

GROWING IN FAITH
1 Peter 1:5-7
By Andy Manning

Did you know that Jesus was only amazed two times?

And both times it had to do with faith.

In Mark 6, Jesus was at the unbelief in His hometown of Nazareth. It says that there was so much unbelief there that He was unable to do a miracle, and He was amazed at their unbelief (Mk 6:5-6).

The second time that Jesus was amazed is found in Luke 7. A Roman Centurion, a Gentile, asked Jesus to heal his servant who was sick.

The Centurion said several things that revealed his great faith.

He told Jesus that he was unworthy to have Jesus visit his home. This showed that He believed that Jesus was no mere man.

As well, He was confident that all Jesus had to do to heal his was to say the word for his servant to be healed. He did not need to visit the servant, or meet the servant, or see the servant, or touch the servant, or pray for the servant. Just by saying the word, he would be healed.

Luke 7:9 says, “Jesus heard this and was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, ‘I tell you, I have not found so great a faith even in Israel.’”

Jesus was amazed at belief and unbelief because faith is so important.

It is the way we begin the Christian life – by trusting in Jesus Christ as Savior and King;

and it is the way we live the Christian life on a daily basis.

And today we're going to talk about how to grow our faith.

For the next eight weeks in our series in 2 Peter we are going to aim at growing in Christ-like character.

If you remember, chapter 1, verse 3, it says that God has given us everything required to grow in godliness, or God-likeness, or the divine nature.

2 Peter 1:5-7 says, “5 For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with goodness, goodness with knowledge, 6 knowledge with self-control, self-control with endurance, endurance with godliness, 7 godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.”

In verse 5 we are commanded to make every effort. Make every effort to do what? To supplement your faith, or add to your faith goodness, knowledge, self-control, endurance, godliness, brotherly affection, and love. Peter lists a total of eight virtues that we are to cultivate, or develop, or nurture, or grow in our lives.

And we are to make every effort to do this. So we're not going to skim past this list. We are going to take our time, and dig deeply into these virtues.

The first of the eight virtues is faith. So this morning let's take some time to study the virtue of faith so that we can cultivate it in our lives.

The subject of faith is probably the most misunderstood topic among Christians today, so this is a very important sermon.

WHY YOU NEED FAITH

Let's begin with why you need faith.

1. Faith is a command. **Proverbs 3:5-6** “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding.” See also 1 Tim 6:11; 2 Tim 2:22

2. Faith empowers you for costly obedience. In Daniel 6, Daniel disobeyed the king's order not to pray for thirty days, even at the threat of being thrown in the lion's den.
 - 1) **Daniel 6:23** "The king was overjoyed and gave orders to take Daniel out of the den. When Daniel was brought up from the den, he was found to be unharmed, for he trusted in his God."
3. Faith empowers you for civil disobedience. Daniel 6:23
4. Faith enables you to receive God's blessings. Jesus was unable to perform miracles in his hometown because of their lack of faith. **Mark 6:5-6** 5 He was not able to do a miracle there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. 6 And he was amazed at their unbelief. He was going around the villages teaching.
5. Faith the only way to pray with power.
 - 1) **1 Chronicles 5:20** "They received help against these enemies because they cried out to God in battle, and the Hagrites and all their allies were handed over to them. He was receptive to their prayer because they trusted in him."
 - 2) **Mathew 21:22** "And if you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."
6. Luke 7 tells the story of a woman who was a known sinner. While Jesus was eating at the home of a Pharisee, the woman came in with a very expensive jar of perfume and stood behind him at His feet. While she was weeping, she cleaned His feet with her tears and her hair, and then she put the perfume on His feet. And then Jesus commended her for her faith. **Luke 7:50** And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace." This teaches us four more reasons we need faith.
 - 1) Faith motivates you to demonstrate great love for Christ in spite of what others think.
 - 2) Faith energizes you to serve Jesus in humiliating ways.
 - 3) Faith moves you to weep over your sins.
 - 4) Faith drives you to give generously to Jesus.
7. Faith pushes you to be persistent in prayer. **Luke 18:6-8** 6 Will not God grant justice to his elect who cry out to him day and night? Will he delay helping them? 8 I tell you that he will swiftly grant them justice. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

