

## The Life of Faith: Prologue

'Faith' is a popular word to throw around. Employed by both Christians and non-believers in various sorts of contexts, it has come to have quite the nebulous definition. One might think that Christians have a better grasp on what the word means, seeing as the core of our religion rests on putting faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ. Although salvation by faith alone seems to be understood well enough by those adhering to an Evangelical flavor of Christianity, the purpose and efficacy of faith in other matters of life seems to have been marginalized due to our over-emphasis on grace and predestination. In hopes of avoiding irreverence, we oftentimes point to the providential grace of God to the extent of denying what Scripture teaches concerning our own actions, that is, that our faith and prayers have an objective effect outside of the believer. The purpose of this study is to demonstrate what the New Testament teaches about faith in non-salvific contexts, and how we are to apply this knowledge to our lives in a practical manner.

I have heard faith described by the following analogy: *two people are sitting next to one another on an airplane. One has faith in the ability of the plane and the competency of the pilot, while the other does not. During the flight, the man with faith is calm and confident, whereas the man without faith is fearful and uneasy. Neither the faith nor the lack thereof had any effect on the flight itself, but only worked to affect the disposition of each man throughout.* As regards faith exerted by Christians, this analogy is not entirely accurate. When a believer puts forth, or fails to put forth faith, not only is his disposition affected, but the flight is as well. Faith has an objective impact on things outside of the one who possesses it.

To a Western Christian mind, a mind that has been nurtured in the doubt-filled spirit of this age, the above idea probably sounds ridiculous, or even heretical. However, most of these sentiments come from a lack of experience, not a biblical teaching. We are not used to seeing the practical outworking of faith manifest in an obvious manner, or simply are ignorant of it when it does. Above and beyond our assumptions concerning predestination and God's sovereignty, as Christians we must be ready at a moment's notice to submit to the Word of God, no matter where that may take us. A commonly accepted method of hermeneutic is to interpret obscure passages in light of that which is clear. What if I told you that there are many more biblical passages that clearly point to the efficacy of faith and prayer than there are passages that clearly portray individual, non-salvific events as being predestined? Either way, if both are affirmed in Scripture, both are true, even if we are unable to perceive the mechanism whereby both function in harmony. Together we will now embark on a survey of New Testament narrative in order to draw out exactly what the Scriptures are teaching about non-salvific faith. Over a dozen examples will be shown to affirm the efficacy of faith outside the one who possesses it. Some are descriptive narrative, while others are records of Jesus teaching, thus making that particular passage didactic. Nonetheless, the sheer amount of text the Bible devotes to this topic should be enough to convince even the most skeptical believer.

## The Life of Faith: Lesson 1 (Collecting the Data)

### A Primer for Faith

James 2:14-26

What is the main point that James is making in this passage?

### Group A: Faith Producing Positive Outcomes for the One Exerting Faith<sup>1</sup>

**Example 1:** ‘The Woman with the Issue of Blood’ Matt. 9:20-22; Mk. 5:24-34; Lk. 8:43-48

If many from the crowd were touching Jesus, why did she alone receive healing?

**Example 2:** ‘Healing of the Lame Man in Lystra’ Acts 14:8-10

Paul did not speak forth the healing until what happened? Why?

**Example 3:** ‘Healing of the Ten Lepers’ Lk. 17:11-19

Although the men ask Jesus to have mercy on them, clearly they are asking to be healed. Jesus responds by sending them to the priest. What is the significance of this?

**Example 4:** ‘Healing at the Gate Called Beautiful’ Acts 3:1-16

Does Peter explain the mechanism of healing? If so, how is it described?

**Example 5:** ‘The Testing of Abraham’ Heb. 11:17-19

Why were Abraham’s actions so clear a demonstration of faith?

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<sup>1</sup> For another example besides these five, see Matt. 9:27-30, wherein Christ has the recipients outwardly confess their faith before he heals them.

## The Life of Faith: Lesson 2 (Collecting the Data)

### Group B: Faith Producing Positive Outcomes for One who is Represented by Another<sup>2</sup>

**Example 1:** ‘Healing of a Paralytic Man’ Matt. 9:1-8; Mk. 2:1-12; Lk. 5:17-26

Jesus responded to whose faith?

