

**Practical Teaching**  
*Five Things God Uses to Grow Our Faith*

Last week we talked about “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.*

Wouldn't you like to have faith like that? Faith is simply trusting God ... trusting that He's there for you, not just in the sense of making happen whatever your desires dictate, but being there for You through all circumstances that you may come into a deeper and better relationship with Him. You see, ever since Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden, trust between God and humanity has been broken. Adam and Eve believed the false narrative of the Devil that God was withholding something good from them, so they didn't trust Him. But God created us to be in close relationship with Him and life just doesn't go right when don't put our faith in Him. So, God wants to rebuild our faith in Him. That's what the Bible is all about. Jesus came to restore that relationship of trust between humanity and God.

In the coming weeks, through our small group study and the Sunday messages, we're taking a close look at the means by which God can build up our faith, which, in turn, gives us confidence to live the life He's destined for each of us and in the manner that He designed us for.

**Practical Teaching**

One of the ways that our faith can be built up is through practical teaching. Years ago, when I was Pastor at another church, we had several small groups going through the Alpha program ... which is a faith renewal experience, designed for people who have drifted away from church or maybe never really connected with Christian faith in a vital way. In one of our groups was Laura. She had been born and raised in Rome, Italy. She came to the states as a young woman, but never really attended church regularly or got involved until late in life. After a couple weeks into the study she exclaimed, “This is what we had in school, when I was a girl!” She was ecstatic that now, what she'd learned in school was finally making sense to her. In her day the Catholic catechism was taught in the schools of Italy, but it wasn't until she had some practical teaching that it made any sense to her.

For many of us the Bible can be confusing and difficult to understand. [Maybe you feel that way. Maybe you're wondering why you're here today and all of this church stuff seems distant or maybe irrelevant or even boring. And the Bible, are those stories in there even true? I get it ... I used to be there too. We'll talk about all that another time.] But here's the point: being exposed to teaching that makes the Bible meaningful, practical, and applicable to everyday life makes all the difference. The people of the Old and New Testaments are simply telling their story of encountering God, how that changed them and spurred them to get engaged in God's work. When we see how their story connects with our own, that's when we can really respond with action in our own lives that bring us closer to God. And then God gets involved in your life and your eyes and understanding start to open up. That's what grows big faith!

We have classes and groups that teach us the Bible, and it's very important to know what the Bible does, and does not, say. But knowledge alone isn't sufficient. We need to know the truth, then apply it in our own lives. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) was His

way of saying to people: “If you really have faith in God, this is what you’ll do and how you’ll live.” He concludes His sermon this way: *Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock...* Matt. 7:24. He means for us to put His words into practice.

If we want your faith in God to show up when you go through the storms of life, if you want to see God at work, then you must do and not just hear whatever Jesus tells us. *Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.* James 1:22.

## Obedience & Faith

Now the fact is many Christians are educated beyond their level of obedience. They know the Bible stories, perhaps understand the underlying messages, but they haven’t put those principles into practice, on a regular basis.

Oh sure, the Sermon on the Mount and all that stuff sounds wonderful ... but then we get back into our routines and relationships after Sunday at church and begin to think (and certainly act) in a way that says, “These aren’t practical things we can do Jesus. Maybe they’re good and I agree with them, and all, but I can’t do them. Jesus, you don’t know what kind of home and family I have to face every day, or what kind of workplace I’m stuck in, or all the health and physical hurdles I have to go over every day” ... and on we go. Maybe we’re like Peter when the resurrected Jesus appeared to the disciples on the shores of the Sea of Galilee.

“I’m going out to fish,” Simon Peter told them, and they said, “We’ll go with you.” So, they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. He called out to them, “Friends, haven’t you any fish?” “No,” they answered. He said, “Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.”

How many of us, if in the same boat, would’ve said, “Hey we’ve been out all night and there’s no fish. Forget it, I’m too tired, we’re almost ashore, no fish around here ... not gonna throw that net out one more time just humor you?” And, of course, we’d have come to shore with no fish.

God tells us to do something and we’re afraid to do it, or too stubborn. We read things in the Bible, having to do with our money, our family, fellow church members, our neighbors, our enemies and we think them nice ideas, but we don’t act on them.

But those disciples, in the boat, went ahead and threw the net back in the water as Jesus told them. *When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish,* John 21:3-6.

