

FULL FAITH PART 6

**HINDRANCES
TO FULL FAITH**



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The Fellowship of Ailbe

Hindrances to Full Faith

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Full Faith Part 6
A *ReVision* Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe
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Waxed Tablet Publications

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Contents

Welcome to <i>Hindrances to Full Faith</i>	4
1 Losing Sight of the Promises	5
2 Languishing in Our Limitations	7
3 Following Our Own Best Ideas	9
4 Failing to Seek God's Power	11
5 Failing to Nurture Faith through Praise	13
6 Failing to Take the Next Step	15
7 Who's Your Daddy?	17
Questions for Reflection or Discussion	19

Welcome to *Hindrances to Full Faith*

Welcome to *Hindrances to Full Faith*, a study in overcoming the obstacles that can keep us from knowing full and abundant life in Jesus Christ. *Hindrances to Full Faith* is Part 6 in our series, *Full Faith*, and one of our *ReVision* series of studies in Biblical worldview.

In our previous installation in this series, we looked at three hindrances to fruitfulness in the life of faith: spiritual narcissism, fear of men, and departing from the teaching of God's Word. In this series we'll look at some additional hindrances to full faith, and the best ways of dealing with them.

By considering Abraham, and the faith he exercised toward God, we can learn how to recognize and overcome those obstacles to full faith that can deprive us of the full and abundant life Jesus came to bring us.

These studies are designed for individual or group use. While you may derive much benefit from studying on your own, that benefit can be greatly enhanced by joining with a friend or a group to read, discuss, share, challenge, and pray for one another.

Take one lesson at a time. Read through the study and reflect on the questions provided. Be sure to do the *Next steps* assignment each day, as this will help you put your learning into practice. Use the questions at the end of the study to reflect on what you have learned.

These studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your understanding of the Christian faith, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God, and life in His Kingdom.

If you have not already, we invite you to subscribe to *ReVision* so that you can receive it daily on your computer, tablet, or smart phone. Visit our website, www.ailbe.org, where you can subscribe to *ReVision* and our other newsletters.

Our prayer is that this study will enlarge your vision of Christ and His Kingdom, and encourage you to greater faith, boldness, and consistency in living for Him.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 Losing Sight of the Promises

...contrary to hope, in hope [Abraham] believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, "So shall your descendants be." Romans 4.18

Fruitless faith?

The Christian life is a life of faith – full faith. In it we reckon on the greatness, grace, power, and goodness of God, and bring our lives into line with what He prescribes and expects in every area of life. We are plants in the garden of the Lord, and we long to bear fruit in line with His purposes and our joy.

We journey through this life by faith, by trusting in God, and not merely by what we see: our familiar experiences or reasoned best-guesses (2 Cor. 5.7). Without faith, it is impossible for us to please the Lord (Heb. 1.6). When we live by faith, there are virtually no limits to what God might be willing to show us or enable us to do in His Name (Matt. 21.22).

Faith is the assurance that what we hope for we already possess, and the evidence that comes forth in all our daily experience. By faith we show that we look to God, trust in His Word, and are determined to know His presence, promise, and power in every aspect of our lives (Heb. 11.1).

In our day it seems apparent that the faith of those who name the Name of Jesus Christ is not bearing the kind of exceeding abundant fruit that might be expected (Jn. 15.1-5; Eph. 3.20). Many surveys and studies have shown that, when it comes to our everyday lives, Christians are not all that different from the unbelieving people among whom we live and work. Our culture shows diminishing evidence of true and lively faith informing all the great issues and institutions of the day. As a people, the millions of us who claim to believe in Jesus are simply not evidencing a faith that turns our world upside-down for Jesus.

Perhaps it's time we paused to ask why. What is it about *our* faith that is keeping us from bearing the sort of fruit we see in the Christians of the New Testament, and which we can discern in other eras of Church history as well? Is something – or are some things – inhibiting the growth and fruitfulness of our faith? And if so, what are they, and how can we overcome them?

Father of the faithful

The case of Abraham, as Paul recounts it in Romans 4, is a good one for us to consider. Here is a faithful man – the father of all the faithful, as Paul says (v. 16) – and one from whose example we might be able to discover any hindrances to faith keeping us from full and abundant, transforming life in Jesus Christ. How do we see Abraham recognizing and resisting the various hindrances to faith that might have throttled his walk with the Lord and left him just another forgotten believer on the pages of Church history?

