

## Jump Starting My Faith

In 1991 when Senator John Kerry (**picture**) was running for President. A man named by the name of Walter Carter wrote to Senator Kerry urging him to support forcing Iraq to leave Kuwait, after Iraq invaded Kuwait. In response, Mr. Carter received two separate replies from Senator Kerry. The first letter agreed with him, stating the Senator's strong support for President Bush's response to the crisis. But the second, mailed to him by mistake, thanked Mr. Carter for opposing the war and pointed out Senator Kerry had voted against the war resolution!

Politicians love to please people. It seems they'll say or do nearly anything to please people if it means being elected. But what does it take to please God? Turn to Hebrews 11:1-6 (p. 1007).

Faith is essential to pleasing God. That's what we want to talk about this morning – **Jump Starting My Faith**. Two words underscore this in Hebrews 11:6 – *impossible* and *must*. It's impossible to please God without faith. You *must* believe that God is and He is a *rewarder* of those who seek Him.

This isn't new. We all know this on a human, relational level. If someone doesn't believe you or questions your integrity, you're not pleased with that person. In effect, they're calling you a liar. If you've spoken the truth, to have someone call you a liar is very displeasing.

Think how much more it displeases the God of truth, who cannot lie, when we call Him a liar by doubting His Word! It's so insulting! When we don't trust Him, in effect we're saying, "God, You're wrong, I'm right!" If we want to please God, we must learn what faith means and what it means to live by faith. If you're taking notes...

**1. What is faith?** Hebrews 11 opens with a definition of faith. Faith, according to Hebrews, is the inner assurance that the things that we hope for but do not see, truly exist. It's the conviction that the things God talks about in His Word are fact and true...they're really there.

Now this definition of faith doesn't line up with the definitions of faith most people hold to. There's great confusion when it comes to what faith actually is. So let's clarify that by working through some false views to assist us in coming to a true, biblical understanding of faith.

**a. Faith is not an achievement.** It's not pulling things out of the air and calling it faith. That's a vivid imagination, not faith. Instead, biblical faith is a response to God's Word, His truth and revelation. Faith only becomes relevant when God has spoken. If God hasn't spoken, there's nothing to believe or exercise faith about.

Many think faith is like a fairy tale, believing something very unlikely. The more unlikely it is makes it "faith." In *Alice in Wonderland*, (**picture**) Alice says, "*There's no use trying. One can't believe impossible things.*" To this the Queen counters: "*I daresay you haven't had much practice. When I was younger, I always did it for half an hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.*" The Queen's idea of faith is widely held today but biblically speaking, it's nonsense.

If someone says, "I believe God is going to help me win the lottery...or give me a new car" or some other claim, that's dumb. God hasn't made a promise or spoken specifically about those things. Faith is believing what God has said, not what I imagine or dream.

**b. Faith is not unreasonable.** Faith doesn't mean we "park our brains at the door." God want us to use the intellect He gave us. Hebrews 11:3 says, "*By faith we **understand** that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.*" We live in a world of matter which was here long before we were here. As we observe our world, it forces us to face the question of how the universe got here.

Some teach the universe is eternal. That's not true though in our experience. Everything has a beginning. Everything is wearing down. Nothing else in our reasonable experience, no effect (the universe is the ultimate effect) can be said to be uncaused. Isn't it reasonable to say the universe had a beginning?

There are just two possible explanations to explain the universe's existence: **(1) It was called into existence by an incomparable power**, a power greater than itself; or **(2) It was an inexplicable accident**. Of these two explanations, only the first is reasonable. But Science (at least what usually passes for science) takes the second approach and doesn't provide an explanation. Science's explanation is the Big Bang theory, but the Big Bang theory is not an explanation. To suggest the universe began with an explosion doesn't explain where the matter came from that exploded. The very first question of philosophy and reason is this: *Why is there something instead of nothing?*

The gap that exists between the existence of a material universe and nothingness is so great that Science has absolutely nothing to say about it. Science can only deal with observations of what is. It can't cope with nothingness. The Bible tells us the universe was put in place by the One who was there. God spoke the universe into existence, *ex nihilo* (out of nothing). God said, "Let there be..." suddenly there was something instead of nothing. So what we see, the Bible tells us. It didn't come from a rearranging of existing matter. It all came into being at the command of the Creator-God. God asks us to believe that and it's perfectly rational to do so.

**c. Faith does not validate God.** Faith doesn't create the reality. Faith in a weak ladder will get you hurt. A little faith in a strong ladder is safer.

