

Fasting Devotions by Nazarene Pastor Jon Carnes

Too Stressed Not To Pray

2 Chronicles 20:5-12 “Then Jehoshaphat stood up in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem at the temple of the LORD in the front of the new courtyard and said: “But now here are men from Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir, whose territory you would not allow Israel to invade when they came from Egypt; so they turned away from them and did not destroy them. See how they are repaying us by coming to drive us out of the possession you gave us as an inheritance. O our God, will you not judge them? For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you.”

This day dawned like most days for the past five years. King Jehoshaphat had no reason to think that this day would be any different than yesterday in Judah. He knew the schedule of each day was set. He would rise, have a healthy breakfast, do his morning exercise routine, go to the throne room and work on the business of administrating a country. Everyday was a stressful day for such a powerful individual, but this day was going to be different.

During the course of the morning or early afternoon the messages came. Sentries from three of the kingdom outposts came rushing into the palace with disturbing news. Three nations Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir had each gathered an army and were marching against Judah. Any of the three armies were large enough to fight against Judah by themselves; all three together were overwhelming odds.

It was in this immediate stress that the King had to make a decision. He could have panicked and given up. He could have rounded up his army and marched to victory or destruction whichever destiny brought. But, King Jehoshaphat knew that in times of great stress the first issue is prayer. He went before God and said that amazing prayer found in our text. The most astonishing part was what happened when this powerful King understood his need and prayed, “...for we have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are upon you.” The King’s honesty brought God’s answer.

This mighty king of a great ancient nation understood the principle of praying first when stress was the greatest. If he knew such a principle as necessary several thousand years ago, it would do us well to remember it now. Prayer has always been the doorway into gaining wisdom from God. Prayer is the key to receiving the blessings of God. It is in the miracle of prayer that God answers back with words like He gave Jehoshaphat, “Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God’s.”

When stress comes in those overwhelming moments you must not run nor is it time to go and face your issue trusting some destiny wrought by luck. It is time to bow your knees before the Creator and seek help and wisdom. You and I hesitate to do this because we live so much in the natural man. Prayer is a supernatural practice. It reaches out to your supernatural God to receive supernatural power and wisdom. Best of all prayer moves the hand of God on your behalf.

The Day God Answered Prayer

1876 was a terrible year in Minnesota. Locusts had swarmed through the state and devastated the crops bringing almost complete destruction. Spring of 1877 brought fear again of another year where locusts would bring devastation. Governor John S. Pillsbury on April 26, 1877 called the state to a day of prayer and fasting. All the stores, shops, schools and business offices were closed. The Churches were opened for people to gather. In both sanctuary and homes groups gathered and dared to believe that God could and would help.

The next day dawned with a summer glow to the sun, instead of the cool Minnesota spring. It remained warm for three days. By the end of the third day millions of locust larvae began to hatch. Imagine the questioning in the minds of the people of this great state when they saw this pestilence squirm to life. Do you think the faith that made them shut the state down began to waiver?

However, on the fourth day the temperature dropped until a deep freeze covered the land. The locusts began to freeze to death. In four days God brought a miracle to the land. Minnesota farmers remember April 26, 1877 as the day God answered prayer for the people. My question to you is, "Can you speak of a day when God answered prayer for you?"

How can you and I get results from God when we pray? Matthew 6:5-6 states, "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth; they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." From these two passages we get two implied facts; "when you pray" and "when you fast." You cannot get answers to prayer, if there is not a habit of prayer. It is not enough just to come to God when there is a great need, the power is found in a consistent prayer life.

Fasting has been an all but lost discipline among Christians. Fasting expresses repentance and a contrite spirit in front of God. It is an inward discipline that is strengthened by outward abstinence. Fasting has always moved the hand of God on behalf of His people. Where there is a need, times of stress, God's people will still get answers to prayer if they will but dare to believe. It is possible to have times in your life that can be marked by a date when God answered prayer on your behalf.

Prayer That Moves The Man

Matthew 6:9-13 "This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

A century ago David Livingston read the words of Robert Moffit when he wrote of

Africa. The words he read that day burned in his heart and a dream took shape. He read these words, "From where I stand I can see the smoke of ten thousand villages that have never heard the name Jesus Christ." This made Livingston drop to his knees and offer himself to God to be used. There was no way at that moment Livingston could dream of what his life would mean to an entire continent of people.

He traveled 11,000 miles on foot, through uncharted jungles, facing dangers and unimaginable hardships. He fought off wild animals and several times nearly killed by the people he went to bring hope to. He was robbed, and abandoned by those who were to help him, and suffered from disease as he grew older. He went on and on until his body could take no more. The secret to this dedicated life became obvious at his death. On May 1, 1893 he was found dead on his knees in a position of prayer.

You and I live in a plastic society where the theme is "fake it till you make it." For Christians this cannot be our philosophy. You must be sincere about faith and spiritual disciplines. Prayer is the key to gaining spiritual power in your life. We see it in the life of Jesus over and over again as a habit of getting away from people and spending time in prayer.

