

LAWS FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Part 3: We must live by faith

Imagine a family of mice who lived all their lives in a large piano. To them and their piano-world came the music of the instrument, filling all the dark spaces with sound and harmony. At first, the mice were impressed by it. They drew comfort and wonder from the thought that there was someone who made the music-though invisible to them-above, yet close to them. They loved to think of the great piano player that they could not see. Then one day, a daring mouse climbed to the heart of piano and returned very thoughtful. He had found out how music was made. Wires were the secret; tightly stretched wires and graduated to ninths which trembled and operated. They must revise all their old beliefs; none but the most conservative could any longer believe in the unseen player. Later, another explorer gave another explanation. Hammers were now the secret-numbers of hammers dancing and leaping on the wires. This was a more complicated theory, but it all went to show that they lived in a purely mechanical and mathematical world. The unseen player came to be thought of as a myth. But the unseen pianist continued to play. Today, we live in a world that is very similar to the world of those mice. People have sought to replace God with what he has done, but the unseen player, God, continues to do what He has always done in ruling the world.

The third spiritual law for growth tells us that we must live by faith. Faith is a key word in the New Testament and a key concept in the Bible. If someone who did not know anything about Christianity were to obtain a bible and began reading it, it would be apparent very soon that faith is one of the most important parts of the Christian life. So important is faith that the bible tells us in Hebrews 11:6 that without faith it is impossible to please God. That is a very strong statement. We might say that it is impossible to please God while we are robbing someone or that it is impossible to please God while we are lying to someone, and that would be true. But it is also just as true that it is impossible to please God without faith.

THE EXAMPLES OF FAITH

We all love stories. We relate to the characters in the story, and we learn from them. God understands that, and he gives us many stories of people who lived their lives by faith. A brief description of many of them is given in Hebrews chapter 11-often called "the faith chapter."

1. Enoch

Hebrews 11:5, "By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God."

We know very little about Enoch. We know he was the father of the long-lived Methuselah and the great grandfather of Noah. It is said of him that he walked with God after the birth of Methuselah, three hundred years. Other than that, we know very little about this man. The scripture does tell us that Enoch walked with God. In a time when many of the descendants of Cain had rejected the true God for idols, Enoch stayed faithful to that true God, and he was in fellowship with God for many hundreds of years. Every day was a new spiritual adventure for Enoch as he spent time with God and worshiped him.

2. Noah

Hebrews 11:7, "By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family."

Noah lived in the world before the flood. In fact, he lived before it had ever rained on the earth. God told him that he was going to bring judgment on the wicked people of the world by means of a worldwide flood, and Noah believed and obeyed God.

As the sun rose on the horizon every day, large crowds gathered around the skeleton of a gigantic ship resting on the dry ground. As the crowds gathered to observe this landlocked monstrosity, they likely jeered, perhaps asking, "What's your problem, Noah? What do you think you are doing? Days turned to weeks, weeks to months, and months to years.

Noah could have become disheartened at times. What probably hurt him most, however, was to know that his relatives and friends thought he was crazy. To them he was building a monument to stupidity; to God he was building a monument to faith and obedience, and he stayed at it for 120 years. That's the way true faith is. It is willing to wait and wait and wait for God's promise when it seems as though that promise will never come to pass.

3. Abraham

Hebrews 11:8, "By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going."

Abraham was content living his life in a very advanced city called “UR” of the Chaldees. When he was in his seventies, he was set to live the rest of his life in comfort until God called him to go to a place that he knew nothing about. And Abraham, without knowing where he was going, led his family to the land God had promised him. That was faith. And the stories go on and on as God tells us about people who were the “high points” of the human race because they lived by faith.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF FAITH

KID’S FAITH VIDEO (SERMON SPICE)

1. Faith begins with a holy discontent

Hebrews 11: 1 Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

You've got to want some things that you don't have in order to have faith because faith always deals with things "hoped for." If you've already got everything you need and want, and if for you all the promises of God have already come true, and if you've reached a state of spiritual perfection, if all your loved ones are saved and serving the Lord, if there is no lack anywhere in any area that you can see, you don't need faith because you're living in heaven already and you just don't realize it. If you are satisfied with the current state of affairs, then you can skip this sermon altogether because it doesn't apply to you.

On the other hand, as long as we live in a world where people suffer, where doctors give bad news, where there is hatred, violence and prejudice, we will need faith because the "things hoped for" have not yet come to pass.

2. Faith believes the unseen

HEBREWS 11:1, “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”

Philip Yancey said, “Faith means believing in advance what will only make sense in reverse.” So many things in this life make no sense to us. I imagine there are people in this room who have some very deep and personal questions that really don’t have a good answer. We want to know why things happen the way they do and why they couldn’t have happened some other way. Faith tells us that God has a good answer to those

questions, even though we don't understand now. We believe that one day we will understand. Until then, we trust in God to make the right decisions.

2. Faith is always active

There is no such thing as a passive faith. Faith is always involved in believing something and in doing something. It never sits back in a spiritual recliner and watches as other people do the faith stuff. Go through that list of people mentioned in Hebrews chapter 11 and you'll find that they're always doing something in response to what God has told them.

True faith moves us to action. It leads us to say "no" to sin and "yes" to righteousness and to walk around Jericho again and again until at last "the walls come tumblin' down." Someone has defined faith as "*outrageous trust in God.*" "Outrageous trust" is what you have when you build an ark hundreds of miles from any body of water. "Outrageous trust" compels you to leave your home not knowing where you are going. And "outrageous trust" sends you into the valley to face Goliath. Have you ever been in a situation where you needed "outrageous trust" in God? If not, it is likely that your Christian life has been too boring.