Obedience to God’s word is the foundation of big faith. The Word of God, incarnate, is Jesus Christ. As the Apostle Paul reminds us: *For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ,* 1 Cor. 3:11. Our relationship should go farther than just claiming His Name or personal prayer time. Obedience to God’s Word, Jesus, is necessary to building faith in God. Disobedience is simply admiring what Jesus says, but not following it. Disobedience is calling yourself a Christian, but not acting like one.

Disobedience is coming to church on Sunday, but living like the devil Monday through Saturday. They may appear wise and successful in the world but those who think they can build their lives on the things of this world - career, wealth, power, fame, relationships – are really building on shifting sand, and when the storms come great will be their fall! Proverbs 10:25 says that *when the storm has swept by, the wicked are gone*, but the righteous stand firm forever!

Here's another illustration: In the Gospel of John it tells of Jesus and His disciples traveling through Samaria: *Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)*

*The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)*

*Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."*

*"Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? John 4:6-11.*

She's reacting to Jesus the way many of us react in our own minds. "Oh sure, Jesus is a great guy, God's words to us are impressive, but you can't expect me to live it out in the details of my life! I mean, there are practical considerations here. Each of us thinks – or acts – this way about Jesus in some particular thing in our lives. It is all very well to say, "Trust in the Lord," but one has to live, and Jesus has nothing to draw with – nothing by which to give us the things we need. Most of us never have misgivings about ourselves. We know exactly what we can and cannot do. But we do have misgivings about Jesus. We may even be miffed at the idea that He can do what we cannot. Maybe we need to confess: "Lord I have not believed in your wits apart from my own; I have not believed in your almighty power apart from my finite understanding of it."<sup>1</sup>

But the point is that Jesus draws from wells that are not ours. He's not drawing up living water from below – that is, out of our own nature – but drawing water down from His heavenly store. If we'd just trust Him, we'd find the resources to do what He tells us.

This is what we tried to teach with our series of messages on the Holy Spirit. God has given us supernatural help to do what He tells us to do. When we allow the HS to work in us and we ask for HS power to do things like, love one another, love the unlovable, speak a word of truth when afraid, or witness to our faith in Jesus when we are scared, then we are growing in faith because we're trusting God in those moments. When we finally give it up to God, you know, that insurmountable problem, like a bitter and broken relationship, family strife, some kind of addiction, insurmountable financial issues (maybe stemming from our own lack of discipline) ... when we let God in on those things, asking for HS power to take a step in the right direction ... that's when we'll see God at work in our minds and hearts, even in visible, tangible ways throughout the circumstances of our life. That's when we'll connect with God's word in a practical way.

Doing what Jesus says is a demonstration of obedience and obedience is really an action to trust God. Many times, we must simply do it because God said so, and that's faith. Putting feet to our beliefs intersects with God's faithfulness. Our understanding expands after that.

## Taking the Step

Practical teaching helps us grow in our faith by connecting our stories with God's story in the Bible, and that's what encourages us to step out of our usual patterns, out of our comfort zones and see His amazing works.

In Joshua it recounts how the Israelites were able to cross the Jordan River into the Promised Land, even though the river was at flood stage. God said to Joshua: *Tell the priests who carry the ark of the covenant: 'When you reach the edge of the Jordan's waters, go and stand in the river.'* ... *Now the Jordan was at flood stage all during harvest. Yet as soon as the priests who carried the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water's edge, the*

***water from upstream stopped flowing. It piled up in a heap a great distance away... Joshua 3:8, 15-16.***

The priests had to first step into the roaring water, trusting God's direction, before the water parted. If they had waited on the bank of the river nothing would have happened.

It is so vital for all of us to place ourselves in environments where we hear and see the words of the Bible being applied. We don't need to be up on sophisticated theological or doctrinal fine points. We just need to be inspired by God's word and inspired to act on it. What really transforms our lives for the better is not acquiring more Bible knowledge, but obeying Bible truth in how we live.

***All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 2 Timothy 3:16.***

### **Sermon Take Away**

Doing what Jesus says is a demonstration of obedience and obedience is really an action to **trust God**.

Obedience to God's word is the foundation of **big faith**.

---

<sup>1</sup>Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost For His Highest*, Feb. 26.