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## ***The Disciple-Making Minister***

Biblical Principles for Fruitfulness and Multiplication

By David Servant

### **Chapter Fourteen Fundamentals of Faith**

And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him (Heb. 11:6).

As believers, our faith is built on the foundation that God exists, and that He treats people who seek Him differently than He does people who do not seek Him. As soon as we *truly* believe those two things, we begin to please God, because we immediately begin to seek Him. Seeking God implies (1) learning His will, (2) obeying Him, and (3) trusting His promises. All three should be components of our daily walk.

This chapter focuses on our walk of faith. It is unfortunate that many have emphasized faith to the point of unbiblical extremes, particularly stressing the area of material prosperity. For that reason, some are apprehensive to approach the subject at all. But just because some people drown in rivers is no reason for us to stop drinking water. We can remain balanced and scriptural. The Bible has plenty to teach on the subject, and God wants us to exercise our faith in His many promises.

Jesus set an example of one who had faith in God, and He expected His disciples to follow His example. Likewise, the disciple-making minister strives to set an example of trust in God, and he teaches his disciples to believe God's promises. This is vitally important. Not only is it impossible to please God without faith, it is impossible to receive answers to our prayers without faith (see Matt. 21:22; Jas. 1:5-8). Scripture clearly teaches that doubters are deprived of blessings that believers receive. Jesus said, "All things are possible to him who believes" (Mark 9:23).

#### **Faith Defined**

The biblical definition of faith is found in Hebrews 11:1:

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

From this definition, we learn several characteristics of faith. First, one who has faith possesses *assurance*, or confidence. This is different than hope, because faith is the "assurance of things *hoped for*." Hope always leaves room for doubt. Hope always says "maybe." For example, I might say, "I sure *hope* it rains today so that my garden will be

watered." I desire rain, but I'm not sure if it will rain. Faith, on the other hand, is always certain, the "assurance of things hoped for."

What people call *faith*, or *belief*, is often not faith by biblical definition. They might look at dark clouds in the sky, for example, and say, "I *believe* it's going to rain." They aren't, however, certain that it's going to rain—they just think that there is a good possibility that it *might* rain. That is not biblical faith. Biblical faith has no element of doubt. It leaves no room for any outcome other than what God has promised.

### **Faith is the Conviction of Things Not Seen**

The definition found in Hebrews 11:1 also states that faith is the "conviction of things not seen." Thus, if we can see something or perceive it with our five physical senses, faith is not required.

Suppose someone said to you right now, "For some reason that I can't explain, I have faith that there is a book in your hands." You would, of course, think that something was wrong with that person. You would say, "Why, you don't need to *believe* I have a book in my hands, because you can plainly *see* that I'm holding a book."

*Faith is of the unseen realm.* For example, as I'm writing these words, I believe that there is an angel near me. In fact, I'm certain of it. How can I be so sure? Have I seen an angel? No. Have I felt or heard an angel fly by? No. If I had seen an angel or heard or felt one, then I wouldn't have to believe there was an angel near me—I'd *know* it.

So what makes me so certain of the angel's presence? My certainty stems from one of God's promises. In Psalm 34:7, He promised, "The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and rescues them." I have no evidence for what I believe other than God's Word. That is true biblical faith—the "conviction of things not seen." The people of the world often use the expression, "Seeing is believing." But in the kingdom of God the opposite is true: "Believing is seeing."

When we exercise faith in one of God's promises, we often face circumstances that tempt us to doubt, or we go through a period of time when it looks as if God is not keeping his promise because our circumstances are not changing. In those cases, we simply need to resist doubts, persevere in faith, and remain convinced in our hearts that God always keeps His word. It is impossible for Him to lie (see Tit. 1:2).

### **How Do We Acquire Faith?**

Because faith is based solely on God's promises, only one source exists for biblical faith—God's Word. Romans 10:17 says, "So *faith comes from hearing*, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17, emphasis added). God's Word reveals His will. It is only when we know God's will that we can believe it.

So if you want to have faith, you must hear (or read) God's promises. Faith does not come by praying for it, fasting for it, or having someone lay hands on you to bestow it. It only comes from hearing God's Word, and once you hear it, you still must make a decision to believe it.

Beyond the acquiring of faith, our faith can also grow stronger. The Bible mentions various levels of faith—from little faith to mountain-moving faith. Faith grows stronger as it is fed and exercised, just like a human muscle. We should continue to feed our faith by meditating on God's Word. We should exercise it by acting and reacting to everything based on God's Word. This includes those times when we face problems, worries and concerns. God doesn't want His children to worry about anything, but rather to trust Him in every situation (see Matt. 6:25-34; Phil. 4:6-8; 1 Pet. 5:7). Refusing to worry is just one way we can exercise our faith.

