their heart, and who always bemoan their circumstances, are unable to love their brother or sister; for they treat others as they treat themselves.

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Therefore, we must have a holy acceptance of ourselves. I am not referring to a selfish, proud love that only thinks of one's own interests and beauty as Lucifer did. I am speaking of a healthy self-esteem that is proper and balanced, which gives us the ability to love others and finish our climb up the mountain of perfection.

Love

The eighth and final step in the mountain of Christian perfection is *love*. Love is the first commandment of Christ. In this commandment we are told to love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength (Mt. 22:37). This means to love and cherish the Lord above everything else in life. It means we are to live totally for Him and to abandon ourselves completely to Him. It means to have a deep and intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, the true lover of our souls. Love is a commandment, yet it comes through faith not through the law.

Love is the top of the mountain. Therefore, it would be quite natural to think that love is our goal. However, the mark and ultimate destination of the Christian is to climb to the top of the mountain so that we can *descend* downward into the realm of ministry to others. I think it is very important to understand this, because when the Apostle Peter was on the Mount of Transfiguration with the Lord,

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he wanted to stay there. Peter's wholehearted desire was to remain on the top of the mountain in that particular aspect of holiness.

This truth is brought out in the Song of Songs. After the Shulamite had washed, perfumed, and anointed herself, the Lord appeared to her and knocked on her door. However, she did not want to get up to open the door, so she said to the Lord, "I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them?" (Song. 5:3). In other words, she had attained unto a certain degree of holiness and purity, and she wanted to remain there.

In pressing on to holiness and love, there is a danger of having love and holiness as our only goals. In actuality, these are simply a *means* to the end. The goal for every Christian is to fulfill the will of God. The will of God involves basically two things. One aspect is *character*, but the other aspect of the will of God is *ministry*. As seen in our diagram, the first side of the mountain of Christian perfection involves our character, or that which Christ wants to accomplish *in* us. Ministry, the other side of the mountain, is that which God wants to accomplish *through* us.

Therefore, if we only go up one side of the mountain, we shall not fulfill all of God's will. We shall only be *partial* accomplishers of His will. God is looking for men and women after His own heart who will

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perform and accomplish *all* of His will (Acts 13:22). He does not delight in those who only do *part* of His will as did King Saul (see I Sam. 15).

The Lord Jesus completed all of His Father's will. He ascended the Mount of Transfiguration, which was the highest spiritual plateau in His life. This Mount of Transfiguration experience speaks of coming to glory and perfection. However, Christ did not remain on that mountain, even though it was glorious and peaceful. He descended and ministered to the needs of those in the valley below. Christ is our pattern to follow. Therefore, we must also be mindful of this call to minister to others.

Two Types of Faith

There are two types of faith. There is the faith that is related to salvation. This form of faith is the *fruit* of faith, by which we have imparted to us the various aspects of God's nature, and by which we come to perfection. However, there is another type of faith called the *gift* of faith. This type of faith is what we might refer to as "faith in action." It is the type of faith expressed in First Corinthians 13:2, where Paul speaks of the faith that is able to move mountains. It was through this dynamic faith that Samson performed all of his miraculous and incredible feats (Heb. 11:32).

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Both aspects of faith are very important. The Church is so prone to emphasize one aspect of faith (the fruit of faith for holiness) while totally ignoring and disregarding the other aspect of faith (the gift of faith which relates to miracles and actions). Obviously, this is not a balanced message. However, in the last few years there has been an overemphasis in some circles on the gift of faith and miracles, and character and holiness have not been emphasized enough. However, to balance this last statement, we must also be careful not to get so totally engrossed with holiness that we forget about the gift of faith and miracles.

I would like to conclude this introduction with the admonition of the Apostle Peter, who stated, “If these things [these eight virtues necessary for perfection] be in you, and abound, . . . ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (II Pet. 1:8). These eight virtues must abound and be overflowing in our lives.

The Apostle Peter then issues this word of caution in Second Peter 1:9: “But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.” Mental blindness and a lack of spiritual vision are the result of the deficiency of these eight virtues

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that Peter mentions in Second Peter 1:5-7. The Pharisees of Christ's day were condemned for their spiritual blindness because they ignored these things (see Mt. 23:23).

Peter then exhorts us to “give all diligence to make our calling and election sure.” Peter uses this word *diligence* twice in chapter one, in verses five and ten. We have to be diligent to work at these things. We must not be indolent and lax in our Christian life. To make our calling and election sure, we must be diligent in our pursuit of holiness and godly character, and we must never give up until we obtain that for which we are seeking. If we do these things, we will never fall.

Unfortunately, we have seen many Christians and ministers fall by the wayside in recent years. In over forty years in the ministry, I have known so many who have failed and missed the mark of God for their lives. The reason they have failed can be traced to the first slope of the mountain in our diagram. They have been void of godly character and holiness.

When we do *not* allow these virtues to develop and come to maturity in our lives, there are terrible consequences. However, if our hearts are soft and fertile ground in which these virtues can grow, there are also tremendous blessings. If these eight virtues abound in our lives, we will be granted an abundant and glorious entrance into the kingdom of heaven (II Pet. 1:11).

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Therefore, what I want to emphasize is this—we do not want to just *barely* make it into heaven. We want a rich welcome into God's presence! If we heed them, the steps delineated in this book will show us the way to have a grand and regal reception into the life to come. We will have fruit that abides forever.

Part One

FAITH DEFINED

Faith is the foundation of our Christian experience (Eph. 2:8), and it is also the basis for receiving, developing, and going on to purity (II Pet. 1:5-8). Faith is the means by which we live our whole Christian life. Paul emphasizes this truth in Galatians 2:20, where he testified, “I live by the faith of the Son of God.”

Faith is certainly not a New Testament doctrine only, because we see that one of the Old Testament prophets declared, “The just shall live by [God’s] faith” (Hab. 2:4). Then in the New Testament era,

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Paul said in Galatians 2:20 that the righteous live by God's faith. Paul also said in Romans 14:23, "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." Therefore, everything we do must be done in faith, in response to a mandate of God to do a particular thing. If our actions are not done in faith and in accordance with God's will, we shall fall short of the glory of God and miss His mark for our lives. Without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6).

Now we must define faith. Faith is not an emotion, nor is it a product of our will or intellect. We cannot manufacture faith; it is divine. In Hebrews 11:1 Paul gives what is probably the best description of faith in the whole of scripture: "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence [or proof] of things not seen." Faith is a substance—it is something that is tangible; you can feel it. When you have it, you will know it. However, it is a gift from God (Eph. 2:8).

We might hope and pray for something from the Lord, but how can we be sure that we are going to receive it? We can have the assurance that we are going to receive those things we have asked for if we have God's faith, for faith is the evidence of things not seen and the *substance* of things hoped for. Faith is very real!

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Faith is given by God to fulfill His purpose and to the end that He might be glorified. The KJV translation of Christ's words in Mark 11:22 reads, "Have faith in God." However, the literal Greek rendering of this verse is, "Have the faith *of* God." We must have God's faith because we live by His faith (Gal. 2:20, Hab. 2:4). I just want to give an example of this because it is so very important to understand how faith works.

Several years ago, we were seeking to purchase a compound for a missionary and conference center and a Bible school for Zion Fellowship. At that time, the Catholic church was selling a campus in upstate New York. The state of New York, which was offering \$800,000 for the campus, wanted to buy the compound for a State Correctional Institution. The majority of the people in the surrounding areas did not want the state to buy it, because they did not want a prison near their towns. We felt impressed by the Lord that this campus was His choice for our Bible school.

However, we did not have any money at all. Several of us prayed, and we felt that the Lord wanted us to offer the Catholic Church \$400,000. That was a step of faith, because we did not have the money to pay for the building. Abraham bought a piece of ground for 400 shekels of silver (Gen. 23:16),

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which we estimated was equivalent to about \$400,000 in our present-day economy. This is the amount the Lord impressed upon our hearts to offer.

Our offer was accepted. This was the first miracle. However, we did not have any money, and the down payment was \$2,500. We did not ask anyone for the money. We simply prayed in faith to God, “Lord, if it is Your will for us to purchase this campus, please bring in the money.” The money came in just as we felt by faith that it would. By the end of the month, we were required to give the Catholic negotiators \$22,500, which through prayer also came in on time. Again, we had told no one of our needs. The next obstacle we had to overcome through faith was our next payment of \$100,000.

When we moved into the campus, there were many expenses to begin operating. Halfway through the year, the Lord said to me, “I want you to build an auditorium which will be used to have conferences and will also serve as a gymnasium for the Bible school students.” We had no money, and we had not even paid for the building. When I implored of the Lord, “Where is the money for this project going to come from?” the Lord quickly replied, “You do not need money. I have put faith within your heart, and that faith will produce the finances necessary for the auditorium.”

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The Lord was true to His words to us, as He always is. We made no appeals for money whatsoever. We began the construction of the auditorium, which ended up costing over \$110,000. At the exact moment that we needed money, the Lord not only provided the initial \$100,000 for the building, but He also paid off the whole balance of \$400,000, and paid for the auditorium at the same time.

It was the *faith* that God had placed within my heart that *produced* the finances for the campus and auditorium. We did not ask anyone for money, and yet it came in on time. Therefore, we know what we are talking about when we speak concerning various principles of faith, because of the many miracles the Lord has performed for us personally. I know by experience that faith is a substance. I have felt it in my heart. It is faith that produces the answers for whatever need we may have. However, the faith that causes our prayers to materialize is a divine gift from God. It is not something we can “stir up” in our hearts because we want a new car or a new church.

In order for us to have faith, the Lord must impart it to us. However, the Lord only gives His faith for those things which are His will. Therefore, we must be absolutely sure that we are not being presumptuous and moving forward on something that is not God’s will. If we move in a direction that

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is not God's leading, we can *believe* with all our might that the situation will work out; but if it is not birthed of God, He will not give us the faith to see His hand accomplish the matter.

Faith is an absolute reality—it produces. The faith that produced the finances for this Bible college and missionary center has also produced the finances to run the college and support missionaries on several continents for the past twelve years. Let us have God's faith!

Part Two

BELIEVING DEFINED

It is imperative that we understand the difference between faith and believing. We are very fortunate in the English language to be able to understand the difference between words. English grammar teaches us the difference between various parts of speech. For example, *faith* is a noun and *believe* is a verb. We might tell someone to “believe,” but we could never tell them to “faith.” We cannot make faith a verb, because it will always be a noun. A noun refers to a person, place, thing, or idea. Faith is a *substance*. However, *believe* is quite different. *Believe* is a verb. Since a verb depicts an action or

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state of being, believing is something that we do. Believing is an action—a choice of accepting and having confidence in what the Lord says. It is a heart attitude, but faith is a substance.

The difference between believing and divine faith is wonderfully illustrated in Mark 9:24-25. The father of a demon possessed child said to Jesus, “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief [or lack of faith].” This man came to the Lord, pleading with Him to heal his son. He believed with all of his heart that Jesus could heal. However, he lacked the faith of God to make that healing a reality. Therefore, he asked the Lord to help his lack of faith. Jesus imparted faith to his heart, and his son was instantly healed and delivered.

It is extremely important to believe what God says when He speaks to us. However, we must see that *believing* does not produce the desired miracle. I will try to illustrate this. We all believe that God heals, yet healing does not materialize until God has placed faith within our hearts. When that faith is there, we know we will obtain our desired miracle.

For example, a minister might receive a word of knowledge from the Lord in a service. God might say that He wants to heal everyone with stiff joints. At that moment, something comes into his heart. His response to the Lord should be, “Lord, I believe You are able to heal tonight. I believe what You are

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speaking to me.” Then the pastor would declare from the pulpit, “God wants to heal stiff joints tonight.” As he declares God’s message, the Lord places His faith into his heart. He would then have the assurance that God will heal as He said He would. He is persuaded and confident that everyone with stiff joints will be healed that night. I have personally experienced this many times. This is real faith, and it will produce the miracles. *Believing* alone cannot generate miracles because believing is an act of our will, but faith is divine.

God is very precise. If He tells you He wants to heal all those afflicted with cancer, and if you believe and your heart is right, He will give you the faith to heal all those with cancer. However, if you make a declaration that everyone with heart problems is going to be healed, and God has not specifically spoken that to you, He will not give you the faith to produce the miracles to heal them. Miracles are not the product of believing. They are produced by the faith of God. God only gives us His faith for purposes that are His will. Therefore, whenever we attempt to do anything, we must be sure that it was God who told us to do it. Otherwise, we will not have the faith to accomplish it and bring it to pass, because God does not give His faith for endeavors that are contrary to His will.

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There is a progression in our Christian experience. First of all, God speaks to us, or His will is ascertained in a given situation. For example, we knew it was God's will for Zion to buy the New York campus. This is the first step. We must first know the Lord's will. Then the response of our hearts to His will must be to believe Him wholeheartedly. That is point number two. We cannot have the attitude that we do not have the money for what God is asking us to do. Neither can we think that the circumstances are impossible, for *all things* are possible with God. We must believe what God speaks to us. However, this act of believing by itself will not bring the promise into reality. After we have a believing heart, then we have to practice step number three. We have to pray earnestly and travail for God to bring to pass that which He has spoken to us. We must pray until faith comes.

“The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (Jas. 5:16). There must be fervent prayer on our behalf to bring into existence that which God has spoken. The Lord Jesus Christ made this very clear in Luke chapter eleven. In response to the disciples' request for Christ to teach them how to pray, He gave the following illustration in Luke 11:5-8: “Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and

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say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.” Normally, we do not receive anything from God if we ask Him for it only once. We have to ask and keep on asking until He finally grants our petition.

There is another important parable concerning prevailing prayer and the subject of importunity in Luke 18:1-5: “And [Christ] spake a parable unto them *to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint*; Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.” This is how we must pray. We must ask and keep on asking until the Lord answers our prayers. It is not a matter of simply praying once for something; we must continue praying until we have a breakthrough.

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Let us consider the prevailing prayers of the prophet Elijah. James 5:17-18 says: “[Elijah] was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.” We see the details of this story in First Kings 18:1, which says, “And it came to pass after many days, that the word of the Lord came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go, show thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth.” This is very clear-cut. God spoke to the prophet, and Elijah obviously believed, because he obeyed the Lord and showed himself to Ahab.

However, the rain did not come simply because God had spoken and Elijah had believed. Well, what actually caused the rain to finally come? We are given the answer in First Kings 18:41-44: “And Elijah said unto Ahab, Get thee up, eat and drink; for there is a sound of abundance of rain. So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; and he cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees, And said to his servant, Go up now, look toward the sea. And he went up, and looked, and said, There is nothing. And he said, Go again *seven times*. And it came to pass at the seventh time, that he said, Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the

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sea, like a man's hand. And he said, Go up, say unto Ahab, Prepare thy chariot, and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not." After Elijah had ascertained God's will and had believed, he prayed through until faith arose within his heart. He told Ahab in faith that they had to move quickly because the rain was coming. Since there had been no rain for forty-two months, this was a tremendous declaration of faith.

The following four steps are very important in order to succeed in our Christian life and obtain the promises of God. Regretfully, because of a lack of understanding of these four steps, many have shipwrecked their lives, ministry, and eternal inheritance. When men and women do not follow these four steps, because things do not work out the way they have anticipated, they blame God for their disappointments and become bitter at Him.

Let us briefly reiterate these four points.

**Four Steps to Fulfilling God's Will and
Obtaining the Promises of God**

- 1.) A revelation of God's will
- 2.) The act of believing in response to His will
- 3.) Prevailing prayer
- 4.) Faith—which brings the promises of God into reality and fruition

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First, we must ascertain God's will, either through a personal word directly from the Lord, from a prophet, through prophecy, or through a quickened scripture. We must be certain before we begin to move toward something that it is the will of God and not our own good intentions or desires. I want to give you an illustration of this.

When I was pastoring on the West coast, I was asked to pray for two men who had had heart attacks. God showed me that one of them would live, but the other one would die. Someone might say that I did not pray enough for the one that died. Yet that is not the truth of the matter, because it was not God's will for that man to live. My wife and I were actually more attached to the man who died than the one who lived, as he was my wife's uncle.

We have to understand that healing and miracles do not depend upon us. If healing depended upon us, we would have chosen to heal my wife's uncle as well. Therefore, you can see how terrible it would be if we had the power to heal whenever and whomever we wanted.

Healing is the sole prerogative of God, and it must be done according to God's sovereign will. The power to perform miracles is not resident within us; it comes from God. The Apostle Peter possessed extraordinary power. After he healed the lame man in Acts chapter three, he said, "Ye men of Israel,

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why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly upon us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?” (Acts 3:12). Like Peter, we must always humbly acknowledge and recognize that the *source* of all our power comes from the Lord. Therefore, He deserves all the credit and glory for anything we do.

After God’s will has been determined, the second thing we must do is believe the Lord. That is our part. Thirdly, we must pray until we prevail, believing that God will answer our prayers. Many people pray, but they do not believe when they pray. Therefore, their prayers are not answered. We have to pray until we have received an impartation of faith from God to perform the miracle or bring God’s will to pass.

The Lord told Elijah that it was His will to shut the heavens for three and a half years. Yet the heavens were not closed until Elijah prayed fervently. Then he received faith from the Lord to shut the heavens. Elijah also had to pray earnestly until the heavens were opened and the rains came.

There is also a specific time for God’s purposes to be accomplished. When the *appointed* time came, God told Elijah to command the heavens to be opened. We must operate according to God’s timetable, not ours. Time always comes into play in the realm of faith. The Word of God tells us that

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there is a specific time to heal (Eccl. 3:3). We must not try to heal someone before God's appointed and predetermined time to heal them. Ask God to reveal to you His timing.

I hope that you will review these four steps frequently and meditate upon them so that they might enable you to lead a victorious life of faith in Christ Jesus. I also hope that you are able to comprehend the difference between faith and believing. Believing is not enough. Many people believe that Jesus is the Son of God, but they do not have the faith to appropriate salvation.

Faith is a substance; believing is a heart attitude. Believing is our responsibility. It is our part. It is something that we do by an act of our will. However, it is up to God to give us His faith (if He so chooses) for something that is His will. Yet, we must follow the steps we have just mentioned, and be upright in heart to position ourselves to receive God's faith. Once we grasp this, we will enter into an entirely new relationship with God and a new dimension and realm in our Christian experience!

Part Three

THE FRUIT OF FAITH

Now I would like to consider the subject of faith as a fruit. In Galatians 5:22-23 Paul lists the nine fruits of the Spirit: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, *faith*, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.” Faith is not only a gift, but also a fruit of the Holy Spirit. And because faith is a fruit, it has to develop and grow. Jesus explained the different stages of growth in Mark 4:28, saying, “The earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the *blade*, then the *ear*, after that the *full corn in the ear*.”

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In Mark 4:28 we see the threefold development of fruit which could correspond to the faith necessary to abide in the outer court, then the faith necessary to proceed into the holy place, and then the faith required to go within the veil into the holy of holies. These three levels of the development of faith also represent bringing forth fruit thirtyfold, sixtyfold, and one hundredfold (see Mt. 13:8). They are comparable to the three levels of fruitfulness in John chapter fifteen—fruit, more fruit, and much fruit.

1. The blade	2. The ear	3. The full corn in the ear
Outer court faith	Holy place faith	Holy of holies faith
Thirtyfold	Sixtyfold	Hundredfold
Fruit	More fruit	Much fruit

There are stages of development in our Christian experience. This is especially true concerning the fruit of faith. When we are born-again, we receive God’s faith into our hearts like a grain of mustard seed (see Mt. 13:31-32, 17:20). However, we do not want to live the whole of our Christian life with a seed of faith. We want our faith to grow and mature so that it becomes a large, strong tree that bears much fruit for the kingdom of God. We will develop this in more detail when we study “Ever-Increasing

Faith” in Part Five. There are many aspects to the fruit of faith, and I want to look at a few of them with you now.

Faith Expressed Through the Names of God

Psalm 91:14 speaks prophetically of the Lord Jesus and also of all those who follow in His footsteps: “Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath *known my name*.” I would like to link this verse with the fruit of faith because, in actuality, faith is expressed through the many names of the Lord Jesus Christ. Through faith, we come to know the Lord by His various names as we allow Him to take us through circumstances that require a revelation of one of His names.

We could never know the Lord by His name Jehovah-rapha (“the Lord our Healer” - Ex. 15:26), unless we have been sick. Nor could we ever know His name Jehovah-shalom (Jud. 6:23), which means “the Lord our Peace,” unless we have gone through troublesome situations that are very stressful and confusing. We need the faith of God to carry us through sickness and troubles. The whole goal of Christianity is to know the Lord (Jn. 17:3), and we come to know Him by His many

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names as we pass through different experiences by faith. We do not want to know His names in theory only, but we want to *experience* them.

Faith and Provision

As we stated earlier, faith is a gift of God, and since it is faith that produces the answer for our needs, it is actually the Lord Jesus who provides the faith for our needs. The Lord is our Provider. Jehovah-jireh, meaning “the Lord our Provider,” is actually one of the names of Christ (Gen. 22:14). Therefore, even the faith that is necessary to provide for our necessities is expressed through the Lord’s name Jehovah-jireh.

