

Living Faith!

*J*esus commands us: “**Have faith in God**” (*Mark 11:22*).

This verse may also be correctly said another way: “Use the faith that God has freely given, producing fruit to His great glory.”

This kind of faith is both alive and life-giving. Just imagine! Now think of how we might glorify Him when we exercise faith in Him that results from that free gift!

Unfortunately, many of us are far from doing so, since for the most part we do not quite understand it and thus have talked our way out of it. It would be somewhat frightening to suddenly embrace a faith that could reach “light-years” beyond where we are reaching today. It may take some time, but we should by all means strive for it.

Jesus said, *“whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says. Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray believe that you receive them, and you will have them” (Mark 11:23).*

Sounds radical, does it not? Of course, this one verse does not really tell the whole story about believing-faith in the life of a Christian; but practiced within its proper context, it still reaches far beyond where most of us are today. It is much safer for us to stick with other things that Jesus taught about prayer, such as the “Lord’s Prayer” found in Matthew 6:9-13. Limiting ourselves to this kind of prayer keeps us in our “safety zone,” and it, too, is a prayer of faith. But with this lesson I would like for us to begin to look upward and ask the Lord to increase our faith. This is by no means meant to be an exhaustive work on faith but rather a start in helping us to understand faith in its most fundamental sense. Through this lesson, I would like to introduce faith as something that is alive! Of course, I am speaking of faith in and through the Person of Jesus Christ, God’s Son and our Savior. His connection with our faith makes it alive! Thus, we have the title of our first lesson in a series on faith – *Living Faith!*

I really desire to consciously spend more time growing my faith and teaching about it, probably because so much of our Christian walk depends on it. The Bible clearly teaches that we are saved by faith; that it is impossible to please God without faith; that we are to live by faith; that we are children of faith; that Jesus is looking for faith; and that faith is our victory by which we also overcome the world! It is obvious that faith is vital not only to the believer's new birth experience but also to his daily walk. However, I think if we were able to actually measure our faith, the great majority of us would score somewhere around the mediocre level. We know the "faith verses" and we pray in an exercise of faith, but I believe we have wandered around too long in an almost faithless desert. I hope that we will honestly examine our faith and allow His Spirit to motivate us further along in obedience to Jesus' command to "have faith in God" in everyday life like we have never had it before. In fear that I might be misunderstood at the outset of this study, let me make clear that our understanding of a living faith will not buy us a "ticket" to wherever we want to go or to whatever we want to do. Neither is true living faith going to open up a whole new shopping list that satisfies our carnal cravings. It is **not** the key to getting more "stuff." However, living faith **is** the key to a full life in Christ Jesus and to bringing great honor and glory to His name!

In speaking of living faith, first of all we should consider that the Bible says there *is also* a faith that is dead, and it is critical that we recognize the difference.

According to James, the brother of Jesus, there is a faith that is dead.

James described dead faith as a confession of belief that does not bear fruit (James 2:14-16). He brought attention to this all-important truth as he observed many “believers” who failed to support their confession with action. Of course, this was nothing new then, and it still exists today – people making a “profession of faith” but not standing by it. This was true of the children of God under Moses, as well as throughout all the Old Covenant period. God Himself spoke of this through the prophet Isaiah, saying “Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths and honor Me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from Me,”(Isaiah29:13a). Others in more recent Bible times, including Jesus, declared this sad truth as well, and unfortunately it needs to be repeated today: faith that is limited to confession is dead faith and counts for nothing.

On the other hand, we know there is also a faith that is alive!

This kind of faith I call **living faith**. James spoke about it as well when he said that true faith is belief that is followed by action. It is alive and actually works wonders on behalf of the believer and brings great glory to God! Living faith is the only thing that truly “overcomes the world.”

“For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” I John 5:4-5

Here, John, “the beloved” disciple of Jesus, makes clear that those who are born of God overcome the world. We could also conjecture that it is **only** because we are born of God that we **can** overcome the world, and it is **only** by **living** faith through Jesus Christ that we are born of Him.

We can overcome the world because we are born of **Him** who is alive and has overcome the world before us. Through **His** continuing life we pass from death to life and have **His** life as **His** new creatures, created for Him, “after His kind” (*Genesis creation account*), equipped with His living faith! (John 5:24, II Corinthians 5:17)

Believing with the head is of eternal value only for those who also take it to heart with action.