If we truly believe what God has said, we will act and talk as if it's true. If you believe that Jesus is the Son of God, you will talk and act like a person who believes it. If you

believe that God will supply all your needs, you will talk and act like it. If you believe that God wants you to be healthy, you will act and talk like it. The Bible is full of examples of people who, in the midst of adverse circumstances, acted on their faith in God and received miracles as a result. We'll consider a few later on in this chapter and in a later chapter about divine healing. (For some other good examples, see 2 Kings 4:1-7; Mark 5:25-34; Luke 19:1-10; and Acts 14:7-10.)

### **Faith is of the Heart**

Biblical faith does not operate in our minds, but rather in our hearts. Paul wrote, "For with the heart a person believes" (Rom. 10:10a). Jesus said,

Whoever says to this mountain, "Be taken up and cast into the sea," and *does not doubt in his heart*, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it shall be granted him (Mark 11:23, emphasis added).

It is quite possible to have doubts in your head but still have faith in your heart and receive what God has promised. In fact, most times when we endeavor to believe God's promises, our minds, influenced by our physical senses and Satan's lies, will be attacked with doubts. During those times we need to replace doubting thoughts with God's promises and hold fast in faith without wavering.

### **Common Faith Mistakes**

Sometimes when we attempt to exercise faith in God, we fail to receive what we desire because we are not operating according to God's Word. One of the most common mistakes occurs when we try to believe for something that God has not promised us.

For example, it is scriptural for married couples to trust God for children because God's Word contains a promise upon which they can stand. I know of married couples who have been told by doctors that they could never bear children. They chose, however, to believe God instead, standing on the two promises listed below, and today they are parents of healthy children:

But you shall serve the Lord your God, and He will bless your bread and your water; and I will remove sickness from your midst. There shall be no one miscarrying or barren in your land; I will fulfill the number of your days (Ex. 23:25-26).

You shall be blessed above all peoples; there shall be no male or female barren among you or among your cattle (Deut. 7:14).

These promises should encourage childless couples! To attempt to believe specifically for a boy or a girl, however, is another story. In the Bible there are no specific promises that tell us we can pick the sex of our future children. We must stay within the boundaries of Scripture if our faith is to be effectual. We can only trust God for what He has promised us.

Let's consider a promise from God's Word and then determine what we can believe based on that promise:

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ will rise first (1 Thes. 4:16).

Based on this scripture, we can certainly trust that Jesus is going to return.

Could we pray, however, believing that Jesus will return tomorrow? No, because this scripture and no other scripture promises us that. In fact, Jesus said that no one knows the day or the hour of His return.

We could pray, of course, *hoping* that Jesus would return tomorrow, but we would not be guaranteed it would happen. When we pray in faith, we are certain that what we are praying for will happen because we have God's promise on it.

Based on this same scripture, we can trust that the bodies of those believers who have died will be resurrected at the return of Jesus. But can we have faith that those of us who are alive at Christ's return will receive resurrection bodies at the same moment as the "dead in Christ" do, or possibly even before they do? No, because this scripture promises us just the opposite: The "dead in Christ will rise first." In fact, the very next verse goes on to say, "Then we who are alive shall be caught up together in the air" (1 Thes. 4:17). Thus, there is no possibility that the "dead in Christ" won't be first to receive their resurrection bodies when Jesus returns. God's Word promises just that.

If we are going to trust God for something, we must be certain that it is God's will for us to receive what we desire. God's will can only be safely determined by examining His promises recorded in the Bible.

Faith works the same way in the natural realm. It would be foolish for you to believe that I was going to visit your home tomorrow at noon unless I had first promised you I would be there then.

Faith, without a promise on which to stand, is not really faith at all—it is foolishness. So before you ask God for anything, first ask yourself the question—which scripture in the Bible promises me what I desire? Unless you have a promise, you have no foundation for your faith.

### **A Second Common Mistake**

Many times Christians attempt to trust for one of God's promises to come to pass in their lives without meeting all the conditions that accompany the promise. For example, I've heard Christians quote from Psalm 37 and say: "The Bible says that God will give me the desires of my heart. That's what I'm believing for."

However, the Bible doesn't only say that God will give us the desires of our hearts. Here's what it actually says:

Do not fret because of evildoers, be not envious toward wrong doers. For they will wither quickly like the grass, and fade like the green herb. Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness. Delight yourself in the Lord; and He will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He will do it (Ps. 37:1-5).

Several conditions must be met if we are to believe that God will give us the desires of our heart. In fact, I counted at least eight conditions in the above promise. Unless we are meeting the conditions, we have no right to receive the blessing promised. Our faith has no foundation.

