

YOU CAN HAVE LIVING FAITH

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Introduction

“. . . When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8).

Our world is experiencing a crisis of faith. Few people place much faith in the future. Many have no faith their marriages will survive, that political leaders will honorably serve their country or that education will prepare them adequately for the challenges ahead. Faced with the difficulties of everyday life, many people simply have no confidence that there will be a better tomorrow.

In a burned-out, tuned-out and turned-off world, sentiments like “The rich get richer and the poor get poorer” and “Nothing ever turns out right” clutter our thinking.

At the same time, many people view the values and promises of the Bible as judgmental and archaic. The popular approach is to accept and validate all opinions, no matter what they are. But the same people don’t realize that such an approach inevitably produces doubt, which undermines faith. We may not deny the existence of God, but, because of the materialism, humanism and moral relativism of the world around us, we convince ourselves that God is not involved in human affairs. We see through a prism that leaves God out of the picture.

Even for professing Christians, religion is often superficial. Many lack a basic knowledge of the teachings of the Bible or their denomination’s beliefs. Far too many have come to believe that every aspect of life is simply a matter of personal choice, and nothing matters beyond their feelings. Instead of relying on God, they trust only themselves to

solve their problems. Then, because emotions are so subjective, people are left confused and grasping for anything that offers hope.

Religious unbelievers

Pollster George Barna commented on America’s Christianity: “I am quite confident you will agree that Americans are religious people. Personally, I am less persuaded that we are truly a Christian people, regardless of our self-perceptions” (George Barna, *The Index of Leading Spiritual Indicators*, 1996, p. xvi).

Confirmation of the superficiality of faith is to be found in the fact that, although 90 percent of Americans say they pray, many are unsure that their prayers make any difference (*National & International Religion Report*, May 17, 1993). “What we have witnessed in the latter part of the twentieth century is the growing secularization of a self-described religious people,” the pollster commented (pp. 2-3).

Are churches helping solve this problem? The results of a survey of 11,122 people across six Christian denominations indicate that churches are not doing their job when it comes to inspiring faith in their members. Only a third of adults surveyed said they have a life-transforming relationship with God and are dedicated to serving their fellowman (“What Makes Faith Mature?,” Eugene Roehlkepartain, *Christian Century*, May 9, 1990, pp. 496-499).

If the United States, said by some to be the most religious Christian-professing nation, is having such problems, what does that tell us about the rest of the world? Lack of faith—an active, living trust in and relationship with God—is a widespread problem affecting every nation and virtually every individual.

When it comes to faith, does God encourage or accept a divergence of approaches? Is it true, as many believe, that many paths lead to God?

Jesus Christ pointed us in *one* direction: “But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him” (John 4:23). Our worship of God must be a reflection of *truth*. Although worship involves feelings and emotions, God expects us to understand *how* and *why* we worship Him. Only by understanding these concepts can

we develop the sure, unshakable faith spoken of in the Bible.

A perpetual problem

Generations come and go, but chronic problems persist. Lack of faith has been around a long time. Two thousand years ago Jesus Christ spoke a parable that illustrated our need to have and practice living faith. He described a widow who was having difficulty obtaining justice. She persevered in her quest for righteous judgment, however, and eventually the judge decided to help her only because he grew weary of her constant pleadings (Luke 18:1-5).

Jesus used this example drawn from everyday life to illustrate God's promise to intervene on behalf of people of faith: "And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily" (verses 7-8).

Although Christ assures us God will answer our prayers, do you have faith that He will answer yours?

Understanding and living according to God's instructions will inspire faith in God and His promises. Faith helps us make sense out of our troubling and confusing world. It gives us the confidence we need to move forward with our lives.

When Christ concluded this parable, He asked a question with profound implications for all of us: ". . . When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" (verse 8).

Faith is all too rare today, but we can develop it if we understand the keys to faith. Continue reading to learn more about how you can have living faith.

What Is Faith?

"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" (Hebrews 11:1, New International Version).

Do you see much faith in the world around you? We live in a secular-oriented society that is virtually devoid of faith. Since most people don't read the Bible, they don't know much about God.

Many are not even sure there is a God. Others, although they believe in Him, don't know what kind of God He is. This situation shouldn't surprise us. After all, it's impossible for people to have living faith in a God they do not know.

What about you? Have you thought about—do you *know*—what God can and will do for you?

The God of the Bible tells us that we *can* come to know and develop a relationship with Him. We can know what He has planned for us and our families in this life and in the future. We can rest assured He wants good things for us. His Word tells us that "godliness is profitable for all things, having *promise of the life that now is* and of *that which is to come*" (1 Timothy 4:8, emphasis added throughout).

Not only can we come to know God, to believe *in* God, but—much more—we can learn to *believe* God.

There is a huge difference. Many people believe *in* God. They assume He exists, although they probably haven't given His existence much thought. But God is not real enough to them, and this lack of

reality affects what they think and do.

To *believe* God, on the other hand, is to have faith that God *will do for us whatever He has promised to do*. He expects us to *act* on that belief. He requires that we have *living faith* in His existence, power and promises.

Faith isn't some magical ingredient. It does, however, lead to a confident attitude toward God. Faith motivates our minds to the assurance of God's power and will to act in our lives. Faith becomes more than a mental conviction as it grows into a commitment, not only to trust God to involve Himself in our lives, but to do His will. We can rest assured that God's will does not include frivolous or unproductive behavior—only “godliness [that] is profitable for all things.”

God's Word elaborates on living faith. It assures us that “the just shall live by faith” and “we walk by faith, not by sight” when we repent of our sins and begin to live dedicated, godly lives directed by our Savior (Romans 1:17; 2 Corinthians 5:7). People who live by faith as followers of Christ and members of God's Church are “believers” in Him (Acts 5:14; 1 Timothy 4:12).