In other words, God validates faith. God exists and is faithful whether anyone believes in Him or not. He doesn't need our faith to run the universe. Your faith affects you and your life. If God is faithful, and He is, then your faith will make your life and future hugely better. Trusting God to do what He says is critical, but God will do what He says either way. Only your life and mine will be very different depending on whether we believe He's trustworthy. If you put your trust in someone who's unworthy of it, all the faith in the world won't change the disaster that could come as a result.

Did you ever buy a car and the salesman made promises but didn't come through? You bought in "good faith," but he deceived you. Faith doesn't create realities. Realities give us an opportunity to trust Someone who is infinitely worthy of trust. It's not enough to have faith. It's WHO you have faith in. Faith in the God of the Bible makes all the difference because God and God alone is worthy of our faith.

**d. Faith is not faith in faith.** In some circles, it's believed there's a link between the effectiveness of our faith to how strongly we can convince ourselves there will be a positive outcome to a particular situation. We exert all of our will power and squeeze all doubt from our mind. We convince ourselves if we pump up enough faith, God will honor our desires. We pray, read Scripture, scold ourselves for any second thoughts—and try to convince ourselves we can believe enough to get God to do what we think is right.

That's not biblical faith. Thinking like that isn't trusting in God's wisdom and power. No, it's confidence in ourselves and the amount of belief we've conjured up in an attempt to manipulate God. This is the false faith of Prosperity Gospel hucksters. It's known as "Name it, Claim it." You find it with many TV preachers. But this flawed kind of faith won't outlast the first major disappointment. When we can't claim what we name—when a loved one isn't healed or a promotion doesn't come through or some unforeseen tragedy hits—faith like this crumbles like a house of cards.

In their book, *We Let Our Son Die*, (picture) Larry and Lucky Parker recount the tragic story of the way they embraced this kind of misguided faith. In painstaking detail, the Parkers share how they'd come to believe that if they just had enough faith, God would heal their diabetic son. Eventually, their son, Wesley, got ill and needed insulin. Believing God would heal Wesley, they withheld the insulin. Predictably, Wesley lapsed into a diabetic coma. The Parkers, warned by some about the impropriety of not having enough faith, believed God would heal him. Tragically, Wesley died.

Even after their son's death, the Parkers, undaunted in their "faith," conducted a resurrection service instead of a funeral service. For more than a year following his death, they refused to abandon their firmly held faith that like Jesus, Wesley would rise from the dead. Eventually, they

were tried and convicted of manslaughter and child abuse. Their nightmare is the result of faith in their own faith, not faith in God. It's not biblical faith but a warped form of religious positive thinking. It's faith in faith rather than faith in God Who is always faithful.

How different is the testimony of the late Ron Mehl (**picture**). Ron Mehl endured leukemia by embracing a biblical faith in God. He finally succumbed to the disease. He wrote a book for his sons to read after his death, entitled *After Words*. Ron Mehl wrote, "*Faith isn't trying to manipulate God or circumstances to get what I want. It is resting in Him so that I can have what HE wants.*" Ron Mehl was right!

Biblical faith is resting on the promises of God, no matter what happens—His assurances that we will encounter hardship and heartache in this life but He's with us and is working in all things for our good and His glory—and that when this life ends, we'll enter Heaven, that perfect world where everything is made right. It's a relationship of trust in God, an experience-built confidence in the character of our Heavenly Father. Faith in and of itself is worthless. The value of faith is rooted in the soundness and worthiness of its object. As Mark Buchanan says, "*Without faith it is impossible to please God but without God it is impossible to have good faith. Faith like that has nowhere to lay its head.*"

**e. Faith is not some blind leap in the dark.** Some think faith in God means you ignore logic and reason. Many ridicule Christians for their faith that God exists, saying that kind of faith makes no sense.

Yet, believing there is no God requires an unreasonable kind of faith. If atheists or secular humanists put their faith into words it might sound like this: "*By faith we believe that this amazingly intricate universe evolved from mindless matter. We believe that order accidentally emerged from chaos.*"

It's more faith than I have. They're hard-pressed to find any evidence for this "statement of faith." True scientific observation consistently proves that *order* does not grow from *chaos*. *Design* points to a *Designer*.

For me and I hope for you, I find my Christian faith more logical and much more reasonable. When it comes to my statement of faith I return to Hebrews 11:3, "*By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.*"

Both belief systems require faith, yet only Christian faith is actually compatible with logic and reason. Ours is a faith based on historical evidence and scientific observation. It's supported by the Biblical record, by personal testimony and by our own experience. All around us we see the fingerprints of our Creator. We can also look back and see evidence that God is worthy of the trust and faith we put in Him. The longer we walk with God, the more we know Him. The more we know Him, the more we know we can trust Him.

