

TAKE YOUR FAITH TO THE GYM

Hebrews 11

INTRODUCTION

There are some statements that Jesus made that drive me crazy. In one he made to his disciples after they saw the fig tree that withered he said:

“Have faith in God,” Jesus answered. ²³ “Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them. ²⁴ Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. Mark 11:22
NIV

When I read that statement, I feel like a pipsqueak in my faith.

And it doesn't get any better. When the disciples could not cast a demon out of a boy, the disciples asked Jesus why they couldn't. And Jesus replied:

He replied, “Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.” Matthew 17:20
NIV

These are challenging statements to me because I want to honor God and bring him much glory. I want to live my faith in such a way to please him, and, as the Bible says, without faith it is impossible to please God.

Maybe that's why I love the story about Jesus and the Roman Centurion. We read: *When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help. ⁶ “Lord,” he said, “my servant lies at home paralyzed, suffering terribly.”*

⁷ Jesus said to him, “Shall I come and heal him?”

⁸ The centurion replied, “Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. ⁹ For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and that one, ‘Come,’ and he comes. I say to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.”

¹⁰ When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him, “Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. Matthew 8:5-10
NIV

Jesus was so impressed with this soldier because he had such great faith. Normally, it was Jesus who amazed people, but here, the soldier amazed Jesus.

I ask myself the question, “Has my faith ever amazed Jesus?” Let me ask you: “Has your faith ever amazed Jesus?”

The Bible says:

Without faith it is impossible to please God. Hebrews 11:6

Faith pleases God. That's the key truth in our series that I want each of us to embrace

and live.

I want to please God. That means I need to live by faith. When I live by faith God is pleased. I don't know about you, but I want to not just live by some faith, I want to have great faith. That means that my faith needs to grow. Does your faith need to grow?

Here's my **key point** that I want you to take away this morning: "**God can grow my faith.**"

Transition a few months after Jesus' resurrection when the disciples were arrested for preaching about Jesus. The religious leaders couldn't figure out what to do with the disciples:

They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

So what did the disciples do?

*⁴¹ The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. ⁴² Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they **never stopped teaching** and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah. Acts 5:40-42*

Their faith was stronger and more courageous. Quite a contrast from earlier times with Jesus.

Faith pleases God. And, God can grow our faith.

Let's review a couple of things from our first message.

Faith is made up of these parts:

Need/Want + Knowledge of God + Persuasion + action = reality

Def 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.

Growing our faith is another way of saying perfecting our faith. God wants our faith to grow; he wants to perfect our faith. And Jesus can help us:

...looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith. Hebrews 12:2

Jesus perfects our faith.

So, how can we increase or perfect our faith?

God can help us grow our faith when we:

1. Inform your faith about God

Here's a great quote about God:

*"Faith is knowing that God is real and that you can trust in his promises. You cannot trust someone who isn't there, nor can you rely on someone whose promises are not reliable. That's why faith is talked about as the substance of things hoped for and as the evidence of things not seen. Both words carry with them a sense of reality. Our hope is not wishful thinking. Faith does not make God real. On the contrary, **faith is the***

response to a real God who has made Himself known to us.” Ramsden

As we have said, faith always comes back to the object of our faith. And the object of our faith, the one in whom we are trusting to make our faith happen is God. The more we learn and experience God, the more potential we have to trust God for bigger faith.

Here’s another verse I want all of you to memorize:

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 3:20-21

I love this verse. It reminds us that God is so great, we can’t even begin to imagine what God can do.

Another important aspect of God is that God doesn’t change.

James 1:17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

God does not change. God doesn’t lose power or strength with the passing of time. God’s wisdom and knowledge do not fade with time like a person with dementia. God’s the same God today as he was with Noah, with Abraham and with Moses.

And it’s not just God’s strength that we need to remind ourselves of. The other aspects of God’s character show us how much God wants to do: God is merciful and full of grace—he wants to do things for people. God is full of all wisdom and knowledge—he wants to help us know how to carry out great projects for him. God is caring—he wants to help us live by faith even in the little aspects of our lives.

The point is, the bigger God becomes to you, the bigger your faith will be. Little God = Little Faith; Big God = Big Faith

A second way to grow your faith is to:

2. Remind your faith of what God has done

The first expression of faith in Heb. 11 focuses back on creation:

By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible. Hebrews 11:3

When we look at the creation around us, it’s a daily reminder of the greatness of God and what he has done. When we remember what God has done in the past, it’s a reminder of what God can do in the future.