8. Faith is the way to begin the Christian life. **Ephesians 2:8** “For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God’s gift”
9. Faith shields you from the devil’s attacks. **Ephesians 6:16** “In every situation take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.”
10. Faith is required to live the Christian life. **2 Corinthians 5:7** “For we walk by faith, not by sight.”
11. Faith gives you the strength to work for the Lord. **1 Thessalonians 1:3** “We recall, in the presence of our God and Father, your work produced by faith”
12. Faith is the goal of Christian teaching. **1 Timothy 1:5** “Now the goal of our instruction is love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith.”
13. Faith is the only way to please God. **Hebrews 11:6** “Now without faith it is impossible to please God”
14. Faith sets you up to receive God’s blessings. **Jeremiah 17:7** “The person who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence indeed is the Lord, is blessed.” I found eight special blessings reserved for those with faith.
 - 1) God’s faithful love will surround you. **Psalms 32:10** “Many pains come to the wicked, but the one who trusts in the Lord will have faithful love surrounding him.”
 - 2) God will help you. **Psalms 37:5** “Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act,”
 - 3) God will grant you happiness. **Psalms 40:4** “How happy is anyone who has put his trust in the Lord and has not turned to the proud or to those who run after lies!” **Psalms 84:12** “Happy is the person who trusts in you, Lord of Armies!” **Proverbs 16:20** “The one who understands a matter finds success, and the one who trusts in the Lord will be happy.”
 - 4) God will help you overcome fear and worry. **Psalms 56:3-4** “3 When I am afraid, I will trust in you. 4 In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?” **Psalms 112:7** “He will not fear bad news; his heart is confident, trusting in the Lord.” **John 14:1** “Don’t let your heart be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.”
 - 5) God will give you strength. **Psalms 125:1** “Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion. It cannot be shaken; it remains forever.” **Isaiah**

40:31 “But those who trust in the Lord will renew their strength; they will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not become weary; they will walk and not faint.”

- 6) God will give you guidance through life. **Proverbs 3:5-6** “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding; in all ways know him, and he will make your paths straight.”
- 7) God will give you prosperity/success. **Proverbs 28:25** “A greedy person stirs up conflict, but whoever trusts in the Lord will prosper.”
- 8) God will grant you inner peace. **Isaiah 26:3** “You will keep the mind that is dependent on your in perfect peace, for it is trusting in you.”

5 THINGS FAITH IS NOT

To grow in faith it is essential that you understand what faith is, and what it is not. Most of what people think of as faith has nothing to do with faith. It is superstition.

1) **Faith is not sowing a seed of faith.**

Some preachers preach the concept of seed money. They say that if you sow money in their ministry you will receive a return. The more money you sow, the bigger the blessing. According to this teaching, exercising faith means giving your money to them. If you have a lot of faith, then you will give a lot of money, and you will receive a big blessing.

Many of these preachers say that you should name your seed before you plant it. In other words, first name your seed – your child’s salvation, a new car, physical healing, and then plant your seed. That is not faith.

There are two problems with this teaching.

First, this theology is very convenient for these preachers. Give them your money, and God will give you whatever you want. The bigger your offering, the bigger your blessing.

Second, this puts the individual above God. God does promise to bless us when we give to the Lord’s work with the right motives, but when and how He

blesses us is His choice, not ours, and sometimes His blessings aren't given this side of heaven.

2) **Faith is not positive affirmation, or positive confession.**

One of the most popular false teachings about faith is that the way you exercise your faith in God's promises is to verbally confess it.

Sometimes this is referred to as "name-it-claim-it" theology.

In other words, the way to inherit God's promises and blessings is to confess it out loud as if you are certain that you will receive it.

For example, if you want God to heal your broken marriage, then you simply need to confess it by saying something like this, "My marriage is healed."

Of course, you also must really believe it. But believing it is not enough. You must confess it, and keep confessing it without wavering until it comes true.

The individual can speak things into existence by their "word of faith."

There are three problems with positive affirmation or positive confession.

First, the Bible does not tell us to positively affirm or confess what we want, but to pray for what we want.

The reason is that our words carry no power; the power belongs to God. The Bible does not teach positive confession; it teaches prayer. We don't name and claim things, we pray for things.

A second problem with positive confession is that it assumes that God's will is for all Christians to be healthy, wealthy, successful, prosperous, victorious, and have good relationships. All we have to do is name and claim what God has already promised.

Unfortunately that is not biblical. In **John 16:33** Jesus said, "You will have suffering in this world."

All you have to do is read the Bible, and look at the stories of all the heroes of the faith, and you can see that their lives were not always healthy, wealthy, and prosperous.

