



The Christian Life

Module 7

The Dynamics of Faith

MODULE SEVEN

The Dynamics of Faith

INTRODUCTION

One of the beauties of the Christian life is the knowledge that God knows and understands our every need. **He knows each of us personally** and shares our problems and trials. **He loves us and cares for us** and is always ready to help us no matter what the situation.

We would not be telling you the truth, however, if we did not tell you that there are **two prerequisites to receiving God's help**.

The first is the committing of our lives to Christ, which we discussed in Lesson Six. Some Christians wonder why God is not blessing their lives. Often, it is simply because they have never dedicated themselves to Him and are still living lukewarm Christian lives that are spattered with sin. A total dedication of one's life to Christ is the answer in that situation.

The second prerequisite is our mental attitude. God wants us to come to Him in **faith**. Christians who do not have much faith in God are not living the full and blessed lives God wants them to have.

You may think this kind of faith is difficult to attain. But this is not so. All it requires is a simple act of faith and trust on your part, and He will do the rest.

The Bible says that God has given to every man a measure of faith. **There is no reason why you cannot have a dynamic faith in God, even if your trust in Him at this point is virtually non-existent.**

The purpose of this lesson is to teach you the principles of the life of faith, challenge you with the possibilities of your own faith by the examples of men and women in the Bible, and to show you how you can develop a dynamic faith. **You, just as Abraham and Paul, can live a rich, exciting life of faith in Jesus Christ.**

1. WHAT IT MEANS TO “HAVE FAITH IN GOD”

STUDY Hebrews 11:1-6.

Before we discuss faith it is important that we explain exactly what we mean, for the Bible talks about different kinds of faith.

Four Kinds of Faith

First of all, there is **saving faith**. You will recall that Paul says in Ephesians 2:8, “God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God.” **Saving faith** is faith in Jesus Christ as one’s Saviour. This kind of faith is initiated by God and must be considered of supernatural origin. It is not the kind of faith we are talking about in this lesson, although the faith we are discussing springs from **saving faith**.

Another kind of faith the Bible talks about is the **gift of faith**. This is one of the nine gifts of the Holy Spirit Paul tells us about in 1 Corinthians 12. This is a special kind of faith given by God, we will look further at this kind of faith in Lesson Nine.

A third kind of faith is usually referred to as “**the faith**”. Paul often uses the term (see 1 Timothy 5:8 and 6:10), and by it he means the Christian faith or belief as a whole. Again, that is not the kind of faith we are discussing here.

What we are talking about is **your own personal faith, human faith**, which, when cultivated and nourished, can bring about amazing results. This is the kind of faith the writer of Hebrews is talking about when he says, “it is impossible to please God without faith”.

You may be discouraged at this point and think that you will not be able to please God because you have very little faith and trust in Him. However, Paul says that we should, “measure yourselves by the faith God has given us” (Romans 12:3). **Your faith is there whether you are taking advantage of it or not.** Why not take a moment right now and **thank God for the faith He’s given you?**

We shall, in this lesson, seek to help you increase your **personal faith** so it might be productive for God and enable you to live a richer and fuller life. You can increase your faith right now by believing that this very thing will come to pass.

2. THE PRINCIPLES OF FAITH

STUDY Mark 11:12-14 & 20-25.

Jesus' cursing of the fig tree is thought by some to illustrate the kind of faith we should have, while others view it as a destructive act. Let's study this further to see for ourselves what it means.

It was April in Judea and the figs would not be ripe until June at the earliest. Mark, in fact, tells us plainly that it was not the season for figs.

The best explanation is to see the miracle as an acted-out parable. Jesus' hunger provides the occasion for the use of this teaching device. The fig tree represents Israel. This symbolises the nation of Israel, a people which honoured God with their lips but whose heart was all the time far from him. Like a tree with an abundance of leaves but no fruit. This made her ripe for the judgement of God.

Now let's look at Jesus' answer to the disciples' exclamation of amazement, "Look, Rabbi! The fig tree you cursed has withered and died!"

Mountain-Moving Faith

Jesus said that it withered because He had **faith** that it would. **And he says that if we have the same faith we will be able to move mountains** (mountain is a symbol of great difficulties). He says that if we pray in faith we will receive whatever we ask for.

Does it really only take faith to work this kind of a miracle? If that is so, could you ask for \$1,000,000 and get it? How about a new car? **Can a person, just by exercising faith in God, have a new car-or anything he wants?**

STUDY John 5:19, 30; 6:38; 8:28; and 12:49.

