

(The Series)

UNFEIGNED

FAITH



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UNFEIGNED FAITH (The Series)

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CONTENTS

	Introduction	3
1	Living in Precarious Times	4
2	Genuine Faith	8
3	Walking With God	12
4	Walking Towards Promises	16
5	The steadfastness of Faith	19
6	The Box	23
7	Exercising Faith	28
8	Omission	31
9	Greater Resurrection	36
10	Ultimate Goal of Faith	41

INTRODUCTION

The Bible is clear that no one can please God without faith. The Bible speaks of unfeigned faith. The Apostle Paul commended such faith. Obviously, faith that is tainted, insincere, and perverted will not be accepted by God. It is not only unacceptable, but it will not sustain people in times of great trials and tribulation.

As the world hurls towards its final judgment, unfeigned faith is becoming a luxury that cannot easily be found even among the religious people. It is not unusual to see people's dependency directed towards everything but God. Granted, some of the dependency might be towards that which is considered decent, religious, and moral, but it finds its reliance in man, organization, and activities, but not in the character and work of God.

One of Jesus' main concerns when He came back is whether He would find real faith. The series of faith was first presented in Gentle Shepherd Ministries monthly newsletters for the purpose of causing believers to consider where their reliance is and where their sufficiency lies. It was intended to also challenge them to consider the maturity of their faith.

1

LIVING IN PRECARIOUS TIMES

A very popular subject in the Christian realm that often proves controversial is faith. For years I have tried to come to terms with what it means to walk by faith and not by sight (*2 Corinthians 5:7*). I used to think the Scripture was in reference to a person having to actually see something with his or her eyes before he or she will believe it. However, the sight it often refers to is not necessarily based on what we see, but on what we perceive or understand about a matter.

I learned a long time ago that I can't really trust my physical sight, but I do put a lot of credence in what I think I understand. When I encountered Scriptures such as *Proverbs 3:5-7*, "*Trust in the LORD with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes; fear the LORD, and depart from evil,*" I did not in my initial Christian walk connect the dots that I was walking according to my own understanding that made me wise in my own eyes.

As Christians in America, we are coming into precarious times. We can tout, debate and argue about what constitutes unfeigned faith that was first delivered to the saints, but the harsh reality is that many of us have not had to live by faith (*Jude 3*). The abundance of the world we live in has afforded us various options. As a result, we can believe that we have been walking by faith in a matter, but in most cases, we are walking according to what we perceive to be our best option and trusting that God will see it our way and bless us in our endeavors. In all honesty, many Christians in America have not been prepared to stand in faith, withstand according to faith, and remain steadfastly standing because of faith during times of great trials and tribulations. In America, we have always had some type of option or world's system to fall back on as a solution to most matters.

Sadly, the prosperous environment we Americans have lived in has allowed Christians to develop, adopt or buy erroneous teachings about faith, such as "Positive Confession." This is where you confess something into being by using God's promises as a means to lay claim to the best God has to offer. Such methods are nothing more than futile attempts of trying to twist God's arm to get one's way, especially in regard to worldly wealth.

Although there have been many people who have been left spiritually shipwrecked in their faith by such heretical nonsense, it has financially served the preachers and teachers well who have shrewdly used this teaching to fleece the sheep for the last three or four decades. In some cases they have made their converts two-fold the people of hell than themselves. I shudder to think of the damnation these deluded fools are heaping upon themselves, and the great woe they are bringing upon those who innocently or foolishly believe and follow them.

It does not take a rocket scientist to see that all the world's systems are beginning to collapse around us. Retirement plans have dissipated before our eyes. Financial security is becoming a nightmare that is flinging many into a pit of utter despair. Hard work is now being mocked, playing by the rules is being taxed beyond comprehension, and trusting that it will all work out in the end because we live in America is being revealed as nothing more than a pipe dream.

We must ask ourselves where is the Church in this time? How much of it is asleep, or sitting back on its laurels waiting for Christ to appear and deliver it from the dark storm that is clearly looming on the horizon and is about to consume America? It is hard to say where the Church is, but I can tell you what God is doing. He is shaking the foundations upon which this nation and the “professing Church” stands. He has warned us that such shaking would take place in Hebrews 12:26-27.

The reason for such shaking is to reveal the stability of something. Is what a person or nation holds to as truth and righteousness truly built on and according to the fickle standards of worldly systems, or is it built on and according to the principles and truths of the eternal foundation that God has established? Such shaking will bring down any false structure of belief and cause all faulty foundations to crumble (Matthew 7:24-27).

As I consider the shaking taking place, I realize that it started as a small nudge and is now working its way up to earthquake proportions. As I ponder this shaking, I realize that God is trying to shake a sleeping nation awake, stir up a spiritually dulled down church to consider where it is standing, and alert people to the abyss of destruction that lies ahead of them if they do not change direction.

The one thing I have discovered about myself when I first wake up in the morning is that I must first get my bearings if I am going to function. Where am I and where do I need to be to accomplish what I must complete? When people are asleep, they are not aware of what is happening around them. If they do not get their bearings, they become confused and lost.

How long ago did we as a nation lose our bearings? The truth is we have been getting away from the center for a long time. For this nation, the center of who we are and what makes us distinct as a unique nation is our Judeo-Christian principles, our Constitution, and our generous spirit because we recognize we were blessed of God as a nation.

As long as we remembered what made us great as a nation, we would not lose our way. However, we failed to recognize that many in our educational system were actually enemies that opposed what made this nation great. Their ideology began to influence the hearts and minds of the younger generation. As a result, the enemy can be found within many of America’s homes, causing conflict, division, and despair while being reduced to rubble around us.

It is clear that America has been asleep to the cancer that has been growing under the cover of darkness. This cancer has various names, but we know it to be Communism, Marxist or progressive ideology. It attacks decency, morality and freedom. Sadly, the younger generation has been indoctrinated into it, thereby, standing ignorant, numb and indifferent to its destructive ways. The older generation has been medicated into accepting a false security while living in a state of denial that this nation is in trouble. In fact, it is fast becoming a third world country where there is a constant move for a despot to serve as a dictator at the helm rather than a president.

From all appearances many in America is waking up. But, consider the shaking that has been going on. The Lord has mercifully exposed and brought down the idols so many Americans have been unknowingly bowing down to, such as money, material wealth, and self-centered lifestyles. Many are losing their jobs, small businesses are becoming casualties, and others are feeling the oppressive claws of fear grip their resolve as it robs them of hope and their quality of life.

What can we perceive about this shaking where the church is concerned? As I consider the different reactions of those who call themselves Christians, I have seen a variety of responses. I would like to share my observation with you as to what I have observed.

The Jonah Syndrome: If you ask me what God's real aim is when He shakes nations, my answer would be that He probably is really after the sleeping, dulled down element of the Church. When God allowed a storm to grip the ship that Jonah was on, it was not because God was after the crew on the ship; rather, He was after Jonah.

As I watch and listen to the actions and reactions of many Christians, I have to admit I do not see much movement, even in the midst of the great shaking that is going on. It seems as if the different churches around me are carrying on with business as usual. Their signboards often sport silly, worldly, cutesy little nonsensical sayings. It is as though they are Jonahs, hiding or sleeping in the hulls of their little religious pews while the storm rages around them. They are so asleep or living in such denial of the times that we are living in that they are unaware of or indifferent to the danger they are putting others in. After all, there are no cries of prayerful intercession or calls for repentance coming from their sanctuaries. There is no awareness of the seriousness of the times they are living in, and what it will mean for those who are sitting by them if they fail to properly prepare them, along with warning unsuspecting souls from without. The songs they sing and the claims they make are ones that make them appear as if they are living in some Disneyland fantasy; rather than soberly preparing for the events that are about to overtake the world.

My concern is when they are awakened as reality finally shakes them out of their indifferent or lukewarm state, will they admit that God is after them? Will they repent of their indifference and be prepared to offer themselves up as a living sacrifice or will they remain in self-denial, causing their particular ship to be lost at sea?

Johnny Come Lately Group: This group is often represented by the religious bigots. You might have met one or two of them along the way. You can always spot bigots by how small their religious worlds are and how big they have become in them. For example, these individuals know it all, are the final authority to all that is supposedly true, and judge all matters according to their "small" way of thinking. They are prideful about being immovable in their theology, mean-spirited towards those who dare to disagree with them, and will set out on a mission to shred apart anyone who will not submit to their way of thinking.

Such individuals are out of step with reality. To them the only reality that counts is their take on it. When something is happening of any real significance, they fail to respond because they miss the bigger picture or they come late and miss any real opportunity to be effectively involved with what is significant. God is shaking all foundations and sounding the alarm through unlikely people. However, these individuals are like a soldier called to the war but who fails to show up at the right place. These unprepared individuals end up behind the lines, far away from the real battle. In an attempt to save face, these people look around for some cause and begin a war of their own that often wounds allies.

In the end, such individuals end up standing unaccompanied to face the harsh reality that no one else is standing with them. They have rid themselves of any checks and balances that could bring reality and reason back into their small worlds so they could embrace a much greater, and more worthy perspective. Therefore, they alone will face an inevitable tidal wave of judgment because if they have not shot their allies, they have driven them away or left them wounded. Since their faith is based on their personal religious piousness and standards, and not in Jesus Christ, their foundation and structures will be crushed by the wave of judgment and reduced to sand.

The Do Nothing Group: Even though the Christian Church is 20 centuries old, the members of it are not. The real Church of Jesus Christ must be constantly refreshed by each member being renewed daily in their inner man by the washing of God's Word and the ever abiding presence and guidance of the Spirit of God. Such people are not to live

off yesterday's manna comprised of what was, but is now decayed, but they must daily seek their own manna. They must not be content to settle for man-made doctrines or traditions that may feed the mind to some extent, but have no real spiritual nutrition to inspire and sustain the spirit through times of testing. They are not to sit on their "past laurels" thinking they have it made because they are on their way to heaven.

Jesus was clear that we are to watch, be ready and pray that we will be found worthy to escape the tribulation that is coming upon the face of the entire world. We must discipline ourselves and learn how to possess our souls in patience. To watch requires one to be aware concerning the hour, sober about his or her responsibility to detect, discern and sound the alarm when danger is near, and to be prepared and ready in an appropriate manner to take up arms, escape or flee if necessary to fight another day. We as believers must never be caught unaware because we are secluded in some type of religious bubble and drunk on the ways of the world, while thinking God is somehow going to spare us of the inevitable. The truth is He is trying to prepare us to respond to the inevitable. He is contending with some as He bursts their bubble to wake them up to the reality that their faith is about to be tested in the fiery ovens of tribulation.

One of Jesus' main concerns is that when He returns, will He find any real, genuine faith (Luke 18:8). When you consider these three groups, they lack unfeigned faith. For the Jonah's they may believe God, but they have failed to put their faith in action by obeying Him. The second group has put their faith in their own theology, but not in the person or character of God. It is obvious that what they hold to is not God but their religious opinions. The last group puts their faith in their association to God rather than believing His Word. As a result, they end up putting God to a foolish test. To these people He could easily come like a thief in the night.

As Christians, we must always walk according to the present light and not the fading glory of the past. We must not assume or presume all will be okay because as Christians we are in some bubble that immunizes us against the trials and tribulations taking place around us. God calls us to be prepared for what comes our way, not secluded in some religious indifference, world or bubble that keeps us unrealistic and unresponsive.

What about you? Do you possess the true faith that will cause you to obey, enlarge your world to see the bigger picture and prepare you to face the inevitable? Be assured, unfeigned faith will always be tested, refined, enlarged, and brought forth by way of the fiery ovens of tribulation.

2

GENUINE FAITH

What is unfeigned faith? We know according to the Apostle Paul that it is tied into charity that comes from a pure heart and a good conscience (*1 Timothy 1:5*). Unfeigned faith is faith that is void of any pretense or hypocrisy. It is a faith that inspires faithfulness, commitment, and confidence. Therefore, without love walking hand in hand with faith there will be no faithfulness. Without a pure heart there will be speculation and uncertainty, and where shame is concerned there will be no confidence when approaching a matter.

The Apostle Paul also stated in *Romans 5:2* that we have access into grace by faith, which allows us to stand and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. As believers, we know we are saved by grace through faith. Grace is the glorious door that, once it is opened by faith, will make available the storehouse of God to each believer. All blessings and promises are a matter of God's favor being shown to undeserving man. However, it is faith that allows man to receive and benefit from God's favor.

The Apostle Paul encouraged Timothy to remember the unfeigned faith that his grandmother and mother walked in (*2 Timothy 1:5*). He told him that he was persuaded that the faith that Timothy witnessed in these two women also operated in his life. After all, faith is about a deep persuasion that a matter will always be found to be true and real regardless of the challenges and times surrounding the individual. Paul understood such a prospect because he operated according to such persuasion. We read about this persuasion in *2 Timothy 1:12-13*, "*For which cause I also suffer these things; nevertheless, I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day. Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou has heard of me in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.*"

The apostle's exhortation concerning his abiding faith in Christ is clearly brought out. He had suffered many things for his faith in Christ. He was not ashamed that he had suffered such affronts for he did believe what was said concerning his Lord. Once again, the Apostle Paul's words ring forth, "*So, then, faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*" (*Romans 10:17*).

