



Talmid תלמיד a Hebrew word that means “a true disciple who desires to be what the Rabbi Jesus is.”

Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did. 1 John 2:6 (NIV)

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STUDY TO SHEW THYSELF APPROVED UNTO GOD, A WORKMAN THAT NEEDETH NOT TO BE ASHAMED, RIGHTLY  
DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH. 2 TIMOTHY 2:15



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## DOES PRAYER CHANGE THINGS?

### THE PLACE OF PRAYER

What is the goal of the Christian life? It is godliness born of obedience to Christ. Obedience unlocks the riches of the Christian experience. Prayer prompts and nurtures obedience, putting the heart into the proper “**frame of mind**” to desire obedience.

Of course, knowledge is also important because without it we cannot know what God requires. However, knowledge and truth remain abstract unless we commune with God in prayer. The Holy Spirit *teaches*, *inspires*, and *illuminates* God’s Word to us. He mediates the Word of God and assists us

in responding to the Father in prayer.

Simply put, prayer has a vital place in the life of the Christian. One might pray and not be a Christian, **but one cannot be a Christian and not pray**. [Romans 8:15](#) tells us that the spiritual adoption that has made us sons of God causes us to cry out in verbal expressions: “**Abba! Father!**” Prayer is to the Christian what breath is to life, yet no duty of the Christian is so neglected.

#### [Romans 8:15 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>15</sup>“**For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!”**”

Prayer, at least private prayer, is difficult to do out of a false motive. One can preach out of a false motive, as do the false prophets. One can be involved in Christian activities out of false motives. Many of the externals of religion can be done from false motives. However, it is highly unlikely that anyone would commune with God out of some improper motive.

We are invited, even commanded, to pray. Prayer is both a privilege and a duty, and any duty can become laborious. Prayer, like any means of growth for the Christian, *requires work*. In a sense, *prayer is unnatural to us*. Though we were created for fellowship and communion with God, the effects of the fall have left most of us lazy and indifferent toward something as important as prayer.

Rebirth quickens a new desire for communion with God, but sin resists the Spirit.

We can take comfort from the fact that God knows our hearts and hears our unspoken petitions as well as the words that emanate from our lips. Whenever we are unable to express the deep feelings and emotions of our souls or when we are completely unclear about what we ought to be praying, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us. [Romans 8:26–27](#) says: **“The Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”**

When we don’t know how to pray or what to pray for in a given situation, the Holy Spirit assists us. There is reason to believe from the text that if we pray incorrectly, the Holy Spirit corrects the errors in our prayers before He takes them before the Father, for [verse 27](#) tells us that He **“intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”**

Prayer is the secret of holiness—if holiness, indeed, has anything secretive about it. If we examine the lives of the great saints of the church, we find that they were great people of prayer. **John Wesley** once remarked that he didn’t think much of ministers who didn’t spend at least four hours per day in prayer. **Luther** said that he prayed regularly for an hour every day except when he experienced a particularly busy day. Then he prayed for two hours.

The neglect of prayer is a major cause of stagnation in the Christian life. Consider the example of Peter in [Luke 22:39–62](#). Jesus went to the Mount of Olives to pray, as was His custom, and told His disciples, **“Pray that you may not enter into temptation.”** The disciples fell asleep instead. The next thing Peter did was try to take on the Roman army with a sword; then he denied Christ. Peter did not pray, and as a result he fell into temptation. What is true of Peter is true of all of us: we fall in private before we ever fall in public.

**Is there a right and wrong time for prayer?** [Isaiah 50:4](#) talks about the morning as the time

when God gives the desire to pray on a daily basis. But other passages give times of prayer during all hours of the day. No part of the day is set apart as more sanctified than another. Jesus prayed in the morning, during the day, and sometimes all night long. There is evidence that He had a time set aside for prayer; however, considering the relationship Jesus had with the Father, we know that communion between them never stopped.