Christ's time spent in private prayer made Him ready to face stressful situations. He was accused by religious leaders of having wrong motives. He was aligned by His distracters with the false demon god of flies, gnats and stench. He was threatened, rejected, scoffed and ridiculed. Yet through all this He held true and steady.

Power always accompanies prayer; it is one of the miracles of grace. When life seems to throw its worse at you, pray. When dark clouds loom on the horizon of your future, pray. When the enemy of your soul brings unexpected problems, pray. Pray when life is going great and when it is not. Pray when your understanding is clear and when you cannot see your next step.

It is through prayer that God uses you to do greater things than you otherwise could. Doors of opportunity will open in unusual ways enabling you to minister to the needs of others. And when life comes to overwhelm you, spiritual power and a sense of peace will be your comfort. God does miracles through your life when you become a person of prayer.

Prayer For The Difficult Moments

Luke 22:39-42 "Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. On reaching the place, he said to them, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation." He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."

I cannot think of a more stressful situation than when Jesus experienced while praying in the garden. He was hours from dying a terrible death. He was facing unfair

treatment because of unfounded accusations. He knew it was coming and was willing to submit to it for your and my benefit. The stress level wasn't any lower because it was a good thing He was doing.

Jesus needed the time spent in the garden praying to prepare for the greatest stress moment in His life. If Jesus needed that time, you and I need it even more. The spiritual battles of life are fought on our knees in the garden of prayer. The devil will do anything to keep us from praying. Prayer will allow you to see the issues of life more clearly.

Prayer gives us opportunity to be honest. Some of the difficult circumstances people find themselves in are of their own making. God gives us the chance to come clean about behavior, attitudes, feelings and anything else we desire to share. If "this fine mess" you are in is of your own doing, you must come to terms with your own behavior. God seldom blesses the person who makes excuses instead of accepting responsibility. Since you determine your own attitude, God can only lead you in the right direction not make you someone you're not willing to become.

However, many stressful situations are not of our own making. The choices other people make bring difficult circumstances into our lives. Divorce, loss of retirement security because of someone's bad management, crime, rebellious children are all examples of others bringing stress into our lives. It is in these moments that we need to have learned the secret to "garden prayer." Garden prayer knows that a difficult time is coming and committing to pray and obey God in spite of circumstances.

Garden prayer is the place where submission to God is required. It calls for you and me to trust God. Our tendency is to test Him, but you must learn to trust. When you test God you argue with Him, when you trust God you accept His direction. When you test God you try to get God to submit to your will, when you trust God you submit to His will. When you test God it increases the stress because it can bring us into conflict with God, when we trust it brings peace, strength and power to live. When the stress is greatest, go to the secret place of prayer, get on your knees and submit to God's leading.

Making The Decision To Pray

You and I know we need to pray. Too bad it often takes tragedy or stress to get us serious about our prayer lives. There is nothing more important to our relationship with God than prayer. I married my wife thirty-one years ago. I stood before a preacher and said, "I do." I made a commitment to a lifetime relationship. But, what if I never talked to her? What would happen in the relationship if we just co-existed in the same house

without communication? If we remained married it would be a miracle. At very best it would be a strained and cold relationship.

It is much the same way in your relationship with God. If you ignore His desire to have intimate spiritual communion the result will be a sense of distance and coolness of soul. This, the most imperative relationship in your life, is too important to ignore or leave undeveloped. You and I must cultivate prayer as a spiritual discipline. Prayer is not only talking to God but also learning to discern His voice when He speaks to us. To accomplish this we must learn to recognize the things which will hinder the prayer life.

Scripture gives us at least six things to guard against. Prayer is hindered when we pray out of pride. Jesus said in Matthew 6:5 that we should never pray to be seen or heard by men. He speaks here of motive not a regulation against public prayer. Prayer is not to showcase our ability to speak eloquently. In public or in private, pray to talk to God.

Another struggle in prayer is an unforgiving heart. Jesus told us that we must forgive others if we want to experience forgiveness. This also includes forgiveness and growth in our marriage according to 1 Peter 3:7. Peter teaches there needs to be mutual consideration and respect between a husband and wife. Marital unrest hinders prayer life.

The other three things that hinder prayer are living in the habit of sinning. Your sin always separates you from God (Isaiah 59:2). A self-centered heart will hinder your prayer life (James 4:3). A doubting spirit that causes you to be unstable in your faith will hurt your prayer life (James 1:6).

You need prayer every day but especially when stress gets high. God wants to help you in every circumstance of life, but you first must be willing to help yourself by staying away from those things that hinder prayer. God loves to answer prayer for all His children. He is this day awaiting you to stop your busyness for a little while and talk to him.

Dangerous Prayer Of Search Me

Psalm 139:23-24 "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

I do not like going to the dentist. It is one of those trips where there is the possibility for pain. I go for the purpose of cleaning and a check up knowing there is the chance of finding a problem. The dentist takes that sharp pointed probe and begins to scrape

away the plaque. He searches out each tooth one at a time. He slides the probe along the surface of the tooth looking for any decay. The hope is that there is none but if there is, it takes only a split second to realize it. If the probe hits a decayed spot immediate pain flashes through my entire body. Then immediately a plan is made to clean out the decay and fill the place where it was with a permanent fix.