Since Paul believed the words of God, he was completely persuaded that no matter what challenged his life in Christ, the Lord would keep everything intact that was committed to Him in good faith. However, Paul also recognized that in order to possess such persuasion, a person had to hold fast in faith and love the sound words that had been spoken. This pointed to unfeigned faith that could not be moved from what had been established in the heart and mind.

We know, according to the Apostle Paul, there is only one real faith according to *Ephesians 4:5*. In *Jude 3*, we are told this faith was clearly delivered to the saints for safe keeping through sound teaching and example. *Hebrews 4:2* also told us what is not mixed with faith will prove to be unprofitable. The Apostle Paul stated in *Romans 14:23* that what is not of faith is sin and also warned in *2 Corinthians 13:5* that we need to examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith that was first delivered to the saints. In

fact, we need to prove to ourselves that we are secure in such faith to avoid being considered or deemed a reprobate in our Christian life.

The Apostle Peter reminds us in *1 Peter 1:5-8* that faith must be tested and refined in the fiery ovens of life. He goes on to say unfeigned faith will come forth as gold when tested. It will survive the fiery process and come to the surface as pure gold as all the dross and residues of defilement and perversion will settle to the bottom to be cast aside or consumed in the fire.

All true faith will survive the test of the ovens. It will be refined to come forth in the purest manner so that it can withstand in the greatest tests or trials and tribulations. In fact, it will always come forth in greater purity in each test for it is based on what is true and everlasting.

This brings us to the real crux of the matter, that of Jesus' ominous warning in Luke 18:8. He asked whether or not He would find real faith when He returns. Clearly, the Christian faith will come under attack. Since we cannot please God without unfeigned faith, it only makes sense that it will be a major target of the enemies of the cross. It is vital that we understand what unfeigned faith looks like. We must avoid assuming we understand what constitutes faith, and make sure we are living according to it.

We know one of the great men of faith was Abraham. However, anyone who has believed God at any point reveals faith in action. We need to consider the attitude and responses of true faith and truly examine ourselves as to whether we possess an unfeigned faith or whether our idea of faith will prove to be dross that hits bottom when tested in the fiery ovens of trials and tribulation.

The first person that I want to consider is rarely ever considered in light of faith. In fact, this person is often held up as a bad example. However, she is the first one that displayed genuine faith. Her name is Eve.

When we hear the name of Eve, we think of "that woman" who was dumb enough to talk to a serpent in the garden. Her conversation opened her up to be seduced, resulting in her transgressing the covenant of God. No one will argue that Eve's failure was a great tragedy.

In spite of being a great failure, Eve was the first one to unveil unfeigned faith. What she revealed about faith is that it chooses to simply believe God. You might be saying in what way did Eve believe God? The answer might surprise you. She believed God concerning the seed of redemption. In other words, she believed that God would fulfill His promise in *Genesis 3:15* of sending forth the seed of the woman who would redeem man from the curse that came upon all mankind through her and Adam's transgression. In fact, she so believed the prophecy and promise concerning the seed that she named her oldest son with expectation that it would come forth. Who was this son? His name was Cain. The name "Cain" points to two components of faith—that of believing and expecting. Cain means to "acquire" or "possession." But, notice Eve's declaration about Cain in *Genesis 4:1*. She declared "I have gotten a man from the LORD."

According to Katharine C. Bushnell, a professor in the 1920's who was a recognized authority in the area of Biblical translation in relationship to the original transcripts, stated in her book "God's Word to Women," that the original translation of *Genesis 4:1* should read: "I have gotten a man, --even 'the Coming One.'"

Eve believed God about the "Coming One" and lived in expectation of seeing it come to fruition. Even though Cain proved to be anyone but the "Coming One," her expectation reveals she did believe that God was going to send forth the Redeemer. Even though Jesus would not enter into history until 4000 years later, it shows how faith makes every promise of God an expected reality. Even though such a reality may not happen until years or generations later, it is up to each of us to seize upon and acquire the hope of such promises in our hearts. We need to live every day in expectation of

those promises coming true. Such expectation may not be realized in the age we live in, but as the writer of Hebrews pointed out in *Hebrews 6:11-12*, “And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end; That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”

The reality of faith is that even though it may not see a fulfillment of a promise, it lives in expectation of it coming true. Such expectation soars on the wings of hope that assures those who do cling to the promise that they will ultimately possess or acquire it when the fullness of the believer’s eternal inheritance is fully realized in Christ Jesus. It is for this reason that *Hebrews 11:1* gives this definition of faith, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

Eve gives us insight into the expectation of faith, but Abel gives us the evidence of such faith. Faith without works is dead. In other words, faith that fails to respond in a right way does so because it is void of expectation. Faith that has no expectation is dead. Expectation always produces action. If Eve had not expected the “Coming One”, she would never have given Cain the name she did. She sincerely believed God’s promise. She proved this by naming her first son in expectation of God bringing it about. Granted, faith seems to be born out of season in relationship to when such events actually take place, but it is never out of season when it comes to living in expectation of what God will ultimately bring about in the end. Faith is ongoing and will perpetuate even in generations to come until a matter is brought to fruition.

Abel’s faith reiterates that it is always followed by obedience or works that declare a matter is so. Keep in mind, unfeigned faith makes three definite statements. It states since I believe a matter is true, “amen.” “Amen” means “so be it.” Since a matter is true, “so be it,” for without any doubt or wavering “it is so.” Such a matter has been stated by God; therefore, in heaven it is as good as done, and in due time it will be carried out at the appointed time in relationship to man and the age he lives in.

Abel believed God as to the type of sacrifice he needed to offer to Him. In fact, his offering brought a distinct contrast between the offering his brother, Cain, made. The contrast was made evident when God accepted Abel’s offering. The evidence of faith is that God counts the actions inspired by such faith as righteousness. If God does not put His approval on that which has been done or offered as being righteous, it cannot be considered an act of genuine faith. Keep in mind, faith acts according to God’s requirements, standards, or desires.

Hebrews 11:4 tells us that by faith Abel offered God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain. As a result, Abel obtained the witness or evidence that he was righteous. His act of righteousness revealed his brother’s prideful motive behind his sacrifice and even reached beyond the grave after Cain killed him, and brought an indictment against his brother. The evidence of faith will always bring a contrast, and ultimately, its very evidence will serve as a witness against those who refuse to believe what God and His Word have declared as being so.

This brings us to a very important subject: the coming of Jesus. Eve believed it, each age has brought us closer to it, and the evidence that it is at hand is all around us. However, Jesus asked if He would find unfeigned faith that lives in expectation of His coming. He wondered if there would be an active faith that would be counted as righteousness that would ultimately bring an indictment against those of the present age who refuse to believe.

We need to accept the challenge put forth in Scripture. First, we must make sure we are in the true faith that was first delivered to the saints. From the right premise we need to recognize the days we live in, heed Jesus’ warnings, and take to heart His concerns about the matters in regard to His kingdom. Like Eve, we need to live in expectation of

the blessed hope, and like Abel we need, by faith, offer that which is excellent to our Lord. Such excellence will ensure that the evidence of our faith will not only be approved and accepted by God, but it will reach beyond the grave as an example, as well as serve as a living witness and indictment to those who refuse to believe.

3

WALKING WITH GOD

As Christians, we must understand faith. There are many false presentations of faith. Last month I talked about the type of faith that simply believes what God has promised and the witness that it leaves, even if it must be declared from the grave. In fact, we are told that there is a great cloud of witness when it comes to faith (*Hebrews 12:1*). By following the examples of faith in other saints' lives we can see how it works.

Genuine faith is not just a matter of believing something. Granted, such belief possesses expectation. Expectation declares that since it believes a matter to be true, it expects what has been promised to come true. The challenge with faith is even though it expects a promise to be fulfilled a person may never see it occur in his or her lifetime. For example, both Abraham and King David never witnessed the fulfillment of the promise God gave them, but they continued to live in expectation that it would happen (*Hebrews 11:13*). They rested in complete assurance that it was already done because the Lord said so.

The expectation in faith brings us to the next aspect of true faith, and that is that it is active. Sadly, faith has been demoted to an intellectual acknowledgement, a method or a practice. However, faith is active regardless of what it sees or does not see. It ensures advancement, not a stalemate when it comes to our Christian life. In a sense, it is living as it discerns, interrelates, interacts, and responds with what is going on around an individual.

The Bible tells us that God counts or reckons acts originating from faith as being righteous. Keep in mind that Abraham's faith was active. He was ready to offer up his son, Isaac, out of obedience to God. We are told that due to God's promise to Abraham regarding his son that he had the assurance that God would raise him from the dead (*Hebrews 11:17-19*). The Lord counted Abraham's act as righteousness. The problem with some believers is that they perceive that faith will in some miraculous or supernatural way carry them through challenging situations. This is a wrong perception of faith. Faith actually enables a person to walk through challenges with confidence that God is in the circumstances. We can see this in Abraham. He is the one who walked to the mount to offer his son.

Faith enables us to take steps of obedience towards what we know is true and right before the Lord. For this reason faith is active. It is always advancing a person in a matter. It does not sit back while clinging to wishful thinking that all will turn out well. It does not live in denial of what is going on; rather, it faces the reality of a matter in order to walk through it in the strength and power of God.

The Apostle Paul tells us that we are to walk by faith and not by sight (*2 Corinthians 5:7*). Sight in this case not only points to walking according to what we see, but what we also understand about a matter. Genuine faith does not walk according to events taking place in the physical world. Rather, it walks according to the character and righteous ways of an unseen God. It does not walk according to a worldly perception, but an inner knowing and witness of the Spirit of God that God is who He says He is. Because of who He is, God will never lie and He will always keep His promises. Regardless of what the world presents or declares that is contrary to God, He will ultimately prove to be faithful and powerful enough to bring about all that He has declared and promised.

Faith on our part is a matter of showing good faith by believing that God will do as He says. Based on our assurance of His faithfulness, we walk according to what has been established and verified as being true. Such a response usually translates into obedience towards God and His Word. For this reason we are told that faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God (*Romans 10:17*).

As believers, we are to walk according to the Word of God. This means obeying and applying the instructions, commandments, examples, and exhortations to our way of living. Each time we apply the Word of God by faith, we will grow spiritually. Through the years I have been aware of the different stages of the faith walk. In the initial stage of my faith walk, it was as though the Lord took my hand until I learned to somewhat walk on my own as my spiritual legs gained the necessary strength to take steps of obedience to what I knew was right.

Due to my spiritual immaturity in those initial years, I did find myself taking various detours. Granted, I was running what I thought was the race, only to find out I was not even in the race. I had veered off course due to disobedience and unbelief, and ended up spent out and exhausted in what seemed to be one dead end after another.

Thanks to the faithfulness of the Lord, He got me back on track. The detours of my life taught me some valuable lessons about running the race. First, I had to be prepared. I had spent a lot of unnecessary energy on activities that proved to be vain and empty. After learning valuable lessons in relationship to my faith, I waited for instructions from my Master. I allowed Him to equip me to properly run the race before me, restrain me along the path when discipline was required, compel me with inspiration when the terrain became challenging, and lead the way when darkness and uncertainty was upon me.

By considering my past walk, I can see how I could have avoided many detours if I had walked in belief towards what the Word of God stated about certain subjects or matters. The problem is I wanted life on my terms. Each time I insisted on my right to have it my way, it would end in disaster. It was not until I chose to believe the Bible that I found the means to make strides in my spiritual walk.

This brings each of us as believers to what it means to walk by faith. There are two men that give us incredible insight into the faith walk. They are Enoch and Noah. These two men understood how faith was to operate. Their faith walk actually put them in step with their God. We know this is true because it is recorded that they actually walked with God. Let us now consider their examples in order to understand what active faith entails and will ultimately produce.

When I study these men's lives, I realize that their faith brought them in step with God's will and purpose. Sadly, most Christians perceive faith as a means to arrive at some spiritual level of enlightenment, greatness, or accomplishment. However, genuine faith simply brings you into step with a great God. Such a walk points to communion. Saints who walk in communion or agreement with God develop an incredible familiarity with Him. Abraham reveals the level of familiarity when the Bible refers to him as a friend of God.

Jesus pointed to this same familiarity. He stated to His disciples on the night He was betrayed that He no longer wanted to call them servants, but friends. He stated that servants do not know the intimate matters of their Lord. He wanted intimacy with them so that He could make known to them the matters of heaven. However, such a relationship would hinge on them obeying His commands (*John 15:13-15*).

What did Enoch and Noah discover in their walk with the Lord? The first characteristic in regards to walking by faith is that it brought a clear distinction in their lives. It caused God to take note of Enoch and caused Noah to stand distinct in the midst of a wicked world. Clearly, the faith walk identifies believers to the One who they must put their trust and confidence in.