[First Thessalonians 5:17](#) commands us to pray without ceasing. This means that we are to be in a continual state of communion with our Father.

Prayer, then, is central and crucial in the life of the Christian. Let us look further into this vital but neglected and misunderstood Christian discipline.

## THE PURPOSE OF PRAYER

Nothing escapes God’s notice; nothing oversteps the boundaries of His power. God is authoritative in all things. If I thought even for one moment that a single molecule were running loose in the universe outside the control and domain of almighty God, I wouldn’t sleep tonight. My confidence in the future rests in my confidence in the God who controls history. But how does God exercise that control and manifest that authority? How does God bring to pass the things He sovereignly decrees?

**Augustine** said that nothing happens in this universe apart from the will of God and that, in a certain sense, God ordains everything that happens. **Augustine** was not attempting to absolve men of responsibility for their actions, but his teaching raises a question: If God is sovereign over the actions and intents of men, why pray at all? A secondary concern revolves around the question, “Does prayer really change anything?”

Let me answer the first question by stating that the sovereign God commands by His holy Word that we pray. **Prayer is not optional for the Christian; it is required.**

We might ask, “What if it doesn’t do anything?” That is not the issue. Regardless of whether prayer does any good, if God commands us to pray, we must pray. It is reason enough that the Lord God of the universe, the

Creator and Sustainer of all things, commands it. Yet He not only commands us to pray, but also invites us to make our requests known. James says “**that we have not because we ask not**” ([James 4:2](#)). He also tells us that “**the prayer of a righteous man accomplishes much**” ([James 5:16](#)). Time and again the Bible says that prayer is an effective tool. It is useful; it works.

**John Calvin**, in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, makes some profound observations regarding prayer:

But, someone will say, does God not know, even without being reminded, both in what respect we are troubled and what is expedient for us, so that it may seem in a sense superfluous that he should be stirred up by our prayers—as if he were drowsily blinking or even sleeping until he is aroused by our voice? But they who thus reason do not observe to what end the Lord instructed his people to pray, for he ordained it not so much for his own sake as for ours. Now he wills—as is right—that his due be rendered to him, in the recognition that everything men desire and account conducive to their own profit comes from him, and in the attestation of this by prayers. But the profit of this sacrifice also, by which he is worshiped, returns to us. Accordingly, the holy fathers, the more confidently they extolled God’s benefits among themselves and others, were the more keenly aroused to pray ...

Still it is very important for us to call upon him: **First**, that our hearts may be fired with a zealous and burning desire ever to seek, love, and serve him, while we become accustomed in every need to flee to him as to a sacred anchor. **Secondly**, that there may enter our hearts no desire and no wish at all of which we should be ashamed to make him a witness, while we learn to set all our wishes before his eyes, and even to pour out our whole hearts. **Thirdly**, that we be prepared to receive his benefits with true gratitude of heart and thanksgiving, benefits that our prayer reminds us come from his hand. (Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill [Louisville: Westminster John

**Knox, 1960], Book 3, chapter 20, section 3.)**

Prayer, like everything else in the Christian life, is for God’s glory and for our benefit, in that order. Everything that God does, everything that God allows and ordains, is in the supreme sense for His glory. It is also true that while God seeks His own glory supremely, man benefits when God is glorified. We pray to glorify God, but we also pray in order to receive the benefits of prayer from His hand. **Prayer is for our benefit, even in light of the fact that God knows the end from the beginning.** It is our privilege to bring the whole of our finite existence into the glory of His infinite presence.

### A Discourse with God

One of the great themes of the Reformation was the idea that all of life is to be lived under the authority of God, to the glory of God, in the presence of God. Prayer is not simply a soliloquy, a mere exercise in therapeutic self-analysis, or a religious recitation. *Prayer is discourse with the personal God Himself.* There, in the act and dynamic of praying, I bring my whole life under His gaze. Yes, He knows what is in my mind, but I still have the privilege of articulating to Him what is there. He says: “Come. Speak to me. Make your requests known to me.” So we come in order to know Him and to be known by Him.

