

“MY LOVE IS BEYOND YOUR UNDERSTANDING”

“I know it’s difficult to trust Me when *everything* appears to contradict what I have said to you. But I want you to know that when I make a promise it is true and right and absolute—even when you are facing the impossible. I am faithful and My word will never fail (Luke 1:37, NLT). Even when the sky grows dark and the earth quakes, you can have confidence that *I am a rewarder of those who diligently seek [Me]*’ (Hebrews 11:6).”

Christ’s followers watched from a distance as the One who had defied the impossible took His last breath. They had watched Him open blind eyes, restore the lame, deliver men from sickness, heal the brokenhearted, set the captive free, and raise the dead to life (Isaiah 61:1). But now that He was the one in need, *could* He... *would* He...perform the impossible again? He said, “*You have heard Me say to you, ‘I am going away and coming back to you.’ And now I have told you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe*” (John 14:28-29).

Jesus asked His disciples to have faith (Hebrews 11:6)—to trust Him to accomplish what was beyond their ability to understand. Without trust they would have no reason to believe He would do what He had promised.

How would you define faith? _____

What are your greatest hinderances to faith? _____

Are you afraid of the process and/or outcome of demonstrating great faith? Why? _____

Trust

Hebrews 11:1 says, “*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen*” (NKJV). The New Living Translation says it this way: “*Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see.*”

Faith is founded in the surety of God’s identity and His Word. It is the assurance that what we hope for will transpire. It is belief, trust, and confidence in God and what He *will do*, despite what we fail to see or understand. It is absolute certainty that His Word can be relied upon. Faith can also be substantiated by things that have occurred in the past; things God *has done*.

Read Hebrews 11:6. What three components are imperative to faith? _____

Do you believe insecurity in these areas are at the root of the doubts many entertain? _____

Faith requires that one believes God is who He has revealed Himself to be in the scripture and that He will do what He has promised therein. If you doubt His character, ability, and strength, or the truthfulness of His

claims, you will struggle to place your confidence in Him when you are faced with circumstances that challenge your understanding.

In what ways have you been tempted to distrust God? What circumstances have you faced that have challenged your beliefs in His promises? _____

Demands

Before the people would trust that Jesus was who He claimed, they demanded that He meet their terms. "If you are the Messiah, meet these conditions." Although some who recognize Jesus as Savior may not realize it, they *can* share the attitudes of those who made such ultimatums. As we examine the stipulations made by those who stood looking on Christ just hours before His death, the mindsets that keep us from exercising *absolute* trust in God are brought to light.

Begin by reading Luke 23:27, 32-39. Identify those who "*stood looking on*" (v.35). Record their words regarding Jesus. Also note what aspect of His divinity they challenged.

1. (v.35) _____
2. (vv.36-37) _____
3. (v.39) _____

Also read Mark 15:29-32 and note these individuals' reactions to the suffering Christ.

4. (v.29) _____
5. (v.32) _____

Demand #1: God must prove Himself to me.

Christ's onlookers insisted, "Prove You are who You claim." *But faith requires you to believe God is who He claims without requiring demonstrations of His power.*

Have you ever demanded that God perform to gain your trust? If so, explain. _____

The religious leaders mocked Jesus, saying, "*Let the Christ, the King of Israel, descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe*" (Mark 15:32). See and believe? Consider what many of the Jews had already witnessed. Review John 11:38-46. _____

How do you know that Jesus is who is He claims? Has He provided evidences? If so, explain. _____

Also read Mark 8:11-21. Four thousand hungry people had just been satisfied when the religious leaders approached Jesus seeking evidence to believe He was who He claimed. What did Christ warn His disciples against in verse 15? (See also Luke 23:6-12.) _____

What danger lies in seeking signs and visual demonstrations of God's power to substantiate your trust in Him? _____

Is there a time when it is appropriate to seek proof? Read Judges 6:36-40 and note the difference in the onlookers' and Gideon's reasoning. _____

Demand #2: God's character must fit my ideals and agenda.

Along with the religious leaders, the soldiers challenged Jesus' identity. *"If You are the King of the Jews, save yourself"* (Luke 23:36).