For Enoch, this identification caused him to cease to be. We are told that he “was not” for God took him. His faith actually brought him to a place in God where he was translated to heaven without seeing physical death (*Genesis 4:22-24*). We are told that before his translation he had a testimony that he pleased God (*Hebrews 11:5*). We know we cannot please God without faith in Him (*Hebrews 11:6*). Was Enoch’s walk with God so precious that the wicked world was not worthy to witness his life (*Hebrews 11:38*)? Once again, we are reminded that faith is an active walk that will bring us into step with God.

The book of Jude gives us some more insight into Enoch, “*And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him*” (*Jude 14-15*). Enoch saw into the future. Genuine faith is what gives God’s people the vision to see into the world to come.

We can see how faith produced the ability to see into the world to come. Abraham’s faith would never allow him to settle for this present world. As a result, he developed a vision that allowed him to see beyond his age. Therefore, he was not caught up with seeing the promises fulfilled in light of the present world, but to see the essence of his real hope in relationship to the next. We are told, “*For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God*” (*Hebrews 11:10*).

Faith begins where personal understanding ceases. What most people do not understand about faith is that when it expresses itself through obedience, light penetrates the darkness in order to light up the path that His people must walk. The light not only allows His followers to see where they are walking, but sometimes it reveals what will happen in the future.

Some Christians are groping in the darkness of the world because of unbelief towards the Word of God. I must state at this time that unbelief is expressed through failure to obey God’s Word. Such darkness is not caused because understanding is eluding a person, but because a he or she is failing to do what is right. It is known as the sin of omission.

This brings us to Noah. Enoch pleased God by how he faithfully walked in regard to Him. However, when it came to Noah, He found grace in the midst of great wickedness. In other words, his life stood out in the darkness of wickedness and God was able to show him favor at a time when He was repenting that He had even created man. God was about to destroy mankind, but He considered Noah’s life, and counted his faith as a point of righteousness.

The Apostle Paul tells us in *Romans 5:21* that grace reigns through righteousness. Because of Noah’s faith, God’s grace was able to flow down to him and through him. We are told that Noah’s response to God’s instruction concerning the impending judgment condemned the world and made him an heir of salvation.

What can we learn from Noah’s example? We are given insight into the aspects of his faith as recorded by *Hebrews 11:7*. The first response of Noah’s faith finds its origins in a right attitude. We are told that in fear he moved to do what he was instructed to do even though he did not understand the implications of the judgment coming upon the world. Most people do not respond to God because they want to understand how spiritual matters are going to fare for them. In reality, they do not dread facing Him in judgment. They are not concerned as to whether their attitudes or actions would bring a reproach to their testimony and to the kingdom of God.

Noah’s next response was that he took action, and built an ark. In other words, he obeyed the voice of the Lord. There was no indication that he argued with the Lord or

asked Him to explain His instructions. Noah simply believed what was being said and responded accordingly.

His actions served as a living witness to those who observed his activities of faith. Because of Noah's witness, he condemned the whole world. God always has a witness that will bring some type of clarity or warning. Except for Noah's family, the people did not take heed and perished in their sins.

The final aspect of faith is that Noah became an heir of righteousness. In essence, he was counted righteous by God. God showed him favor and today he is part of the great cloud of witnesses. We can study the life he had with God and the way he responded to his Lord because he was a man of faith. He believed upon God's Words, believed Him concerning future judgment, and believed in Him that He would do all things according to His character and will. He moved in respect towards God, and with assurance obeyed Him, and with confidence knew he would receive the fullness of his heavenly inheritance.

As we face the darkness of this world, we need to be walking in step with God. We need to hear His voice in order to prepare ourselves to enter the ark He has prepared for us. We need to recognize that future judgment is pending. The truth is Christians will not make it through the darkness of this present age without faith. They will never please God, and He will not be able to count any of their religious acts as being righteous.

What kind of faith do you possess? Check out your walk. Consider if you are making any real spiritual advancements towards the heavenly destination promised to those who are heirs of righteousness.

4

WALKING TOWARDS PROMISES

What does it mean to walk by faith? We know it begins with believing something as being true. If you believe a matter, you will come into step with it. We see this in the lives of Enoch and Noah. They came into step with God's will and purpose, and ended up walking with God. As a result, Enoch was translated out of this world and Noah was delivered from God's wrath.

What does it mean to come into step with the Lord? To answer this question we must consider Abraham. The one Scripture that best describes Abraham's faith walk is found in *Hebrews 11:10*, "For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God."

When God called Abraham out of his country, he had no real consensus as to where he was going. Granted, he had somewhat of an idea of the direction he was to head towards, but he had no concept as to what was before him.

This brings us to a very important aspect of faith. Faith is exercised in relationship to the unknown. Abraham was walking into the unknown. All he possessed at the time was the word and promise of an unseen God. Obviously, Abraham would not be walking by what he could see with the eye for his destination was not within his physical vision. He would not walk according to what he understood. He had no point of origin in which to understand what he would be seeing or experiencing. He could not walk according to any fanciful notions for he had no real expectations about where he was going. Abraham went out of his known environment because he trusted God.

Abraham's faith in God is what allowed him to take the necessary steps forward into a new life. His confidence in God made his steps steadfast. His trust in God would keep him on the strait, narrow path of obedience. His assurance in God would ensure that in the end he would come to the Promised Land.

Most people want a blueprint before they tread into unknown territory. However, faith does not walk according to a blueprint, but according to the character, word, and promises of God. Faith does not walk according to the light of this world or even man's religion. In reality, the false, temporary, fading lights of the world and man create darkness rather than light. True faith always begins when personal and worldly understanding ceases. This is the beauty about faith. It does not depend on the light of this world; rather, it walks according to the vision and promises of an unseen world.

For example, even though Abraham was walking towards the Promised Land, his real focus or vision was on the unseen city made by the hands of God. He also understood what his real portion or inheritance was. It was not some stretch of land, but it was the Lord Himself (*Genesis 15:1*). Abraham would never see the physical promises come to fruition, but he understood the spiritual implication of following the God of heaven and earth. All real blessings and promises attached to Him were of a spiritual nature that reached far beyond this world. It is from Abraham's example that we learn that genuine faith does not walk according to the present age of understanding or enlightenment, but according to an unseen age that is yet to come in power and glory.

It is for this reason that Abraham serves as an example as to how unfeigned faith responds to God. Scripture tell us that it is faith that identifies us to the unseen kingdom and family. The Apostle Paul put it in this way in *Galatians 3:6-9*, "Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye, therefore, that

they who are of faith the same are the children of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Greeks through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So, then, they who are of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham."

We know that the children of Israel thought that their biological identification to Abraham made them exceptional. However, John the Baptist put their physical identification to the great patriarch in this way, *"And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham as our father; for I say unto you that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham"* (Matthew 3:9).

Even though the Jews rightfully had claim to the Messiah from a biological standpoint, they could not be identified to the spiritual heritage except by way of faith. We see in some cases, such as recorded in *John 8:31-47*, that Jesus rebuked them because they did not believe. Although they knew their God was unseen, they still related to His many promises on a physical level that outwardly complied to religious rituals, but lacked any real heart belief or revelation. Jesus stated that they would draw near to God with their mouths but their hearts were far from Him (*Matthew 15:8-9*). In *Malachi 2:17*, we read these words, *"Ye have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied him? When ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and he delighteth in them; or, Where is the God of judgment?"*

Words are cheap if they are not backed up with action. There are many words, claims and declarations among those who claim to be Christians, but what do their works reveal about them? God was wearied with idle, meaningless words that had no consideration for His righteous ways. Such disobedient people proved they did not believe Him. It is for this reason the Apostle Paul clarified that the faith that leads to salvation is indeed a matter of the heart believing unto righteousness. Notice in what way the heart believes God, *"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation"* (Romans 10:9-10).

We know that God counts that which is inspired, compelled, or motivated by faith as being upright to Him. In spite of Abraham being born in the Adamic fallen race, he chose the way of faith. Each step of faith led him to the place where God was calling him. Every time Abraham adhered to God's instruction, God counted his response as being upright and acceptable to Him. Since God counted Abraham's obedient responses as being upright, He could in turn bless him. In the end, Abraham's steps of faith would allow God to fulfill His very promises.

Faith not only advances us in our walk, but it will bring us to the place where God will be able to reveal Himself to us and fulfill His promises in our lives. The truth is, faith is always walking towards God in expectation of inheriting His promises.

It is important to follow Abraham in his faith walk. His example shows us how faith responds and where it will ultimately lead a person in his or her relationship with God. Let us now examine the journey of Abraham.

Opened: One of the things I meditated upon about Abraham was why God chose him from among all the other people who lived during his time. Perhaps *2 Chronicles 16:9* gives us an answer to this question, *"For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect towards him. Herein thou hast done foolishly; therefore, from henceforth thou shalt have wars."* From this Scripture we can conclude that Abraham had the type heart that God could reveal Himself to in order to bring forth His plan of salvation.

The Call: God is always calling people. We see Him calling out to Adam in the garden. He sent prophets to the children of Israel to serve as His voice. Twenty

centuries ago, He sent His only begotten Son to communicate His heart and desire to the poor in spirit. We read in *Genesis 12:1* that the Lord spoke to Abraham. No doubt, His call went out to Abraham, and he heard His voice. His call for Abraham was to leave his present home for a land that He would show Him.

Jesus' call has gone out to all who will hear. He calls for people to follow Him into a new life. He has called the blind and leprous people to come to Him. He has called the Zacchaeus's of the world to step down and sup with Him. He invites people to drink from the wells of salvation.

The Promise: Genesis tells us the first thing that God spoke to Abraham after His call was the promise. God made a promise to Abraham that He would bless Him, make his name great, and that he would become a blessing to many others. Keep in mind that God was able to bless Abraham because of his faith. His name is great because of the faith he displayed. He became a blessing to those who follow in his footsteps of faith. In Abraham, we see the role that unfeigned faith plays in the lives of God's people.

The promise that is being offered to all of us is that of salvation. We are saved by the grace of God through the small measure of faith that clings to the promise of eternal life. It is the same faith that enables us to pursue the untold, unseen blessings that are attached to eternal life.

Obedience: Faith responds in obedience. Abraham obeyed the voice of the Lord. He departed from his homeland. He left behind the old in order to embrace the new. Genuine faith in the Lord will always lead us away from the old. Each step of obedience will lead us closer to realizing the fullness of the new way or new life that we are being called to. As we embrace the ways of this new life, we will draw closer to the reality of the promises attached to the new life.

Scripture tells us that if we love Jesus, we will obey Him. *Hebrews 5:8-9* tells us that Jesus became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him. Unfeigned faith cannot help but obey what it knows is true, right, and pleasing to the One who is loved, honored, and worshipped.

Separation: Abraham experienced separation from that which would keep him from inheriting the new. His father had already died, but he had to separate from the home he had always known and most of his family to a new, foreign place. He would later separate from his nephew, Lot. He would be required to send his son, Ishmael and his mother Hagar away to pursue the integrity of God's promise.

As believers, we are continually being separated from that which belongs to the old way of living. We cannot combine the old with the new without destroying the old and defiling the new, leaving us with emptiness and vanity.

Detour: Abraham was a man. We see him taking a detour. Instead of going to the Promised Land, he went to Egypt during a famine. God did not call him to Egypt. Although God protected Abraham in his foolishness, He did not speak to Him until he came back into line with God.

Like Abraham, we will take detours, but we will quickly learn the vanity of such steps. We must turn back in repentance to the place where we last committed all matters to God to ensure the quality of our walk before Him. We must never settle for Egypt when we have yet to discover the fullness of God's promises.

The question is, have you settled for the vanity of Egypt (the world) or are you in line with that which God has promised to you. Keep your eyes on Him as you trust Him to lead you into that which He has promised you. Perhaps you cannot see it, nor do you understand what it all means for it is foreign to you. But, what must not be foreign to us is God. We may be walking into the unknown, but we are walking according to what we know is true and trustworthy. We are walking according to the call and leading of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

5

THE STEADFASTNESS OF FAITH

It is obvious that we are living in precarious times. The Lord Jesus, the Apostles Paul, Peter, and John, as well as Old Testament prophets, spoke of these times. As I consider what is happening on every front, I can see why the present intense travailing, tribulation, and quasi-religious environment would cause Jesus to be concerned with the prospect of not being able to find true faith when He came the second time.

As believers, we must not let the precarious times that surround us cause us to faint in our hearts and minds when it comes to finishing the course set before us. However, we must not be foolish or live in denial as to the times we are living in either. We know from Scripture that certain events must take place before Jesus can return as Lord of lords, King of kings, and the great righteous Judge who will bring all matters to the light for the purpose of separation and judgment.

The question is how must we face the prophetic events that are unfolding before us? We know we cannot be foolish or live in denial about the times we live in because Scripture instructs us to be watchful, ready, and prepared. In other words, we must be sober about the matters of heaven. Sobriety points to being clear-headed in how we view matters, serious about our responsibilities, tempered in our actions, and somber about taking necessary steps to wisely prepare.