We note, first of all, that Abraham kept his focus on the proper objective. Against what must have seemed impossible odds, Abraham believed *God* when He promised the he would be the father of many nations.

Abraham never strayed from this focus. Every action he took – even those stumbling and bumbling actions which brought the rebuke of God – was with a view to attaining the promises of God. He would not allow *lesser* promises – such as the esteem of his neighbors, material prosperity, or the remembrance of his pagan past – deflect his vision from the exceeding great and precious promises of God.

Hindrances to Full Faith

Abraham must have rehearsed the promises of Genesis 12.1-3 daily, praying them back to God and organizing his day around whatever he could think to do to move closer to realizing the blessing and blessedness of the Lord. He never lost focus on these promises and the God Who gave them.

Which promises?

What about us? What promises focus our minds, capture our hearts, organize our priorities, and drain our strength each day? The promise of a bigger income? The hope of material happiness or relational bliss? The prospect of early retirement and a life of leisure? A comfortable, untroubled *status quo*?

If our promises only reach to the temporal and material horizon of our lives, then we will never know what it means to walk in full faith, we will never experience the pleasure of God, and we will express but little of the abundant evidence of Spirit-filled power in our lives.

But if we focus day by day, moment by moment, on the precious and magnificent promises of God, and keep those promises in focus, so that they command all our plans and paths, our faith will begin to grow, and we will begin to live like Abraham, our father in the faith.

Only by focusing on the Lord and His promises will we be in a position to recognize, confront, and overcome all the hindrances to faith that we can expect to encounter in our journey of full faith.

For reflection

1. What do you understand by the “precious and very great promises” of the Lord (2 Pet. 1.4)?
2. How much, and in what specific ways, do these promises inform and guide your walk with and work for the Lord?
3. What hindrances to full faith do you experience, and how do you deal with them?

Next steps: Meditate on Genesis 12.1-3. Pray those promises back to God. Then rewrite them in a way that can guide your daily planning and life. Share that rewritten version with a Christian friend.

2 Languishing in Our Limitations

And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. Romans 4.19

Experience and faith

Many Christians fail to realize a powerful and transforming life of full faith because, well, their lives simply aren't focused where they ought to be. Rather than longing for and striving to realize the precious and very great promises of God (2 Pet. 1.4), they're too busy chasing the vain dreams and fleeting pleasures of their temporal lives.

We'll never make progress in the life of full faith until we learn to fix our hopes, dreams, desires, and longings on, and organize our priorities and activities around, the promises God holds out to us in His Word. Losing our focus is the first of several hindrances to faith which can keep us from the life we've been redeemed to live.

The second hindrance to full and fruitful faith is languishing in our limitations. We're frozen in what we think we know of ourselves, or our experience, or what we might be capable of in following the Lord.

What this means is that we don't believe the Lord, and thus we don't rise to the life He intends because we're bogged down in what we consider to be the limitations of our experience and our faith. Every time you hear yourself saying, in the face of some command or promise of God's Word, or some opportunity to serve in His Name, "Oh, I could never do that," or "I've never done that before," or any variation on either of those two, you have lost your focus, denied the power of God, and are languishing in your limitations.

Focused on the promises

Abraham might have done this. God had told him he would be the father of many nations, and for many, many years, Abraham believed God, focused on His promises, and lived as He taught.

But the years passed and still Abraham had no child. He was old and his wife had been barren all their married lives. Abraham might have looked at his circumstances and concluded, "Well, it's a great idea, but it's never going to work for me; I'm never going to have a child."

He *might* have done that, *if* he had taken his eyes off the promises of God and *Him Who made those promises*.

Nothing about Abraham's experience or capabilities indicated that he and Sarah could have a child. It hadn't happened yet, and the circumstances essential for having a child had, we can imagine, deteriorated over time. If we focus on our circumstances, live according to our past experiences, and follow God on the basis of our own perceived strengths and abilities, we'll never get beyond where we are in the life of faith.

Yet many Christians do not trust the Lord, for example, with their finances. They don't tithe, and they give a portion of whatever's left over once they've satisfied their wants, because they don't believe they have enough for their own needs to give to the Lord what He requires.

Other believers hesitate to share their faith, because they don't think people are interested in the Lord, or they've never shared their faith before.

Hindrances to Full Faith

They won't volunteer to serve in their church because they don't think they have what it takes, or they've already committed their available time to something they regard as more important or interesting.

