

Five Things God Uses to Grow Our Faith BIG FAITH

Jesus said to His disciples, ... *Truly I tell you, 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, Matt. 17:20. Wow! That's big faith!*

Perhaps like the first disciples many followers of Jesus cry out to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" Sometimes you hear people in church say, "Gee, I wish I had faith like ..." Faith in God, in all circumstances, in all seasons, in all places, a profoundly strong faith is actually what God wants us to have. Ever since Adam and Eve broke the relationship between God and humanity, God has been working to restore a trusting relationship with humanity. Adam and Eve believed the false narrative of the Devil that God was withholding something good from them, so they didn't trust Him. God wants to rebuild our faith in Him, for He created us to be in close relationship with Him. This is what the OT and NT is about: renewing a right relationship with God, our Father and Creator. The OT shows that relationship precedes the Law. The NT shows us that life isn't about more commandments, but first having faith in God. Jesus came to restore that relationship of trust between humanity and God.

Faith Defined

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.

This is what the ancients were commended for. By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible. Heb. 11:1-3.

Having faith in God means we know that we can trust Him to meet our every need as He has promised. All our hopes are based on faith; yet our hopes will be fulfilled only according to the faithfulness of the one in whom we have put our faith. We might hope to become a millionaire by buying a lottery ticket. We might hope to restore a youthful complexion by using a certain cream or soap. We might hope to become a worldly success because we trust in ourselves. But all these hopes are based on the reliability of the source of our faith and many will disappoint us. Hope built on faith in God and His word will produce a confidence in life that cannot be acquired any other way, because it is based on God's faithfulness.

Abraham was strong in faith, believing that God would perform His Word. Abraham's faith produced supernatural hope, over the unreliable hope in the natural world.

What Faith Is Not

Why did Jesus say things like: "Oh you of little faith," or "... not even in Israel have I found such faith?" He said these things to point out that religiosity is no substitute for genuine faith in God. Faith is not just about going through religious rituals and motions and saying the correct words. The rituals and the words are there to keep us on the path of faith in God, but they are not God. Trusting in someone or something other than God to save you, to make you a "good person," is simply not faith in God. Neither is faith a particular emotion. Our emotions are fickle. God is not. Faith is actually doing what God tells us to do.

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. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac

and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. Heb. 11:8-10.

Example of missionaries: Buckner, Spitaleri.

Big faith is more than acknowledging God ... even the Devil acknowledges God. Big faith, the kind of faith Jesus spoke of, is acting on God's call, His command, and His direction. We easily acknowledge God, but then go on living life as though He and His directions did not exist ... we drift with the culture. The faith Jesus invites us into is to trust God enough to do what He asks.

Love one another, heal the lame and sick, go and make disciples, speak the truth with grace, all with His authority and in the power of the HS. Jesus was making manifest on earth what is already commanded in heaven: that wholeness and health (life before the Fall) be made real on earth.

Faith Developed

...faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ, Romans 10:17. That's what our Lenten small group study is showing us. Faith is developed by attending to the means of His grace to build our faith: practical teaching, disciplines of Bible study and prayer, being involved in ministry. Along the way, as we learn to trust God more, we are brought into relationships with those who encourage us in the faith, and into circumstances that grow our faith. Christians grow and do the works of the kingdom as they grow in knowledge and relationship with God. *Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.* James 1:2-4. Faith grows and develops when it is tested. You trust God, you take that step of faith, and then things get rough and it feels like all's falling apart. What's your first reaction? Do you cry out, "God, have you abandoned me?" Maybe you think God has let you down. What do you mean Jesus, 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?

I recently read something from Baptist Pastor Jesse Crooks that inspired me.¹ He said, "... I confess to you I've never been able to make my mountains go hopping around." Ever feel that way yourself? He went on to say, "Each of us has our mountains where no mountains really should be." He described three ways that people deal with their mountains.

1. They pretend the mountain is not there. Have you ever known someone that really did have a problem, but kept saying they didn't? They'd blame it on someone or something else, make excuses, refuse to recognize it. A lot of people want to blame others for their problems. They pretend their mountain doesn't exist; it's someone else's.