**Example 2:** ‘The Syrophenician Woman’s Daughter’ Matt. 15:21-28; Mk. 7:24-30

Was Jesus going to heal her daughter initially? Why did this change?

### Group C: A Lack of Faith Hindering Positive Outcomes

**Example 1:** ‘Peter Walks on Water and Sinks’ Matt. 14:22-33

Did Jesus rebuke Peter for having no faith, or for not having enough?

How could Peter have walked all the way to Jesus without sinking?

**Example 2:** ‘Nazareth’s Unbelief’ Mk. 6:1-6

Why was the power of God hindered?

**Example 3:** ‘The Demon Possessed Boy’ Matt. 17:14-20; Mk. 9:14-29

Why could the disciples not cast out the demon?

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<sup>2</sup> For another example besides these two, see Matt. 8:5-13, wherein the Centurion comes to Jesus asking for his servant to be healed. It is the great faith of the Centurion that causes Jesus to marvel and appropriates healing for another.

## The Life of Faith: Lesson 3 (Defining and Applying Faith)

### Defining Faith from Hebrews 11

Although the definition of faith is plainly written in Hebrews 11, it was necessary for us to see it in action several times over before considering this verse. The passage reads as follows: “Now faith is the reality of things hoped for, the proof of things not seen.” The word ‘reality’ (ὑπόστασις in the Greek) could also be rendered ‘substance,’ although ‘reality’ is better. The reason I choose this translation over ‘confidence’ (as some translations prefer), is that the author of Hebrews consistently portrays existence as a dualism: this physical, temporal reality exists concurrently with the spiritual, eternal reality. He does this frequently when speaking of Christ’s sublime sacrifice and also in chapter 11 when describing the faith of the patriarchs. The Old Testament saints were connected to that heavenly city even while sojourning in earthly cities here on Earth. Their faith was that connection. Thus, faith is the reality, or substance, of that which is hoped for. Those things promised by God, that which we will appropriate fully upon being in his heavenly presence, are grasped by us even now through faith. This faith granted to us by God allows us to pierce the fabric between the physical and the spiritual, the temporal and the eternal, enabling us to preview those future blessings here and now. This matches what we see in the Gospel narratives: individuals exert faith and thereby appropriate physical blessedness that belongs to the future while in the present. Faith connects us with the unchanging power of God, and when that happens, all things are possible.

### Applying Faith through Prayer and Action

**Example 1:** ‘The Prayer of Faith’ James 5:13-18

What is the condition that must be met in order for the prayer mentioned in the passage to be efficacious?

What is the significance of James mentioning Elijah?

**Example 2:** ‘The Lesson of the Fig Tree’ Mk. 11:12-14, 20-25

What is the condition that a believer is to abide by when praying? If this condition is met, what is the limit on that person’s prayer according to this verse?

**Example 3:** ‘Greater Works’ Jn. 14: 12-14

What is the condition that must be met in order for one to do ‘greater works?’

What is the condition and purpose of answered prayers?

**Example 4:** ‘The Persistent Widow’ Lk. 18:1-8

What was the purpose of this parable?

The persistence in prayer encouraged by Jesus is an indication of the individual’s what?

**Example 5:** ‘Teach Us How to Pray’ Lk. 11:1-13

This entire discourse is a response to what request?

## The Life of Faith: Epilogue

### Reviewing the Data

Now that we've gone through the biblical data, a few things are abundantly clear: first, when a Christian exerts faith in the power of God, objective results often occur; second, in a moment of prayer, the faith of the one praying, the one being prayed for, and even those simply in attendance all play a role in the outcome; third, of the dozen examples we have considered of faith accessing and stifling power, almost all of them concern divine healing; fourth, perseverance in prayer is a sign of faith and is recommended by Jesus; fifth, bold confidence in prayer is a sign of faith and is recommended by Jesus.