Or they don't take seriously the call to make disciples "as they are going" in life because, well, they've never done that before.

Slouching along?

If you live this way, if you choose to languish in your own limitations, you will never know the full faith of your father, Abraham.

What's more, you'll never experience the power of God's Spirit, stretching and growing you beyond where you've ever dared to ask or think (Eph. 3.20). You'll never know the joy of seeing the Word of God bear fruit in your life in new and transforming ways. And you'll never make your contribution to the building of Christ's Church or the progress of His Kingdom. You'll just keep slouching along in the old baby clothes of your newborn years in the faith, always assuming that this is as good as it gets.

In the Christian life, however, it's *never* as good as it gets. As we look to the promises of God, deny the limitations of our experience and our flesh, and trust in the Lord to lead us in new paths with the eternal and mysterious power of His Spirit, we can overcome this hindrance to full faith and grow to new heights of Christian joy, fulfillment, and ministry.

Don't languish in your limitations! Trust God to make you more than what you've ever been before.

For reflection

1. Meditate on Ephesians 3.20. What are some things you know Christians do or have done, but that you've never been willing to think for yourself or ask the Lord to let you do?
2. Do you think God knows better than you what you might be capable of doing in living for and serving Him? Explain.
3. Meditate on Philippians 2.12, 13. Explain "work out" and "at work in you" as these relate to you.

Next steps: Begin praying Ephesians 3.20 daily, asking God, as you pray, to help you being to "think" and "ask" more in line with His promises and full faith expectations.

3 Following Our Own Best Ideas

Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace... Romans 4.16

How?

For all his focusing on the promises of God and refusing to languish in his limitations, Abraham still struggled at times to walk by faith rather than sight.

God had spoken an enormous promise to him – precious and very great, as Peter would describe it (2 Pet. 1.4) – and it must have boggled his mind as he pondered the question, “How? How will it be that I and Sarah shall have a child?”

We’re the same way. We read the precious and very great promises of God in Scripture and we think, “Man, how am I ever going to realize that?” Nothing in our *experience* makes us think God can do all that He has promised. Our own level of *ability* certainly doesn’t augur well for it, and there are just so many other distractions, leaving many of us to believe these promises must be for when we get to heaven.

Still, something in us wants to have a go at them. We know our lives are supposed to be full and abundant in Jesus Christ. We believe we can have more joy and power and fullness and boldness than what we have ever known before.

We just don’t see how it’s going to be possible.

Plan B?

Abraham went through the same struggle. His response, after much waiting, was to suggest to God an alternate plan, a different way of getting to the promises of God other than the one God had indicated.

God had said that Abraham would have a son. In Genesis 15 God reiterated the promise. But Abraham didn’t have a son, and the prospects weren’t good. So Abraham suggested that his servant, Eliezer of Damascus, would have to do instead. That was the best Abraham could think of as a way of realizing what God had promised.

God, however, declined to change His plan. Again, two chapters later, when Abraham had fathered a son by Sarah’s maidservant, God again came to him and promised a son. Abraham readily offered Ishmael as the candidate. God again said, “No.” God makes the promises, and God determines the *way* those promises are to be achieved. He is not interested in our alternative plans or good ideas, and, as long as we insist on living by these, we’ll never realize all that God has in store for us.

His way, or ours?

For example, God promises a harvest of souls as we go, like Jesus to seek and save the lost, bearing witness by our lives and words “as we are going” through our everyday lives.

That sounds a little risky.

So, instead, we propose to doll up our churches all contemporary-like, take out an ad in the paper, hire a billboard, and put up a spiffy marquis out front, hoping the lost will come inside and have a look, and then maybe, you know, stick around. That’s not God’s way, but we persuade ourselves it’s the best we can do to

Hindrances to Full Faith

realize what God has promised. But He is not going to fulfill *His* promise on *our* terms.

Or the Lord Jesus declares that He will build His Church, grow it in unity and maturity so that it becomes the joy of our communities and refracts the beauty of the Lord into every area of life (Eph. 4.11-16; Ps. 48.1, 2). And He declares that He will do this as pastors and teachers shepherd the flock of God, outfitting them for ministry as a way of life (1 Pet. 5.1-3).

Yeah, well, that sounds a little old fashioned and un-hip. So, instead, we devise all kinds of cool programs with snappy names, open up a coffee bar in the narthex of our church, set up lots of teams and boards and committees, raise a budget and improve our facilities, tweak our worship all glitzy and contemporary, and then expect the Lord to bless.

