

FULL FAITH PART 7

# FAITH HURDLES



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Faith Hurdles  
Full Faith Part 7  
A *ReVision* Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe  
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## Welcome to *Faith Hurdles*

Welcome to *Faith Hurdles*, a study which looks at the daily obstacles, distractions, and impediments that can keep us from coming to or growing in full faith. *Faith Hurdles* is Part 7 in our series, *Full Faith*, and one of our *ReVision* series of studies in Biblical worldview.

Just as there are hindrances to faith rooted in our own experience, that can trip us up in our journey with the Lord, so various hurdles to faith can make it difficult for others to find their way into the Kingdom at all. Full faith, we recall, bears *evidence* of our truly knowing the Lord. One form of the evidence is the concern we show toward others, so that we are careful not to become stumbling blocks for them in their journey toward full faith.

If we can identify the obstacles that trip up others, we will be better able to guard against these popping in our own lives, and to help others over the hurdles of faith that can impede their progress toward Jesus.

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 Hearing and Understanding

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

### *The Good News of the Kingdom*

Christians rightly think of their message as Good News. The Gospel of the Kingdom announces a new beginning for humankind and the world. It opens the door to a way of life so completely different from the worn-out worldviews of the day, that those who observed the first Christians were persuaded they were turning the world upside-down for Jesus Christ (Acts 17.1-9).

The Gospel offers the promise, not only of forgiveness of sins and a glorious eternity in the presence of God, but of new beginnings every day, here and now, in every aspect of our lives. The Kingdom of God is power, power for righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 4.20; Rom. 14.17, 18). All who make the Kingdom turn into this new reality discover that old things indeed have passed away, and all things have become new, and are filled with meaning, purpose, and power.

Christians have Good News for the world, the Good News that, in Jesus Christ, the Kingdom of God has come to earth.

So why is it that so many people in the world continue to remain apart from the Gospel of the Kingdom? Why is there still so much unbelief among the people we know – our neighbors, friends, co-laborers, and people in every walk of life? What keeps them from seeing what we see, understanding what we have come to know, and entering with us into newness of life in Christ? And what does full faith require of us in helping others overcome these hurdles to faith?

At least seven powerful obstacles prevent people from receiving the Good News of the Kingdom and entering into newness of life in Jesus Christ. It might surprise us to know that perhaps the most common obstacle is that people just do not understand the Gospel. They have never heard the Word of Christ clearly, in a way that they can understand and that helps them to see the true beauty of the Gospel.

### *Two wrong conclusions*

Faith, Paul explained, comes from hearing the Word of Christ. In our day those who have come to know the truth that is in Jesus Christ have made two conclusions concerning their unbelieving neighbors, both of which are false.

The first is that everyone they know already understands the Gospel. They've heard it a thousand times already and understand clearly what the Bible teaches concerning how to be saved. They've heard it; they just aren't interested in believing.

My experience, however, tells me that this is not true. Over the years, using a simple questionnaire, I've found that most people who do not believe the Gospel simply do not understand what it teaches. If they ever heard a clear presentation of the Good News, it did not register, and they continue to believe that Christianity is a religion in which salvation comes by doing good works, following the example and teaching of Jesus. People will never get on track with a full faith race in the Lord until they become disabused of this false idea.

### *Faith Hurdles*

The second conclusion that Christians make about their unbelieving neighbors is that they aren't interested in spiritual matters. This also is false. Again, using this same questionnaire, I have found people more than willing to talk about spiritual matters and to hear the true teaching of Scripture concerning the Gospel.

And years of equipping others to bear witness for Christ, and leading them to do so, also assures me that the unbelievers we see each day are not closed to conversations about spiritual matters. They will be eager to talk with someone who is confident and knowledgeable, and who treats them with respect.

#### *Our task*

The first obstacle to believing the Gospel is simple ignorance. People cannot believe what they do not understand. They need to *hear* the Good News, and not just once, but again and again, until it begins to sink into their souls where it can work its transforming power.

Paul says that they cannot hear with understanding unless someone goes to them and proclaims the Good News of Jesus Christ and His Kingdom.

