

Faith in the Pain

[Hebrews 11:30-40](#)



It seems to me that those in our fellowship are experiencing a lot of pain lately. The past several weeks our prayer times have been very weighty. We have people that are experiencing financial problems, marriage problems, family problems, health problems; we have friends who are dealing with life threatening illnesses. How does our faith hold up in the midst of these painful trials? How can we strengthen our faith in the midst of what seems like unbearable pain?

Life's problems can become extremely difficult for us to bear if our faith is weak and our thinking is not biblical. Are you familiar with the expression, "**fat, dumb and happy**"? I think that would be an appropriate description of the twenty first century American Church. We are **fat**—we have so much in the way of physical material blessings and yet we do not seem to appreciate what we have. We need the same warning that God gave to Israel as they entered the promise land:

"Beware lest you forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes which I am commanding you today; ¹² lest, when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived in them, ¹³ and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies, ¹⁴ then your heart becomes proud, and you forget the LORD your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. (Deuteronomy 8:11-14 NASB)

We are **dumb**—the depth of our understanding of God's word is 3,000 miles wide but only an inch deep. We have this idea that God wants us all healthy, wealthy, and trouble free. After all, we are Americans, and we have God's special favor. This is a very destructive, very unbiblical thought pattern.

We are **happy**—but only as long as things go our way. The idea of being in pain, suffering, undergoing hardships as a Christian sounds outdated like something from the ancient past. We are comfortable, prosperous, and content in our biblical ignorance, and think things should always go as we would like them to. But when they don't, when trials come, when we are in pain, we can find ourselves questioning God as if He has made some mistake or lost control. I believe this happens because our faith is weak and our faith is weak because our thinking is not biblical.

In [Hebrews, chapter 11](#) we have a call to faith. In this chapter we are encouraged to live by faith, trusting God in every situation and circumstance of life:

And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. (Hebrews 11:6 NASB)

There is no way our life can be pleasing to God apart from faith. He is pleased with us when we trust Him. And I'm sure that we all understand that trusting Him is much more difficult when things are not going our way.

Our life of faith begins when we trust Jesus Christ alone for our [eternal salvation](#). Forsaking any goodness or [merit](#) in ourselves, we look to Jesus Christ alone for our salvation. All men are born

[spiritually dead](#), separated from God because of our sin. We do not deserve, nor can we earn our salvation, it is a [gift](#) of God's grace. Jesus Christ died to pay the sin debt of all who trust in Him. Once we have trusted Jesus Christ for salvation, we begin the life of faith. All believers have faith, but they don't all have the same amount of faith. There are degrees of faith, and we are to always be growing in our faith. How do we grow in faith? Not by time in service; you don't automatically grow. As a matter of fact if you don't work on growing in your Christian faith you will actually digress.

We grow by increasing our knowledge of God through a study of His Word. The more we know Him, the more we will trust him. Do you trust people you don't know? I hope not, that would be foolish. You must know someone in order to trust them. That is why many Christians find it difficult to trust God, they don't know him very well. We must study the Bible if we're ever going to grow in faith:

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ. (Romans 10:17 NASB)

But study alone won't do it, we must apply what we know. As we study the Word of God and apply what we learn, we will grow in our faith.

Hebrews 11 gives us many examples of men and women who had grown strong in their faith, and because of their faith lived victorious lives. The writer's design in chapter 11 is to encourage us through the examples of those who by faith were victorious.

