

Faith Without Intimacy Is No Faith At All
By David Wilkerson March 25, 2002

I've always wondered at a question Jesus asks in Luke 18:8: "Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" What could the Lord mean by this? As I look around at the church of Jesus Christ today, I think no other generation has been so focused on faith as ours.

Everyone seems to be talking about faith. Sermons on the topic abound. Seminars and conferences on faith are held across the country. Books on the subject line the shelves of Christian bookstores. Multitudes of Christians flock to meetings to be propped up and encouraged by a message on faith.

Today there are faith preachers, faith teachers, faith movements, even faith churches. Clearly, if there is one type of subject specialization taking place in the church today, it's on this matter of faith.

Yet, sadly, what most people consider to be faith today isn't faith at all. In fact, God will reject much of what's being called and practiced as faith. He simply won't accept it. Why? It's corrupted faith.

Many preachers today totally humanize the topic of faith. They describe faith as if it exists only for personal gain or to meet self-needs. I've heard some pastors declare, "Faith isn't about asking God for what you need. It's about asking him for what you can dream of. If you can dream it, you can have it."

The faith these men preach is earthbound, rooted in this world, materialistic. It urges believers to pray, "Lord, bless me, prosper me, give to me." The needs of a lost world are not considered. I can't say strongly enough: this kind of faith is not what God is desiring of us. It cannot be about gain without godliness.

There's a particularly dangerous doctrine of faith being espoused today. It claims that the godliest believers are those who have "worked their faith" to gain a comfortable living for themselves. According to this doctrine, the people we're to emulate are those who drive the biggest, most expensive cars, and own the largest, most lavish homes.

This is absolute heresy. If it were so, then the saintliest believers would be those who gouge others financially. It would mean our daily focus is to work every angle for our own gain. That's simply not the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Yet my focus in this message isn't on prosperity preachers or doctrines of personal gain. It's on those who truly love Jesus, and who want to live by faith in a way that pleases him. My message to every such believer is this: all true faith is born out of intimacy with Christ. In fact, if your faith doesn't come out of such intimacy, it isn't faith at all in his sight.

Hebrews 11 speaks of a biblical pattern of intimacy.

As we read Hebrews 11, we find a single common denominator to the lives of the people mentioned. Each had a particular characteristic that denotes the kind of faith God loves. What was this element? Their faith was born of deep intimacy with the

Lord.

The fact is, it's impossible to have a faith that pleases God without sharing intimacy with him. What do I mean by intimacy? I'm speaking of a closeness to the Lord that comes from yearning after him. This kind of intimacy is a close personal bond, a communion. It comes when we desire the Lord more than anything else in this life.

Let's look at just four examples of faith-filled servants who walked closely with God, as mentioned in Hebrews 11:

1. Our first example is Abel. Scripture declares, "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh" (Hebrews 11:4).

I want to note several significant things about this verse. First, God himself testified of Abel's gifts, or offerings. (Note that there was more than one offering. Abel clearly offered sacrifices to the Lord on a frequent basis.)

Second, Abel had to build an altar to the Lord, where he brought his sacrifices. And he offered not only unspotted lambs for the sacrifice, but the fat of those lambs as well. Scripture tells us, "And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof" (Genesis 4:4).

What does the fat signify here? The book of Leviticus says of the fat, "It is the food of the offering made by fire for a sweet savour: all the fat is the Lord's" (Leviticus 3:16). In short, the fat is food to God.

You see, the fat was the part of the sacrifice that caused a sweet aroma to rise. This part of the animal caught flame quickly and was consumed, bringing about the sweet smell. The Lord said of the fat, "It shall be a perpetual statute for your generations throughout all your dwellings, that he eat neither fat nor blood" (3:17). The fat is the Lord's.

The fat here serves as a type of prayer or fellowship that's acceptable to God. It represents our ministry to the Lord in the secret closet of prayer. And the Lord himself states that such intimate worship rises to him like a sweet-smelling savor.

The Bible's first mention of this kind of worship is by Abel. Abel allowed the sacrifice and the fat to be consumed on the altar of the Lord. That means he waited in God's presence until his sacrifice rose up to heaven.

This is why Abel is listed in Hebrews 11's hall of faith. He's a type of servant who was in fellowship with the Lord, offering him the best of all he had. As Hebrews declares, Abel's example lives on today as a testimony of true, living faith: "He being dead yet speaketh" (Hebrews 11:4).