This is a good example of taking our souls before God with a dangerous prayer. We must have the courage to go to God and say, "You have my permission to search every part of my life; body, soul, and mind." To do this is to ask for a spiritual probing. It means that He will take every part of our lives, one piece at a time and search for any spiritual decay. When it is found it can be painful. It may require us to give up a beloved habit that will ultimately be self-destructive. It may cause us to have to develop self-discipline in areas that are weak. It may cause us to give up an unhealthy friendship with someone who influences us to do wrong. It could mean we have to confess things we had thought hidden. Man could not see but God's probe found a spot of decay on our souls.

To ask God to search us is to ask Him to seek out that which slowly destroys our soul. We may or may not know it's there, that is, until God's probe touches it. Our confidence is found in the fact that God does not bring us pain for His pleasure but for our good. God's convicting Spirit is a wonderful gift, a gift for growth, learning and becoming righteous. Righteous in the sight of God, which leads to the way of eternal life is what God has for each of us. Do we have the courage to pray, "Search me, O God, and know my heart?"

Dangerous Prayer Of Cleanse Me

Psalm 51:1-3, 9-10 "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me."

A real dangerous prayer is when we ask God to, "Cleanse me." King David had messed up bad. David had committed adultery, had a man killed, and hurt his own reputation as a man of integrity. He had deceived himself into believing it was OK. But no position or time removes unconfessed sin. David had to come to the realization that he wasn't able to lift himself out of his need, only God could do that. When he turned to God and sought for cleansing he found God ready to help.

The cleanse me prayer begins with a willingness to confess any sin or attitude that is unholy. It is impossible to disregard our unrighteousness and sincerely pray for cleansing. Unrighteousness is the object of God's cleansing. This prayer goes beyond a willingness to improve "old Adam," it desires to allow God to search every room, closet and corner of our life.

When David asked God to wash him thoroughly from his iniquity, he was holding nothing back. Cleansing comes when we don't try to deceive ourselves into believing our Lord cannot see our sin. The only way He doesn't see our sin is when they've been forgiven by Him. Forgiveness happens only as part of confession and repentance. Confession admits sin, repentance turns from sin and God in His cleansing power enables us to be cleansed from sin.

Why is this such a dangerous prayer? It is dangerous because we have to be totally open, nothing held back. We have to admit wrong behavior and attitudes. We have to admit our tendencies toward evil. We must repent (turn away) from the things in our life, which takes away from an absolute and ongoing obedience. We cannot keep parts of our life from God, it is all His without reserve.

The key issue is that from cleansing comes a steadfast spirit. The focus of our cleansing is the ability to stand strong spiritually under difficult circumstances. A steadfast spirit holds our faith steady when the world around us doesn't make sense. A steadfast spirit can keep us steady throughout this life and on into eternity. Dare to ask God for complete cleansing.

Dangerous Prayer Of Break Me

Psalm 51:15-17 "O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."

"Lord, I know new spiritual growth comes as bad habits, unhealthy attitudes and wrong thinking are broken in my life. I ask to be broken in the places that will help me serve better." This is a dangerous, painful prayer. Breaking is always painful. It is also always profitable for God to break us. Our heavenly Father knows the best places to bring brokenness into our lives.

There is a great difference between being broken by God and other brokenness. Getting in too much debt can bring some real personal struggles but that's self-induced not from God. When we do not keep our body in shape there will be physical struggles but that also isn't from God. Being rejected because our attitude is negative and prideful will bring brokenness but not from God.

The brokenness that comes from God always has a spiritual significance. Its goal is to humble us before our Lord and create within us a willingness to be a faithful servant. Many times the brokenness that God brings us through seems to have no origin or reason that can be explained. It comes in God's own time and wisdom. He knows when and what we need. It may come in a time when circumstances seem wonderful and there is no observable reason for us to go through one of those times of refining. Other times difficult outward circumstances will be used to teach us inward spiritual lessons.

We don't talk much about brokenness because it holds a mystical ingredient. Spiritual brokenness is a God thing. It comes into our lives to create within us a spiritual quality that we need. It comes and leaves by God's design and will. It has no earthly rhythm or rhyme. The value of brokenness is eternal and its worth is more valuable than worldly wealth. It is painful because it changes us through the pressure of circumstances. Every instance becomes a path to significant personal spiritual development. We can share our experiences of brokenness but the lessons are learned very personally and individually.

Dangerous Prayer Of Lead Me

Psalm 31:1-3 "In you, O LORD, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame; deliver me in your righteousness. Turn your ear to me, come quickly to my rescue; be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me. Since you are my rock and my fortress, for the sake of your name lead and guide me."

The doctor was in the operating room intently working to help a patient when the scalpel slipped out of his hand and fell to the floor. Without missing a beat the doctor reached out and picked up a fresh sterilized scalpel that was waiting to be used. The doctor was equipped with more than one surgical instrument, clean, purified and at their immediate disposal. These clean instruments were ready and available to be used at the doctor's discretion.

