

FULL FAITH PART 10

# INCREASING FAITH



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Increasing Faith  
Full Faith Part 10  
A *ReVision* Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe  
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## Welcome to *Increasing Faith*

Welcome to *Increasing Faith*, a brief study examining the need for and way to grow in faith, until full faith becomes increasingly our possession. *Increasing Faith* is Part 10 in our series, *Full Faith*, and one of our *ReVision* series of studies in Biblical worldview.

Our study of full faith comes full circle as we begin this series where our study as a whole began, with Hebrews 11.1 and the nature of full faith. From there we review important concepts we have explored throughout this study, and add a few more in order to focus our minds and point our lives toward increasing faith in the Lord.

As we shall see, increasing faith leads to a richer life of *full* faith in Jesus, where we become more *like* Him because we are living more consistently *in* Him, and He is making all things new in our lives. We'll see that full faith comes to expression in a life of bearing witness for Christ, hearing and obeying His Word, and encouraging others in their walk with and work for the Lord.

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](http://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 Why More Faith?

*And the apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith." Luke 17:5*

### *The necessary thing*

The Lord Jesus had just finished instructing His disciples concerning the need to forgive those who sinned against them, no matter how many times they did, as long as they came with repentance, seeking to be forgiven.

The disciples apparently regarded this as a duty beyond what they were able to perform, for they immediately responded to the Lord, asking Him to increase their faith. Without faith, they understood, they would not be able to overcome the natural tendency to want to “get even”, or the equally natural tendency to hold a grudge against those who had injured them. With faith – with *more* faith, that is – the disciples hoped they might be able to fulfill the commandment of the Lord.

When it comes to obeying Jesus, which is the duty of every disciple, faith – *full* faith – is the necessary thing. We will not obey Jesus without it, and so we will not be able to follow Him into a richer and fuller experience of eternal life, unless our faith is equal to every daily challenge and opportunity which presents itself before us.

We do well, therefore, to make the disciples’ plea our own, and to seek the Lord daily for the increase of faith, that we might obey Him fully at all times.

But two things are necessary if we are to increase faith. First, we must make sure we understand what faith is, and then, second, we must be rightly motivated in wanting to see our faith increased.

### *The essence of faith*

What is faith? We recall that the writer of Hebrews says that faith “is the assurance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (11.1, my translation). Full faith thus consists of three facets.

First, in order to have full faith we must nurture *increasing familiarity with, and a proper disposition toward, unseen verities*. Ours is a heavenly calling, as we have seen. The visible cosmos exists within a framework of vast, unseen realities. Central to these are God the Father, Son, and Spirit, as well as the angels, departed saints, and spiritual forces of wickedness in high places. Faith *hopes* in these holy, unseen verities – longs to participate in them, understanding that only through constant exertion in a great spiritual warfare can we make progress in this blessed hope (Eph. 6.10-20).

Second, faith is being *assured* of these heavenly realities – an *inward experience of wellbeing* in relation to these unseen things – the sense that we are properly disposed toward Christ and His Kingdom, and armed to resist those unseen powers of wickedness that would frustrate and defeat us. This *assurance* that we are on the Lord’s side is a necessary component of full faith, and every believer should seek to increase in it.

Finally, full faith consists of *outward evidence, the fruit of a life devoted to honoring God* and furthering His Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. Jesus said that He has called us to follow Him so that we might bear much fruit *increasingly* throughout our lives (Jn. 15.16). To increase in fruitfulness, we must increase in faith.

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This is full and saving faith, and we must, like the disciples, seek the Lord's help to increase it consistently.

### *Motives for increasing faith*

But why? Why can't we have just *enough* faith to be sure that we're going to heaven when we die? Why is it essential that we seek to *increase* faith and the assurance and fruitfulness that go with it? What should motivate us in this quest for increasing faith? Four reasons come to mind.

First, faith pleases God (Heb. 11.6). Thus *increased faith* should enable us to please Him more, and thus to know more of His pleasure.

Second, full faith leads to good works of love, and love is the defining mark of a true Christian (cf. Jms. 2.26; Jn. 13.35). The more we are able to increase faith, the more works of love for God and our neighbors should be *evident* in our lives.