Jesus did not do anything He felt like doing. In fact, He said in John 5:19 and 30 that **He could do nothing on His own authority**. This has tremendous implications in His cursing of the fig tree and in the application of the principle of faith to daily living.

First of all, Jesus cursed the fig tree only because God willed it to be cursed, it was a lesson in faith that needed to be taught. Secondly, it means that **we cannot by faith attain anything that is not in the will of God**.

Paul's Thorn in the Flesh

In 2 Corinthians 12:1-10 Paul tells us that because he was caught up to the heavens and saw and heard marvellous revelations, God allowed a messenger of Satan to give him a "thorn in my flesh," We do not know what the thorn in the flesh was, but only that God refused to remove it. Paul asked Him three times... take it away, but God said he needed it to keep him from being "proud," or, in other words, from being so carried away by the revelations that he would lose sight of his mission to preach Jesus Christ to the Mediterranean world.

Paul, of course, did have faith to move mountains, as evidenced by his many miracles in the Book of Acts. But faith was not able to remove his thorn in the flesh because - **and this**

is an important point to remember, God did not will it to be removed. Neither can faith remove our mountains when God does not will them to be removed.

We need to be aware of the distinction between faith and **presumption**. A man thought faith was writing checks on an empty bank account, believing that God would some-how give him money to deposit before the checks cleared because he had “acted in faith.” When the cheques bounced he realised he had not really acted in faith, but **presumptuously**.

To “have faith in God” means to have faith either in His Word, the Bible, or in answered prayer. Presumption is acting on our own thoughts. And presumption can get us into a lot of trouble.

Faith, then, produces results only when it is coupled with the will of God. Before we go on to some examples of faith from the Scriptures, let’s probe the meaning of the word more deeply.

STUDY James 1:5-8.

Faith is the opposite of **doubt**, but it is not quite synonymous with **belief**. Many people say they **believe** that Jesus is the Son of God but they have never exercised **faith** in Him. James 2:19 says that even the demons **believe in God** but they have certainly never had faith in Him. While belief involves the intellect, faith involves both the intellect and the heart, or the emotions. In other words, it involves **our very beings**.

Faith is **acting on belief**. Faith is **confessing belief**. Faith is **keeping on believing**.

This same faith will change your life. It will put doubts to flight. It is available to you as a believer in Christ. All you need to do is make it a part of your life. As Paul says in Ephesians 6:16, we should hold up “the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil.”

3. EXAMPLES OF FAITH IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

STUDY Hebrews 11:7.

Noah was a tower of faith. By faith he built an ark, a giant ship the size of which was never duplicated until the late 19th century. How foolish he must have looked.

But Hebrews 11:1 says, “**Faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see**” God warned Noah that a great flood was coming on the earth, and verse 7 says that Noah “built a large boat to save his family from the flood.”

Faith in Action

What an example of faith in action! **By faith he acted on what God had told him.** Moreover, he confessed his beliefs that God was sending a flood, for 2 Peter 2:5 says that Noah “warned the world of God’s righteous judgment.” In other words, he urged his fellow men to repent of their sins and give their lives to God. But nobody believed the judgment of God was near except his wife and his three sons and their wives.

One might expect that Noah would have lost his faith in the face of endless ridicule as he laboriously built a super ship. But he chose instead to trust God, **and it was his faith which ultimately saved his life.**

STUDY Hebrews 11:29.

Here’s another example of faith. In the Old Testament we read that thousands of fleeing Israelites **by faith** crossed the dry bed of a large sea while strong winds held back the water!

For the complete story we have to go back to Chapters 13 and 14 of Exodus. Here’s the picture: the Egyptians had held the Israelites captive and used them as slave labour for many years. But when God killed the first-born sons of the Egyptians, Pharaoh released the Israelites from captivity. However, he soon regretted this and pursued them with a massive army until he caught up with them encamped by the Red Sea (Exodus 14:5-9).

Now we will let you complete the story by working through the following SELF-STUDY. Your assignment is to determine how the people of Israel reacted when faced with dire circumstances.

SELF-STUDY #1

STUDY Exodus 14:10-31 and respond to each question with a short answer.

(a) When the Israelites saw the Egyptians, what was their immediate reaction?

(b) What did they do? _____

(c) Did they have faith and trust in God? _____

(d) What was Moses’ response to the massive show of force by the Egyptians?

(e) Why did Moses unhesitatingly stretch out his hand and rod over the sea?

(f) When the waters of the Red Sea parted, how did the Israelites respond?