God's Word has a good reason for calling them *believers*.

In the New Testament the Greek word for *faith* is, in virtually

The Meaning of Faith

Many people think of “faith” as either a feeling or a collection of ideas that represent one's convictions. Although both of these concepts involve elements of faith, the full definition is much broader. The Greek word most often translated “faith,” *pistis*, means “firm persuasion” and “a conviction based upon hearing.” Notice the definition from a respected Bible dictionary:

“The main elements in ‘faith’ in its relation to the invisible God, as distinct from ‘faith’ in man, are especially brought out in the use of this noun and the corresponding verb, *pisteuo*; they are (1) a firm conviction,

producing a full acknowledgment of God's revelation or truth, e.g., 2 Thess. 2:11-12; (2) a personal surrender to Him, John 1:12; (3) a conduct inspired by such surrender, 2 Cor. 5:7. Prominence is given to one or other of these elements according to the context” (*Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, 1985, “Faith”).

Faith is attitude, conviction and conduct based on a right relationship with God. It is not static, but grows in strength and depth as we nourish that relationship with our Creator throughout our lives.

every instance, the same word for *belief* (see “The Meaning of Faith,” page 6). Although translators choose whether “faith” or “belief” is intended based on their understanding of the context of each passage, the meaning is usually much broader than either word alone.

Defining faith

Even in modern language, to believe in someone, something or some cause is *to have faith in* that person, thing or movement—to believe it is true, just and worthy of one's support and involvement. In the same way, to have faith as it is defined in the Bible is to fully believe in someone (God), to believe in and act on the truth of His Word (the Bible) and to live for the greatest of causes: salvation for all who believe in the coming Kingdom of God (Mark 1:14-15).

Faith *is* belief. But let's not make the ages-old mistake of thinking that if we believe *in* God—that is, that He exists—we therefore have faith. Many hold to this mistaken idea. They say they believe in God; therefore, they think, they have faith.

To believe in God is only the starting point of faith. But believing in God does not necessarily involve conviction or commitment to Jesus Christ and God the Father. Belief in God is profitable, but incomplete. As the apostle James noted: “You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons [fallen angels] believe—and tremble!” (James 2:19). We must go beyond the level of the faith exhibited by demons.

If we want to better our lives, our model for living faith should be Jesus Christ. His life is the perfect model of faith. Throughout His human years Jesus displayed perfect, living faith and motivated others not only to believe *in* God, but to go a step beyond by *believing what He says*.

When Jesus learned that Lazarus had died, He told Lazarus's sister, Martha, “Your brother will rise again” (John 11:23). She acknowledged that, yes, he would “rise again in the resurrection at the last day” (verse 24).

Martha's response showed she not only believed in Jesus, but she believed what He said. Her faith was much more than an academic acceptance of God's existence. She believed God's promise to resurrect the dead.

Jesus replied to her: “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?” (verses 25-26). After Martha again affirmed her faith, Jesus responded by calling out to her brother, “Lazarus, come forth!”—and he walked out of the tomb, brought back to life (verses 27-44).

Martha’s life is a wonderful example of living faith—the kind of belief required for salvation. Living, active faith is confidence that God can and will intervene in our lives. We can have this kind of faith. We can believe God too! If we do, He will intervene for us as well.

Genuine, active, powerful, living faith in the God of the Bible is hard to imagine in our cynical, secular society. But it can and does happen. That faith, along with the blessings God brings us when we apply it, is available to those who really believe Him.

Faith is evidence

The “faith chapter” of the Bible defines faith this way: “Now faith is the substance [realization, confident assurance, solid ground] of things hoped for, the evidence [conviction, reality, proof] of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). Faith is our assurance of the existence of things we cannot see.

The remainder of Hebrews 11 identifies real people who long ago lived examples of faith. They believed God, even to the point of death, confident God would deliver them or resurrect them to eternal life in His Kingdom. They believed. Faith gave them assurance to carry on.

But faith is not wishful thinking, a pie-in-the-sky feeling that everything will be all right. Faith is a deep conviction that God deeply cares for us and will *always* act with our best interests at heart.

Each of us *can* have this kind of faith. In fact, we *must* have it if we wish to honor and love God because “without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (verse 6).

The preceding passage describes two aspects of faith. First we must believe God exists. He is the one and only all-righteous,

all-powerful Being—something we can comprehend through the magnificence of the physical creation we see around us (Romans 1:20). Then we must believe God will ultimately reward those who humbly, obediently seek Him.

Why many lack faith

Many people don’t have the faith described in the Bible because they do not believe or practice what Jesus said: “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15). Most people can’t even name the Ten Commandments. Some assume Jesus lived the Commandments for us so we wouldn’t have to. Others believe what we do doesn’t matter that much as long as we have feelings of love toward everyone.

Many people cling to misconceptions about Jesus’ message, the gospel. Our Savior, who came preaching “the gospel of the kingdom of God,” instructs us to “repent, and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:14-15). Yet many have never understood the true gospel Jesus taught. A flawed understanding produces a faulty faith.

Since faith involves diligently seeking God (Hebrews 11:6), we must base our faith on a correct understanding of God’s Word. (If you would like to know more about the truth of the message Jesus taught, be sure to request your free copy of the booklet *The Gospel of the Kingdom*.)

Changing our lives to submit to God—what the Bible refers to as *repentance*—is based on the conviction that He will intervene in our lives and ultimately grant us eternal life. Faith, which includes understanding and action, is required for salvation. After all, God will not give eternal life to someone who does not believe or obey Him. Such a person would bring misery on himself and others for all eternity. Faithlessness is hopelessness.

