

# Increase Our Faith

## Growing Faith, Session 1

*Warm-up question: What does a life of faith look like to you? What comes to mind when you think of the words “living by faith?”*

The topic of faith is an important one for the days in which we live. In my opinion, America is approaching a time of persecution for Christians. When that happens, you will need to trust God like you have never trusted Him before. The scriptures teach us that in the last days, our faith will be tested and that many will fall away (2 Thessalonians 2:3. The word “rebellion” in the NIV is elsewhere translated “falling away” in the KJV or “apostasy” in the NAS). We need to start preparing to live by faith now, not when the going gets tough. Faith grows as we use it. The five wise virgins were prepared ahead of time for the darkness—they had oil for their lamps. The five foolish virgins were unprepared for the dark night when the bridegroom came (Matthew 25:1-13).

One of the most important things that the disciples ever asked Jesus was how they should grow in their faith. They said to him, “Increase our faith” (Luke 17:5). To start out, I thought it would be helpful to give you a real life example from the life of a man that exhibited great faith, a man by the name of George Mueller.

### **An Example of Faith**

George Mueller was born in Prussia, Eastern Europe, in the year 1805 and died in 1898 at the age of 93. He grew up a very ungodly man often stealing from his father and friends. His early years were that of a drunk and worldly-minded man, stealing even much of the money his father had given him for the clergy to pay for his confirmation and to be able to take Holy Communion. Now and then he tried to change and reform his life. He knew deep inside that his life was displeasing to God, but again and again he was unable to change his lifestyle of deception, theft and drunkenness until one of his drinking buddies told him something that he did on a Saturday night. In his own words Mueller said:

“One Saturday afternoon, about the middle of November, 1825, I had taken a walk with my friend Beta. On our return he said to me, that he was in the habit of going on Saturday evenings to the house of a Christian, where there was a meeting. On further inquiry he told me that they read the Bible, sang, prayed, and read a printed sermon. No sooner had I heard this, but it was to me as if I had found something after which I had been seeking all my life long. I immediately wished to go with my friend, who was not at once willing to take me; for knowing me as a merry young man, he thought I should not like this meeting. At last, however, he said he would call for me.”<sup>1</sup>

When he got to the meeting, a man named Kayser, who afterward became a missionary to Africa, asked God’s blessing upon the meeting while praying upon his knees. “This kneeling down made a deep impression on me,” said Mueller. The meeting was composed of a hymn at the beginning, a chapter from the bible, and a printed sermon was then read. The time together ended with another hymn. In speaking about the experience of reading and meditating on scripture with a group of godly folk, he said, “I was happy, though if I had been asked why I was happy, I could not clearly have explained it.” That evening was the turning point in his life, he said, “Whether I fell on my knees when I returned home, I do not remember, but this much I know: I lay peaceful and happy in my bed. I have not the least doubt that on that evening God began a work of grace in me, though I obtained joy without any deep sorrow of heart, and with scarcely any knowledge.”

The first four years of his life in Christ was somewhat uneventful, but in July 1829 he came into an entire and full surrender of heart. He writes,

“I gave myself fully to the Lord. Honors, pleasures, money, my physical powers, my mental powers—all were laid down at the feet of Jesus, and I became a great lover of the Word of God. I found my all in God and my faith is not merely exercised regarding temporal things, but also regarding everything, because I cleave to the

<sup>1</sup> Taken from the book called *Deeper Experiences of Famous Christians*, James G. Lawson, Printed by Whitaker House, Pages 190-203.