People try all kinds of thing to help with the pretense, alcohol, drugs, sexual promiscuity, extreme and risky behaviors, always blaming circumstances or people. These may help for a little while, but they never make the mountains go away. When they sober up or dry out or move on or get with different people, the mountains are still there, often looming larger than before. Sooner or later you'll have to deal with your mountains, and better to do so before they fall down and bury you.

2. They are stopped by the mountain. Some people come to a mountain in their life, look up and shrink back. They can't go around it, they can't over it, can't go under it, so they stop and pitch a tent in the shadow of their mountain and never get past it. How many people do you and I know that are eking out an existence in the shadow of their mountain? Yet, on the other side of that mountain there is a beautiful vista and vast opportunities awaiting them.

Most of us can think of various obstacles to our personal ambitions and goals. But I want you to think this morning about the obstacles to your relationship with God. Think of

this: if you ignored your spouse 6 days a week and spoke only on the one day, and for a few minutes only, what kind of relationship would that be? Or, if your kids, even into adulthood, only talked to you when they wanted something to benefit themselves, not at all concerned about you, what kind of relationship would that be? It's the same in our relationship with God. Maybe your spiritual mountain is how you allocate your time – little quality or quantity of time with God.

Others sit in their rocking chairs waiting for something to happen to move that mountain out of the way. 80 years later they're still in the rocking chair, used to being there and believing that's all their life was ever meant to be anyway. Funny thing about rocking chairs: they move a lot but never get you anywhere. "The saddest words of tongue or pen are the words, 'it might have been.'" But take heart, there's a better way to deal with our mountains.

3. Mountains can be climbed. When Jesus talks about moving mountains could it be that He is teaching us to have faith in God? Could He be saying that with faith in God we can go over our mountains just as if they weren't there? Maybe He's saying to you right now, stick with me and we'll be going places! When you get frightened about the path, not sure where it's taking you, talk to me, He says, be quiet and listen, and take another step, because we're going places. I have never literally moved mountains, but with His help I have been able to go over many of my mountains just as if they were never there.

The apostle James wrote: *In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.* James 2:17. If we confess to have mountain-moving faith, we should get a shovel and a wheelbarrow and start moving rocks and making a path. What are you going to do with your mountains? Are you going to pretend they aren't there? Are you going to be stopped by them or are you going to climb them? What are we going to do with the mountains in our church? There's never been a Church that didn't have some mountains that needed climbing.

All About Relationship

"Have faith in God," Jesus answered. "Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them. Therefore, I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. Mark 11:22-24.

This scripture alone has led many Christians to grief. They believe with all their heart and then nothing happens. Was their faith not enough or incorrect? Not necessarily. There are other dimensions to faith beyond this one scripture. The most important dimension of faith is our relationship with God ... it must be personal and vital.

Here's something to remember: the best relationships are characterized by trust. That means faith in someone even when they don't do what I thought they'd do, or the way I thought it should be done, or in the timeframe I thought best. My faith in that person tells me that there's a good reason they didn't do it as I expected. Can you build trust with someone, talking at them for a few minutes a week? God wants you to spend more than a few minutes with Him, and to listen to Him, so that you will have faith in Him. So maybe God doesn't give you the thing you ask for. Rather, He gives you the spiritual healing you need to succeed and excel at His calling for your life.

Big Faith

Have we forgotten that God is more than a general practitioner? God specializes in things thought impossible. God is never caught by surprise nor is he caught off guard. He

wants us to have big faith. God can take our messes and make messages. God can take our tests and make testimonies.

When mountainous problems loom over you, call on your faith saying, “Me and God can make a way over this.” God bids us to move by faith and not by sight and emotions. Emotions count apple seeds. Faith counts apples in the seed.

Pray with me: Holy Spirit walk with me today that I may walk with You through all that comes my way. Lord remind me, that today I will face nothing that You and I can’t handle together.

Friends, the deeper we dig our faith well, the sweeter the water.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. Ephesians 3:20-21.

Sermon Take Away

The most important dimension of faith is our relationship with God.

If we confess to have mountain-moving faith, we should get a shovel and a wheelbarrow and start moving rocks.

The faith Jesus invites us into is to trust God enough to do what He asks.

¹ *The Mountain Within* by Jesse Crooks, Feb 26, 2019; Sermon Central.