And this, my friends, is a task which has been appointed to each one of us.

#### *For reflection*

1. Suppose you were asked to explain the "Good News" of the Christian faith. What would you say?
2. Why do you think Christians today are so inconsistent and timid about sharing this Good News with the people around them?
3. What evidence have you seen to support that claim that people today (a) don't really understand the Gospel and (b) would be happy to discuss it?

*Next steps: Download the [free questionnaire mentioned in this article](#). Read and study through it, then practice using it with a Christian friend. Ask the Lord to give you opportunities to go through it with any unbelievers in your life.*

## 2 Influential Others

*But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. Acts 13.8*

### *A second hurdle*

The biggest obstacle to people coming to faith in Jesus Christ is that they've never had the opportunity to hear the Gospel with understanding. Christians wrongly assume that their unbelieving friends and co-workers already know the Gospel but just aren't interested. In fact, just the opposite is the case, so we need to renew our commitment to become more active and effective as witnesses for the Good News. Full faith in Christ will see us becoming bold, Spirit-empowered witnesses for Him (Acts 1.8). We have a glorious offer to propose to our unbelieving friends, and they will only be able to hear it if we are faithful in our calling to be witnesses for Christ.

A second obstacle to faith can be the views of influential others, like Elymas the sorcerer.

I saw this some years ago when two young men appeared at my door trying to persuade me to believe their version of the Good News, which I knew to be false. I listened politely as one of the men – obviously the trainer in this situation – waxed eloquent about his works-oriented view of Christian faith and how I, too, could join the army of witnesses who, through their obedience, were earning the right to become children of God.

After a while he asked me to respond. I said, "I appreciate your interest in my eternal wellbeing, and I admire the zeal and thoroughness of your witness. However, I cannot believe it because what you are presenting is not what the Bible teaches."

He looked at me amazed. As he started to respond I looked over at his friend, who was looking at him a little shocked. He said to me, "Didn't I just show you from this Bible what the teaching of the Kingdom is all about?"

I answered, "You did, indeed, but what you showed me is not what the Bible teaches."

"What do you mean?" he asked.

I said, "What you explained as the true nature of Christianity and the Kingdom is not what the Bible teaches. It is instead what someone has *told you* the Bible teaches. In fact, I'm not convinced that you know what the Bible teaches at all, but only what others have told you about it."

Now he was more than aghast; he was offended. I hastened to say, "May I show you what I mean?"

He said, "Do tell."

"OK," I said. "Can you tell me, in a single sentence, the basic message of the book of Amos? What, in a nutshell, was the burden of this prophet?" No answer. "All right," I continued, "that was perhaps a bit too hard. How about the book of Genesis? In a single sentence, what's the message of Genesis?" Silence, as he looked down, thumbing at his Bible. "How about Judges?" I asked. "Or Romans? Ephesians? In fact, any single book at all? Can you tell me in a single sentence the message of any single book of the Bible?"

He didn't even look up.

Then I turned to his companion and asked, "What do you think? It's obvious your friend knows the message he wants you to learn. But do you think he knows the *Bible* well enough to be able to tell me the true nature of the Gospel and the Kingdom of God?"

The friend looked nervously at his trainer, who didn't even look at him, and said – not surprisingly – "Yes."

I thanked them for stopping by and gave a brief summary of the true Gospel, and then they left.

*Sow a little doubt!*

I didn't change any minds that day, but hopefully I was able to sow some doubt into the thinking of at least one of those young men.

Many people today are kept from believing because someone influential in their lives – a friend, family member, or some respected or admired public figure – is keeping them from hearing the true Gospel. We see this with people who have heard some scientist raving about the glories of atheism, or who admire some pop culture icon who sports a life and spouts a creed of unbelief. It may be necessary for us to challenge the views of that influential other in order, first of all, to shake free from their grip those who are looking to them for their understanding of truth.

So we'll need to be ready, by working hard to understand the times in which we live, and considering the best ways of making the Good News of Jesus known to the people God sends our way.