Through the years, I have watched genuine faith come under blatant attack by pseudo faiths that were being promoted by wolves, heretics, and charlatans. Whether it was being promoted behind the guise of such movements as “Positive Confession”, “Word of Faith”, or “Contemplative Spirituality”, the harsh truth is that the faith that was first delivered to the saints has always been, and continues to be, under attack. Each affront against faith has weakened the foundation of those who have not been brought up on the pure doctrine of Christ. Instead of people being disciplined to follow Jesus, they have been made converts to religious leaders, heretical movements, and lifeless denominations. This “dumbing down” of Christians has fudged the decisive lines of truth, conditioning the following generations to accept greater compromise in the Christian realm. This compromise has been so great that there is no distinction as to what identifies true Christianity. In fact, everything that has a religious connotation to it is now being labeled as “Christianity”. Clearly, the term “Christian” has been hijacked to embrace every kind of religious movement regardless of how contrary or far away from that which was clearly established by the Word of God. For example, if a person is not “born again” from above by the Water of the Word (faith in the Gospel) and the Holy Spirit who will take residence in the person’s spirit to bring forth the life of Christ, he or she is still lost. The Bible is clear that such a person will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Christianity is not about living some sort of “decent life”; rather, it is about possessing the life of Christ. His life within a person is the real source behind wearing the label of being a “Christian.” The life of Christ will express itself in a lowly, humble disposition, through a meek attitude, and with a godly lifestyle. It will be motivated by love (charity), compelled to be benevolent, and will express itself in sacrificial ways.

Why is faith the main target of all that which opposes God in relationship to His way, truth, and life? The main reason why faith comes under blatant attack is clear. True faith is only directed towards the true God of heaven. It will not follow another god, worship an image, serve a tyrant, compromise the truth, sacrifice purity, make peace with the

unholy, or cater to the despots of the world. It will not let go of what it knows is true, will not be swayed from what is right, and will not be bullied to compromise with or submit to the tyrannical ways of man or the world.

It is for this reason that genuine faith is the only means by which man can please God. It is the only way man's standing and actions before God can be counted as righteousness. It is what inspires men to tread into the unknown in light of gaining the eternal. True faith is what causes steadfastness in the soul. This steadfastness is present because God serves as the rock that true faith clings to at all times.

Today faith is coming under greater attack as the unholy agreement between the professing Church and the world escalates. We can actually see where the professing Church is now coming into agreement with a wicked government of despots, Marxists, and arrogant revolutionaries. Together this unholy mixture has been proclaiming another gospel known as "Social Justice." They also have been promoting a heretical salvation which does away with the "sin" factor and totally bypasses the redemption of Christ, while putting the burden on man to somehow make the ills of society right. The name of this form of salvation is known as "Collective Salvation."

It is clear that a line is being drawn in the sand. Although there are those who claim that they will remain neutral in the battle that is raging for truth, this unholy, blasphemous agreement will divide the true Church from the apostate church. People will have to come out of the apostate church and take a stand as to which side they are going to choose, knowing full well that it could cost them everything in the end. The cost will be obvious. For one side, it will be the life they used to know, and for the other side it will be the life they could have known. One side will consecrate all to God, while the other side will lose their souls in the end.

The harsh reality is that the visible Church has been going apostate from the faith first delivered to the saints for years. As this element of the Church has given way to the world's influence, devised a "seeker-friendly" gospel, mixed pagan rituals with Christian truths, and conformed to a worldly "approved religion," it has become lost to its true calling. On the other side are those individuals who contend for the true faith as they warn and exhort Christians of the dangers that await them in the path they are taking. Such watchmen are forever trying to pull souls out of the fire as they bring them back to center as to what is true, right, and godly.

This brings us back to the days we are living in. The one aspect of the Christian faith that we must be sober about is the fact that genuine faith is under blatant attack in America. Instead of discerning the times in which we live, it appears as if much of the professing Church is being caught up with the wave of delusion. Granted, this delusion has the veneer of religion attached to it, but there is an anti-Christ spirit behind it. This anti-Christ spirit is seducing many with a false light into an unholy reality that will one day cause them to crash against the rocks of judgment. For this reason, we must know where we stand and in whom we are going to believe. We are going to have to make some tough decisions as to what will serve as our absolute authority, who we are going to ultimately believe and follow, and what we will end up loving.

As for me, I choose the way of Abraham. He chose to believe God and allowed His Word to be his final authority. He chose to love everything associated with his God, from His truth to His ways in order to embrace his ultimate inheritance. In Abraham's life there was only one absolute and that was his God. There was only one purpose and that was to inherit the unseen promises of God. There was only one way to walk, and that was in accordance to all that God had ordained.

As we follow Abraham, we see the type of steadfastness his faith towards God produced in him. By faith he separated from the world (Ur) in search of the Promised Land. He separated from his father (idolatry) in order to discover God as his portion.

Even though Abraham took a detour here and there, he always came back into line with his God.

The more I consider Abraham's steadfastness, the more I realize I must possess the same resolve in relationship to my faith if I am going to complete the course. The truth is we as believers are walking through a spiritual minefield. At times we are going to be overwhelmed as we encounter the travailing of our souls, the distress of tribulation, and the reality that we could be swallowed up by the different deceptive waves of the age we live in.

What does Abraham's faith show us about his steadfastness towards God? The first thing that I noticed was that Abraham's faith was steadfast because his resolve was based on the character of God. He believed that God never lied; therefore, he could trust His instructions. If He said "go," he could go with confidence, knowing that the Lord would never lead Him astray.

When we bring this down to layman's terms for us today, we must believe what God has said in His Word. If His Word commands us in a certain way, we must obey it. If His Word instructs us to wait, we must wait. If His Word tells us to be faithful in the small ways, we must in good faith be responsive to do so in order to be entrusted with more. If His Word promises a matter, we must make sure we are adhering to its condition to benefit from such promises. God desires to do much for us, with us, and through us, but the conditions must be present for Him to have His way in our lives and in our circumstances.

When the Lord made a covenant with Abraham, he was assured that God would fulfill it in due time. We can actually see that Abraham was not caught up with seeing the covenants of God being fulfilled. After all, the covenants that God made with him were not necessarily for his benefit. God makes covenants so that He can show that He not only means what He says, but says what He means. He is also faithful to not only remember what He promised or agreed to, but He is true in bringing a matter about regardless of the time that has elapsed between the actual pledge or agreement and its coming to fruition.

Abraham walked according to promises and covenants that would not be brought forth for generations to come. For example, there was a four-hundred-year lapse between the covenant that God made with Abraham concerning his descendants possessing the Promised Land to when it actually happened. The beauty about Abraham's faith is that the promises and covenants of God caused him to look past them being fulfilled or coming to some type of fruition, towards eternity where all matters of heaven would find their ultimate fulfillment.

As Christians, we are part of a covenant that identifies us to the status of being children of God. However, we will not completely benefit from our status until we come into the fullness of our spiritual inheritance. Like Abraham, we should be looking beyond this present age towards the next one to come. We must be walking according to that which God has established, and not that which belongs to this present age. We must be looking beyond the temporary to that which has been promised, and be assured of an eternal inheritance.

As we consider the possibilities before us in relationship to the times in which we live, we need to consider them in light of God bringing forth all of His promises and covenants. We are living in precarious times, but they are also exciting days. We know that the prophetic events are pointing to wickedness hitting a pinnacle that will cause all of it to be brought low by the wrath of God. Meanwhile, we must become resolved and steadfast in our faith towards God. We must walk with confidence towards what is true, stand sure upon what is right, and remain immovable in the course set before us.

UNFEIGNED FAITH (The Series)

We must set our face towards our destination, knowing that only faith towards God will enable each of us to keep our eyes steadfastly on the glory that awaits us.

6

THE BOX

Does the term “Fireside Chats” ring a bell with you? It is where the promoter or leader would casually sit, with supposedly a fireplace in the background, and chat about the issues presently affecting the landscape. In this article, I want to have such a chat with you about faith. In a way, I want to reason with you about what constitutes the faith that was first delivered to the saints.

I, for one, have struggled greatly with this issue. When I was first saved, I had an understanding that my salvation was the result of believing the Biblical evaluation that was pronounced upon my spiritual condition. Without any doubt I knew I was a sinner. I had identified hatred in my heart, perversion in my conclusions, confusion in my thinking, emptiness in my soul, and discontentment in my life. I had come to the end of myself and realized there was nothing I could personally do about my condition. It was clear that I needed to be saved and only something outside of my limitations could accomplish such an incredible feat.

Salvation of my soul was my first encounter with faith. It was that measure of faith that served as the incredible seed that allowed God to impart the very life of Jesus in me. It was incredible to think that faith, the size of a mustard seed, had connected me to the glorious work of heaven.

However, that small measure of faith was just a beginning. There was an incredible ocean that needed to be explored in regard to faith. Each measure of faith that was imparted to me would be greater than the measure before. Each impartation of faith would expose me to the vast storehouse of God’s possibilities and promises.

This brought me to the reality that faith required me to be an explorer. It would make me a stranger in the world as I explored the possibilities of that which was unseen. It would make me a pilgrim as I sought out my real destination. As my status caused me to venture forth in my faith, I would have to take steps into the unknown. To explore the unknown I would have to take risks that could result in failure, or bring me to the abyss, teetering on the edge of absolute destruction.

Each journey would bring me to a type of Job’s outcome. I would have to choose to trust the Lord with everything in me, regardless of the uncertain outcome. In times of great adversity and conflict, I would have to maintain my ways before the unseen and tangible worlds around me to be able to give a defense of the faith I possessed (*Job 13:15*).

The problem is that in our ignorance towards the Christian life, we can often romanticize about genuine faith until we have to walk the walk. When the Apostle Paul talked about walking by faith and not by sight, he understood what it entailed (*2 Corinthians 5:7*). Paul had indeed walked the walk. We can actually identify some of the steps he had to take. Sometimes circumstances forced him to walk in a certain direction, other times the Spirit led him, and in many cases he had to simply obey what he knew was right in light of God’s Word, his calling, and his mission.

As I considered the walk of faith, I realized that what prevents us from taking such steps towards a greater life and ultimate destination of heaven is that so many of us are entangled or enslaved in a box. You might be wondering what box I could be talking about. The box has to do with our way of thinking.

When the Apostle Paul made reference to walking by faith and not by sight, he was referring to walking according to our own understanding. We know what *Proverbs 3:3-7* states, “*Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart: So shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man. Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil.*”

The Apostle Paul made it clear that our minds have to be transformed by the Spirit, thus no longer being conformed to the world’s way of thinking (*Romans 12:2*). Clearly, the great battle for faith takes place in the mind. The mind serves as a narrow, limited box that has been conditioned and indoctrinated by the world to oppose genuine faith.

Like all boxes, the mind will encase what it contains. Trying to operate outside of the borders of this box will bring each of us up against formidable walls. Every time a person gives way to the hindrances created by walls, faith becomes a casualty. These walls become the mountains that are too great to climb, the chasms that are too deep to bridge, the roads that are too winding and precarious to travel, and the rivers that are impassable. These walls magnify circumstances that will hold people down and establish foundations that will make their walk uncertain as they try to balance their feet on shifting sands. It is for this reason that these walls must be identified.

The first wall that will immediately erect itself when personal understanding eludes us is *fear*. The fear of the unknown will produce mountains in front of us. When fear takes hold of our mind, it becomes paralyzed as chains of anxiety and despair strangle our resolve. Instead of taking a step back, applying the mustard seed of faith, and looking upward to our only hope, we often find ourselves hitting our head against an entrenched barricade, or cowering in the corners of absolute panic. Instead of taking hold of the immovable Rock and source of faith, fear takes hold of every aspect of our souls. It becomes the ever looming mountain before us that appears too great to climb; therefore, all is lost. It is for this reason the writer of *Hebrews 12:2-3* made this statement, “*Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your mind.*”

The second wall is *pride*. Pride produces the high peaks of opinions. In other words, it is not unusual to have high opinions about our personal worth and abilities. This personal worth often translates into self-sufficiency. Instead of putting our faith in the character of God, we will put our confidence in our strength and abilities to get through a matter. It is for this reason the Apostle Paul reminded us that our sufficiency is of God (*2 Corinthians 3:5*). He also made this statement in *Romans 12:3*, “*For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.*”

The problem with our pride is it is arrogant in its conclusions and will not humble itself before that which would prove worthy or beneficial. Pride will scoff at the ways of faith. It will always deem faith as being weak and silly. Since pride always wants to come out on top, it is not unusual for great competition to ensue as we strive to climb over obstacles in order to come out on top. This fleshly motivation is also quick to move away from taking personal responsibility for its limited, but divisive ways, causing the person to spiral downward into the great gulf of hopelessness. In such a condition people cannot afford to be wrong; therefore, they are not in the position of getting it right. In such a state, these individuals will lack real wisdom as they give way to the folly of their arrogance and foolishness.

The third wall is that of *logic*. We are instructed to not become wise in our own eyes. However, all of our ways seem clean in our own eyes (*Proverbs 16:2*). The reason all of our understanding seems so right is because we have approached the matter from every logical standpoint there is, and in our minds there is no way we can be wrong. However, we are told that God's ways and thoughts are not the same as ours. In fact, they are much higher (*Isaiah 55:8-9*). As people maneuver the dangerous twists and turns of life according to their logic, they often find themselves missing a turn and plummeting head first down the steep hillside of failure.