Faith and Righteousness

Another name of Christ is Jehovah-tsidkenu (Jer. 33:16), which means, “the Lord our Righteousness.” This aspect of the Lord’s nature is also connected to faith because Romans 1:17 says, “The righteousness of God [is] revealed from faith to faith.” Therefore, righteousness and faith are linked together in the Word of God. There is an ever-increasing revelation of the right-eousness of God revealed to us through faith, as seen in Romans 1:17. Therefore, faith must grow in our hearts in

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order for righteousness to increase in our lives. These virtues do *not* originate within ourselves; they are divine. The Apostle Paul understood this truth when he proclaimed in Philippians 3:9, “Not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the *righteousness which is of God by faith.*” Therefore, it is very clear that one aspect of the fruit of faith is to produce the righteousness of God in our lives.

Imputed and Imparted Righteousness

In Romans 4:6-7 Paul addresses the subject of imputed righteousness: “Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God *imputeth* righteousness without works, Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.” In Romans 4:5 Paul connects righteousness to faith when he says, “But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his *faith* is counted for *righteousness.*” The Apostle also spoke in Romans 3:22 of the righteousness of God which is by faith.

Therefore, by faith we receive *imputed* righteousness from God at our new birth. We are counted righteous in His sight by faith, but that state of righteousness must grow and develop. We need to go on to know the Lord as Jehovah-tsidkenu, the Lord our Righteousness. We should know Jehovah-

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tsidkeru in all His fullness—not in theory, but in experience. Romans 4:11 also associates faith with righteousness: “[Abraham] received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that right-eousness might be imputed unto them also.”

We are counted righteous when we are born-again, but there are many aspects of righteousness that we still need to come into by faith after that initial imputation of righteousness. We do not want simply to be *counted* righteous, we want to become righteous in character. When we are counted righteous, our “slate” is wiped clean and we are forgiven of all our sins, but we are actually still very carnal in character. What the Lord does for us at salvation is exactly what a judge does for a criminal when he pardons him. A judge can pardon a criminal of his crimes so that he is freed of the charges. However, that criminal is still a criminal in heart and character. He is forgiven, pardoned, and his record is cleared, but he is not yet honest and upright in character. Only in his judicial standing is he changed.

The same thing happens to us when we are born-again. The Lord forgives all of our crimes and debts, and His righteousness is imputed to us. However, we are still very carnal inside. Therefore, the Lord desires to work in our lives to make us just as righteous as Himself. This is called *imparted*

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righteousness, and it involves being filled with God's very own righteousness. Righteousness is an actual spiritual garment that clothes the Bride of Christ, as seen in Revelation 19:8: "To her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness [or righteous deeds] of saints." Therefore, faith must increase in our lives for us to become partakers of the imparted righteousness of God, so that we may fully reflect the image and nature of Christ!

Imputed Righteousness means God counts us righteous, but we are not actually righteous in character and in heart. This is the thought of a judge pardoning a criminal of his crimes. He is counted innocent, but inside he still needs to be changed.

Imparted Righteousness involves being filled with God's very own righteousness. This is an actual spiritual garment that clothes the Bride of Christ.

Steps of Obedience We Must Take by Faith

If we desire to correctly resemble the Lord, there are successive steps of obedience we must follow in order for righteousness to develop and increase in our lives. One step of obedience we must take after salvation if we are to grow in righteousness is to be water baptized. Water baptism is an ordinance, but it is also an act of faith because we go into the waters of baptism believing that we are following the commandments of the Lord. Christ insisted on being water baptized Himself, saying in Matthew 3:15, “For thus it becometh us to fulfill *all* righteousness.”

Therefore, being water baptized is not only an act of faith, it is also fulfilling righteousness. With every step of obedience we are fulfilling the righteousness of God. That is very important. Christ said we should fulfill *all* righteousness. Therefore, there are many levels and degrees of righteousness that we need to experience after we are saved.

After we have accepted the Lord into our hearts and we have been water baptized, the next step of faith and obedience in the Christian life is to be baptized in the Holy Ghost, with the evidence of speaking in other tongues. The baptism of the Holy Spirit requires great faith, because we have to bypass our intellect and release our tongues to the Lord. It is also faith that leads us into the crucified

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life whereby we die to ourselves and our will, and the Lord lives His life through us (Gal. 2:20). Every step of obedience in the Christian life is by faith.

The promises of God are also linked to righteousness which comes by faith. Romans 4:20-22 is a perfect illustration of this where it says of Abraham: “He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.” As spiritual sons of Abraham, when we believe and embrace the promises of God, it is counted to us for righteousness. When we believe what God says to us, it is an act of our will and it shows that we trust the Lord. When we believe, God gives us His faith to bring that promise to fruition.

Righteousness increases in our lives to the measure that we believe God’s Word. As we walk in obedience to His Word, faith *expressed* through righteousness increases in our lives. Romans 5:1 speaks of being justified by faith. To understand the meaning of justification, we can use the illustration of a typewriter. When you type a document on a typewriter, the carriage always returns to the left margin. Therefore, the left side is always lined up and straight, but the right side is normally uneven at the end of each line. Each line is a different length. You should not publish a document like

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that. Therefore, you would take it to an experienced printer to straighten the right side, line by line, so that it is just as straight as the left side. This is called *justifying* a document.

This illustration helps us to understand how the Lord works in our lives. Line upon line He straightens us. The left side of the document which is straight represents Jesus Christ; and the right side which is jagged represents us. Point by point and issue by issue in our lives, as we take steps of obedience by faith, the Lord delivers us from our bondages, sins, and weaknesses, and thereby transforms our character to be straight and righteous like His.

This process of making us straight is called justification. We are told in Romans 5:1 that we are justified by faith. We become straightened as the Lord puts His finger upon an area of our life and we yield to Him and appropriate by faith His righteousness in that area of our life. As we are justified line upon line (issue by issue), righteousness grows and develops in our lives.

Romans 5:17 speaks of the gift of righteousness, which is a righteousness that is worked out in us and imparted to us: “For if by one man’s offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of *the gift of righteousness* shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.” What kind of man or woman receives the gift of righteousness? Psalm 24:3-5 describes the man or

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woman who receives this gift from the Lord. The Holy Spirit through David asks: “Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord [Mt. Zion]? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and *righteousness* from the God of his salvation.”

The gift of righteousness is granted to those who hunger and thirst for it. Those who aspire to having clean hands (right actions), a pure heart (right motives and thoughts), and humility (right attitudes) receive righteousness from the Lord. The righteousness spoken of here does not refer to the righteousness that is imputed to us at salvation. How many had clean hands, a pure heart, and were not vain and proud when they gave their lives to the Lord? No one, of course.

Psalm 24:3-5 refers to a blood-washed believer who has walked with the Lord for some time, and who has an ongoing vision for spiritual Mount Zion. These are the ones who receive *imputed* righteousness and *imparted* righteousness. Those who receive this imparted gift of God's righteousness are the ones who reign victoriously in life by Christ Jesus.

Jesus declared in Matthew 5:6 in His sermon on the mount, “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled [in abundance].” This speaks of a Christian who is

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crying out to God for a deep cleansing and an infilling of God's righteousness. It is not referring to someone who is seeking salvation. Our vessels must first be cleansed and emptied of all uncleanness before they can be filled with the Lord's righteousness. We purify our hearts of all uncleanness as we cry out to the Lord in faith. It is by faith we pray with anticipation that God will answer our prayers.

Paul reminds us, "Without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that *diligently* seek him" (Heb. 11:6). When we come to God with our petitions, we must believe that we are going to receive, and by faith we will. Therefore, when we hunger and thirst after righteousness, we must believe and have faith that we are going to be filled. Faith, then, is the key to receiving the righteousness of God.

In the last part of Romans 6:19 Paul exhorts, "Even so now yield your members servants to righteousness *unto* holiness." From this verse we can see that righteousness leads us on to holiness. Holiness is deeper than righteousness. Holiness means a separation from the world, the flesh, and the devil; and being joined to God who alone is holy. This involves being filled with the fruits of righteousness (see Phil. 1:11), which are peace, quietness, and assurance forever (Isa. 32:17).

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A holy person is someone who has been thoroughly cleansed and daily walks in uprightness. This makes him a *candidate* to be joined in intimate union and communion with the Lord of glory.

In Romans 8:4 Paul connects righteousness with walking in the Spirit. Those who walk in the Spirit have the righteousness of the law fulfilled in them. Therefore, since faith is the key to receiving righteousness, faith progressively develops in our lives as we walk in the Spirit; for faith is a fruit of the Spirit.

Faith and Peace

Faith also leads us into peace, as seen in Romans 5:1: “Therefore being justified *by faith*, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Here progressive righteousness (being continually justified issue by issue) is linked to peace with God. As we stated earlier, the key to the Christian life is to know the Lord *experientially* by His many different names. Another name of Christ is Jehovah-shalom, which means “the Lord our Peace.”

True peace is obtained as we release all of our cares and troubles to the Lord. This is illustrated in Philippians 4:6-7: “Be careful [or overanxious] for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and

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supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep [guard as with a garrison] your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Peace pervades our life and governs our minds when we discipline our minds to not think negatively or worry and fret (Phil. 4:8, see Col. 3:15). As we release our many burdens and cares to the Prince of Peace, the peace of God will rule our minds and hearts. Giving our concerns and worries to Christ is a key to victory. Resisting doubts and negative thoughts is a major step to possessing the peace of God. This requires a tremendous amount of faith because we must believe that the Lord is able to take care of all our problems. Thus, we see that peace and faith are intricately linked.

After we have laid down our cares at the feet of Jesus, we must leave them there. So many people give their problems and worries to the Lord, but then they take them back again. Doing this reveals a lack of faith and trust in God. It is like saying to the Lord, “You are not able to take care of my problems, so I am going to handle them myself.”

The battleground of the Christian is basically in his mind and in his heart. When we have stressful situations that are troubling us, we must let our requests be made known unto the Lord with fervent

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praying and thanksgiving. This produces faith in our hearts. Why does Paul tell us to pray with thanksgiving? Praying with thanksgiving is an act of faith; for when we pray with thanksgiving we are thanking the Lord for *already* taking care of our worries, whether they be physical, financial or emotional. Let us release our cares to the Lord by faith, trusting that our loving Heavenly Father cares for us (I Pet. 5:7). Then the peace of God will settle and calm the storms of anxiety that are raging in our hearts and minds.

We must discipline our minds so that we do not try to analyze all of our problems. By faith we should trust that God will work everything out for our good. Therefore, as the fruit of faith grows in our lives, so does the fruit of peace. Thus, by faith we must ever seek to know the One whose name is Jehovah-shalom, the Lord our Peace.

As I conclude this section on the fruit of faith, may I just repeat what I have already said. The fruit of faith needs to grow in our lives just as all the other fruits need to grow. A farmer would never be satisfied if he planted seeds that never grew, or that produced little fruit. Likewise, if the fruit of faith is to flourish in our lives, the soil of our hearts must be fertile and soft. All the stones of hardness and the thorns and briars of the fallen nature must be uprooted in order for faith to mature in our lives.

Part Four

THE GIFT OF FAITH

In Part Four of this book we are going to study the gift of faith. The *gift* of faith is quite different from the *fruit* of faith. The gift of faith relates to miracles, healing, and the power of God, whereas the fruit of faith relates to our character and relationship with the Lord. The gift of faith can be called “faith in action.” As we saw in our diagram of the eight steps to perfection and power, the fruit of faith which is necessary for salvation was at the bottom left corner of the mountain. Then we ascend the left side of the mountain until we attain unto love, which is the summit of Christian perfection and maturity.

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However, we must *not* remain on the top of that glorious mountain. We must go down the other side of the mountain, which represents our ministry and flow in the gift of faith. Remember, the Lord Jesus came down from the Mount of Transfiguration to meet the needs of the multitudes in the valley (Mt. 17:14-21). And it was *after* He had descended the Mount that Christ spoke of the tremendous power of the gift of faith in Matthew 17:20. After we attain unto love at the top of the mountain, that love then causes the gift of faith to begin to flow and operate in our lives. The fruit of faith leads us to love, which then releases the gift of faith and the power of God in our lives. Paul spoke of this when he said, “Faith works [or operates] by love” (Gal. 5:6). It was through a compassionate heart of love that Jesus healed people (see Mt. 9:36, 14:14, 20:34). That love which was resident in His heart released faith to heal people.

The gift of faith is one of the nine *gifts* of the Holy Spirit spoken of in First Corinthians 12:7-11. And as we see in Galatians 5:22-23, the fruit of faith is one of the nine *fruits* of the Holy Spirit. There are two sets of nines. In First Corinthians 14:1 the Apostle Paul teaches us the correct balance we should have in our lives: “[Pursue] after love, and [eagerly desire or covet] spiritual gifts.” One of the hardest things to maintain in the Christian life is a proper balance. There is a human tendency to

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overemphasize one thing or another and to veer either to the left or the right. This is so often the case with character and the power of God. Paul tells us to major first in our character and to pursue love, which is the mark of maturity, but also to eagerly covet spiritual gifts in order to serve others.

Let us consider for a moment these nine gifts of the Spirit. “But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues” (I Cor. 12:7-10).

As we have already stated, there is a difference between believing and faith. Believing is our responsibility. However, it is up to God to give us His faith. Therefore, when dealing with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, we must understand that our responsibility is to desire, covet, and pray for spiritual gifts. Yet it is still up to the sovereignty of God to give them to us. This is confirmed by the Apostle Paul in First Corinthians 12:11 where he said that the Holy Spirit divides several gifts to every man, according to His determination.

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When I was in Bible school in England, I had already received the baptism of the Holy Ghost, the gift of tongues, the interpretation of tongues, and prophecy. One day as I was meditating in First Corinthians chapter twelve, I thought to myself that the next gift I would like to receive was the gift of healing, especially since I was called to the ministry. And as my custom was, I went out of the city into some fields and spent time in prayer there with the Lord. I said to the Lord, “The next gift I would like to have is the gift of healing.” However, as soon as I had breathed that prayer to the Lord, the Holy Spirit promptly spoke to my heart the words of Paul in First Corinthians 12:11: “All these [are the work of one and the same Spirit] dividing to every man severally as he [determines].”

Immediately I understood the message the Lord was trying to speak to me. It is God alone who determines *what* gifts we receive and *when* we receive them. I realized that it was not the Lord’s will to give me the gift of healing at that time. However, since then the Lord has been gracious to use me in the realm of healing. The point I am trying to make is that these nine gifts (and the gift of faith in particular) are bestowed upon us according to the sovereign will and timing of God Almighty.

As we look at various lists in the Word of God, we can clearly see that they are either in a descending or ascending order. That which is at the beginning is either the greatest in importance, or else it is the

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least in significance and then it goes to the greatest. That would be true of the eight steps to perfection in Second Peter 1:5-8. The first step is faith. Love, which is the greatest, is the last step. However, the list in First Corinthians 12:7-10 is obviously in a descending order because the gift of tongues is the last on the list, and Paul says that the gift of tongues is the least in importance. The word of wisdom is the first and most important gift, and the word of knowledge is the second. Therefore, since the gift of faith is the third gift mentioned in this list, it is imperative for us to possess this precious substance.

The gift of faith is linked to the gifts of healing and the working of miracles. Sometimes it is difficult to discern which gift or gifts are operating. When the Lord performs a miracle, we do not have to analyze whether it was the gift of healing, the gift of the working of miracles, the gift of faith, or all three that were in operation. We should simply appreciate the fact that God performed a miracle. However, faith is really the basis for these operations of the Holy Spirit because you must have faith to move in any of these nine gifts. You must have faith to prophesy, to give a message in tongues, to give the interpretation of tongues, and to speak a word of wisdom. Thus, faith manifests itself in many ways.

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Faith is instrumental in healing. In Acts 3:1-8 we read of the account of the lame man who was healed by Peter and John. This was a tremendous miracle. Peter testified that it was the faith which is by Christ Jesus, and faith in His name, that healed him (Acts 3:16). Faith was intricately involved in the healing of this man. Faith manifests itself in many different ways. This is the reason the gift of faith is so important if we would desire to move in the Holy Spirit.

Paul gave us a wonderful definition of faith in action when he said of Abraham in Romans 4:17 that God “*calleth those things which be not as though they were.*” God rejuvenated the physical bodies of Abraham and Sarah to enable them to have children in their old age. All of this came about through the *agency* of faith. Faith overrides natural laws. Nature said that they were past the age of childbearing, but faith made it possible for them to have children. God is still performing extraordinary miracles today; so let us be encouraged!

Hebrews 11:3 confirms this truth when it states, “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.” The world was formed by the creative words that came forth from the mouth of the Lord. He spoke everything into existence by the faith that was resident in Him. By faith the Lord spoke things into

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existence that were not there before. In response to the charge of God, Moses struck the rock in faith and water came forth. There is tremendous power in faith. Faith creates things that were not there before. I have heard many accounts of people praying for others who had no eyes, and the Lord instantly created eyes in their eye sockets. That is an act of creation.

Faith is also a vital source of provision. In the late 1940's, when I was attending Bible school in England, I was sent on an outstation to a Pentecostal church in Wales. The people in Wales told me stories about what they had experienced firsthand during the Great Depression of the 1930's that affected England, America, and many other countries. Many of the people were so poor because of the unemployment situation that they did not have any food to eat. All of their cupboards were empty, but they would pray and believe that the Lord would provide for them. Then when they opened their cupboards, they would be full of food. This happened time and time again during that depression era.

Also, mothers told me of milk bottles that never ran dry because they would pray in faith. This reminds us of the barrel of meal and cruse of oil that never failed to supply for the widow and her son (I Kgs. 17:14-16). Faith always provides for our needs. However, once the depression began to lift

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and people were able to find jobs again to support their families, the miracles also ceased. Yet God had faithfully provided for them every time they could not provide for themselves.

When I was an assistant pastor in France, I knew a lady there who ran a laundry business. She told me a marvelous story of what faith had done for her many years before. This was in the days before there were automatic washing machines and dryers. People had to wash their clothes by hand and hang them up to dry. One day she felt so exhausted that she did not think she could wash and iron all the clothes she had to launder that day. So she sat down and said to the Lord, “Oh God, please help me.” After looking to God for help, faith arose within her heart, and when she went into the next room, she found all the clothes washed, dried, and ironed. Can you see how faith brings into existence those things that were not there previously? I have known people who have prayed for money, looked down on the ground, and found money that was not there before. We must realize the tremendous supernatural power of faith that can provide for everything we need.

Kathryn Kuhlman experienced on many occasions this tremendous power of faith that is able to bring the nonexistent into existence, and I would like to recount one such occasion. Kathryn had written a book entitled *I Believe In Miracles*, but she had lost the only copy of the manuscript. She could not

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remember where she had put it. Her secretaries and staff members thought she had left it inside her automobile, so they thoroughly searched, but they could not find it. It was definitely not inside the car. Then Kathryn got into her car alone and said to the Lord, "I know that You know where the manuscript is. I am going to put my hand down by the side of my seat, and I am believing that when my hand touches the floor, I am going to pick up that manuscript." When her hand touched the floor of the car, she felt the manuscript and picked it up. This is the creative power of faith. Faith brings into existence those things that are not.

The gift of faith in particular is given when there are insurmountable obstacles that God wants us to overcome. Therefore, He wants us to look to Him. When God has given us a commandment to do a certain thing, it is useless to say to the Lord that we do not have the money, because He has a never-ending supply. By faith we can tap into His source of finances to bring to pass what He has told us to do. Faith produces. Where there is nothing, faith creates. Where there is no way, faith makes a way. Unfortunately, I have seen many people fail because they lacked faith and looked at their natural obstacles saying, "It cannot be done, Lord." But with faith, all things are possible.

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Abraham did not consider that his own body was as good as dead, but he was strong in faith and was fully persuaded that God was able to perform those miracles He had promised (Rom. 4:18-21). We must not consider the natural obstacles or our own resources. We must view everything with a heavenly viewpoint, knowing that nothing is able to stand before the awesome and commanding presence of faith!

The function and very nature of faith is that it transcends natural laws. When the Lord walked upon the water, He was overcoming natural laws. And when Peter asked the Lord to bid him to come out onto the water also, there was a transmission of faith from Christ to Peter that enabled him to defy the laws of nature and walk on water. There are no boundaries faith cannot cross. Faith is one of the most powerful forces in the universe because it is not subject to the ordinances and laws of nature. It overrides them with the greatest of ease! Faith makes possible what is impossible in the natural. If we have this “better and enduring substance” flowing and working mightily in our lives, there is no limit to what we can accomplish for the kingdom of God!

Part Five

EVER-INCREASING FAITH

In this fifth lesson on faith we are going to develop the theme of ever-increasing faith. God has given all of us a measure of faith (Rom. 12:3). However, that amount of faith must grow and ever increase. The disciples cried out to Jesus, “Lord, *increase* our faith” (Lk. 17:5). Faith is not something we simply receive once; it is something that must ever be increasing in our lives. The Lord wants to enlarge and expand our capacity to receive more of His life-transforming faith.

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It is a fact and maxim of the Christian life that virtually all spiritual experiences, virtues, and blessings of God are both *instantaneous* and *progressive*. We receive them instantaneously, but then they must progress and develop. There is an initial experience and impartation, but then there is a continual unfolding and broadening of that experience or virtue.

This is true concerning our salvation. We are instantly saved and translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. However, then there is a progressive outworking of our salvation whereby we experience deliverance from many areas of our lives that are unlike Christ.

Paul tells us to “work out [finish and accomplish] our salvation with fear and trembling” in Philippians 2:12. This is a process that continues for the whole of our sojourn upon this earth as new areas of our heart experience His redemption.