*For reflection*

1. Who are some "influential" people today whose views may be keeping others from believing the Good News? What do these people believe?
2. How would you begin to approach the task of examining the views of influential others in order to understand and refute them? What would that require? How does 2 Corinthians 10.3-5 lead you to think about this?
3. We need to think of the work of bearing witness more like a process and less like an event. Explain the difference:

*Next steps: One of the great "influential others" of our day is advertising. How does advertising discourage people from coming to faith in Jesus? How should we respond to that modern "Elymas"? Talk with some Christian friends about these questions.*



### 3 They Love Darkness

*“And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.”* John 3.19, 20

#### *Comfortable in sin*

A third obstacle some people encounter in coming to faith in the Gospel is that they have become comfortable in their sin. They love the darkness, and they’re just not ready to give up what they consider to be their right to have some fun.

We should be encouraged whenever we encounter this response to the Gospel, because it indicates that unbelievers may have a better grasp of one aspect of the Gospel than even many believers do: The Gospel requires repentance. Christians today have grown rather too complacent about sin. We don’t hear much preaching on the subject, and we’re all encouraged not to be judgmental, but to practice tolerance toward one another because, after all, we’re all sinners.

Well, yes, that’s all true. However, the Gospel and the Christian life demand repentance. We cannot know new life in Jesus or the righteousness and Kingdom He commands us to seek unless we are daily laying aside every weight of sin that holds us back (Heb. 12.1, 2).

Unbelievers understand that Christianity and sin don’t go together, and, for many, the love of sin may be too strong to keep them from believing the Good News of Christ. How should we respond to someone who is stumbling over this hurdle to faith?

#### *The Golden Rule*

In two ways: First, we should appeal to them on the basis of the Golden Rule. How, as a rule of thumb, would they want others to treat them? Or, you might throw in, their children? You could put it even more pointedly: Would you prefer someone to treat you like Jesus would, or, like (pick a notorious contemporary sinner) might?

The answer will most likely be, “like Jesus.” But the difference between Jesus and some notorious sinner is simply this: Jesus was without sin. We can hardly expect anyone to treat us or our children as Jesus would – without sin – unless we’re willing to do the same.

But if we’re holding on to sin, that’s going to be pretty tough. And if we insist on relating to others as sinners, we have no right to expect them to treat us otherwise. If they protest that they’re not sinners, a simple review of the Ten Commandments – reminding them that God gave these to expose our sin – should lead them to retreat from that position.

#### *The dangers of sin*

Second, we need to explain to our unbelieving friend that sin is a dangerous condition.

As Paul explained in Romans 1.18-32, sin lodged in a person’s soul goes from bad to worse. The more we hold on to sin, the more God loosens His hold on us, by which He restrains us from ruining our lives in sin. The more He loosens His hold, the more we fall into sin, greater and deeper sin, sin that hurts not only ourselves, but others as well.

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We might even want to suggest that, if they persist in holding on to their sin, five years from now they will find themselves thinking, saying, and doing things, as a matter of course, which today would embarrass even them.

Sin pulls us into a black hole of moral compromise and decline which brings harm to us and others. And the only way out of this trap is through the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Don't worry, as you begin talking about sin, that people will think you're judging them. You can simply point out that it's not you but the Word of God that has shown the light of righteousness on the dark recesses of their soul.

And just as the light of God's Word shows them their sin, it warns them to flee its clutches and to find the deliverance from sin which only Jesus Christ can provide. Confronting people with their sin may be a little awkward, but since sin is such a powerful obstacle to believing in Christ, we must not shy away from this challenge.

#### *For reflection or discussion*

1. Why is sin able to exert such a powerful hold on people?
2. Imagine that the idea of sin comes up in a conversation with a friend, and he says, "Oh, I don't believe in sin." How would you try to help him begin thinking differently?
3. What is the place of the Law of God in sharing the Good News of the Kingdom? How does the Law help bring sin to light?

*Next steps: Do your unbelieving friends believe in sin? Ask a few of them.*

## 4 Materialism

*But when he heard this, he became very sorrowful, for he was very rich. And when Jesus saw that he became very sorrowful, He said, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!"* Luke 18.23, 24

### *Made to know God*

Human beings are made to know God. Every one of us is made in His image and likeness, and we have a homing instinct in our souls which makes us long for Him, whether we recognize or admit it or not.