### Addressing a Few Concerns

This teaching will undoubtedly bring up a few concerns. I have lumped them into three categories: first, this sounds like 'name it and claim it' theology; isn't that heresy? Second, I don't know God's will for everything; what if it's not his will to do that for which I am asking? Third, God has predestined all things, but you are contradicting that by saying that my faith can change a situation.

First, this is not 'name it and claim it.' The Bible teaches that faith, faith-filled actions, and faith-filled prayers have a powerful effect. However, one of the aspects of 'name it and claim it' is the propensity for people to take any verse, even if completely out of context, and claim it as a promise for themselves. That isn't a good idea. One should pray for things that are applicable to them based upon context, or things that God has revealed specifically to the individual.

Second, God never requires us to know his secret will. Furthermore, think about the nature of prayer. God knows that we are not privy to his hidden will, yet he invites us to pray. Moreover, Jesus instructs us to pray with great confidence and persistence. The question of 'is this according to God's will?' is not the exact question we should be asking, for most of the time this is impossible to know. Instead, we should ask ourselves 'does this fall within God's generally revealed will?' Do not pray for something selfish, or some other thing that is clearly outside of God's will according to Scripture. However, if it does fall within what God generally does, such as healing and the salvation of the lost, go for it. You wouldn't refrain from sharing the Gospel with someone because you didn't know if God was going to save the person, so why would you not pray for healing because of the same? We shouldn't just assume that God put a sickness on the individual. Why isn't it just as reasonable to assume that he wants to heal him? Let this suffice for this concern.

Third, the Bible does not explicitly teach that all events that ever occur are predestined. However, we will assume for the sake of argument that they are. Just because the Bible affirms predestination does not mean that the numerous clear examples of faith's efficacy are false. They must harmonize somehow, even if we cannot comprehend the means. I suggest that our faith and prayers are necessary 'cog wheels' in the machine whereby God executes his will. They are only necessary because God, in his sovereignty, designed it to be such. So instead of assuming that God would have you refrain from praying due to his secret will, simply trust that God knew what he was doing when he commanded us to pray with boldness and persistence.

### Applying this Knowledge

Now that we have seen this demonstrated continually by the text of Scripture, how are we to apply it to our lives? Remember that James tells us that faith without works is dead. To see this evidence and then say that we now believe it is not enough; we must act. It is contained in the Scripture for a reason. God desires his people to be bold and persistent in prayer, and also to step out in faith, believing in him for mighty things.

I recommend that one apply this knowledge directly to areas that are within God's generally-revealed will. For instance, we know that God desires all to reach repentance, and that he commanded his disciples to go out and make disciples of all nations. For this reason we should begin praying diligently for God to soften the hearts of unbelievers we know, and also should ask him to give us opportunities to share the Gospel. But if we are praying for this in faith, we must obey the Spirit's unctations when these opportunities arrive; faith without works is dead. If we pray for God to save sinners with whom we are interacting while also being faithful to actively share the truth, some will come to salvation. Not everyone whom we evangelize will be saved; however, knowing that we play a crucial role in this process, it is evident that God has foreordained situations wherein we will effectively deliver the Gospel to someone seeking truth.

I also recommend that the individual who goes through this course pray that people be healed. There must be a reason why almost every example of this from the Gospels and Acts is associated with physical healing. Under the new covenant, healing through a human agent is something that God seems to do more frequently. The best way to practice this is to actually lay hands on the individual, pray that God would heal them right then, then after the prayer ask the person to judge whether any improvement has occurred. So when praying for an injury, ask the person if there has been any change in the pain, or ask them to do something that was not previously possible. If an individual believes the New Testament's witness concerning faith and starts to pray for people, that person will eventually start seeing people get healed. Healing doesn't manifest on every occasion. However, when one begins to pray for it in faith, miraculous events will happen much more frequently than if no prayers, or weak, doubt-filled prayers, are offered up.

Lastly, praying for the revival of the Body of Christ is always an important petition to perpetuate. God desires his bride to be faithful and to love him. This theme is found all throughout Scripture. Thus, one can pray with complete boldness for awakening to come into the Church. It is God's will. Blessings on walking out this faith journey with the Lord!