Every Christian wants to grow in faith? How can we jumpstart our faith in our loving Heavenly Father?

**2. Jumpstarting my faith is learned.** God must do a work in our life and then we need to grow in walking by faith. Walking by faith is something we learn to do. It begins with a relationship with God. We believe God that we're sinners and He gave His Son for our sins. We trust God's Word that the cross and Christ's sacrifice is enough to pay our debt. We commit our lives to Christ and trust Jesus as our personal Lord and Savior.

By nature, we're not trusting people. When we see a "wet paint" sign, we usually don't trust it and must touch it to see for ourselves. We're born faith-challenged. It's part of our fallen nature. Yet, we utilize faith every day in natural ways. When you drive over a bridge, you're putting faith in the engineers who designed and built it. The difference is in the object of your faith. You can see the bridge; you can evaluate how strong it looks.

When we walk by faith, we're simply putting our faith in a God who cannot be seen by human eyes. How do we learn to walk by faith? Romans 10:17, "*So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.*"

The more you read, study and hear the words of Scripture, the stronger your faith becomes. You can't see God with your naked eye, but as you soak your soul in this Book, you learn what God is like. You learn He can be trusted. It doesn't come naturally. It's a work of the Spirit. The Spirit cultivates faith and it's something you learn to do.

Are you in the Word? Are you learning to walk by faith more every day?

**a. Walking by faith means surrendering to God everything.** It takes faith to obey Romans 12:1, "*present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.*" "Have you come to a place where you've surrendered everything to Christ? Do you have a totally dependent relationship with Jesus? Can you honestly say, "Wherever He leads, I'll go, whatever He asks, I'll do"?"

The life of faith requires every part of our life. Offering ourselves to God isn't something encapsulated in a 60 minute, Sunday worship service. Worship doesn't just occur on Sunday. It's to happen in every part of our life and world. Living by faith is part of each relationship, each task, each opportunity, each problem, each success and even each failure.

Living by faith is allowing the Spirit to link faith and works, the offering of everyday life to God. Living by faith sees the whole world as the temple of the living God and every common deed as an act of worship. Worship is the offering of everyday life to God. Living by faith means saying, "I'm going to church to worship God, and to the office, school, garage, garden, everywhere ... to worship God." Living by faith affects all we do and everywhere we are.

We're often so insipid in our faith because we've devolved into an unbiblical, selective Christianity which allows us to be deeply and sincerely involved in church activities and yet almost totally pagan in the day in, day out business of our lives. What's sadder is that few of us ever see the discrepancy. Living by faith is a whole life activity. A. W. Tozer (**picture**) wrote, "*If you will not worship God seven days a week, you do not worship Him on one day a week.*" Or as James Pike said, "When someone says "Oh, I can worship God anywhere," the answer is, "Do you?"

**b. Walking by faith means trusting God even in the darkest hours.** The only way to learn to walk confidently by faith is when we've spent time in the darkness of adversity and God has led us through. "*Consider it pure joy, my brothers, when you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance*" (James 1:2-3)

How's your faith walk today? Are you walking through a dark time? Faith is like a photograph; it only develops in darkness. It's trusting God even during the dark, frightening times of life. When we walk by sight we say, "This looks bad...hopeless." When we walk by faith, we know God is there walking with us through the darkness with us, and we can trust Him.

**c. Walking by faith is a daily walk extending over a lifetime.** The Old Testament hero, Enoch, demonstrates this. Genesis 5 doesn't mention faith in connection with Enoch, but it does say twice that Enoch walked with God.

The Septuagint translators, seeking to make the language less anthropomorphic render that phrase, "*Enoch was well-pleasing to God.*" Since it's impossible to please God without faith, it follows that Enoch walked by faith. His 300-year walk of faith obtained God's testimony that he was pleasing to God. We must walk by faith with God on earth if we expect to dwell with Him forever in heaven. What does it mean to walk with God?

**A walk is not spectacular or impressive.** If you know the story, you know one-day God just took Enoch to heaven. Now if we were writing the biography of a man who was taken up into heaven bodily, without dying, I don't think we'd title it, "*The Man Who Walked With God.*" We'd call it, "*The Man Who Flew With God.*"

We're attracted to the sensational, but God calls our attention to a man who walked with Him. To fly with God sounds impossible, but to walk with God is doable. Walking isn't flashy or fast, yet it's a frequent description of the Christian life. John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (**picture**) is a wonderful picture of the Christian walk. To walk with God means our lives are in step with God, yielded in obedience to Him, headed in the direction He chooses.

