



*Joe Gerick*

After serving as superintendent of Northwest Yearly Meeting, I spent five years as associate pastor at Rose Valley Friends Church (Washington) where I was greatly blessed to work with Jeff Dumke. I left there in June, 2009, and am now working as a project manager for Columbia Analytical Services. So after 17 years in full-time ministry I find myself working in the secular world, which is a very interesting experience. I enjoy my job and the people I work with a great deal. I am an elder at Shiloh Christian Fellowship which meets in a school in Kelso, Washington. I continue to teach the Bible to those who are interested and preach occasionally.

*BIBLE READING: Galatians 5:1-6*

In Galatians Paul says that what really counts is “faith expressed through love.” This phrase must be the most concise statement of the Christian experience ever penned. And while the concept of love seems to be well understood, the concept of faith continues to confuse many people. Some think it is a spiritual ether that God bestows on individuals. Others see it as a power to be used. Some despair for their apparent lack of it. Others name it and claim it. If faith is so central to the Christian life, we must attempt to understand it.

Simply put, faith is a gift from God that gives us the ability to believe that what he says is true. While it's obviously a gift from God since he gives us all of our abilities, its use is dependent on us. In most aspects of our spiritual life, we are colaborers with God. Why he has chosen to make us his colaborers is a mystery, but that he has so chosen is quite clear. Regarding faith, God gives us the ability to believe, but as his colaborers we must exercise this ability to empower faith.

Scripture shows that four steps are necessary to forge the “chain of faith.”

1. God gives us a message.
2. We believe that what God says is true.
3. We then act on what God has told us.
4. God does what he says he will do.

If any one of the first three steps is missing, then faith will not be empowered to completion.

*SONG: Faith Is the Victory*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Father, raise up within me an awareness of your gift called faith so that the world may see it expressed in my life.*

—Joe Gerick

*BIBLE READING: Matthew 6:25-34*

The first step in the chain of faith is receiving the messages God gives us. These messages typically come in two forms. God's messages to all believers are given in the Bible. As we study it, we can list his commands and promises that are messages to us for living the Christlike life. Occasionally God sends a personal message to us through dreams, visions, angelic visitations, or more commonly, convictions or intuition. If we choose to believe these messages and act on them, we glorify God and release his power into the world. When we fail to believe them, we dishonor God and inhibit the completion of his will upon the earth.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus chided the Jews for their lack of faith. Throughout the entire Old Testament God had told the Jews that he was their heavenly Father and would care for and protect them if they would obey his commands. Over thousands of years he had been true to his word acting as the Israelites' shield, their provider, and sustainer. Yet Jesus perceived that those to whom he spoke continued to worry about the things of the world—what to eat, what to drink, what to wear—rather than the things of the Spirit. Jesus asked them why they worried about these things when the Father had promised to provide them. Such worry and anxiousness showed that they didn't believe God's message of provision. Jesus called them people of little faith.

Hannah Whitall Smith wrote, "Remember always that there are two things which are more utterly incompatible even than oil and water, and these two are trust and worry."

*SONG: We Thank You Lord*

*PRA YER SUGGESTION: Father, forgive me for my lack of faith that displays itself in worry.*

—Joe Gerick

*BIBLE READING: Matthew 14:25-33*

Most messages from God apply to all believers and are presented in the Bible. Occasionally, however, God gives a message to an individual. In this case Jesus gave a message to Peter that if he would step out of the boat, he could also walk upon the water. Peter chose to believe the message and exercised his faith by stepping out of the boat. The message was given, the message was believed, action was taken on the basis of that belief, and the power of God was released to allow Peter to walk upon the water.

But as Peter got farther from the boat his faith wavered. He began to doubt that what Jesus had said was true even though he was currently experiencing its reality! When his faith wavered he broke the conditions required for God's power to flow in a miraculous way and began to sink into the sea. Then Jesus caught him up and said, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

This event teaches us that faith can be gained and it can be lost. In many cases God has chosen to let our faith control the application of his power. It's incredible but true.

Another lesson we should learn from this event is that specific messages to individuals do not apply to other people. The fact that Jesus told Peter he could walk on the water does not mean that everyone else can. To believe what God says is true is faith. To believe what God has not said is presumption. Faith healers and name-it-and-claim-it proponents often exemplify more presumption than faith.

*SONG: Teach Me Thy Way, O Lord*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Father, I thank you for holding my hand during times of wavering faith.*

—Joe Gerick

*BIBLE READING: Matthew 8:5-10*

The Gospels are filled with examples of people who demonstrated varying degrees of faith. In this story the centurion demonstrated great faith. But what was God's message that the centurion believed? Apparently it was that Jesus had the power to heal the sick. Whether this message was stated in words is unclear. However, the message was made unmistakable by Jesus' actions, for by the time of this story he had healed many, many people. Indeed, his signs and wonders attracted multitudes wherever he went.