**There is something erroneous in the question**, “If God knows everything, why pray?” The question assumes that prayer is one-dimensional and is defined simply as supplication or intercession. On the contrary, prayer is multidimensional. God’s sovereignty casts no shadow over the prayer of adoration. God’s foreknowledge or determinate counsel does not negate the prayer of praise. The only thing it should do is give us greater reason for expressing our adoration for who God is. If God knows what I’m going to say before I say it, His knowledge, rather than limiting my prayer, enhances the beauty of my praise.

My wife and I are as close as two people can be. Often I know what she’s going to say almost before she says it. The reverse is also true. (After 42 years of marriage we have developed that oneness in our relationship). But I still like to hear her say what is on her mind. If that is true of man, how much more true is it of God? We have the matchless privilege of sharing our innermost thoughts with God. Of course, we could simply

enter our prayer closets, let God read our minds, and call that prayer. But that's not communion and it's certainly not communication.

We are creatures who communicate primarily through speech. Spoken prayer is obviously a form of speech, a way for us to commune and communicate with God. There is a certain sense in which God's sovereignty should influence our attitude toward prayer, at least with respect to adoration. If anything, our understanding of God's sovereignty should provoke us to an intense prayer life of thanksgiving. Because of such knowledge, we should see that every benefit, every good and perfect gift, is an expression of the abundance of His grace. The more we understand God's sovereignty, the more our prayers will be filled with thanksgiving.

**In what way could God's sovereignty *negatively* affect the prayer of contrition, of confession?** Perhaps we could draw the conclusion that our sin is ultimately God's responsibility and that our confession is an accusation of guilt against God Himself. Every true Christian knows that he cannot blame God for his sin. I may not understand the relationship between divine sovereignty and human responsibility, but I do realize that what stems from the wickedness of my own heart may not be assigned to the will of God. So we must pray because we are guilty, pleading the pardon of the Holy One whom we have offended.

## Does Prayer Change Anything?

**But what about intercession and supplication?** It's nice to talk about the religious, spiritual, and psychological benefits (and whatever else might derive from prayer), but what about the real question—Does prayer make any difference? Does it really change anything? Someone once asked me that question, only in a slightly different manner: "Does prayer change God's mind?" My answer brought storms of protest. I said simply, "No." Now, if the person had asked me, "Does prayer change *things*?" I would have answered, "Of course!"

The Bible says there are certain things God has decreed from all eternity. Those things will inevitably come to pass. If you were to pray individually or if you and I were to join forces in prayer or if all the

Christians of the world were to pray collectively, it would not change what God, in His hidden counsel, has determined to do. If we decided to pray for Jesus not to return, He still would return. You might ask, though, "Doesn't the Bible say that if two or three agree on anything, they'll get it?" Yes, it does, but that passage is talking about church discipline, not prayer requests. So we must take all the biblical teaching on prayer into account and not isolate one passage from the rest. We must approach the matter in light of the whole of Scripture, resisting an atomistic reading.

Again, you might ask, "Doesn't the Bible say from time to time that God repents?" Yes, the Old Testament certainly says so. The book of Jonah tells us that God "**repented of**" the judgment He had planned for the people of Nineveh ([Jonah 3:10, KJV](#)). In using the concept of repentance here, the Bible is describing God, who is Spirit, in what theologians call "**anthropomorphic**" language. Obviously the Bible does not mean that God repented in the way we would repent; otherwise, we could rightly assume that God had sinned and therefore would need a savior Himself. What it clearly means is that God removed the threat of judgment from the people. The Hebrew word *nacham*, translated "**repent**" in the King James Version, means "**comforted**" or "**eased**" in this case. God was comforted and felt at ease that the people had turned from their sin, and therefore He revoked the sentence of judgment He had imposed.

