

This is a reworked transcript of a three-session series on the development of faith within the life of a believer – the ability to **believe** and **act** on God's promises. Some of this is technical, some anecdotal. We make no apology for either. We hope it is a blessing to you. MP3 copies are downloadable on our church's website (access password from burns@hnlc.org.au). We hope this series has a significant beneficial effect on your walk with the One who is the embodiment of credibility and loyalty! Brian Rensford.

### **SESSION #1 - COMMON NT DEFINITION OF "FAITH"**

The following extract from the Social Science Commentary by Malina & Rohrbaugh P252 puts a very different emphasis on the normal definition of the word "faith" when it appears in the New Testament.

The noun "faith" and its various verb forms ("to have faith," "to believe") are found throughout Mark, beginning with Jesus' opening appeal to "repent and believe in the Gospel" (1:15). In the social system that controls English usage, faith or belief usually means a psychological, internal, cognitive, and **affective assent of mind to truths**. This assent is given either because the truths make sense in themselves (e.g., most people believe if  $A = C$  and if  $B = C$ , then  $A=B$ ) or because the person speaking has credibility (e.g., most college students simply "believe" the authors of their chemistry and physics textbooks about the outcome of experiments mentioned since there is no time in college to replicate all the experiments). This dimension of faith, assent to something or to something somebody says, **is not common in the New Testament**.<sup>1</sup>

Faith, believe, have faith - refer in the NT to the **social glue that binds one person to another**. They point to the social, externally manifested, emotional behaviour of loyalty, commitment, and solidarity. As a faction founder, Jesus requires loyalty and commitment to Himself and His project [Mark 9:42]. as a rule, however, this loyalty is to be directed to the God of Israel, as stated explicitly in 11:22-25 [see also 4:40 5:34,36 9:42 10:52]. It can similarly be manifested in solidarity with others bent on obedience to the God of Israel [2:5].

11:23 "does not doubt in his heart but believes" - this wording (incorrectly) puts the phrase into the category, assent of mind. But this is not the normal use of the words in Mark, and they are better translated, "**whoever... does not hesitate, but remains loyal (to God)...**". Similarly, in the next verse, the literal meaning is, "**whatever you pray for and ask for, remain loyal (to God) that you are receiving it and it will be yours.**"

In sum, the term "faith" means,

1. primarily personal loyalty, personal commitment, fidelity, and the solidarity that comes from such faithfulness;
2. secondarily, the word can mean credence as in such phrases as "to give credence", "find believable".

The world and the devil and demons can (and often do) believe in this mental assent manner, **but, they are NOT TOTALLY LOYAL** to Christ (see **James 2:19-21** where Abraham [THE father of the faith] showed his total loyalty by being prepared to sacrifice the dearest thing to his heart – his only son, Isaac).

#### **"Receiving what you desire"...**

This (KJV) emphasis must be aligned with other aspects of Scripture to be properly understood; eg. (**Rom 7:8**) *But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead.* This truth must be reckoned with **before** we can make sense of **Mark 11:22-24**.... And so must the passage preceding it in...

(**Mark 10:35**) *Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask."* This opens a discussion in which Jesus points out that answers to requests work when an **unselfish focus is the object of what "we desire" (10:35-44)**. The grand culmination of this discourse comes in **10:45** *For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.* What an example He left us all!<sup>2</sup>

(**Mark 11:22,24 KJV**) **And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God.... Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.**

(**Mark 11:22-24 NIV**) "Have faith in God," Jesus answered. "I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours."

This statement is the result of Jesus cursing the fig tree. Jesus clarifies His behaviour by His answer in **v22-25**. He underscores His answer with a word of honour (Truly I tell you), and explains why the fig tree withered. It did so because of Jesus **total loyalty to God**, and His total lack of hesitation ("not doubt in your heart") in what God requires

<sup>1</sup> It is found in Mark in **13:21**: "and if anyone says to you at that time, 'Look! Here is the Christ!'", or 'Look! There he is!' - Do not believe it." Also very rare is the use of the term to mean the "tradition," as in the "faith," which was once and for all delivered to the saints (**Jude 1:3**).

<sup>2</sup> Jesus mission was to the world. **John 1:29 3:17 12:47 Luke 19:10 Mark 10:45 1 John 2:2** The ministry of reconciliation has been committed to the apostolic company, so that the church might be reconciled to God (**2 Cor 5:18**), so that the church can in turn be God's agent for the ministry of reconciliation to a lost world **2 Peter 3:9**.

of Him. This is what it means to "have faith". His lack of hesitation explains what He is doing in Jerusalem - His prophetic activity and the fate bound up with that activity, ie. suffering and death.