In fact, as Paul explains in Romans 1.18ff, so firmly has the image of God been embossed on the human soul that all people *do* know God – even those who deny that He exists! He has made Himself plainly known to them in the things He has made, and they are “without excuse,” Paul says, for failing to acknowledge and worship Him.

Now we don’t expect unbelievers to agree with that. However, their disagreement doesn’t make the Bible wrong, and doesn’t negate the fact that all people are made for God, all people know God, and, if they will not worship God, they *will* worship something else.

Every human being is religious in the sense that we hope in things beyond us, things that *transcend* our present experience and allow us to envision a better life and a happier and more fulfilling existence. Whatever people set their hope on becomes what they serve. They organize their time and priorities to pursue the thing they hope to achieve. Their vision of the “good life” becomes a consuming passion and establishes values and priorities which keep them on track, as they see it, toward a full and abundant life.

### *The ultimate “religion”*

And for many people in our day material prosperity is the supreme condition, the ultimate destination, the only worthwhile god.

This should not surprise us. Everything about our increasingly secular society is bent toward material happiness: education, politics, advertising, pop culture – you name it. People are reared in an ideological atmosphere which says that in order to be happy you have to have things: The one who has the most toys when he dies, wins.

Deep inside, however, those who have devoted themselves to achieving material prosperity know that this cannot provide the happiness and fulfillment they seek. Wealth cannot, for example, deliver them from the grave. It can’t guarantee they won’t know sorrow or suffering in this life. It won’t make them more likely to love their neighbors. It can’t keep them from growing old. And no matter how wealthy they become, they’re likely to believe that “just a little bit more” will make them happier still.

Wealth and prosperity, rather than bring true happiness and fulfillment, create in many people anxiety, uncertainty, and the fear of losing it all. And they present a huge hurdle to overcome in surrendering to Jesus and the hope of the Gospel.

### *What Jesus offers*

We’ll want to question the materialistic assumptions of any unbelievers who prefer the pursuit of things to following Jesus Christ. How can we do that?

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One way is to ask them to describe the final state to which they believe material prosperity will bring them. What will wealth do for them? How will it make them feel? What is it that they really want in life that they think having wealth and things is going to accomplish?

The point is that it's not wealth, but *the state of mind and life* they believe wealth will provide – *these* are what people really want. And what they don't know, but we do, is that overall state of wellbeing comes not from things, but from the unseen God and Jesus Christ, His Son.

What people really want is what the Gospel offers: unshakeable peace, true friendship, safety, security, hope and joy, life forever without a care in the world. As Augustine explained, God has made us for Himself, and our hearts will always be restless until they find their true rest in Him.

If you can establish that this is what people really want – that sense of wellbeing, security, happiness, and love – then you can question their assumption that material possessions can provide all this. Of course, they can't.

But we want them to know there is Someone Who can, Someone in Whom all these deep-seated longings of our souls find their full and complete satisfaction. If we can dislodge them just a bit from the god of things, we might be able to clear a path for them to rethink their view of the Gospel.

#### *For reflection or discussion*

1. What would be some other examples of “gods” that people prefer instead of the Lord?
2. Why is the allure of material possessions so strong? How do Christians prepare themselves to resist this powerful tendency?
3. Why is Jesus alone qualified and able to bring us to this state of overall wellbeing?

*Next steps: How does the allure of materialism keep even some believers from full faith in the Lord? Talk with some Christian friends about this question.*

## 5 Pride

*“The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’”* Luke 18:11, 12

### *A warning against pride*

In Jesus’ parable about the self-righteous Pharisee, He was warning people against the prideful notion that we are sufficient in ourselves for whatever “salvation” we might require. Pride is yet another hurdle people have to overcome if they’re ever going to make their way to faith in Christ, and it comes to us in a variety of ways, although it always takes the same form:

“I can handle this by myself!”

Pride frequently comes from comparing oneself to others, especially those who are obviously one’s inferiors in some way. “I’m not as bad a sinner as some,” pride leads us to conclude, and, of course, we can always find plenty of sinners compared with whom our own morality looks pretty good.