John the Baptist was beheaded. Stephen was stoned. Paul was stoned, flogged, imprisoned, rejected, and ultimately executed. Eleven of the twelve apostles were executed.

For most of the heroes of the Bible, faith did not make life easy; it often made life harder.

A third problem with positive confession is that it assumes that we know God's will and plan for our lives.

For example, let's say you apply for a promotion at work, and then you start confessing, "I'm going to get the promotion; I'm going to get that promotion; thank You, Lord."

Well, the problem is that you don't know if God wants you to have that promotion or not.

Maybe it is God's plan for you to not get promoted right now. Maybe it is not God's plan for you to be healed.

Paul prayed three times for God to remove his painful thorn in the flesh, and God said "No."

3) Third, faith is not positive thinking.

Many people have come to equate faith with thinking and speaking positively.

They act as if thinking or saying anything contrary to what you want to happen is bad luck; it will jinx you.

For example, let's say I told you that a hurricane might ruin my summer vacation, because there's one in the Gulf headed right for us.

And you said, “Don’t say that! Have faith!”

This is not faith. Faith is not positive thinking, or positive speaking.

You are not going to jinx yourself by saying something negative. It’s not bad luck.

God is not going to punish you for saying something negative.

Faith is not confidence that God will do what you want; it is confidence that God will do what is best.

It is not confidence that God will give you good weather for your vacation; it is confidence that God will do what is best for you on your vacation.

Pastor **Larry Osborne** wrote a book called *10 Dumb Things Smart Christians Believe*. Dumb Idea number one is that “Faith can fix anything.” Let me read some excerpts from his book.

I’ll never forget the day my wife and I stopped by the local hospital for what we knew would be our last visit with her friend Susan.

For three years, Susan had put up a valiant fight against a disease that was not in its last stages. Her labored breathing, gaunt figure, and deep-set eyes made it painfully obvious that she would not be around much longer.

As we sat by her bed, wondering what to say and how to pray, I was stumped. But before I could say anything profound – or even trite – our awkward silence was broken by the entrance of Susan’s husband, John, into the room.

We exchanged hugs and a quick greeting. Then John began to talk. He spoke of the plans he and Susan had for the future. Not in a regretful reflection of what could have been, but with a powerful conviction of what was yet to be.

It was weird.

Susan lay there barely cognizant, struggling for each breath, seemingly hours from death. Yet her husband stood inches away talking

about future vacation, a kitchen remodel, and their retirement years as if the four of us were hanging out at a backyard barbeque.

While John and Susan had often spoken of their confidence in God's ability to heal, this was different. He wasn't talking about an assurance that she *could* be healed. He was describing his absolute certainty that she would be healed. He didn't have an ounce of doubt. It was already a done deal.

Then he told us what had happened. That morning, while in prayer for Susan's healing, he'd been overcome with a powerful sense of God's presence and a deep conviction that God had answered his prayer. As he continued to pray, biblical passages proclaiming God's protection and care flooded his mind. He felt as if God had physically reached down and touched him, whispering in his ear, "I've heard you. She'll be okay."

Beaming with confidence, he figured he'd arrived at the epitome of faith because he had absolute assurance of what he hoped for and complete certainty of what he had not yet seen. He was as giddy as a prospector who'd just tapped into the mother lode.

I didn't know what to say. Could it be that God was up to something big? Were we about to witness a miracle? Was John's faith going to pull her back from the jaws of death?

I wasn't so sure.

He was absolutely certain.

That night she breathed her last breath.

John was devastated. For years after Susan's death, he limped along spiritually, disillusioned with God, prayer, and the impotence of faith.

But his spiritual meltdown had nothing to do with God letting him down. It had nothing to do with the promises of the Bible being hollow. It was the predictable result of having placed his trust in the fool's gold of faith's best known and most widely believed spiritual urban legend: they myth that if we have enough faith, we can do or fix anything.

Unfortunately, John's concept of faith didn't come from the Word of God; it came from the word on the street....

The word on the street is that faith is a potent mixture of intellectual and emotional self-control that when properly harnessed can literally change outcomes through positive thinking and clear visualization.

It's what successful people tout as the key to their achievements, survivors of great tragedies cite as the source of their endurance, televangelists credit with healing power, and motivational speakers make a sweet living espousing.

It's why, when our team is five runs down with two outs in the ninth inning, we're not supposed to think negatively. Instead, we're supposed to hang tough, visualize a big inning. Because as long as we really believe we can win, there is a good chance we will.