(g) What were the Egyptians exercising when they tried to cross on dry ground?

(h) Besides saving their lives, what did this great miracle do for the Israelites?

STUDY I Kings 17:8-16.

One of the most exciting, faith-producing stories in the Bible is this story of the widow who had reached the end of her rope and was ready to die. Here was a woman who had given up all hope and was preparing a last meal for herself and her son. As the narrative begins she is gathering sticks for a fire to bake her last handful of flour and measure of oil. There was no human way of replacing her diminished food supplies, for there was a drought in the land.

But God sent the great prophet Elijah to her doorstep. Obviously, Elijah knew he had met a starving, desperate woman. Yet he said to her. **“Bring me a bite of bread”.**

What was Elijah doing? First of all, he was **acting in faith**, for God had told him that this widow woman would feed him. It did not matter that she had only a handful of flour. **God had spoken.** Elijah had faith that God’s word and power would prevail. Secondly, he was endeavouring to bring the woman to the point where she realised her need for faith in God.

The widow’s first response to Elijah’s request is negative, and she tells him she has enough food only for herself and her son. Elijah answers by telling her not to worry, for God has said that her meal and oil would not run out until the drought was over.

What Would You Do?

Put yourself in the widow’s shoes. Would you share your last meal with a stranger who told you not to worry, that God would miraculously multiply your food for several years? (**NOTE:** James 5:17 tells us that the drought lasted 3½ years!)

Chances are you would have your doubts. And that exactly what verse 24 of 1 Kings 17 indicates for, later when Elijah restored the woman’s dead son to life, she says, **“Now I know** for sure that you are a man of God, and that the Lord truly speaks through you.”

But through her doubts God spoke to her, verse 9 tells us that He had **instructed** her to feed Elijah. The narrative does not indicate that God spoke directly to the widow as He did to Elijah, but God speaks both to our hearts and to our minds, and He had at some point spoken to this woman’s heart and assured her that Elijah was a man of God.

It would have been easy for her to have had great faith if she and her son were full and there was plenty of food on the shelf. But this was not so, and being human her faith was small. The point is that **she put her small faith to work and God did great things with it.**

At this point you might wonder, "Is faith acting on what some-one else tells us to do? Not necessarily, and we need to be careful here. One young couple got into trouble because they acted on the words of a man who was supposed to be a servant of God. He "prophesied" that they were to go to a Christian university where a business man in the town would supply all their financial needs. The man did not have the funds to help them, nor did he think God wanted him to do so. The couple returned home broke and sadly disillusioned.

What is the difference between this couple's story and the story of the widow woman? The difference lies in three words God spoke to Elijah in 1 Kings 17:9: "**I have instructed.**" If God instructs us to do something He will give us peace in our hearts about it. **Never act on somebody's orders or advice - EVEN IF HE IS A PROVEN SERVANT OF GOD - without the inner witness of the Holy Spirit.** That would be presumption and foolishness.

Real faith is trusting in **God's plan** for you, even when you have doubts. **And faith is what produced the miracle of the multiplied flour and oil.** Had this woman not acted in faith she would have starved to death.

Thank God that He provides for our needs and responds to us when we come to Him in faith!

There are numerous exciting tales of faith in the Old Testament which we do not have room to investigate here. As you take time to read them for yourself, God will speak to you through them and your own personal faith will grow.

4. EXAMPLES OF FAITH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

STUDY Mark 4:35-41.

Here's a story that has more than one message. It is a story that speaks of the divinity of Jesus and the power of God. Based on those two facts, this story calls us to a greater faith in the God of salvation.

Put yourself in the disciples' place. They were rowing across the Sea of Galilee when a severe wind storm, common to the sea, suddenly arose. Raging waves swept into their boat. It looked like they would drown if this kept up.

What was Jesus doing while this was going on? **Incredibly, He was sleeping.** How is it possible a person could remain fast asleep in a boat that was being buffeted by a storm. There's only one answer: **Jesus was in perfect peace because He, the very Creator of nature, was in control.**

Jesus Has Control

So it is with our lives. Jesus is in control. Sometimes wind and waves threaten to drown us in the sea of modern life. **But we need to realise, by faith, that Jesus is with us, in perfect control of all of life's situations.**

The disciples ignored that fact and were overcome with fear. They were certain they were going to drown. Yet we see a trace of faith in their hearts, for they did turn to Jesus for help. And He responded by calming the wind and the sea.