A mental belief and acceptance of the gospel message of Jesus Christ does nothing for a person until his heart has responded with genuine repentance and total trust in Christ alone as the gospel so clearly states. It is only then that his belief has become a faith that makes him alive. He has been made alive by a living faith. For all of us who have actually put our belief to this kind of obedient action, we have become recipients of **His** Spirit! He has made us **His** earthly “temple!” We possess **His** mind also – that is to say, we have the ability to think like He thinks if we choose to allow Him to think through us. Once we are in Christ through living faith, our inferior thinking begins to pass away and we become increasingly aware of **His** much-superior thinking, freely given to us by Him – new, all because of this simple act of a living faith! (1 Corinthians 2:16)

Getting knowledge about gospel truth from the head to the heart should be of particular concern for ministers of the gospel today, especially in this southern Christian culture. Probably more than anywhere else in America, the majority of people here grow up in a Christian-oriented environment; and thus many assume that, because they believe “like the church,” they are “saved.” But that simply is not the way it works. I venture to say that there may be some of you reading this who believe the gospel with your head but not with your heart. You need to add living faith to your belief.

James, the brother of Jesus, said that even the demons believe and tremble at the thought.

James also said, “Show me your faith without works and I will show you my faith by my works” (James 2:18-19). These are not works that save, for no amount of works can save except the simple work of believing faith with the heart. But do you have evidence of your faith? That is what James means by works; they are the evidence of a true saving faith – a living faith. Is there enough evidence in your life to demonstrate to others that you have a living faith that has made you a new creation? Please do not mistake your faith as a saving faith simply because you believe with your head and have a few good deeds to your credit. Nor should you run the risk of basing your saving faith on the fact that you are kind, or congenial, or that you generally have the interest of others at heart. These characteristics are evident throughout *lost* humanity, as well as among true Christians.

A few years ago, I was in Scotland with hundreds of Muslim university students who were among the kindest, most congenial people that I have ever met. They had genuine concern for each other and for me. If I had not known better, I would have assumed that many of them were Christian – but not so. I have also fellowshiped with Hindus in India, and Buddhists in Sri

Lanka, who were of the same kind, congenial, compassionate nature, but none of those trusted Jesus Christ as their Savior. None of them had a living faith that had made them a new creation, but all of them displayed characteristics common to Christianity. On the other hand, we have all probably been around many professing “believers” right here in America who through their lifestyles revealed that they did not have a living, saving faith either.

If you are uncertain whether your belief has led to a living faith that saves, I encourage you to read through the short first epistle of John. He told us several ways in which we can be sure of our salvation.

For one, he said if we are truly born of God, we will have a *sincere* love for the brethren. This kind of love is proven through loving action, the action of laying down our lives for one another. He also said that if we are truly born of God through Jesus Christ, we will keep His commandments and we will be “righteous,” just as Jesus Christ is righteous. This sounds like a tall order, and it *is* a marked difference from the normal order expected of those still of the spirit of the world. But he is not speaking of “self” righteousness; rather John is simply saying that since Jesus Christ is righteous, we will be keen to make a sincere attempt to live out His righteousness if He truly is abiding in us. This is proof

that He is abiding in us. While we attempt to be living examples of His righteousness, we will surely fail; but John also said that if we confess our sins, Jesus will forgive us and cleanse us from all our **unrighteousness!** What great news! (I John 1:7-9, 2:29)

Finally, regarding assurance of salvation through a true, living faith, I would add that both apostles John and Paul taught that if God is truly resident within, His Spirit will bear witness with our spirit that we **are** His children (Romans 12:2, I John 4:13).

Again, this kind of evidence of living faith is not to be confused with any kind of works doctrine, for our works cannot possibly save us.

But it **does** confirm that true salvation will be evident at some point **by** our works. If these things are lacking in your life, then you would be wise to make no delays in “making your calling and election sure” (II Peter 1:10). Don’t be discouraged. Simply allow your head knowledge of the gospel to once and for all sink down to your heart and commit your life to God wholeheartedly and with all sincerity by faith now. Ask Him to search your heart and to cleanse it through Jesus Christ, the One that He sent into the world for this very purpose. Ask Him to change **your** sinful nature to **His** righteous nature, making you a new creature in Christ. With this,

you can begin looking to Him with confidence today and move on with your new-found living faith!