It is a dangerous prayer for us to come to God with. It will mean that we accept our responsibility to be pure and clean so that God can use us at a moments notice. This prayer comes with deep personal commitment. This dangerous prayer says, "God lead me to become the person I have the possibility to be and guide me to what you want me to do." This prayer has led me to live in five different states from Colorado where I went to Bible College to Florida where I now pastor.

This prayer for some will never mean that they move from where they were raised, for others it will mean changing countries. Some will be asked to preach; others teach and still others to take care of Church property. The "lead me" prayer submits to the sovereign will of God. We accept the commission that God has for us personally. This spiritual journey becomes very personal and therefore rejects the temptation to envy. Envy comes from wanting the position or possessions of someone else. When we commit to follow God we determine to be content with where God leads us.

We miss the opportunity to be led by God when we aren't spiritually prepared to be used. As the doctor needs to be able to reach for a clean instrument, God needs clean believers even more. Sinfulness can keep Him from being able to lead us to our greatest opportunities for service. The good news is that God can take dirty tools and clean them up. If we will commit to personal spiritual purity then we can be an available tool for God to use whenever and wherever He leads us.

God may never ask you to go outside your community but He may ask you to teach children, teens or adults. He may ask you to dig a ditch, change light bulbs or work a sound booth. He may ask you to evangelize or to disciple a young Christian. The point is when we are led by God we go where He desires and find contentment in it. We take by faith that His will is better than our best plans. Dare we pray such a dangerous prayer as “lead me?”

Dangerous Prayer of Stretch Me

1 Chronicles 4:9-10 “Jabez was more honorable than his brothers. His mother had named him Jabez, saying, “I gave birth to him in pain.” Jabez cried out to the God of Israel, “Oh, that you would bless me and enlarge my territory! Let your hand be with me, and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain.” And God granted his request.”

I will never forget coaching a 12-year-old girl named Sarah in fast pitch softball. She played second base on a traveling tournament team. This team of twelve-year-old girls played two or three weekends a month. Sarah was one of those people who had good abilities but had to work hard. We practiced twice a week for two to three hours. Sarah was the starting second baseman. She needed to stretch her range so I would hit the ball just past her comfort zone. She would grunt as she got to some and missed others. I knew her potential even when she didn't. She spent time frustrated and tired but she never quit. The ultimate result was that Sarah had the opportunity to play on a team, which went to a national tournament.

When we pray and ask God to, “stretch me”, we are asking to be forced out of our comfort zones or our safe places? Comfort zones often lead us into ruts. Asking to be stretched is to request that God not take away all our burdens. It is to plead for obstacles in life. It is a prayer that desires God to see and push us toward our potential even when we think what we are being pushed to is beyond us. There must be a willingness to change if we pray the dangerous prayer.

Gods stretching often comes through doors of opportunity. Being stretched is something we have to desire. It will not be forced on us but opened to us. We must have a heart for becoming better, stronger and faster. Stretching comes because we willingly accept the work that it takes to bring it about. It moves us out of the destructive ruts that we are so often tempted to settle in to. A rut has been described as a grave with both ends knocked out, a place to stay until they push the dirt over us. I want to be stretched to the place I refuse to get caught in fruitless ruts.

Stretching is not a spectator event. It requires a willingness to walk through a door of fresh opportunity and expend the energy to learn new things. If we pray this dangerous prayer, expect only to see the door of opportunity, the stretching will only come when we have faith enough to step through the door. Dare to pray dangerous prayers.

Faith For Everyday Life

Hebrews 11:1-2 “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for.”

Ask a group of kindergarten children if they can paint and every single one of them will say yes. Ask a classroom of adults that same question and there may be one who will raise their hand. The adults will tell you they neither have the talent nor skill to paint. Skill and talent are only barriers that people have built for themselves. The underlying question is, “Are we willing to put feet to our desires and learn the skills and ability to paint or whatever?”

It takes a measure of faith to pick that brush up for the first time and place it against an empty white canvas. The fear that inadequacies will be revealed prohibits us from venturing out where faith awaits us with enormous victories. We bring these same fears into our spiritual life, even when we know that God is constantly beside us. We know that we should not doubt for God has never let a single child of His down yet often we struggle with fear and doubt. Fear comes from this world not God’s kingdom. So, the real challenge is: How can we who live in this fleshly body overcome the fear that destroys faith?

There can be many reasons for faith-killing fears. We can fear failure because we suffer from self-image issues. We can fear man’s opinion or reaction to steps of faith. We can fear the loss of worldly security, position or prestige. We can fear that some personal disobedience will be exposed by the enemy of our soul. Fear is the greatest faith-killer to be dealt with in our spiritual journey.

Faith is not speculating that God is able, but believing He is and desires to bless a life of obedience. Faith is not based on possibilities but probabilities. Faith is not double-minded but singular in purpose, mission and passion. Faith challenges doubt with confidence and dependence upon the grace and promises of God.