This truth also applies to the baptism of the Holy Ghost. There is an initial infilling of the Holy Spirit evidenced by speaking in other tongues. But there is also a progressive experience of the Holy Ghost as we continue to be filled to our capacity with the precious Holy Spirit and the nine gifts of the Spirit. The book of Acts bears this out. In Acts chapter two the disciples were filled with the Holy Ghost, but later in Acts chapter four these same disciples were filled again with the Holy Ghost (Acts 4:31). Paul

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also spoke of this ongoing experience and infilling of the Holy Spirit in Ephesians 5:18: “Be ye [being] filled with the Spirit.” The original Greek brings out the thought that we should continually be filled with the Spirit and seek to receive the nine gifts of the Spirit.

Virtually every experience of God is both instantaneous and progressive. Understanding this truth is essential if we are to come into all that God has provided for us on the cross. This truth is extremely important when we consider faith, because we want our faith to be progressing, maturing, and increasing continually.

There are different degrees of every virtue and blessing in the Christian life. Second Corinthians 3:18 speaks of being changed from one degree of glory to another; and Psalm 84:7 speaks of going from one level of strength to the next. It is clear in the Word of God that there are also different degrees and levels of faith. The Lord wants to take us from one level of faith to the next, even as Paul said, “from faith to faith” (Rom. 1:17). Jesus speaks to us in Matthew 8:10 of the faith of the centurion who told the Lord that all He had to do was speak the word only and his servant would be healed. “Verily I say unto you, I have not found so *great faith*, no, not in Israel.” The Lord commended this man for his great depth and amount of faith. So, clearly there are degrees of faith. Others were rebuked for their

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little faith. Christ said in Matthew 6:30, “Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of *little faith*?” Therefore, it is abundantly clear that people have differing amounts of faith. We want our faith to ever increase until we have great faith that is able to overcome every mountain and obstacle we face in life.

In response to the disciples’ desperate plea to increase their faith, the Lord said, “If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this [sycamore] tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you” (Lk. 17:6). Jesus told His disciples that if they had faith as a grain of mustard seed, they could command the elements of nature. Therefore, faith is analogous to a grain of mustard seed. To understand what the Lord was really saying here, we must compare this passage with a similar passage in scripture, for scripture interprets scripture.

Christ said in Matthew 13:31-32: “The kingdom of heaven is like to a *grain of mustard seed*, which a man took, and sowed in his field: Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but *when it is grown, it is the greatest* among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.” A mustard seed is extremely small, being almost invisible to the naked eye.

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However, when it grows and matures it becomes a very large tree. Men riding on horses have even been reported to have taken shelter from the sun under one of these large trees. The point Christ was trying to make is that faith, just like a tiny seed, must grow in order to be of any significance. Yet when faith does grow and increase in our lives, it becomes the greatest of all powers in the universe.

Faith, just like a seed, is sown in the hearts of men. It is like the seed the sower planted in the parable of the sower and the seed in Matthew 13:3-8, 18-23. There are four kinds of grounds in this parable that typify four different kinds of hearts in which the seed of faith is sown. Understanding the interpretation of these four types of hearts is a key to maintaining a steady growth of faith in our lives.

Those who receive the seed by the wayside are like those who do not understand faith (Mt. 13:19). They have unbalanced and false concepts about the true faith of God. This causes them to lose that which they do have. Others receive the seed into stony places (Mt. 13:20-21). This speaks of areas of rebellion and hardness of heart that have not been dealt with. Pride hardens our hearts (see Dan. 5:20). Therefore, when persecution and tribulation come to try their faith, they become offended and give up because they were never deeply rooted and grounded in the Lord Jesus Christ.

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The third piece of ground was full of thorns (Mt. 13:22). This speaks of the cares, riches, and pleasures of this life that choke the growth of faith in our lives (Lk. 8:14). Faith never develops or comes to full maturity in those who are given to pleasure. Those who love worldly pleasures will be spiritually poor and deficient of God's faith and character (see Prov. 21:17). Also, those who do not triumph over cares and worries never increase in faith. Faith cannot thrive or flourish when we are troubled. Peace and faith are linked together. One of the things that was most noted about George Mueller was that he was a man of peace. He had an inner strength of spirit that could look beyond the storms of life. He was not ruled by his emotions, but by his spirit. A real man or woman of faith is rooted and grounded in peace.

These first three types of ground found in the parable of the sower in Matthew 13 reveal areas of our life that can hinder the growth of faith which is sown in our hearts as a seed. The fourth type of ground is good ground, which is the kind of heart that we should all strive to possess. The condition of our heart determines whether God's faith finds a lodging place in our lives. Faith is divine; it is a gift from God; and we can only receive faith if God gives it to us.

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Yet God places the responsibility back on man and says, “Where is your faith?” (Lk. 8:25). Christ said to His disciples in Mark 4:40, “How is it that ye have no faith?” Therefore, faith ultimately comes down to heart conditions. The Lord is saying: “Why is your heart so hard that My faith cannot operate in your life? What is blocking the flow of My faith into your life?” God will give us His faith if our hearts are soft and receptive.

The condition of our heart determines whether we receive God’s faith! This is one of the most important points to understand about faith. If we learn this lesson, and soften our hearts before the Lord, God’s faith will find an entrance into our lives and will transform us.

Unbelief also stunts the growth of faith. Unbelief and hardness of heart are one; they are married to each other (Mk. 6:52, 16:14). In Hebrews chapters three and four, hardness of heart and unbelief are repeatedly connected to each other. The Lord told His disciples that it was because of their unbelief that they could not cast the demons out of the lunatic in Matthew chapter seventeen. This was the

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reason they lacked faith (Mt. 17:17,20). Christ could not perform any mighty works in Nazareth because of their unbelief (Mk. 6:5-6). From this we can see that miracles depend not only upon the faith of the minister, but also the recipient. We can limit the working of the Lord in our lives by our unbelief. We receive according to our faith. Jesus said, "According to your faith be it unto you" (Mt. 9:29, see also Mt. 8:13, Mk. 5:34, 10:52). What is hindering the flow of God's faith in our lives?

Our intellect, logic, and natural mind can also limit the flow of faith in our lives. Principles, natural logic, and psychology appeal to our *natural* mind. As humans, we want something tangible. We hate to live by faith and step out into the "unknown." When a person is too analytical and must have everything all figured out before he will follow the Lord's leading, faith cannot flow in his life.

Remember, God imparts faith to our *hearts*, not to our *minds*. However, positive thinking and a positive attitude are important. Faith means that we obey the Lord and step out into new circumstances without knowing exactly how everything is going to work out. By faith Abraham obeyed the Lord's leading and went west toward Canaan not knowing exactly where he was going (Heb. 11:8). All he had to go by was a general direction.

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If we demand that the Lord explain everything to us and give us all the details before we will obey Him, faith will *never* be developed in our lives! Faith obeys the Lord and leaves the rest up to Him. If He has told us to do something, then it is His responsibility to provide for it; our part is to obey and believe Him.

Doubt will absolutely deplete our lives of faith. Doubt and faith cannot coexist together because they are complete opposites. Peter walked on water by faith. However, when he began to consider the raging waves, he became afraid. He lost the faith he had received when the Lord told him to come out on the water, and he began to sink. Christ rescued Peter and said to him, “Oh you of little faith, why did you *doubt*?” (Mt. 14:31). Doubts in his mind are what caused Peter to lose his faith. The Lord said that if we have faith and we *do not doubt*, we will be able to command a mountain to be moved and it will be removed (Mt. 21:21). Do we see how faith cannot operate in our lives if we rely on our natural minds! Let us now review some of the hindrances to an increase of our faith.

**Six Hindrances to the Growth and
Development of Faith**

- 1.) Wrong concepts and ideas about faith
- 2.) Hardness of heart and rebellion
- 3.) Cares, riches, and pleasures of this life
- 4.) Unbelief
- 5.) Our intellect and natural mind
- 6.) Doubt

Keys to Increasing Our Faith

After looking at some of the hindrances to faith, let us now consider some of the keys to increasing and enlarging our faith. First and foremost, faith is rooted and grounded in an intimate love

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relationship with the Lord. That is the basis of faith, because faith is a divine gift and attribute of God. As we stay close to the Author and Finisher of our faith, the Lord Jesus Christ, and spend time in His presence, He will impart more and more of His faith to us (Heb. 12:2). Great faith was produced in Enoch's life from walking with the Lord Jesus and spending time in intimate communion with Him (Heb. 11:5, Gen. 5:22-24). It was the faith which was deposited in his life as He walked with the Lord that enabled him to be translated and taken up to heaven.

Faith flows freely and fluently into our hearts as we continue to draw our life from the Lord. However, if we allow our love and fervor for the Lord to grow cold, the flow of faith begins to decrease and diminish. Remember, faith operates and flourishes in a heart that is soft and full of love (see Gal. 5:6). Therefore, let us always remember this first and most important key to faith, and seek ever to be in intimate fellowship with the One who is faith.

Flowing out of this first prerequisite to faith is the second key to faith, which is humility. Humility is produced from an intimate relationship with the Lord, and its importance cannot be stressed enough. In Luke 17:7-10 the Lord gave a parable on the subject of humility and having a servant's heart. This

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was in response to the disciples' plea to increase their faith. In other words, Christ was clearly telling His disciples that the way to increase their faith was to be humble and be the "servants of all."

Faith is a quality of spirit that depends and relies upon God. In order to have that holy dependence upon the Lord, we must have a heart of humility. Humility acknowledges that we cannot do it by ourselves but that we need the assistance of another. Pride, the opposite of humility, has confidence in self. Therefore, humility is an essential key to faith.

Pride hindered Israel from having faith in Christ. Paul brings this out in Romans 9:31-32: "But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone." Israel was filled with religious pride. They were coming to God on their own terms. They were rejecting God's means of pardon, and that means was faith in His Son. The Jews were seeking to be justified by their own works, by the works of the law. They were not seeking righteousness through faith, through a humble dependence upon the Lord.

In Luke chapter eighteen Christ directed a parable to those who trusted in their own piety instead of depending upon the Lord (Lk.18:9). This parable concerned two men, a Pharisee and a publican. The

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Pharisee was proud and presumptuous, and trusted in his own works, but the publican was poor in spirit and cried out to the Lord to save him. Jesus went on to declare in Luke 18:14, "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." Faith is a holy dependence upon the Lord. Faith and humility are inseparable, for at the very root of faith is a humble reliance upon the Lord!

Intricately linked with humility is obedience. Obedience is the third key to faith. The Lord said in Deuteronomy 32:20 that the Israelites were "children in whom was no faith." The reason the children of Israel lacked faith was that they had not obeyed the voice of the Lord. They continually ignored Him and would not hearken unto any of His words (Jer. 11:6-8). They had forsaken the Lord and neglected their relationship with Him. Because of their pride, they trusted in themselves (Deut. 32:15).

However, there were two men in that generation, Caleb and Joshua, who did obey the Lord. They were of another spirit. Their obedience produced within them a believing heart and a right confession, which led them to divine faith. Because they were full of faith, they inherited the promises and made it into the promised land, whereas the others did not.

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Obedience conditions us for a believing heart. If we do not obey the Lord, we will *not* be able to believe! Paul confirms this in Romans 10:16: “But they *have not all obeyed* the gospel. For [Isaiah] saith, Lord, *who hath believed* our report?” A believing heart is absolutely essential for faith to operate in our lives. This is the attitude that says, “I know You are able, Lord.” It is also a positive confession. Belief leads to faith; however, we must always remember that belief is not faith. A believing heart is the fourth key to increasing our faith.

Faith is also increased and developed by meditating on the Word of God. Paul said that “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom.10:17). Faith is produced by hearing, reading, and meditating on the Word of God. Those that delight in the law of the Lord and meditate on it day and night shall prosper (Psa.1:2-3). That seed of faith in their hearts will grow and be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, and that faith will bring forth fruit in its season. Psalm 119:165 says, “Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them [or cause them to stumble].” No trial or obstacle will be too great for us to overcome if we constantly meditate on the Word of God.

Another essential key to enlarging our faith is to walk with great men of faith. King Solomon declared, “He that walketh with wise men shall be wise” (Prov. 13:20). This is a principle of God’s Word. To

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become wise, we must walk with men and women of God who are also wise. In like manner, to become men and women of great faith, we must walk with godly men and women who have great faith. The Apostle Paul said to the Corinthian believers, “Be ye followers [or imitators] of me, even as I also am of Christ” (I Cor. 11:1). There are spiritual fathers and mothers in the Church of Christ who serve as examples for us, and who show us the way to great faith. In order for our faith to grow, we must walk with them, love them, be loyal to them, and learn of their ways.

We must also exercise faith for it to increase. Faith is like a muscle; it must be exercised in order to grow and develop. No athlete is suddenly able to lift a world-record-breaking amount of weight without gradually conditioning his muscles to lift that much. The great men and women of faith in the Bible did not become spiritual giants overnight. But as they exercised their faith, it began to grow and grow until it became mighty. This is seen in the lives of virtually all the men of God that we refer to as pillars of faith.

Abraham grew strong in faith by exercising it in smaller acts of faith (Rom. 4:19-22). In Genesis 12:11-13 Abraham told Sarah to say she was his sister so that the Egyptians would not kill him. He would not have been ready at that time in his life to offer Isaac upon the altar with worship and

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thanksgiving. It took many *steps of faith* in Abraham's life before he truly became the father of our faith (Rom. 4:12). There are many steps of faith we must take before we become God's man of faith and power. There is a progression in the growth of our faith.

In Exodus chapter four Moses made all kinds of excuses to God about his inability to lead the people of Israel. At that phase of his life, he was not ready to command the Red Sea to part. It took smaller acts of obedience and faith to enlarge his faith to perform such a tremendous miracle. He had to have faith to command the rod to become a snake, and the water to become blood. However, it was smaller acts of faith such as these that later enabled him to tell three million people to stand still and see the salvation of the Lord at the Red Sea.

This is also seen in the life of David. There had to be smaller victories in the life of young David to enlarge his faith to defeat Goliath. Prior to his triumph over Goliath, David had battled with a lion and a bear (I Sam. 17:34-36). It was these victories and acts of faith that increased David's faith for his victory over the giant. These smaller acts of faith were *absolutely* necessary to increase David's faith. Without this preparation, David could never have made his declarations about defeating Goliath.

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Faith to perform tremendous miracles is never going to be *suddenly* dropped into our lives. Faith is developed and enlarged as we exercise it in the little things of life. We must not think that we can wait passively all of our lives and then suddenly emerge as a great man of faith. Rather, we must actively seek God to give us faith in the small areas, which will prepare us for the mighty acts of faith. Then we can truly be God's man or woman of faith and power for these last days!

When God wants to develop faith in our lives for a particular avenue of ministry, there will always be a preparation. This preparation takes place in the wilderness. The wilderness and trials produce faith in our lives and purify our faith. Song of Songs 3:6 speaks of a believer coming out of the wilderness "perfumed with myrrh and frankincense." Myrrh represents the fruit of meekness, and frankincense represents faith. This order is very important; it cannot be reversed, for it is as we go through the wilderness and learn meekness that faith begins to increase in our lives. Meekness is a holy acceptance of our circumstances with joyfulness. Meekness conditions our hearts for faith.

Meekness must be developed first because there must be an acceptance of the circumstances that God chooses to produce His faith in our lives. We must accept the situations God places us in. Saints who refuse God's corral and squirm their way out of their pressures end up in sorrow. Consequently,

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faith is never produced in their lives (see Isa. 50:10-11). Having right attitudes in the wilderness and in our trials is an essential key to having faith developed in our lives. We must not harden our hearts in the wilderness, but allow God to complete His work in us (Heb. 3:8).

The prophet Jeremiah described this spiritual wilderness that we as Christians have to pass through. It is a land of deserts, pits, drought, the shadow of death, and it is very lonely (Jer. 2:6). It is here, and only here, that faith is produced and refined. Are you willing to go through this wilderness that you may come out adorned with faith? This was the way to the throne for Joseph. He literally experienced the pit, the wilderness, and prison. He was lonely and confused; yet it was in this lowly and humbling place that God produced faith in Joseph's life. Jesus also was trained in the wilderness where He learned obedience by the things He suffered (Heb. 5:8). If the Son of God needed preparation to fully equip Him for His life's work and to produce faith in His life, certainly we would not be exempt from the wilderness.

The way to great faith is through great valleys and trials. That is why so few people have great faith. They are not willing to pay the price. For everything in life there is a price to pay. The Word of God says, "Buy the truth and sell it not." Are you willing to pay the price? Are you really wholehearted for

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the Lord, and totally consecrated and sold out to Him? This is the only way to great faith. Faith is a precious gem, and we must pay a dear and costly price to obtain it. However, if we pay that high price there will be nothing we cannot do.

It is an unchanging principle of the scriptures that whenever God wants to do something of significance in a person's life, He first of all brings him into barrenness and reduces him almost to nothing. Prior to the birth of six mighty deliverers of God in the Bible—Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Samuel, Samson, and John the Baptist—their mothers experienced a period of barrenness and bewilderment. God uses barrenness to produce humility in our lives so that we will not credit the miracles to ourselves and that all the glory will be deflected to Him.

Before the Lord can bless us with an extremely fruitful ministry, He must first take us through a period of barrenness. We will see others being blessed, and yet we will not be blessed. If we are pastors, we will see other pastors prosper, and yet we will barely make it financially, and we will only have a few members in our church. However, if we are patient, in due time God will cause us to prosper in every area of our life.

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Faith cannot be developed in any significant measure in those who say they do not have to put up with difficulties and pressures, and who never allow the Lord to take them through barrenness. But once God gives us His faith, that faith produces. God is looking for vessels that are tested and tried, whom He knows will ascribe all the praise and glory to Him. The Lord longs for men and women whom He can entrust with His power and faith. The Lord earnestly desires to manifest His power to the nations of this earth. Unfortunately, a major hindrance to this has been self-seeking ministers who want the glory and fame for themselves. We must always remember that we are only channels to be used by God. We are not the source of the miracles and the power. This is the reason the Lord goes to such great lengths to purify and prepare those to whom He will impart His faith.

Everyone who ministers in real faith has been tested in the particular realm of faith in which he ministers. Few men in history have ever experienced the power and faith which Moses possessed, but few have ever been tested to the degree Moses was tested. He experienced discouragement and loneliness for forty years in the backside of a desert. This might seem like a long period of time, but it was absolutely necessary to humble Moses for the power he was about to receive.

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Moses felt as if he had lost his purpose in life; yet deep within his heart, faith was being produced. Those who have never suffered are lifted up with pride when they are used to perform miracles. Moses lived with a speech impediment, but it served as a constant reminder of his dependence upon the Lord.

Those who are endued with faith for healing have usually suffered physically themselves. There was no miracle in the New Testament era that the Apostle Paul did not also perform, yet he suffered for years with eye trouble. Because of the awesome revelation and anointing Paul had, he was given a “thorn in the flesh” so that he would not be exalted above measure (II Cor. 12:7). Here was the man who could heal any disease, yet he himself was not healed. That was tremendously humbling for Paul, but that is the way God works.

Smith Wigglesworth performed tremendous miracles. On a number of occasions, he raised the dead, and there was hardly any sickness that was not healed through his ministry. Yet, for six years he suffered extraordinary pain from kidney stones. After the healing services, he would frequently go into his room and roll on the floor in pain. For years he was used to heal others, yet he himself was not

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healed. God was testing this man to see whether he was serving Him for the miracles and for his own healing, or serving Him because he truly loved Him.

This is the kind of man or woman God can use. God saw that Smith Wigglesworth would not use the gift of healing for his own benefit but only for God's purposes. He did not try to force God to heal him until God wanted to heal him. God is looking for this same kind of spirit and character in men and women today. Would you allow God to first reduce you to nothing and take you through the wilderness, that you might be able to minister in true faith?

If we are going to be used in the realm of provision, we will first experience many financial trials until God is sure that He can trust us with His resources. If we have not experienced the wilderness in the area of finances and God blesses us with large amounts of money, we will use that money for our own desires. But if we have had to depend upon Jehovah-jireh to provide our needs for many years, we will only use our money for His purposes and for His glory.

In recent years, God has used my wife and me as conduits for finances to support missionaries and run a Bible school. However, in order to have faith for these huge sums of money, we have literally had to walk the streets at times with no money and nowhere to sleep. On one occasion, we had no

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food at all, and no fuel for heat in our house in the middle of winter. We contemplated calling someone for help, but God said to us, “If you touch that phone, I am finished with you.” God was teaching us to depend upon Him for our provision. God was faithful, and after three days someone brought us food and money for heat.

On another occasion, we were ministering daily at a large church, but we did not have any money for food or lodging. After the services, we would go to the railroad station for shelter from the snow. Then we had to leave the railroad station at midnight. And since we barely had enough money for gasoline, we could not keep the heater on in our car. In the mornings, as soon as the large shopping centers opened, we would go into them where it was nice and warm. My wife and I would walk the streets looking for dimes so that we could share a cup of coffee together. This continued for several days.

If we had told the pastor or anyone in the congregation of the church that we needed money or somewhere to stay, they would have been mortified to find out that we had been sleeping on the streets. They would have immediately helped us. Yet God would not permit us to tell anyone. Rather, we had to trust solely in the Lord. After about ten days, the church gave us an offering which was enough to provide food and lodging for a time.

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However, that money soon ran out and we found ourselves sleeping on the streets again. It was Christmas time, but our situation was so bleak that it was hard to believe that we would have a merry Christmas. Then at ten o'clock on Christmas Eve, a lady we were seeing off at the bus station gave us ten dollars. That was enough to rent a cheap hotel room for the night and have breakfast on Christmas morning. And that was our merry Christmas that year!