The initial rush of missing our turn may be exciting, but the end results are devastating. Logic will often leave us in a heap of confusion, uncertainty, and despair. Not only do we discover how limited our logic is, but it is incapable of reaching the heights of excellence when it comes to obtaining the ways and thoughts of God.

Even though our logic is limited, earthbound, and incapable of seeing the whole picture, it will mock faith that trusts the simplicity and truth of Jesus Christ. It will perceive itself as being so much more superior in its so-called "rational" state that it will see genuine faith as being foolish, ridiculous, and silly. It is for this reason the Apostle Paul gave this instruction in *Romans 12:16*, "*Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.*"

The fourth wall consists of *vain imaginations*. Imagination has a way of making a matter impassable when it comes to advancing in a situation. Imaginations can run as wild and fast as any river. They can exaggerate how wide or great the challenge is, while dramatizing the odds of what it would mean to properly cross over a matter to finish the course.

When it came to inheriting the Promised Land, the children of Israel imagined that the cities were too fortified, the iron chariots too great, and the soldiers too fierce for God to enable them to possess the land. They could not see how they could get around or pass through such strongholds without being utterly consumed by that which was greatly exaggerated and exalted by their imagination. Granted, the cities were fortified, the iron chariots swift, and the soldiers trained, but in light of God's power, cities would fall, chariots would become weighed down and rendered ineffective, and soldiers would be reduced to nothing more than the size of ants, scattering in every direction.

Vain imaginations will push faith aside as they give in to their own vain currents of ridiculousness. Since they have no boundaries, they will overflow any sound reason and rush headlong towards the falls of destruction. At such a time, our focus is not being turned towards the character and ways of God. It is for this reason the Apostle Paul made this statement in *2 Corinthians 10:4-5*, "*(For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.*"

This brings us to the bottom or foundation of the box. It is known as *unbelief*. Faith is a choice that finds its foundation in our will. I choose to believe what I know is true about God and His ways. It is only from the basis of such belief that I can get my bearings enough to step aside from the mountains of fear, step around the high walls of prideful opinions, deem the precarious route of logic as an utterly dead end, and close the dam on my vain imaginations. In other words, I must step outside of what I have deemed to be the comfortable, controllable, and convenient, but insidious box of my carnal mind in order to gain God's perspective.

It is vital that I get my bearings by putting my faith in the immovable Rock of heaven. If I fail to do so, I will discover that my foundation is the shifting sand of unbelief. As I sidestep the uncertainty of my situation, I will discover that my ceiling is not that of God's truth, but a *sick reality* that leaves me in a state of denial, delusion, or fantasy. Instead of

being prepared to believe that God is bigger than every mountain, I will give in to the mountain of fear. In such a state of unbelief I will arrogantly trust that I am capable of getting myself through a situation, rather than flinging myself on the Rock in search of leadership and safety. Instead of being ready to reason with God about the matters of His kingdom and my pathetic ways, I will logic why His ways are foolish and my ways are correct. Instead of challenging the rapids of my imagination with child-like confidence and obedience, I will be swept away by its current towards a collision course with the jagged rocks of foolishness.

When it comes to faith, the biggest battle takes place in the mind. It is too easy to bounce back and forth from one insipid wall to the other in order to try to make sense out of the unknown, control the overwhelming, pull back the unpredictable, and bring matters back into the confines of our limited understanding. If it is not bad enough that we are bouncing back and forth in our decisions and emotions, we find ourselves losing our footing on the shifting sands of unbelief as we hit the ceiling of a reality that is void of heavenly hope, truth, and sanity.

Perhaps you might be relating to this particular article. Maybe you want to quit feeling like a ping pong ball, get off the merry-go-round of ridiculousness, and land at the place of sanity in order to gain clarity in the midst of the overwhelming. You first must cease to depend on what you think you know and humble yourself before that which possesses the eternal perspective. You must repent of trying to understand according to your own perspective and seek to know the heart, mind, and will of God. You must quit wrestling against or repelling away from that which is unknown, and desire to embrace that which is eternal.

Faith is clearly a choice. And, the choice we must make up front to exercise mountain moving faith is to step outside of the limited box of our natural thinking. We must turn our focus heavenward, set our affections on that which is heavenly, and put our full trust in the abiding, faithful character of God. We must choose to trust that He will work out the unknown, bring about the incredible, do the impossible, and ultimately be glorified in it. As we put our trust in Who God is, what He said, and what He will ultimately accomplish for His glory, we must walk in expectation of it all being brought forth in our life.

The question is, are you walking according to your personal understanding, or according to faith that is solely directed towards God?

7

EXERCISING FAITH

As many of you are aware, we have moved to Northern Idaho. One might ask if this was a sudden move on our part. The truth is this move was not sudden, but the door of opportunity to actually relocate proved to be quick. Four years ago, we made some necessary moves to relocate as far as our housing situation. Three years ago we became aware that God was not simply impressing us to move from our present home to another in the Treasure Valley area, but to actually pull up what roots we had and move north.

As a ministry, we began to see that God was changing direction in what we were doing for His kingdom. He confirmed it by phasing out the various ministries we were involved with and fine tuned our thinking in other ways.

We began to seek the Lord as to how far north we were to move. We were given a general locality, and as we considered the different towns in northern Idaho, we could see where Coeur d'Alene, Blanchard, and Clark could possibly be in the general vicinity in which we were to relocate. However, after we received a bit of enlightenment about change in ministry, we were met with silence that lasted for three long years.

During that time period, people who knew about the instruction we had received to move north began to ask us if we really heard correctly. Clearly, we have the examples of Joseph, Moses, and David who had to faithfully endure many years of waiting before they saw a matter through to completion. And, given our humanness, we want a matter completed yesterday. In our weak, fleshly condition it is natural to occasionally venture back to the drawing board and ask the Lord if we had heard right. However, each time He confirmed the calling and brought us to a place of rest.

At times we would feel overwhelmed about the obstacles that stood in front of us in relocating. Clearly, our moving hinged on the selling of our house, but as we all know, the housing market took a big nose dive. Krista also needed to have a job, and the economic prospects looked bleak in the areas we considered. We also had to have certain needs met to function as a ministry, such as high speed internet. In many of the areas of northern Idaho it is too remote for such luxuries. It was clear from all appearances that if God wanted us to be in Northern Idaho, He had to work some miracles.

It was during the three years of waiting that we could sense that our faith was being put into the fiery ovens of testing. This testing became more so obvious when we occasionally found ourselves focused on the obstacles before us. This is when we would have to battle the black, dark whirlpools of unbelief. Many times it looked impossible for our present status to change. It was during those times that some would find occasion to mock us for believing that after so many months or years that God had indeed called us north.

As you now know, God did finally open the door. A young couple serious about buying our house began the negotiation process. This started everything in motion. The Lord also opened up a job for Krista that had His signature all over it. Miraculously we located a house the weekend after Krista's job was secured, and literally had to pack up everything in two weeks. Waiting may be a long-drawn out process, but once the current of God breaks through the door, everything from that point on will become a big blur. At

such times you cannot keep up with the current; thus, you must simply submit to its fast moving pace.

Usually, I do not mention the stout-hearted people who help us along the way, but due to the enormity of the task, I feel it is only proper to mention the names of these people with great appreciation. Our friend Carrie Seaney actually flew in from the state of Washington to help us to pack up, as well as ensured that we got settled in our new home. Thanks to other friends, Don, Jared, and Katie McCollough and Larry and Maureen Human, we managed to get all of our stuff packed up, and at 9 p.m. on February 23rd, our caravan set off from Nampa to a new location in Priest River, Idaho which is located not far from Blanchard, Idaho. Our plans were to travel as far as Grangeville, Idaho, the first night. Our many Christian friends across America who were aware of our plans to leave on February 23rd, were also aware of the extreme weather conditions that awaited us. They were faithful to pray because every weather report pointed to treacherous conditions. We also owe a debt of gratitude to faithful supporters.

In the past the Lord has gotten us through many challenges created by the weather. His incredible intervention met us that night as well. We bucked snow a foot deep between Council and New Meadows, Idaho. Our windshields and wipers iced up, but the lower areas, such as Riggins, allowed us time to thaw out enough to face more challenging conditions such as the total whiteout on the infamous White Bird Hill. We arrived in Grangeville at 4 a.m., exhausted and thankful.

Even though we were planning to make the last trek of our trip on the 24th, the Lord gave us a day off. Due to snow, ice and semi-truck slide offs and roll-overs, there were various road closures along the way. The Lord knew we needed the day to rest before we met the unpredictable road conditions the rest of the way. We not only took advantage of the day by resting, but we also enjoyed fellowship with our dear friends, Howard and Nona Donaldson.

We arrived at our destination at 5 p.m. on February 25th when the temperature was a “balmy” ten below zero, breaking a record. Thanks to Krista’s father, Tony, and two strong, young Christian men by the names of Patrick and Kyle Mulligan, we managed to get all of our stuff in by Saturday afternoon. Granted, some things were so cold they broke and food items and plants, along with my spackling compound froze, but the strenuous activity of moving kept people from experiencing the full effect of the freezing temperatures.

Tony and his talented partner, Peggy Beckmeyer, along with Carrie helped us to make the house livable. We not only had to deep clean everything, including the carpets, and paint the house, but the electrical situation had to be fixed along with a host of other things. Then we also had to contend with a flooded garage, where our books, paintings and other stuff was stacked, as the weather warmed.

It is easy to talk about faith, but to exercise it is a different story altogether. Faith is not exercised when the things of life are going well; rather, it is tested and put into practice when everything around you seems to be going wrong. People have a tendency to think that if they are being obedient to God, all will go well for them. The reality is obedience to God serves as an opportunity for Satan to test our real level of faith. Faith cannot be enlarged or refined unless the fires of adversity are properly applied.

The truth is we have been in this place at different times during the 20 years we have been involved in ministry. Even though we have seen God move some incredible obstacles out of the way, and regardless of its length the waiting is never easy. In the past we have waited months for the door to open and in the last case three years, but the reality is we have waited for many years to see some matters come to fruition. The truth is only genuine faith towards the abiding eternal faithfulness of God can sustain people during such waiting. Even though God may give you insight about a matter, you

will often be met with complete silence. It is during such times you must exercise faith by choosing to believe that God means what He says and will bring it about in due time.

It is during the silent times of waiting that faith is truly enlarged to embrace the impossible. Hence enters the promise of *Isaiah 40:31*: “*But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.*” We often limit God, not because we do not believe He can do the impossible, but because we have our ideas as to how He will bring it about. In such a state, God becomes an entertainer who is simply into sensationalism and not in the business of bringing to fruition eternal matters.

Faith can only be experienced when it is being exercised. However, there are two ways in which faith is exercised. It has to do with believing and trusting. Believing involves discipline, while trusting requires action. Believing enables you to abide in faith while waiting for God to open the door, while trusting God enables you to go forward once the door is opened. Believing also allows you to operate in persuasion that a matter is so regardless of whether it has come to fruition, while trusting causes you to walk in confidence towards a matter, knowing that it will come to fruition. It is for this reason trust is always in conjunction with obedience.

Most people think that exercising faith involves taking steps forward, but initially exercising faith begins with disciplining your walk. It is much like the children of Israel. When the cloud moved, they moved, but when it abided, they would abide. The disciplined ways of faith are necessary to teach a person how to properly discern if it is time to move or not.

A time of waiting is also a time of preparation. God will not require His people to walk before they are prepared to take on the challenge of the terrain. After all, genuine faith is always met with great adversity. It must experience the purging heat of the wilderness, the extreme cold of lifeless environments, and the insurmountable challenges presented by worldly obstacles.

The natural tendency of the flesh is to impulsively walk according to a foolish zeal. When the flesh responds to the matters of God, it throws all caution and discernment to the wind and foolishly and ultimately ends up putting God to a test. Keep in mind real faith shows wise restraint until it discerns that a matter is according to God’s perfect timing and plan.

In *Hebrews 11:8* we are told that Abraham was called to a place where he would receive an inheritance. He obeyed, but he did not know where he was really going or where he would eventually end up. We do not know the exact time between when he left Ur and when he stepped into the Promised Land. We know that his initial claim to the land was during a sorrowful time. He bought a burial plot for his beloved wife, Sarah. As you study Abraham’s life, he had to leave the old behind in order to embrace the new. He had to initially believe what God had revealed to him, and learn to trust and follow the leading of His direction to his final destination. We also know he took a detour to Egypt during a famine.

It is important to point out that Abraham’s initial test of faith was to simply go in the direction ordained by God. However, each point of obedience enlarged him in his faith. When it came time to offer his precious son as a sacrifice, he was prepared to do so in confidence. He had thoroughly been prepared to pass one of the greatest tests of faith recorded in the Bible.

The other aspect about faith is that the test and lessons that must be learned or reinforced are always the same. Will you believe His Word even though nothing makes sense? Will you trust His character and ways even though nothing is going right? Will you maintain your footing on His eternal promises when wrong seems to be triumphing over righteousness? Or, will you succumb to the overwhelming circumstances that

challenge your claims and commitment towards God, allowing unbelief to pull you down into the endless abyss of hopelessness and despair?