Third, Jesus taught that faith is the key to an effective prayer life (Matt. 21.20-22). Since prayer is *the* distinguishing discipline of the Christian life, increased faith should result in increased prayer, and more effective, enjoyable, and frequent and fruitful prayer.

Finally, everyone lives by faith. Even the most outspoken unbeliever believes in something, though he believes wrongly. Full faith, focused on unseen things, fervent in prayer, fruitful in good works, and therefore favorable in the eyes of God, will make our lives fuller and richer and more meaningful in every way.

Thus there are good reasons for us to join the disciples in praying, "Lord, increase our faith!" How we can actually increase faith is the subject of our study in this series.

### *For reflection*

1. What is your present approach to increasing in faith?
2. In what areas have you seen growth in faith in your life over the past few months?
3. Where do you see a need for increasing faith in your walk with and work for the Lord?

*Next steps – Demonstration: What is faith? That is, how does your Christian faith operate in your life? Where do you find faith working in or for you? Are there any areas of your life where faith seems to be weak or absent? Discuss these questions with some Christian friends.*

## 2 Get Focused!

*Now there were certain Greeks among those who came up to worship at the feast. Then they came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and asked him, saying, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." John 12.20, 21*

*Visions of sugar plums?*

The children in Clement Moore's poem, "The Night before Christmas," were, I fear, in danger of missing the point of the whole season. I may be reading more into Mr. Moore's poem than is justified, but I can't help it. I think about this every time I hear that lovely ditty.

Christmas isn't about "sugar plums." Christmas is about Christ.

See, these kids went to bed on Christmas Eve focused on the wrong thing. For them, Christmas was all about things and stuff – "visions of sugar plums danced in their heads" – as they lay down to await the exciting day ahead. Now they didn't know whether or not they were going to receive any sugar plums. Maybe lumps of coal would end up in their stocking? But those unseen sugar plums were what they *saw in their mind's eye* and therefore what they *hoped for* as they lay nestled all snug in their beds on that snowy December 24<sup>th</sup>.

And a good many Christians live just like this. For them the Christian life – believing in Jesus – is about *getting* something – some feeling or benefit or other blessing which, they're convinced, can't be found anywhere else. Visions of various kinds of sugar plums – health and wealth, a place in heaven, peace and freedom from guilt – dance in their heads as they think about their faith.

And, like those children in "The Night before Christmas," such Christians are in danger of missing the whole point of Christian faith.

*It's about Jesus, you see*

The Gospel is not about us. The Good News is not that we can be rich or healthy or peaceful or guilt-free or secure in heaven.

The Good News is that Jesus has risen from the dead, is seated in glory at the Father's right hand, and is bringing a new world order of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, on earth as it is in heaven (Rom. 14.17, 18).

This Good News is amazing in that it affects all of life – all our relationships, roles, and responsibilities, everything we are and possess – and makes all things new, refracting the glory of the Triune God into our everyday life experiences. The Good News is that we could actually end up with *nothing* in this life, and still have everything, because we have Jesus.

This is because Jesus is exalted in glory. Jesus is reigning at the right hand of God. Jesus speaks His Word of power and the whole vast cosmos obeys and does its thing and keeps its place. Jesus commands His angels and they serve us for His glory and praise. Jesus is putting all His enemies under His feet. Jesus is reconciling the world and everything in it to God. Jesus is radiant in glory, mighty in splendor, brilliant in wisdom and power, unstoppable in everything He intends. He is *the* great unseen thing of our heavenly calling, and He fills the vision and commands the obedience of every true believer.

The more clearly we "see Jesus" with the eye of faith and understanding (Eph. 1.15-22), the more our faith

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will increase, and with it, all the benefits that come with the life of full faith.

But if we insist only on thinking about the “sugar plums” of the Christian life, we’ll never increase in faith.

#### *The vision of Christ*

Faith gains assurance and brings forth the evidence of full faith by focusing on the unseen things of Christ and God. The Apostle Paul understood this, and so he commanded us to set our minds on the things that are above, where Christ is seated in the heavenly places (Col. 3.1-3). The starting-point for increasing faith is to improve our vision of Christ exalted in glory, and to devote more time and effort at making *that* vision the *guiding* vision and hope of all our experience.