My point is this—God knew what He had in store for us in the future, and He was testing us then to see if we could be trusted with large amounts of money. God wants ministers who have “teflon-coated” hands, so that His finances are not amassed for themselves, but they are used as channels to bless others. God wants us to depend upon Him. The purpose of the wilderness is to empty us of our own strength so that we come out of the wilderness *leaning upon our Beloved* (Song. 8:5).

As God takes us through trials and through the wilderness, we begin to trust in Him and His faith is produced in our lives. The trials my wife and I had to pass through produced faith within our hearts. We might tend to think that faith is developed when we are in a time of blessing and abundance, but that is not so. Faith is produced in the wilderness.

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In order to teach us holy dependence, the Lord creates needs in our lives so that we have to look to Him. For faith to operate, first there has to be a need. You cannot perform a miracle of healing on a man who is perfectly healthy. That person first of all has to become ill. The man in John chapter nine was born blind, and for many years he suffered from this handicap. Christ said that this man was born blind so that God might be glorified by his healing.

Therefore, when God wants to increase our faith and deposit more of His divine faith into our hearts, He first of all creates *needs* in our lives. He creates circumstances so that we must have faith in God to make it through that trial. The Lord, not chance, purposely orchestrated events so that there was no water for the children of Israel shortly after they came out of Egypt (see Ex. 17:1-6). His purpose behind this crisis was to increase faith in the lives of Moses and the children of Israel. Circumstances demanded Moses to have faith in God. Then by faith Moses struck the rock and water came forth.

God takes us from trial to trial; and to develop our faith, He starts us off with small trials. Then He increases the pressures and tests so that we require more faith. After this fashion, the Lord gradually enlarges our faith, step by step. We climb the ladder of faith rung by rung. There are no *shortcuts* to great faith! The Lord led the children of Israel through the wilderness from test to test, desiring to

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develop faith in their lives. The culmination of all these tests was at Kadesh Barnea where they had to have great faith to conquer the giants and the walled cities in the land. Yet because Israel had never believed the Lord in all of their smaller trials, their faith was never enlarged during their wilderness journey. Therefore, they did not have the necessary faith when God told them to arise and possess the land of Canaan. If the children of Israel had believed the Lord in their smaller trials, faith would have been developed in their lives, and at Kadesh Barnea they would have had the great faith needed to overcome all the obstacles in the land.

If the Lord wants to increase our faith in the area of provision, He will arrange circumstances that require more money than we have. We must allow the Lord to stretch us; otherwise, we will never grow spiritually. We come to know Jehovah-jireh, the Lord our Provider, *line upon line*. First of all, He creates small needs such as our daily necessities. Then He provides for them. Afterwards, He increases our needs so that our faith develops more.

Eventually, He might make us responsible for a work such as a Bible school or orphanage, and then we absolutely must depend on the Lord to provide for our needs. It was the faith of the Son of God in George Mueller that provided for all of his orphans. But God progressively developed faith in

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Mueller's life through smaller needs, so that he could have the faith to believe God to provide for his orphans.

If you are a pastor or a leader, and God is desiring to increase your wisdom which operates by faith, people in your congregation will have unusual problems they never had before. Many times they will come to you with problems that you have never encountered. This stretches your faith, and you begin to cry out to God for wisdom. We must allow our families and those we are responsible for to stretch our faith. Our spiritual children will also stretch and enlarge our faith (see Isa. 54:2-3).

Leaders represent God the Father, and He has unlimited resources. Therefore, when there are legitimate needs for expansion, building projects, and so forth, we must exercise faith and believe God to provide for those things which are His will. Alexander the Great asked a certain man who had done him a large personal favor what he would like as his reward. When the man requested a colossal sum of money, he was immediately rebuked by Alexander's nobles: "How could you ask the king for such an extraordinary amount of money?"

Well, Alexander had a very different point of view, as he declared emphatically to his nobles, "This man is honoring me by asking for so much money because he is assuming that I have that much to

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give.” Therefore, as representatives of God the Father we must not limit expansion, but believe in faith that the Lord has all the resources necessary to provide for our needs.

We must also keep in mind that there are many avenues of faith. God grants people faith according to their calling and ministry. Some people have faith for healing, but that does not necessarily mean they have faith for finances. Smith Wigglesworth had tremendous faith for miracles, but not for money. He even testified that finances were not his area of faith. Rees Howells had faith for extraordinary amounts of money, but he did not have that same amount of faith for healing.

God imparts faith according to our ministry. Paul brings this out in Romans 12:6-7: “Having then *gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us*, whether prophecy, let us prophesy *according to the proportion of faith*; Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching.” Our avenue of faith depends on the particular ministry in which God wants to use us. There is a different sphere of faith necessary to teach than there is to prophesy. We must see that faith is segmented and compartmentalized.

According to the particular aspect of faith in which God wants to use us, so also are the trials we go through to prepare us for that ministry. Those who are going to be used by God as conduits for

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finances will experience tremendous economic and financial pressures. However, those who are used in healing will experience sickness in their physical body, or in those dearest to them. This is to produce faith in them for healing. If we are going to be used by God as proponents of His truth as teachers, we will go through times when we will be surrounded by false doctrines and mixture.

We must have faith to preach. According to our message and vision, so will our trials be. We can only preach what we are, what is real to us. We cannot truly preach on comfort unless we have first been comforted by God in our sorrows. Our trials depend upon our calling. That is the reason we cannot compare ourselves with others, because we all have our own particular trials and preparation.

May we meditate often on ever-increasing faith and review these keys and hindrances to faith. As we seek the Lord earnestly to increase our faith and as we apply these keys to our own lives, God will impart great faith to us!

Nine Keys To Increasing Our Faith

- 1.) Being intertwined with the One who is the Author and Finisher of our faith
- 2.) Possessing humility
- 3.) Being obedient
- 4.) Having a believing heart
- 5.) Meditating upon God's Word
- 6.) Walking with godly men and women of faith
- 7.) Having right attitudes in the wilderness and in trials
- 8.) Exercising faith
- 9.) Dealing with any hindrances to faith in our lives

Part Six

THE TRIAL OF FAITH

In Part Six we are going to consider the trial of our faith. Our faith is going to be tried and tested. This is an inevitable and inescapable fact of the Christian life! However, our attitude and response toward these trials determine whether we come out *better* or *bitter*. James, the natural brother of the Lord Jesus Christ, tells us to “count it all joy when we fall into [various kinds of] temptations” (Jas.1:2). The Apostle Paul had so allowed the Lord to work in his life through the trials of his own faith that he could say “we glory [or rejoice] in tribulations” (Rom. 5:3).

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In the trials of our faith, we must keep our hearts soft and humble before the Lord. We must rejoice in Him even *in the midst* of our tests. Otherwise, our hearts will become hardened and bitter at the Lord and others. The Lord continually warns His people not to harden their hearts in the day of temptation in the wilderness (Heb. 3:8). Yet regrettably, many harden themselves in the times of adversity, and cut themselves off from the life-flow of grace.

Bitterness creeps in and closes our hearts toward the Lord when we fail to receive and appropriate God's grace in trials (Heb. 12:15). Peter says we should rejoice in *manifold* temptations (I Pet. 1:6). This word *manifold* means "varied hues of color." We experience many varieties of trials and pressures. They are not all the same. Peter, however, goes on to speak of the *manifold grace of God* (I Pet. 4:10). The Lord spoke to my wife many years ago that according to the color or hue of our trial, there is a perfect matching hue of grace.

Therefore, there is no reason for any of us to fail or become bitter in our trials. We can overcome and triumph in every test we go through in life by the grace of God! The Lord has provided "a way of escape" in our trials, and that way is His grace (I Cor. 10:13). In every trial we go through, God's

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grace is there to sustain us. However, we must soften and humble our hearts to appropriate that grace into our lives.

When we comprehend what trials accomplish in our lives and hearts, then we are able to rejoice in them. James the apostle said this: “Count it all joy when ye fall into [various kinds of] temptations; *Knowing this*, that the trying of your faith worketh patience” (Jas. 1:2-3). The key is in “knowing this.” When we see temptations from God’s perspective, and we view trials as He does, we can rejoice in them because we realize what they are going to do *in* us. The trials of our faith and the sufferings of this present time are not even worthy to be compared with the glory and fruit they will produce in our lives (Rom. 8:18). Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal weight of glory (II Cor. 4:17).

Then James exhorts, “But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing” (Jas. 1:4). Patience (or endurance) is worked out in our lives through adversity. Trials strengthen us so that we will not give up when the pressures seem unbearable. The ultimate benefit of trials is that they will perfect us if we yield to the Lord in them. However, if we do not allow God to test our faith, we will *never* become complete, mature, or perfect!

The Main Reason the Lord Tries Our Faith

The main reason the Lord tries our faith is to purify us of human strength. As self-reliance ceases, we can begin to trust solely in the Lord. The Apostle Paul said to the Corinthians, “For we would not, brethren, have you [uninformed] of our trouble which came to us in [Asia Minor], that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life: But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead” (II Cor.1:8-9). Paul is saying here that all the terrible pressures and hardships that came upon him and his traveling companions were for a very important reason—that they would no longer trust in themselves, but in God. They even felt the “sentence of death” in their lives, and their human strength failed them. All these things happened to them purposely so that they would trust in the Lord’s strength and not their own.

The Lord Jesus told Paul when he was sorely tested in his flesh that His “strength is made perfect in weakness” (II Cor.12:9). These words gave Paul a heavenly perspective of trials so that he could respond: “Most gladly therefore will I rather [rejoice] in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in

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distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong" (II Cor.12:9-10). Thus, the Lord weakened Paul so that he did not rely upon his own strength, but upon God's.

In Genesis 32:24-32 Jacob wrestled with the pre-incarnate Christ. Jacob wanted the Lord to change his nature. Thus, the Lord touched his thigh. This touch of the Master's hand left Jacob with a lifelong limp. Ever afterwards, Jacob had to lean upon the Lord. Jacob's natural strength and abilities were diminished to cause him to trust in God alone. It is the Lord, not chance or the devil, who weakens us. Through this process, God's strength is made perfect in our weakness. The Lord wants to destroy the pride of trusting in ourselves instead of in Him. God's desire is that His people depend solely upon Him, for He is the all-sufficient One.

Because of the tremendous promises that Joseph had from God, the Lord had to purify his faith so that his trust would be in God alone and not in the promises. After Joseph had been in prison for several years, Pharaoh's butler and baker were imprisoned beside him. Shortly thereafter, the butler and baker each had dreams that neither could interpret. Enabled by God, Joseph gave them the interpretation. When they were eventually released from prison, Joseph urged them to intercede to Pharaoh on his behalf. At this point, Joseph still had some confidence in self. Joseph's confidence

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was not yet one hundred percent in the Lord. He was partially trusting in his ability to interpret the dreams to bring about his deliverance, and God wanted to deal with this area of his life.

Therefore, God allowed Joseph to be forgotten for another two years. The Lord did this because He did not want Joseph to trust in his interpretations, or in the baker and butler. He wanted Joseph's confidence to be completely in Him. The Word of God tells us that during this time "the word of the Lord tried him" (Psa. 105:19). God was testing Joseph's faith and trust in Him. Through this most difficult test, the Lord was saying: "Joseph, do you believe Me? Do you believe that I will one day turn things around and exalt you to the throne as I told you I would? Even though you are in prison right now, do you believe that your brothers, who sold you into slavery, will one day come and bow before you? Even though the butler has forgotten you, do you believe that I have not forgotten you, Joseph?" Sometimes we try to figure out how our trials are going to come to an end, and then we become confused when it does not happen that way. We feel forsaken and forgotten. Yet it is God who is taking away all other forms of deliverance so that we have to trust completely in Him.

This is producing faith and reliance upon the Lord in our hearts. The Lord gives us tremendous promises, and then He reduces us to the place where they can never come to pass in the natural. He

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does this so that we will trust in Him. Do we believe that the Lord is going to change our circumstances one day and exalt us just as He said He would? God will exalt us after we lose all of our confidence in self and we rely totally upon Him. First Peter 5:6 says, “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.”

Everything we will ever accomplish in life for God will only be done through the help and enabling power of God’s grace. Many times we rely upon our own strength to accomplish our endeavors or even to walk in holiness before the Lord. Yet, our dependence must be totally upon the Lord, not upon ourselves. How did Christ go to the cross and offer Himself without spot to God? Was it by His own strength? Absolutely not! Hebrews 9:14 gives us the answer to these two intriguing questions. It was *through the eternal Spirit* that Jesus offered Himself without spot to God.

Although He was the Son of God, Christ did not go to the cross in His own strength. He needed the help of His Father and the Holy Spirit to become that spotless sacrificial lamb and to accomplish everything He was called to do. Christ made this very clear in John 5:19: “*The Son can do nothing of himself*, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son

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likewise.” Jesus was wholly dependent upon the Father. He lived by faith. We can only fulfill God’s will for our lives and offer ourselves without spot to the Lord by His enabling strength and grace.

At the time of the building of the restoration temple (recorded in Ezra and Nehemiah), Zerubbabel the governor of Judea was confronted with a tremendous obstacle. He had already laid the foundation of the temple, but now the Persian empire was forbidding him to complete it. The Lord wanted Zerubbabel to know that it was only by His strength that he would overcome this mountain and obstacle.

God spoke to Zerubbabel saying, “Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts. Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it” (Zech. 4:6-7). God assured Zerubbabel that he would finish the temple. However, it would not be by his own strength or power, but by the Spirit of the Lord. The Lord had to convince Zerubbabel of this so that he could finish it crying, “Grace, grace unto it.”

In Revelation 4:10-11 we have the account of the twenty-four elders casting their crowns at the feet of Jesus. A crown is representative of a position, and also of victories gained. To cast a crown at the

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feet of Jesus is to acknowledge that everything we have accomplished is not by our own strength or power, but only by His grace. Therefore, the twenty-four elders worship the Lord saying, “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power.”

The Lord tries our faith to *convince* us of our needs. We need to be persuaded through many shortcomings, weaknesses, and trials that our human strength is insufficient, and that we cannot make it on our own strength. This is something we all know in *theory*, but it takes a revelation to be absolutely persuaded of it deep down in our being. If we are ever to ascend the holy hill of the Lord, this must be a strong conviction in our lives.

Job had to be convinced that he had a need before his trial could come to an end. Job was trusting in his own flesh and dedication to the Lord. This caused him to be *self-righteous*, and it is the reason why the Lord tried Job’s faith and weakened him. Job had to be convinced of his utter dependency upon God. Deep in the heart of man is a horrible pride that causes him to think that he can direct his life better than God. When we question the Lord, we are saying that we are wiser and more righteous than He.

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The Apostle Paul grew up as a devout disciple of the Jewish religion. He was a Hebrew of Hebrews, and blameless according to the law (Phil. 3:6). He said in Galatians 1:14 that he “profited in the Jews’ religion above many of his [own age] in his own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of his fathers.” Paul had many qualities that could have caused him to boast and have confidence in the flesh (Phil. 3:4).

However, the Lord *proved* to Paul through many trials that without Christ he was absolutely nothing. Paul said, “In nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, *though I be nothing*” (II Cor. 12:11). Because of this personal revelation of who he was without the Lord, Paul could say he was the chiefest of sinners and the least of the apostles (I Tim. 1:15, I Cor. 15:9). Paul was learning to trust in the Lord and rely completely upon His grace.

The lives of many dear saints have become shipwrecked because they have failed to realize that their own strength was not sufficient. They have relied upon their human abilities to carry them through life rather than living by faith and trusting in the Lord.

The Life of Peter

I want to consider now the life of Peter. Peter truly loved the Lord and wanted to serve Him with all of his heart. Peter, however, by nature was very strong in himself. Therefore, the Lord took Peter through many humiliations and difficulties to purify him of confidence in his natural abilities so that he would draw his strength from above.

What was Peter's nature? Well, our nature depends upon our ancestors and also upon the part of the world into which we were born. Every locality and country has different characteristics. Peter was a Galilean. Therefore, to correctly understand what Peter's nature was like, we must study the characteristics of the people from Galilee in his day. Historians of the first century tell us that Galileans were fond of innovation. By nature they were disposed to change. They were impulsive, emotional, anxious for honor, and easily aroused by an appeal to adventure. However, they were also loyal to the end. These characteristics and temperaments are seen in Peter's early life.

Peter had many areas of *self-strength* in his life; and it took years of hardship and failures to purify Peter of natural strength. Peter was a born leader. However, his leadership abilities were often rooted in his own strength rather than in the strength of Christ. Peter was the most outspoken of all the

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disciples. Even when there was nothing to say, he would open his mouth (Lk. 9:33). Peter was impetuous, and often would barge into things without contemplation (Jn. 20:3-6). His impulsive disposition induced him to get involved in situations where there was no faith or grace to enable him to triumph in them. Peter had pride in his life that caused him to think he knew better than the Lord. On one occasion, he even corrected and rebuked the Lord (Mt. 16:22).

In Luke 22:31-32 the Lord said to Peter, “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.” The Lord told Peter that Satan was trying to sift him. However, Peter did not listen to the Lord and set himself up for an unnecessary temptation and trial by his daring remarks. Peter replied to the Lord, “Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death.”

In John 13:36 Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, whither goest thou?” The Lord said to him, “Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards.” Peter proudly responded, “Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake” (Jn. 13:37). Peter was speaking like a true Galilean, very loyal in the flesh. Peter truly desired to follow the Lord and lay down his life for

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His sake. But his confidence was in his flesh. It was in his human loyalty to the Lord. However, this weakness led him to deny the Lord.

The Lord said to His disciples in Mark 14:27, “All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.” Peter said to the Lord with confidence in his human loyalty and dedication to the Lord, “Although all [these other disciples] shall be offended, yet will not I” (Mk. 14:29). Peter’s words were spoken in such a tone that it appears that he expected the other eleven disciples to forsake the Lord. He thought he was more sold out to Christ than his brethren. Thus, he proudly asserted that he would never desert the Lord. But where was Peter’s confidence? It was in his own nature. Christ said that all His disciples would forsake Him because the scriptures had to be fulfilled. Yet Peter challenged the Word of God.

Peter sincerely desired to remain loyal to the Lord, but he was trying to do so in his own strength. In First Corinthians 1:29 Paul said, “That no flesh should glory in His presence.” Peter could not have remained faithful to the Lord *in his own strength*, because then he would have had a reason to glory in his flesh.

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Why could Peter not follow Christ? Christ was going to be crucified. None of the apostles could have gone to the cross with the Lord because that would have confused the message. It was the Lamb of God who was going to be crucified that day. The two thieves who were crucified with Christ were illustrations of God's mercy. The one who called out for mercy was saved. Yet the other criminal who mocked the Lord damned himself.

Christ did not go to the cross in His own strength. He was enabled by the eternal Spirit to endure the contradiction of sinners and to suffer vicariously for others (Heb. 9:14). God even sent Moses and Elijah prior to the crucifixion when Christ was transfigured to strengthen Him for His decease in Jerusalem (Lk. 9:30-31). It was not God's will for the apostles to go to the cross with Jesus. Therefore, there was no faith or divine strength for them to go to Calvary's cruel death. Neither could any other mortal have endured the ordeal in Gethsemane that Christ went through.

However, Peter would not listen to the Lord. He followed the Lord into the high priest's house where the trial of Jesus was being held, and it was there that he denied the Lord three times before dawn. The reason Peter denied the Lord is that he went there in his own strength. This incident nearly destroyed Peter. Yet the Lord knew his motive for following Him was an intense desire to remain

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faithful. Therefore, when the angels appeared to the women at the tomb of Jesus after His resurrection, these women were given specific instructions to tell the disciples *and Peter* to wait for the Lord in Galilee (Mk. 16:7).

Peter was singled out because the Lord did not want him to give up and turn back. After Jesus told him that he would deny Him, the Lord encouraged Peter by telling him not to be troubled (Jn. 13:38-14:1). Many times we can become discouraged when we fail the Lord. Our shortcomings, weaknesses, and failures almost make us want to give up. However, the Lord wants us to be encouraged that “*He* [not our own strength or efforts] who hath begun a good work in us will complete it” (Phil. 1:6).

We read of Peter’s restoration in John chapter twenty-one. God sees our hearts and our motives; and He takes into consideration *why* we do certain things. Judas was not restored because he betrayed the Lord out of an evil heart. However, the Lord saw that Peter had a good heart. Jesus knew that Peter loved Him, and that he was just following Him in his own strength.

As we meditate on the life of Peter, we can see why our faith must be tried. God wants us to rely upon Him and His grace. The Lord said to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I

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will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy” (Rom. 9:15-16). The Lord’s grace and mercy are the source of everything. Our salvation is rooted and grounded in the sacrifice of Christ, not in our good works. Therefore, the rest of our life must be lived by the faith of the Son of God.

Grace, Not Good Works

So many people try to earn salvation by their own works. However, we must be convinced by the Lord that it is all by His grace. We have to look to Him for our salvation and justification; we cannot trust in our own flesh. We can only please the Lord by His grace and strength. The Apostle Paul said, “By the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (I Cor. 15:10).

Paul realized it was not his own efforts or his own human strength that had made him what he was, but it was only the grace of God. We are what we are only because of the grace of God. Faith cannot operate in our lives if we are trusting in our natural strength! Faith only works in the lives of those who rely solely upon the Lord.

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God wants to purify our faith. He repeats this message many times in the Word of God in various forms. We must lose our confidence in our own flesh so that we can trust wholly in the Lord. Satan was permitted by God to test Peter so that Peter could be convinced that he could not go to the cross and follow Jesus in his own strength. It is only by the grace and enabling power of God that we can serve the Lord. When it was God's appointed time for Peter to be martyred, then there was grace given to him to enable him to triumph. Through many years of hardship and purifyings of his faith, Peter learned to place his confidence in the power and strength of the Lord alone. God is going to try our faith to purify us of reliance upon self.