Faith includes humility

Having faith means understanding that God is great and by comparison we are small. This is a kind of humility that is a rare commodity in our modern, pride-filled world. To come to believe that God is all powerful and that we desperately need His help is actually comforting.

The ancient Greeks believed—had faith—that the world was supported on the shoulders of Atlas, one of their gods. If we refuse to

have living faith in God by not submitting to His will, we attempt to be our own Atlases trying to hold our personal worlds on our own shoulders in an exhausting and fruitless endeavor. That way ultimately leads to frustration and misery because, on our own, we don't know how to live happy, productive lives or find the way to eternal life (Jeremiah 10:23; Proverbs 14:12).

Having faith, on the other hand, is knowing with absolute conviction that the same God who holds our planet in its orbit wants to guide our personal world as well. Such living faith gives us peace of mind, confidence and hope of an eternal, bright future.

Faith, works and grace

Simply saying "I believe" without making accompanying life-altering changes is not sufficient. Acknowledging God's existence does not magically produce a right relationship with Him. As already noted, Jesus commands us to repent (Mark 1:15). (For a better understanding of repentance, be sure to request your free copy of *The Road to Eternal Life*.)

Repentance doesn't just happen. It requires effort and commitment. Living faith must be nurtured and spiritually fed and built. Jesus cautions us against the danger of false faith—faith that is immature and incomplete: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but *he who does the will of My Father in heaven*" (Matthew 7:21). But what about Paul's statement, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God"? (Ephesians 2:8). Did Paul preach a faith that did not involve a need for obedience?

Not at all. This passage shows us that God's grace—His undeserved favor toward us—is a gift. It is simply wrong to assume that, since grace is a gift, no actions—good works demonstrating a repentant heart and faith in action—are needed (James 2:14-26). The truth is that our salvation comes through God's gift of grace *and* faith, which God helps us develop throughout our lives. We must have *living* faith, not an empty, inactive faith.

The Bible tells us salvation is by God's grace and is not earned by good works "lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:9). But we are saved by grace *through* faith (verse 8). The danger we face is that

our faith will die if we neglect our salvation by not living a life of obedience to God (Hebrews 2:1-3). That is why the apostle Paul wrote, ". . . I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified" (1 Corinthians 9:27).

Of themselves, works will not earn us salvation. But the book of James makes it clear that faith, if unaccompanied by works, is dead—utterly useless (James 2:17, 20, 26; see also "The Book of James: An Epistle of Straw?").

As a faithful elder in the Church and the half brother of Jesus Christ, he wrote: "Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil

The Book of James: An 'Epistle of Straw'?

Martin Luther, founder of the Protestant Reformation, referred to the book of James as an "epistle of straw." Frustrated by religious leaders who claimed this book supported their mistaken ideas that people could buy their salvation through monetary gifts to the church, Luther uttered his ill-advised phrase. Consumed in the debate, he went beyond a proper understanding of the Scriptures and dismissed James's statements that works are a necessary evidence of faith.

Many people today misapply Luther's words, not understanding the circumstances behind them. Martin Luther's life was one of dedication and chaste behavior. But his zealous words and arguments are sometimes taken out of historical context to excuse undisciplined lifestyles.

Jesus Christ expects actions—works—from us: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My

Father in heaven" (Matthew 7:21).

At the same time Jesus is also described as our merciful High Priest (Hebrews 2:17). Works and grace go together. James, a younger half brother of Jesus, wrote his epistle in harmony with Jesus' teachings and instructions. He not only wrote about works (James 2:14-26) but addressed grace (James 4:6) and Christ's "compassionate and merciful" nature (James 5:11).

The Bible is consistent and plain in its teaching that salvation is a gift from God. But, even though it is a gift, something we cannot earn, we are expected to obey God if we are to receive that gift.

Paul wrote, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith," and we are "created in Christ Jesus to do good works" (Ephesians 2:8, New International Version). James summarized this concept simply and concisely, telling us that "faith without works is dead" (James 2:20).

that is so prevalent, and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. Do not merely *listen* to the word, and so deceive yourselves. *Do what it says*" (James 1:21-22, New International Version). He adds, ". . . The man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but *doing* it—he will be blessed in what he does" (verse 25, NIV).

True, living faith requires much more than words. It requires commitment and evidence of that commitment. James asks this rhetorical question: "What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds?" (James 2:14, NIV). He shows that mere words are useless when someone needs food and clothing (verses 15-17). James cited the example of faithful Abraham to show that "his faith was made complete *by what he did*" (verses 21-22, NIV).

Our faith lives when we respond obediently to the love of Christ by keeping His commandments (John 14:12-15). We are not saved by grace through inactive faith.

Living faith among the faithless

After Jesus Christ was resurrected, His disciple Thomas said he wouldn't believe Jesus had come back to life unless he could see the nail marks in His hands and feel the spear wound in His side. He wanted tangible, visible proof that Jesus had been resurrected. Christ reassured Thomas, by providing those tangible proofs, that God and His plan of salvation were real and encouraged him to believe (John 20:24-29).

We know this apostle by his nickname, Doubting Thomas. Although he had seen Christ perform miracles, he still had doubts in the back of his mind. Although his fellow apostles told him of meeting the resurrected Jesus face to face, he refused to accept their statements. In spite of the evidence reported to him, he didn't believe His master had risen from the grave as He said He would. Will we be like Thomas, doubting the testimony of the many credible eyewitnesses to the resurrection and miracles of Jesus Christ? Will we believe and have faith in God and His promises? Sadly, living faith often escapes our grasp, and doubting comes all too easily (James 1:6-8).