Word. My knowledge of God and His Word is what helps me.”<sup>2</sup>

After a number of years of learning how to trust God by hearing him speak and acting on it, he felt led of God to begin an orphanage with only two shillings (around fifty cents) to his name. He made a commitment to God that he would never ask for money and any time that the needs were not being met, he would take that as the sign that God no longer needed the work. Through faith and just the strength of his prayer life, he would literally pray in all the needs for a work that became five large orphanages, buildings of immense solid granite that, before he died, met the needs of no less than 10,000 orphans, 2,000 at any one time. At 29 years of age he started the Scripture Knowledge Institution for Home and Abroad. Its purpose was to aid Christian day schools, to assist missionaries, and to circulate the scriptures. This institution, without worldly patronage, without committees, subscribers, or memberships, but through faith in the Lord alone, had obtained and disbursed no less a sum than one and a half million pounds, an astronomical sum for the time that he was living in, especially when one considers that the invoice of the fourteen ton bell called Big Ben at the Houses of Parliament in London was only £572 (pounds) when it was submitted in 1858. The bulk of this enormous sum was spent on the orphanages. He sometimes would gather the children together and pray with them as to their needs. Sometimes the mealtime was almost at hand and they did not know where the food would come from, but God always had it in hand. One time they prayed the blessing over the food, even though there was none on the table, only to have a person bring the food as the prayer was ended. God never let them down in all those years of praying and trusting God. Six hundred pounds a week was required for the support of the orphans at the time of Mueller’s death, and yet day by day the Lord sent them their daily bread.

*If you had the faith of George Mueller, what would you do with it? What would you believe God for?*

### **What You See is What You Get**

When I consider the life of George Mueller, it makes me wonder how he grew to have that measure of faith. What was his secret? I think that the secret of his faith was his world view. What do I mean by a world view? A world view consists of basic assumptions and im-

ages that provide a more or less coherent, though not necessarily accurate, way of thinking about the world. Our world view is a lens through which we view the world because of our experiences and the things we have learned on the way to where you are right now. Perhaps the school you attended as you were growing up taught that the world came about through evolution. Perhaps you were taught that there is nothing beyond death, that there is no God, and that man came about by chance. Those thoughts and assumptions about the world form your world view, your perception of how the world is and how it operates. How we see the world we live in will affect how we live. We need a paradigm shift, a change in the way we perceive the world if we would like to live a life of faith in God. Scripture puts it like this:

<sup>2</sup> Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind (Romans 12:2).

*In what way do you think modern life is shaping your world view to conform to its standard? How has life changed, for example, in the last 100 years?*

We are being pummeled, shaped and conformed to a world view promoted to us on every side, ideas that contradict the Word of God. Satan is called the “ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient (Ephesians 2:2). When we think of the fact that a “godless and faithless world view” is broadcast to us by media 24/7, it is clear that we are under a great deal of pressure to conform to commonly accepted ideas and a world view which excludes God and makes faith seem like a foolish and false notion. This world does not have a place for the idea of faith. We are led to believe and trust only in what can be explained and substantiated by our minds and our five senses. It is important for us to be aware of the things that influence our minds for the better or for worse. This is especially true in our Western culture. The pattern of this world will take us down a different road than the road you set for yourself when you committed yourself to Christ and His kingdom. Conformity to the world can be overcome by nothing but conformity to Jesus. It is difficult to live a life of faith if we see the world only in the way we have been programmed to by our upbringing and schooling. Day by day, with our thoughts, we are confronted with a choice of world views to live

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

by; this world's or God's. If we do not know the Word of God, we will not be able to choose to think according to scripture, and we will not be able to grow in faith.

As an example of how we see something being affected by previous data input, let me show you some drawings below. You've probably already seen this drawing – but what do you see?



Most people will see a beautiful young woman in the drawing. The next drawing gives us a sharper picture.....What do you see when you scroll down?



Chances are that you see a more refined picture of the young woman. Some people can see an old hag in the drawing. Can you see the old hag? Now scroll down to the third drawing:



If one were to put up the first drawing on a PowerPoint slide and only allowed half of the room to view the first drawing, and then the other half of the room would only be shown the third drawing, the room would be split into an argument when the second drawing is shown. It is difficult to shake what you have been programmed to see by the first picture that pops into your view.