This is a work of faith and love in which, through prayer and meditation, we engage our imaginations with God’s Word as it guides us in thinking about the majesty, splendor, glory, wonder, beauty, mystery, goodness, and power of Jesus exalted in glory. He really *is* exalted in glory, and the Scriptures plainly teach us, in various places, that it is important and useful for us to envision and think about Him as He is portrayed.

We will increase in faith to the extent that we focus more clearly on the true object of Christian faith. Let us not place our hope in the “sugar plums” of faith, as if these were the great boon, the most abundant blessing to be gained from believing in Jesus. No, the great glory of Christian faith is to know Jesus, to see Jesus, to participate in Jesus, and to partake through Him of the divine glory of our heavenly calling!

By focusing more clearly and consistently on Jesus our exalted and glorious King, we may expect to find our faith increasing, and with it, all the benefits and evidences that declare the reality of Christ and His Kingdom to the world.

#### *For reflection*

1. Do you find that, in your walk with the Lord, you tend to concentrate more on the “sugar plums” of faith, rather than the Author of it? Explain.
2. Meditate on Colossians 3.1-3. How do you practice this mandate at this time?
3. Meditate on Ephesians 2.6. What does it mean for you, that you are seated with Christ in heavenly places?

*Next steps – Preparation: Jot down any thoughts and images that you think of just now concerning Christ exalted at the Father’s right hand. How often do you think about this during the day? How confident are you that this is as complete a picture of Jesus exalted as you might know? Talk with a pastor or church leader about these questions, and see if they have any thoughts about how to improve your focus on the risen and reigning Christ.*



### 3 To Live is Christ

*I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. Galatians 2.20*

*You become what you admire*

As a kid, I was a St. Louis Cardinals fan. Especially *one* Cardinal – Stan Musial, old number 6. He was, after all, an Illinois boy like I was. He menaced opposing pitchers with his hunched-over, left-handed batting style, his excellent eye for the ball, and his exasperating ability, throughout his whole career, to get a base hit more than once every three times at bat.

As often as I could, I watched the Cardinals on television. My dad took us over to old Busch Stadium on Grand Avenue to watch them play. I listened to their broadcasts on KMOX radio. And I always paid special attention when Stan the Man came up to the plate.

And when I went out on the sandlot or with my local baseball team, I *was* Stan Musial. I wore his number six. I assumed his batting stance, albeit from the right side of the plate. I insisted on playing first base. I thought Musial, felt Musial, ran and fielded like Musial. I had every Stan Musial baseball card from every year of his major league career.

The more I watched and imitated Stan Musial, the more I became him, if only in my own mind, during those times on the baseball diamond.

We're all like this, you know. What we admire or love we concentrate on. And what we concentrate on, to a very great extent, we become. We are what we admire.

And if we admire, love, and concentrate on Jesus, we will become more like Jesus in every aspect of our lives.

*To live...*

What does it mean to be a human being? To “live” as a human being?

We are made in the image of God, and we make our way through the world by means of a soul and a body. Our soul consists of our *minds*, to direct our thinking and planning; our *hearts*, to develop and deploy our affections; and our *consciences*, where our will is lodged and our thoughts and feelings are processed into decisions and actions.

The more we contemplate Jesus and take Him into our soul, the more our minds, hearts, and consciences will begin to take the shape of His indwelling presence. We will *think* like Jesus, *feel* like Jesus, and *will* what Jesus wills. Full faith increases to the extent that we open every area of our souls to the presence and power of the risen Christ, learning from His Word and leaning on His Spirit to transform us from glory to glory into the very image of Christ in our souls (2 Cor. 3.12-18).

The same is true in our bodies. All the members of Jesus' body – his eyes, ears, tongue, hands, feet, and all the rest – were devoted to honoring God and furthering His rule of grace and truth. As Jesus rules more completely in our souls, He will also make Himself known through the members of our own bodies, in all our words and deeds, to the praise of the glory of His grace.