The world we live in seems designed to undermine faith. Educa-

tional systems and the mass entertainment and news media are overwhelmingly secular and undermine godly principles and the Bible. Over generations we have gravitated toward the material while excluding God. Everything—science, philosophy, history—is reduced to physical phenomena. The result is predictable and obvious. Few know what God expects of us. Fewer still trust Him to guide or be involved in their lives. Is there no living faith, no spiritual hope for us, our children and grandchildren?

Although the development of living faith in an age of doubt and materialism is difficult, the Bible promises that some will have this precious commodity when Christ returns (Revelation 14:12). Because something is difficult to come by doesn't mean it is impossible, especially with God. Living faith is possible and within our grasp. Says Paul: "He who did not spare His own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:32, NIV).

God gave us the Bible to provide hope and instruction through the examples of others (Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:6; 2 Timothy 3:16). By studying their experiences, we can see real-life examples of faith in action.

In the next chapter we will consider the lives of men and women who, with God's help and encouragement, developed living faith.

Examples of Living Faith

*“Now these things became our examples . . .”
(1 Corinthians 10:6).*

We are fascinated by the stories of other people. People like to hear other people’s reactions to challenges and tribulations. This is obvious when we notice the enormous appeal of inspirational magazines and newspaper stories. When we learn how other people have succeeded, we are encouraged that we can triumph as well.

Because God inspired the Scriptures so “that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17), we should regularly study His Word, the Bible. No other book has this same divine approval. The Scriptures contain numerous success stories written for our benefit. The Bible is a record of people who faced challenges and difficulties. Even though they lived long ago, their stories are preserved as timeless examples for us.

Writing to the church in Corinth in the first century, the apostle Paul reminded the Corinthians of important events in Israel’s history 1,500 years earlier (1 Corinthians 10:1-10). He wrote, “Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, on whom the ends of the ages have come” (verse 11).

The examples Paul referred to are not archaic accounts concerning irrelevant issues. They are genuine. The Bible doesn’t varnish its

heroes or sanitize its sinners. It is a record of real people with real experiences, good, bad and everywhere in between. Though the time and circumstances varied, these people dealt with frailties, fears, hopes and desires like those we face throughout life.

Knowing that the people of the Bible experienced needs and sorrows can comfort and reassure us (Romans 15:4). Seeing the results of their decisions helps us learn from their choices.

Let’s examine some of the positive examples in the Bible that should encourage us.

The example of Abraham and Sarah

After Abel, Enoch and Noah had lived their lives of faith (Hebrews 11:4-7), God called a man named Abram (whom He renamed Abraham; Genesis 17:5). Abram’s life, with that of his wife, Sarai (renamed Sarah; verse 15), deserves our attention because he was “the father of all those who believe” (Romans 4:11). Scripture recognizes Sarah as an outstanding example for wives (1 Peter 3:6). Hebrews 11, sometimes called the “faith chapter,” honors both as people of faith.

“By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Hebrews 11:8-10).

In an early account involving Abraham, we note his obedience. When God asked him to move out of his native country to an unfamiliar land, “Abram departed as the LORD had spoken to him” (Genesis 12:4).

One of Abraham’s outstanding traits was his firm belief in God’s promises. Even though Abraham was childless, when God told him he would father an heir and his descendants would become as numerous as the stars in the sky, Abraham “believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness” (Genesis 15:6).

Sarah similarly set an example of faith. “By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised” (Hebrews 11:11).

When It Seems God Doesn't Hear or Answer

Few attitudes are more disheartening and destructive to faith than the notion that God doesn't hear our prayers, doesn't answer or doesn't care. It is easy to come to such conclusions when God doesn't respond when or how we want.

The apostle Paul was a man who could have concluded that God doesn't listen to people. After all, he urgently pleaded with God to intervene for him in a chronic trial. But God refused to grant Paul's request.

Does this mean Paul lacked faith? Of course not. However, there is a deeper lesson for us in Paul's life of living faith.

Paul's grievous trial

Notice Paul's account of this trial: ". . . There was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me" (2 Corinthians 12:7-8, New International Version).

What was this trial, this messenger of Satan, that tormented Paul? Comments in Paul's writings hint it may have been a problem with his eyes.

To Church members in Galatia, Paul wrote: "As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you. Even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead, you welcomed me . . . I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me" (Galatians 4:13-15, NIV). Writing about his illness, Paul said that some of the members there would

have given him their own eyes if that could have helped him.

At the end of his letter to the Galatians he writes: "See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand!" (Galatians 6:11, NIV).

Perhaps Paul had to write using large letters because that was the only way he could see the words he had written.

Several years later Paul wrote the Corinthians that he had pleaded with God on three occasions to have his "thorn in the flesh" removed. We shouldn't read into this that Paul simply mentioned the problem in prayer to God. The implication is that he fervently asked God to deliver him from the trial, no doubt with fasting and heartfelt prayer (2 Corinthians 11:27). He wanted this hindrance removed so he could continue to spread the gospel effectively and care for the congregations God had raised up through him.

God's answer to Paul

Paul could have concluded that God had not heard his pleas. But this is not the case. God simply gave Paul a different answer: "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Whether God directly spoke these words to Paul or whether Paul gradually came to this understanding of God's will isn't clear from the Greek wording. What is clear is that Paul came to a deeper spiritual understanding that strengthened his faith and commitment.

Paul came to see that the credit

belonged to God and Jesus Christ rather than to himself and that his weakness drew him closer to that source of power and strength. "I am therefore happy to boast of my weaknesses, because then the power of Christ will rest upon me. So I am content with a life of weakness, insult, hardship, persecution, and distress, all for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong" (verses 9-10, Revised English Bible).

Paul's experience stands as an important spiritual lesson for us. Sometimes God's answer for us is "no" or "not yet." God never intended our physical bodies to last forever. He has allotted us an existence of about 70 years (Psalm 90:10). He is far more concerned that we develop righteous character and a trusting relationship with Him that can last for eternity. He wants to resurrect us to eternal life in a glorious, immortal spirit body not subject to weakness, illness and death (1 Corinthians 15:40-44, 50-54).