**So, requests made of God are granted to those totally loyal to God.**

So, let's now go back and look at the context then that sets up **Mark 11:22-24**.

**A prior relationship with God**

is implicit. Getting to know the True God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent is the beginning point of faith that moves mountains, and causes God to act into our world, our situations.

Part of this (as in any developing relationship based on **love**) is **spending time**, and growing in understanding of His ways and purposes – the place of the **Word**. **Rom 10:17 faith comes out of relationship** – hearing words from the God we have a relationship with builds up our faith – strong enough to act on. So, thank God for Calvary, for the blood shed! For the reconciling nature of God, who has drawn us into a living relationship with Himself through Lord Jesus Christ. Then, the next phase unfolds...

**Psa 37:3-5 (desires = requests, petitions)**

This can now come into focus, because now your heart's desires are lining up with the heart of God! The elimination of selfish requests sets up the possibility of **Mark 11:22-24** actually working!

A person who proves their total loyalty to God, stands in a position of relationship with God from which they can confidently expect God to answer their requests –this is true biblical **FAITH** in action! Faith operating from a stance of righteousness.

This broad definition goes beyond mere "Faith to believe for evangelism / conversions" (yes, it must include conversion of people for eternal salvation, but the other two major elements of the original gospel commission – given to the 12, 72, and then everybody [in **Mark 16**] must also be incorporated – the call is to also believe for healings and deliverances, as well as speaking (for instance, the Syro-Phoenician mother in **Mark 7:24-30**).

For instance, Pastor Brian English's testimony of a bike accident in which he suffered a broken neck (vertebrae, not spinal cord) – proven by x-rays. But 25 people from his church refused to lie down and resign themselves to what had happened. They quickly gathered for prayer, and within 24 hours, he had been totally healed – MRI scans could not find any breaks in the neck bones. They believed! They prayed! They took God seriously and refused to bow to Australian unbelief, which so often limits prayers for healing to something like, "Lord, guide the doctor's hands", and nothing more.

Similarly, deliverance from the powers of darkness does not occur through ritual and formula, but through a **relationship** and **authority** that comes from living in a **Col 3:1-3** state. *Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.*

To finish this session... We must be **sensitised in our spirit to hear from the Holy Spirit**... This makes a lot of sense re the necessity to make room in our lives for a place of regular prayer and word "washing". Then, after clearly hearing from God (both through Scripture and a word in our spirit, we can effectively **ACT** in **faith**! That's another reason why we need to seriously do business with God regarding removing the rubbish from our minds and lives – clear the ground so real faith can be planted and grow! Faith that can be acted upon!

**SESSION #2: THE SPIRIT OF FAITH VS THE SPIRIT OF UNBELIEF**

Here we will look at what these two opposites are, and the results of their dominance, including the place and power of **unbelief** to limit the development of true faith.

**Definition of a stronghold**

Something that dominates a whole range of thinking and doing. Neil Anderson defines a stronghold as "**a mind-set impregnated with hopelessness which causes us to accept as unchangeable something known to be contrary to God**".

It can manifest (including demonically) through a little voice that says inside (or even outside!), "I/we/you can't do that..." (more next session on this). John Wimber recounted his question to the pastor of the Pentecostal church he was attending, "when do we get to **do the stuff??**" He meant the "stuff" of prayer for the sick; deliverance; breakthroughs in work, courses, direction, provision, etc, etc. According to Wimber, his pastor replied, "we don't actually get to do it; we just sing about it..." May our reply never be like theirs.... They had lost faith somewhere along the line.

Like Wimber's quote, growing up in New Zealand, I spent more time **talking** (and **criticising** like some armchair general or leader of the Opposition) than constructively **doing**! Such people make good accountants and auditors! But poor No. 1 leaders. They don't originate businesses, new ideas very well!

At the beginning of my spiritual journey, there was no "give me this mountain!" cry in my heart – as a teenage non-born again Presbyterian, **I lacked real FAITH**. And even after my conversion and baptism in the Holy Spirit - from our first session's definition - it really was true that, despite appearances, I continued to struggle to truly grow in my faith.

Why, because I **lacked true knowledge, born out of RELATIONSHIP, of the TRUE GOD**. I still perceived Him through the preset grid of my own upbringing (including my mudzimu / Ancestral Spirit, the mhondoro / ruling spirit prevailing in New Zealand, and the particular religious movement that shaped my early years of [Pentecostal] Christianity).