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To live and be human is to function as a whole person – soul and body – in a wide range of relationships, roles, and responsibilities. To live *by faith*, and to *increase in full faith* is to see our souls and bodies becoming more filled with and like Jesus in every way, so that He refracts through our unique personalities, callings, and opportunities.

*...is Christ*

Paul said that the life he lived in his soul and body he lived by faith in the Son of God. We may expect to increase in faith to the extent that we yield more of our souls and bodies, and all the ways we apply these in the world, to the rule of our exalted King and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Are there thoughts in your soul which are not the kinds of thoughts Jesus would entertain? Be rid of them, and embrace more of His thoughts instead. Is your heart bitter, resentful, lustful, prideful, fearful and doubting, or otherwise contrary to the selfless, giving heart of Christ? Repent of such things, and seek the Lord to transform your affections so that they are more like Jesus. And what of your values, priorities, and will? Are they wholly devoted to Christ? And all your words and deeds as well?

There is plenty of room in each of us – soul and body – for Jesus to increase and make Himself known. By focusing on Jesus, and by opening up our bodies and souls to His indwelling presence, we may expect to increase faith and to know more of faith's evidence and blessings in every area of our lives.

As a kid I knew I would never *be* Stan Musial. But I wanted very much to be *like* him. When, as a student in college, I finally met Stan Musial, he was as much the all-star gentleman and saint as he was a baseball player. I was glad at that moment that he had been one of my childhood heroes. As we contemplate the beauty and majesty of the risen and exalted Christ, let us freely and eagerly desire to be like Him. For as we do, as we long for Jesus and earnestly desire to be like Him, we will hold back no part of our lives from becoming conformed to the vision of Him that fills our minds. And our faith will increase as we do.

And when we finally see Him as He is, face to face, we'll be glad we lived for Him in this life.

*For reflection*

1. How is it evident that for you, "to live is Christ"?
2. Are there any areas of your soul – mind, heart, conscience – that are not consistently and entirely devoted to Jesus? Explain.
3. How can believers help one another to become more like Jesus – soul and body?

*Next steps – Preparation: Spend an extended period of time thinking about yourself – mind, heart, conscience, words, and deeds. Can you see any areas of your life where Jesus might dwell more fully? How can you "make room" for Him in these areas? Share your thoughts about this exercise with a Christian friend.*

## 4 All Things New!

*Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." Revelation 21.5*

*Stuck in the status quo*

I suppose it could be said of a good many Christians that they haven't changed much over the years. I even suspect many of us would say that about ourselves. Sometime ago we hit a stride, found a groove, settled into certain routines and habits, and that's pretty much where we've been since. Life is good. Why upset our contentment with new, strange, or perhaps even risky things or undertakings?

Let's suppose the disciples had taken that approach. Let's focus on Peter and Andrew. Here they were, family men in the family business, doing pretty well and living in nice lakefront homes. They put in a full day's work and seemed to be doing just fine. They'd never had much time for formal learning, but that was OK with them. They liked the sea, the boats and nets, the exertion and exhilaration of a big catch. Life was good, and they weren't looking for anything new or risky.

Then along came Jesus. Suppose, in response to His call to follow Him, they'd said, "Wow, thanks for the invitation. We're honored you'd even think of us. But you know, we've never been away from home much, and we have a lot to do. We believe in God, really we do, and He's been very good to us. Besides, I don't know, what you have in mind – that 'fishing for men' thing? – we've never done that, and we're pretty sure no one would ever respond to *us* like that. So thanks, Jesus, but we'll just keep on keeping on right where we are. We'll be praying for you."

What about you? Are you stuck in the status quo? Is your Christian life pretty much the same as it's been for years?

And do you expect to increase in full faith under such conditions?

*Get out of the boat!*

Peter again. Jesus walking on the water. An idea comes to Peter's mind. It's crazy. Far-fetched. Unlikely, and unlike anything he's ever thought or done before: "Lord, if it's You, command me to come to You on the water." Can you hear Andrew? "What!? Are you *crazy!*?" Can you see John, who's known Peter like forever, burying his face in his hands, muttering to himself, "Here he goes again"?