In the meantime, Paul understood that God in His love will never allow us to fall into trials greater than we can endure. "God is faithful," Paul wrote, and He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. "But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it" (1 Corinthians 10:13, NIV). Sometimes that "way out" is simply the determination to endure the trial, to "stand up under it."

Submission to God's will

Paul was not the only one who learned that living, trusting, abiding faith is more important than physical health and longevity. Even Jesus, knowing that He faced a cruel death only hours away, prayed, "O My Father, if it is possible, let

this cup pass from Me . . ." (Matthew 26:39). Jesus loved life and wanted to live as much as any of us. But He acknowledged a greater purpose for this physical life: ". . . Nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done" (Luke 22:42).

Jesus Christ, the perfect example of faith, knew God's will was more important than His will.

God knows what is best for us in the long run, even if it may conflict with our short-term wants and desires. As Peter tells us, "[cast] all your care upon Him, for He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7). Paul says we should be "confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6). Because God works within us from a broader perspective to build faith and character, He doesn't always answer our prayers in the way we desire.

Some were delivered, some not

The faith chapter tells us that at times "women received their dead raised to life again." But "others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword . . . And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us" (Hebrews 11:35-40).

God does not always answer our prayers to our immediate satisfaction and instantly deliver us from our trials. But He will always do what is best for us.

What was the result of Abraham's and Sarah's faith? Even though they were old, with Sarah past the age of childbearing (Genesis 18:11), "the LORD visited Sarah as He had said, and . . . Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him" (Genesis 21:1-2).

Abraham and Sarah faced many other difficulties. Sometimes their faith wavered. Fearful for his life, Abraham twice made a misleading statement, claiming Sarah was his sister (she was his half sister) instead of his wife (Genesis 12:13; 26:7). When Sarah heard that she would bear a child, she laughed at the idea of someone her age giving birth (Genesis 18:9-12).

Abraham and Sarah weren't perfect, but their lives are shining examples of people growing in faith and confidence in God's promises. They tried to do what God asked as they faithfully waited for Him to fulfill His promises. Because they lived and died by their convictions, "God is not ashamed to be called their God" (Hebrews 11:13-16).

King David's example

Hundreds of years later, another man of faith arrived on the scene. Much has been written about David, both as a young man and later as king of Israel. In general, his life exemplified living faith in God.

As a youth facing the giant Goliath, David had faith that "the LORD, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine" (1 Samuel 17:37). As an adult, God called him "a man after My own heart, who will do all My will" (Acts 13:22).

Like David, each of us must face our Goliaths, lions and bears—the challenges and trials that can overwhelm us. Just as God protected and delivered David, so can we enjoy God's protection. God certainly has the power to intervene for us if we do His will and have confidence and faith in Him. God does not change (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8), so we can be confident in our faith in His power to help us.

Three Jewish lads and a fiery furnace

You have probably read of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego (Daniel 3). These three young men put their lives on the line when they chose not to bow before King Nebuchadnezzar's golden image.

Doing so would have been a violation of the Second Commandment (Exodus 20:4-6). Refusing to bow to the image also meant they would be thrown alive into the king's fiery furnace.

Notice their inspiring response to their last opportunity to bow to the image and save their lives: "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter . . . Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up" (Daniel 3:16-18).

Rather than violate their commitment to obey God, they put their lives in His hands. They did not know whether God would intervene to save their lives or not. They knew God *could*, but they didn't know that He *would*. Regardless of the outcome, their living faith convicted them to put God first—a principle Jesus also emphasized during His earthly ministry (Matthew 6:33).

As an example of His power, God intervened to spare their lives. Even though He allowed them to be tied up and thrown into the furnace, the blazing heat didn't affect them at all (Daniel 3:25-27). They walked out of the furnace unharmed.

Although our tests may not be as severe, they can seem just as difficult while we are facing them. The example of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego reminds us that God can and does intervene in the lives of those who trust Him (Psalm 37:4-7; 118:6-8; Proverbs 3:5-6).

Reflecting on these examples

A principle of faith in the preceding examples is obedience. Godly belief inevitably leads to *doing*. This is why we read in James that faith without works is dead (James 2:14-26). Living faith comes by doing what God says is good and right and being willing to accept whatever results may come from our actions.

The examples and testimonies of the men and women we read about in Hebrews 11 show us we can believe God. He does not lie (Titus 1:2), and, as our loving, faithful Father, He delights in providing for us. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. Of His own will He brought us

forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures” (James 1:17-18).

God the Father and Jesus Christ have made promises to mankind about Their love, protection and faithfulness (Psalm 33:4; 37:28; 97:10; Proverbs 2:8; 2 Thessalonians 3:3). These promises are sure.

Some may conclude that these examples in Hebrews 11 do not apply to the average person. They may erroneously assume these people were so spiritually strong that faith was an easy matter for them. The reality is that we must build our faith over time.

Our faith initially comes through God’s Spirit. Faith is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22) that God gives us when we repent and are baptized (Acts 2:38). (For more information about these subjects, request our free booklets *What Is Your Destiny?* and *The Road to Eternal Life*.) God begins the process of reconciling us to Himself by calling us (John 6:44) and leading us to repentance (Romans 2:4).

The faith God gives us at baptism, however, must be nurtured and developed. We are warned against neglecting our salvation (Hebrews 2:3) and quenching God’s Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19). God expects us to have faith, and our works (efforts to do God’s will) show that we have it (James 2:20). We have a responsibility to make sure our faith grows (2 Peter 3:18).