Like all faith experiences, we have clearly been tested. As in the past, we have chosen to remember that God never makes a mistake in the route He leads us. He is able to turn what has been intended for evil into good. We also believe and know that God does all things well. He never has, nor will He ever, make a mistake. He will never leave His people without recourse or a way out. His faithfulness towards us is abiding and sure.

And, where does faith lead His followers? It is clear they lead to God's promises coming to fruition. Abraham, along with his descendants, were led to the Promised Land. According to *1 Peter 1:9*, faith will lead the Christian pilgrim to his or her full inheritance of salvation. Where did it lead us? We now reside with beautiful mountains and trees before us and the beauty of the Pend Oreille River behind us. However, we are aware that God did not bring us here to simply enjoy the beauty of the countryside, but to be prepared to do His bidding in whatever way He opens the door of ministry for us. Once again, we are faced with the test of faith. We cannot see what He has in mind for us, but we can trust that He will bring it to completion. The key for us is to continue to believe enough that we remain faithful, and trusting enough that we remain open and available to carry out His marching orders.

Faith has taught us that it will lead us into the place of God. It reminds us that we are simply strangers in this world and pilgrims in our journey. We may stop along the way to do His bidding, but the ultimate goal of genuine faith is to lead us into the fullness of God's eternal glory. It is in His glory that the promise of our faith will be fully realized: *"For the Scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed"* (*Romans 10:11*).

8

OMISSION

We have been considering what unfeigned faith looks like and how it will work and express itself in our lives. As you probably know, we discover or experience different stages of faith in our Christian journey. For example, the first stage of faith is when we are born again. At such a time a new life has been quickened in us by the Spirit. The joy of it all represents sort of a honeymoon in light of discovering Jesus. It is all so exciting and wonderful.

The next stage of faith involves preparing our spiritual muscles to stand. Needless to say, this stage finds us crawling around in uncertainty as we try to find some stable means to pull ourselves up to explore an unseen world that appears to be out of reach. As we test our ability to stand, we find ourselves a bit wobbly as we struggle to put our trust in God so that we can stand on His promises in expectation of them coming to fruition.

Once we learn to stand, then we can begin to take small steps in confidence that if we fall, our loving Father will pick us up and dust us off. He will encourage us to take the necessary risks in order to walk out the life that is being formed in us. After all, faith is about taking a risk. It is obvious that you cannot discover the depths or heights of God unless you are willing to risk normalcy, comfort zones, and conveniences of the present life. To learn to take steps, we must learn to obey His Word. Such obedience allows us to discover the unknown that can prove to be both exciting and frightening. Even though intellectually we know that God will not fail us, we also realize that He may not catch us when we think He should. In our immature way of thinking we can question whether He will bother to pay attention to our particular plight or circumstances. It appears that our unstable spiritual legs also represent our uncertainties and doubts as to whether God will truly take note of us. After all, there is nothing that dictates to Him that He must prove Himself faithful to be at our side while we take such steps. His presence and intervention in our lives are a matter of His abiding grace, not because we are worthy of such consideration from Him.

Once we begin to walk in obedience towards His Word and purpose, our walking legs will become strong and we can begin to run the race toward our high calling and heavenly destiny. We can begin to explore the depths of God's ways and discover the heights of His character. As we become more disciplined, the path will become narrower as we are called to the place of excellence while we press forward to apprehend the heavenly prize of possessing our Lord Jesus.

Genuine faith is what gets us where we need to be. Each new foreboding terrain of our spiritual walk will cause us to reach down into the depths of our souls in the way of determination, in order to reach up with everything in us to cling to the character of the Lord. It is for this reason that God is able to count or impute that which originates from unfeigned faith as righteousness (Romans 4:4, 9).

God must count or impute righteousness to us because as Romans 3:10 states, "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one." There is no good or beneficial thing in our flesh; therefore, what we would consider to be righteous in our lives is viewed by God as being filthy rags (*Isaiah 64:6; Romans 7:18*).

Since God is holy, He cannot accept that which is not righteous before Him. It is for this reason that the matter of righteousness has been clearly outlined in Scripture.

Due to the reality that we have no real origin or source of righteousness outside of Christ, we need to understand what God counts or considers as being righteous. As we are reminded in 1 Peter 4:18, “the righteous are scarcely saved.” When you understand how God imputes such righteousness to us, you will understand how Peter could make such a statement.

Right standing in God: The Bible tells us that upon salvation, God places us into Jesus who is the essence of righteousness (*1 Corinthians 1:30*). When God considers us, He sees the righteousness of Christ and not the best of our filthy rags, which are nothing more than attempts to make ourselves right. Because we are placed in Christ, we have right standing in God. As a result, we can be established in a right relationship with Him.

Right standing before God: To stand right before God entails faith. As previously stated, genuine faith is active. Faith believes God. Such faith declares, “Amen, so be it, for it is so.” In other words “amen” is the same as saying that a matter is already so. Since a matter is what it is, it makes it truth. Because it is truth, its fruits will be brought forth to fruition in the appropriate time. The beauty about active faith is that it will always line a person up to the truth of God. Keep in mind, an unsaved person is naturally bent towards the matters of sin and the world. These people’s preference is the darkness that will hide the intent and purpose of their wicked deeds. However, when active faith is applied to truth, it causes a person to line up to the heavenly and the eternal. Faith clearly changes the bent on a situation. Since the person is standing in line with the purpose and will of God, he or she will be reckoned as standing upright before Him.

Right standing because of God: Active faith walks hand and hand with love towards God (*Galatians 5:6*). It desires to please Him in honorable ways. As Jesus stated, if you love Him, you will keep His commandments. The natural bent of godly love and unfeigned faith is to obey the Lord as a means to bring glory to Him. Because of love and the desire to do right by God, a person will have right standing because of Him.

True righteousness can only find its source and inspiration in God. For this reason we need to recognize that even though we may be counted as righteous by God, we must realize that it is His source and standard of righteousness that He is imputing to us.

This brings us to how righteousness will manifest itself in our lives. Righteousness will express itself in doing right. I am not just talking about doing “good” things. Deeds may give the appearance of righteousness but such deeds may be considered reprobate or useless to God (*Titus 1:16*). Once again, righteousness is more than doing “good” deeds. It is an attitude that produces a holy inward state that will express itself in godliness.

The reason we must understand how righteousness operates in and through us is because it creates right attitudes in us. The one attitude that speaks of righteousness is its blatant repulsion towards sin. Righteousness abhors sin for it is totally contrary to it. The Apostle John in his first epistle bears this out in *1 John 3:9-10*, “Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil; whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.”

The reason righteousness will not tolerate sin is because it breaks fellowship with God and puts one on shaky ground with Him. Sin will cause one to inevitably walk under the covering of the darkness of deception. Since faith is the platform in which righteousness can be declared, established, and brought forth, it will choose to believe God rather than walk in unbelief towards Him. In a way, it will tremble before God in dread of displeasing Him, and in sobriety as to the responsibility to properly handle the matters of God.

We see this same dread and sobriety in the case of Noah. He lived during wicked times. Because he believed God, he walked with Him in a midst of an environment where the Spirit of God was withdrawing (*Genesis 6:3*). As a result of Noah's faith, he found grace or favor with God (*Genesis 6:8*). To avoid the pending judgment coming upon the face of the earth, he was instructed to build an ark. We are told that he, in the fear or dread of the Lord, obeyed. Due to Noah's reaction towards the wickedness of the world and his response of faith towards God, his right standing before his Creator brought judgment upon the rest of the world (*Hebrews 11:7*).

Righteousness is what brings a needed contrast into the world. Without contrast there is no means of bringing distinction or understanding to a matter. For example, the Lord imputed the Law to show us we were sinners so it could point us to our need for Christ (*Romans 3:19-20; Galatians 3:24*). Without the Law of God there would be no such contrast to awaken or cause people to consider their spiritual plight.

Righteousness will have no part with wickedness. It will not only refrain from partaking of evil, but it will flee it. It was because of unfeigned faith we see Moses choosing to suffer affliction with the people of God, rather than enjoying the pleasures of sin for a season. The reason he chose the way of affliction is because of, "*Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward (Hebrews 11:26)*."

Moses clearly valued the things of God. He was aware of the promises given to the people of God and had faith that in due time that those who maintained the integrity of their faith towards God would experience the fruits of it. In a sense, Moses had gained spiritual sight that allowed him to see beyond his present time and world to a future promise. *Hebrews 11:27* stated that he forsook Egypt and endured as seeing Him who is invisible. Remember, Moses encountered God's glory on Mount Sinai, and beheld His glory.

Faith will cause one to stand upright before God and endure to the end to receive the reward. For Moses, it was the future revelation of Christ, and for Christians, it is the fullness of their redemption.

This brings us to the second type of fruit that righteousness will produce, and that is doing what is honorable. Being right before God is not just a matter of refraining from the ways of evil, but it also entails doing what is honorable. Note, I am not saying doing what is right, for people have different ideas as to what they think is right. Doing what is honorable has to do with doing that which has been ordained by God. In summation, it is what God can count as being right and accept it as a means of service or sacrifice (*Romans 12:1-2*).

The reason the term "honorable" is used instead of "doing right" is because honorable points to doing that which would constitute your reasonable service. On the other hand, "doing right" perceives that a person is being quite "noble" about a matter. In many cases the individual is seeking honor or recognition for his or her deeds.

The heart attitude behind honor and nobility is diversely different. Honor comes out of true humility. When you go to honor something, you must first exalt it. Nobility comes out of pride. When you are regarding something in light of whether it is right or wrong, you are being placed in a position of being a judge over the matter.

The truth is there is nothing noble about doing right in regards to the things of God, for it is the least a person can do (*Romans 12:2*). Doing right does not deserve recognition for it is one's responsibility to do so. Therefore, the concept of being honorable in all we do entails having a right attitude towards the matters of God. As Christians, we must always do what is right because we love Him. We must always be honorable in all matters because it represents the One we serve. Since we have the

Lord's Spirit in us we should be inclined to do right, as well as develop godly tendencies that will ensure the proper disciplines to maintain the integrity of our Christian walk.

Unfeigned faith is what causes us to walk in an honorable way. It directs us in the right way, while inspiring us to greatness and leading us to that which is excellent. It will not settle for less nor accept what is nominal as a means to simply get by. It will be willing to identify with the suffering of the present world to possess the glory of the next.

This brings us to the reality that unfeigned faith must be mixed in the equation in all matters of life if we are going to prove to be honorable in who we are, what we do, and who we ultimately become. What is not mixed with faith will prove to be unprofitable (*Hebrews 4:2*). It will not be considered righteous; therefore, it will be rejected by God.

Romans 14:23 tells us this, "And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith; for whatever is not of faith is sin." To do something that is wrong before God reveals that the person does not believe God about the matters of righteousness. To fail to do what is honorable or right shows that the person is walking in unbelief towards God. The individual lacks sobriety towards that which is honorable and will end up showing contempt towards that which is righteous.

Today many Christians take pride in refraining from doing wrong. However, the greatest discrepancy in their spiritual walk is that they fail to do what is honorable or right. Doing wrong is the sin of "commission", while failing to do what is right when the opportunity arises is a sin of "omission". In essence, a person is omitting the ways of righteousness in a situation, failing to bring honor or glory to God. Keep in mind refraining from doing something wrong will not bring honor to God; rather, it puts you in a position of having a clear conscience, a pure heart, and a credible witness before God, allowing Him to meet with you and show His grace. But, when it comes to doing that which is right, it will honor God. For this reason, Jesus made this statement, "Let your light so shine before me, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father, who is in heaven."

Unfeigned faith keeps us on the cutting edge of Christianity. It keeps us open and prepared to receive the truths of God, as well as available and willing to do what is honorable. Regardless of the terrain and challenges, genuine faith keeps us going forward towards our ultimate destination. It will keep our feet on the narrow path. Because of such faith, we will not have any desire to take a detour by turning to the right in lieu of judgment and excuses, or to the left to embrace deception. Because of its steadfastness, God will be able to keep our feet from slipping on the rocks of uncertainty in times of adversity.

Test your faith and see whether it is active or useless. Try your faith to see if it is founded on the eternal Rock or standing on shifting sands. Examine the fruits of your faith to see if it is bringing contrast or whether it blends into the worldly terrain. Honestly consider whether you are betraying the faith first delivered to the saints, or because of it your life is bringing glory to God.

When we examine these elements, as believers, we must recognize that the past does not require us to have any faith. Faith enables us to walk in the present in light of the future. It is active; therefore, able to possess what has been promised. The writer of *Hebrews 6:12* confirms this, "That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises."

In considering this Scripture, we can begin to see that those who live in the past are slothful towards the present, and inactive about walking out a matter according to the saints of the past who now serve as our examples. Clearly, we may regard the past in light of examples, but we must not longingly look back or regard the past as that which now defines our present life and the future hope. We cannot place our past in front of us if we are planning to follow those who left all behind to follow God into a new life.

