

THE HABIT OF FAITH

The next morning as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. He noticed a fig tree in full leaf a little way off, so he went over to see if he could find any figs. But there were only leaves because it was too early in the season for fruit. Then Jesus said to the tree, "May no one ever eat your fruit again!" And the disciples heard him say it. Mark 11:12-14 NLT

In Mark chapter 11 and verse 14, the Lord Jesus spoke what turned out to be a death dealing curse to a tree. We are told that the disciples took note of what He said (I assume they had noticed that there was nothing that could qualify as casual talk from His mouth). Please note that what He said to the tree was motivated by the kind of disappointment which we all face every day. Sometimes you look into your fridge, find nothing and say something like "this fridge is good for nothing;" or your computer misbehaves and you tell it, "this useless computer." That is something similar to the kind of frustration that the Lord Jesus felt. Don't forget that He was flesh and blood too, just like we are (Heb 2:14), but thank God our words have not been coming to pass like His own did, we would have damaged a lot of things.

Now, in the case of the Lord, as a result of the casual words he spoke, the tree withered completely, having died from the roots. That was what amazed the disciples. They were surprised that a word that seemed so casual when it was spoken could kill. I can imagine that they realized the Lord must not be provoked to speak against them. Thank God He was so calm and slow to anger.

What was the response of the Lord to the words of amazement from the disciples?

"Have the faith of God." (vs 22, literal translation)

What does it mean to have the faith of God?

The Lord Jesus did not muster up faith at that moment; even though He spoke casually, His faith was a habitual part of Him. The words of someone with the faith of God is *always* full of power. They do not ever say things and it would turn out that they didn't mean it. The Lord was telling us that the faith of God is a habit and not an emergency brake we use when things are bad. We walk by the faith of God all the time. The Amplified Bible renders that verse 22 like this: "*Have faith in God constantly.*"

Jesus didn't have to muster up His faith to curse the tree; He spoke as He normally would at any other time and the tree died. From His explanation as He taught the disciples from this incidence we understand that the words He spoke were words of faith. We easily see it from His statement that, "whoever says to this mountain... and does not doubt... but believes..."

The mistake with a lot of us is that we walk every day in unbelief, and then in an emergency we want to muster up this faith from somewhere. We suddenly want to pray in faith when we are sick and get healed or pray for money in the time of urgent need. But it doesn't work like that. Someone said, "Whatever you do regularly, you become good at." We cannot make unbelief a habit and then have faith in the time of trouble. If unbelief has been your habit, then you would

have become good at it so that it would come out of you easily. For you not to doubt in your heart when you need to speak words of faith to a serious situation, then you must have made faith a habit. We must be walking by the faith of God all the time otherwise we will surely doubt in our hearts in the time of need. That is what we must address—how to make faith a habit.

This is a short teaching and so I will condense what should actually be a long teaching into a number of short points. Practice these things and you will be making faith a habit.

1. Listen to (and read) the word of God regularly.

The word of God is the food that nourishes and builds up faith. You cannot have strong faith which flows easily with power in your words unless you are build up with adequate nourishment. We eat this food of the spirit by hearing (which includes reading).

You see faith is contagious; if you interact with a source of faith, you will catch the spirit. The way the spirit of faith enters you is by the infusion of the word of God (Jn 6:63).

Make listening to messages and reading of teachings of the word of God a habit. We live in the days of technology and we must take advantage of it. The tiny memory chips in our phones can store hundreds of messages; take advantage of this. Fill up your devices with the word of God and listen to the word as often as you can. These days most of us can easily listen to up to 2 hours of messages every day; all you need do is have it as your fill-in for those idle times.

Unfortunately technology has been abused. People spend most of the time on Facebook and other social networks, gossiping and paying attention to what does not edify. Ladies, you are gossiping about what a celebrity wore to an event in which worldliness was celebrated, and you expect your words to have power? No way! What you pay attention to is either building up your faith or draining it. There is no neutral zone. If you like to chat and talk online, get yourself into a chat group where the word of God is shared regularly. Anything that focuses you on the things of this world is not good for your faith.

Make listening to the word and reading your bible and faith building books a habit. That way the word of Christ will dwell in you richly. Many of us Christians pass a whole month and do not hear or read something serious unless it is in church on Sunday. That is the very way to weaken faith. Don't forget that the world inundates you daily with faith-killing words; you must fight back by deliberately filling your life with the word of truth.