Christians also like to quote the promise found in Philippians 4:19: "My God shall supply all my needs according to His riches in glory." However, are there conditions to that promise? Decidedly, yes.

If you examine the context of the promise found in Philippians 4:19, you'll discover that it is not a promise given to all Christians. Rather, it is a promise given to those Christians who are givers themselves. Paul knew God would supply all the Philippians' needs because they had just sent him an offering. Because they were seeking first God's kingdom as Jesus commanded, God would supply all their needs, as Jesus promised (see Matt 6:33).

Many of the promises in the Bible that relate to God's supplying our material needs carry the condition that we first be givers ourselves.

We really have no right to think we can trust God for our needs to be met if we're not obeying His commands concerning our money. Under the old covenant, God told His people that they were cursed because they were withholding their tithes, but He promised to bless them if they would obediently give their tithes and offerings (see Mal. 3:8-12).

Many of the blessings promised us in the Bible are contingent upon our obedience to God. Therefore, before we endeavor to believe God for something, we should first ask ourselves: "Am I meeting all the conditions accompanying that promise?"

### **A Third Common Mistake**

In the New Testament, Jesus stated a condition that applies to every time we pray and ask for something:

Have faith in God. Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, "Be taken up and cast into the sea," and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it shall be granted him. Therefore I say to you, *all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they shall be granted you* (Mark 11:22-24, emphasis added).

The condition Jesus stated is to believe that we have received when we pray. Many Christians mistakenly try to exercise their faith by believing that they have received when they *see* the answer to their prayer. They believe that they are *going* to receive and not that they *have received*.

When we ask God for something that He has promised us, we should believe we receive the answer *when we pray* and begin thanking God for the answer right then. We must believe we have the answer *before* we see it and not *after* we see it. We should make our requests to God with thanksgiving, as Paul wrote:

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God (Phil. 4:6).

As I previously stated, if we have faith in our hearts, naturally our words and our actions will correspond with what we believe. Jesus said, "The mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart" (Matt. 12:34).

Some Christians make the mistake of asking repeatedly for the same thing, which reveals they haven't yet believed they have received. If we have believed that we have received when we pray, then there is no need to repeat the same request. To ask repeatedly for the same thing is to doubt that God heard us the first time we asked.

### **Didn't Jesus Make the Same Request More Than Once?**

Jesus, of course, made the same request three times in a row when He was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane (see Matt. 26:39-44). But keep in mind that He was not praying in faith according to God's revealed will. In fact, as He prayed three times for any possible escape from the cross, He knew that His request was contrary to God's will. That is why He submitted Himself to His Father's will three times in the same prayer.

That same prayer of Jesus is often wrongly used as a model for *all* prayer, as some teach that we should always end every prayer with the words, "If it be Thy will," or "Nevertheless not My will but Thy will be done," following Jesus' example.

Again, we must remember that Jesus was making a request that He knew was not God's will. To follow His example when we are praying according to God's will would be a

mistake and display a lack of faith. To pray, for example, "Lord, I confess my sin to you and ask you to forgive me if it be Thy will," would imply that it may not be God's will to forgive my sin. We know, of course, that the Bible promises that God will forgive us when we confess our sins (see 1 John 1:9). Thus such a prayer would reveal one's lack of faith in God's revealed will.

Jesus didn't end every prayer with the words, "Nevertheless not My will, but Thy will done." There is only one example of His praying in that manner, and it was when He was committing Himself to do His Father's will, knowing the suffering He would endure because of it.

On the other hand, if we don't know God's will in a certain situation because He has not revealed it, then it is appropriate to end our prayer with the words, "If it be Thy will." James wrote,

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that." But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil (Jas. 4:13-16).

What should we do once we've made our requests based on a promise from God and are meeting all the conditions? We should continually thank God for the answer that we have believed we have received until it actually comes to pass. It is through faith and patience that we inherit the promises of God (Heb. 6:12). Satan will surely try to defeat us by sending doubts, and we must realize that our mind is the battleground. When thoughts of doubt attack our minds, we simply need to replace those thoughts with thoughts based on God's promises and speak the Word of God in faith. As we do, Satan must flee (see Jas. 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:8-9).

### **An Example of Faith in Action**

One of the classic biblical examples of faith in action is the story of Peter's walking on the water. Let's read his story and see what we can learn from it.

And immediately [Jesus] made the disciples get into the boat, and go ahead of Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away. And after He had sent the multitudes away, He went up to the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone. But the boat was already many stadia away from the land, battered by the waves; for the wind was contrary. And in the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were frightened, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out for fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid." And Peter answered Him and said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." And He said, "Come!" And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But seeing the wind, he became afraid, and beginning to sink, he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!" And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" And when they got into the boat, the wind stopped. And those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, "You are certainly God's Son!" (Matt. 14:22-33).