But Peter was up for something new, and He was looking at the one Person Who could make "new" happen like nobody's business. You know the rest.

One sure way to increase faith is to position yourself in new circumstances or surroundings, to reach out to new people, to acquire new skills, learn new things, or to take on new responsibilities – to get out of your familiar boat and walk on the water toward Jesus. Your faith will not increase as long as you persist in the status quo of all things familiar and safe. Faith increases as we stretch beyond ourselves into new areas of thought, service, caring, and love – places where we need to trust that the Spirit of Christ will meet us and carry us exceedingly abundantly above or beyond where we've ever been before (Eph. 3.20).

*Where's your new?*

So where's your "new"? Where might Jesus take you more deeply into the regions of increased faith and all things new? Know first of all, that newness in Christ requires facing up to and working to overcome whatever

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of your “oldness” is keeping you from increasing faith (Eph. 4.17-24).

How about learning to know Jesus through a new and different means – more concentrated study of Scripture, church history, Christian art, or the study of creation?

What about finding a new place of service where you can touch others with the love of Jesus? I’m sure your pastor and church leaders are looking for help in a good many places. Give them a call and tell them Jesus is commanding you to get out of your boat and you’re eager to do it.

How about becoming more consistent in your witness for Christ? Never done that? Well, here’s an area of “newness” to which every believer is called. Ask your pastor to help you map out your [Personal Mission Field](#) and to begin working it consistently, day by day, for the purpose of making Jesus known.

How about prayer or other spiritual disciplines? Isn’t it about time you tried something new in seeking the Lord? What about fasting? Or singing? Or a spiritual retreat? Or how about getting a soul friend with whom you can meet, pray, and encourage each other in your walk with the Lord?

Jesus is the King of all things new! If we are resistant to newness, how can we expect to increase faith in Him? But as you take up the challenge of newness, don’t mistake newness for novelty. Novelty is something we *try*, then, most likely, set aside. But newness is something we *become* (2 Cor. 5.17-21). And the reason we become new by venturing out onto the waves of life is because we are moving toward Jesus, Whom we desire, and like Whom we are becoming – soul and body – as He increases our faith and makes all things new in our lives.

#### *For reflection*

1. What would getting out of the boat look like in your life?
2. Why do you think most Christians prefer a status quo faith rather than increasing and full faith?
3. In what areas of your life would you like to know more of the newness of Jesus?

*Next steps – Demonstration: What opportunities for “newness” might you explore? Ask a church leader to think and pray through this question with you. Then choose an area or activity and get out of your boat!*

## 5 Just Do It!

*Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name...* Romans 1.5

*To be, or not to be?*

Jesus plainly told His disciples that a primary reason He was leaving to return to His Father was so that the Spirit of God might be poured out on earth (Jn. 16.7).

He further insisted that when the power of the Spirit comes upon His followers, they will be His witnesses (Acts 1.8). The book of Acts records the proof of this promise. When the Spirit fell on that Pentecost morning, those who received Him poured out into the streets proclaiming the Good News of Christ and His Kingdom. The rest of the book of Acts, and the New Testament, records the story of [the ongoing work of Christ](#) as He employed His people in replacing the kingdom of darkness and sin with the Kingdom of light and life, through the proclamation of and obedience to the Gospel of the Kingdom.

Being a witness to Christ is a matter, not of some extraordinary spiritual gift, but of obedience to the Gospel. If the Spirit of God lives in us, we can be sure that He will daily prepare, prod, and prompt us about being witnesses for Christ. He will get us ready and send us out to live – soul and body – in such a way as to declare to everyone around us, by deed and word, that Jesus Christ is alive and His Kingdom is advancing on earth as it is in heaven.

Whether or not we will be the witnesses Christ intends us to be depends on whether we have full faith in Jesus and the Gospel. For full faith – the *assurance* of things hoped for – is *always* unto obedience – the *evidence* of things not seen (Heb. 11.1).