“Look at everything I do!” is yet another form of pride. I work harder, earn more, am more active in helping others, and besides, I’ve managed to achieve quite a bit. What would coming to Jesus do to make me any more successful than I already am?

Pride also comes by thinking that one has been somehow “favored” more than others, and is therefore, better than they. A prideful person might even attribute his acquisitions and successes to some “higher power” and thus display a false humility. Such a person is grateful – to something – for not having been born in a Third World nation, and he converts that sense of blessing into one of deserving, concluding that there must be something special about him to be who he is.

### *The essence of pride*

Pride is making more of oneself than is justified. When a person comes to consider that his own attainments, abilities, or status somehow rank him a notch above others, and that, in the end, he is the architect of his own success, pride can have a blinding effect. It leads a person to conclude that, since he’s done it all so well so far, why would he think that he needs anybody else, much less God, to help the rest of the way?

Of course, there’s always the matter of the grave.

The sons of Korah observed of the rich and prideful that they always hoped that the lands and projects they named after themselves would keep their glory alive after they had departed this world. But it seldom did, and even if it did, what good would that do them, a-mouldering in the grave (Ps. 49)?

### *A nation of narcissists*

In our day it seems just about everyone has bought into the problem of pride at some level. We are a nation of narcissists, as Christopher Lasch explained, and our “all through the day” cry and concern is, as The Beatles so aptly phrased it, “I, me, mine!”

Pride can blind us to our needs because we figure whatever needs we have we can handle, and if we can’t, they probably aren’t important anyway. Pride leads people to justify their immoral practices. Pride leads us to acquire more things with which to prop up our self-image. Pride causes us to pooh-pooh whatever lack of knowledge might characterize us: After all, if *I* don’t know or care about this, it’s undoubtedly not all that important.

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How can we break through pride? How can we help a prideful person take off the mask of security and smugness and look within his own soul? In love, Jesus confronted His prideful generation, both directly and indirectly. And He showed, as in the case of the Apostle Paul, that pride, while a considerable hurdle, can be overcome.

This can be very difficult, for as soon as you begin to challenge a prideful person, he might cut you off completely. If you don't see things his way, you must not be worth knowing.

Solomon's story might be useful in such a situation. As he relates his life in the book of Ecclesiastes, no one ever had more to boast about than he. Just listen to all that "I, me, mine!" in chapter 2. Let your prideful friend read from Solomon's own words that pride and self-satisfaction are, in the end, empty, hollow, and meaningless. Accomplished and prideful as he was, Solomon's life was without substance or happiness, and his only hope was to turn to God and to find his rest in Him, as he recounts in Ecclesiastes 12.

A prideful friend might be able to identify with Solomon's journey, and perhaps, his conclusion.

### *For reflection or discussion*

1. Why is pride such a powerful hurdle for people to jump when it comes to believing the Gospel?
2. Reflect on Solomon's story, as he tells it in Ecclesiastes. How can you see pride and humiliation at work in him?
3. Suggest some ways of approaching someone about this faith hurdle. How might you help a prideful person to look at himself a bit more objectively? Why is this important if we hope to help such a person be open to the Gospel?

*Next steps: Do you sense the presence of any pride in your own life? Spend some time in prayer, waiting on the Lord to show you any areas where you need to repent of pride, before you go to call others to do the same.*

## 6 Lack of a Credible Witness

*“But I have a greater witness than John’s; for the works which the Father has given Me to finish—the very works that I do—bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me.”* John 5.36

### *Christianity and good works*

Most people associate Jesus with good works. You won’t find many people who will deny that Jesus, Whoever He may have been, was a good Man.

Consequently, most people also believe that real Christianity has something to do with good works – with living sacrificially, caring for the poor and needy, not passing judgment on others, and helping wherever one can.

At the same time, most contemporary unbelievers do *not* associate such good works with Christianity as they have known it, and observe it, in this country. Ask many unbelievers their view of Christians in America, and it won’t be long before the word, “hypocrites”, is expressed.