God also plays a role in the *development* of our faith. We cannot create faith or make it grow entirely on our own. This is why the Bible tells us we must have “the faith of Christ” (Galatians 2:16; Philippians 3:9, both King James Version). As we noted in the previous chapter, believing in God means more than mere acknowledgment of His existence. Faith is a relationship with God that deepens and matures over time.

More examples of living faith

Several other, lesser-known biblical figures demonstrated faith in God. Their examples are also inspiring and show that God does not show partiality (Acts 10:34). All of us, no matter what our circumstances, can develop living faith.

Matthew 8 contains two excellent examples of faith. First, a leper was healed after saying to Jesus, “Lord, if You are willing,

You can make me clean” (Matthew 8:2-3).

In another case, Christ offered to go to a Roman officer’s home and heal his servant. The officer’s faith in Christ’s healing power was so strong that He knew Jesus didn’t have to be physically present for the servant to be healed. “Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed,” he told Jesus (verse 8). The centurion’s faith impressed Jesus so much that He said, “Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel! . . . Go your way; and as you have believed, so let it be done for you” (verses 10-13). The officer’s servant immediately recovered.

In another example a woman who had “a flow of blood” for 12 years approached Jesus to ask for healing (Matthew 9:20). She believed all she needed to do was touch Jesus’ clothing. Jesus responded by saying, “Be of good cheer, daughter; your faith has made you well” (verse 22). This woman, too, was immediately healed.

Still another example of faith occurred when two blind men came

Enemies of Faith

Have you ever wondered why we don't see more evidence of faith? The Bible identifies several tendencies that undermine faith. They include:

- *Worry.* Jesus cautioned: “. . . Do not worry . . . But seek first the kingdom of God” (Matthew 6:25-33).

- *Fear.* While on a boat in the middle of a storm, the disciples awoke Jesus and pleaded that He save them from drowning. He answered, “Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?” Then He rebuked the sea and it immediately grew calm (Matthew 8:23-26).

- *Doubt.* Peter saw Jesus walking on the water of the Sea of Galilee and asked if he could do the same. Jesus invited him to join Him, and Peter, too, began walking

on the water. “But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid” and began to sink (Matthew 14:30). Christ “stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, ‘O you of little faith, why did you doubt?’” (verse 31).

- *Human reasoning without spiritual understanding.* Jesus warned His disciples, “Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees” (Matthew 16:6). He was cautioning them against the teachings of religious leaders who appeared outwardly correct (verse 12) but lacked spiritual understanding. Because the disciples did not understand this spiritual principle, their reasoning was to no avail (verses 7-12).

to Christ for healing. He asked them, “Do you believe that I am able to do this?” They responded, “Yes, Lord.” Jesus touched their eyes and said, “According to your faith let it be to you.” The men’s blindness was healed. (Matthew 9:28-30).

As we have seen, many examples of faith during Christ’s life dealt with healing. Even in our secular society in which God is often overlooked, life-and-death matters command our attention. Although we may seek the best medical service possible, our lives are still ultimately in God’s hands. As the apostle Paul said, “. . . in Him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28).

Although Christians are advised to call the elders of the Church when they fall ill (James 5:14-15), it is also wise to seek medical advice and help. There is nothing wrong with seeking professional care when we are sick. Luke, the traveling companion of Paul and author of the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts, is called “the beloved physician” (Colossians 4:14).

Jesus Himself acknowledged the need for physicians in caring for our health (Matthew 9:12). In the example cited above of the woman with the flow of blood who was healed when she touched Jesus’ garment, Luke adds the detail that she “had spent all her livelihood on physicians and could not be healed by any” (Luke 8:43). Jesus did not withhold healing or condemn her for having gone to physicians; on the contrary He commended her faith.

Though the resurrection is a sure biblical promise, we must remember that this life is temporary and no one can escape death (1 Corinthians 15:22; Hebrews 9:27). In comparison, our faith bears eternal significance. This is why Paul said, “. . . We walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7) and “The just shall live by faith” (Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38).

At the end of the faith chapter, Hebrews 11, we find that we, too, can share in the future promised to these outstanding examples of faith: “And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us” (verses 39-40). We can share being “made perfect” with these remarkable people of faith. The next chapter will help you understand how this can take place.

Growing in Faith

“The just shall live by faith” (Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38).

In the previous chapters we saw the Bible’s definition of faith. We considered examples of faith in action in the people of God. We learned that we must have faith to receive God’s gift of salvation. In our faithless age (Luke 18:8), how can we develop living, active faith?

Don’t be discouraged if you think you lack faith. Sometimes people who profess belief in God are deeply ashamed when a crisis occurs and they find their faith is weak. This may happen to you. But don’t despair. The Bible shows that even men and women of powerful faith struggled at times with faith-testing challenges.

The Bible relates their anguish as they wrestled with their trials. Hebrews 11:34 tells us that “out of weakness [they] were made strong . . .” These men and women grew in faith through the crucible of challenges and—at times—setbacks and failures.

Jeremiah’s example

The prophet Jeremiah was just such a man. He was one of the people listed in the faith chapter who suffered “chains and imprisonment” (Hebrews 11:36; compare Jeremiah 37:15-16). Jeremiah’s captors not only imprisoned him, they lowered him into a “dungeon”—apparently an abandoned cistern—filled deep with mud (Jeremiah 38:6). This was the third time Jeremiah was imprisoned and the most harsh. His situation was so dire that he nearly died (verse 10).

Jeremiah's undeserved imprisonment was the culmination of a long period of abuse he suffered at the hands of his own people. God had called him to prophesy and warn the people of Judah that, because of their sins, their kingdom would fall to foreign invaders. Rather than repenting and heeding God's warnings, the people turned on Jeremiah and hated him. They tried to assassinate him (Jeremiah 11:19, 21). They accused him of treason; they arrested him, brought him before the king and imprisoned him.