By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they had been encircled for seven days. (Hebrews 11:30 NASB)

The Israelites had just crossed the Jordan River, and by doing so had burned all their bridges. They had nowhere to run, they were now in the enemy's territory, and they had to fight or die. [Jericho](#) was a walled city, actually a fortress. It contained an armed garrison filled with experienced warriors. Jericho had to be defeated before the valleys of Canaan could be occupied. This is one of the cities that frightened the spies, causing them to say, "***The people are greater and taller than we, the cities are great and walled up to heaven***". To their eyes, the city seemed impregnable. But by faith, they obeyed God. It took a tremendous amount of faith to follow through with this plan. March around the city? What if the Canaanites shot at them, or dropped rocks on them from the top of the wall? Nothing could seem more foolish than for grown men to march around a strong fortress for seven days on end led by seven priests blowing rams horns. But they obeyed God and He destroyed the city. Their victory was accomplished by faith. [Chrysostom](#) said, "***Assuredly the he sound of trumpets is unable to cast down stones, though one blow for ten thousand years, but faith can do all things.***"



The faith of [Joshua](#) and the children of Israel serve as a good illustration of the Christian life. A Christian is never going to live the Christian life without running, sooner or later, into some Jericho; some massive kind of problem. It is by this same faith that other Jerichos, both large and small, can be overcome.

In verses 32-35, the author gives us some other examples in which faith has enabled the people of God to be victorious over incredible opposition:

And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, (Hebrews 11:32 NASB)

The implication of the rhetorical question is that there is no need for further elaboration—"I don't have time to continue to go into detail." These names are no more than a random sampling of the many deserving of mention. The selection made is rather startling, I would not have chosen these men as an example of faith, but God did.

The writer does not go into detail about what these men did. But if we examine the Scriptural record, we find that each man battled against overwhelming odds so that, humanly speaking, there was little chance of his coming out on top. For men in such positions, faith in God was not a formality. It meant real trust when the odds seemed stacked against them. They set worthy examples for the readers in their difficult circumstances.

They also show us that faith is not a rarity, which the readers might be unlikely to experience. It has been often found, and can be found today. Let's look at some of the examples the writer uses:

Gideon - We're all probably familiar with the story of Gideon; Through a series of events, God took Gideon from a cowering coward to a man of great faith. With 300 men with no weapons, Gideon went up against 135,000 armed trained warriors. The point should be obvious, **they certainly weren't trusting in themselves**; it was all up to God.

This is how you are to live the Christian life, by **faith in God**, and not in yourself. Trust in Him, and let Him fight your battles for you. It took a lot of faith to do what Gideon did, he believed God, and he tackled the impossible. Apart from faith, what he did was stupid.

Barak—we're probably not too familiar with Barak. But according to God, who inspired the writing of Hebrews, he was a man of faith. The story of Barak is in Judges 4. Barak took 10,000 men and attacked and defeated the mighty massive force of Sisera. Practically speaking, there was no way Barak could handle Sisera, but God told Barak, ***"I will deliver him into your hand."*** Barak believed God, and won the battle.

Samson—we're all familiar with him, but we might not of thought of him as a man of faith, but he was. He knew that his strength was from the Lord. It takes a lot of faith to fight 1,000 men, no matter how strong you are. Samson's conquests illustrate the truth of 1 Samuel 14:6:

Then Jonathan said to the young man who was carrying his armor, "Come and let us cross over to the garrison of these uncircumcised; perhaps the LORD will work for us, for the LORD is not restrained to save by many or by few." (1 Samuel 14:6 NASB)

God is able to save by many or by few.

Jephthah—this is another man that we are not too familiar with. Jephthah trusted in the Lord. He faced tremendous odds, yet believed God and won the victory.

David—David spent his whole life facing incredible odds and trusting God for the victory. David said to Goliath in 1 Samuel 17:

"This day the LORD will deliver you up into my hands, and I will strike you down and remove your head from you. And I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the sky and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, (1 Samuel 17:46 NASB)

David's victories were by faith. As we read through the life of David in the Bible, we see that when he trusted God he was strong, and when he didn't trust God he was filled with fear.

Samuel—He never fought in any wars, but he fought the battle of idolatry and immorality. He had to stand up in the midst of a polluted society and speak for God, and that takes faith.

The Prophets—Samuel and the prophets balance the warriors. To fight for God takes faith, but it also takes faith to speak for Him.