How Does the Lord Try Our Faith?

Now let us consider how the Lord tries our faith. We are going to be tested and tried in the three basic areas of our life—in our body, soul, and spirit. To know how to triumph in our trials, we must see how Christ triumphed in His temptations; for He is our example. Therefore, I would like to look briefly at the Lord's temptation by Satan, which is recorded in Matthew 4:1-11.

Christ was tested in the same three areas in which we are tested. Hebrews 4:15 says that Jesus was “in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” The enemy hurled everything he could at the

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Lord to try to defeat Him, but He overcame every onslaught and temptation of the adversary. Therefore, in Christ's temptation we see what weapons the enemy uses against us, what areas we will be tested in, and how we can overcome our trials.

The first important point to remember is that it was the Spirit of God that led Christ into the wilderness to be tested (Mt. 4:1). God is the author and originator of our trials (see Job 1:8). But He is also the One who sustains us through them by His grace, and it is He who brings us out of them in His time.

The devil said to Christ in Matthew 4:3, "If thou be the Son of God." The enemy was trying to create doubt in the heart of Jesus. He said, "*If* thou be the Son of God." Doubt is the greatest weapon Satan has to try to defeat us. He first used it in the Garden of Eden when he said to Eve, "Yea, *hath* God said?" (Gen. 3:1). Satan was trying to create doubt in Eve's heart about what God had spoken to her. The devil was seeking to make Christ doubt that He really was the Son of God, of whom all scriptures were written. Remember, Jesus not only had to believe as we do that we are adopted sons of God, but He had to believe that He was the only begotten Son of God. The enemy also tries to make us doubt our experiences in the Lord, as well as our position in Christ.

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Satan continued his onslaught against the Lord in Matthew 4:3: “If thou be the Son of God, *command that these stones be made bread.*” Here Christ was being tested in the area of His body. If Jesus had commanded those stones to turn into bread, it would have proven that He was the Son of God. Also, it would have met His physical needs, for He had not eaten anything for forty days. Nevertheless, He did not give in to His bodily appetites.

Likewise, we must not seek to satisfy our physical needs outside of the will of God. Satan was tempting the Lord to use His power to perform a miracle. Jesus was probably eager to perform miracles and demonstrate His Father’s power, because although He had already been anointed at the Jordan River, up to this point He had not performed any miracles.

Christ’s response to this temptation was outstanding. He replied with the sword of the Spirit. The Word of God was His defense every time the enemy tempted Him. Christ had meditated upon the scriptures for so many years that they were the outrushing of His soul. We need God’s Word written upon our hearts, for the scriptures will be our salvation from failing and giving up in trials! This is what preserved Jesus through His temptation. The Word of God, which is like a two-edged sword, is the weapon that destroys the enemy!

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Quoting Deuteronomy 8:3, He replied to the devil in Matthew 4:4, “It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” In other words, Christ was saying, “I don’t move unless My Father tells Me to.” Jesus refused to perform miracles to prove a point or to show that He was anointed. He only moved at the behest of His Father.

Some people exploit their gifts, such as the gift of healing or the word of knowledge, to prove that they are anointed and that they have power. The motive for this exploitation is pride, to make themselves look good. This is the reason we must come to the place where we only do something when we know it is God’s will. If Christ had turned the stones into bread, He would have performed a miracle that was contrary to the will of His Father; and that which is not of faith is sin (Rom. 14:23). This would have immediately disqualified Him from being the spotless Lamb of God who was to take away the sins of the world by His sacrifice upon the cross. This was Satan’s whole purpose for tempting Him. He wanted Him to violate God’s will.

Doing God’s will or our own has been the issue of the universe throughout all ages! The Lord permits the enemy to try us to see whether we will do our own will or His will. Satan was not afraid of Christ performing miracles. He even invited Him to do miracles. What he was afraid of was the Lord fulfilling

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all of His Father's will. The thing that destroyed Satan was when Jesus said, "Not My will but Thine be done," and went to the cross. The thing that bruises the adversary more than anything else is men and women who are committed to doing *all* of God's will.

Christ was also tested in the area of His soul in Matthew 4:5-7. The devil took Jesus to a pinnacle of the temple in Jerusalem and said to Him, "If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone." Satan again said to the Lord, "*If* thou be the Son of God." It must have been a tremendous battle for Jesus to believe that He was the Son of God; otherwise Satan would not have repeatedly said this to Him. Here Christ was tempted in the area of His emotions. Satan wanted Him to please His soul.

The human soul delights in proving that it is "somebody." Sometimes we tempt and dare the Lord to save us, thinking that He will most certainly spare us because we are so precious to Him. Often, we even put out fleeces before the Lord, tempting Him. However, we must be very careful of this, because while God honored Gideon's fleeces, in the end Gideon led the children of Israel into idolatry

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(see Jud. 8:24-27). Christ's response to the devil in Matthew 4:7 was, "It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." Therefore, let us not seek to fulfill desires that are soulish.

The third area in which Christ was tested was in His spirit. In Matthew 4:8-9 the devil took the Lord into a very high mountain and supernaturally showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a single moment of time. He offered Jesus all these kingdoms, saying, "All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me." Satan was tempting Jesus to worship him. Worship involves our spirit. We, too, will be tested in the area of what we worship.

Satan was offering Christ what already belonged to Him by inheritance. The Word of God is very clear that all the kingdoms of this world belong to the Lord Jesus. However, Christ would only receive them after He had gone to the cross and fulfilled God's will for His life. Satan was trying to induce Jesus to bypass the cross and the agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. Yet Christ did not give in and take the "easy way" into His inheritance. Instead, the price He paid for the nations was His very own blood. We must be very careful not to take a "shortcut" into the promises of God. Paul said to his spiritual son Timothy, "And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully" (II Tim. 2:5).

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God may have promised us something, but we must not take it before it is His time. David was anointed by the prophet Samuel at the age of seventeen to be the next king. However, he had to wait for about thirteen years before he actually became king. David had several opportunities to kill Saul and take what rightfully belonged to him, but he refused to do so. He waited for God to exalt him to the throne.

In these temptations, Christ's faith and trust in God were being tested. The test of His confidence in God was intensified during the last few days before His crucifixion, and the ultimate test was at Calvary. In Gethsemane, all the powers of the Satanic world came against Jesus, trying to prevent Him from going to the cross. In the garden, Christ had to be strengthened by an angel from heaven because His human strength was not strong enough to withstand the tremendous attacks of the enemy (Lk. 22:43). He was in agony as He prayed to His Father to help Him. It was here that Jesus was compelled by His Father to drink the cup filled with the sins of the world (Lk. 22:42).

Sin put such a tremendous pressure and weight upon Jesus that the blood vessels in His head broke and He began to sweat great drops of blood (Lk. 22:44, cf. Heb. 12:3).

Leaning on the Strength of God

We will all come to the place where our human strength is no longer sufficient. As the Apostle Paul said in Second Corinthians 1:8, “We were pressed out of measure, above [human] strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life.” The phrase “pressed out of measure” means that our human strength is not sufficient to fulfill what we are called to do. The Lord tests our faith to create in us a dependency upon Him. Sometimes we wonder if our human body is going to be able to handle the pressures we encounter. These pressures can be in the emotional, spiritual, or physical realm.

At times we may even feel as though our heart is going to break. That literally happened to the Lord. In Psalm 69:20 David spoke the words that Christ would utter one day—“Reproach hath broken my heart.” Jesus did not die from the wounds inflicted upon Him on the cross. Although the nails in His hands and feet would have eventually killed Him, they were not the cause of His death. When the soldier thrust a spear through His side, blood and water flowed out (Jn.19:34), medically proving that His heart had ruptured and broken from reproach.

It is so human to rely upon our own strength. Consequently, the Lord increases the pressures in our lives until we stop trying to make it in our own natural strength. God wants our reliance to be upon His

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strength. Through many trials, pressures, and years of being weakened, the Apostle Paul learned to lean upon the Lord and His strength. He testified from a Roman prison cell, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phil. 4:13). Knowing this truth is the key to the whole of our Christian life! We can do everything God tells us to do, not by our own human abilities, but through Christ who strengthens us. God wants us to have the faith to do everything He tells us to do. But we must know deep within our hearts that everything we accomplish is only by His grace and strength.

I will say this about the Apostle Paul—he was a man who knew where his strength and power came from, and he knew how to tap into that supply of God’s strength. This was something that Paul had to learn by experience in order to fulfill the extraordinary call that was upon his life. He was chosen to be a pattern of longsuffering; consequently, he did not live an easy life (I Tim. 1:16). He was beaten many times, shipwrecked, imprisoned for years, faced great opposition, and was ultimately martyred. Paul needed *supernatural strength* to carry him through all of these trials. He could never have accomplished everything he did in his own strength.

Peter tells us not to be shocked or surprised by the fiery trials that come upon us (I Pet. 4:12). Peter said in chapter one of his first epistle, “Ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the

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trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ” (I Pet. 1:6b-7). The Lord tests us and chooses us in the “furnace of affliction” (Isa. 48:10). Malachi 3:3 says, “And [the Lord] shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.” Jesus purifies our hearts of self-reliance, just as a refiner of gold and silver purifies these costly metals of foreign elements.

A number of years ago, my wife and I were taken on a tour of the Rand Refinery in South Africa. There we saw gold that was 88 percent pure being heated in crucibles to 1100 degrees centigrade. It was at this extreme temperature that this gold became 99.996 percent pure, which is the purest form of gold possible. To our amazement, we learned that the last metal to be purified from gold is silver. Silver is very valuable in itself. However, it must be refined from the gold if the gold is to be totally pure. Even in our lives, quite often the last things the Lord purifies and removes from us are those things that are very precious and good in themselves. He removes from our lives those things that may be good and yet are not part of God’s perfect will for us. Therefore, He asks us to lay them upon

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the altar before Him and to allow Him to consume them. God wants to purify our hearts so all that is left is *His nature* and *His faith*.

The director of this refinery told us that when they boil gold at 1100 degrees, it is a very crucial moment. Refiners have to be extremely careful not to overheat gold at this temperature because gold cannot hold up under any higher temperature. That is why the refiner must sit and watch the gold. He cannot just walk by and casually monitor this refining process. He must concentrate on the gold. The director went on to tell us that when the refiner can see his own image in the gold, then he knows the work is finished.

This is exactly how the Lord Jesus deals with His people. He tries our faith through many fiery trials. Yet He is sitting in the heavenlies watching us ever so carefully to make sure that our crucible is not overheated, for we can be ruined if the heat of our pressures becomes too hot. Many times we think we are at our breaking point, where we cannot take any more. However, the Lord says to us, “No, you can take a little more.” All of our trials and pressures are working for our eternal good. The Lord’s image is being produced in us, and faith is being created in our hearts so that we do not trust in ourselves, but only in Him.

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Another very important aspect of the trial of our faith is that there is a specific time for our trial to begin and a specific time for it to come to an end. Ecclesiastes 3:1 says, “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.” Some preachers say: “You can be healed anytime—just have faith!” Yet the Lord spoke through Solomon and said that there is a specific “time to heal” (Eccl. 3:3). God has appointed times for everything in our lives to happen.

God had a specific time for Joseph’s liberation and for his trial to come to an end. In relationship to Joseph, Psalm 105:19 says, “*Until the time that his word came*: the word of the Lord tried him.” There was a predetermined time for his word of release to come, then Joseph was elevated from prison to the throne of Egypt at the age of thirty. Joseph could not be delivered until he turned thirty because he was a type of Christ, who entered into His ministry at the age of thirty also. This is another important reason why he could not be set free at the age of twenty-eight when he interpreted the dreams of the butler and the baker.

Sarah’s trial lasted for a very long time. For years she was barren. Yet “Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, *at the set time* of which God had spoken to him” (Gen. 21:2). Trials have a beginning, but they also have an ending. Many years ago, when my wife was going through a

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terrible trial, God said to her that He never leads His people into caves, He always leads them into tunnels. The reason for this is that there is light at the end of a tunnel. All tunnels come to an opening of light at the end, whereas caves do not.

The Lord sent the children of Israel into Babylonian captivity, beginning with the first siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 606 B.C. The reason the Lord sent them into captivity was that they had become proud and strong in themselves. Yet the Lord told them long before they ever went into captivity that their trial had an appointed time to come to an end. The Lord said to Judah, “*After seventy years* be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place. For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you *an expected end*” (Jer. 29:10-11). There is a set time for our trials to culminate, and that is when everything that God wants to do in our lives is accomplished.

In summary, God is going to try our faith with tremendous pressures. He weakens us and reduces us with one main objective in mind—to purify us of our human strength so that we live by faith and trust solely in Him. The Lord must prove to us through many trials and failures that our human strength is

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not sufficient. God is the author of our trials, and He is the One who sustains us through them. During our trials, we must soften our hearts and allow His grace to keep us from becoming bitter. His grace is sufficient for any trial we will ever go through. The Lord said to Paul in his sufferings, “My grace is sufficient for thee” (II Cor. 12:9).

Remember, there is a specific time for our trials to come to an end, and for us to come out of the wilderness and into the promises of God. The ultimate purpose of our trials is that we come out of them with the likeness and image of Christ, and that we come out leaning upon Him, even as the Shulamite in the Song of Songs came out of the wilderness leaning upon her beloved. May we meditate often upon these lessons pertaining to the trial of our faith. And may we live by Philippians 4:13, which tells us that we “can do all things *through Christ which strengtheneth us.*”

Part Seven

PILLARS OF FAITH

Part Seven is entitled “Pillars of Faith.” Hebrews chapter eleven eloquently records for us the lives of several great men and women of faith from the Bible. We are going to consider in this section the first eight pillars of faith—Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses. By faith these men were enabled to accomplish miraculous deeds. These pillars of faith received faith from God to do a specific work. Faith is *power* to do God’s will!

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Hebrews 11:1 tells us that faith is a substance, as we have also seen in previous chapters. It is not an emotion; nor is it a product of our will or intellect. It is not something we obtain through hoping or wishing. It is a gift of God. Faith is given by God to individuals to perform a specific task and to do God's will in a particular circumstance. Faith is granted only to accomplish God's will, not our own will! Therefore, we must not try to copy someone else's ministry.

If God has not chosen to give us the gift of healing, we should not try to perpetrate the healing ministry. We must know what capacity God wants *us* to move in and what His will is for *our* individual lives. The question is—What does God want *me* to do? The Lord supplies faith only for something that He has commissioned *us* to do. Hebrews 11:2 tells us that it was through this precious substance of faith that *the elders* obtained a good report.

In Hebrews 11:3 we see that understanding comes through faith: "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear." It is by faith that we understand creation. As faith increases in our lives, so does our understanding of the Word of God and the Lord's purposes for our lives. If God has called us to

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be teachers of His Word, we must believe the Lord to develop that area of our lives. It is only through faith that we are able to correctly interpret the sacred scriptures.

A number of years ago when my wife and I were teaching in a certain Bible school in Switzerland, there were about eleven or twelve languages represented in the classroom. It was a very confusing situation, because at times the different translations of the Bible contradicted each other. Therefore, I decided to study Greek again, thinking that Greek would give me the correct interpretation of the scriptures. After I had already paid for a Greek course, the Lord spoke to me and said, "Understanding does not come by Greek, but by grace!" So immediately I stopped relying upon Greek for my answers.

Although studying and using Bible study books is very important, ultimately we must look to the Lord for *His* interpretation of *His* Word. We must only use the Hebrew and Greek scriptures to reinforce and enhance the message that God has already given to us. There are many scholars who know the Hebrew and Greek scriptures by memory, yet their interpretations are totally wrong. It is because they have failed to realize that the correct understanding of the Word of God is a gift from God. It comes

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through grace and faith, not through our intellect. Revelation of the truth only comes by the anointing, and the anointing comes by faith.

Abel

The first pillar of faith spoken of is Abel. Hebrews 11:4 tells us concerning this godly man, "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh." Abel must have been a very wonderful man. The Lord Jesus said he was righteous (Mt. 23:35). The Apostle John also alluded to him as being a righteous man, contrasting him with his wicked brother Cain (I Jn. 3:12).

The area in which Abel received faith was in the area of sacrifice. Abel offered up a more excellent sacrifice than his brother Cain (Gen. 4:1-7). In other words, Abel had understanding of the sacrifice that pleased the Lord. Abel offered up a life that was pleasing to God. That is the reason God accepted the lamb he sacrificed to Him. Cain offered up the fruits of the land, the fruits of his own labors. But because his life was not pleasing and acceptable to the Lord, his sacrifice was rejected. God does not accept all sacrifices. He only receives those sacrifices that please Him.

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As New Testament priests after Melchisedec's order, we must offer by faith sacrifices that are pleasing and acceptable to God. First Peter 2:5 declares that we are to “*offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.*” What is the sacrifice that pleases the Lord? Is it an animal sacrifice, as they offered during the era of the law?

The Lord complained to the nation of Israel in Jeremiah 7:22-23: “For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices: But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice.” Even before God instituted animal sacrifices at Mount Sinai, He told the children of Israel what He really wanted from them. God delights in the sacrifice of obedience. He wants a people who listen intently to His voice and obey Him.

King David was a man of faith and he had a breakthrough in the area of sacrifices. Even though he lived in the Old Testament during the time when God had ordained animal sacrifices, he had a revelation of the true sacrifices that God really wants. In Psalm 40:6 he said, “*Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened [or digged]: burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required.*” The Levitical law and animal sacrifices were not really God's desire. They simply

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served to illustrate the supreme sacrifice of Jesus, the Lamb of God. What, therefore, does God really want?

David went on to say in Psalm 40:8: "I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart." One of the sacrifices that pleases God is the delight His people have in doing His will. God wants men and women who are committed to doing His will. Hebrews 10:5 says of Christ, "Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me." God has prepared a physical body for His Son, and a body for each one of us in which we are to do His will.

The Apostle Paul said in Romans 12:1-2: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." By faith we understand, even as David did, that a man who does God's will is a far greater sacrifice than a sacrificial animal. There is absolutely no comparison in the eyes of God between the two.

Another sacrifice that is pleasing to the Lord is the sacrifice of a broken and contrite heart. David said in Psalm 51:16-17: "For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt

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offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.” A broken spirit is that quality of spirit which is humble and does not resist God. It is the fruit of offering the sacrifice of obedience.

The sacrifice of praise is also an acceptable sacrifice to the Lord. Hebrews 13:15 says, “By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.” This is a continual way of life! Many times it is a sacrifice to praise the Lord, especially when we have been reduced and our blessings have been taken away. When Job lost everything he had in this life, including his children, he worshipped the Lord and said, “The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away; blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:20-21). Job offered to the Lord the sacrifice of thanksgiving.

By faith Abel understood which sacrifices pleased the Lord and which sacrifices did not. Cain offered the fruit of his own labors to the Lord, yet they were not accepted because his life was not pleasing to the Lord. I have noticed that those who leave the paths of righteousness often begin to give much to the Lord in the area of finance. They give their money, time, and energy to work for the Lord, but they are not willing to offer to the Lord the sacrifice that pleases Him. I have known people who have even

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gone to the mission field to serve the Lord, and yet in their hearts they are not pleasing Him. Instead, they attempt to ease their conscience by working for the Lord or giving to the ministry. However, God does not accept our sacrifices and labors if our hearts are not right, and if we are not offering unto Him the sacrifices that really delight His heart (see Jer. 6:20, Hos. 8:13).

God's account of these pillars of faith is not simply a historical record; for it also serves as a pattern for our lives. Through the lives of these great men of God, the Lord is showing us what He really wants from us. He is also showing us how we can have great faith. Abel's more excellent sacrifice is recorded for all of eternity not only for his sake, but also to show us the sacrifices in which God delights. We are to offer our bodies and our whole lives as living sacrifices unto the Lord. And as we have seen in the life of righteous Abel, it is *through faith* that we can offer a sacrifice that is well pleasing to the Lord.

Enoch

In Hebrews 11:5 is the record of a man who pleased God: "By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God." There is not much written about this wonderful man of

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God in the scriptures. Jude refers to him as a prophet who prophesied concerning the last days and the coming of the Lord (Jude 1:14-15). Enoch and Elijah are the only men who did not die physically.

Enoch was translated and taken to heaven because his life of faith pleased the Lord. The brief account of this saint's life is recorded in Genesis 5:21-24: "And Enoch lived sixty and five years, and begat Methuselah: And Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years, and begat sons and daughters: And all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty and five years: And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him." Notice that this passage brings out the fact that Enoch walked with God for three hundred years. He lived for sixty-five years before his son was born, but it was after this period of time that he walked with the Lord.

Apparently, for the first sixty-five years of his life, although he was not living a life of sin, his life was not totally surrendered to God. Yet it seems that he had a significant meeting with the Lord around the time of his son's birth. Nearly one thousand years before the great flood took place, the Lord gave Enoch understanding that it would destroy all but eight people in the days of Noah. This is seen in the fact that he prophetically named his son *Methuselah*, which means "at his death shall the going forth of the waters be." Enoch knew that the flood would begin when his son died. Therefore, from that time

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on, he began to walk in intimate communion with the Lord as a mighty prophet who also prophesied of the second coming of Christ.