In the face of such determined opposition, Jeremiah struggled spiritually. He had not wanted to prophesy in the first place (Jeremiah 1:4-8). He voiced his misgivings and essentially accused God of forcing him to be a prophet (Jeremiah 20:7). At one point he decided he would no longer speak God's word (verse 9), yet he found his convictions compelling him to continue. As his struggle continued, he wished he had never lived (verse 14).

Jeremiah's life was an endless struggle. His was not the smug, sunny faith of a man impervious to doubt. The Bible instead records the all-too-human battle of a troubled and sometimes weary man. But Jeremiah triumphed through faith in God. He cried out to His Creator: "Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed; save me and I shall be saved . . . You are my hope in the day of doom" (Jeremiah 17:14, 17).

God delivered Jeremiah from the dungeon and from death. Today we recognize Jeremiah as a great Hebrew prophet. More important, he gained the approval of God and awaits the resurrection. Jeremiah's life was not easy, but his faith matured throughout his trials.

Many other men and women of the Bible who professed faith in God cried out when their belief wavered in difficult times. Choosing to obey and serve God will lead to difficulties that challenge our faith. Paul tells us that "all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus *will* suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12). We need go to God asking for His help to build a loving, trusting, faithful relationship with Him that will enable us to endure such trials.

You may find yourself like the father who came to Christ with a severe problem: His son was demon-possessed, and the father wanted Christ to heal him. When Jesus told him "all things are possible to him who believes," the man knew his faith was weak. In his anguish

and tears he cried out to Christ, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:23-24).

Christ did not condemn or refuse to help the man whose faith was weak. Nor will He turn us away when *our* faith is weak. But there is something we should do under these circumstances.

Grow in faith

God expects us to grow in faith. It is crucial that we grow in faith, because it is impossible to have a relationship with God without it (Hebrews 11:6). Faith is one of our most precious possessions and a key to everything important. It is because we have faith that we can receive the commendation and approval of God. Those whose examples of faith are recorded for us in Hebrews 11 were "commended for their faith" in God (Hebrews 11:39, NIV).

Because they had faith, God will resurrect them at the return of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:50-52; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-16). Faith is a crucial key to the Kingdom of God and eternal life.

As discussed earlier, we cannot muster up faith on our own and determine we will never doubt or question again. Instead, true, living faith emerges as a result of a maturing relationship with God. Let's notice what we can do to strengthen this most important of all our relationships.

Vital importance of prayer

We begin our journey to living a life of faith by *asking God for it*. It is His will that we have faith, and He is willing to give it to us (Luke 11:9). We should pray to God for faith, and we should pray often for it (Luke 18:1). Prayer for faith should be an integral and regular part of our lives.

Many scriptures show that we need to maintain daily contact with God (Matthew 6:11; Luke 11:3; 2 Corinthians 4:16). King David, to ensure a close relationship with God, prayed three times every day (Psalm 55:16-17). The prophet Daniel similarly prayed three times daily (Daniel 6:10).

Prayer, along with study of the Scriptures, is a vital part of conversation with God. It is a way of expressing our love, as well as our concerns, to Him. This heartfelt communication with God increases faith.

Prayer also results in God responding to us. Notice this promise:

“. . . You will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul” (Deuteronomy 4:29).

If we devote ourselves to earnest prayer and ask for faith, God will not refuse us. He wants to give us spiritual gifts just as a loving parent wants to feed a hungry child (Luke 11:11-12). Jesus promised that whatever we asked in His name God would grant to us (John 14:13; 15:16; 16:23).

Read the Bible regularly

In prayer we talk to God. When we read the Bible, we let God talk to us through His Word.

The Bible tells us that “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17). Let us remember what faith is. In its simplest form, faith is believing God will do what He says He will do (Romans 4:20-21). To know what God says to us, we must read the Bible, God’s revealed words to man. It tells us how He wants us to live. It tells us what He will do for us. It includes many accounts of His dealings and intervention for individuals and all mankind.

As you regularly read the Bible and pray, you will grow in faith in two ways. First, you will learn what God promises. He makes promises you can claim. Second, the inspiring stories of the Bible will reassure you and help strengthen your faith.

Speaking of the Holy Scriptures, Paul said, “For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (Romans 15:4, NIV). As our hope increases, our faith increases. The two are intertwined. (Please request our free booklets *Is the Bible True?* and *How to Understand the Bible*. They can help you learn more from your study of the Bible, strengthening and building your faith.)

Obey God

Another necessary step to grow in faith is to *do what God says*. We must heed His commands.

Many people do not have a proper understanding of obedience. On the one hand, some think they can earn eternal life by their deeds. They fail to understand that salvation is God’s undeserved gift to us (Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8), and we could never earn this priceless

gift by our own efforts. On the other extreme are those who want God to accept them just as they are and have no intention of making any changes in their lives.

Heartfelt obedience is a statement—an expression—of faith. It is perhaps best summarized as our grateful response to all that God has done and promises He will yet do for us. It is a natural part of wanting to draw near to God and become more like Him. Jesus promised that any who obey Him will enjoy a special bond with Him and the Father. “. . . If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him” (John 14:23).

This shows us we can grasp the reality of the presence of Jesus and the Father if we obey Them.

The link between obedience and faith is evident throughout the Bible. If we have faith, it should be evident by our conduct. The faithful men and women of the Bible had this in common.

However, heartfelt obedience to God requires a good understanding of His law. To learn why God gave us His law and to understand the fundamental principles found in the Ten Commandments, please request your free copy of the booklet *The Ten Commandments*.