Sometimes we Christians can be the greatest obstacle to others believing the Gospel. The 20<sup>th</sup>-century philosopher and mathematician Bertrand Russell, a renowned atheist, pointed to Church history as the most convincing evidence that Christianity was a lie and Jesus was a fraud (*Why I Am Not a Christian*). His very selective reading of Church history dwelt on religious wars, persecution of those who did not toe the majority line, factionalism, and a variety of other undeniable evils which have appeared in the record over the years. If he were still alive today he would doubtless include the sex and money scandals that have rocked the Church in recent years, as well as the shameful record of certain putative Christians in supporting terrorist activities and bigoted demonstrations.

No one can deny that the record of Christian history is not perfect. However, as Rodney Stark and others have shown, the positive contribution of the Christian faith far and away outpaces the negatives we have managed to strew along the course of world history (*The Victory of Reason*).

### *The need of the hour*

What many unbelievers lack today is a witness to the Good News whose life is truly believable, someone who evidences the fruit of the Spirit, the tokens of love, and a sincere and humble holiness, someone whose life, like Jesus’ life, bears witness to the claims he makes about a new Kingdom and a new way of life.

Someone truly living a life of full faith.

You may be such a person. But if unbelievers are going to know that, you’ll have to get close to them. You’ll have to learn their names, begin praying for them daily, take an active interest in their lives, and look for ways to serve them in Jesus’ Name. You’ll have to demonstrate a quiet spirit, a gentle and respectful tongue, and a readiness to hear them out on whatever they want to talk about. You’ll need to be a good listener, to ask relevant questions, and to be willing to admit your own ignorance and shortcomings.

We need *believable* Christians if we’re ever going to help our unbelieving friends get over the hurdle of hypocrisy and come to faith in Christ. Unless we are able to *demonstrate* the reality of the faith we proclaim, many people are going to continue in their unbelief.

*Personal Mission Field*

The place to begin in becoming a credible witness for Christ is in making sure you are staying close to the Lord in prayer and His Word. Only as the living Christ replaces the dead attitudes, thoughts, and values of our sinful souls will we begin to show a genuineness and hope that will make others curious about what we believe (1 Pet. 3.15).

Then, by identifying and owning your own Personal Mission Field, you can begin to show the Jesus *in* you to the people *around* you by your daily words and deeds.

Just as Jesus was sent to a particular place and time, and to a particular people, with a mission to bring near the Kingdom of God, so He has sent each one of us (Jn. 20.21). Do you know the people in your Personal Mission Field? And are you working – through prayer, service, demonstrating Jesus’ love, and seeking conversations – to bear witness to these people about the Good News of the Kingdom?

Unless the people in your life encounter a credible witness for the Lord, they’re not likely to get over the hurdle of hypocrisy and find their way into the Good News of Jesus Christ. Jesus has sent you to them. Are you ready and willing to go?

*For reflection or discussion*

1. What do we mean by “Personal Mission Field”? Do you have one? Who’s in it?
2. How do words and works come together to create a credible witness for the Good News of the Kingdom?
3. Jesus commands us to make disciples “as you are going” (Matt. 28.18-20). Where do you “go” each week? To whom has God sent you for the purpose of making disciples?

*Next steps: Download the free [Personal Mission Field worksheet](#), map out your Personal Mission Field, and begin showing Jesus to the people to whom the Lord has sent you.*



## 7 The Need for the Spirit

*“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.”* John 6.63

*What if?*

Suppose we could somehow manage to overcome every obstacle to belief, every faith hurdle that we’ve talked about so far. What if we could speak the Gospel so clearly that all our unbelieving friends could tell it right back to us, and get it right? If we could expose and unravel all the lies and deceptions by which influential others keep unbelievers from receiving Christ? Could get our friends to repent of their sins? To denounce the god of materialism? Swallow their pride? And see in us a truly faithful and believable, flesh-and-blood example of the truth we proclaim?

What if we could do *all* that with *all* the unbelievers in our Personal Mission Field? Would that be enough to see them all embrace the grand proposal of new life in Jesus and join us on our full faith journey of seeking His Kingdom?