It is through faith and patience that we inherit the promises of God. However, when people are in limbo, it is due to a lack of faith. Since a person is not waiting in faith according to God's plan, there will be no need for patience to be established. Obviously, these individuals have no need to inherit promises because they never have let go of their fantasies of the past. They are not looking to inherit such promises, but their desire is to do the impossible by changing their past, thereby, changing the type of person they have become or are allowing themselves to become. Sadly, such people will never possess any promises or realize their potential in the kingdom of God.

Greater Resurrection

Faith has proved to be one of the most popular subjects among Christians through the years. Genuine faith is motivated, inspired, and guided by the character of God. It has a sure confidence that He will never step outside of who He is. It has assurance that the Lord will not change His mind about a matter nor adjust His will or ways to placate someone else. Even though God does not do things in the manner in which our finite and perverted understanding can grasp, as believers, we must always choose to know that He is trustworthy in every way, true to His holy nature, and just in His dealings.

As already pointed out in last month's newsletter, righteousness finds its origins in God. In Christ we are placed in an upright state, but we must also be established in righteousness by faith. However, being right before God and being upright in the Lord are two different things.

Job learned this when the Lord began to question him about his involvement in creation (*Job 38-41*). For example, was he there when He created the very foundation of the world? Each question or statement God leveled at Job revealed His greatness and Job's smallness. Even though Job had done right before God, he realized that the Lord had provided everything that pertains to life and godliness so that his upright acts could be counted as righteous (*2 Peter 1:3*). It was He alone that established Job in righteousness.

This brings us back to faith being a popular subject in Christendom. Perhaps, it is because the idea of faith gives us some hope that we can indeed affect or change the circumstances confronting our lives. Surely, if through faith waters have parted, walls have fallen, victories have been secured, kingdoms subdued, righteousness wrought in the midst of wickedness, promises obtained, and lions rendered harmless, we as believers in America should be able to accomplish incredible feats as well.

However, for today's American Christians, we find ourselves in a similar struggle as Gideon. This struggle was recorded in *Judges 6:13*, "And Gideon said unto him, O my Lord, if the LORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us? And where are all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt? But now the LORD hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites."

As we live during the times of evil unmasking its contorted and perverted face as never before in this present generation, we ask where is the power to overcome? Where are the miracles that silence the enemies? Where is the expectation of deliverance? Although I have seen God's miraculous deliverances on our part in the past, I have to honestly face the days we live in. The faith needed to face the present challenges will never find its needed resolve because of past experiences. The beauty about faith is that it will actively rise up on the wings of confidence in God in order to soar on the currents of expectation in light of present challenges. It is in expectation that hope is able to embrace the promises of God in light of eternity regardless of the circumstances. The splendor about the walk of faith is that it is not earthbound by the false promises of the world; rather, it is heaven bound by the glorious hope of eternal glory.

Clearly, we are living in insane times that will call for the extraordinary to inspire, lead, and shape our lives in order to stand and endure the darkness engulfing the world. The idea that we can maintain the same type of Christianity today that we enjoyed in days past is unrealistic. If believers do not honestly face the days we are living in, they

will fail to possess the type of faith that was recorded in *Hebrews 11*. The living faith of the great cloud of witness referred to in *Hebrews 12:1* enabled these individuals to endure through the unfolding darkness of their time to witness the ultimate victory of heaven. In the end, they were able to claim and secure the many glorious promises of God.

What many Christians fail to keep in mind is that genuine faith does not produce the means that moves mountains; rather, it produces the endurance to walk within the frightening shadows of darkness until God moves the mountain. Faith is not flexed like muscles; rather, it is exercised and enlarged in relationship to the steps of obedience that needs to be taken, the unknown path that must be walked upon, and the race that must ultimately be run until the finish line is crossed.

The Bible is clear that as we get closer to Jesus' Second Advent, the battle between light and darkness will become more blatant. People will be forced to choose which side they will stand on. In some cases it will appear that evil will ultimately win out as the darkness of sorrow, despair, and death takes center stage. As evil rages against the resolve of believers to remain faithful to Jesus and His truth, they must dig deep into the recesses of their souls to make the necessary resolution of faith towards God to remain standing regardless of the darkness or the losses that may be incurred around them.

I have to admit, one of the things that concerns me is that it seems some Christians are asleep as to the days in which we live. Whether this sleep is due to a false security, a belief that they will not be personally touched by the encroaching darkness, or that they will be spared from tasting the bitterness of the times we are living in would be speculation on my part. However, I sometimes feel that many in the Church are about to have a Jonah experience.

Remember Jonah? He was the prophet who did not care if the people of Nineveh perished in their sins. After all, he was a Jew, a servant of Jehovah God. He had nothing to worry about because judgment was not about to fall on him or the people of Israel. He ran away from the responsibility of doing God's bidding to warn the people of Nineveh. He knew that if these enemies of Israel repented, God could withhold His judgment and actually show mercy on these uncircumcised heathen. Heaven forbid such a thought!

Jonah hid in the bottom of the ship he had managed to board while fleeing the abiding convicting presence of God. However, God followed him and sent a storm to wake him from his state of sleep. Not only was his indifference towards Nineveh going to cost every person his or her soul in the city itself, but he was also endangering innocent souls on the ship who were not privy to his disobedience.

I have often wondered how many people are hiding in their churches while the storms of life are raging against the doors of not only their institutions, but their homes. How many are waiting for deliverance while ignoring their Scriptural responsibilities to be prepared and be available to let their light so shine as a witness in the dark world for the lost to see. As the storms rage, how many are asleep in their pews, living in denial that there is danger afoot that could bring their ship down into a watery grave? And, if some in the church are asleep, what kind of "fish" will end up swallowing them, causing them to wake up, only to realize they are now encased by a form of darkness and death? Will they have the mind to call out in repentance to God with the intent of committing and wholly consecrating their lives for His work and glory? It is obvious that any aspect of the church that may be asleep must be quickened by the Spirit and awakened to the ways of righteousness.

These are only questions, but the people of God must truly examine themselves. Although the darkness may be great, the fires of judgment or separation are greatly burning. Such fires will consume, purge, or purify everything in their path. In the end, these fires will test the resolve of God's people and their source of reliance.

As we read about the victories that abound in *Hebrews 11*, we must also note the challenges that also confronted these hearty saints. Even though some of these saints witnessed great miracles and deliverance, others were tortured and would not accept deliverance. The reason for not accepting such deliverance was so that they could obtain a better resurrection.

For years I have pondered what it would mean to obtain a better resurrection in regard to the faith walk. I realize that some people of faith would accept the refining fires of adversity to experience a greater resurrection, but what would that mean?

To understand the concept of a better resurrection, we must first come to terms with what it means. The concept of resurrection points to the quickening or rising up of something that is inactive (comatose state) or dead. To be resurrected implies being raised up from one state in order to be quickened or brought forth into another state.

When Jesus talked about resurrection in *John 11:25-26*, He made a distinction between resurrection and life. In essence, resurrection points to the power to raise someone into a different state or with a new life. Without the presence of power, the new life would never come forth. Jesus said of Himself that He is both the resurrection and the life. Clearly, He possesses the power that can raise one to a new life.

This brings us to the basis of resurrection. We are told in *Hebrews 6:1-2* that resurrection is one of the principles that make up the doctrine of Christ. "Principle" in this text implies first or chief. These principle doctrines serve as a type of cornerstone in which all other doctrines must in some way come into accord with in order to ensure their integrity in the scheme of things. In fact, the second principle in the order of the six doctrines mentioned in *Hebrews 6*, is faith towards God. First you must repent of all unbelief in order to choose to believe. From the premise of faith comes identification through baptisms, calling and anointing through the laying on of hands, followed by being brought forth in resurrection power in preparation to face eternal judgment or separation. These doctrines have been established in the Old Testament. And, the doctrine of resurrection is no exception. It was clearly brought out in the Old Testament by Job, David, and Daniel.

For Job, resurrection was a declaration of faith in the midst of great adversity. He said, "*For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.*" Job connects resurrection with redemption. Even though his physical body would be decayed away, he had an assurance that he would see his God. This faith was based on redemption.

The Apostle Paul gives us this insight about resurrection that Job spoke of in *1 Corinthians 15:53*, "*For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.*" The apostle also made reference to our bodies being changed in the twinkling of an eye at the last trump in *1 Corinthians 15:52*. When Jesus rose from the grave and encountered Mary Magdalene in *John 20:17*, He instructed her not to touch Him for He had not yet ascended to the Father. It was obvious that Jesus was raised in a new, glorified body that was incorruptible. In fact, Jesus described this new body as being like the angels of God in *Matthew 22:30*.

King David made reference to resurrection in *Psalms 17:15*, "*As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake, with thy likeness.*" Consider the assurance David had in regard to being raised in newness. His first point of confidence spoke of expectation. Notice how he stated, "**I will**" behold His face. There is no doubt about what David expected to see when he was raised up from his state of sleep or death. This confidence points to his unfeigned faith.

The next reference David made to resurrection was in regard to the state he would be raised up in—that of righteousness. In other words, there would be no deviation or

inconsistencies found in his new state. It would be a state that would be good, acceptable, and perfect before God.

The final statement David made about resurrection is how the new life would manifest itself—that of godliness. He stated that he would be like his Lord. This likeness pointed to the fact that in his new state he would be reflecting his Lord's glory. The Apostle Paul stated that we have been predestinated to be conformed to the image of the Son of God (*Romans 8:29*). In *2 Corinthians 3:18*, the apostle also stated that we would be changed into the same image as our Lord from glory to glory.

The prophet Daniel spoke of a time of trouble as never before, but that those who were found written in the book would be delivered. It is at this point he made this statement in *Daniel 12:2-3*, “*And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars forever and ever.*”

Daniel is not only giving us insight into resurrection, but also into eternal judgment. All will be raised from the grave to face their eternal destination. Some will be raised to experience the glory of heaven, while others will be raised to face the shame of damnation. Once again, we are reminded that the matters of a glorious resurrection or damnation rests with what we do with Jesus.

Jesus mentioned this same reality about resurrection in *John 5:25-29*. He stated the hour was coming that the dead shall hear His voice, and they shall once again live, for the Father had not only given Him life to give, but also the authority to execute all judgment. He instructed us not to marvel that all who are in the graves will hear His voice. He went on to say this, “*And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.*”

As I pondered the idea of a better resurrection, it is obvious that we want to be part of the first resurrection where we are called forth from the grave to receive the fullness of our redemption (*Revelation 20:6*). Once again, is there more to obtaining a better resurrection? H. A. Ironside stated in his commentary on Hebrews that it means that such a person would receive a greater reward. The fact that Jesus mentioned good works in relationship to the believer's resurrection could imply that a better resurrection points to a time where believers who have been faithful with all that they have been entrusted with will receive greater rewards. We have reference to this fact in *Matthew 25:14-30*.

In his commentary, Matthew Henry related the concept of a better resurrection as obtaining deliverance upon more honorable terms. In *Hebrews* the concept of better resurrection was in correlation to suffering. We are told that if we live godly, we will suffer persecution. We are warned that if the world actually speaks well of us, “Woe unto us!” There are great advantages to being persecuted for the sake of righteousness. One of the benefits is that we will actually inherit the kingdom of heaven. Jesus also tells us there are rewards attached to such affliction (*Matthew 10-12; Luke 6:26; 2 Timothy 3:12*).

Suffering not only points to identification with Jesus, but it is a type of purging of the old or profane in order to possess that which is new and holy. It is said of Jesus' suffering that had come by way of obedience to the cross that He was actually perfected in His humanity by it, thereby, making Him the author of salvation (*Hebrews 5:8-9*). As one becomes less and less entangled with the enslaving ways of the world, he or she becomes more aware of the eternal. The less a person fits in this present world, the more he or she is prepared to come into his or her own place in the next. As the Apostle Paul stated, those who suffer for His sake, shall also reign with Him (*2 Timothy 2:12*).

As I pondered the possibility of obtaining a better resurrection on more honorable terms, I once again had to go back to that great cloud of witnesses. It is true that by faith they secured much in their present ages, but there were those individuals who chose to refuse deliverance in their plight in order to possess more of the next world. The faith they had to possess in order to endure the persecution of the present so as to embrace a greater awareness of the next world had to be unfeigned, patient, and enduring.

It is true that I can complicate the simplicity of God's truth. The idea of obtaining a greater resurrection may just be about receiving greater rewards. However, I believe there is more. Perhaps receiving rewards was something that did not enter these people's minds. It certainly does not enter mine. When I think of obtaining something better it has to do with reaching the heights of excellence to experience that which is far superior to what I already know. Obtaining something better would not allow me to simply get by or accept what is mediocre in regard to the matter. It would cause me to do all that I could do to discover the fullness of it, in order to know the satisfaction of it as indicated by King David in *Psalms 17:15*.