What a Saviour we have in Jesus! He has power over the elements and power over the problems we all face. Let us look to Him not in doubt but in faith, and we too shall see Him calm the wind and the waves of our lives.

SELF-STUDY #2

STUDY Luke 7:1-10 and answer each question carefully.

(a) What was the attitude of the Roman officer toward his slave?

(b) Why did the Roman officer, a Gentile, get his Jewish friends to seek Jesus?

(c) What were the elders of the Jew trying to do when they told Jesus how the Roman officer had helped them? _____

(d) What was Jesus impressed with? _____

Many conclusions could be drawn from this story. To test your understanding of them, simply answer the following questions with a YES or a NO:

- (e) Does God prefer one race over another race? _____
 - (f) Do we need to impress Jesus with our works? _____
 - (g) Can a man have piety without faith? _____
 - (h) Does Jesus really want us to come to Him with our problems? _____
- -

STUDY Acts 14:8-10.

Suppose you had been crippled from birth and had never walked. There was such a man sitting (probably begging) in the town of Lystra toward the middle of the first century.

One day as he was sitting there, a strange man passed by him. This man preached about the Son of God, a Jew named Jesus, who died for the sins of mankind and rose again on the third day.

As he listened to Paul tell of this miracle-working Saviour named Jesus, **faith began to build in the cripple's heart**. He began to think that maybe Jesus' followers could work miracles as Jesus did. Maybe there was hope for his crippled feet.

Suddenly the preacher is looking at him! He commands him in a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet!" the power of God immediately sweeps down upon the man, and, in **response to the faith that is building in his heart**, he leaps to his feet. For the first time in his life he can walk. God has made him whole.

We don't know much about the crippled man from Lystra - we don't even know his name. But what a story of faith! Unlike some of the other miraculous stories in the Scriptures, you won't find any doubt expressed here. When Paul commanded him to stand on his feet he didn't look at his deformity and say, "But that's impossible. I'm crippled".

Rather, **this man looked to Jesus**. He had just heard of Him through Paul's preaching, and his mind and heart were stirred to faith. **He simply did not let doubt linger at his doorstep-and because of this**, faith worked a miracle.

Faith Still Works Miracles.

Modern man is surrounded by doubt. Even Christians are often shrouded with unbelief in the very One who died and rose again for their sins. We have seen so many charlatans and been fooled by so many empty promises that faith in Almighty God is sometimes hard to come by. **If only we could have the faith of the crippled man from Lystra!**

Take heart, for there's good news. You **can** have the faith of the man from Lystra. Having studied six examples of faith from the Bible, your faith has already been strengthened whether you realise it or not. Now all you need to do is believe that you can have the same kind of faith as the man whose crippled feet were made normal. Remember - **believing is only a step away from receiving**.

5. HOW TO APPROPRIATE AND INCREASE YOUR FAITH IN GOD.

STUDY Luke 22:31-34.

Jesus prayed that Peter's faith would not fail in the hour of temptation when Satan attempted to get him to turn away from Jesus. The kind of faith Jesus is referring to here is saving faith, but the lesson is clear: **Jesus is praying for us.**

In Romans 8:34, Paul says that Jesus is sitting at the right hand of God, interceding for us, and Hebrews 7:25 likewise says that Jesus "lives forever to intercede with God on their behalf (those who believe in Him)".

An intercessor is a sort of Communication Bridge between two parties. And Jesus is just that for us. Who could be more effective? He knows our weaknesses our doubts, and He is praying that we will have more faith.

STUDY Mark 9:20-27.

God appreciates honesty. Some people try to fool God with their phony prayers and false piety. But God knows the secrets of our hearts (see Psalms 44:21 and Romans 2:16). We would receive much more from God if we would confess our weaknesses rather than trying to bluff our way through our problems.

The man in our story confessed to Jesus that he lacked much faith. Rather than fake it, he cried out, "help me overcome my unbelief!" **Jesus did just that.**

We need to approach God open and honestly. When we confess our lack of faith and ask Him in all sincerity **for faith** we shall receive just that. Psalm 84:11 says, "The Lord will withhold no good thing from those who do what is right."

STUDY Romans 10:17.

In this verse Paul is not talking about personal faith, but saving faith. Nevertheless, it is a fact that our faith is often built up either from reading the Word of God (the same as **hearing** to the early Christians who had few copies of the Scriptures and New Testament letters), or from listening to the testimonies of others who have received answers to prayer. Faith is contagious, and the more we study the Bible and the more we hear about the faith of others, the more our own faith is going to grow.

