

CHAPTER 30

"JUST WHAT IS LIVING FAITH?"

John Lewis was deeply worried, stunned and shaken. A drunken driver had run a red light and hit his 8-year-old son. The little boy now lay in the intensive care unit of a local hospital — in a coma. The doctors had done the best they could, but with so much internal bleeding and injury, they were doubtful whether the little boy would survive.

"Only God can help him now," one of the doctors said.

John Lewis was in the depths of despair. He felt distant from God — that God was "a long way off." How could he pray to Him for help when he had no faith that God would hear? He believed that God existed, but doubts and anxieties kept flooding his mind.

YOU CAN HAVE FAITH

In the above illustration, we see a man who, faced with a crisis, felt that his faith in God was lacking — that he just didn't have the confidence to pray and expect an answer. His inadequacy held him back from seeking the help that only God could give.

Have you ever felt a lack of faith when faced with a severe trial? If so, there is an ANSWER to this situation. You and I can have LIVING FAITH — every day — to face any problem or difficulty that arises.

How? By learning how to use the faith God gives!

WHAT IT MEANS TO LIVE BY FAITH

When many people think of the word "faith," they often think simply of a belief that God exists, that the Bible is His Word, that Jesus is the Savior of the world, etc.

Of course, these concepts are right. But, they do not capture the true, complete reality of what faith is. There is MORE to faith than just a dry, arid mental concept! True faith COMES FROM GOD as a gift (Eph. 2:8), which must be internalized and acted on if it's to bear fruit. In other words, faith without works is dead (James 2:17-26).

True living faith, then, can be summed up this way:

Living faith which God imparts is based on a continuous, ongoing relationship between you and God — a constant intimate contact with God. It's a "track record" of TRUST — of experiencing God living His life in you.

The Bible admonishes: "Trust in Him at all times" (Ps. 62:8). "Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long" (Prov. 23:17). Living faith involves being God-centered — "Walking with Him" — day by day throughout your life! The Bible speaks of "building up yourselves on your most holy faith" (Jude 20).

Those in God's Church who receive powerful answers to prayer are those who walk with God by faith (Heb. 10:38). They are in constant contact with Him. When a problem or trial arises, they don't have to "work up" faith — God has already given it to them. They have been walking by God's faith on a continual daily basis — experiencing in their lives a living, dynamic, ever-present relationship with God. They stand strong, resolute and immovable. They know that God will never leave them, nor forsake them (Heb. 13:5).

This, then, is the essence of living faith. You, too, can have it. The following twelve principles will show you how:

1. START YOUR DAY WITH PRAYER.

Put God first, from your waking moments. Place Him at the center of your thinking before personal desires and activities start crowding in. Remind yourself of who God is — your Lord and

Master — the One who created you, and the One to whom you must give an account at the Day of Judgment. Meditate on His power and greatness, on His glory and might. Spend the first few minutes in worship, praise and adoration. Give Him thanks. Ask Him to guide your life throughout the day and keep you from falling into sin. By starting each day with God in your thoughts, He will empower you with faith to face every problem.

2. **RENEW YOUR COVENANT WITH GOD EACH DAY.**

The day you were baptized and received God's Spirit marked the beginning of your covenant with God. You counted the cost and presented yourself a LIVING sacrifice (Luke 14:26-33; Romans 12:1). You promised to be faithful to the end of your life. Therefore, with each new day, renew your commitment to God. Renew your pledge of surrender and obedience — your unreserved loyalty and dedication. Always remember that you're bought with a price and belong to God (I Cor. 6:19-20). Keep this fact in the forefront of your mind and it will sustain the faith He has given you!

3. **BE CONSTANTLY AWARE OF GOD'S PRESENCE.**

God is almighty, all-powerful — omnipotent. He is glorious in strength and might. His Spirit emanates from Him and fills the entire universe! (Ps. 139:1-10). His invisible presence is everywhere. He is literally, at this very moment, upholding all things by the Word of His power. God sees and knows your every SECRET — your life is open to His view (Heb. 4:13). Not only are the very hairs of your head numbered; He even knows your thoughts and motives. Are you constantly aware of His glory and presence — tuned in to His wavelength? Do you fear and reverence Him — stand in awe of His sovereign power? You can never know the true meaning of faith until you experience the presence of God.