We must be committed to help our faith grow stronger. To do that we must allow our faith to have challenges. We must obey in spite of our own insecurities and watch God’s hand move on our behalf. Remember faith is based on God’s adequacies not our inadequacies. We should take the King David challenge and “offer no sacrifice to God that cost me nothing.” We must obey when circumstances say it is impossibility. God is the God of impossibilities and they receive it who will dare to believe it. We should do what we know God wants even when it goes against popular opinion. We must exercise our faith like we do our muscles if we are to be strong. For those who live by faith will experience God’s miracle working power.

Faith To Believe God Cares

Hebrews 11:6 “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.”

God is too good to be unkind,
He is too wise to be confused.
If I cannot trace His hand,
I can always trust His heart.”

C.H. Spurgeon

Jesus said, “Without me you can do nothing.” That sentence ends in a period, but should end in an exclamation point. This simple sentence is the starting place of real walking around faith. For those of us, (and I am one), who have tried living in my own inadequacies, we have learned the hard lesson that it is impossible. You can get by on talent as long as the issue isn't a real spiritual battle. When the spiritual battle comes, only those filled and led by the Holy Spirit will be left standing. It is not in a person who has not the power of the Holy Spirit to be able to stand against our spiritual enemy. Michael the archangel would not dispute with the devil, he had to lean on the power of God.

Our promise is simple and true, “Greater is He who is in us than he who is in the world.” What a faith building promise! The key is the Holy Spirit living and reigning in our lives. Ephesians 3 teaches that God will give us more than we “ask or imagine” with this one qualifying statement, “according to the power that is at work within you.”

I would love to give you the freedom to admit your inadequacies. It is the first step in receiving God's more than adequate, more than enough spiritual power to live by. It is when we step out in faith that we find Holy Spirit power. It is awaiting every act of faith.

This simple story illustrates it well:

At a Billy Graham crusade, the late Corrie ten Boom told the story of how As a child she went to her father and said: “Papa, I don't think I have the faith to handle real trouble. I don't know what I'd do if you should die. I don't think I have the faith that some people have to face trouble.”

Corrie's father looked at her tenderly and said, “Corrie, dear, when your father says he will send you to the store tomorrow, does he give the money to you today? No, he gives it to you when you are ready to go to the store. And if you are going on a train trip and need money for a ticket, does your father give you the money when you decide you may take the trip? No, he gives it to you when you are at the depot, all ready to buy your ticket. Corrie, God treats us the same way. He doesn't give you faith until you have a need. When you do, He will certainly give it to you. --Copied

Faith That Believes God Can

Hebrews 11:29-34 “By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned. By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for seven days. By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient. And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies.”

Faith believes that God “can” for me! I don’t have trouble believing God closed lion’s mouths for Daniel, or helped David slay Goliath. I am convinced that Elisha prayed and the widow’s oil multiplied and that the blind received their sight, the lame walked and that Jesus calmed the raging sea. I don’t have trouble believing that God will do anything for others but sometimes I doubt He will do it for me. Why do we seem to be that way?

I am convinced that we feel this way because we live in a world where worthiness is measured by how much money a person has, their lineage, relationships or giftedness. We can see ourselves as unworthy because we are not a part of the “in” crowd. Maybe we haven’t done enough good works for God to notice, so we doubt His willingness to bless. Faith falters every time we put God on the same level of thinking as mankind. If God were like man we should doubt Him but He is God and the call is for mankind to be like Him, never for Him to be like us.

We have to realize that God sees us differently than this world does. He loves us unconditionally which allows Him to bless or judge each individual without prejudice or bias. We can do nothing to earn God’s love nor can we do anything to keep Him from loving us. He loves us absolutely right this minute. No matter how bad or how good you are, He loves you absolutely. God proved His love by sending His Son so that NONE should perish, but ALL come to repentance. This love is for everyone, no one excluded.

This does not mean that we can live contrary to that love and not be judged. God’s perfect justice causes Him to be the Judge of evil when we have rejected His sacrifice of redemption. I am convinced that as we realize how God loves us, our life will change. We will be able to believe that He cares as much for us as He did for Daniel, Elisha, David, the blind man, the woman caught in adultery and those caught in the storm so bad they feared for their lives.

Faith is believing that God “can” for me. What do we need God to do for us? What is it in our life that overwhelms us? What is it in life that, without God’s help, you will fail miserably at? If we can identify one of these things then we are a candidate for God’s miracle working love. Realize that every individual is the object of God’s affection.

Faith To Prepare For The Storms

Matthew 8:23-27 “Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him. Without warning, a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. The disciples went and woke him, saying, “Lord, save us! We’re going to drown!” He replied, “You of little faith, why are you so afraid?” Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. The men were amazed and asked, “What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!”

Have you had everything going great and all of a sudden, in a blink of an eye, life was thrust into chaos? It seemed as if someone turned out all the spiritual light that had shortly before, been burning bright. The questions came flooding into your mind. What happened? Why? How am I going to find my way out of this fog? Who can I turn to who will understand? What will people think?