What to do? Thank God for His mercy. He called me from my own Ur of the Chaldees, and led me to Australia, and then beyond to Africa... I heard a word and obeyed – and **THAT** was an Abrahamic-type action that saved my life from being one bound by the mediocrity of unbelief (being an “expert” in a little world that shrinks even further as you grow older). A path that leads to increasing criticism of others (especially those who kept moving on – sometimes literally!). Old peoples’ homes are full of this kind of unbelief. They reek of disloyalty. Many elderly there spend their lives negatively chipping away at almost **everything**. No wonder such places are called “God’s waiting room”...

And **that’s** the future that awaits people who don’t move with God when He says so. I don’t care about your current age, giftedness, cultural or ethnic background, or situation. **Faith development** is a living, moment-by-moment affair critically dependent on your lived-out level of **obedience to Christ**. Making the changes necessary for your faith to continue to grow. It’s our only hope.

This will help others understand what might be perceived by some as my own overemphasis on Lifeline in Zimbabwe and Mozambique. But **going** into Africa was God’s door of release for me from being a maintenance-only man (as a church, we prayed and gave for 15 years before I went) to someone capable of developing a creative (as in “give me this mountain!”) side as well (14 trips now over 11 years). That’s why I am so grateful to God, my wife, my church, and Lifeline itself.

So, my journey has been from a religious situation essentially entrenched in unbelief, towards one shaped by faith in Christ. And it isn’t finished yet!!

Repetitious living **must** have a creative element with it or a slow, steady paralysis avoiding new, innovative actions will creep in. It’s the bane of churches, families, political parties, whatever. Our last Federal Government election reflected this. The incumbent party was swept out after nearly 12 years of solid, sound administration. One of the observations in hindsight was that they were perceived as having run out of fresh ideas, and campaigned almost 100% on their previous track record of sound management. The people wanted that, plus something more! That’s what happens when “faith” atrophies into repetitious living only.

Lifeline has taken me out of my own comfort-zone (which is inevitably part of **aging** in ministry and leadership), stretched my faith (here with planning stuff, **there** will real-life “God, do something - **NOW!**” situations; that’s why I was not afraid of going during the recent Presidential re-election), and helped me grow up (I am what the child psychologists would term a **very** “late developer”)....

The Enemy knows the paralysing, debilitating, faith-blocking power of unbelief. It’s a principal means by which he wages war against the saints to “wear them out” (Dan 7:25a He will speak against the Most High and oppress [*used only in a mental sense; to afflict, wear out*] his saints...).

Some of us have been subjected to a mudzimu (Ancestral Spirit) strong in this area of inherent unbelief. Your instinctive reaction to anything new proposed is why you/we/they **can’t** do it. We live and think opposite to Bobby Kennedy’s famous statement, “There are those who look at things the way they are, and ask why?... I dream of things that never were, and ask **why not?**” God-connected people like Abraham do **not** practise visualisation techniques to achieve this. They draw near to their God – they have become devoted to Him – then they hear / see / dream / plan... and **DO**. They do what they see, hear, read, dream from their Heavenly Father. **Not** what has its origins in their own heart / mind / dreams.

There will come an increasing stream of moral failures among profile “Christian” leaders as the Enemy seeks to stop the saints moving forward into their true God-given calling that **only** functions when truly biblical faith. Don’t let this discourage you – it was predicted as a sign of the end in the 1<sup>st</sup>C, and is a similar warfare strategy to the one Jesus mentions in **Mat 13:22**.

Stand with me if you recognise you need help being freed from a surrounding “mind-set impregnated with hopelessness which causes us to accept as unchangeable something known to be contrary to God”. It may have been the mark of your family, formative church, ethnic or social background (friends, schoolmates, work environment)... Whatever. But, let’s identify it, renounce it, and commit ourselves afresh to grow in true, action-type **faith** – freed from such negative influences that have distorted our ability to act as a faith-seed child of Abraham.

Recognise that for many there **IS AN INNER VOICE** that seeks to convince believers that “it’s not going to work; you’re doomed to fail...” And engage it in a faith stance of warfare. I am **NOT** going to let such a voice / thought pattern dominate my (renewed) mind and habits! I determine, with God’s help, to be **more** than a maintenance man, repeating continuously the same patterns of religious thought and behaviour!

### **SESSION #3: SOME MEANS OF SENSITISING OUR SPIRIT TO BELIEVE GOD AND ACT!**

In the last session, we dealt with persistent “I/we can’t do that...” unbelief. After it, many stood to publicly cry out to God for a greater release in the area of operative faith, recognising we have to shift any “mountain of unbelief” before

“by My Spirit, says the LORD” can successfully function. We said together, “I/we am/are changing my basic stance, my primary position, from one of unbelief to active faith”.