Enoch enjoyed many hours of sweet union and communion with the Lord. The phrase “he walked with God” implies from the Hebrew that he walked side by side with God. This was a way of life for Enoch. Day after day, the Lord was the lover of his soul and his constant companion. Amos 3:3 says, “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” Enoch was united with the Lord in thought, deed, and heart. This is the key to all holiness—it is being joined with the One who is holy. To become holy we must walk with the Lord and spend time in His presence. Therefore, because the Lord was a delight to Enoch, the Lord delighted in him. Enoch’s life pleased the Lord! There is no higher commendation than this. Pleasing the Lord should be our primary goal in life.

Romans chapter eight shows us what it means to walk with God. Paul stated in Romans 8:4, “That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” He went on to say in verse fourteen, “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the [mature] sons of God.” It requires a certain degree of spiritual maturity to walk with the Lord and to be led by the Holy Spirit, which involves being controlled and guided by Him.

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This is not referring simply to being baptized in the Holy Ghost and speaking in other tongues, for there are many Spirit-filled Christians who are not controlled by the Spirit. They do whatever they want to do, and they make decisions without consulting God. Walking with God and being led by the Spirit really means that all of our decisions and choices are made under the unction and guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is allowing the Lord to choose for us. Certainly, we want every facet of our life to be controlled by the Lord, but how is this accomplished? It is only through a life of faith. It was through faith that Enoch walked with God and pleased Him.

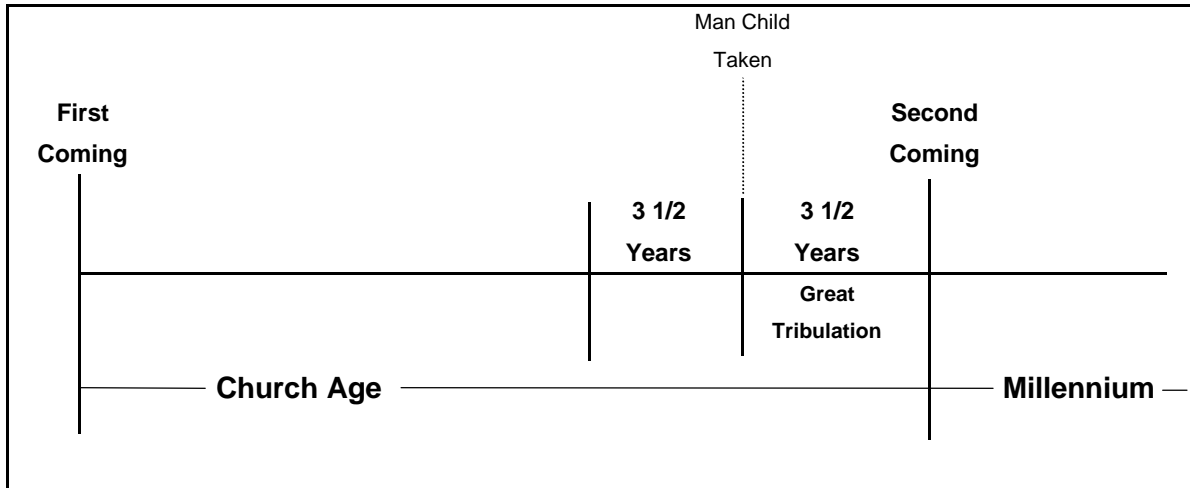
It was the faith that God deposited in Enoch's heart as he spent his life in worship and adoration of Him that enabled Enoch to be translated. Enoch's life, therefore, shows us the criteria to be in the man child group in the last days that will be raptured and taken to heaven at the onset of the Great Tribulation. Christ said in Matthew 24:37, "But as the days of [Noah] were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be."

In the days of Noah there were three distinct groups of believers: 1.) Enoch was translated before the flood; 2.) Noah was preserved through the flood; 3.) And there was a third group of people who were sometimes disobedient in the days of Noah (I Pet. 3:20). These people were not vile sinners. They

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accepted and believed the teachings of Noah, but they were not totally committed to obeying the Lord. Therefore, they were not protected from the judgment of the flood.

The Last Seven Years of the Church Age



These three groups of believers correspond to other groups of *threes* in the scriptures. There were three sections in the tabernacle of Moses—the outer court, the holy place, and the holy of holies. There are three levels in heaven (II Cor. 12:2), for heaven was the pattern used for Moses’

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Tabernacle (Heb. 8:2,5). The Apostle John also speaks of three levels of Christians—children, young men, and fathers (I Jn. 2:12-14). In Revelation chapter twelve, which speaks of the last days, there are three divisions of believers. Revelation 12:1 speaks of a woman which is a type of the Church of Christ. Out from this woman (the Church) there is a select group of believers who are totally committed to the Lord. They are called the *man child*, and they are raptured and taken to heaven at the beginning of the Great Tribulation, which takes place three and a half years before the second coming of the Lord (Rev.12:5). The second group is the woman herself, who is preserved and protected through the tribulation period (Rev.12:6,14). However, the remnant of her seed is persecuted during this time and is affected by many of the judgments (Rev.12:17). These three groups (the man child, the woman, and the remnant) correspond to the three groups in the days of Noah (Enoch, Noah, and those who were sometimes disobedient).

<u>In the Days of Noah</u>	<u>In the Last Days</u>	<u>Divisions</u>
Enoch	The Man Child	Raptured
Noah	The Woman	Protected
Sometimes Disobedient	The Remnant	Judged

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Therefore, since Enoch is a type of those who will be raptured in the last days, his life shows us some of the qualifications to be in this elite group. We must walk with God and spend time in His presence everyday. We must be led and controlled by Him, and allow Him to make our decisions for us. And we must live our lives in such a way that we are well pleasing to the Lord.

The hallmark of Enoch's life was his walk with God. He was a man known in heaven and on earth as one who pleased and delighted the heart of God. This is what God really desires. The thing that brings His smile more than anything else is those who walk in intimate union and communion with Him, and this all comes through a life of faith!

Hebrews 11:6

Hebrews 11:6 says that God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. Truly, God observes all of our labors of love for Him and He will reward us accordingly.

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By virtue of His nature, God is a rewarding God. He loves to reward His people! It brings Him much joy. When we *earnestly* seek the Lord, we must believe that He is going to reward us. Often, the Lord rewards us after we come out of a trial. This is something the Apostle Paul wanted the Christians of his day to understand. He used Abraham as an example of this in Hebrews 6:15: “After [Abraham] had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.”

Paul also said in Hebrews 6:10, “For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have showed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.” God remembers all that we do for Him, and all the right choices we make that are sometimes very painful and costly. God sees our deeds and rewards us according to our works. Therefore, by faith we must believe that God is going to reward us when we seek Him and when we do what is right. Surely, it is well worth it to serve the Lord!

Noah

The third pillar of faith in Hebrews chapter eleven is Noah. Hebrews 11:7 says, “By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.” By

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faith Noah obeyed the Lord, against natural logic and human reasoning, and built an ark. Noah believed God's warning when He said that He was going to send a flood to destroy the earth. This was a tremendous thing to believe, because up to that point there had been no rain upon the earth. There was simply a mist that came up from the earth that watered the planet (see Gen. 2:6). Noah built this ark in faith. Thus, it was through faith that he was preserved from judgment.

Noah was a special man with a unique calling and mission in life. Obviously, it required great faith on his part to fulfill everything God had called him to do. Not only the whole human race, but also the animal kingdom depended on Noah for preservation. If Noah had failed to believe the Lord and obey, we would not be here today. The nine generations before Noah and everyone after him depended upon him for their salvation, since the Lord Jesus came from the line of Noah.

Noah built an ark because he was warned by the Lord concerning things to come. The important point to remember here is that Noah was not the only one who had revelation of the coming judgments and the major events that took place in his times. Nearly all the patriarchs before the flood were prophets who had understanding of what was going to happen. As we have already mentioned,

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the prophet Enoch named his son Methuselah, which means “at his death shall the going forth of the waters be.”

Therefore, Enoch knew a flood was coming and proclaimed the message of the flood through the name of his son. Methuselah was a sign to that dispensation, and everyone knew that the flood would not come until after his death. Methuselah died at the age of 969, in the year 2348 B.C. From history, we know that this was the same year the flood took place.

Methuselah’s son Lamech named his son Noah, and said of him, “This same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord hath cursed” (Gen. 5:29). The name *Noah* means “rest.” Lamech knew that Noah would be the one who would bring rest to the earth after the flood. Lamech lived to the age of 777, which speaks of coming to perfection in body, soul, and spirit. He died five years before the flood.

Isaiah 57:1 says, “The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart: and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come.” Often, God takes the godly home to be with Him before judgment to spare them from it. Therefore, it is very clear that it

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was not just Noah who knew about the flood. There were *many* witnesses who testified of the coming flood.

Therefore, when we consider the last days and the second coming of Christ, of which the days of Noah are a type, we can be certain that not just one person or one group will know about the Lord's coming. It will not be an isolated revelation. In Amos 3:7 the prophet declared, "Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he [first] revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets."

Jesus cautioned us not to believe people when they say that Christ is here or Christ is there, because His coming will be seen by *all* (Mk.13:21). God will reveal His plans to those who are godly, and there will be a witness among many groups in the Church concerning any major truth if it is truly from the Lord.

Noah was given a specific task to perform. He was commissioned by the Lord to build an ark. This is a very important aspect of the ministry. As ministers and pastors, at times we will have to undergo building programs. There are tremendous pressures that come upon a person when he leads a building project. The reason for this is that the builders are claiming space and territory that once belonged to Satan, and they are forcing him out of there. The devil contests this. I have been amazed

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by how many pastors have failed, crashed, and have even fallen into immorality during a building program. Therefore, before we build we must be certain it is God's will. And we must build by faith, not by our own strength. The faith of God will enable the vision He has given us to be fulfilled. Noah, the builder, teaches us that we must build only by faith.

Abraham

Now we come to the fourth pillar of faith—Abraham. Not only is Abraham a pillar of faith, but he is also the father of our faith (Rom. 4:11,16). All of our spiritual roots are in Abraham. Hebrews 11:8 says, “By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.” This step into the unknown could be called “the obedience of faith.” By faith Abraham obeyed the Lord and went out in faith, not knowing exactly where he was going. All he knew was that he should follow the leading and direction of the Lord.

God told Abraham, a native of Ur of the Chaldees, to leave his hometown and his family, and go to the land of his inheritance. Going against natural logic and reasoning, Abraham left his own city, even though God did not explain everything to him beforehand. As the Apostle Paul said in Second

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Corinthians 5:7, “We walk by faith, not by sight.” However, the Lord did give him a *general* direction. He told him to go to the land of Canaan, which was west of the city Ur (see Gen. 11:31). This is a very important point to understand concerning guidance.

I have known many people who have ruined their lives because they moved without first receiving a general direction from the Lord. These people say that they do not have any idea where they are going; they say that they are just living by faith as Abraham did. Well, the Word of God is very clear that Abraham did have some idea of where he was going, even though the Lord did not give him all the details. Therefore, if God is leading us, He will give us a basic idea of where we are going.

This is especially important for those who have a missionary call. It is essential to know that we are called by God to the mission field. However, before we can go anywhere, we must know the country or region to which we are called. It may be that the Lord requires us to do certain things first before He gives us direction. One step might be to go to Bible school to get prepared for the mission field. Yet we must continue seeking the Lord until He reveals to us a definite direction.

I have experienced this in my own life. I attended three Bible schools in England. When I was at the second Bible school, I was quite nervous, because I still did not have any direction for my life. The

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Lord then graciously spoke to me that I would one day go to the country of France. However, I next went to another Bible school. Then after I finished that third school, instead of sending me to France, the Lord told me to go home. After having lived at home again for some time and working, it seemed as if the call of God had faded away from my life. At times I felt as if God was never going to use me. However, hope was still stirring within my heart, and I was clinging to the promises of God.

Then one day I received a postcard from an English missionary in France. He told me he was going to be in England very soon and asked me if I would like to meet with him. My mother received the postcard because it came in the mail while I was at work. She asked me, "This is what you have been waiting for all this time, isn't it?" And with great excitement I exclaimed, "Yes, it is!" When I met with the missionary, he invited me to France to visit him for a few weeks, so I took some time off from work to go on the trip. When I left, I waved good-bye to my mother, thinking I would see her again in about three weeks. However, it was seven years before I ever returned to England.

My first night in France, this missionary asked me to speak. He then asked me to pray for the sick. I did so, and many were healed. After a few weeks, he asked me to stay in France permanently. I wrote a letter of resignation to my firm and stayed in France for seven years. During this time, I came

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in contact with a former classmate of mine and stayed with him for a little while. He then recommended me to another church where I eventually became the assistant pastor. However, the important point I am trying to make is that I had a general direction from the Lord. I knew I was called to France. God then worked out all the other details once I arrived there. Abraham obeyed in faith and followed the leading of the Lord to Canaan.

Hebrews 11:9

Hebrews 11:9 continues the account of Abraham's life of faith: "By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in [tents] with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise." Abraham knew what country the Lord had called him to. It was the land of Canaan that the Lord had promised to him many times as an inheritance; and he knew that his seed would inherit this land with him. God called him to a foreign country, a country in which he was a stranger, and it was by faith that he endured. Traveling itself can be very difficult. Where does our strength come from when we are called to travel and to go to other countries? It comes from union and communion with God. As we spend time with the Lord, He places within our hearts a progressive

vision. That vision burns in our hearts and carries us through all the struggles of missionary life and traveling.

Advertisements always make various countries appear very exotic and beautiful. However, once you arrive in these countries, you soon realize that they are anything but a paradise, except for the few nice places that you saw advertised. When I was in France, I was the only Englishman in the Christian movement and fellowship of churches that I was involved with. I was very lonely, and I often felt like an outsider. Even though I had studied French for eight years before going to France, my French was not perfect by any means. Little children would laugh at me every time I made a grammatical mistake or mispronounced a word. What keeps us going in times like these, when we feel all alone in another country? It is *not* church life and human relationships. In times like this we must stay very close to the Lord and receive our comfort from Him. This is how Abraham endured being a foreigner in a foreign land.

It is the progressive vision that God places within our hearts as we commune with Him and spend time in His presence that enables us to endure the loneliness and difficulties of being in a foreign country. Therefore, if we neglect to spend time with the Lord, we will fail or eventually give up and return home.

Hebrews 11:10

In verse ten of Hebrews chapter eleven we see what actually kept Abraham plodding on: “For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” Abraham had a vision for Mount Zion. It was this vision of the heavenly Jerusalem in his heart that carried him through the difficulties of life. Some of you who are reading this book may be called to a foreign land as Abraham was. If so, it is important to remember that the promises God makes to us will carry us through. We will never make it through life unless we have an ongoing vision that is burning deep in our hearts. Vision is like an anchor of our soul—it keeps us stable and steadfast.

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Not only is it important to have a progressive vision ourselves, but we must marry someone who has the same vision and same calling. Before I even met my wife, God told her that He would give her a husband with the same calling and vision. Abraham was a man of vision. Therefore, he had to marry a woman with the same vision and calling in order to fulfill God's will and purposes for his life. Sarah was a woman of like precious faith.

If a man who is called to minister in many different countries marries a woman who is called to stay at home and be a good pastor's wife, there are going to be great difficulties. Because she is called to stay at home, she is not emotionally able to handle the pressures of traveling. This does not mean that she is not a woman of God, it simply means that she is not called to travel. This creates a tremendous strain and limitation upon the marriage, and they will not be able to fulfill all that God called them to do. Imagine what a catastrophe it would have been if Abraham had married someone who did not have the same vision and calling that he had!

Therefore, it is very important whom we marry. Our spouses will either enhance our ministry and help us to fulfill God's will, or will cause us to fall short of everything that God has ordained for our lives. Not only must we marry a fellow believer, but we must marry someone with the same vision and

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calling. Although there were exceptions, in the Old Testament the Israelites had to marry within their tribe. They could not marry someone from another tribe, because that would mar their inheritance (see Num. 36:5-9). Therefore, as Christians, we must marry those who are from the same *spiritual* tribe. Each tribe had a different vision, calling, inheritance, and different characteristics. Also, we must allow the Lord to choose our mate for us. We can observe what someone looks like today, but God sees what they will be like twenty years from now, and whether or not they will remain on course. Therefore, God's choice is always best!

Guidelines for Choosing a Mate

- 1.)** Marry a born-again Christian (II Cor. 6:14)
- 2.)** Marry someone with the same vision and calling
- 3.)** Marry the one of God's choice

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Hebrews 11:11

God chose someone for Abraham who would be compatible with him. Not only was Abraham's faith tested, but Sarah's faith was tested too. For a marriage to work and for a couple to live together in harmony, they must pass through similar experiences. If they do not have similar experiences, they will not be on the same spiritual level and problems will arise. My wife and I weathered many trials together over the years, and we triumphed in them because we had the same calling, vision, and faith. We read in Hebrews 11:11, "Through faith also Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised." Sarah had her own special trial. Sarah's faith was put to the test when she was barren for many years. She had to believe that God would strengthen her physical body so she could have children after she was past the age of bearing.

It is also clear that Sarah was rejuvenated by faith; for when she was ninety years old, King Abimelech desired her for her physical beauty (Gen. 20:2). Think about it! Obviously, God made her look like a beautiful young lady when she was in her nineties, because otherwise Abimelech would not have pursued her. Sarah and Abraham both experienced Psalm 103:5, which says, "*Thy youth is*

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renewed like the eagle's." Isaiah 40:31 also speaks of *eagle Christians*: "But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew [or exchange] their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint." Eagle Christians receive an exchange of their failing, human strength for God's divine strength, and this strength is received through faith.

An interesting aspect about eagles is that, at a particular point in their lives, they become very weak. During this period of time, they start to lose their feathers, and skin begins to cover their mouths so that they can barely eat. However, when it seems as though they are about to wither away and die, then something extraordinary happens to them. They come back to life with a resurgence of strength and energy, and their youth is restored. This experience of the eagle late in life is similar to what happened to Sarah and Abraham. For them to have children and to fulfill God's will and purposes for their lives, their youth had to be restored. This truth must be understood, because anything that happened to our spiritual parents—Abraham and Sarah—is for us as believers too. We must believe God to strengthen our physical bodies so that we can fulfill His will for our lives and finish our course with great joy! The key to Sarah's triumph was that she judged and considered Him faithful who had

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made the promise to her that she would have a son. This is the key to victory—it is to believe that the Lord is faithful to fulfill His word to us!

Hebrews 11:12

From the uniting of Abraham and Sarah's like precious faith, there came forth a countless number of natural and spiritual descendants. Hebrews 11:12 says, "Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many [descendants] as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable." Abraham was strong in faith, not considering his own body or the deadness of Sarah's womb (Rom. 4:19). Faith arose within the hearts of Abraham and Sarah, even though it was impossible for them to have children when they first received the promise. God arranges circumstances so that we cannot bring the promises to pass in our own strength. He does this so that He receives all the glory, and so that our hearts do not become haughty.

From the union of these two godly saints, there came forth two seeds. One seed is spiritual like the stars of the sky. The other seed is natural and earthly, like the sand of the sea. There is natural Israel and all the Arab nations that came from Ishmael, and there is the spiritual seed of Abraham, the Church. Paul said in Galatians 3:29, "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs

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according to the promise.” The Church is the spiritual Israel of God (Gal. 6:16). As spiritual sons of Abraham, we are heirs according to the promises that were made to him.

It is impossible to know how many people we affect by our lives and by the decisions we make! Abraham and Sarah have affected millions and millions of people. Likewise, if we are totally committed to the will of God, there is no limit to how many people we may turn to righteousness. Like Abraham and Sarah, may we be men and women who are totally committed to the Lord. For as we walk in their footsteps, God will multiply our spiritual seed and we will have a mighty inheritance in the nations.

Hebrews 11:13

Paul continues in verse thirteen, “These all died in faith, not having received the [fulfillment of the] promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.” The remarkable fact about the promises made to Abraham and Sarah is that they never saw the multitudes with their natural eyes. The promises were never realized during their lifetime.

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However, they had vision that enabled them to see afar off. They embraced the promises of God, even though they never saw them fulfilled with their own eyes. Therefore, it was counted to them as though they did see the multitudes. The key to receiving our inheritance and the promises of God is to embrace them and to believe the Lord, even if we never see them with our natural eyes. Abraham and Sarah never saw Christ come forth from their seed, and they never saw the multitudes in the Church Age, yet they inherited them because of their faith.

As we will see later on in Hebrews chapter eleven, some people die in faith and never see the promises of God come to fruition. You might know people who were given special promises by the Lord. They embraced them, but they died before they ever saw them. Yet, because of their faith and because they believed in the Lord, God counts it to them in eternity as if they did inherit those promises. Joseph was a man who inherited the promises of God by faith, even though he never came into them in this life (see Heb. 11:22).

King David saw the Church Age through faith (see Psa. 40:6-8, Rom. 4:6-8). And because he embraced what God was going to do in the New Testament era, it was counted to him as though he entered that age. If God speaks to you concerning something in the future, you should embrace it

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even if you are not living in the right time period, because God will count it to you as though you have entered into it.

There have been many people who have been given promises by God concerning the last day revival and have even had visions of it. However, many of them have died before the time. Yet, if the vision of revival is birthed into a person's heart and he embraces it, though he never sees it with his natural eyes, God credits it to him in eternity as though he had a part in it.

Hebrews 11:14

Abraham and Sarah “confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Heb. 11:13b). Paul goes on to say in Hebrews 11:14, “For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country.” In actuality, there are two countries and two cities, just as there are two seeds. There is the earthly country and the earthly Jerusalem, and there is the heavenly country and the heavenly Jerusalem. Abraham and Sarah were promised a physical inheritance, which was the land of Canaan. However, more than that, they were running to obtain their heavenly inheritance, which is New Jerusalem. Let us be sure that we inherit our geographical inheritance, as well as our heavenly

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reward. If we are called to be missionaries, God will give us the country that we go to as our inheritance.