These questions tempt us toward unbelief. Unbelief keeps us from enjoying all our benefits in Christ. We can be experiencing the great things God has for us and in a moment lose sight of the blessings that brought joy and peace. The challenge for believers is keeping focused when life strikes these confusing blows. How is it possible to stand strong when life is so dark we cannot see our feet much less the ground we stand on?

The secret to standing firm in difficult times is to learn all we can about God when times are easier. Never take the days when “morning by morning new blessings we see” for granted. It is in those days we learn the great promises of scripture. That is the time to be able to rationally see how God worked in people lives past and present. It provides us the opportunity to make a game plan for difficult days. We can make some commitments that transcend the circumstances of life. If we wait until life gets thrust into a storm to learn, grow and commit we may not have the strength to do so. It is what we learn in the blessing days of life that holds us true when life turns the lights out.

We must not neglect the moment we have now. We need the now opportunity to prepare for what the next moment might hold. We are not destined to be drowned in a sea of unbelief. If things are going great, learn and grow all you can. If things are tough, hang on, God has never failed and He does not sleep but sees you at this very instant.

I may never see tomorrow, there is no written guarantee.
And things that happened yesterday belong to history.

I cannot predict the future and I cannot change the past.
I have just the present moment; I must treat it as my last.

I must use this moment wisely for it soon will pass away
and be lost to me forever as a part of yesterday.
I must exercise compassion, help the fallen to their feet,
Be a friend unto the friendless, make an empty life complete.

I must make this moment precious for it will not come again.
And I can never be content with things that might have been.
Kind words I fail to say this day may ever be unsaid,
Be a friend unto the friendless, make an empty life complete.

I may never see tomorrow, but this moment is my own.
It's mine to use or cast aside; the choice is mine, alone.
I have just this precious moment in the sunlight of today.
Where the dawning of tomorrow meets the dusk of yesterday.

Anonymous

Faith To Believe The Promises

Matthew 19:26 "Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

In, "God has never failed me, but He's sure scared me to death a few times," Stan Toler gives steps to faith building. I will attempt to paraphrase these to fit the time we have together. The word faith and believe are used 485 times in scripture. It is obvious that God desires that faith be an imperative lifestyle choice. Yet, it doesn't come naturally to most people, it has to be established and built.

Step one in faith building is to spend time finding and studying the promises of God. God's promises do not fail and will give us something to hold on to in the midst of difficult times. It is much like getting lost in a fog when you cannot see ten feet in front of you. You pull out the compass, trusting the instrument and find your way home. God's promise gives the direction when we cannot see because of the fog of circumstances that may surround us.

The second step is to be obedient no matter what. Our emotions are unreliable and can lead us astray. Obedience to God's word always leads to God's blessing. John Wesley once said, "God has appointed faith to supply the defect of sense, to take us up where sense lets us down, and help us over the gulf.

Another step is to spend time with people who have learned to live by faith. Search for those who have developed positive attitudes in the midst of difficult circumstances. Get next to those who have in the midst of a fog learned to use their spiritual scripture compass to stay steady and straight in their walk.

The fourth step is to seek the gift of faith in prayer. Ask God for faith, seek and desire it to be a part of your spiritual walk. Scripture teaches that as much as a mustard seed worth can move mountains. Ask God to give you as much faith as the ministry you desire to do will require and then use it.

Step five involves a process of faith building from reading history. Read about the spiritual journeys of our spiritual heroes. Discover what they found in a deep relationship with God.

“Faith is like a radar that sees through the fog – the reality of things at a distance that the human eye cannot see.”

Corrie Ten Boom

The last step in living by faith is to expect results. God is a prayer answering God. He wants to give opportunity for us to see miracles. He desires to do for us those things, which we cannot do for ourselves. Faith building comes from practicing faith and believing God for miracles. Doesn't that type of life just get you excited!

Faith That Keeps Hope Alive

Hebrews 11:1-2 “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for.”

There was once a town in Maine that was going to be destroyed by a new dam that was going to be built. The people had five years to find another place to live. In that five-year period the people didn't do anything to keep the town up. No paint was spread on the walls, no screens were repaired in the windows, no railings replaced when broken, and everything was left just as it was. A newspaper reporter came just before the last store closed and asked why they didn't keep up the town's appearance. One of the last citizens said, “Where there is no faith in the future, there is no hope in the present.”

Faith carries with it an energy that brings vitality to all of life. Faith energizes the present because it focuses on the future. Faith in God guarantees an eternal inheritance in the indestructible. It receives what thieves cannot steal, rust cannot corrupt, nor can moths destroy.

Faith relies on the integrity of God. Our God cannot lie! Every promise, every command and every life principle we find in God's word is absolutely true. They are not only true for the moment, but are absolutely true. They will be true for eternity.

However, faith is not something that just drops out of the sky and hits us over the head. It is gained by walking with God. D.L. Moody said, “I prayed for faith and thought that someday faith would come down and strike me like lightning. One day I was reading

in Romans 10 and read that faith comes by hearing and hearing and hearing by the word of God.” D. L. Moody was simply saying that he learned faith as he learned God’s word and how to live it out in life. The more life he experienced and the more of God’s word he understood, the greater his faith became.

Faith does not come without effort. Faith is to believe and act upon that belief even when we cannot see the immediate outcome. A person can believe God wants to help stop an alcoholic habit, but if they put no effort into it they will never stop. Power for change lives is just on the other side of stepping out by faith. It is when we act upon what we believe that we will find God’s power for living.

Feed your faith on God’s word. If we feed our doubts, faith will flicker like a candle in the wind, but when we feed faith doubt starves to death. Jesus said if we only had faith the size of a mustard seed, our growth potential would be incredible. Cultivating that little seed produces an enormous harvest. Faith, which is lived out, will produce good things in our lives now and inherit the indestructible.

Faith That Gives Vision

Hebrews 11:8-11 “By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the Promised Land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. By faith Abraham, even though he was past age—and Sarah herself was barren—was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise.”

Everyone has faith in something. Most of us get on an elevator and trust in the work of man to carry us high above the ground. We cross mile-long man made bridges. We ride on man-made ships and fly in 20-ton hollow tubes. We use faith everyday. I don’t know if I’m going to reach my destination but I sit on my seat in the airplane and believe that I am.

As much as we trust in the works of man, how much more we should trust in the works of God. Faith in God is the most stable belief that we can have. It is faith built on the solid rock, an unshakable, unmovable, and all knowing God. Faith puts God between us and our circumstances. We may see our situation but we also know God is at work in it. It sees past present difficult problems to future possibilities.

Faith creates a vision for the future. Helen Keller was asked if there was anything worse than being born blind. She answered, “Yes, it would be much worse to be born with sight but have no vision.” Too many people struggle with seeing past present circumstances. Fear and a lack of vision have made them live in a 2x4 box when God created them with endless possibilities. We must look past all the limits of men and see out possibilities. Faith helps us see the invisible.

I expect that next bridge I cross to hold my truck up, but even more do I expect God's promises to remain true. I wouldn't get in the next elevator I came to if I thought it would fall, but even more do I trust in God who will never let me down. I fly out of Orlando on Thursday and I believe we will all arrive safely in Nashville, but even more do I believe the God who goes with me has a better plan than my own. I refuse to live in fear, for I have found freedom in faith. I'm not going to do something dumb and jump off a skyscraper with or without a parachute. But, I am going to engage in life with faith that God guides, keeps and when He is ready calls me home where my faith will have perfect sight.

Faith That Receives

Hebrews 11:29-30 "By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned. By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for seven days."

God has given us faith so that we are able to believe and receive the incredible. We will attempt to do great things for God when we expect to receive great things from God. Our receiving from God is based on our believing in who God is and what He wants to do for us. Jesus said, "All things are possible for him who believes." He also said, "With God all things are possible."

The very first principle of faith is to put our dependence in God not in the work itself. The key to experiencing the miracle working power of God is to believe in who He is. Many run after what God can do, but find it to be empty religion without really knowing God. When Jesus said, "My sheep know my voice" He was referring to having a personal relationship with people. He has no desire to be the local miracle worker who gets paid for a service. God wants to bless our lives with the power that comes with His holy presence. Miracles are a natural fruit of God's presence.

The lack of building a relationship with God is what causes our greatest doubts. The Bible says, "We have not because we ask not." If we do ask and do not receive, it can be because of wrong motives. If we only want to know God for what we can get out of Him, then don't expect to receive. Fall in love with God and His will for our lives and we will have those things we pray for. 1 John 5:14-15; teaches us that, "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him."

Remember that every miracle started with a problem. Issues that are bigger than man's ability to take care of are fertile ground for God to work. We do not need faith for that which we can do ourselves. We need faith for the issues of life we have no power over.

The principle is simply this, "We find the miracle working power of God when we step out in faith and begin to work on impossible tasks." We must be obedient children of God. We must always be moral and ethical in our decision-making. We must lean on

God's strength and wisdom. We must believe that God desires to answer all prayers that are in unison with His will. We must expect God to do miracles and we will see them.

Faith To Believe The Incredible

Hebrews 11:7 "By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith."

Faith brings to our lives the ability to think the unthinkable. Think with me about a man named Noah. He lived among people who had no desire for a relationship with God. They cared even less about living a morally pure life. Marriage vows meant nothing to them. They gave no thought to their spiritual needs because they had become so wrapped up in the pleasures of the flesh. In the midst of this atmosphere Noah was determined to live a spiritually and morally pure life.

God spoke to Noah one day and told him to do an incredible thing. He told Noah to build an ark, which is a really big boat. God described the way He was going to give the world another chance. He told of a coming flood, which by the way Noah had no way to picture. No such thing had ever happened before; Noah was given directions on the size of the ark and the materials that were needed. This boat was going to be the size of a small aircraft carrier.

Noah was willing to think the unthinkable, believing God's word was absolutely reliable. He acted upon his faith and began to work on the ark. It was an incredible project taking up most of a section of land. He had to cut trees and mill them to the size he needed. He had to build a sawmill and a wood working shop. He had to store the wood, let it dry out, cut, and size and piece this giant project together. He had to build a place he could mix the pitch that would waterproof this act of faith. Too often we want God to build the ark for us. He asks us to build the arks in life; it's our acts of faith. He promises victories at the end of our obedience.

Year after year Noah worked, all the time facing the ridicule of his neighbors. They must have thought he had gone crazy. Noah could have become bitter but instead took the time to talk to his neighbors about the possibility of their salvation. He was willing to think the unthinkable and he received the incredible. If we are willing to think the unthinkable and act upon it when God speaks to us, we will receive the miraculous blessings He has in store in our future.

Faith That Moves To Action

Hebrews 11:32-40 "And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the

sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned[□]; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.

These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.”

Faith sometimes seems mystical, when we hear about Moses and the burning bush or the Israelites at the Red Sea. Other times it seems too difficult to get our minds around like the time the entire country of Egypt was stricken with plagues because of the callous heart of its leader. Faith seems to make us strain when we see things like Abraham fighting battles to keep his family safe. Through trials, pressures and seemingly impossible obstacles we see that God always came through.

We learn from man’s history with God that real faith is not afraid to get its hands dirty. Real faith faces the Goliaths when they come into our lives. Real faith speaks against the evil and gives grace to the repentant. Real faith builds the tough life disciplines and works to improve weak character flaws.

Faith is not sitting in some safe place waiting for God to send His blessings. It gets out into the trenches of life. True faith is movement and action. It steps into the unknown because God is leading in that place, and receives a greater blessing than could be imagined. It takes up the spiritual battle knowing that some will be saved and the enemy will be put to flight. Faith rides out life’s toughest storms knowing that God goes with us.

We ask God to use us to accomplish His will, and then when He leads us into the Valley of the Shadow of Death we change our minds. Real faith is proven only in the valley. It takes very little faith to live in ease, health and blessing. Faith steps into the valleys and digs its’ hands in to do the work. It may be tough, dirty, and heartbreaking work, but faith takes on the challenge. Very often faith does not see the outcome of its effort on this side of eternity.

Sometimes we will be blessed to see the results of our works of faith. Very often we are not aware of our life influence until we stand face to face in the presence of God, yet faith works anyway. Faith keeps its eyes on eternity and its hands working in the present.

The Reality Of Spiritual Warfare

Acts 4:12 “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”

We have the finest fighting force in the world. We have the best-trained troops with the most powerful weapons. No one can stand against our military might. We have the best-educated commanders from schools dedicated to teach military strategy. Yet, with all that power the world is not more moral.

We have the most influential government in our world. We determine much of the world’s policy. We legislate laws that are supposed to be for the good of mankind. However, it seems as we only rearrange the people and places, the troublesome issues remain the same. No matter how much government influence we have we cannot change men’s hearts or heal the deep desperate wounds left by prejudice and hate. No level of political influence will bring repentance or forgiveness.

The answer to man’s social and spiritual issues will never be settled on the floor of a legislative branch of the government. Business can provide employment opportunities but no amount of money can bring either hope or peace. Education can deliver useful knowledge, and we have the greatest institutions in the world, but it cannot make us stop killing each other. Nothing man has ever been able to come up with has been able to bring a change to the human heart.

There is only one power that can bring real transformation to a person. That power is found in Christ Jesus. It is His love that forgives our sins and empowers us to live a holy life. When we allow his power to fill our hearts, He wipes out our guilt, heals our wounds, allows us to forgive others and replaces shattered dreams with new hope. The message of Jesus Christ is the answer to the problems of our world. Transformation comes one soul at a time when the Church remembers we are at spiritual war for the souls of people.

Preparing For Spiritual WARFARE

1 Peter 1:6-7 “In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.”

In most armies that I have ever seen there is a distinct chain of command. Everyone knows and is committed to their role. They all realize success depends on unity. God’s army is a volunteer army, which makes it quite different than any other one. You do not get put in the brink if you disobey an order. You do not get put on KP for showing up

late. God's army is based on believers having the faith to live in such a way that there is unity to fulfill the purpose of Christ.

I, like you, have prayed, "Lord, make me like David, the giant killer." Or maybe you prayed, "Lord, give me the passion of Paul." How often have we prayed, "Lord, make me the best me possible." Everyone cannot be the quarterback of the team, or the star lineman. For a team to be successful there must be committed trainers, managers and water boys. For God's army to win lost and dieing souls each individual believer needs to become the best they can be. There was only one David, the giant killer. There is only one you. Ask to have greater faith, courage, even abilities, but be yourself.

Too many people are waiting for that magical great day when they will do something grand. That day may come, but there is only one proven way to be ready for it. You must live out your faith day after day with each challenge they bring. You must be daily submissive to the will of God. David could face his Goliath because he had confronted the bear, lion and other predators as he watched the family flocks. His obedience to the daily demands of life created within him the faith he needed for the great challenges.

When you and I are absolutely committed to Christ, He will do the lifelong work of making us the best we can be. But, you and I must be willing to be what Christ wants us to be. We become useful to God and others when we are willing to be who God made us. Be the best "yourself" it is possible to be for the glory of God!