He won't, not in the full faith way He intends, not as long as we hinder full faith by resorting to our own plans and ideas, rather than His.

We do this all the time. Do we really think we know better than the Lord how to realize what He has promised? Are we so arrogant as to suggest that our plans are better than His, our programs can outperform His simple but proven disciple-making guidelines, or that we can do *His* work toward *His* promises however *we* think is best?

We're fools if we do, and we'll never gain the promises of God, and never attain to full faith in the Lord, until we walk by faith and seek His ends in His ways.

For reflection

1. How confident are you that the ministries and programs your church uses are squarely based in Biblical teaching?
2. In your own life, what is your approach to carrying out the mandate of Matthew 28.18-20?
3. Why should we think we're free to seek God's promises and do God's work in anything other than God's way?

Next steps: How can we know when we're trying to do the Lord's work our way instead of His? Ask a pastor or church leader about this.

4 Failing to Seek God's Power

He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. Romans 4.20, 21

Power of Word and Spirit

One of the reasons we falter in the presence of God's precious and very great promises is that we forget that they are *His* promises, not just matters of wishful thinking on our parts.

Yes, it would be great to know the blessing of the Lord all day long, strengthening us, bringing us into His glory, and filling us with His Spirit and Word, so that we radiate His glory to others. And yes, it would be swell to be a source of constant blessing to others, and to be protected and provided for in every effort we make to live for and serve the Lord. Those are wonderful things to hope for, yet most of us don't. We do not live in faith toward these promises of God because we regard them as more "pie in the sky" than what we are to expect here and now, increasingly, every day of our lives.

Abraham never lost sight of the fact that these precious and very great promises came to him quite out of the blue – all of grace, we might say – and from a Deity Who proved His greatness and power over and over. The God Who *makes* promises is certainly able to *fulfill* those promises; but He requires that, like Abraham, we rest in *His* power and trust in *His* wisdom and ways.

Now this can be difficult, for sure, but this is where real faith begins to come into play and engage the unseen power of God in surprising and transforming ways. Our responsibility is ever to seek the power of God for the fulfillment of His promises. That power will always be *according to His Word* and *by His indwelling Spirit*.

Search the Word

What does this mean?

Two things. First, in order to seek the power of God we need to *search the Scriptures* for everything they have to teach us about every aspect of life. This is a daily and ongoing duty, and one that we should engage individually and with other earnest believers.

The Word of God is alive and powerful, the writer of Hebrews reminds us (4.12). Only as we understand and submit to that Word, walking obediently in every area of life, can we expect to increase in full faith and to know the power of God working in and through us toward the realization of His promises.

Rest in the Spirit

But this will require of us things that do not come naturally. If obeying the Scriptures were "natural" there would be no need for faith, and we wouldn't be so inept at obedience (as we typically are).

But we cannot obey the Word of God in our own strength; we must have the Spirit of God to work in and through us so that we can do what God instructs us to in His Word (Phil. 2.13). This means we have to "go out on a limb" in every area where the Scriptures instruct us, trusting that, when we get there, and things begin to get a little scary and uncertain, the Spirit will be present by *His* power to do what God has commanded and promised.

For example, when it comes to bearing witness for Jesus Christ. Jesus said not to fret and worry about how to

Hindrances to Full Faith

do this. Immerse yourself in the Word of God, and rest in Jesus' Lordship over your life. When the opportunity comes, just open your mouth intending to talk about the Lord, and the Spirit will give you the words you need to be able to answer with grace whatever anyone may wish to know (Lk. 12.11, 12; Col. 4.6).

Now, of course, on the underside of that promise is the assumption that (a) we are searching the Scriptures regularly, to understand the Gospel and how it speaks to the needs of our neighbors, and (b) that we are actually *going* to our neighbors with the intention, sooner or later, of bearing witness to Jesus Christ. We are seeking the power of God for bearing witness, in other words, when we seek the *wisdom* of God in His Word and the *presence* of God's Spirit in the actual doing

This is the way it is in all of the Christian life. Whether you want to be a better spouse, or help disciple another believer, bring more justice and love to your workplace, or anything in line with the promises of God, you must learn to seek His power by His Word and Spirit, and move toward the realization of His power, by faith, at every opportunity and by every means.