*The obedience of faith*

Paul says that the Gospel is proclaimed and received to promote “the obedience of faith”. In his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer raises the question of which comes first, faith or obedience. Some people will say, “I just don’t have the faith to bear witness to Jesus. I’d like the Lord to increase my faith, so that I could be His witness, but so far, He has not done so.” Not having sufficient faith, some believers excuse themselves from being witnesses for Christ, and thus from fulfilling a primary reason for the giving of the Holy Spirit.

But Bonhoeffer challenges this reasoning. He insists that if we can *understand* what God requires of us, then we must *obey* Him. Faith will come *with* obedience and *as a result* of obedience. Faith is not the necessary precondition for obedience; understanding is. Do we understand that Jesus has redeemed us to be His witnesses? To live lives of good works of love? If we *understand* this, then we must *obey*, whenever the Spirit prompts us, drawing on the Spirit’s indwelling presence and power to take the next steps of what we *understand* is required of us.

As we do, Bonhoeffer explains, faith increases, making us thereby better prepared for the next opportunity to practice the obedience which leads to faith.

*Nike night*

Some years ago I undertook to train the young people of our church in how to bear witness to the Lord. We studied the Gospel of the Kingdom and learned what makes it such Good News. We wrote out our personal testimonies and shared them with one another. We practiced conversations about spiritual things and learned to ask questions that might lead to an opportunity to share the Gospel. We spent six weeks of focused study and practical experience, learning what is involved in being a witness for the Lord.

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On the first night of our study I told the kids and the adults who were helping us that week 7, the final week of our study, would be “Nike Night.” On that night everyone was to wear something with the Nike “swoosh” insignia on it. I reminded them of this every week, as we learned to give our testimonies, ask good questions, and explain the Gospel, and as we practiced these together in class.

On that last night everyone showed up wearing or carrying something Nike – hats, shirts, shoes, a bag. After we had gathered I asked the group, “Does anyone know what the Nike slogan is?” Hands went up around the room. I called on a young man who stood and said, “Just do it!”

As he spoke those words, his face turned pale, and so did the face of every person in that room. All at once they understood the meaning of “Nike Night.” And as we piled into cars and headed out to the local shopping mall, questionnaires and Gospel tracts in hand, they began to understand what “the obedience of faith” entails.

But while they went with trepidation, they returned with triumph, telling stories of exciting Gospel conversations and emboldened spirits. No one came to faith in Jesus that night, but a good many young people – and a handful of adults – by practicing the obedience of faith, saw their own faith increased in ways many of them had never known before.

Our Nike moments are not merely occasional events; they are the moments and opportunities in all the relationships, roles, and responsibilities of our daily lives. Here is where we are called to be obedient to the Lord and “Just do it!”

What will it take to get you to “Just do it!” today?

### *For reflection*

1. What “Just do it!” opportunities might you expect to encounter today?
2. How can you prepare for those opportunities, so as to make the most of them (Eph. 5.15-17)?
3. Can you expect to increase faith in Jesus without increased obedience to what you understand from His Word? Explain.

*Next steps – Boasting in the Lord: What is God calling you to “just do” today? All day? In every aspect of your life? Get ready in prayer. Make sure you understand what faith requires. Then, when the opportunity presents itself, “just do it!” Share your experience with a Christian friend.*

## 6 Hearing with Understanding

*So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.* Romans 10.17

### *Hearing without hearing*

The Lord Jesus spoke about those who heard Him, but didn't really hear Him (Mk. 4.11). They heard and understood the words coming from His mouth, but because they refused to obey Him, they didn't really hear what He had to say.

It's possible to *bear* the teaching of Jesus – about increasing faith, being His witness, and so forth – but not really *hear* what He's saying. People who “hear” His Word but don't really “hear” it so that they obey Him are not thereby excused. Rather, all who hear the Word of Christ but fail to understand and obey it remain in sin and do not know the forgiveness of the Lord.

Jesus said that only those who have been “let in on” the “secret of the Kingdom” can hear Him to understand His Word and obey what He commands. The “secret of the Kingdom” – or, we might say, the “key” that opens the door to the Kingdom, the “password” to the Kingdom – is the Spirit of God. All who have received the Spirit of God belong to God through faith in Jesus Christ. They possess the Key to all understanding and, thereby, all faith. They are the ones who hear with understanding and increase in full faith.