When God hangs His sword of judgment over people's heads, and they repent and He then withholds His judgment, has He really changed His mind?

The mind of God does not change for God does not change. **Things change**, and they change according to His sovereign will, which He exercises through secondary means and secondary activities. The prayer of His people is one of the means He uses to bring things to pass in this world. So if you ask me whether prayer changes things, I answer with an unhesitating "Yes!"

It is impossible to know how much of human history reflects God's immediate intervention and how much God working through human agents reveals. Calvin's favorite example of this was the book of Job. The Sabians and the Chaldeans had taken Job's donkeys and camels. Why? Because Satan had stirred their hearts to do so. But why? Because Satan had received permission

from God to test Job's faithfulness in any way he so desired, short of taking Job's life. **Why had God agreed to such a thing?** For **three reasons**: (1) to silence the slander of Satan; (2) to vindicate Himself; and (3) to vindicate Job from the slander of Satan. All of these reasons are perfectly righteous justifications for God's actions.

By contrast, Satan's purpose in stirring up these two groups was to cause Job to blaspheme God—an altogether wicked motive. But we notice that Satan did not do something supernatural to accomplish his ends. He chose human agents—the Sabeans and Chaldeans, who were evil by nature—to steal Job's animals. The Sabeans and Chaldeans were known for their thievery and murderous way of life. Their will was involved, but there was no coercion; God's purpose was accomplished through their wicked actions.

The Sabeans and Chaldeans were free to choose, but for them, as for us, freedom always means freedom within limits. We must not, however, confuse human freedom and human autonomy. There will always be a conflict between divine sovereignty and human autonomy. There is never a conflict between divine sovereignty and human freedom. The Bible says that man is free, but he is not an autonomous law unto himself.

Suppose the Sabeans and Chaldeans had prayed, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." I'm absolutely certain that Job's animals still would have been stolen, but not necessarily by the Sabeans and Chaldeans. God might have chosen to answer their prayer, but He would have used some other agent to steal Job's animals. There is freedom within limits, and within those limits, our prayers can change things. The Scriptures tell us that Elijah, through prayer, kept the rain from falling. He was not dissuaded from praying by his understanding of divine sovereignty.

### **The Prayers of the Son of God**

No human being has ever had a more profound understanding of divine sovereignty than Jesus. No man ever prayed more fiercely or more effectively. Even in Gethsemane, He requested an option, a different way. When the request was denied, He bowed

to the Father's will. The very reason we pray is because of God's sovereignty, because we believe that God has it within His power to order things according to His purpose. That is what sovereignty is all about—ordering things according to God's purpose. So then, does prayer change God's mind? No. Does prayer change things? Yes, of course.

The promise of the Scriptures is that **"The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working"** ([James 5:16](#)). The problem is that we are not all that righteous. What prayer most often changes is the wickedness and the hardness of our own hearts. That alone would be reason enough to pray, even if none of the other reasons were valid or true.

In a sermon titled **"The Most High, a Prayer-Hearing God,"** Jonathan Edwards gave two reasons why God requires prayer:

"With respect *to God*, prayer is but a sensible acknowledgement of our dependence on him to his glory. As he hath made all things for his own glory, so he will be glorified and acknowledged by his creatures; and it is fit that he should require this of those who would be subjects of his mercy ... [it] is a suitable acknowledgement of our dependence on the power and mercy of God for that which we need, and but a suitable honor paid to the great Author and Fountain of all good.