What you see is a result of your conditioning. If 10 seconds can determine what you see in that drawing, imagine what effect a lifetime of knowledge and experience has on your perception!

Considering George Mueller's great measure of faith which changed not only his life, but the lives of countless others, it is clear that his world view was one which was shaped by his belief in the promises of God's word and certainty that God would provide not only for his needs but the orphans he cared for as well. George Mueller became a great man of faith by changing his world-view to a biblical one, a world view that was formed by his love for scripture. The word of God literally transformed his heart and mind. He said two things about himself, did you notice them? He said that he gave himself totally to the Lord and to the knowledge of the word of God. What this world tells us is often completely opposite from what God tells us to believe. There is an invisible world that intersects with the physical world. God is spirit (John 4:24) and He longs for His people to ask Him to work on their behalf, those who are connected to Him by His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. God has no favorites! What He did for George Mueller, He wants to do for us, too. Although God has different gifts and callings for all of His children, He wants all of us to live a life of faith. Scripture says; "For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him" (2 Chronicles

16:9). Throughout the earth means you and me, too! He is looking for individuals who are fully committed to Christ and His kingdom. When He sees evidence that your heart is fully His, He comes alongside to strengthen you and help you. He has a work for us to do in this world. We are to be kingdom builders, God's kingdom builders, and this work can only be completed by His power at work in us and through us. In order to live a life of faith, we need to have a heavenly perspective.

*Have you ever had a time in your life when you began to see that there was a spiritual realm and realized there was more to this world than what you can see? Was this a result of something happening to you, or was it just an inner realization?*

### **What is Faith?**

Webster's New World dictionary uses words such as: "confidence, belief, to be convinced of, reliance or complete trust."<sup>3</sup> The Greek word often used in the New Testament is *pistis*, which Strong's Biblical Dictionary defines as: "persuasion, giving credence to someone, moral conviction of religious truth."<sup>4</sup> What we are saying is that faith comes to a person when he or she gives credence to, or trusts that God is speaking to us through His word.

<sup>17</sup> Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ (Romans 10:17).

We could paraphrase it by saying that faith comes by hearing God speak, and hearing God speak through the word of God. The more one feeds, or "inputs" their mind with God's thoughts, the more faith will grow in a person's heart. Let's use the example of a computer. If I never load software on to it, how much use is it? If I don't load a browser, such as Internet Explorer onto my computer, how will I ever be able to access the internet? Faith in God comes as one grows in knowledge of God's thoughts expressed in the word of God. One person might say, "I don't have any faith." But God says that everyone has been given a measure of faith:

<sup>3</sup> 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 (Romans 12:3. KJV).

We put our faith in people every day. Have you ever been to the doctor or dentist? You have exhibited faith in the doctor or dentist by allowing them to work on your body or teeth. All of us have faith. When a person gets on a plane they exercise faith in the airplane mechanic and the pilot, that they have been properly trained. You are trusting that this person can get you to your destination! Think of the trust that you personally invest in people on a daily basis. When you think of it that way, why do we have such a hard time trusting in God? This is where our world view becomes apparent. What God is asking of you is to place your trust and complete reliance for your life on Him. He said, "I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it" (Mark 10:15). I used to play a game with my son when he was young. I would stand him on top of the counter and tell him to jump into my arms. Not once did he ever look down and wonder whether I was capable of catching him and saving him from the fall. We have so much to learn from children as to their simple trust and childlike faith. It means a change in our world view to that of faith in God.

<sup>6</sup> And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him (Hebrews 11:6).

It means throwing yourself into His arms unreservedly and saying, "not my will be done but yours" (Matthew 26:39). You are to believe that He is there and that He will reward you for earnestly seeking Him.