All of these men listed are just men, they weren't perfect, they often failed. They were men of like passions with us, and from that fact we may take comfort. He lists among the faithful: **Gideon**, a big coward (it took a lot of convincing to get him to trust God); **Barak**, he wouldn't go into battle unless Deborah went with him (what a man); **Samson**, he married a Philistine—he was so weak as to yield the secret of his strength. In so many ways, Samson was a failure, he was a sinful man, and yet he was an example of faith; **Jephthah**, because of a rash vow, he sacrificed his only daughter ([Judges 11:30-35,39](#)); **David**, an adulterer and a murderer, and yet used as an example of faith.

Surely, there is a lesson to learn here. These examples are all real people who were not perfect, but in the midst of their weakness, they trusted God, and as they trusted God, they were made strong. But when they failed to trust God, they were weak. Strong faith does not await perfection of character. **Faith is a response to who God is, not what we are.** It's encouraging to me that God would use these men as examples of faith. It helps me to see that I don't have to be perfect to trust God, but as I learn to trust Him, I'll grow. It also shows me that faith can be strong one minute and weak the next. The key to strong faith is keeping our eyes on God. Is faith practical? You bet it is, and the next three verses show us just how practical it can be:

who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions,³⁴ quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.³⁵ Women received back their dead by resurrection... (Hebrews 11:33-35a NASB)

The Greek word for "conquered" is *katagonizomai*, [kat-ag-o-nid'-zo-my] it means: "*to fight down*" or "*to overcome*". They were victorious; Joshua, David, Gideon. I think that it's clear that the dominant thought in all these examples is triumph over adversity; victory in battle because of faith in God. This is one great side to the experience of faith, but there is another. And verses 35b-38 give the other side of the picture.

Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, in order that they might obtain a better resurrection; (Hebrews 11:35 NASB)

The transition is startling, from victory to torture. The word "tortured" is from the Greek word

tumpanizo, [toom-pan-id'-zo] which means: “*to torture with the tympanum*” [tim-pa-num]. This was a drum shaped instrument over which criminals were stretched and then beaten with clubs. The word means: “*to be beat to death*”. Believers please grasp this; faith is not always rewarded in this life.

and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment.³⁷ They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated³⁸ (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. (Hebrews 11:36-38 NASB)

In my opinion, this is an even greater manifestation of the power of faith. **Faith's power to enable those to suffer what other wise they could not have suffered.** Here is a group of people that didn't gain great victories out on the battlefield. They didn't perform great feats for God, but in my opinion, these are the real heroes. They trusted God when the day was dark, when the night was long, the suffering was great, and when there was no deliverance for them at all.

They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (Hebrews 11:37 NASB)

These believers, these men of faith “*were put to death with the sword*”– I want you to notice a contrast here. Back in verse 34 we have been told:

quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. (Hebrews 11:34 NASB)

Some “*Escaped the edge of the sword*”– David escaped the sword of Goliath and Saul, and there are many other examples, but some through faith “*were slain with the sword*”. Elijah escaped Jezebel's vengeance, but other prophets of the Lord were slain with the sword at that time.

So too in the apostolic age, Herod Agrippa killed James, the brother of John, with the sword: **And he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword. (Acts 12:2 NASB)**

When Herod tried to do the same thing to Peter, God delivered him:
And on the very night when Herod was about to bring him forward, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains; and guards in front of the door were watching over the prison.⁷ And behold, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared, and a light shone in the cell; and he struck Peter's side and roused him, saying, "Get up quickly." And his chains fell off his hands. (Acts 12:6-7 NASB)

By faith one lived, and by faith the other died. James was put to death Peter was set free. Just because we are Christians and love God does not mean that things will always turn out as we would like them to. All things will work together for our good, but we may not like how they turn out. We need to trust God in the bad times as well as the good.