Once we are truly in Jesus Christ through living faith, we soon discover that we leave the monotony of a darkened, circular path spiraling downward, and we start a fresh, well-lighted path directly upward, enabled to live victoriously by a true living faith! Now we press toward a **new** goal – a destination that only God’s children can ever hope for, that glorious “high calling” that is in Christ Jesus! Yes, indeed! It is true! The same Jesus Christ, by whom the world was created and by whose name all things consist, has also overcome the world in the midst of His enemies and has gladly and freely empowered us through living faith to do likewise! We only need to “have faith in God,” taking on His kind of faith! It only takes a small measure of this kind of faith to do great and mighty things. (Matthew 17:20)

For most of us, we have been encouraged through our traditional Christianity to know God’s will and follow it; but since that is not always easy, we have also been taught that it is relatively equivalent to simply do whatever it is that we really want to do deep down inside. We have even heard some go so far as to say that as long as we just keep God as the priority in the mix and “get on with it,” whatever “it” is will be ok, too. Do you see how we have gradually moved away from the need

to really seek and to know His *perfect* will for us? We have settled for a weak substitute for the kind of faith action God really intends for us to have. Even though we might sincerely employ our “faith” to those kinds of substitute formulas for success, it is not truly the living faith that God has made available, neither does it produce the highest success.

Think about this for a moment. The Bible says that to “every man” there is given “a measure of faith,” even to all humankind, both in Christ and out of Christ (Romans 12:3). This is easy to see since we know that it takes faith for anyone to live. It takes faith to get up in the morning, to drive a car, to take a job, to purchase a house, to get married, and the list is endless. We know that the “faith” of those who care nothing for the Person of Jesus Christ is not of Him, neither can it be alive with His power. Thus it is faith, but not living faith that is really made alive through Him. So what makes our faith alive – those of us who are in Christ? The answer is obvious...He does! But what makes it really alive with His full force behind it? When **He** is giving the marching orders and we are following them by faith, then our faith is really made alive with **His** power! All other faith, even the faith of the Christian who adds God to the mix, is much inferior to the living faith to which He gives His full life and energy. This is what we want to make clear:

There is a living faith of obedience that is alive with power like no other faith can be.

Few Christians understand this kind of faith, and consequently even fewer among us experience it. What a great blessing we are missing out on! What great glory to God is forfeited as a result of our lack of engagement in this way of faith! Let us forever be resolved to take the great step that we might have long avoided. Let us wait on God, hear His voice, take His command, and do it by living faith! (1 John 3:22-23)

Living faith comes with obedience to God's will and way. It is this simple: God has a plan. His plan is not elusive or indecisive. He wants us to be a part of it. His plan is much bigger than we are. He must give us faith so that He can carry it out through us. So when we are in cooperation with Him, our faith truly becomes alive because His power is behind it! It is the power of God behind His will that yields living faith to accomplish His will through us. This overcomes the world!

In the area of living faith, many of us have been "churched to death" rather than "to life" because of uncertainties about faith as it really should be.

Sad to say, but many of us take our lives back in hand sometime after our salvation experience; we begin again to order our **own** steps, and perhaps with all sincerity we ask God to accompany **us**. And this He does. You can rest assured that once we have truly **surrendered** to His life by faith He stays with us, for He has actually made up residency inside us (John 14:20, Hebrews 13:5). But let us make clear that we may very well be speaking of two different things when we talk of doing **His** will at **His** pleasure, as opposed to doing ours. He may accompany us in our will because of His great **permissive** will, but He will not necessarily make it alive with His power. **He** makes **His** good, acceptable and perfect will alive with **His** power (Romans 12:2). Then, and only then, does our faith become living faith that glorifies Him. My! How many times I have been in His permissive will rather than in His perfect will. I shudder at the thought! But He was always with me, and He always honored my faith until He brought me back around to His perfect will. He will do the same for you. But how much better to be in His perfect will all along?

I remember one time many years ago when I was doing small commercial remodeling and my first office was the water heater closet in our garage. Naturally, I thought I needed a much larger place. Now, really, I **did** need a larger place if I was going to stay in business and grow; but the fact is that the Lord's perfect will for me was not

to be in that business at all. I was not *exactly* sure of what He *really* wanted me to do, but I did have an idea. However, it seemed too far reaching for me, so I applied my faith in my most comfortable zone – right where my thoughts and abilities were already safely employed.