4. **BE INSTANT IN PRAYER.**

The Bible commands us to pray without ceasing. (I Thess. 5:17.) This means to stay in an attitude of prayer — to sustain an ongoing relationship with God. It means being able to COMMUNICATE with Him anywhere at anytime. When faced with a problem or tempted to sin, and you're unable to cry aloud — pray in your mind. This was the practice of Jesus Christ: *"Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always..."* (John 11:41-42). Pray for instant strength and self-control when encountering attitudes that are destructive and harmful. Allow nothing to break your contact with God. Set your will to walk with Him, no matter what the cost. Become so close and united to God that He's just a prayer away!

5. **START EXPECTING MIRACLES.**

Answered prayer is a miracle. God's protection is a miracle. His direct intervention in your life, however small or insignificant, is a miracle. As you grow in God's likeness and closer to Him each day, your awareness of these miracles will increase. To the degree you submit to and rely upon God, is the degree you can expect greater miracles. Don't think of God's miracles solely in terms of super-natural phenomena — that is, in great healings, in deliverance from horrendous trials, in unusual and extraordinary answers to prayer. Don't limit miracles to just the physical needs of life — food, shelter and clothing. Think of miracles as the power God provides in overcoming Satan, temptation and discouragement — as the strength He gives to live a clean and holy life. If you are truly walking in faith, you should begin to experience more and more miracles day after day.

6. **RESPOND TO THE INFLUENCE OF GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT.**

God's Spirit is an active power that flows from Himself continually. It's the totality of His mind and strength, His power and glory. It's the summation of all the qualities and attributes that comprise His life and being. God's Spirit is His holy presence diffused throughout the universe. With it He created all things, and with it He sustains what He made. It is also the power He uses in building character in those whom He has called and chosen to be His sons (Phil. 2:12-13; Eph. 3:16-20). How does it function? It speaks to us through promptings and urges,

impulses and desires. From His own mind, God projects or transmits thoughts to our minds, thus moving us, stirring us and leading us to do His will. God's Spirit works in conjunction with His own Word, opening up new riches and depths of understanding. The Bible tells us not to grieve or quench God's Spirit — for it is through this power that He imparts His life, faith and righteousness to us. Are you responding, changing and repenting when God's Spirit moves you? Are you drinking in of His fullness, becoming more and more like Him each day?

7. **STIR UP YOURSELF WHEN YOU START TO SLIP OR SIN.**

As you walk with God, He will convict your conscience when you start to slip or edge toward sin. This is a facet of His saving grace, a process by which He removes the blemishes and wrinkles from your life. When moved by God's Spirit to recognize error or sin — respond immediately! Don't delay! Crush out the temptation before it takes root and starts to grow. Don't allow sin to get a stranglehold. Do as David did, "*I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments*" (Ps. 119:60). Some days are especially evil and fraught with troubles. The Devil becomes unusually active, works overtime and tries every trick to make you fall. Be prepared to resist his attacks — be vigilant and watchful (1 Pet. 5:8-9). Never drop your guard for a moment. Keep yourself in the fear of God, so that He may grant you the faith to live triumphantly.

8. **USE YOUR BIBLE AS A QUICK AND READY GUIDE.**

Jesus Christ was filled with the Word of God. It was a source of continual guidance and inspiration to Him. We, too, should have God's Word living in us (Matt. 4:4). When making decisions or facing problems, try to think of a scripture that would apply. Moreover, actually live what you study each day. Test it, prove it, do it — experience it's effectual power and inspiration (1 Thes. 5:21; 1 Thes. 2:13). Remember, it's not the hearers (or readers) of the Word that will be justified, but the doers (Rom. 2:13). When you read a command in the Bible, stop and think of ways to apply it. Expand and magnify the meaning to everyday life. Get into the habit of using the Bible as a quick and instant reference. Allow it to so fill your mind that it becomes a basis of your constant behavior. Faith comes by hearing and obeying God's Word (Rom. 10:17). The more you study and experience it's depths — the greater your faith will become.