More importantly, however, we want to obtain our heavenly inheritance and make it to the heavenly Jerusalem. If we qualify, our greatest ministry will be in the millennium and in eternity. God is preparing us for an eternal inheritance and an eternal calling. Therefore, let us remain faithful to the Lord so that we inherit everything that He has in store for us.

Hebrews 11:15

In Hebrews 11:15 there is a tremendous warning. “And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned.” The Lord has really impressed this verse upon my heart over the years, and I have shared it with many people around the world. It is rare that we love the country we are called to more than our own country. There is always a longing in our hearts for our home country, our own food, and our own culture.

For example, I am from England. The food in England is extremely plain and simple. In general, eating does not excite the English. It is usually done out of necessity rather than out of pleasure.

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Therefore, I had a lot of adjusting to do when I went to France. The food in France is very exquisite and delectable. Quite often, I had to spend three hours at the dinner table as I was served course after course.

In France, when people in the congregation of a church invite their pastor to dinner, they prepare the most elegant, fancy meal imaginable. I remember one time when a friend of mine, named Andre, and I were invited to a certain family's house for dinner. Andre informed me that since I was the guest of honor, I had to ask for two servings of each course to compliment the cook; otherwise I would offend her. While I was still busy eating my fourteenth serving, I pleadingly asked Andre how many more courses we had to eat. To our horror, they had already prepared three more courses. The next one was cooked duck.

Then I noticed Andre looking at his watch, and I asked him in English, "Why are you looking at your watch?" "Well," he replied, "it is 8:30. At 9:00 we have to go to the church for service, and you are preaching." In utter dismay, I whispered to him in hushed tones, "What have you done to me, Andre? First of all, I don't have a message. Secondly, I can barely move from this table!" We had to rush

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through the last three courses in fifteen minutes and then leave for church. I was drowsy from all the food we had eaten; but praise the Lord, we did make it through the service.

You would think that I should have enjoyed all the delicious foods and pastries of France, but that was not the case. All I could think of was the food that I used to eat in England. Often, my stomach craved English fruit cake and a cup of English tea. I was so ashamed of myself. Yet, the Lord was merciful to me and provided fruit cake and tea for me through an old English lady who lived in France.

I am mentioning these things because you will be surprised how much you will long for your own country when you are in a foreign land. At times, you really want to go back home. One of the keys to the lives of Abraham and Sarah is that they were not mindful of their own country when they left it and went to the land of Canaan. They accepted the differences in the land of their adoption, and did not constantly compare it to their own country. Unfortunately, this was not the case with the Israelites. After the Lord delivered the children of Israel from the bondages in Egypt and set them free, they complained during the whole wilderness journey. They continually compared the Lord's provision of food with the food back in Egypt, and all they wanted was to return (see Num.11:5-6, 14:2-4). As a

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result, only two men from that generation made it into the promised land and obtained their inheritance. The rest died in the wilderness.

I am speaking about this because of a man I once met at a convention in France. This man was an Englishman who had been a missionary in a certain European country. He said that all he could think of when he was in that country was how much better it was back in England. He began to pray that the Lord would make it possible for him to return to England, and after six months the Lord miraculously opened the way for him to go back. He said, "I am going back to England, and I know that I will never return to the land of my calling." Through this man's life, the Lord warned me of the danger of insisting upon returning to my own country.

Hebrews 11:15 tells us that if Abraham and Sarah had been mindful of their own country and wanted to return, they would have been given that opportunity to go back. If we constantly complain about the country we are in, and we want to return to our own country, the Lord will create the opportunity for us to return. However, if we go home, we will never get back to the country of our calling. We will miss God's calling for our lives and forfeit our inheritance in that land! It is just that serious.

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I have known many missionaries who have failed because of this very issue of not accepting the country to which they were called. And make no mistake, it is the Lord who will open the doors for us to return to our own land if we complain about where He has placed us. However, that does not mean He is pleased by our decision to leave. It simply means that He gave us what we wanted. As a consequence, we never fulfill everything that God ordained for our lives. Therefore, let us learn to be content wherever we are.

Hebrews 11:16

Verse sixteen shows us what country Abraham and Sarah had their eyes set on: “But now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.” Abraham and Sarah could be content in a foreign country because their vision and expectation were not set on earthly things—they were set on a heavenly inheritance and a heavenly country. As we have said before, that which enables us to endure the difficulties of going to a foreign country is a heavenly vision. Like Abraham and Sarah, we must live for eternity and not for this life if we are ever going to succeed.

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As we spend time with the Lord, He will give us a hunger and thirst for heavenly Mount Zion and heavenly Jerusalem. He may even show us in a dream or a vision the heavenly city. When we have vision, we are not deterred by our circumstances, but we know deep in our hearts that we are bound for Mount Zion. A heavenly vision enables us to triumph over complaining about the food and living conditions on a foreign field. If our eyes and hearts are fixed on the heavenly city, we will not dislike any country that God calls us to, because our expectation and hope are not in our native country, but in ultimately making it to heavenly Jerusalem.

If anyone had a right to complain it was the Lord Jesus. He left the glory of heaven to come to earth and be born in a stable. Yet He never complained about the conditions on this earth. He rejoiced to do the will of God, and we should model ourselves after Him. May we ask the Lord to place an ongoing vision in our hearts and cause it to burn brighter and brighter within us so that we may triumph as did Abraham and Sarah.

Hebrews 11:17-19

In Hebrews 11:17-19 we see the greatest trial of Abraham's faith: "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, Of

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whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.” Isaac was Abraham’s only begotten son. He was the one he loved most. The Lord said to Abraham in Genesis 22:2, “Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.”

All the promises made to Abraham concerning his seed and the land of Canaan were wrapped up in Isaac. Therefore, to offer up Isaac meant to give up everything that he had lived for and waited for so long. Abraham knew that without Isaac there would be no fulfillment of God’s promises to him, and yet God was asking Abraham to give back to Him all these promises. God was testing Abraham to see who came first in his life and whom Abraham loved most—Isaac or his God.

There is going to come a time in all of our lives when God asks us to give our personal *Isaacs* back to Him. Isaac represents the thing that we treasure most—a person, a call, promises, a position, or a ministry. At one time or another in our life, the Lord will require us to offer our Isaac to Him. Our decision at that point will determine whether we go on in God and continue in His will for our lives.

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God is jealous for our love and affection. He wants our expectation and fulfillment to be only in Him, not in other people or possessions (see Psa. 62:5)! God will only have a Bride that is wholeheartedly dedicated and devoted to Him. Jesus laid down His fruitful ministry as a preacher and teacher, and went to the cross because it was His Father's will. His Father came first in His life before anything else.

We must never let our call and ministry be more important to us than the Lord. We knew a godly Danish lady in Switzerland who had been a missionary to Africa. Her circumstances caused her to return to Denmark, and then she went on to Switzerland. However, her heart was still in Africa. (The hearts of all *true* missionaries are always in the land of their adoption.) While she was with us at the Bible school and missionary conference center in Switzerland, she cried out to the Lord everyday to allow her to go back to Africa. Then God dealt with her one day and said to her, "I want you to offer to Me your Isaac."

From our viewpoint, as we consider the account of Abraham offering Isaac, and we know the end of the story—that he got Isaac back, we might say that it is easy to offer our Isaac. However, it most certainly is not! It is one of the most difficult things we will ever have to do in our lives. Abraham had

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no *guarantees* that he would get Isaac back, although he believed by faith that God could raise him from the dead (Heb.11:19). Abraham was never assured of Isaac's return, and yet he offered him upon the altar with *no strings attached*.

Likewise, it was very difficult for this Danish lady to surrender her call to Africa to the Lord. You would almost have to be a missionary to understand how missionaries feel. Their whole life is consumed with the desire to be on the field where God has called them. Nothing else matters to them. So perhaps you can see how difficult it was for this Danish woman to surrender. The Lord said to her, "Are you willing to give Me your call and never see Africa again?" She then discussed what the Lord had spoken to her with my wife and me. We said to her, "There is only one way to go. God must come first, even before your call."

We prayed with her, and God was very gracious to give her the grace to give up her call. It looked from that moment onward that she was either going to live the rest of her life in Switzerland, or go back to her native Denmark to be just a member of a church there. She finally did return to Denmark. However, in Denmark the Lord revived her call and said to her, "I am going to send you back to Africa now." She returned to West Africa where she had been a missionary many years before, and she had

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a very fruitful ministry there as a spiritual mother to about a hundred churches. Eventually, she died there in the land of her adoption.

Do we see that this dear lady was tested by the Lord to see what was first in her life—the Lord or her calling? When she gave up her call, she honestly thought she would never see Africa again. Yet by faith she triumphed by putting the Lord first in her life. Because of this, the Lord caused her to be extremely fruitful in that part of Africa. God is going to test every one of us in this same area. May we cry out to the Lord for grace to always make Him number one in our lives, even as Abraham did.

Abraham's Faith Passed on to His Descendants

The faith and vision that God deposited in Abraham's life did not go with him to the grave when he died. His faith and vision were passed on to his descendants. The next three pillars of faith that we are going to look at are his son Isaac, his grandson Jacob, and his great-grandson Joseph. These three were all direct descendants of Abraham. The faith of their father Abraham was in their hearts too. If we are men and women of great faith, we will reproduce spiritual seed who are also full of faith. However, if we always analyze everything with our natural mind and sow seeds of doubt and unbelief, our natural and spiritual children are going to turn out just like us—void of faith.

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This principle of begetting like kind is seen in nature. God said in Genesis 1:11 when He was creating this earth, “Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so.” It is a law of nature that likes beget likes. We reproduce what we are. An apple tree does not reproduce an orange tree; it reproduces an apple tree.

In First Corinthians 15:46 the Apostle Paul said, “First the natural, then the spiritual.” Therefore, this principle is also true in the spiritual realm. Spiritually, we reproduce like kind. We reproduce what we are in our spiritual children. We pass on our vision to them. This is very true of the life of Smith Wigglesworth. I never had the privilege of personally meeting Smith Wigglesworth, but I have met many of his spiritual children and followers. Nearly all of them are just like him—full of faith. I once went to a church that Smith Wigglesworth had ministered in, and all the people there who were followers of Wigglesworth were mighty in faith.

When I was in France, I knew a woman who was one of his spiritual daughters. I remember one night when she went out alone, which was certainly inadvisable for a woman who was ninety years of age. Unfortunately, while she was out she fell down some steps and broke her leg. Her daughter, who

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was inside their house, suddenly heard her mother saying from outside, “Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!”

Her daughter quickly went outside to check on her, and she found her slowly crawling up the stairs with a broken leg. The daughter insisted, “Mother, we must take you to a doctor right now.” “No, my daughter,” she replied, “Jesus will heal me.” And the Lord did indeed heal her! About three years later I saw her again in another part of France, and she was as healthy as could be expected for a woman her age. Clearly, Smith Wigglesworth had reproduced in her the same faith that was in his life.

Therefore, as we now consider the next three pillars of faith, we must realize that the faith which was produced in Abraham’s heart was passed on to his descendants, because he paid a great price. There is something else that we must keep in mind for our own lives. We should concentrate on pouring our lives only into those who are going to carry on the vision. Although Christ ministered to the multitudes, He spent the majority of His time with His twelve disciples. He poured into their lives His message and vision because He knew they would be faithful to carry on that vision (see II Tim. 2:2).

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Isaac

In Hebrews 11:20 we read concerning the faith of Abraham's son Isaac: "By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come." Isaac is a type of the hundredfold Christian (Gen. 26:12, Mt.13:23). Isaac inherited the covenant that God made to his father Abraham (Gen. 26:3-4). He followed in the footsteps of his father by redigging the wells his father had hewn out. This speaks of the renewal of the promises and life which his father entered into by the faith of God (Gen. 26:18-19). These promises were confirmed unto Isaac after he had been tested through conflicts with the Philistines, who contested the ownership of his wells. His meek and quiet confidence in the Lord enabled him to not retaliate or fight for his rights. Thus, the Lord could include him in the Messianic line.

Isaac passed on to Jacob the same vision and faith that Abraham had implanted within his heart. The vision burned as brightly in the heart of Isaac as it had in the heart of his father Abraham. Even though Isaac was physically blind when he prophesied over his two sons, by faith the gift of prophecy flowed accurately through his lips concerning future things for Jacob and Esau.

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Jacob

Faith then was passed on from Isaac to his son Jacob. Hebrews 11:21 says, “By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff.” The life of Jacob, the twin brother of Esau, covers about half of the book of Genesis. He bought the birthright from his elder brother for a bowl of lentils, and gained the blessing of Isaac through deceit. Yet the Lord established the covenant of Abraham unto him at Bethel. However, he had to spend twenty years with his uncle Laban, the arch master of deceit, who changed his wages ten times. Laban tricked Jacob into marrying his eldest daughter Leah in place of Rachel, the one whom Jacob really loved. Thus, he was forced to serve Laban for an additional seven years to obtain his second wife.

But when the Lord finally took Jacob out of Laban’s household and led him back to the promised land, he was an extremely wealthy man. There then followed a period of time when Jacob was bereft of his favorite son Joseph through the treachery of his other sons.

When the Lord finally elevated Joseph to the position of prime minister in Egypt and Jacob saw him again, Jacob was a broken man, physically and emotionally. Nonetheless, he was rich in faith and he

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earns his place with the other pillars of faith for his prophetic blessing of Joseph's two sons. Genesis 48:9-20 records Jacob's blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh just before he died. What was he doing? He was prophesying of things to come.

We read in Genesis 48:15-16, "And [Jacob] blessed Joseph, and said, God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, The Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth."

Genesis 47:29-31 and Genesis 49:29-32 record the charge of Jacob to bury his body in the promised land instead of in Egypt. Thus, Jacob manifested the faith of God by also declaring with assurance that he should be buried in the land of Promise with his fathers Abraham and Isaac.

Joseph

In Hebrews 11:22 we read of Joseph, "By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones." Through this act of faith, Joseph was flowing in the spiritual line of the faith of his great-grandfather Abraham. Joseph was

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preoccupied with obtaining his inheritance. We do not want to merely receive promises from the Lord, but we want to be those who *obtain* everything that God has promised to us. Our desire should not be to just see our inheritance as the children of Israel did at Kadesh Barnea, and yet not obtain it (Num.13-14). Joseph wanted to make sure that he inherited everything that God had promised to him. And remember, we obtain our inheritance by faith.

Joseph left the land of Canaan when he was sold into slavery at the age of seventeen or so. More than ninety years after he was taken to Egypt, when he was one hundred and ten years old, he had still not forgotten the land of promise. He knew his inheritance was there, not in Egypt.

Joseph said to the children of Israel in Egypt just before his death, “God will surely visit you.” He assured them that God would bring them into the promised land. Joseph asked them to promise him that they would take his bones and bury them in the land of his inheritance (see Gen. 50:24-26). Joseph was a man of unusual vision and extraordinary faith. He foresaw what God was going to do many years later in the days of Moses, the eighth pillar of faith. We see in Exodus 13:19 that Moses took the bones of Joseph with him from Egypt when they began the exodus. Many hundreds of years after his death, Joseph was finally buried in the promised land in Shechem (Josh. 24:32).

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Usually we cite only two men from the land of Egypt who made it into the promised land—Joshua and Caleb. That whole generation (except for these two) wandered for forty years, and then died before entering the land of Canaan because of their disobedience. It was their children who finally made it into the land. However, there were actually *three* men from Egypt who made it in, if we include Joseph, because Joseph's bones were also brought into the land. Although Joseph died before the time of the entrance into the land of rest, by faith he embraced what God was going to do. Therefore, it was counted to him as though he had made it into the land. Proof of this is that his bones were buried in the land.

Moses

The eighth pillar of faith in Hebrews chapter eleven, and the final pillar that we are going to consider, is Moses. Moses is one of the greatest men who ever lived. As a leader of men, he is unexcelled except by the Lord Jesus Himself. His life was not just interspersed with individual acts of faith, but he lived a *life* of faith. Therefore, if God has called us to be leaders in the Church, we must follow the pattern of one of the greatest leaders of all time and live by faith. We are introduced to Moses in

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Hebrews 11:23: “By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king’s commandment.”

In the days of Moses, Pharaoh commanded all the male Hebrew children that were born to be killed (Ex.1:22). However, by faith the parents of Moses, Amram and Jochebed, hid Moses for three months after he was born (Ex. 2:2), because they feared God more than they feared this wicked Egyptian ruler. We are commanded in the scriptures to obey our human leaders and rulers, and to obey the laws of the land. But when the commandments of a government or king contradict God’s Word and His will, we must obey the Lord (see Acts 5:29). Therefore, by faith Moses’ parents hid him for three months. Then they put him into a basket and placed the little basket in a nearby river where Pharaoh’s daughter saw him and saved him.

So we can see that even from the very beginning of Moses’ life, it was faith that preserved him. The devil knew who Moses was and what kind of man he was going to become. Moses later executed judgments upon the gods of Egypt in the Lord’s name (Ex.12:12). That is why the enemy tried to have him killed, but he was preserved by the faith of his parents when he was newly born. Therefore, it was *faith* that was going to govern the rest of Moses’ life.

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We continue reading God's record of this great pillar of faith in Hebrews 11:24-25: "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." Because Moses was raised by Pharaoh's daughter, this would have been a difficult decision for Moses to make; yet by faith he made the right choice. We need faith to strengthen us to do what is right, because at times it is very difficult to choose God's will. Moses could have had anything he wanted in Egypt. He had all the privileges of an Egyptian prince. Yet by faith he chose to suffer affliction with his own people, the Hebrews. Within his heart the heavenly vision and light were burning brightly.

Moses esteemed "the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward" (Heb. 11:26). Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians. He was brought up in Pharaoh's court. He was in every respect a prince in Egypt, but he chose to go with the children of Israel. This was a very humbling thing to do. He went from being a *prince* to associating himself with the Hebrews who were *slaves* in Egypt, and he was enabled to do so by faith.

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Hebrews 11:27 is a very interesting verse. “By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.” Through Paul, the Holy Spirit records that it was by faith that Moses forsook Egypt. This seems to contradict the other accounts of this incident in the scriptures. When Moses recounted this event in Exodus 2:14-15, he records quite truthfully that he fled Egypt after he killed an Egyptian for fear of Pharaoh. However, the Holy Spirit records it quite differently. No mention is made in Hebrews of Moses slaying an Egyptian.

The Lord not only saw Moses’ actions, but He saw his heart and his motives. The Lord saw that faith was the *motivating force* in Moses’ life that caused him to leave Egypt. Moses was forced to leave Egypt in apparent failure; however, the Lord did not record it in heaven as a failure. Many times in our own lives we will go through bitter experiences that we think are failures. Yet, if our hearts are right, the Lord will count them to us as victories and triumphs of faith. Therefore, let us be encouraged by this truth!

Moses was able to leave Egypt by faith and endure this trial because he saw “Him who is invisible.” It was Moses’ relationship with the Lord that enabled him to endure. When Moses had to leave Egypt, the only land he had ever known, he endured because of his union with Christ. The one who lives in

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the presence of the Lord and walks with Him is the one who will overcome every trial, letdown, and disappointment. I have observed over the years that those who have failed in trials have done so because they have neglected to spend time with the Lord and read their Bibles. Communion with the Lord is the most important thing in our lives. If we neglect this one essential ingredient, we will never make it (see Lk. 10:38-42)!

Hebrews 11:28 continues the record of Moses' life of faith: "Through faith he kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them." After enduring for forty years in the wilderness where he habitually sought the Lord, Moses came back to Egypt commissioned by God to be a savior to the people of Israel. Moses left Egypt looking like a complete failure, but he returned as a mighty deliverer. The ministry of being a true deliverer is only produced as we go through humbling circumstances, and as we are willing to look like a failure.

Moses came back to Egypt and kept the passover, and he caused the nation of Israel to keep the passover also. Moses had faith in the shed blood of the passover lamb, which was looking forward to the sacrifice of the Lamb of God upon the cross. Thus, Moses had faith for salvation.

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By faith, Moses stretched forth his rod and the Red Sea opened. He then led the children of Israel through the Red Sea, which is a type of water baptism. Then as Moses stretched forth his rod again, the waters of the Red Sea returned, destroying the army of Pharaoh that was pursuing them. The important thing to remember is this—the God who imparted His faith to these saints of old is still longing to pour this same substance called faith into our lives today!

The Eight Pillars of Faith

Abel - His life shows us that it is by faith and obedience that we offer our lives as a more excellent sacrifice to the Lord.

Enoch - His life shows us that we please the Lord by walking with God daily in intimate communion with Him.

Noah - His life shows us how to receive grace to escape judgment and how to fulfill the tasks that God gives us to do, even standing alone at times, if necessary.

Abraham - His life shows us the obedience of faith, and how to be wholehearted for the Lord, for when Abraham was tested he was willing to sacrifice his only begotten son Isaac.

Isaac - His life shows us the blessing of faith as he pronounced the future of his two sons, Jacob and Esau.

Jacob - His life shows us the development of faith in God's sovereignty, provision, and prophetic word.

Joseph - His life shows us how to obtain our inheritance and how to enter into things beyond our age, waiting with patience for God to fulfill our vision and bring His fruitfulness.

Moses - His life shows us the decision of faith and the endurance of faith.

