

*As he traveled through Galilee, he came to Cana, where he had turned the water into wine. There was a government official in nearby Capernaum whose son was very sick.<sup>47</sup> When he heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went and begged Jesus to come to Capernaum to heal his son, who was about to die.*

<sup>48</sup> *Jesus asked, “Will you never believe in me unless you see miraculous signs and wonders?”<sup>49</sup> The official pleaded, “Lord, please come now before my little boy dies.”*

<sup>50</sup> *Then Jesus told him, “Go back home. Your son will live!” And the man believed what Jesus said and started home.*

<sup>51</sup> *While the man was on his way, some of his servants met him with the news that his son was alive and well.<sup>52</sup> He asked them when the boy had begun to get better, and they replied, “Yesterday afternoon at one o’clock his fever suddenly disappeared!”<sup>53</sup> Then the father realized that that was the very time Jesus had told him, “Your son will live.” And he and his entire household believed in Jesus.<sup>54</sup> This was the second miraculous sign Jesus did in Galilee after coming from Judea.*

John says it was a government official who had a sick son. This man would have no doubt been an official of Herod’s court and was a man of great influence and power. He would have been a man of great wealth. Here was a man who had it all in his world, except for one thing – his young son was seriously sick. The father had watched his son’s life ebb away. Death was imminent and as a result the father’s life was full of anguish and misery. No doubt all of us have felt anguish and the tension over something that is happening in our lives over which we have no control.

Picture: On March 1 1932, famous pilot Charles Lindberg’s son was taken from his home and held for ransom. Later the boy was found dead not far from the home. It was a kidnapping that gripped the nation but especially the parents. If fact Lindberg did everything he could to find and save his little boy. Someone was quoted as saying “Poor old Lindy. Tonight he’s worth six million dollars and he would give every cent of it to have his boy back.”

Nothing hurts quite as bad as an affliction falling on one of our children. This man was in the middle of it with no relief in sight.

In Job 5:6-7, we read these words, “For hardship does not spring from the soil, nor does trouble sprout from the ground. Yet man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward.”

There are many things that money can’t buy. It can buy a king-sized bed but it cannot buy sleep. Money can buy a great house but it cannot buy a home. Money can buy a companion, but it cannot buy a close friend. Money can buy books, but it cannot buy brains! Money can buy a church building but it cannot buy an entrance into heaven. As this story suggests money cannot buy health and life.

This man heard about Jesus and he didn't send a servant or an employee he went himself. We see several movements in this story as this man comes to the Source of our faith. (Author and Finisher of our faith)

### **Moving from desperation and doubt to direction**

*As he traveled through Galilee, he came to Cana, where he had turned the water into wine. There was a government official in nearby Capernaum whose son was very sick.<sup>47</sup> When he heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went and begged Jesus to come to Capernaum to heal his son, who was about to die.* John 4:46-47 NLT

He came to Jesus and begged. He was desperate. It seems that Jesus gives him a rather unfeeling answer.

*<sup>48</sup> Jesus asked, "Will you never believe in me unless you see miraculous signs and wonders?"<sup>49</sup> The official pleaded, "Lord, please come now before my little boy dies."* John 4:48-49 NLT

The man poured out his heart to the Lord and it seems like Jesus throws a figurative glass of water in the man's face. In actuality His comment was full of grace that didn't distract the man at all. C.S. Lewis in his biography, Surprised by Joy, relates how he was brought kicking and struggling into the kingdom of God, his eyes darting every which way for a way of escape. Then he reflects, "The hardness of God is kinder than the softness of men, and the compulsion is our liberation."

Jesus words are not meant for just this nobleman but He longed for the thronging crowds to come to know Him. I believe that He intended for these words to prod the man on to a higher level of faith and trust.

Jesus touches directly with our weakness when it comes to our faith. Many of these folks were following Jesus as if He were some kind of religious freak show. "Hurry, hurry, don't miss the latest miracle. Get your popcorn here. Crowd in close so you can see the latest miracle." Humanity will flock to the latest thing. It is in our nature to follow the crowd but it should never be assumed that being part of a church or crowd means that you are following Christ.

Let me assure you our faith must not be built on signs and wonders but on the knowledge of what we know and believe about God. Jesus had every intention of healing this man's son but he needed to move him from the shallows of doubt and desperation and the only way to do that was to get him to focus on Christ Himself.

I love the fact that this father didn't argue with Jesus or try to defend his position. He just pleaded, "Lord, come before he dies." He cried out for mercy. When we are in trying circumstances it is important that we focus our attention on Christ despite what it looks like. Classic writer John Bunyan wrote these words:

*"I was driven to such straits that I must of necessity go to Jesus; and if he had met me with drawn sword in his hand, I would sooner have thrown myself upon the edge of the sword than have gone away from him; for I knew him to be my last hope."*

When He knew He had his attention Jesus began to give him some direction.