It is a great hindrance to full faith to think that by some memorized formula, or the screwing up of our wills, or our simple determination to do better we can fulfill God's will and realize His promises. Only by growing in His Word and walking in His Spirit, in every moment of explicit obedience, can we increase in full faith and know more of the precious and very great promises of God.

For reflection

1. How can you know when you are "fully convinced" that what God has promised, God will perform? What's involved in becoming thus "fully convinced"?
2. "This means we have to 'go out on a limb' in every area where the Scriptures instruct us, trusting that, when we get there, and things begin to get a little scary and uncertain, the Spirit will be present by *His* power to do what God has commanded and promised." Can you think of a time you've done this, and the Spirit has been there to carry you through?
3. What would it mean for you to "go out on a limb" in the Spirit today?

Next steps: Talk with some fellow believers about how they practice walking in the Spirit according to the Word of God.

5 Failing to Nurture Faith through Praise

... *but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God* ... Romans 4.20

The gift of faith

Christians are called to walk by faith, trusting in God and looking to His promises as their goal and substance in life. Faith is a gift of God, and those who receive it become stewards of this gift.

Scripture teaches us that we must seek to *increase* in faith, to grow in it and become more adept at living by faith. The Lord Jesus and the apostles were not in the least hesitant to chide those of their followers who showed themselves to be “of little faith” or who were “babes” or “infants” in the art of trusting the Lord.

Failing to *nurture* faith in God, so that we increase in full faith, is yet another hindrance that can keep us from knowing abundant life and transforming power in Jesus Christ.

Certainly we grow our faith by focusing on the promises of God, searching His Word day by day, and stretching out to live in the power of the Spirit wherever He is leading us in our everyday lives. But we will not be able to sustain even these important aspects of the life of faith until we learn, like our father Abraham learned, to give glory and praise to God increasingly, continuously, and sincerely in all things and at all times.

Read again the story of Abraham in Genesis chapters 12 and following. He received precious and very great promises from God, and he was determined to realize these as much as possible. His journeys in pursuit of the promises of God are marked by episodes of building altars and worshiping God. In his times of walking close to the Lord, Abraham was never very far from some act of praise, worship, and glorifying God. The more he looked to God in worship, and the more he leaned on God in life, the more the promises of God became the realities of his daily experience.

Faith through praise

We hinder growth in faith when we fail to nurture faith through praise.

Ah, praise – now there’s a topic we know something about. After all, we have all this cool praise music at our church, on our car radios, and in all kinds of CDs and downloads. That’s all well and good. We always need new songs of praise unto the Lord.

But if, during worship, your praise band is so loud that it discourages hearty singing on the part of the congregation, or you’re having to learn the latest pop praise hit while you leave behind the one you almost learned before, you’re defeating the very purpose of such a band and such singing in the first place.

Or if you find joy in *listening* to praise music, but not *singing* it, then the music may actually be hurting more than helping your growth in the Lord, because it’s entertaining *you* but not necessarily glorifying the Lord.

Paltry praise

Let’s face it: we’re just not very good at praising the Lord. We don’t know how to praise. Think of all the prayers you’ve heard where the best people can do is say, “Lord, we really just praise You”; and we aren’t inclined to praise the Lord unless we find ourselves in some situation where such seems to be in order, as in worship.

Praising the Lord on our own, throughout the day, with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs – indicators, I hasten to add, of the filling of the Spirit (Eph. 5.18-21) – is just not something we’re inclined to do. But

Hindrances to Full Faith

Abraham *grew in faith by praising and glorifying* God, apparently, as something of a way of life. We will hinder growth in full faith, and the blessings that come from that, if we fail to nurture faith through praise.

Consider your own prayers: How much of real, Biblical praise do they contain? Or, during the day, as you might have opportunity to sing praise to the Lord, do you? Or does the latest pop tune more readily come to your lips? Praising the Lord grows from *seeing* the Lord and *knowing* Him in His glory. It issues from *walking* with Him in His *Word and Spirit*. But that takes time, focus, and discipline which our contemporary generation of believers often prefers to use for other things.

Which is fine, if you want to continue to live an uninspired, “as good as it gets” approach to following Jesus.

But if you want faith like your father Abraham, faith that transforms and changes people and situations and things, faith that lays hold on the precious and very great promises of God, and stretches out within you by the power of the Spirit of God, if you want *full faith*, then you’ll need to take up the work of praise more consistently and with greater delight.