Keep On Believing

STUDY Luke 18:18.

If you really want your faith to grow - and who doesn't - there's no substitute for persistence. Jesus told the parable of a widow who **refused to believe that the judge would not rule in her favour.** She put doubt to flight by going back to him time and time again. After a while the judge changed his mind and ruled in her favour.

What is Jesus saying? **Don't give up because God has not immediately answered your prayer.** Faith is **keeping on** believing. If God has spoken to you about something within His will for you, **keep on trusting Him until your belief turns to reality.**

In some instances, quite a period of time may pass before God's word is realised. But God does not let us down. He keeps every single one of His precious promises. In Numbers 23:19 we read, "God is not a man, so he does not lie. He is not human, so he does not

change his mind. Has he ever spoken and failed to act? Has he ever promised and not carried it through?" **When you stand on the promises of God and see His word come true, your faith can only increase.**

And God would have you know that your faith **can grow** from the size of a mustard seed into an enormous, fruit-producing tree. **So use whatever faith you have now.** As you do God will nourish it and give you a more powerful faith than you ever thought possible.

Regardless of how much faith we have, there are moments when our faith is at a low ebb. One of the ways to overcome this is found in Psalms 103:2. David says to "never forget the good things he does for me." Remembering what God has done for us in the past builds our faith for the present. Whenever your faith is weak, just count up the ways God has answered your prayers and ministered to you in the past. You'll be surprised how God will use this to give your faith a needed shot in the arm.

Remember: (1) You **already have** a measure of faith. (2) **You can have** a living, dynamic faith in God that will bring about miraculous things in your daily life. **Believing is a step away from receiving.**

SELF-STUDY #3

1. Briefly describe the four kinds of faith
 - (a) Saving faith_____
 - (b) The gift of faith_____
 - (c) "The faith" _____
 - (d) Personal faith_____
2. God gives faith only to certain people. T () F ()
3. Why did Jesus curse the fig tree? (2 answers)
 - (a) _____
 - (b) _____
4. We can get **anything** from God if we just pray in faith. T () F ()
5. Paul obviously lacked faith because God did not remove his thorn in the flesh.
T () F ()
6. What is presumption? _____
7. The power of faith is intricately related to the will of God. T () F ()
8. Faith effectively shields us against the doubts Satan hurls at us. T () F ()
9. By building the ark, Noah demonstrated that faith is the conviction of things not seen. T () F ()
10. Why did Elijah ask the widow woman for food when he knew she as starving?
 - (a) He couldn't get food any other way.
 - (b) He knew her friends would bring her more food.
 - (c) He believed God would multiply her food supplies.
 - (d) He planned to work a miracle.
11. Why did, the widow woman feed Elijah?
 - (a) God had told her to do so.
 - (b) She was afraid to refuse Elijah
 - (c) She did not want to offend God.
 - (d) She didn't mind sharing food since she was dying anyway.
12. What was it that caused God to increase her food supplies? _____
13. What had Jesus' disciples failed to realise when they became afraid during the wind storm? _____
14. The crippled man from Lystra struggled to believe that God would heal him.
T () F ()
15. It is better to put up a front than to let God think we have little faith. T () F ()
16. If God does not answer our prayers right away, He is probably not going to.
T () F ()
17. One of the best ways to increase our faith is to use our faith. T () F ()
18. The recollection of God's past benefits can be a real faith-builder. T () F ()

ANSWERS TO SELF-STUDY #1

- (a) They were afraid and panicked.
- (b) They cried out to God
- (c) No.
- (d) Faith in God.
- (e) Because God had told him to do it.
- (f) They exercised their faith and walked across!
- (g) Presumption.
- (h) It strengthened their faith in God.

ANSWERS TO SELF-STUDY #2

- (a) He highly valued him.
- (b) He didn't think Jesus would want to visit his home.
- (c) They were trying to impress Jesus with his works.
- (d) His faith.
- (e) No.
- (f) No.
- (g) Yes.
- (h) Yes.

ANSWERS TO SELF-STUDY #3

1.
 - (a) Faith in Jesus Christ as one's Saviour
 - (b) A special faith given by God.
 - (c) The Christian faith or belief as a whole
 - (d) Human faith of the mind and spirit.
2. F
3.
 - (a) As a lesson on faith
 - (b) It was God's will.
4. F
5. F
6. Acting on our own thoughts
7. T
8. T

9. T
10. C
11. A
12. Her faith
13. Jesus was in control of their lives.
14. F
15. F
16. F
17. T
18. T