

WHAT DOES FAITH LOOK LIKE?

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The message of the Bible is clear about this: We can only be saved from our sins and judgment to come by faith alone in Christ alone. That is saving faith.

Kinds of Faith

The Bible acknowledges other kinds of faith, but the faith that saves is faith alone in Christ alone.

For instance, *courage is a kind of faith*. To face hardship or difficulty with courage requires faith. But it may be faith that the “goodness of humankind” will eventually show up through your family or friends. Or, it may be faith in a well-tested (or even a new) medical treatment. Or, it may be faith in yourself, that you are tougher than what life has thrown at you. Or, it may be faith in your training that helps you stifle your fear and run, yelling “Charge!” into the face of your adversary.

Confidence is another kind of faith. It’s an optimistic feeling, almost a blindness to defeat, that paints pictures in your mind of your win. Self-confidence says, “I’ve got this.” Or, it may be confidence in the strength, ability, or wisdom of someone else—a helper, a confidant—who can, and will, turn things around for you.

Knowing things that you have not personally experienced—whether you’ve imagined them, or someone has taught them to you, or you read it in a book, or you saw it on the internet, or in a video—is a kind of faith.

Obedience is a kind of faith. We obey whomever we trust. Or fear.

Because *fear itself is a kind of faith*. It produces negative feelings, yet fear trusts in the power and authority of someone or something else.

Surrender is a kind of faith. Giving your will, your strength, your obedience to someone or something other than yourself takes this kind of faith.

Terror is a kind of faith. What are you afraid of? You may never be able to say *why* you are afraid of it, but that it terrorizes you remains a fact, and you know it. You may try to deal with your terror through another kind of faith, like those I’ve already mentioned, but sometimes fear is stronger.

Actually, all the things I've mentioned are *not* faith itself, but *expressions* of faith. They are ways that faith takes form and substance.

Faith's Definition

Like water, you may feel faith, but try to grasp it and, like water, it eludes your grip. That's why definitions, even in the Bible, are vague; they're more like illustrations than definitions.

Hebrews 11 offers this definition: *"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."* (Hebrews 1:1; ESV)

Then, the writer spends the rest of the chapter illustrating what is so difficult to put into words, by rehearsing the acts of others, in the hope that we will get it by seeing it repeatedly in his various examples:

"By faith... Abel brought a more acceptable offering to God."

"By faith... Enoch was taken up to heaven."

"By faith... Noah built a large boat."

"By faith... Abraham obeyed."

"By faith... Abraham offered Isaac as a sacrifice."

"It was by faith that Moses, when he grew up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter."

None of these examples leaves us with a sharp definition. At best, we walk away with a glimpse, a fuzzy feeling, or a vague sense of confidence.

Perhaps, when it comes to faith, this is the best we can offer: a glimpse of man and God interacting; a fuzzy feeling of hope; a vague sense of confidence in God's care and help.

If so, that would explain some things. Like, why it is so hard to convey your faith to another person. Or, why it is so hard to keep faith alive, in the face of life's endless fluctuations.

A Measure of Faith

Nevertheless, Apostle Paul taught that *"God has allotted to each person a measure of faith."* (Romans 12:3)

Therefore, however we may experience it, or seem *not* to experience it when we most want it, faith is. These, and so many more expressions of faith, prove its perpetual existence, and, therefore, its powerful potential.

Thus, it is not a question of whether or not we have faith; we all do. The question is, rather, *in what or in whom* have we put our trust?

And this Bible truth remains: Faith alone in Christ alone is what saves us (any of us).

Incomplete Faith

What we can confidently say about faith, is this: Faith always has an object; it cannot function without one. "I have faith" is an incomplete sentence. We may ask, and should always ask ourselves, "Faith in what or whom?"

And here's *why* we should always ask ourselves that question and complete the original sentence: Faith derives its value from its object. Faith's potency or effect is really the potency and effect of faith's object. I am telling you that faith has no power—zero—in and of itself. Faith's apparent effect is relayed from its object.

Some say, "Prayer is powerful." But if I pray to an oak tree, will that prayer have power? If I pray to a doorknob, will that prayer have power? But if I pray to the Father in the name of Jesus Christ, there will be a powerful effect. It is *dependent on the object* of your prayer, the object of your faith.

Find out what you are trusting in. That's the source of your faith's power. That's the measure of your faith's strength. That's the promise of your faith's effect.

Your faith is only as valid, or potent, or effective, as its object. That's why you cannot simply "have faith." Faith can do nothing by itself. So, what do you have faith in?

Jesus Christ said, "*Apart from Me you can do nothing*" (John 15:4). We can do nothing for God, nothing to please God, nothing to accomplish God's will, if our faith is not intentionally and directly linked to and dependent on Jesus.

Please note that I have said nothing of your *circumstances*, because faith in Christ is not dependent on your circumstances. In fact, you may often express faith in Jesus in *contrast* to what your circumstances suggest.

A Badge of Faith

Do you struggle in some aspect of your walk with Christ? Has this fact caused you some shame and grief? Have you imagined that if you only had faith—stronger faith, or more faith—then your struggle would cease and your hope would come to pass? If so, then you may be pleased today to hear me say, your struggle is your badge of faith; it is the evidence of your faith in Christ. Don't quit!

If you really had no faith in Him, you would not be struggling; you would simply cave to temptation, or give in to your circumstances.

The fact that you're hurting, or trying hard, or longing for victory as you struggle, is evidence of the faith that is driving you.

Every athlete knows, "No pain, no gain." You must work *through* the pain, run *through* the pain, swim *through* the pain, if you want strength and stamina to increase. In fact, you should *expect the pain*, and *prepare yourself* for the pain, and be ready to press through it.

Faith in Jesus Christ is not an escalator to the top floor (just climb aboard and take an easy ride). It's twelve flights of stairs! If you need a break to catch your breath, okay, but expect to make the entire climb.

Faith in Jesus Christ is not a sprint; it's a marathon. If you need to walk for a ways to catch your breath, okay, but expect to cover the entire 26.2 miles.

And why is a marathon such an odd distance as 26.2 miles? LiveScience says, "In a nod to Greek history, the first marathon commemorated the run of a soldier, named Pheidippides, from a battlefield near the town of Marathon, Greece, to Athens in 490 B.C. According to legend, Pheidippides ran the approximately 25 miles to announce the defeat of the Persians to some anxious Athenians. Not quite in mid-season shape, he delivered the message "Niki!" (Victory!) then keeled over and died.

"Today, there are more than 500 organized marathons in 64 countries around the world each year, with more than 425,000 marathon finishers in the United States alone. As many of these veterans will tell you, the first 26 miles are easy, it's that last quarter mile that will kill you."

Your objective, as a follower of Jesus Christ—whether you sit, walk, or stand—is to keep your faith in Him alive (survive!) and keep moving forward, as much as possible.

How Faith Works

Here's how faith works:

If you have covered a given distance (completed a trial) and are enjoying the fruit of your faith, then take your seat and sit in faith—that means, give God the praise and give Christ the glory for seeing you through. Share your reward with others. It's a time for worship.

If there is no immediate battle at hand, no arrows whizzing past your head, then walk forward with Christ, doing what you know will honor Him and make His heart glad. It's time for obedient faithfulness.

If the enemy has risen up against you and the battle is heavy, do not run away and do not attack, because either way you will put yourself off-balance and in danger. Instead, stand your ground in Jesus' name. Crouch behind the shield of faith, and hold your position. The things that are beyond your control are not out of God's control. Your job is to not be moved. It's time to hold on.

If you have been accustomed to starting each day in fear and trembling, with paralyzing insecurity, or with depressing imaginations about what lies ahead, you need a "faith lift"!

That struggle, that battle demands a warrior mentality. But it's not human warfare; throwing and breaking things will not help, yelling will not help, pouting will not help, a pity party will not help. This is spiritual warfare, and it requires a spiritual response.

Call on the name of the Lord. Don't stand alone in your pain and fear. Call on Jesus, and ask the Holy Spirit to come to your help. Invite His presence!

Don't rely on your own strength or determination. Rely, instead, on what Jesus did for you—He shed His blood in death to cancel your sins and sever the devil's grip on your life. Don't face the evil one on your own. Rehearse the story of what Jesus did for you and take your stand on redemption ground. Lift up that shield of faith!

Acting in the authority of Christ, cast down the imaginations that taunt you. Declare your faith in Jesus. If those thoughts or images rise up again, cast them down again. This is battle. This is warfare.

How often would you need to fire your weapon in warfare? As often as necessary.

Run out of ammo? Open the Bible and reload!