Put yourself in the shoes of James's wife and then Peter's. One is grieving over the murder of her husband; the other rejoices over the miraculous deliverance of hers. Peter's wife rejoices and thanks

God, but what does James's wife do? Was God any less sovereign in the death of James than He was in the deliverance of Peter? Is God sovereign only in the "good" circumstances of our lives?

The Bible teaches that God is sovereign over both the good and bad circumstances of our lives: *In the day of prosperity be happy, But in the day of adversity consider-- God has made the one as well as the other So that man may not discover anything that will be after him.* (Ecclesiastes 7:14 NASB)

Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both good and ill go forth? (Lamentations 3:38 NASB)

God is in control of both good and bad circumstances. James' wife must trust in God and in His sovereign control over her life, even in the death of her husband. In the midst of her heartache and grief, she may respond with, "**Lord, I know You were in control of this dreadful event. I do not understand why You allowed it to happen, but I trust You.**"

We honor God by choosing to trust Him when we don't understand what He is doing, or why He has allowed some adverse circumstances to occur. God is sovereign. He controls all events and He wants us to trust Him. Do you? If you can't trust Him, you don't know Him well enough.

It's great to be able to get up and quote Scriptures such as:

The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear Him, and rescues them. (Psalms 34:7 NASB)

The righteous cry and the LORD hears, And delivers them out of all their troubles. (Psalms 34:17 NASB)

That's wonderful, and God does that, but sometimes He chooses not to deliver the believer from suffering. God doesn't always raise a person up from a bed of sickness. While some are healed, there are thousands today who are in the hospitals, thousands lying on beds of pain. Strong faith trusts God in the midst of suffering and death.

Why are we so weak in faith? Why is our faith in God so easily rocked by the circumstances of life? As we have already said our faith in God is weak because we don't know God because we spend little time in His word. But I think another factor is as twenty first century American we have an entitlement mentality. We think that God owes us! We have bought the destructive lie of the health/wealth gospel.

We have bought the lie that [Zig Ziglar](#) teaches, "*As you accept yourself, you will see yourself as a person who truly deserves the good things in life.*" I would dare say that most believers believe that; they think they deserve the good things in life. Most believers think they deserve certain things from God. The word "deserve" means: "to be worthy." I think that most of the church believes that they are worthy of God's grace and goodness. **We think that God owes us.** In this twisted view, God is the debtor and man is the creditor. We often think God owes us **health**; as a matter of fact, He owes us ninety years of healthy life. Or He owes us a certain level of **wealth**; we deserve to have enough money to meet our greeds, like a nice home and two cars. Or we deserve trouble free **children**, a loving spouse. The list of things that we think God owes us goes on and on. Be honest, do you feel

that there are certain things that God owes you? Why do you feel God owes you?

We need to have our minds renewed. The absence of an understanding of God's holiness is the reason for our entitlement mentality. Holiness is the primary attribute of God. God's holiness is emphasized throughout the Scriptures:

'For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy; for I am holy. And you shall not make yourselves unclean with any of the swarming things that swarm on the earth. (Leviticus 11:44 NASB)

because it is written, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY." (1 Peter 1:16 NASB)

The Lord is called "[the Holy One](#)" some thirty times in Isaiah alone. The biblical concept of holiness has two primary meanings: The first meaning is simply "apartness or **separateness**"; that which is holy is set apart from common things. It is different; it is other. To say that God is holy is to say He transcends the entire creation. The second meaning of God's holiness refers to His **purity**. There is no moral blemish, no defect, no stain of wickedness to mar His character.

God's holiness is linked to His righteousness and justice. The righteousness and justice of God is that aspect of God's holiness manifested in His treatment of His creatures:

Clouds and thick darkness surround Him; Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne. (Psalms 97:2 NASB)

God is holy and just, and He must punish sin. Even the slightest sin defies the authority of God, insults His majesty, and challenges His justice. Because of our sin, we all deserve God's WRATH according to:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, (Romans 1:18 NASB)

God's wrath in the Bible is never capricious, self-indulgent, or irritable. God's wrath is always judicial, the wrath of a judge administering justice. Each person gets exactly what he deserves. Wrath denotes God's resolute action in punishing sin, and it is the active manifestation of his hatred of sin. God is holy, and His holiness demands that He not tolerate unholiness. And men, all men, are unholy.

Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. (Genesis 6:5 NASB)

You see, believer, the only thing we **deserve** is wrath; the only thing **God owes us is wrath**. If we really understood the depth of our sin and the holiness of God, we would thank God every day that He hasn't killed us. We would thank God for His mercy and grace. But if we see ourselves as deserving good things from God, then we do not see God as merciful and gracious. First we take mercy for granted, then we assume it, and finally we demand it, as if God owed it to us.

We look at the pain and suffering in the lives of believers and we wonder, "How can God allow those things?" But we are looking at life from a wrong perspective. We are looking at it from our humanistic view that thinks that God owes us certain things: health, happiness, life.

Let's go back to the beginning and see if we can't correct our thinking. God said to Adam and Eve at the beginning:

but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die." (Genesis 2:17 NASB)

In other words, God said, "You sin, you die!" God created man to glorify Himself, but man rebelled and disobeyed God. Did Adam die the day he sinned? Some commentators say that God decided to be merciful, and Adam didn't die. Did God mean what he said? Did Adam die? Yes, he died **spiritually**. If we say that the death God promised Adam for disobedience was physical, we are making God a liar and Satan the truthful one.

God said they would die the very day they ate. Satan said they would not die. Who told the truth? If God was talking about physical death, then Satan was the one telling the truth. Physically, Adam lived for another 900 plus years. It is very important that we understand this. Satan lied. Adam died that day, spiritually. **Man's problem is spiritual**. He is separated from God because of his sin. In this state of spiritual death, he is under God's wrath. If we approach all of life from the truth that we are all born in sin and under the wrath of God, we will realize that God owes us nothing but wrath and that every breath is a gift of God's grace.

We all deserve God's wrath—that's all He owes us:

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned-- (Romans 5:12 NASB)

Did you sin in Adam? Yes, you did! Will you suffer God's wrath? Not if you have put your trust in the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ. God's redemption of man is pure mercy! Praise God for His mercy because you don't deserve it. We deserve wrath. Anything short of that should cause us to be grateful. Whenever things aren't going according to our plans, we shouldn't question God's fairness. We should realize what we really deserve—wrath, and be grateful that God is merciful.

Right thinking about God's holiness and our sinfulness will change how we respond to the circumstances of life. If we lose our health, we should be thankful that we ever were healthy. If we go through a divorce we should be thankful that we ever had a companion who loved us. If a loved one dies, instead of feeling cheated because of our loss, we should be grateful for the time we had with them. **We don't deserve one moment of happiness. We deserve wrath.** So let's thank God for every breath we breathe.

Believer's we are all called to worship God:

And Jesus answered and said to him, "It is written, 'YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD AND SERVE HIM ONLY.'" (Luke 4:8 NASB)

I think that the greatest singular act of personal worship is a grateful heart:

For all things are for your sakes, that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God. (2 Corinthians 4:15 NASB)

The proud person is not grateful because he always thinks he **deserves** better or deserves more. But the humble person knows he doesn't deserve anything; therefore, he's always grateful for God's mercy and grace.

As we begin to think from a biblical perspective, we will become grateful to God for everything. We will realize that whatever our situation might be, it is far better than we deserve.

This should be the attitude of every believer:

The LORD'S lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, For His compassions never fail. 23 They are new every morning; Great is Thy faithfulness. (Lamentations 3:22-23 NASB)

This message was preached by [David B. Curtis](#) on July 15, 2007. Media #374.



Berean Bible Church provides this material free of charge for the edification of the Body of Christ. You can help further this work by your prayer and by sending a contribution to:

[Berean Bible Church](#)
1000 Chattanooga St.
Chesapeake, VA 23322