

How to Build Your Faith (Part 4)

Teacher: Pastor Paul LeBoutillier
Calvary Chapel Ontario

We've been talking about ways to have a healthy, growing faith the last few weeks – and it's something I don't normally do. I don't normally do series. In 23 years of pastoring here, I can count on one hand how many little series that I've done. But just felt led as we were in our Matthew study to go through these different aspects of having a growing faith and things that you can do in order to make that happen.

We're on the fourth part of that series of how to have a healthy, growing faith. And each week I've been giving you another reason to care about why you have a healthy, growing faith. We've been making the point every week that, as believers, we're called to live by faith.

And so, since that's the case, it would make a lot of sense to care about our faith and make sure that it's moving in the right direction; it's not plateauing; it's actually moving forward; that each month, each year, we should be saying, I'm growing. I'm not staying the same. I'm not the same Christian I used to be. I'm growing. I'm putting my faith in God more now than I used to, and so forth.

I want to share a verse with you from Romans chapter 15. I'll put this one up on the screen, and then I'll have you open your Bibles in just a minute to something else. But in Romans 15:13, Paul wrote to the church in Rome, and to you and I. He said:

Romans 15:13 (NIV)

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Now I want you to notice something about that verse. First of all, it talks about trusting in God, trusting in Him. That's the part that really grabbed my attention because trusting in God is something we do, you guys, when our faith is healthy. When our faith is healthy, we trust in God; we put our trust in God. When our faith is weak, when it's sickly, we struggle to trust in God. All right.

What this passage talks about is a logical progression of our lives when we have a healthy, growing faith. What it tells us here is that when you have a healthy faith, you're going to trust in God. And when you trust in God, this passage says that you are going to overflow with hope. You are filled with hope because of your trust in God. You start saying, God, I trust You. That builds hope. It starts to—hope begins to bubble up in your life. Then what happens? You have hope that has an effect.

What Paul tells us here is we begin to be filled with joy and peace because of the hope that we have. And when we have joy and peace in our lives it not only benefits you as a believer, I mean, that's a pretty nice thing to have, but that also speaks powerfully to unbelievers— people who are watching your life.

I got to tell you something. It is such a powerful reality of Jesus Christ living in someone's life when they are going through challenges, difficulties, hardships, and they are walking in these two things: joy and peace.

It wasn't that long ago now that we did a memorial service for a brother of ours who attended Calvary Chapel for the last several years: Gary Minor. We did his memorial service over in Vail, but about two-and-a-half weeks before Gary went to be with the Lord, I visited him at his house, and we just had a great talk. He and I together just sat and talked about— man, we just talked about everything. You name it, we talked about it. But I walked away from that meeting, and my heart got ministered to. It's like, as a pastor I go to minister to people but so sometimes I walk away and I'm the one who gets ministered to.

You want to know what ministered to my heart when I talked with Gary? He knew he was soon going to be with the Lord. He knew it even though he was still able to sit up in a recliner and talk. He had a firm handshake when we met and stuff but he knew that the days were coming down. But there was a peace in his life that just filled the room. He knew where he was going. He knew who he was trusting in and all those things were in place. And now, really, he was just waiting for the Lord to say, all right, come on home. But he wasn't agitated; he wasn't burdened; he wasn't worried; he wasn't upset. He was just, yeah, here I am. I walked away just going, oh, man, it was just so nice. I actually even shared that at the memorial. What a difference that makes.

Joy is something that doesn't come because of circumstances. Joy is something that comes from the Lord, comes from the Holy Spirit, and peace when you're going through a hard, bumpy road and you're just peaceful, and saying things like, God's in charge; He's Lord, and I trust Him. There's something there that's supernatural.

Do you know what I'm saying to you? Because that's not naturally what we do when life starts to turn upside down. We usually are like, waaaah! We're freaking out, and we're telling people that we're freaking out. Everybody that wants it comes near us, and they will listen. We'll tell them just exactly how much we're freaking out.

