

Fear is a reality of life. Uncontrolled fear can limit us. What are you afraid of?

- If you're afraid of heights, you avoid tall buildings and mountain roads.
- If you're afraid of needles, you don't get vaccinations.
- If you're afraid of tight or crowded spaces, you stay off crowded elevators.
- If you're afraid of flying, take a train or drive.
- If you're afraid of failure, you don't try.
- If you're afraid of how others might react, you don't talk about your faith.

The reality is it is not easy being a Christian today. The Christian faith is under attack from those who deny the existence of God, from those who reject God's moral standards, from those who claim that all religions are the same. This is nothing new. The Apostle Paul tells us, **"For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places."** (Ephesians 6:12 NLT) The only way we can protect ourselves and move forward is through faith. Paul tells us, **"Hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil."** (vs. 16)

So what is faith? Faith is more than just believing. James tells, **"You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror."** (James 2:19 NLT) Faith is belief plus trust that leads to action. The letter of Hebrews in the New Testament defines faith this way. **"Faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see."** (11:1 NLT)

We don't have to see or even understand how something works to use it. We have faith the lights will come on when we flip the switch. We have faith our text or email will go through when we hit send. We have faith that the Dr. will give us the right prescription and the pharmacist will give us the right medicine. If we have faith in people, can't we have faith in Jesus?

Faith is a journey, not a one-time thing. We don't just get baptized or confirmed. We don't just accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Faith is a life journey. God told Abraham to pack up and move to a new land. Jesus didn't tell the Disciples to watch Him and be amazed when He did a miracle. He invited them to walk with Him, to go on a journey with Him. Proverbs tells us, **"Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take."** (32:5-6 NLT) Walking in faith is not easy or even logical. Faith is not logical or illogical. It is theological, adding God into the equation.

Faith does amazing things. The New Testament tells us about two times Jesus was amazed with faith. One was with the Roman Centurion who sent messengers to Jesus to ask for healing for his servant. The Centurion had faith that all Jesus had to do was give the word and his servant would

be healed. Jesus was amazed at the Centurion's faith. On the other hand, Jesus was amazed by the lack of faith of the people in His hometown of Nazareth. The people who should have had faith didn't. The man who wasn't expected to have faith had it.

There have been times in the history of Peace where we stepped out in faith and God has done great things. There have been other times when fear got in the way of moving forward in faith and we've suffered the consequences. You may have experienced the same in your personal or family life. If we want to overcome our fears with faith, we need the Holy Spirit's help to strengthen our faith and trust in the Lord.

To grow our faith we need proclamation, we need to hear God's Word. The Apostle Paul tells us, "So faith comes from hearing, that is, hearing the Good News about Christ." (Romans 10:17 NLT) The Holy Spirit uses God's Word to bring us faith. How can we believe in Jesus if we don't know who He is, what He said or what He has done? Whether we hear or read God's Word, it is essential to growing our faith.

As strange as it may sound, our faith needs problems. We don't want problems in our lives. But problems drive us to the Lord and teach us to trust Him. If you've ever lifted weights or gone through physical therapy, you know the goal is to use the muscle to make it stronger. The pain is necessary for the strength that follows. God uses problems to exercise our faith, to increase our trust in Him. If we never face problems, if we are never challenged for our faith, we won't know how to turn to God for the help we need when we need it.

Faith needs people, other Christians. One day when Jesus was in the village of Capernaum, a crowd gathered around Him inside a house. Four men carried a paralyzed friend to the house. When they couldn't get him in through the door, they took him to the roof and dug a hole in it so that they could lower him in front of Jesus. When Jesus saw their faith, He healed the man. (Mark 2:1-12) One of the biggest weaknesses of Christianity in the U.S. today is the focus on individual salvation without being integrated into the Church, the body of Christ. Jesus never intended for us to try to follow Him alone. We need other Christians around us to help and support us. Faith is contagious. Trying to grow our faith when we are isolated from other Christians is difficult at best, if not almost impossible.

Growing faith needs a purpose. We define our collective purpose as being "A family of Jesus followers working together to make and grow new lives in Christ." Jesus certainly gave us a purpose when He told us to "Go, make Disciples." If you are a parent, one of your most important responsibilities is to raise your children to know, love, trust and follow Jesus. The Holy Spirit can give us special gifts and abilities to do the things God wants us to do. Your God given purpose or passion may be uniquely yours. Giving us a sense of purpose is God's way of stretching and strengthening our faith muscles.

To grow in faith we need a different perspective. We need to look to Jesus and not to our limitations or weaknesses. The important issue is not the size of our faith, but the size of our God. Faith must have an object. That is why the letter to the Hebrew Christians tells us, “Let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith.” (12:1-2 NLT) Remember, it is the object of our faith, Jesus Christ, not the size of our faith that’s important. When we shift our focus from ourselves to Him, our faith will grow and God will help us overcome our fears. Just as the Psalmist wrote, “I trust in God, so why should I be afraid?” (56:4 NLT)