### **Moving from direction to dedication**

<sup>50</sup> *Then Jesus told him, "Go back home. Your son will live!" And the man believed what Jesus said and started home.* John 4:50 NLT

Jesus granted him the healing he sought but refused to go with him to Cana. The only thing He gave him was His word. Here again I believe Christ was trying to elevate the man's faith to a new level.

Jesus said, "Go back home. Your son will live". And the man believed Him. It's as simple as that. When God gives you directions it is imperative that you follow the directions. He didn't go with the man as requested. He didn't hold his hand He just simply gave the man His word.

And the man believed! Amazing! There was no whining or begging for just a little sign. There was no pleading, no insistence or arguing. He just simply believed. Something radical happened inside this man. Our world tells us that "seeing is believing" but when it comes to our faith nothing could be further from the truth. In the father's case, "believing was seeing."

I want you to note a passage of scripture and look at it later. It is Hebrews 11. We are going to come back to it in a few moments but for now I want to point out the first verse.

*"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.* KJV

*"And what is faith? Faith gives substance to our hopes, and makes us certain of realities we do not see."* NEB

*What is faith? It is the confident assurance that what we hope for is going to happen. It is the evidence of things we cannot yet see.* NLT

Faith sees the unseen. Believing is seeing and on the basis of Jesus' words this man saw his little boy's health restored. He believed so strongly that John says, "...he believed what Jesus said and started home."

Do you believe what Jesus is saying to you? Do you embrace a verse of scripture like Romans 8:28 and believe that no matter what happens: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to His purpose."

When we run our tests of faith through the lens of this scripture it is imperative that allow our faith in God to grow and rise up within us to a new level.

## Moving from dedication to discipleship

<sup>51</sup> While the man was on his way, some of his servants met him with the news that his son was alive and well. <sup>52</sup> He asked them when the boy had begun to get better, and they replied, “Yesterday afternoon at one o’clock his fever suddenly disappeared!” <sup>53</sup> Then the father realized that that was the very time Jesus had told him, “Your son will live.” **And he and his entire household believed in Jesus.** John 4:51-53 NLT

Incredible! Let me try to help you understand just how incredible this man’s faith was. Notice that when he arrived home and asked when the boy began to get better they replied “Yesterday at one o’ clock”

If this father had left Jesus at one o’ clock in the afternoon he would have been home by five in the evening. It was a short eighteen mile trip by horseback but amazingly he did not return home until the next day. Just think about that for a moment.

If I had a sick child that was at the point of death and I had traveled somewhere to find a cure only to be told he was better now. With no way to communicate with my family I would not let anything stand in the way of going back immediately to check on my son. Maybe it would be a lack of faith on my part. . .but I find it astounding that this man spent the night before returning home. The only explanation that I can find is that his faith was just that strong! He believed so thoroughly in what Jesus had said that he stayed over and did not return till the next day.

Listen. We all have problems and pressures that come into our lives but if we could just learn to trust in the face of our worried breathless moments when life seems to be standing still how much better off we would be.

Think about this. He no doubt rode to Jesus at a breathtaking gallop. He probably ran his horse as much as he could without hurting the animal but the ride back was in faith. I believe it was a leisurely ride because faith had taken hold.

Faith doesn’t come from within you. It is not your strength but it is the gift of God. When we reach out to Him for faith He will give it to us by causing us to have to believe.

*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,<sup>9</sup> not of works, lest anyone should boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.* Ephesians 2:8-10 NKJV

Now for a few moments I want to walk us through a little assessment of our faith.

### **Signs of discipleship: (These are actually action steps that we can take to increase our faith)**

Embrace the facts of the word of God                      Knowing

*So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.* Romans 10:17 NKJV

If you want your faith to grow and be strong open up God's word and get into it every day. Know it. Know the stories. Read them over and over and you will never exhaust the ability of the Holy Spirit to show you something different each time you read it.

The thought of trying to be a Christfollower or a Christian without reading the Bible is as absurd as saying you are a pilot without reading a manual on flying or believing that you are a doctor without ever studying the anatomy or keeping up on the changes in medicine.

While God's word never changes it will change you constantly as you read it!

Exercise your faith

Being

Romans 10:17 says, "Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ." And one of my favorite phrases from the Bible is, "Let the word of Christ dwell in your richly." (Colossians 3:16)

MacLaren of Manchester wrote these words many years ago about exercising our faith. "The way to increase faith is to exercise faith. And the true parent of perfect faith is the experience of the blessings that come from the crudest, rudest, narrowest, blindest, feeblest faith that a man can exercise. Trust Him as you can, do not be afraid of inadequate conceptions, or a feeble grasp. Trust Him as you can, and He will give you so much more than you expected that you will trust Him more."

Every one of us will have opportunities to grow in faith if we but take them. When things come into our lives that are out of our control if we would but turn to the word of God and let it instruct us and speak to us so that we would believe it and act on it our faith would grow.

Let me give you one more sign of a healthy faith. If you believe and exercise faith your family will come along with you.

