

THE REAL THING

Hebrews 11

INTRODUCTION

I think many people thought what these two women were doing was foolish. But I think God was very pleased with the faith of Lottie Moon and Elisabeth Elliot. In fact, I think he was excited to respond to their faith. Why? Because God has said:

And without faith it is impossible to please God. Hebrews 11:6^{NIV}

God is pleased when we live by faith. He is delighted when a person trusts him to do something that isn't going to happen unless God comes through.

Let me say that I'm not just talking about big things. God is pleased when we are trusting him for little things. It may be the faith to keep at a job we hate because you believe God wants to use you there. It may be the faith to sit next to an unpopular boy or girl at school because you believe God will use you in helping him or her become a follower of. It may be the faith to invite your neighbor to church. Faith doesn't have to be just big things. Probably for every big thing we might be trusting God for, there are hundreds of little ways to live by faith.

But this brings up an important point: When we trust God, especially when we trust God for something really big, even something that seems foolish or absurd in the minds of others, how do we know that our faith is genuine and pleasing to God? How do we know that we are not presuming upon God or trying to force God to do something he doesn't want or promise to do?

When you look at the Bible, and in Heb. 11, there are numerous cases of people trusting God for great things, even irrational, or foolish things in the eyes of others.

Just take a look at some of the things God told people to trust him for:

God told Noah to build an ark.

By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. Hebrews 11:7^{NIV}

Do you realize how absurd this was to do? Think of a boat the size of 1 ½ football fields and no chain saws to cut down trees or no electric drills to drill holes. We don't know how long it took Noah to build the ark, but some estimates suggest 50 years or more.

God told Abraham to go to another country.

By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. Hebrews 11:8^{NIV}

Abraham was to pack up his whole family and move, but he didn't even know where? Sounds like a typical man thing—driving but not knowing the way to where you are going.

God told Joshua to march around the wall of Jericho for 7 days,

By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the army had marched around them for seven days. Hebrews 11:30^{NIV}

People, in the name of God, have done some things most people would call crazy—until God brought their faith to reality.

We started a series on faith last week, and my goal in this series is to encourage you, even challenge you, to live by faith and not just learn what it means to live by faith, but to see you actually do it. That means you are trusting God for something that you cannot do by yourself. It may be something big or something small. Size isn't the issue. It is trusting God for something he wants to do in your life or through you. Have you written down something that you are trusting God for?

Let me remind you of our definition of faith:

Def: Faith is being so persuaded that you confidently expect and willingly act as if you already have what you are trusting in.

I am encouraging you to live by faith. Why? Three primary reasons:

1. Faith pleases God.

And without faith it is impossible to please God. Hebrews 11:6^{NIV}

When you are trusting God and living by faith, you are pleasing God.

2. The righteous will live by faith.

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. Galatians 2:20^{NIV}

We are to live the Christian life by faith. Not just trusting God for our salvation, but living our daily lives in ways that show we are depending and relying on God.

3. Some people have the spiritual gift of faith.

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. 8 To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, ... 9 to another faith by the same Spirit. 1 Corinthians 12:7^{NIV}

A person who has the spiritual gift of faith means that they are going to have a faith greater than the average Christian. If you have the spiritual gift of faith, I want to encourage you to use your gift. You will be a blessing to not only yourself, but also our church by stretching us to trust God in greater ways.

Faith pleases God. But where do we draw the line of being presumptuous with God and exercising genuine faith that God will honor and answer?

What qualifications can guide us in having genuine faith? What can help me know my faith is genuine and pleasing to God?

How can I know my faith isn't contrary to what God is willing and eager to do?

1. OUR FAITH MUST BE CONSISTENT WITH THE CHARACTER AND PURPOSES OF GOD

Paul praises God by saying:

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. Ephesians 3:20

God can do immeasurably more than all we ask or imaging. In one sense, that means that anything we could ever ask for, is possible with God. However, it is also true that God will never violate his character.

The Bible also says:

God is not a man, so he does not lie.

He is not human, so he does not change his mind.

Has he ever spoken and failed to act?

Has he ever promised and not carried it through?

Numbers 23:19

NLT

God is not only true, he is faithful. Every promise that God has made, he will keep. Every promise God has made, he has the power and resources to make it happen.

Here's a faith filter:

Is what I am trusting God for consistent with the character and purposes of God?

Related to this is a second qualification.

2. OUR FAITH MUST BE CONSISTENT WITH THE BIBLE

Jesus declared in a prayer to God:

Your word is truth. John 17:17

God's word is truth. God will never violate his word and will never want us to do something that is contrary to his word. He will never give us what is against his will.

Jesus links God's word and our faith with the importance of saturating ourselves in the Bible:

If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. John 15:7^{NIV}

Notice that Jesus tells us to ask whatever we wish, but, first, we must remain in him and in his words. In other words, we must soak in God's word, let God's word saturate our minds and our hearts so that we would only ask what is consistent with God's word.

A second faith filter is:

Is what I am trusting God for consistent with the Word of God?

A third qualification is:

3. OUR FAITH MUST BE CONSISTENT WITH WHAT THE HOLY SPIRIT HAS SAID TO US

This is a very subjective factor, but it is nonetheless true and valid.

Throughout the Bible, God has spoken to people about what he wants them to do. In the O.T. he often sent an angel to speak to a person; sometimes God sent Jesus himself as the pre-incarnate Jesus, telling them to do something. In the N.T. though, and now in this age that we are living in, God has spoken to people and now speaks to us primarily through the Holy Spirit.

When God wanted the Ethiopian official to hear the good news, the Bible says:

The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it." Acts 8:29^{NIV}

When God wanted to open the door to reach Gentiles, he gave Peter a vision and said:

While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Simon, three men are looking for you." Acts 10:19

And in recounting the story later to the Church leaders, Peter says:

The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them.; Acts 11:12^{NIV}

The Holy Spirit continues to speak to us today.

For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. Romans 8:14^{NIV}

What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us. 1 Corinthians 2:12^{NIV}

The Holy Spirit will guide us and direct us. The Spirit will give us insight in the application of God's word to our lives.

But let me add a caution here. The H.S. is not going to give us any new truth beyond what the Bible teaches, nor is the Spirit going to contradict the clear teaching of the Bible or of the character of God and have you do something that is against the Bible.

How does the Holy Spirit speak to us? In two primary ways. One is through the Bible. As we read the

Bible, the Holy Spirit may make the Bible come alive, so to speak, and impress us that he is speaking to us personally. The truth of God is personalized for our life in way that God uses his word to direct us.

The other way is by the Spirit impressing us with his thoughts. It might be a plan or vision of something God wants us to do. In a number of cases people who have started ministries or been called to go to particular places as missionaries, all started with God putting into the heart or mind of a person what he wants them to do.

In either case, God is speaking to us and wants us to step out in faith to do that which he is telling us to do.

The third filter:

Is what I am trusting God for consistent with the Holy Spirit?

A fourth qualifier is:

4. OUR FAITH MUST RESULT IN BRINGING GOD HONOR

When what we are trusting God for comes to reality, who gets the credit? How will it honor God?

Jesus qualified his open-ended invitation to pray for whatever we want this way:

*John 14:12 Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. 13 And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that **the Father may be glorified in the Son.** 14 You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.*

Jesus is willing to do anything we might ask for as long as God is glorified and honored. God must get the credit and honor. That makes sure that our motive is pleasing to God as well as the request itself.

A fourth filter is:

Is what I am trusting God for consistent with honoring God?

Next Steps:

1. Ask God to give you something to trust him for.
2. Run it through the faith filters.
3. Live by faith.