*Share an example of faith, perhaps of a child that you know.*

### **How Can I Grow my Faith—How is it Increased?**

We have seen from scripture that "God has given every man a measure of faith". How important is this measure of faith that you have been given? The amount of faith that you possess is not as important as what you do with that faith. As we have already seen, faith grows in the using of it. Believe God for small things and see answers, and you then have faith for the next steps, for bigger and bigger things. Are you learning to trust and

<sup>3</sup> Webster's New World Dictionary, Third College Edition, Printed by Prentice Hall, Page 487.

<sup>4</sup> Found on e-sword.com, Rom 10:17.

rely on God at all times? If you are, then when hard times come, trust will be easier. After all, God is not limited; our limits are placed on us by our own understanding and lack of expectation. Since we have all have been dealt a measure of faith, the problem is not growing the receptacle (faith) but to add something to the receptacle; knowledge, and stepping out in obedience in accordance to what you know of God's word. Let's look at what Jesus said concerning growing in faith:

<sup>5</sup> The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!"

<sup>6</sup> He replied, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you." <sup>7</sup> "Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'?" <sup>8</sup> Would he not rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink'?" <sup>9</sup> Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? <sup>10</sup> So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty' "(Luke 17:5-10).

How are we to understand Jesus' answer to the apostles in response to their question concerning growing in faith? Why is He talking about servants preparing dinner for their master? The context of the passage is after Jesus' radical statement that a disciple of Christ is to forgive his brother seven times in one day if he turns and repents. The Rabbis had a saying that if a person forgave another three times, he was a perfect man. Jesus advocated that His people are to go a long way further than the rest of this world. The chief antagonists to the Lord and His disciples were the Pharisees and the rulers. The disciples were not to be bitter and resentful toward them for their opposition, but to forgive and maintain a heart of forgiveness to those that sin against them. The disciple's response to such a statement is that they each need greater faith, an increase of faith to be able to forgive to that level. Jesus said that it is not about the size of their faith or ours, our faith can be as small as a mustard seed, one of the smallest seeds. It's more about what we do with the measure of faith that we have been given. It is acting out of obedience to our Master's wishes based on our knowledge of Him and His will. They were to see themselves as servants doing everything they were told to do. Whether it is plowing the fields, or making the supper, faith is living

out what we know about our Master and His will. Faith grows out of obedience to live out what we know about the Lord's character and His will, and this will produce good things, (good fruit) from an outflow of one's life of faith.

I think it will help us if I use the analogy of Charles Cooper from his book which shows Christians how to survive dark days and hard times. It is entitled; "Fight, Flight or Faith." In the book he encourages us to think of faith as an empty pie dish. We don't grow the pie dish. We add to the pie dish the ingredients for the pie, which he views as knowledge or newly acquired information. I quote from his book:

The container that holds the pie and gives it shape is faith. Knowledge is the content of the pie. Each slice is an individual truth or conviction. The container does not grow or get any larger; it remains the same. The number of pieces in the pie simply changes relative to what one believes about a given issue. The Bible describes the number of "slices" a particular person has regarding any particular issue as that of "unbelief," "little faith," or "great faith."<sup>5</sup>

At any one time in your life, you are either in a trial, going into a trial, or just coming out of one. God is committed to building your character through your life experiences. With each trial is a lesson on using another piece of the pie. In one place, Peter, the apostle says, "For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge (2 Peter 1:5). What knowledge of God do you have that you can put to use in this trial of your faith?"

<sup>10</sup> For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10).

*What good works do you think that God has prepared in advance for you to do?*

*If you were to die tomorrow, what would you want people to remember as your most important accomplishment?*

Every trial that you find yourself in has been filtered through the hands of a loving and sovereign God. He has allowed it to come into your life for the purpose of teaching you to walk by faith and to put to use the knowledge you have gained about His word and His

<sup>6</sup> Fight, Flight or Faith, Charles Cooper, Published by Strong Tower Publishing, Page 123.