*<sup>51</sup> While the man was on his way, some of his servants met him with the news that his son was alive and well. <sup>52</sup> He asked them when the boy had begun to get better, and they replied, "Yesterday afternoon at one o'clock his fever suddenly disappeared!" <sup>53</sup> Then the father realized that that was the very time Jesus had told him, "Your son will live." **And he and his entire household believed in Jesus.** John 4:51-53 NLT*

Encourage your family

Doing

There was an outburst of faith in this man's home! When he returned home and told his story he led his family to Christ. I don't know any other way to raise a family than to expose them to faith in Christ. I am not talking about just dropping them off at church for a weekly dose of religious instruction but I am talking about them seeing it in you.

You may be a father or mother or a grandparent but your connection to God will be the link for your children and grandchildren. How close are you living to Christ? How much of your life is based on the word of God and not the latest self-help book?

Your kids and your family are being impacted by your level of commitment to Christ. Your values and priorities are going to be caught by them because more is caught than taught.

I wish somehow I could get you to see this. I wish somehow you could grasp that your love of this world and embracing the entertainment filth that we set before our kids for hours on end in our homes does more to shape them than an hour at church.

I wish you could see that your commitment to things other than God and godliness are setting the course in the hearts of your kids because they are reading you like a book.

Let me close by addressing the toughest part of having faith. When I began to think this week about Jesus healing this man's son I tried to find a story in the Bible where someone wasn't rescued by God. Where God didn't answer a prayer like the person was hoping He would.

You know what I found? I found the ultimate story of God not giving the desired answer.

It was Jesus in a garden praying.

*"He walked away, about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed,<sup>42</sup> "Father, if you are willing, please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine."<sup>43</sup> Then an angel from heaven appeared and strengthened him.<sup>44</sup> He prayed more fervently, and he was in such agony of spirit that his sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood"* Luke 22:41-44 NLT

God heard His prayer but didn't deliver Him from the crucifixion. An angel strengthened Him but He still had to go through it.

Listen very carefully. There will be times when you and I just have to go through it. There will be sickness. There will be tragedy and loss. There will be death but if we can somehow grasp the truth of faith in Christ He will never leave us or forsake us.

I want to encourage you to go to Hebrews 11 this week and read the whole chapter. It is a chapter about people that had faith.

I want to close today by sharing the word of God with you. Listen to these words:

*"All these people died still believing what God had promised them. They did not receive what was promised, but they saw it all from a distance and welcomed it. They agreed that they were foreigners and nomads here on earth.<sup>14</sup> Obviously people who say such things are looking forward to a country they can call their own.<sup>15</sup> If they had longed for the country they came from, they could have gone back.<sup>16</sup> But they were looking for a better place, a heavenly homeland. That is why God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them."* Hebrews 11:13-15 NLT

*How much more do I need to say? It would take too long to recount the stories of the faith of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and all the prophets.<sup>33</sup> By faith these people*

*overthrew kingdoms, ruled with justice, and received what God had promised them. They shut the mouths of lions,<sup>34</sup> quenched the flames of fire, and escaped death by the edge of the sword. Their weakness was turned to strength. They became strong in battle and put whole armies to flight.<sup>35</sup> Women received their loved ones back again from death.*

*But others were tortured, refusing to turn from God in order to be set free. They placed their hope in a better life after the resurrection.<sup>36</sup> Some were jeered at, and their backs were cut open with whips. Others were chained in prisons.<sup>37</sup> Some died by stoning, some were sawed in half, and others were killed with the sword. Some went about wearing skins of sheep and goats, destitute and oppressed and mistreated.<sup>38</sup> They were too good for this world, wandering over deserts and mountains, hiding in caves and holes in the ground.*

<sup>39</sup> *All these people earned a good reputation because of their faith, yet none of them received all that God had promised.* Hebrews 11:32-39 NLT

“The three year old felt secure in his father’s arms as dad stood in the middle of the pool. But dad, for fun, began walking slowly toward the deep end, gently chanting, ‘Deeper and deeper and deeper,’ as the water rose higher and higher on the child. The lad’s face registered increasing degrees of panic, and held all the more tightly to his father, who of course, easily touched the bottom.

Had the little boy been able to analyze his situation, he’d have realized there was no reason for increased anxiety. The water’s depth in any part of the pool was over his head. Even in the shallowest part, had he not been held up, he would have drowned. His safety anywhere in the pool depended on Father.

At various points in our lives, all of us feel we are getting out of our depth – problems abound, a job lost, someone dies. Our temptation is to panic, for we fell – we’ve lost control. Yet, as with the child in the pool, the truth is we’ve never been in control over the most valuable things of life. We’ve always been held up by the grace of God, our Father that does not change. God is never out of His depth and therefore we’re as safe when we’re ‘going deeper’ as we have ever been.” [Craig Larson. Illustrations for Preaching and Teaching. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993) p. 214.]

Prayer for faith.