Maybe the answer to my question about obtaining a better resurrection rests in this verse in *Psalms*. David's satisfaction was based on the fact that when he awoke, he would do so with the likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ. As I thought about it, I acknowledged that my greatest satisfaction would be realized if I truly was raised with an incredible likeness of my Lord. The prophet Daniel confirmed this concept when he stated that those who are wise will, "*shine like the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars forever and ever.*" Unfeigned faith is not just about receiving the life of Christ, but gaining the life of Christ as it is worked in us by His Spirit. The more the ways of self are purged, the more Christ can be unveiled in our lives.

The conclusion I had to draw after much personal examination as to what is really important to me in light of heaven is that the glorious reality I could hope for in resurrection is that when I awake, all that remains and can be seen is a complete likeness of my Lord. For each of us to freely mirror our Lord's glory would represent the prize that could be obtained, the point of excellence that could be realized, and the ultimate reward that each of us could cast before His feet. Can you imagine what glory and honor it would bring Him to look into our faces and see His glorious image?

10

Ultimate Goal of Faith

What can you say about faith? How can you describe a faith that can move mountains, reach unlimited depths of growth, climb the incredible heights of heavenly revelation, and cross grave wastelands of hopelessness to reach its ultimate destination? How can you present the type of faith that can only be embraced by a simple, child-like confidence, glides over rocky terrain according to its blessed assurance, is lifted up by the wings of pure persuasion, and soars on the currents of unadulterated trust to come to a place of complete rest in the arms of God?

For the last nine months I have tried to give each of you insight into this incredible gift of God. Note, I said a gift of God. We cannot possess faith unless there is something that warrants such a confidence. We cannot believe in something that is incapable of performing that which it is designed to perform or what it has promised to bring to fruition. For example, we will not turn on a light switch if we do not have the confidence that it will produce light.

It is God who gives us the confidence to exercise faith. The gift He has given to us in the form of faith is Himself (*Hebrews 11:6*). If He is not who He is, we could not be assured that He means what He promised in His Word. If He did not possess the means to bring forth a matter, we would never live in any expectation as to what He said; rather, we would live in a state of utter hopelessness.

The essence of our faith solely rests in who our God is, and not what He does. As stated in the past it is obvious that many put their faith in God's power and not in His character. It is true God can do anything, but His power is greatly disciplined by who He is. He will never step outside of His holy character to show Himself in a powerful way. For example, consider electricity that serves as a current that ensures the light switch produces the light. If the electricity was not properly channeled, turning on the light could easily result in a person being shocked and possibly killed. God's power is channeled by who He is. If it was biased, unpredictable, or fickle, we would be tasting judgment and wrath instead of love, mercy, and grace.

It is because of who God is and His commitment towards us that any faith we possess must be first imparted to us in some measure or given as a gift (*Romans 12:3, 1 Corinthians 12:6-9*). The confidence that God means what He says is stirred up by His actual Word. As *Romans 10:17* declares "So then, faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." For example, in regard to salvation that initial sense of sin and being lost to God is imparted to us by heaven itself. It is the Spirit who convicts us of our sin according to God's Word, while we were being drawn by the Father with His cords of love towards the reality of Christ's redemption. It was from this premise, we begin to sense how far away we were from the mark, how lost we have become to the things of God, and the hopeless state we would remain in if we do not embrace God's solution. It is at that time the sweet invitation of Christ to come to Him to partake of the eternal life-giving water of heaven can begin to penetrate the darkness of our soul with the glorious message of hope.

Once we believe what the Word has said about our state, we must respond by receiving the hope of salvation. Notice salvation is a matter of unseen hope. It is not tangible, but because God has promised it we can expect it as an end result. This is why

Peter stated that the end of our faith is the salvation of our souls (*1 Peter 1:9*). Once we receive something by faith, the measure of faith that was stirred up in our souls is then enlarged to possess more of the heavenly life as we begin to take the necessary steps of obedience towards the expected end.

I encourage you to meditate on my last statement. The Bible tells us we walk by faith (*2 Corinthians 5:7*). Each time we exercise the measure of faith through obedience to what we know is true, the more the heavenly life will be unveiled to us and in us. Keep in mind, the gift we are given is the eternal life of Christ. When we receive the gift of this life, we must then unwrap it and, according to our faith begin to explore the beauty, depth, heights, and width of its everlasting ways.

However, exploration of this life is done with steps of obedience. In the infancy of my Christian life, I started out thinking that somehow faith was conjured up, but I never realized it came from above and was refined, defined, and expanded through obedience to the Word of God. The obedience that unfeigned faith produces has various facets to it that we must consider.

The first facet is that obedience is a choice. I do not have to obey if I choose not to. Unfeigned faith will always line me up to the will of God. In essence, His will, will become my will. Such faith puts me in step with God, bringing me under His yoke. As a result, I will never get ahead of Him nor will I lag behind.

The next aspect we must understand about unfeigned faith is that its natural inclination is to obey because it believes what has been said about a matter. Promises of God have conditions that must be met to ensure a proper environment for God to bring forth His promises. Each act of faith is like planting a seed in the ground. Each step of obedience in accordance to the measure of faith is what nurtures that seed, producing a proper environment in which that seed can come to maturity. In the end, a person will reap the fruit of his or her investment.

Since faith believes what is said, it will display great wisdom. Unfeigned faith shows discretion because it recognizes a matter for what it is. Godly wisdom will respond according to righteousness. If you walk in the ways of disobedience, you will pay the consequences. If you are inactive or unresponsive towards the ways of righteousness, you will be held accountable for the fruits that materialize because of such inaction. Clearly, what is not a matter of unfeigned faith will be counted as sin (*Romans 14:23*).

Another aspect of obedience produced by faith is identification. Faith is always leading us to that which is excellent. However, we cannot obtain excellence without obedience. Jesus gave up the glories of heaven in obedience to the plan of the Father. In His obedience, Jesus became identified with our plight. We know it was through suffering brought on by obedience that Jesus was perfected in His humanity to become the sacrificial Lamb of God (*Hebrews 5:8-9*). As the Apostle Paul reminds us, Jesus became sin for us so that we could be made in the righteousness of God (*2 Corinthians 5:21*).

The truth is that through obedience the life of Christ is being formed in us. Sometimes obedience points to the travailing of a soul as one wrestles with the price that must be paid in order to unveil a greater measure of the life of Christ (*2 Corinthians 13:5; Jude 3*). Such a price requires denying the self-life of its right to rule and crucifying the flesh in order to gain such a life. However without the travailing that comes with walking in obedience, faith would never be refined in the ovens of separation, defined by the ways of righteousness, and enlarged to inherit the fullness of that which is eternal.

Faith has left us a cloud of witnesses that will testify of its excellent ways, while bringing judgment on those who refuse it simplicity, purity, and sweetness. These witnesses speak of the victory of faith in light of blessings and persecutions. They point to the abiding promise of faith. This promise speaks of a greater resurrection, which will

manifest itself in the glory of Jesus' life being unveiled in and through us. It is a life that truly will identify us to the eternal inheritance that is awaiting us.

Unfeigned faith looks upward in expectation, walks in abiding confidence towards God, and abides in the eternal Rock of Jesus. It is faith that causes us to hide in the Rock as we seek protection, stand on the Rock when we are facing the tests and storms of life, fall on the Rock when we are in need of mercy, seek the Water of the Rock when we need revival, and hide in its shadow when we need grace.

Faith is always going forward, looking beyond the present horizon in expectation of the glory of the next world. Since its focus is heavenward, faith is always prepared to see into the future. For example, though the incident on Mount Moriah where God commanded him to offer Isaac, Abraham saw the figure of Christ's entrance into the world to become a sacrificial offering and was glad for it. He also was preparing himself in light of possessing the city made by the hands of God (*Genesis 22; John 5:56; Hebrews 11:10, 19*).

Unfeigned faith is eternal (*1 Corinthians 13:13*). Since it finds its reliance and complete source in the eternal God of heaven, it clings to that which is eternal. It is steadfast because its anchor is the joy of salvation. It is compelled by the abiding winds of God's love, inspired by His righteous ways and examples, and disciplined by the ever abiding presence of His Spirit.

The subject of faith is inexhaustible, but it is clear it cannot be captured by mere words. It is for this reason that many people pursue it. However, they often start with romantic notions about it. They swing from the limbs of expectation as to what God can do, rather than begin from the foundation of abiding hope in light of who He is. They strive to become experts of faith, rather than those who strive to obey His Word. Sadly, when such people have an experience because of faith they memorize it into a formula, often boxing God in with unrealistic expectations. They even write about it so others can have the same experience. However, faith is personal. It addresses present challenges by exercising the ways of righteousness in regard to current problems. Faith never lives off of past happenings, but is active in truthfully facing the present mountain ranges that loom in front of it as it clings to the eternal Rock of heaven.

Great people of faith have lived it and experienced it. They have realized that even though it cannot be captured any more than the great waves of the world's oceans could be preserved in a glass jar, they had the confidence that they could witness its power and results in their lives. As a result, kingdoms were subdued, righteousness brought forth, promises acquired, lions rendered powerless, violence quenched, swords unable to find their mark, weaknesses became platforms for strength to be displayed, women received their dead, and many endured to the end to receive a better resurrection. This is the witness of those who discover the depth of faith's hope, the height of its expectation, the width of its accomplishments, and the enduring qualities that enabled them to finish the course.

This brings us to addressing the last two aspects of unfeigned faith. The first one is that of judgment. We are living in precarious days. Jesus said that the end of the last days would be as in the days of Noah. Even though judgment abided on the known world of that time, people continued to do their daily activities without any regard to the clouds of God's wrath gathering in the distance. Perhaps they were living in denial as they scoffed at any such possibility as they danced in and out of wishful thinking. Whatever frame of mind existed during that time, the people could not perceive in the darkness of unbelief that such a judgment would come upon them in such a manner. After all, they were too busy living according to the endless wretchedness of their wicked, vain imaginations. From all appearances, they insisted on remaining clueless about the impending judgment.

This state kept these foolish people in a fog of deception until the judgment came. At that time it was too late to escape the wrath of God. It is said of Noah that his obedient actions, which were wrought by faith, condemned the world (*Hebrews 11:7*). The Apostle Peter made this declaration in *2 Peter 2:5*, “*And spared not the old world, but saved Noah, the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly.*” Noah’s life and preaching gave people the opportunity to flee the wrath that was coming, but they did not believe. As a result, the example of his faith and the conviction of his preaching paved the way for God’s wrath to flow.

As I consider this perspective of faith, I have to wonder if my faith serves as a powerful testimony as to the judgment that is gathering on the horizon in regard to this generation. Does it bring the contrast between the light of God and the darkness of this world? Will it ultimately be used by God to usher in His judgment and wrath upon all of those who refuse to believe? In my mind there is no doubt that God will raise up those who will usher in His wrath in these end days including the 144,000 Jews in *Revelation 7* and the two witnesses in *Revelation 11*.

This brings us to the reality that to be able to bring such an indictment against the world, we must not only be walking in faith, we must be looking up in expectation. We must be established firmly in the ark of Jesus, ready to be lifted above the wrath to come. It is when God’s people have finished their course in relationship to their commission, and are finally shut in with Him, that His wrath will suddenly come upon the world.

The second aspect of faith is that it makes the world unworthy to even witness it in abiding assurance (*Hebrews 11:38*). Granted, due to God’s righteousness, unfeigned faith will be used to bring a contrast to the world and an indictment upon it for its unbelief and lawlessness. But, the reality is that the world is not worthy to witness such great faith. The world hates such confidence and has strived through the centuries to wipe out its light, silence its testimony, and mock its way in order to replace it with its foolish idolatrous and pagan ways of unbelief.

Recently, I was studying the lives of saints that possessed true faith. It was a way to remind me of how faith responds to matters of life. It was inspiring to see how these people’s faith carried them through troubled waters of persecution, isolation, and death. Clearly the world hated the distinction that these people’s faith had produced in their lives. The world will rant, rave, and gnash at it. It will sneer, mock, and render it to be non-essential. However, the world could never get around the record of unfeigned faith. It was there serving as a living witness and bringing an indictment against their unbelief.

The world is not worthy to witness unfeigned faith. However, the rejection of the world in regard to true faith is the one indication that such faith is worthy of God to consider, honor, and reward. It is a type of faith that He reckons or counts as being righteous. I could not help but wonder if my faith would create such a reaction from the world. Is it such a faith that would be worthy of God to make a notation concerning it?

As I was considering these realities about faith, I had to consider the real purpose of faith. It is simple enough. Faith wants to lead us home, to the place of abiding rest. It wants us to follow the past footsteps of the saints of old into glory, to receive the ultimate reward and inheritance awaiting every saint who finishes the course, the Lord Jesus Christ. Granted, the walk of faith leads us down the path of salvation, the course of faith leads us towards eternal glory, the place of faith ensures rest for the soul, the promise of faith is that of a better resurrection, the hope of faith is the unfolding revelation of Christ to us and in us, and the expectation of faith is heaven where we will look into the glorious face of our Lord. This is truly the victory wrought by unfeigned faith. Clearly, the ultimate goal of such faith is that we possess the fullness of His promises and our inheritance by possessing Him.

The question is what does your faith towards God say about your relationship with the Lord, your present walk, and the way you are traveling? Does your walk speak of unfeigned faith or wishful thinking?