Moses reminded the Israelites to remember what God had done:

Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Deuteronomy 5:15

The Israelites were in a hopeless situation, but God brought them out of Egypt by his power.

King David writes:

*I remember the days of long ago;
I meditate on all your works*

and consider what your hands have done. Psalms 143:5

David reflected on what God had done to remind him of what God can still do.

The point is that since God doesn't change, what he has done in the past is what he can still do in the present and future. And what God has done for you is a reminder of God's love and care for you and how he continues to want to help and provide for you.

E.g. One of the lessons I have learned is that no matter where I move to, God will always be there, and will always have a church family for me to be a part of. I have moved from my home in LA to Knoxville, from Knoxville to Denver, from Denver to near Santa Rosa, from Santa Rosa to San Jose, and from San Jose to Nashua. Now, as we think about moving from Nashua, I don't know exactly where we are going to be moving to in the future. But as I think back and remember over the past 44 years, I am reminded that wherever I have moved, God has provided all I need, including a wonderful church family. I am not worried or anxious about the future because God has shown himself faithful every move I've made and I have the faith that he will do so again in the future.

Your faith can grow as you remember what God has done for you.

A third way we can help our faith to grow is to:

3. Feed your faith by reading the Bible

D.L. Moody: "I prayed for faith and thought it would strike me like lightning. But faith did not come. One day I read, 'Now faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.' I had closed my Bible and prayed for faith. I now began to study my Bible and faith has been growing ever since."

As you think about having greater faith, do you think it's just going to come out of the blue?

Reading the Bible relates to both our first and second points about informing your faith about God and what God has done. The Bible reveals God and God's history with mankind.

In addition to telling us about God himself and what he has done, the Bible also tells us two important things that relate to faith:

- What God wants to do in our lives and in the world
- God's promises

The important point about this is that what God wants to do in our lives and every promise that God has made is a promise that we can claim and trust God to do in our lives.

Paul reminds the Christians in Corinth:

For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us—by me and Silas and Timothy—was not "Yes" and "No," but in him it has always been "Yes." 20 For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God. 2 Corinthians 1:19-20 ^{NIV}

And Peter tells us:

His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge

*of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. 4 Through these he has given us his very **great and precious promises**, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.*

2 Peter 1:3-4 NIV

God has given us all these promises that pertain to life and godliness. And every promise God has made to us in the Bible is “Yes” in Christ. God has never broken a promise and he has never failed to fulfill a promise. They are fulfilled through Jesus. That means you can take any promise God has made for us and pray that for yourself with the faith that God will fulfill it.

But let me add two qualifiers:

- You need to make sure you are interpreting and applying the Bible in the right way; and
- You need to be patient because God doesn’t automatically respond to your faith in a matter of hours or days.

Notice how Jesus tied together faith and perseverance when he wrote to the church in Thyatira:

I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first. Revelation 2:19 NIV

Jesus saw their faith and their perseverance. When God wants to grow our faith, he also wants to develop our character, and he may do this by stretching our faith through trials and perseverance.

James begins his book:

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. ⁴ Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. James 1:2-4 NIV

If you are having trouble coming up with something to trust God for, start with any of the promises God has made to us in the Bible.

A fourth way to help your faith grow is to:

4. Exercise your faith by action

Many of you have had surgeries of one kind or another, such as knee or hip replacements. When that happens, if you stay in bed too long, your muscles will start to weaken because of inactivity. That’s why doctors get people up and going as quickly after a surgery as possible. If you don’t use your muscles for some time, they atrophy and weaken.

Exercising your faith is another way of saying putting your faith into action. Remember what the Bible says in James:

For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

James 2:26 ESV

Faith without action is dead. Faith must be acted upon. And every time you act on your faith, you strengthen it and potentially grow it like a muscle.

When you see God respond to your faith, your confidence grows. Your view of God grows. You build on your previous experiences to be able to trust God in greater ways.

That's like my moving to all the different places we have lived.

Faith pleases God. God can grow our faith.

Next Steps:

My next steps is very simple. In your bulletin is a sheet that says, "I am trusting God..." What I want to challenge you to do is to finish this sentence:

"I am trusting God to do..."

"I am trusting God for..."

Spend some time with God and ask God, what he wants you to trust him for. It can be something small; it can be something large. But let God give you something that you can trust him for. Then write it out, and put it on the bulletin board in the lobby. Wouldn't you love to see the bulletin board covered with ways that we are trusting God?