### *“Increase our faith!”*

It seems likely that anyone who possesses the secret of the Kingdom of God will want to go as deeply into that glorious experience as possible. It takes faith to do that – *bearing* the Lord with real understanding and obedience. Such a person might earnestly desire to see his faith increase; he might even pray, “Lord, increase my faith!” every day of his life, hoping that the Lord will do something to help him know more of the mystery and secret of the Kingdom of God.

But faith comes by *bearing* and by *bearing with understanding and obedience*, as we have seen. And Paul tells us the way to increase such faith is to *hear with understanding the Word of Christ* as He speaks to us in the Gospel and in all the Scriptures (cf. Rom. 1.1-5). If we will not read, contemplate, study, and learn the Scriptures, we will not increase in faith, no matter how much we pray or how earnestly we long for the Lord to increase our faith. Indeed, we will be guilty of being *disobedient* to what we clearly *understand* concerning how faith increases by hearing the Word of Christ.

How would you describe your attitude toward the Bible? To Job, the Word of God was more important than the food he ate each day (Job 23.12). Jeremiah said that he devoured the Word of God, and it was the “joy and rejoicing” of his heart to do so (Jer. 15.16). Peter instructed his readers to “long” for the Word of God, like a baby longs for its mother's milk (1 Pet. 2.1-3).

Does this describe you and your attitude toward the Word of God? Are you truly *eager* to hear the Word of Christ? And do you apply yourself to reading, contemplating, and studying the Bible faithfully, so that you might thereby increase in faith?

### *Read and run*

At a time of great national crisis, the Lord instructed the prophet Habakkuk to write down the words God was telling him so that everyone who read them might run to obey (Hab. 2.2). Hearing with obedience, you see, leads to increased faith. But we must hear, we must come to the Word of God ready to feast on the

### *Increasing Faith*

spiritual banquet God has spread for us there. This means making the time for reading and studying God's Word. If your time is already too full, then you'll need to cut something back in order to make room in your daily schedule for feasting on the Word of God.

It also means learning how to read the Bible within and according to its own narrative. The feast which God has prepared for us in His Word is not like a smorgasbord, where you take what you want and leave the rest for someone else. It's a full-course meal designed to nurture us in the covenant promises and Kingdom power of the Lord Jesus Christ. All Scripture is about Jesus (Jn. 5.39), Who fulfills the promises of God and brings the Kingdom near to us each day. If we don't read and study the Bible through that lens, and with that objective in mind, then we won't benefit from the nutritional value of Scripture as God intends.

Studying the Bible with a qualified teacher is also important, as all of Scripture testifies. Pay careful attention during the preaching of the Word. Resolve to *hear* something which you can *immediately obey* each time you listen to a sermon, participate in a Bible study, or meditate on the Word yourself.

Listen to hear the Word of Christ in Scripture. Read to run, and you'll find that you will be *hearing with understanding* so that, as understanding and obedience increase, so will your faith.

#### *For reflection*

1. How would you describe your approach to reading and studying the Word of God at this time?
2. How could you improve that discipline in the areas of *hearing, understanding, and reading to run*?
3. Spend a few minutes in prayer, listening for the Lord to show you any areas of your life where you are not hearing with understanding. Confess, repent, then *run!*

*Next steps – Preparation: Do you have a study partner – someone with whom you read and study Scripture, or with whom you can share what you're learning? Do you think having such a study partner might help you to read with understanding and obedience?*



## 7 Increase by Giving

*“Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.”* Luke 6.38

### *A transferrable principle*

In these remarks Jesus was not talking only about giving material goods, like money, although this is the way many preachers interpret our text. Jesus begins by warning against harboring a judgmental spirit and refusing to forgive others. He explains that, if we are generous in our attitudes toward those who offend against us, and ready to forgive them when they repent, then we will find the same generosity and forgiveness extended to us in abundance by the Lord.

What we give to others, God will give back to us in spades.

The Lord looks into our spirits and responds to us by extending to us “the measure” we extend to others. And while I would not be reluctant to apply this passage to the matter of tithes and offerings, I think there’s a spiritual principle here which we can apply to the question of how to increase faith.