It was Helen Keller who said, "Life is either a daring adventure, or it is nothing at all." Karl Wallenda was one of the greatest high-wire artists of all time. For many years his troop—the Flying Wallendas—went from town to town thrilling thousands with their death-defying acrobatics. One of their most amazing acts was the amazing Living Pyramid. Two men on the wire holding the pole—three above them—two above them—one at the very top. All this while far above the ground, on the thinnest of wires, with no net underneath. Time and again they performed this feat with no mistakes. But eventually the day came when one of the performers stumbled and the pyramid collapsed, killing two members of the troop and injuring two others for life.

Many people thought that would be the end of the Flying Wallendas. But not many weeks later Karl Wallenda led his now-decimated family back out on the high wire once again, building the Human Pyramid as they had done so many times before. When reporters asked Karl Wallenda why he would get back up on the wire after such a terrible tragedy, his answer was simple: "To be on the wire is life. All else is waiting."

Walking on God's wire for your life is what makes life worth living. Everything else is simply your life in limbo, waiting for that special thing to happen that will make everything different, but never finding it. It's walking on the faith wire that gives true meaning to life.

4. Faith is based on God's Word

There are a lot of strange things said about faith and how it works. For example, some people give faith the power of creation. The idea is if I can just believe enough, what I am believing in will come true. Faith then becomes the creator of what God is going to do. Believing something you want to happen will not make it happen. Faith is always based on something that God has said. It could be a promise that he has given in his word, or it could be an inward conviction that he has put within your heart. God doesn't give you any and everything you ask for if you can work up enough faith for it. God gives blessings that are within His will. It is when you believe what God has said that He will answer your prayer.

In the list found in Hebrews chapter 11, it is always God who initiates the thing asked for. For example, **verse seven says**

“by faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family.”

Verse eight says of Abraham, “By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.

Noah and Abraham were not blessed because they believed hard enough in something they wanted. Their prayers were answered because they obeyed God's will.

1 John 5:14-15, “This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. 15 And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.”

Make sure that when you are believing God for something that it is His will that you are believing Him for.

THE GROWTH OF FAITH

1. Faith grows in the environment of surrender

When you go swimming and you first put your foot into the water, you can't believe how cold it is, and everything within you is telling you to get your foot out of that water before it freezes and falls off. That's when you have a choice. You can stand there all day playing “footsy” with the cold water, putting your foot in and then removing it again, or you can do what you know you have to do. You jump in. It is that way with the spiritual life. Many Christians play spiritual “footsy” with the Christian life. They don't want to get in too deep, so they put their foot back and forth in and out. Some people

make the decision to jump and spiritually and let the waters of God's grace cover them. That's when faith begins to really grow.

2. Faith is motivated by a spiritual perspective

There are two ways you can look at life. You can see life in a purely natural perspective, or you can see it from a spiritual perspective. When you live your life by a natural perspective, your life is so full of the things of this world that there is little room left for God. Everything is reduced to what I can do to make life work. On the other hand, a spiritual perspective sees God as being in control. And if He is in control, then my life is directed more and more to the invisible rather than to the visible. That's the way people of faith live. They realize that this world is only a temporary lay over before eternity.

Hebrews 11:15-16, "If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them."

If the perspective of your life is built around this world and the things that it has to offer, you will not have much faith. Faith is built when you understand that life is short, that God is real and that you are going to soon meet him in eternity.

3. Faith continues in spite of difficulty and doubt

Sometimes faith does not seem like the best option. Sometimes, it seems as though the more you try to believe, the worse things become. Sometimes you are going to have some real doubts. The night that I came to know Christ, I was sitting in a car with a Christian who was witnessing to me. My reply to him was, "Tommy, I still have doubts." His answer to me was, "done you have to come to God with your doubts." I am glad that I did.

It has been said that Faith is Belief Plus Unbelief and choosing to act on the belief Part. Most people think that faith means having 100% certainty before you do anything. There will probably never come a time when you'll be 100% free from all doubt. Just when you think you've gotten rid of all your doubts, they come creeping back in through the back door.

Do you really think Noah never doubted during those 120 years while he was building the ark?

Do you think that Abraham never doubted when he said goodbye to Ur of the Chaldees?

Do you think David never had a second thought when he stepped down into the valley?

Do you think Joshua never questioned God's instructions when he marched around Jericho?

Doubt is not sinful. It's a normal and natural reaction to an apparently impossible situation. Doubt only becomes sinful when you choose to act on your doubts. If you're going to doubt something, doubt your doubt not your faith. If you wait until you think you have no doubt, you'll probably not do much for God.

Are you ready to follow Jesus wherever he leads?
That's all he wants.

Someone may ask, "What if Jesus asks me to do something I can't do?" He will! If he only asked you to do something you could do, you wouldn't need him. *If you decide to follow Jesus, he will ask you to do the impossible, and then he will help you do it.*

Your part is simply to take the next step *God puts in front of you*. You don't have to see the whole plan or even see ten steps down the road.

Faith means taking the next step in front of you and leaving the rest in the hands of God.

By Faith Noah ...

By faith Abraham ...

By faith Moses ...

I wonder if other names could be added to that list.