The fact that the centurion asked Jesus to heal his servant demonstrated faith. However, his belief that Jesus had the authority from God to heal at a distance with just a word was called by Jesus "great faith." This faith far exceeded that of most of the Jews who believed that Jesus could heal but that He needed to be with the afflicted person in order to lay hands on him or some such thing.

These examples show us that faith isn't necessarily an on/off switch—that you either have it or you don't. Rather, faith comes in degrees. The strength of faith is measured by its ability to believe less and less probable messages. Some messages from God might just seem unlikely. For example, God may give you assurance that you will get a job despite great odds to the contrary. Other messages seem impossible, requiring a miracle to bring them about, such as receiving the assurance that a loved one will be healed from a terminal illness. Stronger faith believes the less likely messages.

As we exercise our faith to believe greater things, it will grow (Romans 4:19-20).

*SONG: Through It All*

*PRAAYER SUGGESTION: Father, lead us into life experiences that will increase our faith.*

—Joe Gerick

*BIBLE READING: James 2:12-26*

Faith is believing what God says is true. And sometimes our belief is all the response that is necessary to complete the chain of faith and allow God's power to flow. For example, God may assure us during a difficult situation that all will be well. Our response to his message is simply to believe and not be anxious. However, sometimes our belief must lead to obedience and action. This is step three in the chain of faith.

For example, God's message to Abraham was to sacrifice Isaac. In response, Abraham left immediately with the child to make the sacrifice. James says, "You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did." If Abraham believed the message but disobeyed and didn't act, then his faith would not have been real. Rather it would have been dead faith. When he acted on his faith, he completed the chain of faith and allowed God's power to flow into the world.

Jesus told a lawyer that the two greatest commandments are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. Upon these two commandments rest all the Law and Prophets. James says that we can't claim to have faith in Jesus Christ while disobeying his commands. If we say that we have faith but refuse to assist those who go without clothes and daily food, then we fail to act upon our faith. And faith without action is dead.

*SONG: Faith of Our Fathers.*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Father, may we continually glorify you by enlivening our faith with obedience.*

—Joe Gerick

*BIBLE BEADING: John 14:9-18*

Jesus said, “Anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father.” Few words spoken by Jesus regarding faith have been more misunderstood. Health-and-wealth advocates, name-it-and-claim-it prophets have used these words to remove God from his throne and to put their own desires in his place.

Taken superficially it appears that believers were being given carte blanche to God's power. This belief has created untold confusion, heartbreak, and anguish for those who have sought unsuccessfully to move God's hand according to their own desires. The key to understanding these statements lies in three words—“in my name.” Jesus was telling us that we could exercise our faith just as he had exercised his. But even he consistently followed the chain of faith that allowed God's power to flow into the world. He received God's message; he believed the message; and he prayed and acted in obedience to the message. Indeed, he only did what he saw the Father doing and only spoke what he heard the Father saying.

If we seek the general messages of God in the Scripture and abide in his presence to hear his special word to us, then we may exercise our faith just as Jesus did and see the hand of God move in the world. To attempt to believe a message that is not sent is presumption and places our desires above his will.

*SONG: I'll Live for Him*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Father, teach us to express our faith just as Jesus did. May we believe and then pray in his name.*

—Joe Gerick

*BIBLE READING: Genesis 12:1-4; 15:1-6; 21:1-6*

In many ways our society and culture work against the exercise of faith. Television and movies assure us that any problem can be solved in an hour or two. This constant subliminal message serves to drain the patience required for persevering faith. We need to remember that God measures time differently than we do. Even those with the gift of patience expect to see some “progress” in a few months or a few years. How many of us would continue to have faith in a promise after 24 years of no progress? Well, that's what happened to Abraham. God promised him a son, but after 24 years there was still no offspring. But Abraham had persevering faith. He continued to believe God's promise and in the 25th year the hand of God moved and Isaac was born.

God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He has always been faithful to his word. He is faithful to his word. He will continue to be faithful to his word. Persevering faith trusts in God's faithfulness regardless of delays. It believes that no force in heaven or earth can stop the movement of God's hand as long as the chain of faith is forged, and it fills its link in this chain by believing the Word of God until his message is fulfilled.

*SONG: My Faith Has Found a Resting Place*

*PRAAYER SUGGESTION: Father, may we stand as stalwarts in your kingdom; examples of persevering faith, never wavering until your word is accomplished.*

—Joe Gerick