With respect *to ourselves*, God requires prayer of us ... Fervent prayer many ways tends to prepare the heart. Hereby is excited a sense of our need ... whereby the mind is more prepared to prize [his mercy] ... Our prayer to God may excite in us a suitable sense and consideration of our dependence on God for the mercy we ask, and a suitable exercise of faith in God's sufficiency, so that we may be prepared to glorify his name when the mercy is received." ([The Works of Jonathan Edwards \[Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974\], 2:116](#))

All that God does is for His glory first and for our benefit second. We pray because God commands us to pray, because it glorifies Him, and because it benefits us

# CORAM DEO

## (Before the face of God)

We must never limit God in the methods that He uses to speak to us, but from my experience and observation, I believe there are three main ways that God speaks to us today:

1. His Word
2. His Holy Spirit
3. Other believers in Christ Jesus

The person who desires to hear from God, and who wants to put himself or herself into the best position to hear from God, will follow one of these three methods. In these ways God routinely, daily, and consistently speaks to all people who seek Him.

### Listening to the Holy Spirit

As we walk in the Spirit daily, surrendered to His power, we have the right and privilege to expect anything we need to hear from God. The Holy Spirit living within us and speaking to us ought to be the natural lifestyle of believers. We claim His presence, direction, and guidance by faith.

One of the lines of the Lord's Prayer points toward our daily reliance on the Holy Spirit: **"Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."** I believe that is how the Holy Spirit guides us in an ongoing way each day. He speaks in our hearts a no to everything that would bring us harm, and thus, He delivers us from evil and away from temptation. He also speaks in our hearts a yes to everything that will bring us blessing.

In the Old Testament when men such as King David inquired of the Lord, the question was nearly always put to the Lord in such a way that the answer was yes or no. I believe this is the foremost way that the Holy Spirit speaks to us hour by hour as we walk through our particular set of circumstances. We can never ask too many times of the Holy Spirit, **"Should I do this—yes or no?"** or **"Should I say this—yes or no?"** We will sense in our spirits His word of reply to us. Generally, it will be a sense of enthusiasm and eager desire marked with great joy and freedom, or it will be a sense of foreboding, danger, caution, or need for silence. I find that it is much easier to receive the direction of the Holy Spirit by asking for yes-or-no counsel than to say to Him in general terms, "What do You want me to do?"

Very specifically, the Bible teaches us that the Holy Spirit guides us and gives us God's advice in these ways:

***The Holy Spirit reminds us of what God has said to us and done for us in the past (including God's word to us in the Scriptures and through the life of Jesus).*** Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would testify of Him—in other words, remind His disciples of all that Jesus said and did, and of its appropriate-

ness for their lives. (See [John 15:26–27](#).) Ask the Holy Spirit to remind you continually about what Jesus would be, say, and do if He was walking in your shoes, through your circumstances, today.

***The Holy Spirit gives us words to say.*** After describing for His disciples what would happen at the **"end of the age,"** Jesus encouraged His disciples that the Holy Spirit would teach them what to say in moments of crisis or questioning. We, too, should breathe a prayer for the Holy Spirit to give us the words when we face difficult moments in which we don't know what to say. We can trust God to provide words for us just as surely as we can trust God to meet our other needs. At times, the Holy Spirit may advise us to remain silent.

***The Holy Spirit gives us direction about where to go.*** The apostle Paul said that the Holy Spirit spoke to him when he was on his way to Asia, forbidding him to go there. (See [Acts 16:6–7](#).) We can trust the Holy Spirit to point us in the right direction.

***The Holy Spirit guides our prayer.*** Paul taught the Romans, **"He [the Spirit] makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God"** ([Rom. 8:27](#)). When we don't know how to pray, we should ask the Holy Spirit to pray for us and through us to the Father. That's the sure way we can know that we are always praying in God's will.

As you pray about a particular matter, ask the Holy Spirit to guide your prayer. Wait in silence for Him to bring to your mind and heart various aspects of a situation or of a person's need. You may be surprised at the things the Holy Spirit prompts you to pray—things you had never thought about before.