**A walk implies intimacy and fellowship.** Walking with a friend is a time to talk, to get to know one another, to share the things happening in our lives. Walking with God is a daily process of growing closer to Him as you share everything in your life with Him and learn more of who He is.

**A walk means you have to do your own walking.** Someone else can't do it for you. Just as a physical exercise program requires discipline, spiritual walking requires discipline (1 Tim. 4:7). You must take the initiative, the time and effort required to walk with God. If you don't make frequent appointments to be alone with Him, it won't happen. If you don't make an effort to read His Word and apply it to your life, you're not walking with Him. It's by knowing God's Word and applying it the various situations we face; we learn to walk by faith. If you've trusted Christ as Savior, but aren't really walking with Him, get up and get back on the path. Faith is daily dependence on God, step by step, that continues over a lifetime.

**3. When my faith is jumpstarted, it will be lived out in my life.** If my faith doesn't change my life, if it can't be applied to the real world, then it's worse than worthless. Hebrews 11 give us faith in life, faith in action. This is where we want to be. These people of faith were commended by God for their faith. Don't you want to be commended by God for your faith? As we tie this up, let's touch on these this morning. Turn back to Hebrews 11 (p. 1007).

**a. Faith is believing when I don't see it.** Verse 7, *"By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith."* Noah had this kind of faith. Noah was warned of an impending flood. He'd never even seen rain before, much less enough water to flood the world, but he was so sure of this future event that in faith he built the ark as instructed by God.

Faith doesn't see and then believe. It believes and then sees. In other words, it's believing in a future that you can't see. Many times we won't see why we should trust in God. In those times people of faith put their trust in Him, even when they don't see because they know God is absolutely trustworthy.

**b. Faith is obeying when I don't understand it.** Faith is a way of living. It's more of a verb than a noun. Verse 8 *"By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going."* Abraham's faith motivated him to obey God even though it meant leaving home and heading off for some unknown destination. This trip probably didn't make a lot of sense to him.

Many times God's commands don't make sense. Oswald Chambers (**picture**) said, *"Common sense is not faith and faith is not common sense."* Proverbs 3 says faith often means to *"lean not on our own understanding."*

God's instructions didn't make sense to Abraham but it didn't stop him from acting on his faith. Abraham's example teaches us *authentic* faith is always characterized by *action*. That's true of the other men and women of faith listed in this chapter. Their faith in the future made them act in the present in obedience. Genuine faith isn't passive. It's dynamic and forceful. Living by faith means to actively obey God day in and day out.

Genuine faith is seen in our actions. What would people who know us and work with us, who see us live our lives, what would they say we believe? It's important because genuine faith is obeying, even when we don't understand.

**c. Faith is giving when I don't have it.** Have you ever wondered why God accepted Abel's sacrifice and rejected Cain's? It wasn't because God likes bacon more than He does vegetables. Verse 4, *"By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain...God commending him by accepting his gifts."*

Abel's offering was better because he gave the best from the first offspring of his flocks. He basically gave God his irreplaceable breeding stock. It took faith to give this sacrificially. It appears Cain gave a small amount from his overflowing harvest of works he'd done, it required no real faith. Abel's faithful offering pleased God; Cain's faithless gift did not.

Abel's example gives us a clear picture of this third aspect of genuine faith. It's in giving even when I don't have it to give. It's giving when I don't think I can afford to give. Because when I give in this sacrificial way, I force myself to trust God.

Paul wrote to the Christians at Corinth and told them of the faithful giving of other believers in Macedonia. These givers were paupers, not knowing where their next meal would come from. Yet Paul said that, *"Out of their overflowing joy...they gave beyond their ability."*

So how's your faith in giving? Ask yourself: *"Is my offering to God more like Cain's or Abel's?"* 2 Corinthians 9:6-8 says, *"Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, but whoever sows generously will reap generously and God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others."* Scripture teaches that faith in giving means giving to the point where I must trust God.

**d. Faith is persisting when I don't feel like it.** This one is really tough because our culture says, "Base everything you do on how you feel." If you feel like doing it, do it. If you don't feel like doing it, don't. That's a guaranteed formula for an immature faith. Immature people build their lives on feelings rather than on commitments.

Olympians don't get to the Olympics by doing what they feel like doing. Concert musicians don't become masters by practicing when they feel like it. Godly men and women don't get that way by feeling like it. They grow in godliness by persisting at doing God's will even when they don't feel like it.