You’ll walk with God

If you live a life of prayer, studying the Bible and obeying God, you will develop a close relationship with Him. As you walk with God, your faith will grow. To walk with God is to have deep faith. Enoch and Noah are two examples in the Bible of men with deep faith (Genesis 5:22; 6:9).

Walking with God means a daily relationship with Him, of earnestly and consistently seeking His will. When you live a godly life, walking with God with a pure heart, you grow in faith. Frequent, regular contact with God is essential because faith is a by-product of godly living. Faith increases over time. A bricklayer knows a wall doesn’t spring up in a moment. He must build it a little at a time, brick by brick. In the same way, we develop and enrich our faith through frequent, regular contact with God.

When your faith is tested

Everyone who has faith is tested. The Bible says such tests are

“more precious than gold” (1 Peter 1:7). Although gold will ultimately perish, our faith will forever be a part of us when God resurrects us to meet Jesus Christ.

Trials and problems are not pleasant. When they hit us, they may at first seem terrible, traumatic and even devastating. But trials are opportunities to build faith and grow spiritually.

When the guards cast Daniel into the lions’ den (Daniel 6), he didn’t know what his physical fate would be. He had been commanded to pay idolatrous homage to a man. He refused. Although he didn’t know what would happen to him, he knew the only right thing was to obey God, even if it meant his death. He refused to compromise, and God saved him from the lions.

However, before God delivered Daniel, he had to put his trust in Him. He knew that, even if God did not deliver him from the lions, his future with God was assured for eternity.

Anyone who decides to follow Christ will eventually face tests. You may be asked to compromise with the truth God reveals in His Word. The genuineness of your faith may be tested in such a moment of truth. How will you fare?

As we have learned, God is kind and understanding toward our weaknesses, but sometimes He requires us to go forward in faith. At such times we must seek His wisdom even more earnestly. We must pray for Him to show us His will.

We should seek wise spiritual counsel (Proverbs 24:6). Then, with His courage and faith in us, we should move forward.

Since God may allow smaller trials to fall on us to prepare us for bigger trials that lie ahead, we should daily strengthen our faith. If we do not practice trust in God until a major crisis arises, we will find the going much more difficult.

Living a life of prayer, Bible study and humble obedience to God clarifies and strengthens our faith. We can’t always choose the time in our lives for a faith-testing crisis, but if we seek God now we can be much better equipped when such a test arises.

Faith in the promise of the Kingdom of God

Like the prophet Daniel, we should have faith and hope in the promise of the Kingdom of God and all it entails. The Kingdom of

God is the eternal realm that Jesus Christ will establish on earth at His return. It will supersede all other earthly governments (Daniel 2:44) and last forever. The saints—the servants of God—will rule forever in that kingdom (Daniel 7:18). Any sacrifice we are called on to make for that future reward will pale in comparison to the greatness and magnificence of the reward God has in store for us (Romans 8:18). (To better understand the awesome truth about the Kingdom of God as Christ taught, be sure to request your free copy of *The Gospel of the Kingdom*.)

We will inherit the Kingdom in the resurrection to eternal life at the return of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:50-52). Our belief in this coming kingdom is, in itself, an act of faith. This is because we do not see the Kingdom of God, but God tells us it will be a reality. To inherit a future of such magnitude and glory calls for us to live by faith.

A life of faith may require that we, at times, step into uncomfortable situations. We may find ourselves in circumstances in which we can no longer be assured of our customary comforts. Even our personal safety may be threatened. In such times we must stay focused on the Kingdom of God. After all, “faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (Hebrews 11:1, NIV).

Our faith takes its stand based on the sure Word of God, which stands forever. “All flesh is as grass . . . But the word of the LORD endures forever” (1 Peter 1:24-25). The people of faith whose stories the Bible preserves for us took their stand on the Word of God. They believed God.

God promises a better reward (Hebrews 11:40) for those who devote their lives to seeking the Kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33). Even though this life has its pleasant moments, Paul kept the proper perspective: “. . . I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord . . .” (Philippians 3:8, NIV).

God promises us eternal life at the resurrection. In the meantime, He will comfort us when serving Him brings painful sacrifices (2 Corinthians 1:3-5). Maintaining a clear vision of the magnificent future and remembering God’s promise of comfort help us develop living faith.

The calling to a knowledge of and faith in the Kingdom of God is

a precious one. Not everyone is called to understand or receive it in this age (Luke 8:10).

Understanding these truths of God is a gift from Him. If you understand them, God is calling you to participate in His great plan. To claim this gift you must act on it. Follow the advice of Hebrews 6:12 and “imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”

Begin now to develop the living faith that will see you through the trials of this life and into the coming Kingdom of God.



Recommended Reading

If you would like to study more about God’s purpose for you and what you can do to fulfill it, we invite you to send for your free subscription to *The Good News* magazine.

This booklet has touched on many subjects that are vitally important to understanding God’s purpose for you and the relationship He wants with you. Many other booklets are available that discuss these crucial topics in much greater detail. All are yours free for the asking when you contact one of our offices at the address or number nearest you at the end of this booklet. As always, there is never any cost or obligation, and no one will call on you.

- For more information about the awesome purpose of human life, request your free copy of the booklets ***What Is Your Destiny?*** and ***The Road to Eternal Life***.

- The foundation of right behavior is the Ten Commandments. But why are they so important? What makes them different from any other rules or guidelines? Do they have deeper meaning that most people miss? Be sure to request your free copy of ***The Ten Commandments***.

- What is the true gospel Jesus Christ taught and commanded His Church to proclaim to the world? What does this gospel mean for you, your family and friends? What is the “different gospel” the apostle Paul warned us not to accept? Is it possible that most of Christianity accepts and teaches a different gospel from the one Jesus Christ taught? Request your free copy of ***The Gospel of the Kingdom*** to discover the surprising answers.

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