At any rate, I was on the lookout for a place to move and grow, and one day an ad in the newspaper caught my eye. There was a piece of property advertised for sale that had great interstate frontage, offices and warehouse space, and everything else that I thought I needed in order to do all that I wanted to do and more! Wow! My heart leapt inside, and I began to pray immediately! I asked the Lord for this place and began to really “lay hold” of it by faith. Both asking the Lord and “laying hold” of something by faith may be ok, depending on the whole matter; but they are most effective when in agreement with ***His*** perfect will. Well sure enough, He honored my faith because His hand was on my life and I earnestly desired to walk with Him, even though He knew full well that I was not headed for His perfect will with this venture. Through a series of things too many to share and much too uncanny to have been only ***circumstance***, He made a way for me to purchase the property. All in all, I could clearly see His hand in it, and within a month or so I took possession. I continued in the remodeling business; and since I had so much room to grow, I started other small entrepreneurial

ventures along with it. Everything looked great for a while, but eventually I began to realize that rather than growing in the areas I wanted to, I was just working more and more hours and really gaining very little. I was just putting off the **perfect** direction that God had for me. It was three years later that I finally decided to go in His perfect direction. It was not something that came about without great spiritual warfare, though. But He was faithful, always. When I accepted what I knew all along to be **His** perfect will, He put His full blessing on my faith and caused it all to work together for good! My! How gracious God is! He will do it for you too!

Once again, I **did** use faith to acquire the property and He **did** honor my faith, but it wasn't faith that was **alive** with His power and fully backed by Him. I was using a measure of faith that everybody has, but in His grace, He honored it and accompanied me along the way until I finally surrendered to a better way – His perfect way. Do you see the difference? Could it be that you are in that position in your life? If so, let Him examine your heart. Trust Him to show you His perfect way, and move in the direction of living faith – faith that is alive with **His** power because it is in obedience to **His** will, having **His** power behind it! It may take some time to “turn your ship around” just as it did mine, but He will do it! Have faith in God!

I can honestly testify with years of personal experience in the permissive will of God that most of my frustration and disappointment in life has been due to my lack of faith in executing steps toward His perfect will. Here again, I did not yet “have faith in God” that He could do what He actually wanted to do through me. I focused on what appeared to be the impossibilities rather than on His ability to do things well. I could not understand why He was not accompanying me with the same support that I saw in the lives of the men of Bible times – and for that matter of a few other believers that I knew and observed. But I finally learned that while **my own** initiatives were sincere, they were inspired by **my own** thoughts and put in to play by **my own** abilities; and the results of such action generally have little effect in His kingdom. They neither permit us the time to do His perfect will nor glorify Him.

Let us test our plans to be sure that they are inspired by Him; then we can be sure that He will support us wholeheartedly.

Can you imagine being supported by God’s power wholeheartedly? Wow! I want that! Let us take a look at some real-life living faith stories where God supported His people wholeheartedly.

There is really no better place to look than in Hebrews chapter eleven to find how our faith should operate. This chapter is widely known as the faith chapter of the Bible since it begins by directly defining perfect faith, followed by a list of some famous faith-filled characters of the Bible with their best known faith-deeds.

In the interest of this brief study, we will divide this chapter into categories of specific kinds of living faith, as follows:

1. Living Faith that Saves
2. Living Faith that Multiplies
3. Living Faith that is Loyal
4. Living Faith that does Mighty Exploits

1. Living Faith that Saves

Hebrews 11:4-7

Abel, Enoch and **Noah** each had faith that saved them.

Abel was saved by obedience to God through faith when he offered sacrifice in the way that God commanded him. As a result, he still lives today, awaiting the resurrection through Jesus Christ.

Enoch was saved by obedience to God through faith as his daily walk pleased God in such a way that God simply

took him. He also lives today and will join with all the believers in eternal glory.

Noah and his whole family were saved by his obedience to God when he built an ark that provided a place of safety through judgment on the earth. Otherwise they would have perished with the rest of the world in the flood. Now, he also lives awaiting the final resurrection with us!

2. Living Faith that Multiplies

Hebrews 11:8-21

Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph had faith that blessed them with great multiplication.

Abraham paved his way for multiplication as the “sands of the sea” and as the “stars of heaven” when he obeyed God, going out from his own country and his own people, not knowing where he was going. He and **Sarah** actually started multiplying supernaturally when they obeyed God by having relations in faith far beyond the age to have children. From them was born Isaac, “the son of promise,” a living son, born from two “dead” bodies through their living faith. Just think how important this was! He was the promised seed that leads to us today!

Isaac and **Jacob** continued to multiply through their faith by taking wives from among their own people and declaring blessing over their sons that they should also multiply through faith in keeping with God's promise to their father and grandfather respectively, Abraham.