It is significant that Jesus' disciples had been caught in another violent storm in a boat on the Sea of Galilee sometime earlier (see Matt. 8:23-27). During that incident, Jesus had

been with them, and after He calmed the storm by His rebuke, He then rebuked His disciples for their lack of faith. Before they had embarked on their journey He had told them that it was His will that they go to the other side of the lake (see Mark 4:35). When the storm arose, however, they were more persuaded by their circumstances, and at one point believed they were all going to die. Jesus expected them at least not to be afraid.

This time, however, Jesus sent them across the Sea of Galilee on their own. Surely He was led by the Spirit to do so, and surely God knew that a contrary wind would arise that night. Thus the Lord allowed them to face a small challenge to their faith. Because of those contrary winds, what would have normally taken just a few hours took all night. We have to credit the disciples for their endurance, but can't help but wonder if any of them attempted to have faith for the winds to be calmed, something they had seen Jesus do just a few days earlier. Interestingly, Mark's Gospel reports that when Jesus came walking to them on the water, "He intended to pass by them" (Mark 6:48). He was going to leave them to face their problem alone as He miraculously walked right by! This seems to indicate that they weren't praying or looking to God. I wonder how many times the Miracle-Worker walks right by us as we strain at the oars of life against the winds of trouble.

### **Principles of Faith**

Jesus responded to Peter's challenge with a single word: "Come." If Peter had attempted to walk on the water prior to that word, he would have sunk instantly, as he would have had no promise upon which to base his faith. He would have been stepping out by presumption rather than by faith. Similarly, even *after* Jesus spoke His word, had any of the other disciples tried to walk on the water, they also would have sunk immediately, as Jesus gave His promise only to Peter. None of them could have met the condition of the promise, as not one of them was Peter. Likewise, before any of us attempt to trust one of God's promises, we must make certain that the promise applies to us and that we are meeting the conditions of the promise.

Peter stepped out on the water. That was the point in time when he trusted, although there is no doubt that he who had been crying out for fear of a ghost just seconds before also had doubts in his head as he took his first step. But in order to receive the miracle, he had to act on his faith. Had he clung to the mast of the boat and dipped his big toe over the boat's side to see if the water would support his weight, he would never have experienced the miracle. Likewise, before we receive any miracles, we must commit ourselves to trust God's promise at some point in time and then act on what we believe. There is always a time when our faith is tested. Sometimes that time is short; sometimes it is long. But there is going to be some length of time when we have to disregard the testimony of our senses and act on God's word.

Peter progressed well at first. But as he considered the impossibility of what he was doing, taking note of the wind and waves, he became afraid. Perhaps he stopped walking, fearful of taking another step. And he who had been experiencing a miracle found himself sinking. We need to continue in faith once we have begun, continuing to act on our faith. Keep pressing on.

Peter sank because he doubted. People don't often like to blame themselves for their lack of faith. They would rather pass the blame on to God. But how do you suppose Jesus would have reacted if He had heard Peter, when he was safely back in the boat, saying to the other disciples, "It was really only God's will for me to walk part way to Jesus"?

Peter failed because he became afraid and lost his faith. Those are the plain facts. Jesus didn't condemn him, but immediately stretched out His hand to give Peter something steady to hold. And He immediately questioned Peter about why he doubted. Peter had no good reason to doubt, because the word of God's Son is more certain than anything. *None of us ever has any good reason to doubt God's Word, be afraid or worry.*

Scripture is full of victories that were the result of faith and failures that were the result

of doubts. Joshua and Caleb possessed the Promised Land because of their faith while the majority of their peers died in the wilderness because of their doubts (see Num. 14:26-30). Jesus' disciples had their needs supplied as they journeyed two-by-two to preach the gospel (see Luke 22:35), but they once failed to cast out a demon because of their unbelief (see Matt. 17:19-20). Many received healing miracles under the ministry of Christ while most of the sick people in His hometown of Nazareth remained ill because of their unbelief (see Mark 6:5-6).

Like all of them, I've personally experienced success and failure according to my faith or doubts. But I'm not going to grow bitter over my failures or blame God. I'm not going to justify myself by condemning Him. I'm not going to search for some complicated theological explanation that reinvents God's clearly revealed will. I know it is impossible for God to lie. So when I've failed, I just repent of my unbelief and start walking on the water once again. I've noticed that Jesus always forgives me and rescues me from drowning!

The verdict is settled: Believers get blessed; doubters don't! The disciple-making minister follows Jesus' example. He is full of faith himself, and he admonishes his disciples, "Have faith in God!" (Mark 11:22).