Part Eight

THE BLESSINGS OF FAITH

Part Eight is entitled “The Blessings of Faith.” In this last section we want to consider the boundless and limitless possibilities of a life that is lived by faith. We are going to look at a number of scriptures to see what the Word of God teaches about this subject. It is very important when we are studying a certain truth that we do not only consider isolated verses. We must take into consideration the context of these verses, for quite often the context of a verse qualifies it. In recent years, there have been

many erroneous and unbalanced teachings on the subject of faith because people have taken verses out of context.

Ten Conditions To Receiving

First of all, I want to consider the fact that there are conditions to receiving answers to our prayers. Many times in the scriptures we read verses such as, “Ask and it shall be given to you.” Verses like this have caused great confusion in the Church over the years. The reason for this is that people have failed to take into consideration the context of these verses. They have not examined scripture with other scriptures.

1. *Having God’s Faith, Not Our Own*

The first prerequisite to receiving is that we must have God’s faith. This is the premise for receiving. In Mark 11:23 Christ said, “Whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith.” However, the condition to this is in Mark

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11:22, where the original Greek reads, “Have God’s faith.” Therefore, to receive what we ask for, we must have God’s faith; otherwise, we will not receive.

Also, we must ask in faith in order to receive. The Apostle James said: “Ask in faith, [not doubting]. For he that [doubteth] is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord” (Jas. 1:6-7). When we ask the Lord for something, we must believe that He is going to answer us. If we doubt, we will not receive.

2. Having A Believing Heart

Christ said in Mark 11:23 that if we believe the Lord and we do not doubt, we shall receive. Jesus went on to say in Mark 11:24, “What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, *believe* that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.” Christ also said in Matthew 21:22, “And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, *believing*, ye shall receive.” Therefore, we can see that having a believing heart is another condition for receiving.

3. *Doing Good to Others*

The Lord declared in His sermon on the mount: “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?” (Mt. 7:7-11). The blessings of God revolve around His character. Because He is our Heavenly Father and He has adopted us into His family, He loves to bless us and lavish us with gifts. Even natural fathers who are unredeemed and are not upright delight to give good gifts to their children. How much more then shall our Heavenly Father bless us if we ask Him?

This seems like a very wonderful, unconditional promise from God. However, the Lord went on to qualify these verses in Matthew 7:12. “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.” We see that Christ links this condition with the preceding verses, as is evidenced by the fact that He starts off by saying

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“therefore.” He is saying that if we want to receive the blessings of verses seven through eleven, we must fulfill this condition. The condition in verse twelve is what is called the “Golden Rule.”

We receive in the proportion or in the manner that we treat others. God will do unto us as we do unto others. God’s character is such that He loves to bless His children; however, He only blesses us to the degree that we bless others. David spoke of the Lord’s nature in Psalm 18:25-26: “With the merciful thou wilt show thyself merciful; with an upright man thou wilt show thyself upright; With the pure thou wilt show thyself pure; and with the [crooked] thou wilt show thyself [crooked].” God deals with us in the same way that we deal with others. Therefore, our life should be a life of doing good to others. The Apostle Peter tells husbands to be considerate of their wives and to treat them with respect and honor, because if they do not, their prayers will be hindered (I Pet. 3:7). Our relationship with others determines whether we receive from God and whether He answers our prayers. I knew a minister who did not like to spend money on his wife for anything until the Lord spoke to him one day, “As you treat your wife, so will I treat you.” And, as you can probably guess, after that he began to buy things for her because he wanted to receive from the Lord for his personal needs.

I mention these things because when we are considering the subject of faith, we are dealing with the character of God. On one hand, we have a tremendous invitation in Matthew 7:7-8 to ask, and the Lord guarantees that we shall receive. However, He qualifies this in Matthew 7:12 by saying that we will only receive if we are treating others the way we should.

4. Keeping the Lord's Commandments

One of the most important conditions for receiving is seen in First John 3:22. "And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, *because* we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight." The Apostle John, the disciple who was nearest to the Lord while he was upon earth, had keen insight into the ways of God. He tells us that we must keep the Lord's commandments and do those things which are pleasing to Him in order to have our prayers answered.

We must see the relationship between God the Father and His children. Which son is going to touch the Father's heart? It is the son who obeys Him and does those things that please Him. The Father's heart is going to be opened to a son like that. He will reward and bless those who keep His commandments. But do you honestly think that He is going to answer the prayers of those who are disobeying Him?

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The Apostle John also records the words of Jesus in John 15:7: “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.” If we abide in Christ we will be able to ask of the Lord anything we want, and He will give it to us. Yet, the Lord Jesus goes on to qualify this statement in John 15:10, where He tells us that to abide in Him is to keep His commandments. Therefore, in order for our prayers to be answered, we must be obeying the Lord and doing those things that are pleasing to Him. Otherwise, this blessing in John 15:7 and First John 3:22 of obtaining everything that we pray for will not be fulfilled in our lives.

5. Having A Forgiving Spirit

In Luke 11:1 the disciples said to Jesus, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.” In Luke 11:9-10 the Lord said that all we have to do is ask and we shall receive. But one of the conditions to this blessing is found in Luke 11:4, a verse that precedes this wonderful promise. In Luke 11:4 the Lord addressed the issue of having a forgiving spirit. We will only receive answers to our prayers if we forgive others. If we hold grudges against people, we are not candidates to partake of Luke 11:9-10.

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In a similar passage on the subject of faith in Mark 11:23-24, the Lord says that we will receive whatever we pray for. Yet, Mark 11:25 qualifies this statement and says that when we pray, we must forgive others; and it is only when we pray in this manner that we shall receive answers to our prayers. We cannot take these promises about receiving everything we ask for out of context. They will *only* be ours if we fulfill the conditions. Unforgiveness certainly will block the flow of God's faith unto us.

6. Being Persistent

Another condition for receiving is importunity. The Lord Jesus said in Luke 11:5-8: "Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth."

After His parable on importunity, the Lord said in Luke 11:9-10: "Ask [and keep on asking], and it shall be given you; seek [and keep on seeking], and ye shall find; knock [and keep on knocking], and

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it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.” Therefore, the context of receiving is that we must be *persistent* when we ask the Lord for something.

We will not receive from Him if we only ask Him once, as portrayed by the man in the parable. It is as we ask and keep on asking and we refuse to be denied, that the Lord will grant our requests. In Luke 18:1-5 the Lord gave another parable about a widow who would not give up until the judge moved on her behalf. This parable also was given to illustrate that we must pray and keep on praying until we obtain our petitions.

I would like to consider again the story in First Kings chapter eighteen of Elijah praying for rain. Even the mighty, anointed prophet Elijah did not receive the first time he prayed to the Lord. He had to pray earnestly seven times before the rain came (1 Kgs. 18:42-43). It was only when he prayed relentlessly and would not be denied, that he received the answers to his prayers! Therefore, when we pray, we must pray until we break through and obtain that for which we are praying.

7. Asking for the Glory of God

There are specific instructions in the scriptures concerning asking and receiving. The Lord Jesus said in John 14:12-13: “He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father. And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, *that the Father may be glorified in the Son.*” This seems like a blessing with no strings attached. It appears that the Lord is giving His children a blank check and all that we have to do is fill in the amount. However, that is only one side of the truth.

There is a qualification here for receiving. That which we ask for must be something that will bring glory to God. We must not be deceived into thinking that we can ask for things that we know will not glorify the Lord and still receive them. That is not what the Lord is saying at all. Do you see what kind of errors we can embrace if we take scriptures out of context?

8. Asking That Our Joy in the Lord May Be Increased

Christ then went on to say in John 16:23-24: “Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. . . . ask, and ye shall receive, *that your joy may be full.*” This is another prerequisite for

receiving. Are we asking the Lord for things to please our human desires, or for things that will increase our joy in the Lord?

9. *Asking According to God's Will*

Also, what we ask for must be according to God's will. First John 5:14-15 tells us: "And this is the confidence that we have [in the Lord], that, if we ask any thing *according to his will*, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him." This typifies the relationship between a father and a son. A natural father would not give his son something that he knows is not good for him, even if he begs for it.

In the same manner, God the Father many times seemingly does not answer our prayers because what we are asking for is not a part of His perfect will for our lives. The Lord knows what we need more than we do. He knows who will be the best marriage partner for us, what occupation will make us the happiest, and so forth. Therefore, in His infinite wisdom and love for us, He often does not give us what we want because He knows that it will only be to our detriment and sorrow. Thus, we can see that another condition for receiving answers to our prayers is that we must ask for things that are the

Lord's will for us to have. May I also say that a mature son of God, because he loves the Lord, will not ask for things that he knows will not please the Father.

In James 4:2 the Apostle says, "Ye have not, because ye ask not." If we stopped here, we would think that the only reason we do not have the things we want is because we have not asked the Lord for them. However, James went on to say in verse three, "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask [with wrong motives], that ye may consume it upon your lusts." To receive from the Lord, we must ask with pure motives and ask according to His will.

10. Having Contentment

The last condition to receiving answers to our prayers is contentment. The things that we ask for spring from our heart, and they reveal what is in our heart. Are our prayer requests covetous and self-seeking? Do we ask the Lord for the fanciest cars, the most elegant clothes, and the biggest, most expensive houses? Or are we content with the things God has given to us? As we have already mentioned, we must only ask for things that we know are God's will for us.

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Queen Esther was a woman who received answers to her prayers many times, and she is the one who was exalted to the throne to be the queen of Persia. How did this wonderful woman of God obtain all of this? It was through the beautiful spirit of contentment which she possessed. When King Ahasuerus disposed of his first queen Vashti because of her rebellion, he sought for a new queen. All the prospective brides could choose anything they wanted out of the king's treasures (Esther 2:13). They could ask for the best jewels, the most beautiful gowns, and all kinds of cosmetics to make themselves attractive to the king.

However, the one the king chose to be his bride and to sit with him on the throne was Esther, because, as the Word of God tells us, she was content with whatever was given to her (Esther 2:15). She did not ask for anything else but what she was given. And she is the one who obtained the favor of the king. Throughout the book of Esther, all of her requests were granted by the king. So we see that contentment is another key to receiving.

There was something different about Esther. Her character was different from the other virgins. They were all covetous, and they asked for the finest of everything, but Esther was content with what she had. Many Christians spend their whole life asking and asking for personal possessions and personal

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blessings. And I suppose they receive, but is it so important to ask only for things that God wants us to ask for. We need to come to the place in our Christian walk where we do not have to ask for personal provision any more. If we have come to know the Lord in a very intimate way and He is our Heavenly Bridegroom, we can expect that our needs will be met because of our relationship with Him. We do not worry about provisions because we know He will provide for us.

The one who received the throne was Esther, because she did not require anything more than what she was given. Christians who use the blank check from the Lord to ask for extravagant gifts are not the ones who will inherit the throne and reign with Christ.

We must ask largely for the needs of *others*. Zion Fellowship supports an orphanage for children in India, and we ask the Lord to provide a good standard of living for them. Be assured, we can come to the place in our Christian life where the provision for our own needs just flows out of our close relationship with the Lord; and we can be content with whatever He chooses to give or not give us.

For ourselves, we should ask and keep on asking to be filled with the Lord's nature and character, and that we may behold His glory. The Lord is more interested in doing an eternal work of redemption and grace in our hearts than He is in blessing us with earthly possessions. His desire is to transform

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us into His image. It requires much prayer and crying out on our part to receive a new heart. Yet, in the realm of material blessings, we should be content with the necessities of life. But remember, we must ask and keep on asking God to help those for which we are responsible.

I feel so sorry for those who always demand better living conditions because they are disqualifying themselves from reigning with Christ. In Switzerland, I was the director of a very nice hotel, which also served as a Bible school. We had students from other countries who were extremely wealthy. When they came to our hotel, they were very appreciative of everything they were given. However, we also had some students from a very poor part of Greece. They came from homes that had dirt floors.

Do you know that the students who had been poor all of their lives were not content at the hotel? They wanted a different rug, better chairs, and so forth. Isn't that amazing? I have been in the ministry for over forty years and have taught in a number of Bible schools and have been to many churches, and I have observed that those who succeed in the Christian life are those who are grateful and content. Those who always complain and demand better conditions never make it!

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What I am trying to say is this—it takes a greater level of faith not to ask for our daily necessities than to ask for them. A proof of maturity is the ability not to ask for every little thing that we need. Yet in the realm of character and the gifts of the Spirit, we should ask largely for ourselves. Also, we should ask for the necessities of those for whom we are responsible. Remember, godliness with contentment is great gain (I Tim. 6:6).

Ten Conditions To Receiving

1. We must have God's faith and we must ask in faith (Mk. 11:22, Jas. 1:6-7).
2. We must have a believing heart (Mk. 11:24, Mt. 21:22).
3. We must do good to others (Mt. 7:7-12, Psa. 18:25-26, I Pet. 3:7).
4. We must obey the Lord's commandments and do those things which are pleasing to Him (I Jn. 3:22, Jn. 15:7,10).
5. We must have a forgiving spirit (Lk. 11:4, Mk. 11:25-26).
6. We must practice perseverance (Lk. 11:8, 18:1-5, I Kgs. 18:42-43).
7. We must only ask for things that will bring glory to the Lord (Jn. 14:13-14).
8. We must only ask for things that will increase our joy in the Lord (Jn. 16:23-24).
9. We must ask according to the Lord's will (I Jn. 5:14-15, Jas. 4:2b-3).
10. We must have contentment (Esther 2:15).

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How We Obtain Faith

Paul states that “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). Faith comes by hearing. It comes as we read the written Word of God and the Lord quickens a passage to us. It comes by hearing the voice of God speaking directly to us in our spirits. It can also come through listening to the testimonies of others.

Three Things That Faith Is Dependent Upon

Faith is dependent upon three basic things. The first basic step is *believing*; for it conditions us for faith. We must believe Him when He speaks to us. Then we must *confess* with our mouths that which He has spoken to us. It is only after we have done these two things that God can impart His faith to us. We can believe and confess with our mouths, but still not obtain faith. In order to have faith, *God must give it to us*, for it is divine. We can only have faith if He gives it to us. We cannot produce it.

In Romans 10:8-10 Paul says: “The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart

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man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” Hearing from God and believing God is not enough. Confessing with our mouths is an absolute necessity! Unless there is a confession, we can believe that Jesus is Lord, but we will not be saved. Therefore, our confession is extremely important. We must declare what the Lord has spoken to us for that thing to come to pass.

Faith is dependent upon three things:

- 1.) First of all, we must believe what God speaks to us.
- 2.) Then, we must rightly confess what He speaks to us.
- 3.) Finally, God will impart to us His living faith.

Declare a Thing and It Shall Come to Pass

We must declare with our mouths what the Lord speaks to us, and then it shall come to pass. However, this must not be taken to an extreme. Our declarations will only come to pass if the Lord has truly spoken them to us. God will not back up proclamations that He has not made. Mark 11:23

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says that whatever we declare will come to pass. However, that is preceded by having God's faith (Mk. 11:22). It is true that at times we are to declare certain things, but they must be done in the will of God and His faith must be there for them to come to pass. Making declarations on behalf of God must be done under the anointing and direction of the Lord.

Today there is a doctrine called "Name it and claim it," and it is very prevalent in the Church. There is a certain truth to this doctrine, that we are to declare things and believe that they will come to pass. However, any truth taken to an extreme becomes error. One of the verses that has been taken out of context in this teaching is Isaiah 45:11, where the Lord says, "Concerning the work of my hands command ye me." People have stated that we are to command the Lord to do certain things, and He will do them. Yet that is not what this verse is saying at all. The Hebrew text reads, "Concerning the work of my hands are you commanding me?" The Lord is not happy with people who command Him to do this and that. The NIV translation of this verse says, "Do you give me orders about the work of my hands?"

Matthew 16:19 says, "Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." This verse implies that we have power to decree

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and bind whatever we want. However, the original Greek reads, “Whatsoever is bound in heaven will be bound in earth, and whatsoever is loosed in heaven will be loosed on earth.” The Church must act in accordance with the will of God. Believers must only decree what the Lord has already decreed. We are only to echo what He speaks.

There is tremendous power in words. Those who take this truth too far are in great danger. It is true that they might receive what they declare, but who is producing the miracle? If it is not the Lord’s will for someone to have something and they decree it into existence, it is most likely an evil spirit that has produced the miracle, not the Spirit of God. Therefore, let us only make declarations under the anointing and guidance of the Holy Spirit after we have first heard from God.

Healing

Now I want to consider faith for the realm of healing. Healing is one of the blessings of faith, and it is realized through the agency of faith. There have also been many misconceptions and unbalanced teachings concerning the subject of healing. Therefore, we must look at what the Word of God really teaches about it.

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The ministry of healing was very prevalent in the ministry of Jesus. For the three years and five months in which He ministered, Christ had an impact upon virtually the whole nation of Israel. He drew great crowds, basically because of the mighty miracles that were manifested through His ministry. It was the miracles that brought people to Jesus then, and it is the same today. In many countries of the world, miracles are absolutely necessary to open people's minds and hearts to the gospel. In the Lord's speech just before His ascension to heaven, He promised us certain signs that should follow our conversion. "And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover" (Mk. 16:17-18).

We must have a balance in the realm of healing. And in order to have that balance, we must see what the Word of God from Genesis to Revelation teaches about it. In the book of Genesis, Abraham prayed for the women of Abimelech's house, and their wombs were miraculously opened so that they could bear children (Gen. 20:17-18). This is the first recorded healing in the scriptures. Then there

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was the healing of the bitter waters of Marah after the exodus from Egypt (Ex. 15:23-26). It was here that the Lord revealed His name Jehovah-rapha when He said, “I am the Lord that healeth thee.”

Then there was the brass serpent on a pole that God instructed Moses to make, so that whoever looked at it was healed from the serpents’ bites (Num. 21:6-8). In the ministry of the prophet Isaiah we find that he healed Hezekiah. Isaiah 53:5 says that we are healed by the stripes that the Lord suffered at Calvary. The New Testament is an age of healing.

It is very clear from God’s Word that it is the Lord’s will and desire to heal. Yet, this truth must be balanced by various accounts in the scriptures. Job was stricken with a severe disease, and he was not immediately healed. He had to suffer for about eighteen months to two years before the Lord finally healed him. There were some who lived by *principles* who told him that he was not healed because of disobedience in his life. However, this was not true at all. He was not healed simply because it was not the Lord’s time to heal him. The Lord had something that He wanted to accomplish in Job’s life through that trial and sickness, and He did not want to heal Job until everything was accomplished. Therefore, it is God’s will to heal, but it also has to be in His time. King Solomon said under the anointing of the Holy Spirit that there is a time to be healed (Eccl. 3:3).

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The Apostle Paul had a close friend and fellow worker named Epaphroditus who was very sick and close to death (Phil. 2:25-27). Paul prayed earnestly for God to heal him; and God healed him, showing mercy to him. The Apostle's life was a life of seeing one miracle after another. Handkerchiefs were placed on the body of Paul, and when they were taken many miles away and laid on the sick, the sick were healed (Acts 19:12).

However, in his own life Paul suffered for years with eye trouble and was not healed by the Lord (Gal. 4:15, II Cor. 12:7-9). Also, Moses lived with a speech impediment. Sometimes the answer to our desperate plea for healing is "no." Therefore, there are occasions when God chooses not to heal someone; but this is rare.

To summarize the subject of healing, may we say that it is God's will to heal in His time, but there are certain occasions when God chooses not to heal if He sees that healing is not the best thing for a person. However, if someone is sick, we should pray for their healing until God speaks otherwise. Paul sought the Lord three times to be healed, until the Lord finally said to him, "My grace is sufficient to carry you through."

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Therefore, just because someone is not healed does not mean that they are disobedient, or that the Lord is displeased by their lives. Sometimes it pleases the Lord to bruise His saints (Isa. 53:10). This passage presents firm evidence that we can be in the will of God and not be healed. That is why I say that we cannot live by “principles” alone; we must know what God’s specific will is for each person.

However, the will of God for these last days can surely be seen through the example of the power of God in the lives of the children of Israel as they came forth from Egypt in triumph. It is recorded that there was not one feeble person among their tribes (Psa.105:37). God, moreover, provided for them abundantly. Nehemiah 9:21 records that they lacked nothing during the forty years in the wilderness. Their clothes did not become old, neither did their feet swell. Furthermore, in the lives of Abraham and Sarah, we see that the Lord actually renewed their youth like the eagle.

A number of years ago, I saw a vision of the Church in the last days. In this vision I saw the saints of God vibrant and enjoying divine health. The thing that amazed me was the appearance of youth on their faces, as seen in Job 33:25: “His flesh shall be fresher than a child’s: he shall return to the days of his youth.” Let us not limit God, beloved, but let us understand the words of God through the prophet Jeremiah: “For I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds” (Jer. 30:17).

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Therefore, may we declare with the prophet Jeremiah, “Ah Lord God! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee” (Jer. 32:17). To this the Lord replies in Jeremiah 32:27, “Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for me?”

Let us believe the Word of God and receive faith from the Author and Finisher of our faith to appropriate all that He has in store for us personally in these last days. The reality of Jeremiah 33:9 will truly be realized in our times when God shall say of His Church: *“And it shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and an honour before all the nations of the earth, which shall hear all the good that I do unto them: and they shall fear and tremble for all the goodness and for all the prosperity that I procure unto it.”* Let us call unto Him, and He will show us what great and mighty things He has for all those who believe!

Let us also apply to our hearts all the lessons contained in the principles of faith outlined within these pages, so that we, too, can become those who are known as pillars of faith!