9. **LAY DOWN YOUR LIFE IN CHRISTIAN SERVICE.**

Jesus Christ said, "*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends,*" (John 15:13). Here is one of the most powerful and succinct definitions of love in the Bible. This is love in action — love elevated to its high spiritual state. Love is giving your life in service to others; selfishness is serving primarily yourself. With each person you meet is a new opportunity to express love in some form — kindness, courtesy, encouragement, recognition, appreciation, etc. There are literally dozens and hundreds of opportunities around you to show love each day. The more of God's Spirit you drink in — the more you will be made aware of the needs and sufferings of others. Overcoming is largely a matter of putting down self and allowing God to fill you with His love, compassion, and faith.

10. **REDEEM THE TIME — MAKE EACH DAY COUNT.**

With each passing day you're a step closer to the Kingdom of God. Therefore, strive to improve over yesterday's performance. Work hard at setting the right example. Try to upgrade your conduct and actions in every aspect of life — work at being a better husband and father, wife and mother, employee and neighbor. Realize who you are — a begotten son of God, called and chosen to glorify God in this darkened world. Don't dwell on evil thoughts or entertain wrong attitudes. Spend your time pursuing positive ventures, instead of finding fault with others or engaging in destructive talk. Redeem the time by striving to be a better servant of God as you prepare yourself for Christ's return.

11. **HOLD ON TO GOD IN YOUR DARKEST HOUR.**

Trials will come in every Christian's life. "*Many are the afflictions of the righteous...*" (Ps. 34:19). "*Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution*" (II Tim. 3:12). "...we must

through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). Trials, then, are the common experience of every Christian. But some trials are greater than others and more difficult to bear. Some trials are so severe you'll be tempted to give up and quit — a grave illness, death in the family, loss of a job, a possible lawsuit where you stand to lose all your earthly possessions, etc. There are times that the Devil will unleash his full wrath and fury in an effort to overthrow you. During these moments, hold on to God and trust Him to the bitter end. No matter what the circumstances, don't doubt or waver, faint or falter — anchor your trust solidly in Him! "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the Devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). When facing your "Red Sea," stand still as Moses did and wait confidently for God's help and salvation.

12. **KEEP YOUR EYE ON THE DAY OF JUDGMENT.**

The Bible says, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (II Cor. 5:10). The judgment of God is real and certain. No human mortal can possibly escape. God has decreed in His infinite wisdom that each must stand and give an account before Christ of the way he has chosen to live his life. We, then, should live each day with this in mind. It should be one of the greatest incentives to living a righteous and holy life. For the Christian, the judgment has a double meaning. Not only does it portend a final accounting; it also means that his life is under judgment now. "For the time is come that judgment must begin at the household of God..." (I Pet. 4:17). As Christians, our lives at this very moment are under the scrutiny of God. He is monitoring our thoughts, actions and attitudes to see what is in our hearts and whether we love Him! Ultimately every secret thing will be brought to light. Some will be raised to eternal life and great rewards; others will be raised to everlasting shame (Dan. 12:1-2). For those of us who are being judged now, let us awake to God's great calling and make our election sure.

CONCLUSION

Here, then, are twelve simple steps on how to live by faith. Read them again and review them frequently. Make them a part of your everyday life. They will do little more than give you a temporary lift, unless you resolve to APPLY them DILIGENTLY.

Living faith is an ongoing relationship with God — a constant daily trust. As you exercise God's faith, it will grow stronger like a muscle that is developed. You'll discover that looking to God in any circumstance will eventually become your instant first thought — an instinctive, habitual response! This is the meaning of "living by faith."

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