The short answer is, No.

No amount of clearing away obstacles, reasoning persuasively, or living like a saint will convince your unbelieving friends to turn with all their hearts and embrace Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. For that to happen, one more obstacle must be overcome, one more hurdle remains to get over.

They must be set upon by the Spirit of God.

*The Spirit’s work and ours*

Only the Holy Spirit can bring new life to dead souls. We, like John the Baptist, have important work to do in clearing a path for the Spirit to work, but unless He comes with power, nothing resulting in eternal life is going to ensue.

Only the Holy Spirit can convict lost sinners of sin, righteousness, and the judgment to come (Jn. 16.8-11).

Only the Holy Spirit can break through the heart of stone with which people resist the call of the Lord, and bring a new heart into the soul (Ezek. 36.26, 27).

Only the Holy Spirit can teach people the deep secrets of the Lord and His Gospel (1 Cor. 2.12, 13).

Only the Holy Spirit can exert the power to bring people to new life in Christ and enable them to cry out to God as their Father (Gal. 4.6).

And only the Holy Spirit can “seal the deal” and give that assurance of forgiveness and new life which inaugurates a life of grateful obedience to the living God (Eph. 1.13, 14). Unless the Holy Spirit comes to our unbelieving friends, they will never embrace the Good News of the Kingdom of God.

So where does that leave us? Well, first of all, it leaves us with a good deal of work to do in cultivating the soil of our unbelieving friends’ souls and in sowing the Word of God, little by little and by word and deed, into their lives. The Spirit works with the Word to bring conversion and new life, and God has entrusted His Word to us.

So while the Spirit has to do the final work to help a lost friend come to faith, we have to do the preliminary

### *Faith Hurdles*

work which, if it pleases the Lord, the Spirit will use. We need to work our Personal Mission Fields every day, consistently, and with a view to helping people learn more about Jesus and His love for them.

#### *Pray for the Spirit!*

But we must also pray for the Spirit to come to our unbelieving friends. We should pray that He will strive mightily with them, to persuade them of the reality of God, of their own sins, and of the beauty of Christ and His Gospel (Gen. 6.3). We can pray that the Spirit would fill us and empower us to be effective witnesses for the Lord at all times (Eph. 5.18-21; Acts 1.8). And we can pray that it might please God to send His Spirit to our unbelieving friends, so that they join us in the Kingdom of God and the grand proposal of new life in Jesus Christ (Lk. 11.11-13).

God is sovereign in the work of salvation; His Spirit blows where He wills, and brings life to whomever God chooses. At the same time, God calls us to be active agents in the progress of His Kingdom. Our role, flowing out of our full faith experience of Jesus, is to embody and proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom and to urge our unsaved friends to consider Jesus and the gift of life He offers.

We must do our part, at the same time pleading with God for His Spirit to bring our work to completion in Him.

#### *For reflection or discussion*

1. Why is the Holy Spirit indispensable for someone to overcome all the obstacles that are keeping him from coming to faith in Jesus Christ?
2. If the Holy Spirit is the “CEO” in the conversion business, we are His “executive assistants.” Explain:
3. How would you expect the Holy Spirit to use you – words and works – to help unbelievers have a clearer understanding of what we propose to them in the Gospel?

*Next steps: How will you begin to take more of your full faith calling to help people overcome the faith hurdles in their lives?*

*Faith Hurdles*

*For reflection or discussion*

1. What do we mean by “faith hurdles”? What do these have to do with our full faith calling to follow Jesus?
2. Write out the first names or initials of the people in your life who are stumbling over one or another of the faith hurdles mentioned in this study. Begin praying for those people daily.
3. Have you mapped out and begun working your Personal Mission Field? How might you begin to improve in this effort?
4. What’s the most important lesson you’ve learned about helping others overcome faith hurdles?
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.

The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. Visit our website at [www.ailbe.org](http://www.ailbe.org) to learn more.

We hope you found this study helpful. If so, please consider making a gift to The Fellowship. You can contribute to our ministry by using the donate button at the website, or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 19 Tyler Dr., Essex Junction, VT 05452.

Thank you.