My primary emphasis in the series is **NOT** about finding a relevant faith-building Scripture when it's needed. That is a given that we have covered many times. I am talking about hearing from God in an existential moment that is very relevant to that current moment (and need). For instance....

**Some anecdotes to start with...**

- Peter Zulu and the tyre puncture problem out in the bush of Matusadona... We had no tyre levers to pull a tyre off the rim, but he sent his sons to a small (vehicle-less) compound to see if they had any, and they returned with two!! He saw my stunned look and said, “Brian, we not only **live** by faith here, we **drive** by faith too!” And he **literally** meant it! And I learned a lot from his stance in such difficult times and circumstances....
- A member of our church, Ian Wilson, had his good quality camera stolen by a boarder they were trying to help. Three months later he recovered it when while walking past a pawn shop in Parramatta, received a rhema from the Spirit through his spirit and into his mind, that his camera was in the shop. He still had the serial number on him and, after identifying it, got his camera back.
- In 1972 we were about to drive over 2000km from Adelaide to Brisbane trip in a VW. I had never driven in the Outback, and planned to drive in one section along some very isolated bush roads. While praying before we left, I received a word of redirection to stay on the main highway and visit a recently Spirit-baptised Methodist minister halfway. I shared this with Elizabeth, and we changed our plans. Often the Spirit doesn't disclose all the details; He expects us to loyally obey! And were we glad after a big-end bearing in the engine collapsed on the main highway! A car pulled up right behind us and towed us to the nearest town. Later, looking at the map, we worked out we would have been about 200 kms from the nearest small settlement!!
- Then there is the daily trivial kind of situations – my computer reboot failure at Budgewoi recently, and the word of knowledge that fixed the problem. Mislaid keys, cellphones, wallets, etc, are part of growing older. Not to mention forgotten appointments, commitments to do something for somebody, etc, etc. God can and does speak regularly into our minds via His Spirit to our spirit in many practical areas!
- In the experience commonly known as Laying on of hands – my own experience of **impartation** (next week, when we pray for two people involved in our youth leadership team, I expect to see more good wishes expressed, but impartation of ability, words of guidance, correction, and alignment, etc). It's not about **goodness**, but about asking **in faith**, and desiring to serve God.

Note that much of this is not very dramatic; not life-threatening stuff; it's the **normal walk of faith!** It makes life flow with less crash-bang-wallop... And it validates the reality of God to new believers. They see him existentially **alive and interacting with His people!**

When we walk with God in a daily close relationship, the Holy Spirit **can** communicate, empower (including with **dunamis**), provide, etc, etc. He **wants to!** He wants to do good, **even to those who don't know Him (yet)!** This is touched on in **Romans 2:4**.<sup>3</sup> Refer to Fee's comments on how this is to affect us in the way we too (in **faith**) should relate to the lost!

I learned the power of this (exercising faith on behalf of unbelievers) in Christian witness very early on as a young Spirit-filled believer, when my brother's friend lost his puppy dog from our farm. They advertised, searched everywhere, asked everyone they saw (it was a rural area), but the dog was nowhere to be found. I told them we would pray for God to return it. They didn't believe, but at 6am the very next morning, the phone went and the dog was located some 20km away! He walked into my bedroom and stared at me and said, “I don't know how you did that, but it worked!” The shock set my brother up with a new respect for God, me, and the power of faith in Christ. He converted soon afterwards and has never looked back, now serving God as a minister for over 40 years.

So, the first step is to have an **awareness** that the form of Christianity the Western churches have generally adopted as the “normal” model of personal and corporate life, falls **way short** of that God can and wants to do! Now!

**Peter Chan's notes from our Ministry Development College** - It is time again to come back to the place where the Spirit of God came with the rush of a mighty wind and there is an outpouring of tongues of fire, so powerful that those touched could not help but prophesy and proclaim the Gospel to the ends of the earth. Young and old! (**Acts 2:17-18**) "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your **sons and daughters** will prophesy, your

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<sup>3</sup> The Message - *Or did you think that because he's such a nice God, he'd let you off the hook? Better think this one through from the beginning. God is kind, but he's not soft. In kindness he takes us firmly by the hand and leads us into a radical life-change.* Fee notes in reflecting on the significance of the first two words in **1 Cor 13:4** (Love is patient (longsuffering - KJV), love is kind) – “I was struck by the clear reality that these are two words that Paul uses elsewhere to describe the character of God (the passive and active sides of divine love). Not only is God like this - eternally and faithfully so - but where would I be, and those I love, if it were not so? What if God loved with the same degree of longsuffering as I have toward those who have sinned against or disappointed me....”