For reflection

1. How would you describe the state of praise in your Christian life at this time?
2. How often do you find yourself with other Christians talking about the works of the Lord, sharing what He’s doing in your life, or celebrating His goodness to one another?
3. Abraham’s faith was strengthened as he gave glory to God. How can you incorporate praising and glorifying God more fully into your walk with and work for Him?

Next steps: How can believers help and encourage one another to be more consistent in praising and glorifying the Lord? Talk with some believing friends about this question.

6 Failing to Take the Next Step

He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief... And therefore "it was accounted to him for righteousness."
Romans 4.20, 22

Incremental growth

Abraham's growth in full faith, into becoming the father of all who believe, was accomplished in stages, by a series of obedient steps. Faith always demands action, as we've seen – the "evidence" of the things we hope for from the unseen realm (Heb. 11.1).

So faith is always moving us *toward* something which we *do not at present possess*, or which we are not at present experiencing. And we move toward that promise by *incremental steps* – "next steps." I recall reading a "Miss Manners" column once in which a young girl who was preparing for her first prom asked meekly how to walk in high heels. Miss Manners' answer was succinct: "Right foot, left foot."

That's the way with faith as well. We get to the place of realizing the promises of God incrementally, in daily steps of obedient faith, not in huge quantum leaps of blazing glory.

Abraham had to go to the land, then walk throughout the land, then stay in the land, and daily praise and worship God, building up a repertoire of "faith steps" even as these were occasionally added to from time to time.

When it came to the birth of Isaac the faith step that was required of him was to have sexual relations with his wife, which, Sarah seems to indicate, they had ceased to know (cf. Gen. 18.12).

Beyond that, the Lord required that Abraham take the all but unbelievable step of offering his son as a sacrifice to the Lord (Gen. 22). Faith steps aren't always as easy as we might like, but they're what we have to take if we are going to exercise rather than inhibit transforming faith.

Personal Mission Field

As we invest time each day in reading God's Word and praising Him, focusing on His promises as the *far horizon* of our lives, He will begin to show us how to live by faith with the people around us each day. Like Abraham, our father in the faith, we have each been sent to a particular place, where we are called to bear witness to and make disciples of particular individuals. This is our [Personal Mission Field](#), and Jesus promised that it was ripe for the harvest, if only we will work it by faith (Jn. 4.35-38).

In particular, four faith steps will be required of us every day if we are to realize the power and promises of God in the everyday situations of our lives.

Four daily steps

First, we need to *prepare well*. This means time in the Word of God, prayer, and looking ahead to the day.

Seek the Lord's wisdom and guidance. Study the Scriptures with a view to discovering *next steps* for the day ahead, then commit those *next steps* to the Lord in prayer. Think ahead to the opportunities that you will face each day, and plan to make the most of the time God gives you (Ps. 90.12; Eph. 5.15-17). Think about the people you'll be with and how you will show them the love of Christ. Pray for them, and for the boldness to reach out to them as the Lord opens doors of opportunity.

Hindrances to Full Faith

Plan your day carefully, and bathe your plans in prayer. Gird up your mind for action, as Peter put it (1 Pet. 1.13), before you get busy with your day, and you'll be much more likely to know the appropriate faith steps to take at every point.

Second, work hard to grow in the *art of Christian conversation*. Determine to use your speech to build others up and to encourage and affirm them. Take an interest in people. Ask them questions, and share freely from your experience of the Lord. Don't let others draw you into vulgar or merely trivial conversations. Words are gifts from God and we must not squander or sully them. Become a good listener and let your words to others come as arrows of truth and grace from the very presence of the Lord. Make that your determined mode of conversation, and you'll know just what to say at every moment.

Third, work hard to *show the love of Jesus* in all your works toward others. Be a servant, a helper, a shepherd, and a friend, and God will guide you step by step into His promised blessings.

Finally, understand the ways that God wants to *bring transformation* into your life – all your relationships, roles, and responsibilities. Nurture a vision of your own Personal Mission Field filled with the fragrance of Christ and illuminated by His truth and love. Then pursue that vision, step by step, every day.

Full faith is a matter of next steps, one after another, day after day, year by year. God will bring His promises to fruition in your life if you will take the daily steps of faith as He makes them clear to you.

For reflection

1. What does it mean to read the Word and pray each day, seeking the Lord's *next steps* for your life?
2. What can you do to better prepare for taking the next steps of full faith each day?
3. Who are the people in your Personal Mission Field?