I want to just challenge you with something here this morning. Those of you who know that you know that you are born again today by the by the power of the Spirit, when you are interacting with other people. I'm particularly talking about those who don't know Jesus. Do they see in you a joy and a peace that is supernatural? Or do they see that freak-out, whack-out, weird-out sort of a natural response to the difficulties of life?

I don't say that to upset you in any way. I do say it, however, to challenge you that you might ask the question and say, is my faith healthy enough? Is my faith strong enough? Is it in a healthy place so that when life becomes just upset, I continue to walk in an attitude of faith and trust in God that says, Lord, You know, You understand, and You're going to take care of me. Or does my attitude convey instead, basically, the essence of, I'm not sure what's going to happen. I'm really upset and I don't know where I can turn?

Because to be completely honest with you, sometimes, we Christians convey the latter. There isn't that sense of peace. There isn't that sense like Paul talked about there in Romans. There isn't that overflow. There isn't just that flood of peace and joy in our lives. Why? Because our faith isn't strong and healthy.

That's why we want to have a strong and healthy faith, you guys. That's why we've been talking for the last four weeks about how you can have a strong and healthy faith. And what I've been doing is I put 4 things up. Not that they are the only 4 things, but I put 4 things up on the screen for you each and every week, which I will do once again. Let's put them up, guys. They are the things that we've been covering in the last 4 weeks:

- The Word
- Prayer
- Fellowship
- Obedience

The Word, Prayer, Fellowship and Obedience.

I have not suggested that this is a comprehensive list. These are the things though that I felt like the Lord wanted me to talk about.

Now I'm going to switch gears a little bit on you here this morning, and I'll tell you why or how and why. The first 3 things that we've been talking about here as it relates to having a strong and healthy faith, I've been talking to you from a positive perspective.

In other words, here's what the Word can positively do in your life to give you a strong and healthy faith. Here's what prayer can do to impact your faith and make it strong and healthy. Here's what fellowship, koinonia, connectedness to the body can do to strengthen and encourage you in your faith.

We talked last week about the calling that we have in Christ to build one another up in our faith, and we went through all those things. All these messages are on the Internet in our Matthew study – if you want to go back and some of you might've missed them.

But what I'm going to be doing today, as we come to this subject of obedience, I'm not going to talk to you necessarily about how obedience can strengthen your faith—although I think it probably can. But what I'm going to do is I'm going to slant this one instead from a more negative perspective, and I'm going to be sharing with you how devastating a lack of obedience can be to your faith – in fact, how it can pummel your faith, how it can push it down and just decimate it to the point where you are so weakened as it relates to your faith), you can hardly even pray, you can hardly even believe God for anything.

What I'm going to do is I'm going to have you join me over in 1 Timothy. So join me there; open your Bibles, please: 1 Timothy. We're going to be in the first chapter; we're going to look together at a couple of verses that Paul wrote to Timothy – and to you and I. He wrote to Timothy by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and therefore, he wrote to us, right? The Bible is for you and I. It is our life manual. So here we are in 1 Timothy 1; skip down to verse 18.

Paul writes; he says:

“Timothy, my son, I am giving you this command in keeping with the prophecies once made about you (probably at Timothy's ordination), so that by recalling them you may fight the battle well.

Or your Bible may say, *“so that you may fight the good fight.”*

Stop there for just a moment. We'll keep reading in just a moment, but I want your attention because we need to make this point: Our life in Christ, our walking out of our life in Christ, you guys, it's a battle. There's a battlefield.

There are adversaries on that battlefield, and you, too, are on that battlefield. It is a battle; it is a fight. That's what you do on a battlefield. You fight.

And Paul is speaking to Timothy about that very reality. Sometimes, as Christians, we want to tie into the whole world mentality of life is a party. And we want to come to Jesus and want to even make it a holy party. We want to christen this idea that the world portrays to us that life is going to be this big—just one big bash and we're going to have a blast. Here we go! No, the Bible portrays this life as a battle, and it's hard, and there are difficulties and challenges every single day.

