



The Character of a Disciple

Faith



Introduction

Everyone practices faith of one sort or another. When you sit in a chair, you have faith that the chair will hold you up. When you buy food from a store, you exercise faith in the one who is selling to you, trusting that the food is free of contaminants. You practice faith when you drive on roadways with other drivers. You trust that they will follow the same rules of driving that you follow. Faith fills everyone's day.

Placing our faith in the God of the Bible is not much different than practicing the faith of ordinary living. However, it is different in one big way. Ordinary living faith is based upon easily verifiable evidence. Trusting God requires that we trust God with little direct evidence that he will do what He said.

This study will help you evaluate the Bible's requirement for a life of faith.

The Essence of Faith

There are many words that can be used to describe and explain faith. Belief, trust and confidence are words that can often be used interchangeably with faith.

⁵ Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; ⁶ in all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your paths straight.

Proverbs 3:5-6

- Frame the one in whom we are to trust.
- Circle the amount of our heart that is to be involved in trusting.
- Underline in verse 5 the action of the mind that hinders trust.
- *According to context, acknowledging God in all your ways is one way to trust Him.*

Trusting is a type of faith in that the one who trusts is relying on the one being trusted. There is always something at stake, something that could be lost if the one being trusted fails. In the process of trusting, commitment is also involved.

³ Trust in the LORD and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. ⁴ Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart. ⁵ Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this: ⁶ He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun.

Psalms 37:3-6

- In verse 3, underline the results of trusting in the Lord.
- *In a lifestyle where caring for sheep and cattle is your livelihood, safe pasture is a very desirable thing. It could be likened to the present day idea of job security.*
- In verse 5 circle that which is to be committed to the Lord.
- *Notice the promises in verse 6 that results from trusting. There is a relationship between trusting God and righteous living.*

Faith always has an object of focus

If you sit upon a chair, you are trusting that the chair is strong enough to hold you and will not break. The strength of the chair becomes the object of focus.

If you are **too heavy** for the chair, no amount of faith will change the outcome. The chair will break under your weight.

Similarly, if you believe the chair is not strong enough when actually it **could easily hold twice your weight**, even though you do not believe it, the chair will hold your weight.

Faith in God works just the same except that the **trustworthiness of God** is the focus of our faith as opposed to strength of the chair.



In Hebrew poetry, instead of making words rhyme, the same thought is repeated in different ways. So following "Commit your way to the Lord" with "trust in him" is the poet's way of declaring that these two words are different ways of saying the same thing. It is an elaboration of meaning.

The Necessity of Faith

The author of the Book of Hebrews highlights the necessity of faith. Starting in the third chapter, he explained that the Jews who left Egypt with Moses saw God's great works but failed to enter the rest He had prepared for them because of their lack of faith (Hebrews 3:7-19). He then goes on to explain the necessity of faith for us.

For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith.

Hebrews 4:2

- Underline why the message they heard was of no value to them.
- *The obvious application for us is to combine the message we receive with faith. Otherwise the message will be without value.*

Further on in the tenth chapter, he identifies faith as an essential ingredient for gaining God's approval.

But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him."

Hebrews 10:38

- Circle how a righteous person is to live.
- Underline the characteristic of one with whom God will not be pleased.
 - *To shrink back comes from the Greek word "hupostello" which means to withdraw. Stello in the Greek means to gather in as when a sailor gathers in the sail. So hupostello gives a word picture of one who is taking in the sails. It is a picture of one who is avoiding the energizing wind of God in his life instead of harnessing the wind for effective service.*



Then, at the start of Hebrews 11, God makes it perfectly clear that anyone who wants to please Him must live by faith.

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

Hebrews 11:6

- Circle the condition that makes pleasing God impossible.
- Underline the two things that one who comes to Him must believe.
- *The Greek word for impossible, "adunaton", is made up of two words: "a" meaning a negative, or "not" and "dunation" meaning "able". We are just not able to please God without faith.*

The message that the Author of Hebrews refers to is "the gospel". But it is safe to say that the Bible has become the message we have received. In order for it to be of value to us, it must be combined with faith. Faith is the absolute necessity.

Hebrews 11

is often called the Faith Chapter of the Bible. Beginning with Abel, acts of faith are listed and catalogued so that we can know and understand that God does not change. Faith was essential to the Old Testament Saints just as it is essential to us.

The Basis of Our Faith

Faith that has no God-centered basis tends to be like wishing for something without any certainty that the wish will be granted. Faith as described in the Bible is not wishing. Biblical faith has its roots in the trustworthiness of God. If He says it is so, it is so.

When Abraham was 100 years old and his wife Sarah was 90, God told them that they would have a son. When he first heard the news, Abraham laughed because it seemed so impossible (Genesis 17). Yet, Abraham placed his faith in the trustworthiness of God's promises.

²⁰ Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, ²¹ being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.

Romans 4:20-21

- In verse 20, circle a possible aspect in his relationship to God that Abraham did not allow to operate in his life.
- In verse 20, draw a box around the thing upon which Abraham's faith was based.
- In verse 21, underline the basis of Abraham's faith.

The basis of Abraham's faith was the trustworthiness of God's promise. And, because His word is so essential to our faith, God makes it clear to us that He will never break His promise. When speaking of His promise to David's descendants He says...