Same with a medical crisis. Did the tests come back showing the cancer has metastasized? Don't panic. It can be beat. Just think positively....

Unfortunately, this this kind of hopeful thinking has nothing in common with what the Bible calls faith. It's more about faith in faith than faith in God....

We've been told that for those who can muster it up, an all-doubts-removed, count-it-as-done faith has the power to fix anything. It's God's great cure all, a magic potion.

Pastor Osborne goes on to talk about Hebrews 11.

The entire chapter is about faith. It is often called the Faith Chapter, or the Hall of Faith.

It goes through a list of Bible heroes, and the key to their heroism was their faith.

Verses 33-35 read, "who by faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the raging of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, gained strength in weakness, became mighty in battle, and put foreign armies to flight. 35 Women received their dead, raised to life again."

So far this faith thing seems like the Christian's secret weapon. With faith you can do the impossible. But then it goes on in verses 35-39.

Other people were tortured, not accepting release, so that they might gain a better resurrection. 36 Others experienced mockings

and scourgings, as well as bonds and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, they were sawed in two, they died by the sword, they wandered about in sheepskins, in goatskins, destitute, afflicted, and mistreated. 38 The world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and on mountains, hiding in caves and holes in the ground. 39 All these were approved through their faith...

Wow! Here's a list of people who were approved for having great faith, but their faith did not make life easier, it made life worse.

Their faith didn't lead them to a happy ending, but a sad ending.

What's the point? Faith is not a magic wand that can fix everything.

The Bible doesn't guarantee that if you have enough faith, if you think positively, if you confess positively, if you plant your seed, that your faith will make everything better.

You can't have faith that God will fix everything because God doesn't promise to fix everything this side of heaven. God promises to fix everything on the other side of heaven.

4) **Faith is not acting as if.**

There are people who are convinced that faith is acting as if something has already happened.

For example, some parents don't take their kids to the doctor when they fall sick. They just pray and wait. To take the child to the doctor would be a lack of faith.

The problem is that many of these children died and the parents have gone to jail.

Once again, the problem is that we don't always know God's will and God's plan. God doesn't always heal every sickness, or mend every marriage. Christians don't always win.

5) **Faith is not strong belief.**

What makes faith valuable is the object of your faith.

You can believe with all your heart that the earth is flat, or that the sun revolves around the earth, or that golf is a sport, but that doesn't make it so.

The most important thing about your faith is not your level of sincerity, or how strong your faith is, but the object of your faith.

The important thing is that you believe in the God of the Bible, and that you believe the correct things about the God of the bible.

WHAT IS FAITH?

So what is faith?

Hebrews 11:1 “Now faith is the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen.” Perhaps a better translation is this. “Faith is the assurance of what is hoped for, the conviction of what is not seen.”

In other words, faith is confidence in God. Confidence that God is who He says He is, and that He will do what He promised to do.¹

Jeremiah 17:7 “The person who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence indeed is the Lord, is blessed.”

That's what faith is, but it is more helpful to see what faith does.

What does faith actually look like? **Faith has three primary applications.**

1) **First, faith trusts God enough to do what He says.**

Obedience.

Faith is not mere mental assent. It is not merely agreeing with that certain doctrines is true.

¹ I heard this definition of faith from Andy Stanley.

Warren Wiersbe said it like this. “True faith is not blind optimism or a manufactured hope-so feeling. Neither is it an intellectual assent to a doctrine. Faith does certainly not consist of belief in spite of evidence! That would be superstition. True Bible faith is confident obedience to God’s word despite circumstances and consequences. This faith operates quite simply. God speaks, and we hear his Word. We trust his Word and act on it no matter what the circumstances are or what the consequences may be. The circumstances may be impossible and the consequences frightening and unknown, but we obey God’s Word just same and believe him to do what is right and what is best.”

The Bible is filled with examples of obedient faith.

The most shocking example is Abraham, when he sacrificed his beloved son in obedience to God.

Hebrews 11:17 says, “By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac.”

God commanded Abraham to do the unthinkable; the hardest, most costly thing possible. But Abraham trusted that God’s will is best. That’s faith.

Writing for the Christian Research Institute, Brian Onken wrote, “Faith, true biblical faith, entails surrender; surrender moment-by-moment to God and His will...even if we don’t understand it. Faith is entrusting our whole lives to Him and then trusting Him to do what He deems best. Since His will and ways are often different than ours, at times that surrender may well seem somewhat unpleasant. Faith says, “That’s OK; He knows what He’s doing.”