character. Knowing God's character and knowing all we can about His will through His word is integral to faith. Before the world was created God had an idea of the finished product of each person reading these words. The bible says that, "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:6). Whatever trial you find yourself going through right now, reach out and hold on to a promise of God which relates to that situation. Quote it to Him. Isn't that exactly what Jesus did? When He was facing temptation by Satan in the wilderness, he used a "piece of the pie", His knowledge of God and His Word. He could have just spoken what He wanted to, for what issues out of His lips is the Word of God, but to be an example to you and me, He quoted from God's word, which became a direct living word to the situation He was facing at that time. This kind of word that is alive for the situation at hand is called a Rhema word, a specific word for a specific situation. For our purposes of illustration, we will call this "a piece of pie in the pie dish of faith". This Greek word, Rhema, is the word used in Ephesians 6:17, where we are told to take up the sword of the Spirit, the word of God (Rhema, the specific, living word for the situation at hand). Sometimes this word may not be something that is in scripture, it may be a simple witness in your heart about something that you have asked God to do for you, and you sense a "yes" from God in your spirit. However, a Rhema word will always be in accordance with the scriptures, the written word. That is why it is important that we gain understanding and knowledge in the word of God and how it relates to our faith. If we know and can be absolutely certain that what we are asking for is in accordance to God's will and what He wants to do, we can view ourselves as a partner with Him, just carrying out on earth the very thing that He wants to do. It can be seen as bringing the reality of the kingdom of heaven into our lives on earth, in agreement with the will and the word of God. The Rhema word is always a specific word. It is a word which is inspired by the Spirit of God. This is what I believe took place when the disciple Nathanael, also called Bartholomew, was moved very quickly by Jesus from a state of unbelief to faith:

<sup>45</sup> Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." <sup>46</sup> "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked. "Come and see," said Philip. <sup>47</sup>

When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, "Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false." <sup>48</sup> "How do you know me?" Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you." <sup>49</sup> Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel." <sup>50</sup> Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that" (John 1:45-50).

What was it that happened to move Nathanael so quickly to a place of discipleship? It was Jesus speaking a word to him that only God could have known. We would probably call it a word of knowledge today. More than likely it was a prayer that Nathanael had prayed while alone with God sitting under the fig tree. We can only surmise based on what we see here, but I believe that Nathanael was enjoying one on one time with God while sitting under the fig tree, perhaps asking God if He really did know him and see him. When he met Christ and was told by Him that Christ had seen him under the fig tree, it was a special word to Nathanael's heart that, yes, God had heard his prayer, whatever it was, while he was under the fig tree. To Nathanael, it was the realization that God really knew him. It was a "piece of pie in his pie dish of faith". God was watching him. The Lord knew what was in his heart, that he had nothing false, and that He saw him under the fig tree when Phillip came up to him. Pieces of knowledge were placed in his pie dish of faith giving him evidence to trust for things not yet seen.

Thomas, the disciple, was also moved in such a way to faith. He was not in the Upper Room when the others saw Jesus come to their midst. When he heard about it later, he would not believe. Only when Jesus came to him personally and showed him the nail prints in His hands and feet did Thomas believe. His faith didn't get bigger; he just was provided knowledge to apply to his faith. He fell on his knees saying, "My Lord and my God! Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; **blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed** (John 20:28-29).

Sense evidence is a wonderful thing to add to our pie dish of faith, but we are more blessed if we believe just on the basis of God's word. This was the secret of George Mueller. His world view was one of trust in his Heavenly Father and His resources. The Word of God mixed with faith is a powerful weapon in the life of a Christian man or woman, and will bring great fruit to

your life and to others that are around you. Remember that you do not have to drum up an extraordinary measure of faith, just take the measure you have, mix it with faith in God's word, and you can connect to a faith greater than your own, faith that comes from God. Nothing is too hard for Him. By simple faith, you will connect with the extra-ordinary, the All sufficient One.

Let's pray: Father, thank You for giving me a measure of faith. Help me to use that faith in my walk through this life, believing You to provide not only for me, but for others as well. I want to live an extraordinary life by trusting in Your promises. Increase my faith, Father. Amen.

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