How did Abel obtain such faith? Think of the amazing conversations this young man must have overheard between his parents, Adam and Even. The couple obviously spoke of their former days in the garden with the Lord. No doubt they mentioned their wonderful times of fellowship with God, walking and talking with him in the cool of the day.

Imagine what went through Abel's mind as he heard these stories. He probably thought, "How marvelous that must have been. My father and mother had a living relationship with the Creator himself." As Abel pondered this, he must have made a decision in his heart: he determined he wouldn't live off his parents' history. He couldn't settle for a mere tradition passed on to him. He had to have his own touch of God.

Could it be that Abel told himself, "I don't want to hear any more about past experiences with the Lord. I want to know him now, for myself, today. I want a relationship with him, to have fellowship and commune with him." This is the very kind of "fat" we're to offer God today. Like Abel, we're to give him the best of our time, in our secret closet of prayer. And we're to spend sufficient time there, in his presence, allowing him to consume our offerings of intimate worship and fellowship.

Now, compare Abel's offering to that of his brother, Cain. Cain brought fruit to the Lord, an offering that didn't require an altar. There was no fat, no oil, nothing to be consumed. As a result, there was no sweet aroma to rise up to heaven. In other words, there was no intimacy involved, no personal exchange between Cain and the Lord. You see, Cain brought a sacrifice that didn't require that he stay in God's presence, seeking his fellowship. This is why Scripture says Abel's offering was "more excellent" than Cain's.

Now, make no mistake: God honored the sacrifice that Cain brought to him. But the Lord looks on the heart, and he knew Cain didn't yearn to be in his presence. That was clear in the sacrifice Cain chose to offer. In my opinion, Cain represents many Christians today. Such believers go to church each week, worshipping God and asking him to bless and prosper them. But they have no desire for intimacy with the Lord. They want their heavenly Father to answer their prayers, but they don't desire a relationship with him. They don't seek his face, long for his closeness, yearn for his communion. Like Cain, they simply have no desire to linger in his presence.

By contrast, the intimate, faithful servant seeks God's touch in his life. Like Abel, he won't settle for anything less. This servant tells himself, "I'm determined to give the Lord all the time he wants from me in fellowship. I long to hear his still, small voice speak to me. So I'm going to stay in his presence until he tells me he's satisfied."

2. Enoch also enjoyed close fellowship with the Lord. In fact, his communion with God was so intimate, the Lord translated him to glory long before his life on earth might have ended. "By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God" (Hebrews 11:5).

Why did the Lord choose to translate Enoch? The opening words of this verse tell us very plainly: it was because of his faith. Moreover, the closing phrase tells us Enoch's faith pleased God. The Greek root word for pleased here means fully united, wholly agreeable, in total oneness. In short, Enoch had the closest possible communion with the Lord that any human being could enjoy. And this intimate fellowship was pleasing to God.

The Bible tells us Enoch began walking with the Lord after he begot his son, Methuselah. Enoch was sixty-five at the time. He then spent the next 300 years fellowshiping with God intimately. Hebrews makes it clear that Enoch was so in touch with the Father, so close to him in hourly communion, God chose to bring him home to himself. The Lord said to Enoch, in essence, "I can't take you any further in

the flesh. To increase my intimacy with you, I have to bring you to my side." So he whisked Enoch away to glory.

According to Scripture, it was Enoch's intimacy that so pleased God. To our knowledge, this man never performed a miracle, never developed a profound theology, never did any great works worthy of mention in Scripture. Instead, we read this simple description of this faithful man's life: "Enoch walked with God." Enoch had intimate communion with the Father. And his life is yet another testimony of what it means to truly walk in faith.

3. Our next example of a close walk of faith with God is Noah. Hebrews tells us, "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith" (Hebrews 11:7).

As we read this man's story in Genesis, we discover that "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord" (Genesis 6:8). The next verse tells us how he found this grace: "Noah walked with God" (6:9). Noah clearly knew God's voice. Whenever the Lord spoke to him, he obeyed. Over and over we read, "The Lord said unto Noah" and "Noah obeyed the word of the Lord" (see 6:13, 22; 7:1, 5; 8:15, 18).