God has helped me in an area. My car is filled with the word; my car music player is always playing it. I am hooked to it on the smart phone so much. Many times I have to take long journeys; often even though I could get someone to drive me, I choose to do the driving myself. My reason was that these are periods of meditation. In just one journey I can listen to 4 to 8 hours of sound teaching of the word of God. Many times my wife and I will just leave a message playing on our tablet-pcs or phones as we go off to sleep. At least a few minutes of serious substance will flow in. These things insidiously build faith.

2. *Always address situations and respond to things according to the word of God.*

The first point I made had to do with the use of the ears and eyes in soaking in the word of God. The next has to do with the mouth.

*This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night...
Josh 1:8 NASB*

To meditate on the word of God means to speak to yourself in the word. It means to recite it and to make it a song on your lips. In fact the Bible in Basic English (BBE) says, *“Let this book of the law be ever on your lips and in your thoughts...”*

What I want to advocate at this time in making the faith of God a habit is to put the word you have learnt on your lips in response to every situation. This is a crucial habit. Learn to respond to every situation with something you have learnt from the scriptures.

For example, if you are watching the news and you read of a tsunami or erupting volcano which devastates an area, do not just lament and wail for the people; utter a word of deliverance concerning your life. Say something like, *“from six troubles He will deliver me, even in seven evil will not touch me.”* (Job 5:19). When you hear of a car accident or a plane crash, always reply with a word like, *“The LORD shall preserve my going out and my coming in this time, and even for evermore.”* Don't just be silent!

Also, be careful never to let political correctness or desire to 'belong' steal the word from your mouth. Never, never, agree with people who are speaking against the word of God. As an example, the world these days is trying to make sexual perversion seem like normal. Never speak so as to agree with them. Let everything you say be in agreement with the word of God that you have learnt. Whether you feel like it or not is far from the issue; you are just to agree with your mouth that God is just and that there is no unrighteousness in Him.

You cannot habitually speak against the word of God and expect great faith to flow for you in the time of trouble. Jesus said *“if you deny me before men, I will deny you before my father and His angels.”* Denying Jesus is by being ashamed to hold on to the opinion of the word of God in the face of unbelieving talk. When men say there is a casting down, speak up and say there is a lifting up. Speak your faith in the word of God all the time.

I cannot emphasize this enough. Every day we are being tested, like Job, to see what we will say with our lips. Most times these tests are subtle, and we often fail. We know the truth but we are afraid to speak up. People are discussing about how a man just divorced his wife of 25 years; just release a scripture, *“I hate divorce, says the Lord.”* No more. Don't judge the people; don't analyse the situation; just utter the word. You hear the news of a man who finally got revenge against someone who offended him 10 years ago. Just answer, *“it is written ‘Never take your own revenge, but leave room for the wrath of God, for the Lord said, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay.’”*

When someone is cursing the employer, you answer, *“It is written, ‘Pray for them that despitefully use you.’”* Please I must emphasize that you need not feel like you are speaking; speak only

because it is the word of God. That is how to meditate on the word of God and not be ashamed of Jesus before people. It is a habit you must form. It is a way of walking in the faith of God all the time.

3. Never tell lies.

*Watch over your heart with all diligence,
For from it flow the springs of life.
Put away from you a deceitful mouth,
And put devious lips far from you. Prov 4:23-24*

A major killer of faith is a lying mouth. When your mouth tells lies, your spirit gets confused and cannot effectively store or release spiritual energy. Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord.

People who lie think they are gaining something by deceiving people, but in reality they are hurting themselves spiritually. In the realm of the spirit, the lying man or woman cannot deceive anyone there; he only succeeds in looking like a confused person. Such ones are like spiritual equipment that is short-circuiting. They short-circuit faith and the power of God. Next time they pray, nobody above listens because they sound mumbled up.

Truth on the lips is so important that a Christian should not even joke with lies. It sounds extreme but it is true. What we call 'April fool' is a joke spiritual people do not play because the ramifications of having a lying tongue is spiritual. Imagine drinking a slow poison once a year just because it is supposed to be fun; you wouldn't want to do that. I read this verse of scripture quoted below almost 30 years ago and since then I have not played the April fool thing.

*Like a madman who throws
Firebrands, arrows and death,
So is the man who deceives his neighbor,
And says, "Was I not joking?" Prov 26:18-19*

My dear friends, life is not a joke and preservation of our faith is vital.

Make telling the truth your watchword and your habit. Don't let the fear of man drive you to lying. Lying lips are hated by God; He calls it an abomination. (Pr 12:22). Don't lie to your spouse; don't lie to your friends; don't lie to anybody. Keep away from doing things that you are not supposed to do and lying will be less necessary for you.

Keeping away from lying nourishes your faith.

4. Live generously

Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. 18 Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share. 1 Tim 6:17-18 NASB

A lifestyle of doing good and being generous is vital to the practice of faith. From the verses written by Paul to Timothy quoted above, we see that generosity is a sign of where your hope (derived from your faith) is. A person who lives for himself or herself alone cannot have the capacity for faith. Faith, the bible says, works by love, and love is often shown in giving.

Being generous is one of the ways by which we show and also practice our faith. It is a way by which we make faith a habit. It is interesting that when James wanted to explain the works of faith the example he chose to use was that of generosity. I think there is a reason for that.

If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. James 2:15-18 NASB

It seems one of the most important works of faith is giving. We are talking about the faith of God, and this God is a constant giver. To be generous is a sign of godliness. Paul taught us that we should use as much as possible the opportunities given to us to do good and be generous.

So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith. Gal 6:10 NASB

If you want to make faith a habit, make generosity a habit. Give of what you have to others who have less. Give to those the Lord commands you to honour. Give to solve a problem for someone and do not engage in the selfish giving common in Christianity today which we call seed-sowing. Give and do not even think of what you are going to get back.

5. Be thankful always

For me, this is probably the most important of the habits we must have as we develop the faith of God in our lives. Thanksgiving is crucial, and it is easily formed into a habit.

I believe that it is instructive that Jesus never handled food without giving thanks. When he would share food with his disciples he would give thanks to God first. When he would feed the multitude he would give thanks first. The accounts in the gospels would emphasize that he did these things after giving thanks.

*Jesus therefore took the loaves; and **having given thanks**, He distributed to those who were seated; likewise also of the fish as much as they wanted. John 6:11*

*There came other small boats from Tiberias near to the place where they ate the bread **after the Lord had given thanks**. John 6:23*

*And when He had taken some bread and **given thanks**, He broke it, and gave it to them... Luke 22:19*

*And when He had taken a cup, and **given thanks**, He gave it to them; and they all drank from it. Mark 14:23*

The way the accounts clearly show how he gave thanks tells me that there must be something very important about his habit of giving thanks in His spiritual operations. Notice that account in Jn 6:23; it clearly explains that the eating of bread was possible because the Lord gave thanks. The habit of thanksgiving is crucial to a life of faith.

What Satan tempts us with is to complain all the time against the Lord. That was what destroyed the faith of the children of Israel in the wilderness so that when it was time to enter the Promised Land they were not able to. To enter into that land was a matter of faith (Heb 3, 4), but their faith had been decimated. They were already defeated before they ever saw the giants. I believe that one of the things that destroyed their faith was their constant murmuring against Moses in view of what they were going through. How many of us are like that today.

We have so many things to complain about when there are so many reasons to be thankful. Listen there is always something to thank God for if you have the heart of thanksgiving, and you will always have more than enough to complain about if you are a murmurer against God.

Let me quickly add that many people do not realize it is God they are murmuring against as they complain about their situations and about their countries. You may not mention His name in your complaints but when you are always seeing what is not right, you cannot thank God the way you should and you will inevitably murmur against Him.

Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. 1 Cor 10:10 KJV

Form the habit of waking up in the morning and the first thing that comes out of your lips is “thank you Lord for another day.” “Thank you that I woke up today.” Don’t worry first about the power failure or your back or the mattress; give thanks first and you will soon see those things change.

Give thanks for your food and your drink. Make it a habit to be truly grateful from the heart.

Give thanks for every little good thing you experience, and even for the ones that do not seem so good. The truth is that, “...we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” Rom 8:28

Practice these things and the spirit of faith will fill your life and it will come to pass at a time that every word you speak will be full of spiritual power.