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## Hebrews 11 – Overview Part 2

In the overview of [Hebrews 11](#), it is important to at least have a fundamental definition of the word “**faith**” as used in this chapter. The word “**faith**”, like most all words in the Greek text, can have different meanings based on the context in which it is used. For instance, the word “**faith**” can refer to the primary body of doctrine provided in the Scriptures, or objectively that system of truth that is actually believed. It can refer to “saving faith” that occurs at the moment of regeneration. It can refer to one’s ongoing confidence in God and His Word. People are said to have been “**obedient to the faith**” which means that they actually embraced the gospel. The Greek word for “**faith**” is often translated as “**assurance**” or “**belief**”.

Now, in the context of [Hebrews 11](#), the word “**faith**” has a specific meaning that is critical to understand. The word “**faith**” occurs without the article here. I.e., it is not talking about the body of doctrine that we believe in and adhere to as the practice of our life. When that meaning is required, the Scriptures would have the article “**the**” in front of it and it

would read “**the faith**”. [Ephesians 4:13](#), for instance, would be a good example of this when it says,

**<sup>13</sup> till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;**

Now, the following are several technical definitions of the word “**faith**” as used in [Hebrews 11](#), and they all provide meaningful insight into what the biblical faith and all of the examples provided in [Hebrews 11](#) is all about. The Greek word is “*pistis*”. Strong’s says that it refers to being persuaded and having an enduring moral conviction. It actually comes from the Greek verb “*peitho*” which means to convince. I.e., the idea of biblical faith is that of being fully convinced and persuaded of something to the point that it governs what an individual does and how they live. We are all convinced of certain things that govern our behavior. None of us would drink poison because we are fully convinced that it will kill us if we drink it. We are all convinced that in the United States that when driving a car that we are to stay in the right hand lane when travelling. We are fully convinced of that and it literally governs how we drive. We are fully persuaded of that fact and how we drive is fully regulated by that personal conviction. It “governs” how we drive and controls our behavior while driving. The importance of this nuance of the meaning is that it means that there is a constancy, a faithfulness, an endurance, and a steadiness in an individual’s profession. I.e., the kind of faith that is being addressed in [Hebrews 11](#) is making the point and addressing the issue that the kind of faith that pleases God ([Hebrews 11:6](#)) is one that has an enduring element to it. The individual is persuaded and convinced of God’s truth and fully maintains that conviction in their life no matter the circumstances or consequences for doing so.

The Complete Word Study Dictionary says that the word means “*firm persuasion, conviction, belief in the truth....*” Vincent’s Word Studies in the New Testament says that the key to understanding the meaning is furnished by [Hebrews 11:27](#) “**as seeing him who is invisible**”. Faith apprehends as a real fact what is not revealed to the senses. It rests on that fact, acts on that fact, and is upheld by that fact in the face of all that seems to contradict it. So, in developing a working definition of the word “**faith**” in [Hebrews 11](#), it is speaking of a firm persuasion which invokes the individual to ful-

ly commit themselves to the charge or power of what it is that they say that they believe. However, and this is a very critical element of what is being defined, it is not just having a firm persuasion or conviction about something, but specifically it is having a firm persuasion and conviction in God and in His Word. So, the working definition would be this: a firm persuasion in God and His Word which invokes the believer to fully commit themselves to the charge and power of what they say that they believe. What is important about this aspect of the definition is that it is an intellectual conviction. It is an activity of the believer's mind and will. It is not that the believer just believes something, but that what they believe is demonstrated by their will and what they choose to do and how they choose to live. I.e., it is not enough to just "say" that we believe certain truths. The reality of biblical faith is firmly rooted in what it actually does. It could be stated this way: Having been intellectually convinced and fully persuaded, we commit ourselves totally to that of which we are convinced and persuaded.

The specific faith identified in [Hebrews 11](#) is one that involves the leaning of the believer's entire personality upon God in absolute trust and confidence in both His power and His goodness. It is never anything less. [Hebrews 11](#) faith is having confidence in God's character, God's motives, and God's abilities. This is really very critical to understand. Why? It is because a believer will never have a meaningful and working faith if they do not have any confidence in the character, motives, and power of God. We are not talking about having a kind of faith that manipulates God to do for us what we may want Him to do, but rather the kind of faith that simply lives the way that God wants the individual to live.