Next steps: Make a list of the people in your Personal Mission Field, and develop a plan for praying for them regularly.

7 Who's Your Daddy?

Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all... Romans 4.16

No resemblance

“He’s a chip off the old block.”

We’ve all heard someone say that, and we know what it intends. This child we’re looking at bears a distinct resemblance to its parents. There’s no mistaking whose child this is; he or she is just like Mom and Dad.

Abraham is the father of all those who have true and full faith in God – those who long for His promises and focus on them daily, who are not held back by their limitations, or trying to do God’s work their way, who know how to seek the power of God and nurture faith through praise, and who are faithful in taking the daily steps that allow them to turn their Personal Mission Field into a glorious harvest for the Lord.

Are you a chip off that old block? Or, as we might say, “Who’s your daddy?”

Jesus challenged a group of men who were claiming to be Abraham’s children by saying that couldn’t possibly be the case. He said, “If you were Abraham’s children, you would do the works of Abraham (Jn. 8.39).

Abraham, we know, believed God. Abraham set his heart on the promises of God, and devoted himself to seeking the Lord and His power day by day. The men to whom Jesus was talking had let their religion become a mere formality, a cultural or social activity. Oh, sure, they had some claim on the faith of Abraham. After all, they worshiped and prayed and so forth.

But Jesus was clear that, while they may have been going through the motions of faith, they were not, in fact, the children of Abraham. They resisted the One Who was the very incarnation of the divine promises. They balked at His teaching and insisted they knew better than He did how religion ought to go. They refused to follow Him because their present way of life was “good enough” and all their friends agreed. They weren’t about to exchange their comfortable ways for abiding in Jesus’ Word, becoming serious disciples of the Lord, repenting of their sins, and living in the liberty of God’s Law and Spirit (Jn. 8.31-34).

These people, it was clear, had no resemblance to Abraham.

The devil, you say?

Jesus told these outwardly religious men that Abraham was not their father at all. The devil was their father, because they had chosen to live the Lie that said that Jesus, while He may be a great guy, an excellent teacher, and a nonpareil as a healer, was not God, not really, not in any way that required them to change their lives and follow, really *follow* Him.

Their father, Jesus insisted, would lead them to disillusionment, disappointment, and destruction. A day was coming, He insisted, in which their foolish religion and smug self-satisfaction would leave them without a leg to stand on before the God of heaven and earth. As God the Father gathered the true children of Abraham into the patriarch’s bosom, through faith in Jesus Christ, all the rest, the children of the devil, would be cast into eternal darkness and doom.

Examine yourself!

So, who’s your daddy? Abraham – the man of promise, praise, and practiced faith? Or the devil, the one who

Hindrances to Full Faith

tolerates your shallow religion, and can supply you with plenty of “good reasons” and “explanations” for why you aren’t any more serious about following Jesus than you are?

This is serious business, friends. The days of playing at being Christians are long since past. If we aren’t willing to struggle to attain full faith, take up our cross in pursuit of the promises of God, and follow in the footsteps of Jesus every day, then, all our sinner’s prayers, pious pretensions, and religious rigamarole notwithstanding, we probably are yet the children of the devil rather than of Abraham, the father of the faithful.

As Paul wrote the “believers” in Corinth: examine yourself (2 Cor. 13.5). Do you really have faith? Full faith? Or is your life in fact a series of hindrances to faith, ways of avoiding really following Jesus, by which you deceive yourself and everyone else, as you live out a “good enough” Christian confession?

Don’t wait until the last day to be stunned to find out that you have been clinging to the wrong pedigree all these years. Who’s your daddy? It’s Abraham, the man of faith, or it’s the devil. Think about it.

For reflection

1. The religious leaders of Jesus’ day considered that they were the true children of Abraham? Why?
2. Why were they wrong about that? What did Jesus expect of them?
3. What does it mean for you to “examine yourself” in the light of what it means to have full faith?

Next steps: How can we tell who are the true children of Abraham? Talk with a Christian friend about this question.

Hindrances to Full Faith

For reflection or discussion

1. What are the primary hindrances to faith that Abraham had to overcome?
2. Which of these hindrances to faith do you most frequently encounter? Explain.
3. What does it mean to focus and and strive to realize the promises of God in your Personal Mission Field?
4. What's the most important lesson you've learned about overcoming hindrances to full faith?
5. How are you planning to implement that lesson in your walk with and work for the Lord?

Prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

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Thank you.