2) **Second, faith has inner peace in times of difficulty.**

Think of faith as the opposite of fear and worry.

It is the antidote to fear and worry.

Worry and fear can only exist in the absence of faith.

People without faith or with weak faith worry, and panic, and freak out during difficult times.

We see this in a story of Jesus and His disciples in Matthew 8.

They got into a boat, and a violent storm arose, but Jesus just slept right through it.

Even though they had God incarnate on the boat with them, the disciples were terrified.

So Jesus said in **Matthew 8:26**, “‘Why are you afraid, you of little faith?’ Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm.”

Faith trusts God when things go south; that God is good; that God is in control; that God is going to work it all out for good; that God is going to do what’s best. This is what confidence in God looks like.

Isaiah 26:3 “You will keep the mind that is dependent on you in perfect peace, for it is trusting in you.”

3) **Third, faith praises God in times of difficulty.**

When someone has a lack of faith and they go through hard times, they question God’s goodness. They question God’s existence. They question God’s sovereignty. And they sometimes get angry with God. They shake their fist at God. They may stop going to church, or stop praying, or stop serving God.

But faith does something different. Faith has so much confidence in God that it is able to praise God even during the hard times. In other words, “Even though God is allowing this to happen, God is good, and God is great.”

A great example of this is Job. The Bible says that Job was a righteous man, but in one day his ten children were killed, all of his livestock was either stolen or destroyed, and all of his servants were killed except for four. After all of this Job said in **Job 1:21**, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will leave

this life. The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.”

Notice what Job is saying here.

The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away. In other words, God is in control. Everything that happened to him was under the control of God. So all of God’s gifts were because God willed it. And all of his suffering was because God willed it.

And then he said, “Blessed be the name of the Lord.” In other words, praise God.

That is faith. It doesn’t take any faith to praise God when everything in your life is going the way you want it to. Faith is praising God in the hard times. Not just when it is sunny, but in the storm.

HOW TO GROW IN FAITH – Five Faith Catalysts

Now the question is how do we grow in faith? We all want the kind of faith that trusts God enough to obey Him, that has inner peace in times of difficulty, and that praises God in times of difficulty. How do we get it?

One pastor says that the way to grow in faith involves five dynamics, or what he calls the five faith catalysts.² After years and years of ministry, these are the five things that help people to grow.

1. **Practical Teaching.** This is teaching that helps you understand and apply the Bible to your life. Reading the Bible on your own is essential, but we all need practical teaching.
2. **Private Disciplines.** This involves reading the Bible on your own, praying by yourself, and giving tithes and offerings. One author wrote, “There is a direct correlation between a person’s private devotional life and his or her

² The five faith catalysts come from the book *Deep & Wide*, by Andy Stanley.

own personal faith.... When God speaks to us personally through His word or answers a specific prayer, our faith is strengthened.”³

3. **Personal ministry.** When you serve God in a way that pushes you to grow, and when God touches others through you, it grows your faith. I hope you can find a place of ministry at Church Acadiana.
4. **Providential relationships.** This is when we hear from God through someone, or when we see God in someone. Hopefully you can make these connections at church.
5. **Pivotal circumstances.** These are usually major events in your life, either positive or negative. It can be something good, like starting college, or getting married, or having a baby, or having a grandchild. Or it can be something negative, like the death of a loved one, or a job loss, or marriage problems, or an extended illness. But when you interpret your circumstances Biblically, then your faith will grow.

CONCLUSION

Faith is perhaps the most important virtue of all.

Hebrews 11:6 “Now without faith it is impossible to please God, since the one who draws near to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.”

Romans 14:23 “... and everything that is not from faith is sin.”

Faith is so central to the Christian life that Christians in the Bible are often called “believers” (see Acts 2:44).

It’s no wonder that in both of Paul’s letters to Timothy he told him to “pursue” [strive for, chase after] faith.

The story of George Mueller is one of the most inspiring stories of faith in the history of Christianity. He pastored a church in England during the 19th century

³ Andy Stanley

for more than 60 years, but he is best known for the orphanage that he started. He intentionally never asked anyone for money or resources to run the orphanage. All he did was pray and trust God to provide, and God always came through, sometimes at the last minute, and sometimes in surprising ways. Years later Mueller explained that the reason he started the orphan was not primarily to care for orphans, but to show his people the power of faith, and God's ability to provide. I pray that our faith would be as strong as his.