Joseph multiplied more than any of his brothers, receiving a double portion for his sons to inherit. He obeyed God through great trials and was given the wisdom to multiply food in the earth, which he would eventually be privileged to administer to the whole world through great famine.

3. Living Faith that is Loyal

Hebrews 11:23-28

Moses and **his parents** were loyal to God rather than men.

Moses and **his parents** were loyal to God through their faith, and as a result all of God's people were guided out of hard, cruel slavery into a safe haven of rest with Him. First, **his parents** risked their own lives, defying Pharaoh's command in loyalty to God. Rather than obey Pharaoh's godless command, they submitted their newborn baby to a basket in the river, believing that their loyalty to God would cause Him to act and save their son of divine purpose. Many years later, **Moses** remained loyal to God by despising a life of luxury in

Egypt, defending its poor slaves in defiance of Pharaoh. Here we see that in choosing to be loyal to God, Moses was able to lead all of God's people through great difficulty until they reached the spiritual foothills of their place of promise.

4. Living Faith that does Mighty Exploits

Hebrews 11:29-30

God's people witnessed mighty exploits by their obedient faith.

Under the leadership of Moses, **all of God's people** passed through the Red Sea – a mighty exploit that had never even been imagined. Under the leadership of **Joshua**, all of God's people marched around Jericho and blew their trumpets, only to see its walls come crashing down – also a miraculous feat without precedent!

Throughout the remainder of the chapter, we are reminded of several other men and women with living, obedient faith who did mighty exploits, loyal to God rather than men – believing God against the odds, even to the resurrection of their dead!

In each case they heard God's voice, obeyed His command, and then began to follow through accordingly, trusting Him all the way.

This is always the way to real freedom in Him! Is this the kind of commitment you need to make today? He can turn things around for you, and He is ready to begin when you are willing to have faith in Him!

An Important Reminder:

There are occasions when we are so gripped by something that we lay hold of faith, trusting God to do something out of the ordinary, even to the raising of the dead. But throughout most of this chapter in Hebrews we see an underlying truth about living faith that must be incorporated into our lives if we want to have the same results as those mentioned.

As a general rule, our faith will have at least these three characteristics that show it is alive with God's power fully behind it: it will be in obedience to God's perfect will; it will go beyond our natural abilities or understanding; it will be inspired by motives that are pure, honestly desiring above all else to glorify Him.

When God is in it, it *is* alive and *His* power is behind it! And, when it is beyond our natural ability, it gives all the glory to Him!

A Personal Evaluation:

In order for this lesson about living faith to become a living reality for you, please consider taking a few moments to think through this personal evaluation. Ask yourself these questions and then adjust whatever is necessary in your life, if need be, so that you may have a faith that is alive with God's power, overcoming the world where you live, glorifying Him and finding peace in the midst of the storm.

1. Is your faith alive? What proves that it is alive?
2. Is your belief in God through Jesus Christ limited to head knowledge, or is it mixed with the obedience of surrender so that you might be saved thereby?
3. Are your initiatives simply based on ***your own will*** and God's merciful patience, or are they driven by your desire to do ***His*** perfect will and submission to it?
4. Are you willing to seek His perfect will even if it requires greater faith? For example: doing more

with less, or believing Him for mighty exploits that are beyond your imagination.

5. Are you loyal to God by casting aside the lusts of the flesh and the temptations of the world in exchange for His life, though (as in the case of Moses) it could lead down a road less glamorous?
6. How far out does your faith sphere extend? Are you willing to allow it to go further if He should direct you to do so? How might He be directing you right now?
7. Beyond saving faith, how would you score yourself on the other areas of faith mentioned in this study? Circle the appropriate number going upward from one to seven.
 - Faith that multiplies 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
 - Faith that is loyal 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
 - Faith that does mighty exploits 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

A Final Note:

It is important to remember that each believer is responsible to God for his living faith; some may do things that show up in a great way, while others may walk in an obedience that is relatively quiet. No one should feel guilty because his living faith may be less pronounced than someone else's. Regardless of how your faith may compare with others by outward appearance, take this opportunity to allow the Holy Spirit to do some testing. He may want to help you get on a course to real liberty that you have only imagined at this point in your life. Let this be a fresh opportunity to take in hand those obstacles and trials of your life; ask God for His perfect will, listen carefully, and apply faith that is alive in obedience to Him. Have faith in God! He will **not** disappoint you!

By this living faith, He will allow you to overcome the world starting today!

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April 07

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