One of the obvious goals of what we do when we study the Scriptures together is to motivate, stimulate, and exhort one another to a genuine and working faith, a practical faith in the living God of the Bible. [Hebrews 10:23-25](#) spoke about certain aspects of this when the author stated,

<sup>23</sup>**Let US hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.** <sup>24</sup>**And let US consider one another in order to stir up love and good works,** <sup>25</sup>**not for-**

**saking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.**

This is a corporate issue, a body of Christ issue. It has often been said that God is not interested in a kind of "Lone Ranger" Christianity. We are members of one another and how each of us lives ultimately has an impact on the whole. Now, what we want to do is to look at some of the practical aspects of biblical faith and look at some of the basic and fundamental elements that make faith practical in a believer's life. This is not intended to be a topical study on faith, but rather an overview of what is involved in having a biblical faith. In reading [Hebrews 11](#), it becomes apparent that nearly every single example provided in this chapter is a testimony of individuals who believed God in the face of often very difficult and trying circumstances. After conversion, biblical faith is not matured without trials and testings. Biblical faith cannot grow in a spiritual vacuum. There is not one major individual in all of the Scriptures whose faith grew apart from trials.

Now, the first principle is simple: **The essential element of a meaningful biblical faith is knowing God and knowing His Word.** The greater a believer's knowledge of God and His Word, the greater will be their capacity and propensity to believe. [Psalm 9:10](#) says,

<sup>10</sup>**And those who know Your name will put their trust in You; for You, LORD, have not forsaken those who seek You.**

The second principle is: **Biblical faith only operates within the will of God.** The object of faith is God, and the objective of faith is the will of God. Unfortunately, many Christians do not accept or even believe that the will of God to be the best thing for their life. In fact, very often Christians are constantly doubting the will of God as it becomes worked out in their life. The Christian culture that we live in is one that very often questions anything that God allows into our lives that may be painful and distressing, or that makes us uncomfortable, or that removes our personal creature conveniences and securities. Generally, many of those types of elements within the believer's life cause them not to believe that the will of God for their life is good, but rather causes them to question God's goodness and His overall purposes for their life. Genuine faith will always be



tested, and very often it is the actual testing that seems to make it harder for the believer to accept the will of God as it is being worked out in their life.

**James 1:2-4** says,

<sup>2</sup>My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, <sup>3</sup> knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. <sup>4</sup>But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

**1 Peter 1:6-7** says,

<sup>6</sup>In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, <sup>7</sup>that the genuineness of your faith, *being* much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,

**Hebrews 10:35-36** states,

<sup>35</sup>Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. <sup>36</sup>For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise:

At this point, we must not only believe, but fully embrace that the will of God is good. **Romans 12:2** states it this way,

<sup>2</sup>And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that **good** and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Too very often what happens in a believer's life is that rather than becoming conformed to the character of Christ, they become conformed to this world. Rather than renewing their mind to the will of God for their life, they fill their mind with cultural thoughts and ideas in which they live. The invariable result is that they do not accept the will of God as being good, acceptable, or perfect, but rather they see it as being bad, unacceptable, and critically flawed.

The third principle is: **To believe that God loves us is to be delivered from the fear of (1) what He might do with us, (2) what He might withhold**

**from us, and (3) what He might allow to happen to us.** **Psalm 84:11** says,

<sup>11</sup>**For the LORD God *is* a sun and shield; the LORD will give grace and glory; no good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly.**

The fourth principle is: **God uses two basic means of increasing a believer's faith - (1) knowledge and (2) trusting.**

It is vital to have a knowledge of God Himself and to have a knowledge of God's Word.