It's what Moses did. Hebrews 1:27, *"By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible."*

What made Moses persistent? He *"saw Him Who is invisible."* He had his eyes on God. It's the key to persistence. Keep your eyes on God, not on your problems. As we keep our eyes on God, He'll give us strength to persevere.

When we persist even when we don't feel like it, our faith grows stronger. Think of tough times in life as faith aerobics that push and pull and stretch and pound our faith and takes it to its limits, so that its limits can expand. Oswald Chambers (**picture**) said, *"Faith by its very nature must be tried."*

**e. Faith is thanking even before I receive it.** There's an example of this under the leadership of Joshua. The incident is referred to in verse 30, *"By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days."* God's people had come to conquer the land He'd given them and found this fortified city. They'd been slaves for four hundred years so had almost no training as an army. They had few weapons, yet they faced the heavily fortified city of Jericho. God says in essence, "Here's the plan. Walk around this city once a day for six days. Put the priests and the Ark of the Covenant out front. Blow the horns of worship as you walk in silence. Then, on the seventh day, march around it seven times. The seventh time around it, give a great shout of praise and the walls will fall down." Notice they were to put the priests and the music of praise first in the procession. They were to praise God for the city's destruction before it actually happened.

The principle is this. We praise God before He blesses us. We thank Him before it happens. Rick Warren puts it this way, *"If God tells you to go after Moby Dick in a rowboat, you better take along the tartar sauce."* Real faith is thanking God before I receive it.

**f. Faith is trusting even when I don't get it.** Hebrews 11:39-40, *"And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect."* All of these godly men and women had faith in something they never benefitted from in this life. They weren't great people, just people of faith who chose to believe God would give what He'd promised, even though they never lived to see it on this side of eternity

What's the principle here? Faith is focusing on God's kingdom. It's orienting our lives around things of eternal significance, living for the real world instead of this temporal one. We tend to focus on the temporary, taking our eyes off what really matters and will last. It's a dangerous focus. It gets us off track, weakens our faith and brings pain, loss and trouble.

God didn't create us for time; He created us for eternity. If we just live for time, we miss the ultimate purpose of creation. God uses our present time to mold and shape our future usefulness here on earth and in eternity. It's why we must orient our life to His purposes.

Are you? Do you believe God? If you do, you'll invest your life in that which is lasting and eternal, storing up treasures in heaven.

How's your faith? Does it need a jumpstart? Are you living for the real world? Do you **believe** when you don't see it, **obey** when you don't understand it, **give** when you don't have it, **persist** when you don't feel like it, **thank** God before you receive it and **trust** Him even if you don't receive it in the here and now?

**Conclusion:** What's the bottom line? What does biblical faith look like? How does it change my life? Are you familiar with sportscaster, Ernie Johnson (**picture**)? When Ernie Johnson was forty-one, he realized something major was missing in his life. Let me share his own words:

"My life had been all about me. Everything was in place: I had a great wife, Cheryl, four happy kids who gave me great joy, and a TV career in full ascendancy...I was studio host for TNT Sports. You might as well have stamped a red TNT logo on my forehead...but since everything was about me, I was growing weary. At a critical time in my life, a good friend came along and explained that everything *doesn't* revolve around my existence—that there was more to life. He talked about God having a plan for me and how much He loves me. I had never really explored a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, so this was a revolutionary idea for me...I knew Jesus Christ was there but I had never put the two together. When I heard that Jesus was holding out His hand saying, 'Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.' I grasped that hand. Oh, how I needed rest, Oh, how I needed that peace.

Even with his busy schedule, Ernie began attending Bible studies that built his faith, so when he faced a personal crisis, he had a spiritual foundation. He writes, "I faced personal crisis a few years later. In 2003, I was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma...in late 2005, a lymph node near my left ear began swelling [and I had] six chemotherapy treatments...One of the good things about chemotherapy treatments, besides the fact that they saved my life, was that I became just as bald as Sir Charles and Kenny the Jet...then the cancer went into remission. When people ask me, 'How did you get through that?' I tell them, Trust God...period not Trust God if this next test comes back the way I want it to...Trust God period."

Do you have a biblical faith? Have you trusted Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior? If not, please trust Him today.

Do you have a personal relationship with Jesus? Is your faith growing? Are their steps you know the Holy Spirit is leading you in where you need to jumpstart your faith, where you need some steps forward in trusting Jesus more? What is God asking you to trust Him in? **What's the jumpstart of your faith you need to take?** Write it down. Take that step today!