**young** men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, **both men and women**, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy." This is still **for today!**

Peter is quoting from **Joel 2:28**. Fee says, "in the coming age of the Spirit, **all** of God's people will be 'prophets'" And **1 Cor 14:24** (the NT normative model for local church meetings "Order of Service" flows from this eschatological truth!<sup>4</sup> Church leaders are charged before God to make room in their public meetings for this kind of "normal" charismatic activity!

Peter asked our Ministry Development College students, "we need to be sensitised in the spirit! But how?" He said,

1. By fasting, continual prayer, including intercession.
2. By being diligently devoted to the regular reading of Scriptures.
3. By boldly venturing out to speak out, share, preach, and teach the Word of God.
4. By consistently declaring, there is no other name / person on earth or in heaven by which we can be saved except in and through the Name of Jesus.

If we are not sensitive to the Spirit, we can hardly be led by the Spirit and all that we may be doing may come from good intentions but not from **God's** intentions. This is a **growing** trend, but it has to start somewhere, sometime! And that takes breakthrough **faith!** Faith prepared to begin to act **NOW!**

Itinerant missionary Isabel Paterson said recently there is a great need to recognise and break through cultural barriers in order that we break through to God! This involves areas we are usually unaware of because they have been part of what we have been raised with, what we **ARE** as a community. **UNBELIEF** acts like this – a stronghold opposing us breaking through into God in ways beyond what we have previously perceived, and have previously set **cultural** limitations on (eg. two eye witnesses relating how senior Sydney Anglican Philip Jensen publicly mocked the raising of hands in worship in the Anglican cathedral, as though it was unbiblical and unacceptable to God).<sup>5</sup>

Such cultural restrictions with the **fear** of disapproval they generate, will fight against the emergence of true faith (as defined in the first session); people bound by such fears will commonly fall back to the definition of "faith" as adherence to a set of doctrinal tenets (see Malina & Rohrbaugh's comments in Session #1).

Living a life of constant expectation.... What do **we expect** to happen? For our church? Meeting people? Opportunities? Those who expect nothing will have their prayers answered! We could add these to Peter Chan's list above (1-4).

5. Pray continually over your day's activities, travel arrangements, work situations, money handling, health issues, etc, etc.
6. (**John 4:35**) (*Jesus said*) *Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, **open your eyes** (KJV = Lift up) and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. **Now** is the day of salvation 2 Cor 6:2! Expect to hear from God and for God to act **here and now!***
7. Seek ministry! Often from outside your "normal" church framework. A pastor friend came down twice from Brisbane to our church for laying on of hands; both times he said the prophetic words (from people who knew nothing about his situation) were quite astonishing. And the second time, there was impartation of the gift of discerning of spirits – which was activated immediately he returned to his home church and pastorate.

Can you say "let's go! Let's do it **NOW! GIVE ME THIS MOUNTAIN!!???**... can you function / minister / serve in **Rom 12:3** where you think of yourself with sober judgment according to the **measure of faith?**<sup>6</sup>

Our inheritance is **people**. God wants to use us, so it's vital we develop great sensitivity to the move / work / voice of the Holy Spirit. What joy and fulfilment awaits all those who choose **now** to live such a life, overflowing with Christ's motivation!

As the song says, *Have faith in God; never give up! Never let go of... the Faith that He has placed in your heart...*

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<sup>4</sup> **See also note on Jer 23:18. Prophetic utterance is a "natural" consequence of having been in the presence of the living God** (see Acts 4:20 too)....

<sup>5</sup> Despite the exhortations of the Psalmists! eg. Psa 63:4 Psa 134:2 Psa 141:2 – lifting up hands in worship symbolizing incense ascending while prayers are being offered Rev 8:4.

<sup>6</sup> Caleb is a powerful TO example of a true man of faith – he never gave up, remaining **loyal** to the God he knew was **loyal** to him all those years. As a 45 year-old, he had stood with Joshua against the prevailing mindset of unbelief and said, "we **can** do what God said we can do!" (**Num 13:30-14:9**). And 40 years later, as an 85 year-old, he received his reward, after he had persevered (**Joshua 14:6-15**). He overpowered the "city of the four giants" (=Hebron), the very same town where the "father of faith" (Abraham) was buried.