"The kings of the Gentile nations rule over their subjects, and those in authority over them are called 'friends of the people'," Jesus said (Luke 22:25). Although Jesus' power was never limited (Matthew 26:53), He did not represent their concept of a man in authority—King nor Messiah. *But faith requires you to lay down your expectations or preconceived ideas of who God should be and what He should do.*

Who do many people expect God to be? What do they expect of Him? What underlying motives might form their thoughts about Him? _____

How does a *"friend of the people"* conduct himself? _____

In what ways do individuals worship a god of their own devising? How does this oppose faith as defined by the Bible? _____

How might exercising faith in Christ threaten an individual's lifestyle? threaten his beliefs and opinions? (Consider the Jewish leaders and the Romans.) _____

If Christ had succumbed to their demands to save Himself, what would have occurred? How does this speak to placing your agenda before God's? _____

Demand #3: God must give me what I want, when I want it.

"If you are the Christ, save Yourself and us" (Luke 23:39). The criminal asked Christ to prove His divinity by demanding that He deliver him from his circumstances. *But faith requires you to relinquish control.*

Has God ever failed to act according to your wants, desires, and expectations? What resulted? _____

Has Christ's apparent inaction ever caused you to take matters into your own hands? Explain. _____

At present, is there a circumstance that you are seeking to control? What is preventing you from entrusting the matter to God? _____

What action precedes the granting of your heart's desires? Review Proverbs 3:5-6; also read Psalm 20:4-5, 37:4-5, and 145:14-19. _____

Demand #4: God must keep me from harm, hardship, pain, and suffering.

Ultimately, the criminal's faith was contingent upon his deliverance from consequence, pain, and suffering. *But faith requires trust in God in your current circumstance without knowing the ultimate outcome.*

Read Hebrews 11:13, 35-39. What were these "heroes of faith" required to endure? _____

In Matthew 27:41-44, the religious leaders mocked, "He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him." What is implied by their words? _____

Was God displeased with those listed in Hebrews 11? With Christ? With you? _____

*If necessary, review God's purposes for suffering in the last lesson, "My Love Bears All Things."

Demand #5: God must do exactly as He says.

"And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, 'Aha! You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself and come down from the cross'" (Mark 15:29-30). While Christ spoke of His physical body—His death and future resurrection, the people applied His words literally. But faith requires you to be flexible.

Faith can often be difficult because you may be wrong. Describe a time when you misapplied God's Word to your situation. Why do you think this occurred? _____

Balance the concepts of assurance and flexibility. (See James 1:6.) _____

In what can you have absolute certainty? Read Psalm 138:8, John 10:10, Romans 8:28, Ephesians 3:20, 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, and 2 Timothy 1:12, 4:8. _____

In review, can you place conditions upon your faith? _____

What evidence supports the fact that no display of power would change the onlookers' beliefs?
What then, were they seeking to prove? _____

Keep reading in John 11:47-48 and 12:9-11, 42-50. For what reasons did they refuse to acknowledge
that Jesus was who He claimed?¹ _____

How can these things hinder your trust in God? (Consider Galatians 1:10.) _____

Acknowledging Jesus Christ as the Messiah disrupted and threatened the lifestyle and ambitions of
the religious leaders. Their pride, coupled with their want of power, authority, and status, blinded
them to the evidences that proved Jesus was who He claimed.

Faith

Faith requires you to take God at His Word and trust what you do not understand. Hebrews 11:6 stated that
those who come to God MUST believe that He is a Rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

Read Luke 23:40-43. Describe how the second criminal demonstrated great faith. How was he
rewarded? _____

Continue reading in Luke 23, verses 44-49. Again, list those who stood looking on and note their
responses to Jesus.

1. (v.47) _____
2. (v.48) _____
3. (v.49) _____

Also read Matthew 27:45-56.

What occurred that affirmed the faith of those in the crowd who were receptive? (Matthew 27:45,
51-53) _____

What did these phenomena do for those whose hearts were hardened? (Consider what happens in
Matthew 28:11-15.) _____

¹ Also consider Romans 1:16-32 and Galatians 1:10.

Considering the centurion, in what ways does *faith require courage*? _____

Continue reading the account: John 19:31-37.

Those who followed Christ stood at a distance observing the unfathomable. What Christ had promised was beyond their ability to comprehend. And now they must wait. *Finally, faith requires you to have patience and perseverance* (James 1:2-4), *hope against all odds* (Hebrews 11:11, 2 Corinthians 5:7).

Perhaps, you do not doubt whether God is who He claims or He is able do what He has spoken, but whether He is willing to do it for you. Record Romans 10:11. _____

If time allows, review faith's requirements.

In closing, read Romans 4:20-21.