³³ but I will not take my love from him, nor will I ever betray my faithfulness. ³⁴ I will not violate my covenant or alter what my lips have uttered.

Psalms 89:33-34

- Circle the thing God will never take away from them.
- Underline what He will never betray.
- Circle the thing he will never violate.
- Underline that thing He will never alter.
- *If God would ever violate His covenant or alter His promises, He would be un-trustworthy. But He has sworn and will not change his mind about each promise He has made.*

In another place, the reliability of God and His promises is proclaimed.

God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?

Numbers 23:19

- Two questions are asked in this verse that have an implied answer of "no". How would it affect your faith if either of these questions could be answered with a "yes"?

God's Promises

God made a very specific promise to Abraham that went against all reason and logic. Abraham chose to believe what God said.

In the same way God makes promises to you. Some are generally available to all who believe. The promise of eternal life is just such a promise.

But, like Abraham, God may come along side and speak a promise in your ear that is illogical and maybe even impossible from a human point of view.

Remember Abraham's faith: God has the power to do what He promises.

You can learn more about the importance of God's Word in the vDRC study entitled "Learning God's Word". You can find it in the "Basics" section of www.vDRC.org.

The Effect of Faith

There is no doubt that faith, when rightly exercised, has great power.

I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.

John 14:12

- Underline the requirement for doing what Jesus has been doing.
- Circle the amount of things done that is enabled by faith.

Matthew recorded the invitation to faith a little differently:

Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done.

Matthew 21:21

- Circle what we are to have.
- Draw a box around what we are not to do.
- Underline the effect on the mountain that faith can have.

The Measure of Faith

Often, individuals talk about needing more faith or increasing their faith. Jesus talked about the amount of faith needed to do great things.

⁵ *The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!"* ⁶ *He replied, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you.*

Luke 17:5-6

- Underline the request the apostles made.
- Circle the size of faith Jesus indicated they needed.
- *The mustard seed is one of the smallest seeds known to man. It measures slightly more than 1 millimeter or 1/20th of an inch. Jesus said if you had that much faith you could uproot a mulberry tree by speaking to it.*

Clearly, it does not take very much faith to accomplish really big things. But even when so small an amount was needed, the apostles were found lacking. After Jesus drove a demon from a boy, he had this conversation with his followers:

¹⁹ *Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, "Why couldn't we drive it out?"* ²⁰ *He replied, "Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."*

Matthew 17:19-20

- Circle Jesus' explanation as to why could they not drive out the demon.
- Underline the ingredient needed for accomplishing the impossible.

This is not an idle claim on Jesus' part. The Book of Acts illustrates how the 1st century Christians experienced this promise.

There are no boundaries to the exercise of faith other than that which brings Glory to the Father and to His Son Jesus.



To get some idea as to what can be accomplished by faith, read Hebrews Chapter 11. Look especially at verses 32-38.

Measuring faith is very difficult. Even when Jesus says you only need a little, that amount seems too great to apprehend.

Perhaps it would be easier to think of faith as a switch that is either on or off. If your faith switch is on you can do all that Jesus claimed. If it is off, you'll be frustrated in your doing.



Jesus commended some unlikely people for the greatness of their faith. Both were Gentiles:

- **The Centurion**
Matthew 8:10
- **The Canaanite Woman**
Matthew 15:28

Tests of Faith

Because faith can become an intellectual exercise, God allows events to occur in our life to help solidify and prove our faith.

² Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. ⁴ Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

James 1:2-4

- In verse 2, circle how we should react to the trials we face.
- *James equates trials with the testing of our faith.*
- Underline the results of having our faith tested.
- Draw a box around the effect of having perseverance finish its work.

Peter describes the testing of our faith in a different way.

⁶ In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷ that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, (NKJV)

1 Peter 1:6-7

- In verse 6, circle the duration of the trials that cause us grief.
- In verse 7, underline why we are allowed to experience trials
- Draw a box around the substance to which our faith is compared.



Fire is the means of purifying gold. As the gold is heated, impurities float to the top of the gold so that they can be removed by the goldsmith. In the same way, the fire of trials brings out the impurities in our faith so that they can be exposed and removed by God.

Summary

Based upon the questions and verses in this study, try to summarize the Bible's teaching about faith.

The Essence of Faith – How would you define faith? (Proverbs 3:5-6 and Psalms 37:3-6)

The Necessity of Faith – Why is faith necessary? (Hebrews 4:2; 10:38; 11:6)

The Basis of Our Faith – What are the fundamental truths upon which our faith is based? (Rom 4:20-21, Psalms 89:33-34, Numbers 23:19)

The Effect of Faith - What results can we expect when we act in Faith? (John 14:12, Matthew 21:21)

The Measure of Faith – How much faith is needed to accomplish God's work? (Luke 17:5-6, Matthew 17:19-20)

Test of Faith – Why does God test our faith? (James 1:2-4, 1 Peter 1:6-7)

Application

Is there some aspect of living by faith that God wants you to put into practice?

Describe what it is that you believe God wants you to do.

What is your plan for getting started?

Is there some reminder you can use to help remember what it is you have purposed to do?

Don't skip the application

If you are satisfied with simply knowing about faith without practicing it you miss the whole purpose of study. Study is not intended to increase our knowledge. Rather, study is intended to change our behavior. Application is the method you can use to put into practice what you have learned.