It’s this: If we give faith to others, God will increase our faith.

Faith is not a boon to hoard; faith is a gift to be given away. And when we give it away, we make room for God to fill our souls and lives with increased faith, pressed down and running over into every area of our lives.

### *Giving away faith*

The whole drift of faith is to extend faith to others. Abraham was blessed by God so that He could be a blessing to others (Gen. 12.1-3). We have come to know the resurrection life of Christ, and Christ explains that we are to be His witnesses and extend this glorious benefit to the people around us. Christians are exhorted to teach, admonish, and correct one another, and to stimulate one another to love and good works of faith (Heb. 10.24). All believers, like the Savior Himself, have been appointed not to be served, but to serve (Mk. 10.42-45).

In sharing, giving, blessing, serving, and bearing witness, we give away our faith to others, stimulating faith in them. And as we do, paradoxically and mysteriously enough, our own faith increases as a gift from the Lord.

As is by now obvious, Christian faith is not simply an intellectual exercise. Faith is not merely something to *affirm*; it is something to *live*. We may expect our faith to increase and become full faith in direct proportion to how we *exercise* faith in seeking the Lord, opening our souls and lives to His Word and Spirit, extending ourselves into new areas of learning and life, bearing witness for the Lord, reading and hearing His Word with understanding, and extending the faith of Jesus to others.

This is what Paul Little had in mind in his classic book, *How to Give Away Your Faith*. As we give faith away, through teaching and sharing, by serving or bearing witness, we tap into the wellspring of God’s Spirit, the “secret of the Kingdom,” Who then replenishes the faith we’ve given away with new faith and fuller faith, so that by the increase of faith we become more like Christ day by day (cf. Jn. 7.37-39).

Paul insisted that we walk by faith, not by sight (2 Cor. 5.7). We act in faith toward others when, by faith, we *envision* the ways faith might lead us to show the love of Christ to the people around us, and then when we *step toward* that vision, or perhaps into it, following God’s Word and depending on His Spirit. *By* faith and *with* faith we may stimulate others to *experience* faith, at the same time finding our own faith increased for the next

## *Increasing Faith*

such opportunity of giving it away to others.

In the Gospel, Paul explains, the righteousness of God is revealed “from faith to faith” (Rom. 1.17). We experience and express the righteousness of Christ as we act on what we understand, and obey the promptings of God’s Spirit. And this reading-and-running in faith actually prepares us to live this way in other areas of life, as faith leads to increased faith and the principle of giving-in-order-to-increase spreads into all the relationships, roles, and responsibilities of our lives.

### *Increase our faith!*

In all this seeking increased faith, of course, we must remember where we began – seeking the Lord in prayer: “Lord, increase our faith!” By persisting in prayer, praying without ceasing for the Lord to increase our faith, not only will we be more mindful of the daily faith opportunities the Lord puts before us, but we will be more likely to “get out of the boat” and “just do it”.

Prayer is the constant companion of faith, and prayer is the catalyst that moves *us* to give faith, away and for *God* to increase faith, all at the same time.

The life of full faith never really gets full. There is always more to learn, more to discover, more to live, and more to delight and rejoice in as we follow Jesus in seeking His Kingdom and righteousness. So let us never weary of praying, “Lord, increase our faith!”

### *For reflection*

1. What does giving away faith look like in your life at this time?
2. How have you experienced someone giving faith to you?
3. What opportunities for giving away faith can you anticipate today?

*Next step – Expanding your [Personal Mission Field](#): What are you doing to seek increased faith? What plan are you following? Write down what you intend to do each day to seek increased faith, then share your plan with a prayer partner. Meet from time to time to rejoice in the increased faith the Lord is giving you.*

*Increasing Faith*

*For reflection or discussion*

1. Why should we want to increase in faith? What obstacles can keep you from doing this?
2. What's involved in hearing the Word of God with understanding, so that it leads us to run in obedience?
3. What are some ways you might expect to be able to give faith to others?
4. What's the most important lesson you've learned about increasing in 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.