**Romans 10:17** says,

<sup>17</sup>**So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by (through) the word of God.**

The Word of God is what reveals the primary will of God to the believer. The Word of God is His instrument, His means, and His channel through which faith is developed and imparted in the believer's life. It is absolutely essential that a believer have an understanding of the specific and general will of God for their life simply because God does not provide the believer freedom outside of His overall will for their life.

One of the most common misconceptions about faith is that it is a substitute for knowledge. To make it even worse, one of the secular dictionaries actually defined faith as "*believing without evidence*". So, the misconception is that faith takes up where the facts leave off, but in reality nothing could be further from the truth. Biblical faith is based solely on facts revealed in the Word of God. Faith always begins with a knowledge of the Word of God, without which there can be no genuine faith. I have often heard people say something like this – "*I don't know much about the Bible, but I have faith.*" My question to that comment is simple – "*Faith in what?*" Faith is not a substitute for knowledge. Faith is not a spiritual compensation for ignorance. Biblical faith always begins with biblical facts. Just as an example of how this works out practically, a person cannot be saved without knowing some biblical facts about Christ. Salvation is based on the historical, biblical record that Christ died for the sinner's sin, was buried, and resurrected on the third day. Those are the facts of the historical gospel and the work of God in redemption. A person cannot be saved without a meaningful knowledge of the biblical facts.

Faith is not responding to nothing. To the contrary, faith is when a believer responds positively to God's revelation of Himself, of His work, and of His Word. **In order to exercise biblical faith in God, the individual must have biblical facts from God.** Noah had a word from God, Abraham had a word from God, Moses had a word from God, and Paul had a word from God. The principle is simple: **the strength or weakness of a believer's faith will be directly proportional to the accuracy of their knowledge and understanding of the nature and purposes of God as revealed in His Word.** Faith is always a response to God's Word and to the known will of God as revealed in His Word. Noah prepared an ark, Abraham offered Isaac, and Moses forsook the riches of Egypt. Each one of those men had a direct word from God and then they obeyed God. In [Romans 10:18-21](#) it proclaims that Israel heard God and knew what God had spoken, but they did not believe.

[Romans 10:21](#) says,

<sup>21</sup>**But to Israel he says: "All day long I have stretched out My hands To a disobedient and contrary people."**

The word "**disobedient**" means a stubborn refusal to obey and an unwillingness to obey when the individual knows what is right. Spiritually there are very few remedies for disobedience and stubbornness.

It is also vital to trust God. A believer **learns** to trust God by trusting Him. Biblical faith will always be tested so that (1) the believer can know personally where they really are in their walk with God, and (2) so that God can reveal to them that He is faithful to His promises. David, even as a young man, said this in [1 Samuel 17:37](#) when he was asking Saul to let him fight the giant Goliath,

<sup>37</sup>**Moreover David said, "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." And Saul said to David, "Go, and the LORD be with you!"**

David had experienced God's power in his life and it gave him the faith to believe God in the midst of other seemingly overwhelming circumstances. The

point is that God had already proved Himself faithful to David. Biblical faith grows and develops as the believer yields to God's will and discovers that He can be trusted and that His ways yield the deepest fulfillment that their life can experience.

The fifth principle is: **God is able to enable the Christian to believe.** The principle here is that faith is a gift of God just as it was at the believer's conversion.

[Ephesians 2:8](#) says,

<sup>8</sup>**For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,**

So, faith does not depend on our personal ability to believe, but rather on God's ability that enables us to believe. A believer cannot create or generate faith on their own initiative. It is a gift given by God. Please appreciate that nothing in the kingdom of God depends on our personal abilities, but on God's ability.

[2 Corinthians 12:9](#) declares,

<sup>9</sup>**And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.**


So, whatever it is that God asks of the believer is what He will provide for the believer. That is why [Hebrews 11:6](#) says,

<sup>6</sup>**But 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.***

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