Try to imagine the amount of time Noah must have spent alone with God. After all, he had to receive detailed instructions from the Lord on how to build the ark. Yet Noah's intimacy with God went beyond the direction he received. Scripture says the Lord shared his heart with Noah, showing him the evil in humans' hearts. And he revealed to Noah his plans for the future of humankind.

4. Abraham also shared intimate fellowship with the Lord. Consider the way God himself described his relationship with this man: "Abraham my friend" (Isaiah 41:8). Likewise, the New Testament tells us, "Abraham believed God" and he was called the "Friend of God" (James 2:23).

What an incredible commendation, to be called the friend of God. Most Christians have sung the well-known hymn, "What a Friend We Have In Jesus." These biblical passages bring home that truth with power. To have the Creator of the universe call a man his friend seems beyond human comprehension. Yet it happened with Abraham. It's a sign of this man's great intimacy with God.

The Hebrew word that Isaiah uses for friend here signifies affection and closeness. And in Greek, James' word for friend means a dear, close associate. Both imply a deep, shared intimacy. The result of intimacy is not only a close affection for the Lord, but also an ever-increasing detachment from this world. The closer we grow to Christ, the greater our desire becomes to live wholly in his presence. Moreover, we begin to see more clearly that Jesus is our only true foundation.

The Bible tells us Abraham "looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 11:10). To Abraham, nothing in this life was permanent. Scripture says the world was "a strange place" to him. It was no place to put down roots. Yet Abraham was no mystic. He wasn't an ascetic who put on holy airs and lived in a spiritual haze. This man lived an earthy life, heavily involved in the world's affairs. After all, he was the owner of thousands of head of livestock. And he had enough servants to form a small militia. Abraham had to be a busy man, directing his servants and buying and selling his cattle, sheep and goats.

Yet somehow, despite his many business affairs and responsibilities, Abraham found time for intimacy with the Lord. And because he walked closely with God, he grew more and more dissatisfied with this world. Abraham was wealthy, prosperous, with plenty of good things to keep him occupied. Yet nothing in this life could distract him from yearning for the heavenly country ahead. Each day, he longed more and more to be closer to that better place.

The heavenly country Abraham yearned for isn't a literal place. Rather, it's being home with the Father. You see, the Hebrew word for this phrase, "heavenly country," is Pater. It comes from a root word meaning Father. So, the heavenly country Abraham sought was, literally, a place with the Father.

What does this mean to us today? It means that moving on toward that heavenly country isn't just about attaining heaven someday in the future. It's about longing daily to experience the Father's presence right now.

Hebrews tells us that all four of the men I've mentioned - Abel, Enoch, Noah and Abraham - died in faith (see Hebrews 11). Each man was detached from the spirit of his age. And each was seeking a different country. The world simply wasn't their home. Yet this doesn't mean they were waiting until they got to heaven to enjoy closeness with the Father. On the contrary, as pilgrims passing through this life, they continually sought the presence of God. Nothing on earth could stop them from moving forward, seeking a deeper and closer walk with the Father.

By their faithful examples, these men were saying, "I'm looking for a place closer to my Father. And that place is beyond what this world has to offer. I cherish the many blessed gifts God has given me in my beloved family and godly friends. Nothing in this world could replace the love I have for them. But I know there's an even greater love to be experienced with the Father."

Hebrews 11 speaks of many others whose close walk of faith pleased the Lord. By faith, these servants wrought great miracles and did many astonishing things. And as we examine their lives, we see they too shared the same common denominator: they all forsook this world and its pleasures to walk closely with God.

Can you make this same claim? Does your heart yearn for a closer walk with the Lord? Is there a growing dissatisfaction in you with the things of this world? Or, is your heart attached to temporal things? Without intimacy, your faith isn't true faith in God's sight.

Mark 4 relates a story with Jesus and his disciples in a boat, being tossed about on a stormy sea. As we pick up the scene, Christ has just calmed the waves with a single command. Now he turns to his disciples and asks, "How is it that ye have no faith?" (Mark 4:40).

You may think this sounds harsh. It was only human to fear in such a storm. But Jesus wasn't chiding them for that reason. Rather, he was telling them, "After all this time with me, you still don't know who I am. How could you possibly walk with me for this long, and not know me intimately?"