Paul writes to Timothy and he says, Tim, you're my son in the faith, and I want to just really encourage you. I want you to think about those prophecies that were spoken over you. I want you to recall them into your heart and mind because they were obviously promises given specifically to Timothy so that you can fight the good fight.

He goes on to say—look at this; this is important; in verse 19 he says:

“holding on to faith and a good conscience, which (he goes on to say that) some have rejected (they've let go of) and so have suffered shipwreck with regard to the faith.”

Did you notice that Paul uses faith two ways in that single passage in verses 18 and 19? First, he talks about your faith. He says, I want to encourage you in your faith and so forth, and I want you to hold on to faith and a good conscience. Then he talks about the faith, which means Christianity, and he says some people have let go of conscience, and therefore they have been shipwrecked in regards to their faith or the faith and so forth.

Now Paul is telling Timothy that there are people who have not held onto these things like faith and a good conscience, and therefore they've been shipwrecked. So what does it mean?

Here's the question we're going to ask this morning. First of all, what does it mean to hold onto a good conscience? Well, first of all, what is the conscience? I guess that's the question we need to answer.

The conscience is a mechanism that God has placed in all mankind that sits in judgment over our actions and our words. And I believe that it is something that is part of the leftover from being created by God, and it's there to tell us what's right and wrong.

Now the conscience can be compromised. The conscience can be corrupted. The conscience can become insensitive to be able to feel any sense of right and wrong any longer. In fact, Paul wrote later on in this very letter to Timothy. Let me show you what he said in 1 Timothy chapter 4. He goes on and says:

1 Timothy 4:1-2 (NIV)

The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.

The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. (He tells us what the characteristic of those teachers is.) Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, (look at this) whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.

In other words, they've been branded with sin. Hey, I don't know if you've ever seen an animal that's been branded, but when that happens, when a red-hot iron is placed against the flesh of an animal, it burns away all of the hair. It obviously burns the top layers of skin, leaving a crusty residue of burnt flesh on top, but it also burns away the nerve endings. They're right there on those top layers of skin so that that area where the animal has been branded, however big or small it may be, is now basically not going to feel anything.

And Paul says that our consciences can become like that from the standpoint that they become seared. They become burned away, if you will, as it relates to our ability to feel, and we no longer have that pinprick that says, hey, that's wrong. You shouldn't do that.

Now, again, the conscience is something that's given to everyone, believer or unbeliever; and obviously, in an unbeliever, it can become very corrupted and so forth. Now, as Christians, we have an added element to this whole idea of conscience. We have the Holy Spirit living inside of our hearts as well who will work in concert with our conscience and speak to us now.

It's more than just a pinprick now. He is now speaking to us. He is bringing wisdom and dimension and understanding to our actions and our mis-actions. And our misdeeds to the point now where it's not just this momentary feeling of guilt like an unbeliever might have if they if their conscience is pricked. We now can grieve the Holy Spirit.

That's what we can do, and I'm willing to bet you've probably felt it because I sure have—do something, say something, and just this immediate curdling of

the Spirit, and you know that you've grieved the Holy Spirit and you need to do something about it. So it's even a little more pronounced in our lives. Peter spoke about this. I don't have this up on a slide but he even talked in 1 Peter – his first letter about the pledge of a good conscience toward God.

How is it that we actually let go of a good conscience as believers now? Let's bring it back to believers. How do we let go of a good conscience, like Paul said some of the brothers did? By the way, he went on there—if you still have Timothy in front of you, he went on to actually mention them by name those guys that let go of faith in a good conscience. How do we do that?

It's by breaking through that barrier that conscience creates now with the Holy Spirit. For you and I, that's buttressed by the wisdom and insight and revelation of the Word of God. We break through it, and we say, I'm not going to do it. I'm not going to follow it. I'm not going to be obedient. I'm going to do what I want to do, and I basically go out and just fulfill the flesh. I just do what I want to do. Right?

It's called sin, and that's how we let go of a good conscience. The problem with a conscience—I should say, the problem with violating or breaking through a conscience is that when you do, it gets easier to do, right? I mean, if I do something that I know is absolutely wrong and I'm just going to do it anyway, and I bust through it. Then I've broken down a barrier that was meant to be there, and now it's easier to go and break down the next time, and the next time and the next time and so forth. And so, when I do that, here's the point, you guys, remember because we're talking about faith, we're talking about how it affects our faith.

When I give in to the flesh and say, I'm going to satisfy the flesh even though I know that there's a barrier here. There's the barrier of conscience; but even greater than that, there's the barrier of God's Word that is established as a right and a wrong and a revelation of truth. And I bust through that just to do what I want to do, what happens at that point is that my faith becomes immediately compromised—or I should say the ability to exercise my faith becomes compromised. And my ability to come to the Lord now, in a moment of trial or difficulty or whatever, has now been compromised, has now been weakened through sin. Because my faith, you see, isn't strong and healthy anymore, I've weakened it through sin. I've let go of a good conscience before God. I've busted through.

There's a great quote from one of my favorite authors, George Müller. I've shared many things with him. I love the way he puts this. Check out this quote. He says:

It is not possible to live in sin and at the same time draw down from heaven everything one needs for this life. – George Müller

It is not possible to live in sin and at the same time draw down from heaven everything one needs for this life.

I couldn't have said it better in a hundred years. It is absolutely true. It is impossible to live in a condition of unrepentant sin and to draw down from heaven the things that you need.

It's one of the reasons—not the only reason—why sometimes, when people are going through difficult time, they go and seek out prayer from other people—and we're supposed to do that; don't get me wrong; we're supposed to get prayer from other people. But sometimes people are getting prayer from other people because they can't carry it themselves. They just can't. Their faith isn't strong enough to even go before the Lord. They are in such a compromised state as it relates to their faith, even lifting up the smallest prayer concerns is too much for them. They are weak now. Their faith is weak.

Sometimes people can have a weak faith just because they're new in the Lord. That's not what we're talking about. We're talking about those who have given into sin that and have allowed that sin to interfere with the ability of their faith to now look to God, and wait on God, and trust in God, and hope in God. They do not overflow with joy and peace and so forth because that healthy faith is not there.

So what's the answer? What's the answer when sin has compromised my faith? What is the answer when now trusting in God for even the smallest thing is hard? I don't even know how I'm going to do this. There's this issue in my life, and my faith has been compromised because I've given into sin. What am I going to do? What's the answer for me? Am I just going to always bring my prayer needs to other people and not pray about other things myself? That's not going to last very long because other people might not always be in my life. Things, people, situations come and go. Eventually it comes back to me and I have to ask myself, what am I going to do? What am I going to do?

What do you do when faith has been compromised? Do you turn to works? Do you say, my faith isn't very strong, so I guess I need to build myself back up so

I'm going to be a good person? That's what most of us try to do, and we know that we violated the Word of God, we violated conscience and so on and so forth.

What do we do? First thing we do is we start making promises to God. I'm never going to do that again— and that lasts about a day; if you're lucky, maybe a week, and then you fall right back, and you're into it worse than you were before.

So, you see, works doesn't work. Trying to be a good person doesn't work. You can't be a good person. You can't impress God with your goodness. You can't say, God, I promise I'm not going to do this anymore. That's usually the road that we take, and the reason we do is because my faith is no longer strong enough to carry this because of sin. So, I'm just going to opt for works. But again, it doesn't work, so what am I going to do?

So let's imagine you go to someone, and you would say, listen, I've been— sin has just ravaged my faith. It's just a shadow of what it used to be. I had a strong faith at one time, but I've just given into sin repeatedly, and my faith has been weakened and compromised over and over, and I got these things going on in my life, and I'm in a tailspin. I don't know what to do.

Here's what's crazy, guys. You ready for this? The weirdest thing in the world. You know what you have to do when your faith has been compromised and it's weak? It's going to sound strange. You got to reach out to God by faith.

Listen, there's no plan B. There's no alternative. When God said in the Word, “*the righteous shall live by faith*,” He meant it! He meant there's no other way to live but by faith. But you say, now, wait a minute, my faith has been decimated; my faith has been compromised; it's in a weak condition.

Doesn't matter. Here's what you do when your faith has been weakened: You repent of your sin. You get down on your knees and say, God, I can't do this. I repent. I open my heart to You. God, I cry out to You with all my heart. And you know what God does? He rushes in, He picks up that child that has absolutely destroyed their faith and made it just a weak thing, and He begins to pick them up, and build them up, and strengthen them to start again.

But listen and hear me, please. There is no alternative to faith. When the Bible says you and I shall live from faith to faith, that's exactly what it means. There's nothing in between, and apart from faith, it is impossible to please God. Apart from faith, you can't live the Christian life.

That's why it's so important that we protect it, you guys. That's why it's so important that we keep it built up because there's no other way to live. We don't want to mess with this thing that's so precious, this thing that He has given to us to be able to stand as Paul says in Ephesians. And after having done everything, to stand in the trust and faith that come through Jesus Christ.

So where's your faith? Let me show you this passage from Hebrews. This is really cool. Hebrews chapter 10 says:

Hebrews 10:22 (NIV)

let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience.

let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings (that all sounds good and fine, but then it goes on to say), *having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience.*

This is a really interesting passage. The very first part of it just sounds like somebody who just has this perfect, healthy faith that never has to deal with issues of life. But you know what? When you have a guilty conscience, which we do from time to time, let's face it, we compromise our faith, we bust through and we do things we shouldn't do, and then we have a guilty conscience. We've let go of a pure conscience, a good conscience.

What are you going to do? You go back to God, you draw near to Him, and you come with, first of all, a sincere heart – a sincere heart that says to God, I am such a screw up. It's this reality of just being real with God. You stop playing games; you stop trying to impress God; you just say, I am nothing in your sight.

It's coming to God with a sincere heart, just open. I am open, God, and You see me – all that I am, and all that I am not (and it's mostly what I'm not). You know me, but I come to You now. I come to You, and I bring even my decimated faith. I come back to You now with an assurance of faith because Your Word says to me that if I will confess my sins, You are faithful and just You will forgive me and cleanse me from all unrighteousness.

And now I come back to You with the faith that I have myself have ruined. I ask You to build it up, and ask You now, God, to take some of that precious blood that I trampled on. I ask You to sprinkle my heart, and cleanse my guilty conscience, and restore unto me, as David said, the joy of my salvation, and bring my faith back to a place of health. Help me, Lord, not to go there anymore. Keep me.

Here's what David said: Lord, keep me from willful sin. Keep me from willful sin. You know what he's talking about when he says willful sin? It's where an area is right there in front of you, you got the barrier right in front of you, and you bust through it, anyway. That's willful.

It's one thing to sin in ignorance; it's another thing to sin willfully. So David said, keep me, Lord from willful sin, then I will be innocent of great transgression.

So there's no other workaround, and that is why the apostle said in Acts 24 (last thing I'll put up here for you); he says:

Acts 24:16 (NIV)

So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.

So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.

It's something that is a part of my life. It's something that I consider to be an aspect of the utmost importance. I'm going to keep my conscience clear as it relates to you on a horizontal level, and I'm going to keep my conscience clear as it relates to God on a vertical level.

If your conscience is not clear, you're not going to be able to draw down. Remember, as Müller said, those things from God that you need for your daily life. The only option is to get down on your knees and repent that you might come back to a place of healthy faith.