Indeed, the disciples were astonished by the amazing miracle Jesus had just performed. Scripture says, "They feared exceedingly, and said to one another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" (4:41). Can you imagine it? Jesus' own disciples didn't know him. He had personally called

each one of these men to follow him. And they had ministered alongside him, to multitudes of people. They'd performed miracles of healing, and fed masses of hungry people. But they were still strangers to who their Master really was.

Tragically, the same is true today. Multitudes of Christians have ridden in the boat with Jesus, ministered alongside him, reached multitudes in his name. But they really don't know their Master. They haven't spent intimate time shut in with him. They've never sat quietly in his presence, opening their hearts to him, waiting and listening to comprehend what he wants to say to them.

We see another scene regarding the disciples' faith in Luke 17. The disciples came to Jesus, asking, "Increase our faith" (Luke 17:5). Many Christians today ask the same question: "How can I obtain faith?" But they don't seek the Lord himself for their answer. Instead, they rush off to seminars that claim to teach believers how to increase their faith. Or, they buy stacks of books that offer ten quick steps to an increased faith. Or, they travel hundreds of miles to listen to lectures on faith by prominent evangelists and teachers.

I can tell you without doubt, you'll never truly increase your faith in any of these ways. If you want increased faith, you have to do the same thing Jesus told his disciples to do in this passage. How did he answer their request for faith? "Gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken" (17:8).

Jesus was saying, in essence, "Put on your garment of patience. Then come to my table and sup with me. I want you to feed me there. You happily labor for me all day long. Now I want you to commune with me. Sit down with me, open your heart, and learn of me. There are so many things I wish to speak into your life."

Don't settle for any more theological explanations of faith. Don't look for any more steps to try to obtain it. Just get alone with Jesus, and let him speak his heart to you. True faith is born in the secret closet of intimate prayer. So, go to Jesus and learn of him. If you spend quality time in his presence, faith will surely come. He'll birth faith in your soul as you've never known it. Believe me, when you hear his still, small voice speaking, faith will explode inside you.

That heavenly country - the city with foundations, sought by generations before us - is the place we now live.

That place, that city, is in Christ by faith. The rest our fathers yearned for is found in him. We have received today the promise they could only foresee and embrace by faith.

Jesus said, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad" (John 8:56). Abraham foresaw a day when Christ would come to earth and build the foundation he envisioned. And the patriarch rejoiced in knowing a blessed people would live in that day. He knew they would enjoy uninterrupted access to heavenly conversation and communion with God.

Today, however, many Christians are missing this promise completely. Instead, they live in needless turmoil. They scurry here and there, trying to work up a faith that "gets results." They're constantly caught in a rush of activities, doing things for God that in the end are merely burdensome. They're never fully at rest in Christ. Why? They don't simply shut themselves in with the Lord, to spend quiet time alone

with him.

If you're in love with someone, you want to be in that person's presence. You both want to share yourselves with one another, opening your hearts and becoming intimate. The same is true of our relationship with Jesus. If we love him, we ought to constantly be thinking, "I want to be with my Lord. I want to enjoy his presence. So I'm going to draw near to him, and wait in his presence until I know he's satisfied. I'll stay until I hear him say, "Go now, and rejoice in my love."

In recent days, I've heard the Lord's still, small voice whisper something to me after my times of prayer with him. He says, "David, please don't go yet. Stay with me. There are so few who commune with me, so few who love me, so few who stay to hear my heart. And I have so much to share." It's almost a cry, a plea that I hear in his voice. Then the Lord tells me, "Let me show you where I find your faith, David. It's in your coming to me. It's in your waiting on me, and ministering to me, until you hear and know what's on my heart." "Your faith is in your growing desire to come into my presence. It's in your looking forward to our next time together. It's in that sense you've developed, that being alone with me is the joy of your life."

"It's no longer work for you to draw near to me, no longer a difficult labor. Now you look forward to it all day long. You know that when your labors are finished, you're going to come to me, to feed me and commune with me."

This is true faith.

COPYRIGHT/REPRODUCTION LIMITATIONS: This data file/publication is the sole property of World Challenge, Inc. It may be printed in its entirety for the readers personal use or to pass on to family and friends. It may not be altered or edited in any way and all reproductions of this data file/publication **MUST** contain this copyright notice:

