

WHEN GOD DID NOT FULFIL HIS WORD

A Flash of a Thought or a Lingering
Verdict?

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WHAT ABOUT FAITH?

Something to ponder:

In what ways do we treat faith as a means to an end more than an end in itself? What is the difference?

Introducing Faith

I see faith in two aspects: personal faith and abstract faith. I may not embark on an in-depth detail of these, but simply stated, personal faith is the trust/belief in Personal God (faith in God). That is to say, God is the Person (or object) of our faith. This is the most fundamental foundation of faith. It is the faith that rests on the fact that God exists.

It is important to be aware that personal faith can easily be misplaced. Though it would still be called personal faith, it can be focused on a “wrong person”. A misplaced personal faith can either be focused on self or on another human being.

The starting point for abstract faith is what is recorded in the Scripture:

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

—Hebrew 11:1.

Faith that the Bible describes as a “substance” is the *conviction* that we have about the reality of things that are not seen—things that we presently only hope for. Though it is abstract, the irony is that it is equally the *evidence* because it practically influences our actions. For our abstract faith to be called “evidence”, we must *act* in line with what we hope for. This is what James referred to when he said:

What good it is, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?... faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.” Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.

—James 2:14,17-18 (NIV).

The abstract faith translates into substance only if it is based on the Person of our faith. Our confidence is that we are dealing with God who called things that were not as if they were, and because He called them they came to be (Rom. 4:17; Is. 48:13c).

Abstract faith believes that all things are possible with God; acting in line with this conviction becomes the evidence of our faith. It is one thing to believe that all things are possible; it is another to *act* on that belief.

But is faith that difficult? After believing that God, the Creator of all things, exists, shouldn't the idea that with Him all things are possible come naturally? The problem, I

believe, is mostly the struggle with the thought that God may be “unpredictable”. This is why when things fail to happen the way we had hoped we are wont to get angry with Him.

Not Black and White

When we don't get what we asked for, *must* the reason be contained in the box of lack of faith and/or wrong motives? Is there a possibility that one can ask with good motives and in faith yet fail to get what one prayed for? Why is it that God would expect some people to have faith to get what others don't even pray for in the first place yet they have them? The answers to these questions are not black and white the way we sometimes suggest explicitly or implicitly.

Say for example that someone is trusting God for a child, how does it feel, for example, to be told that you lack faith when others have children even without praying to get one? The place of faith, especially as a condition for receiving from God, is one aspect that may not always be clear-cut as is assumed most of the time.

The main issue is that the puzzles we usually battle with are of “biblical making”. This is why the understanding of the Bible needs thorough balance and sober interpretation. Look for example the following promises against the “reality” that we may not get everything we asked for:

- All things are possible with God (Mk. 10:27);
- He who promised is faithful and He will do it (Heb. 10:23, 1 Thes. 5:24);
- Christ will do whatever we ask in His name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father; we may ask for *anything* in His name, and He will do it (John 14:13-14).

With all these promises, we see how “easy” it is to get either frustrated when things don't turn out as expected or overboard with the theology of, “we must get what we ask for”. People who have always had things going their way may easily pass judgement that we only fail to get if either we don't have faith or if we ask with wrong motives. But is this necessarily true?

In the middle of these promises of “you will get *whatever* you ask for”, the Bible gives a paradox that commends people who didn't get what was promised yet they are still counted as people who held out in faith.

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth...
And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise.
—Hebrews 11:13,39.

The scripture above shows that we may ask according to the will of God and have faith and also ask in the name of Jesus and still fail to get what we asked for. The only thing we need to keep regardless of what happens is our faith. Even without the promised things materialising in the physical realm, we can still maintain that they are true.

I believe that in some unique occasions, we may ask for something only for the Lord to respond: *You don't know what I AM doing.*

I am not about to put a final answer to justify every case of things not turning out the way we had expected. I also believe that there are deeper things of the spirit that we may not understand which would make God's promises valid even when for us we see the end.

I would have given the example of the mother of Zebedee's sons (was she Zebedee's wife?) that sometimes our petitions may not be granted, ...

Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him. And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom. But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able.

—Matthew 20:20-22.

... but this example may not be appropriate since the woman, 'didn't know what she was asking'. If this statement was not figurative to show that even when we are so convinced we know what we are asking, the woman actually knew what she was asking. She was pleading, or if you like, scheming for positions for her sons. This was a noble thing for a mother to do. Rebekah, Isaac's wife got Jacob blessed by this kind of "scheming". She was never reprimanded for it (Gen. 27:5-17).

Many people have gone through experiences where they asked in faith; and in the will of God; and in the name of Jesus. They also knew what they were asking for, yet things didn't turn out as they expected. What happened? In the woman's case, Jesus answered, "You don't know what you are asking". I may not insist that this is the case whenever a petition is not granted, but I think God sometimes may tell us either, *You don't know what you are asking* when we think we do, or, if we actually know what we are asking, He may answer, *You don't know what I am doing*.

If that were the answer from God, I would be comfortable with it. The pain lessens when we are conscious that God knows what He is doing even if we don't understand it—for the moment or forever. He is God and the finality of what He is doing must be virtuous.

If we examine our hearts in the light of God's nature and attributes, we would find that whatever happens, He has ways of working out something wonderfully virtuous out of a situation that is awfully obnoxious. This is why the apostle Paul wrote:

And we know that *all things* work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

—Romans 8:28 (italics, author's emphasis).

The Universal Faith and the Gift of Faith

After what we have seen above, we need to put faith into the right perspective. The Bible calls us to have faith and points out that lack of it can stand in the way of receiving from God. This is in order; the only problem is that the general teaching of faith has confined our thinking into a "box", not to mention the unbalanced teaching of faith. We are going to see some aspects of faith that will make us "consider God more than we consider faith".

The faith I call "universal faith" is that which every believer has. The Bible tells us that to every believer, there is given a *measure of faith* (Rom. 12:3d NIV). Without this measure, it would not be possible to come to the Lord. One must believe in God first before committing his life to Him (Rom. 10:8,14). It is this measure of faith that is at the disposal of all believers to enable them operate in the "universal" acts of worship and commission. This is why, though the Bible says there are those that have the gift of faith (1 Cor. 12:9), everyone is expected to have a measure of faith. This must be the faith without which no one can please God.

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because *anyone* who comes to him *must believe* that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

—Hebrews 11:6 (NIV, italics, author's emphasis).

If every element of faith with which to expect God to reward a diligent seeker remains a specific gift to specific people, God would not have expected everyone (refer to anyone in the scripture above) who comes to Him to have faith, unless faith, in its entirety, is a gift to every believer. And if faith—in all its dimensions—is a gift to every believer and not to specific people, then 1 Corinthians 12:9 becomes complicated or—for that matter—immaterial. This, however, can be explained. The gift of faith is “a special grace” to some individuals who would always see possibilities when others see dead ends. It is also the doing of a special anointing and grace for an *exceptional* operation in a particular area.

She could have gone on and on, bombarding the Lord with a catalogue of accusations and pouring her frustrations on Him. No! She was receptive and gracious.

The universal faith available for every believer is enough to open a door of reward provided a believer diligently seeks God. What does this mean? Even if we don't have the kind of faith that would pass for a gift, we have a faith that would pass for the universal faith (the measure of faith) available for everyone. From here, it is possible to let our faith grow by continuous hearing of God's Word: "... faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom 10:17).

If we continuously feed our basic faith, it can even grow to the extent of becoming a gift. If a gift is not fed (fanned), its potentiality will not be realised. This is why the apostle Paul exhorted Timothy to fan the gift that was in him. Though the above scripture says that faith *comes*, it can also imply that faith *grows*. This is because, I cannot see faith that keeps on coming and just disappears without piling up. A piling up faith must be a growing faith. When something grows it becomes big, hence noticeable.

Another way of getting the kind of faith that would be identified as a gift is by desiring it. The apostle Paul exhorts the Corinthians to desire the spiritual gifts especially the gift of prophecy (1 Cor. 14:1). Earlier, he had said that it is the *same* Spirit that gives gifts to each one just as He determines (1 Cor. 12:11b), but 1 Corinthians 14:1 implies that the determination by the Spirit can be “influenced” by the *desire* we have.

Elsewhere, (Psalms 37:4) the Bible exhorts us to delight ourselves in the Lord and He will fulfil the desires of our hearts. A desire for faith is a good desire.

The Paradox of Qualified Faith

Why did the Lord Jesus give mixed signals when it comes to qualifying faith? At one time He talked of a little faith to mean a deficiency of that which is required to stop fear prompted by the raging sea (Matt. 8:26). And at another time, He talked of little (small) faith to be just enough to move mountains (Matt. 17:19-20; Lk. 17:5-6).

On one occasion, Jesus had just taught about forgiveness. The disciples realised at once how difficult it was to execute what the Lord was talking about. They asked Him, “Increase our faith”. The Lord’s answer implied that they didn’t need any increase of faith. That is to say, there was no need for great or big faith but that a faith as small as mustard seed was enough to accomplish great feats (Lk. 17:5-6).

It gets more complicated. When the centurion whose servant was lying sick sought Jesus’ help, He was willing to go and heal the servant. The centurion, however, perceiving himself unworthy to host the Lord Jesus under his roof, reneged on inviting Him home (Matt. 8:5-10). He thus besought the Lord to, “speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed” (Matt. 8:8). This faith impressed the Lord and He qualified it as a great faith. Now compare the workings of “small faith” and “great faith” in the following stories:

And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, And saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him. The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found *so great faith*, no, not in Israel... And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour.

—Matthew 8:5-10, 13 (italics, author’s emphasis).

And when they were come to the multitude, there came to him a certain man, kneeling down to him, and saying, Lord, have mercy on my son: for he is lunatick, and sore vexed: for oftentimes he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water. And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him. Then Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him hither to me. And Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him: and the child was cured from that very hour. Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out? And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have *faith as a grain of mustard seed*, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.

—Matthew 17:14-20 (italics, author’s emphasis).

In these two stories, whether faith is *so great* or *as small as a mustard seed*, the result would be compelling in both cases. Where does that leave us? Do we need *great* or just a *little* faith to get things happening?

In the case of Matthew 17:17, Jesus talked of unbelief—implying an absence of faith (not even as small as a mustard seed, perhaps). Did this mean that even the “measure of faith” may lack in some circumstances? In what looks like being on the same note, in verse 20, He talks of “so little faith”. Can it be said that the unbelief Jesus meant had something to do with not putting faith that was already available into action? The universal faith was there. In chapter 16 of Matthew, Peter had already identified Jesus as the Son of God. Why were they

concerned that they would perish in the storms and yet the Son of God was right there in the boat with them? The lack of faith here is not referring to its absence but the acting contradictory to the belief they already have. How could they believe in God and behave as if God would allow them to perish along with His Son?

The Paradox of an Ambivalent Faith

James makes a resolute statement concerning faith that receives from God:

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.

—James 1:5-8.

Though James makes that resolute statement, there are, however, cases where people who gave what would pass for indecisive faith got what they wanted. The immediate example can be cited of Martha, Lazarus' sister, in John 11:21-27. Consider the following conversation:

Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. But *I know, that even now, whatsoever* thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee. Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again. Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this? She saith unto him, Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world (*italics, author's emphasis*).

In this case there wasn't a resolved faith on the side of Martha. If anything, Martha was not clear what she was saying. At one breath she says, "But I know that *even now* God will give you *whatsoever* you ask" (v.22), but when Jesus told her what He was about to ask (v.23), she reneged on her earlier statement and said, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection *at the last day*" (v.24). What then did she mean by *even now whatsoever* you ask?

Whatsoever, an absolute pronoun the predicate of which is inclusive of everything, means that nothing was exempted and Lazarus coming back to life "now" was included in the "whatsoever you ask". What about, "even now" what happened to it? She replaced it with "at the last day".

Lazarus' resurrection was therefore not a case of, 'Your faith has raised your brother back from the dead'. Equally, there was no way Jesus could say, *Lazarus! Let it to be done to you according to your faith*. He was already dead and was therefore exempted from all faith requirements. His resurrection had everything to do with Jesus.

On that note, we need to know that even a case of, 'Your-faith-has-made-you-well,' is still an instance where *it* has everything to do with Jesus. If we have this attitude, we will minimise faith in our faith and *maximise Jesus*. And how do we maximise Jesus ahead of our faith? It was exactly what Martha did. She never had faith that her brother would rise there and then but she maintained, "thou art the Christ." Whether her brother would resurrect or not, one thing was settled: *She believed in the Person more than she did on the miracles*.

Even after focusing on Christ, we need to balance our position by asking the following question: *How can we maintain the attitude that in every victory, it is a case of 'everything-to-do-with-Jesus' without at the same time escaping from the part that we have to play?*

Though Martha's faith was ambivalent, she said something very important. When Jesus asked her to confirm her faith that her brother would rise, "Believest thou this?" (v.26), she answered, "Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world" (v.27). It is apparent that Martha was not resolute in her earlier statement, "whatever you ask even now". She didn't actually believe that her brother Lazarus was to rise there and then but she leaned back on one important thing—the identity of Jesus. It was like she was saying, *I have my doubts that my brother is going to live again now, but I still believe in You. Even if he doesn't rise, I still believe that You are the expected Messiah.* This is what it means to minimise our strength as we maximise the strength of the One who is not limited by anything.

How could they believe in God and behave as if God would allow them to perish along with His Son?

Consider also the way she related with the Lord after He "ignored" their urgent call to get to them and help their sick brother who also happened to be His friend. Their relationship with the Lord was not tied to how prompt Jesus was responding to them in their anxious moments. Naturally, and this is what many people would do, she could have expressed disappointment and complaint in the following manner:

What is this You have done to us? What kind of friend are You anyway? We sent for You but You just took Your time. Now our brother is dead. What good are You to us? You betrayed our friendship. We are through with You!

She could have gone on and on, bombarding the Lord with a catalogue of accusations, pouring her frustrations on Him. No! She was receptive and gracious. She only expressed desperation: "If only You were here our brother would not have died." She still addressed His Lordship and never questioned His identity. No wonder, even when she wavered in her faith to have her brother raised back to life "now", Lazarus was still raised back to life.

Let us consider another case where "faith did not seem to have counted"—a case where there was an indecisive faith. It is the story of the boy who was healed from an evil spirit:

And one of the multitude answered and said, Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit; And wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away: and I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out; and they could not. He answereth him, and saith, O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him unto me. And they brought him unto him: and when he saw him, straightway the spirit tare him; and he fell on the ground, and wallowed foaming. And he asked his father, How long is it ago since this came unto him? And he said, Of a child. And oftentimes it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy

him: but if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us. Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, *Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.* When Jesus saw that the people came running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him. And the spirit cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him: and he was as one dead; insomuch that many said, He is dead. But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up; and he arose.

—Mark 9:17-27 (italics, author's emphasis).

When the man asked for help from Jesus, the Lord threw his attention back to himself (the man): “If you can believe, all things are possible for him who believes” (v.23). The condition for receiving was faith (believe). Listen to the response of the father of the boy: “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief” (v.24 NIV). What was the man saying—I believe, help my unbelief? If he believed, what unbelief did he need help with?

He had identified Christ and knew that He was able to do things. So when Jesus told him to look within himself, he played the ball back to the Lord, “You! Help me!” When he gave a contradictory response in the same breath, was he not saying, *I believe You can do it, but I don't believe I have anything to help him. If that were the case, I wouldn't have come to You?*

Whether the above was the case or not, it was apparently not one of the, ‘Be it unto you according unto your faith’. Neither was the man sent away for having been diffident. He got what he wanted because he identified the Lord Jesus and He was present; he focused on Him. He was also honest. He never played faith when he knew a conflict within himself. He was kind of saying that if it all depended on him and not on Christ, then he needed help; he didn't have that kind of belief.

Another story I would like to mention is in Acts 12. Peter had been arrested. Believers were praying for his release. Albeit, when Rhoda, a servant girl, heard a knock at the door and went to answer it, they didn't believe her announcement that it was Peter knocking (Acts 12:1-17).

Can we still say that these people prayed a “prayer of faith”? Was Peter released as a result of their prayers? If it was, then God didn't seem to append a rigid condition for single-mindedness. If they had faith that their prayers would be answered and that Peter would be released, why were they “surprised” when he was released? By vigorously attempting to find an explanation for what Rhoda saw, theirs was also definitely not a “your-faith-has-released-your-brother-from-bondage” case.

In the case I mentioned above about the scared disciples in a boat following a raging sea (Matt. 8:26), the disciples woke Jesus saying, “Master, carest thou not that we perish?” (Mk. 4:38). The Lord arose and rebuked the wind before He turned to His disciples and rebuked them, “You of little faith (also interpreted as lack of faith), why are you so afraid?” (Mk. 4:40, NIV; Parenthesis, author's addition).

Though they had little or no faith, the Lord Jesus rescued them. He didn't charge that since they “had no faith”, He had to abandon them in the boat to face the raging sea—and possibly drowning. Wasn't it “more” serious to doubt when Christ was physically present? Is there any difference between Christ having been *there* (then) physically and Him being *here* (now) spiritually? In fact, did He not imply that it would be better for us that He went away in “exchange” for the Holy Spirit? (Jhn. 16:5-7).

There are more examples of cases that may throw more light in this area. Consider Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego who had invoked and anticipated God's intervention in their situation but added,

But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.
—Daniel 3:18 (NIV).

Did they add an aspect of lack of a resolute faith? Were they then completely sure that God would rescue them? Aren't there cases of people (in the Bible) in whom faith was operative yet they perished or suffered under conditions identical to that of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego?

When Jesus prayed that the cup may pass His head and added that not His will but the will of God be done (Matt. 26:39), did He pray a prayer of faith? And since He went to the Cross, was it a result of failing to make a prayer of a resolute faith? I don't think so! Where do these leave us when it comes to stepping forward? Are we expected to make a move only when we are completely sure of the result? No! Sometimes stepping forward is not a demonstration of "strength" (faith) but an expression of our inadequacies—weakness. Sometimes it may not be the strength, but desperation.

One last example. We read the following in the Scripture:

There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were now well stricken in years. And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course, According to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense. And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John....

And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years. And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings. And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season.

—Luke 1:5-13, 18-20.

Zacharias prayed for a child but when age caught up with them, he though age had cancelled their potentiality to be parents. Even when the angel announced to him that they arte about to be parents, he never believed a result that he was struck with dumbness. The most important thing is that despite Zacharias doubts, God went ahead and did what He had purposed to do.

Identity, Presence and Focus on Jesus

Faith or “no faith”, the identity, presence and focus on Jesus is what counts. Whether we are weak or strong in faith, identifying Jesus as the ultimate rescuer is all that matters.

There are many cases where people have “identified” the Lord Jesus as the only One who can help. Even if they didn’t have a manifest faith, anyone who comes to Jesus, He promised neither to leave nor forsake (Heb. 13:5)

On one occasion, as I was praying for the woman of God, I reasoned with the Lord:

Lord Jesus, if You were here, I mean physically, don’t You think she could have come and knelt before You to get Your healing touch? What would You have done? Would You have left her to go without being made whole? Why should it look like those who were privileged to be with You in a physical fellowship had a “better version” of You than us whom You promised to be with in the Spirit?

Believe me, this was not an inventory of complaints; it was a sincere and desperate call to see Jesus “real” just as He was during the inauguration of the Church. I emphasised to the Lord that He promised and made it clear that He would be with us to the end of time. So He is here with us, albeit spiritually. I pleaded that He should not let us feel like He is far away in heaven and the enemy is causing havoc down here; that He should not make us feel that those with whom He had physical contact had an advantage with Him than we have today. I also reminded Him that He is the same today just as He was about 2000 years ago.

Are You Completely Sure?

Are you completely sure that God has spoken to you and that He is going to do it? Suppose it doesn’t happen? These are questions we may meet either in our mind or through someone. How would we respond to such?

From the above biblical stories about people who didn’t seem to have a resolute faith, we can see that God is not limited by our “lack of faith”. There are things that God would still choose to do even when people waver in their faith. We cannot “contain” God in the box of our faithlessness. May this not cause any confusion. The idea here is that there are things that God does because of His faithfulness and not because of our initiatives.

This being the case, we may run to our Father and tell Him exactly what we feel. We can talk to Him about our fears; doubts, faithlessness and anxieties, *etc.* Someone may ask, ‘Wouldn’t that be a contradiction to Hebrew 11:6?’

Well, we have just seen cases where people who “doubted” still went to God and got what they asked for. Let us look again at Hebrew 11:6:

But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that *cometh* to God *must believe* that *he is*, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him (italics, author’s emphasis).

This scripture is talking about the fact that we cannot please God if we don’t have faith. The basis of the faith being referred to here is the belief that “*HE IS*”. The fact that we run to God is a sign that we *believe* that *HE IS*. We may not believe that something is going to happen the way we have asked God but that “unbelief” doesn’t take away our *basic belief*, namely, *HE EXISTS*.

As for me, whether I get what I wanted or not, I still believe that God exists and that He is a good God whose rewards are not only “real” when they are *material* but also when they are *spiritual*; not only when they are *now* but also when they are *later*. This is the kind of faith Martha had—even if her brother would rise later, she still believed in Christ.

Subjective faith pumps up the ego to a monumental proportion before embarking on a basic operation.

Why is it possible to still get something from God even when we are not resolute in faith? For those who have children, you will realise that there are some general and specific ways in which you would like them to relate with you. However, sometimes they may not behave in any pleasant manner but you may still give them something they request. This explains the essence of grace—getting things we don't deserve.

At one time we had problem with our elder son. The peer influence was making him disappear from home for hours. At age 11, it wasn't safe for him to come home late. All our efforts to make him come home before dark was proving futile. Despite this, the boy had a list of things he wanted us to buy for him. I told him that since he had not been a good boy, he could as well forget about the things he had wanted from us. My wife had other ideas. She advised, "We may not relate with our son like that. All the things we give to our children are not tied to merit. They don't have to deserve them by their being good".

I got the point. Most of the important things we give to our children, we just give them by virtue of being their parents. When we give them food, for example, it is not because they have pleased us in every way.

Regardless of how much we please God, the foundation of our relationship with Him is grace. And if it is grace, we get the explanation why we sometimes get God's ministration when we are at our "worst". This is by no means encouraging people not to bother with faith. If you are a good child, you will care to please your father.

So, must we be completely sure that we will get what we want before we can go to our Father? If we are sure, the better, but even with this, we also need to let God be God and not think that our being sure puts Him in a corner. I have already showed from the Scripture that we don't have to be at our "best" to go to our Father.

Based on what I have shown from the Scripture of cases of "no resolution" on the outcome, it is my conviction that one can step forward in "weakness"; in "trembling"; in "even-if-He-doesn't-do-it"; in an ambivalent faith, *etc.* and yet be still in the right track.

One may say, 'If we go to God without being sure, wouldn't that mean we are trying God?' This may be a matter of the motive and condition of the heart more than what one does. If I ask God to raise the dead, for example, and this is not because I want to approve or disprove Him, but because I know He can do it and because I am desperate for and dependent on Him, this attitude and motive would not constitute "trying God". This position is also strengthened if the failure to get what I had wanted doesn't adversely affect my relationship with Him.

What a Chapter! Is Faith Still Necessary?

For many, this must have been a strange way of dealing with the subject of faith. Most of the teachings we hear about faith is that which insists on "rigidity" leaving people frustrated on both sides of the divide. How is that? There are cases when we may have the "necessary faith" and yet fail to get what we had wanted. Since we think in the "box" that not getting from God is a direct sign that one lacked faith, we therefore get confused and frustrated. On the other hand, sometimes we think that we must be "champions" of faith for us to come to God. We get frustrated because we can't come to God with our "fears" and "doubts", *etc.*

The rigid teachings of, ‘If you have faith you will get it’ and ‘If you didn’t get it, you didn’t have faith’, may sound biblically-based and theologically sound but if we divide the Word of truth correctly (2 Tim. 2:15), we will find that more often these teachings tend towards aberration—that is, over-tilting them on one side.

The way I have treated faith in this chapter may make us quickly ask: ‘Do we still need faith?’ The answer is Yes! Absolutely! The place of faith is solid in the Word of God. The only things we have to be careful about are the following:

- *What* is it—what kind of faith are we dealing with? Is it basic faith (same as universal faith or measure of faith) or a special gift of faith?
- *How* do we use it—do we think that if we have faith we deprive God of His supremacy to use His discretion? Do we use it as a tool of merit replacing the grace?
- *Where* do we focus it—self, another human being or God?

Yes, we still need faith but it has to be the right faith. Yes to faith that focuses on God and no to faith that focuses on self; yes to “patient faith” and no to “impatient faith”; yes to faith that still acknowledges grace to be the arm of God that extends to us; no to faith that have the attitude of merit.

Yes to an objective faith and no to a subjective faith. While an objective faith is essentially focussed on God, subjective faith is essentially focused either on self or on the faith itself. That is to say, while a believer with an objective faith may not even be so conscious of the presence of faith since he is focussed on God, the one with a subjective faith is so conscious of his faith and may not necessarily focus on God.

Objective faith may be very basic; it can be as small as a mustard seed yet it can accomplish a monumental feat. On the contrary, subjective faith pumps up the ego to a monumental proportion before embarking on a basic operation.

After highlighting the possible “faiths” and knowing what the “valid faith” ought to be, we can conclude that faith is still absolutely necessary. This chapter is not by any means an excuse from the requirements of faith; and it is not equally trying to undermine the position of faith. It is, however, aiming at prompting believers to take “steps of faith” while trusting God.

The basic faith can simply be defined as ‘belief in God and believing God’. Mere belief in God is not enough because even the demons do believe in God. What authenticates the belief in God is when we combine the belief in God with believing Him. Believing God means that we let His discretion and counsel govern our life.

So, when we take a step of faith, it may simply mean calling upon God. This in itself is an act of faith (Rom. 10:14). The little faith or if you like belief in God and the fact that He is, might just be enough to move mountains. This position is also not downplaying the fact that the Lord Himself qualified faith at different occasions. When in Matthew 15:25-28 Jesus referred to the woman to have had a great faith, interpreted in the light of what faith as small as a mustard seed can do, the woman’s faith referred to here might not have been a reference to the “size” but the “perseverance”—that is, an enduring faith; a faith that neither gets discouraged nor gives up; calling on God without ceasing. Since the Bible indicates, as we have already seen, that to every believer has been given a measure of faith (Rom. 12:3d), talking about “lack of faith” among believers may not refer to the absence of the basic faith but to “lack of taking a step”, or not acting in agreement with the faith.

The chapter focussed on the paradoxes that may not be very easy to reconcile. That is probably why we need to give an allowance for God to work even after we have failed a requirement. It is a chapter that may not have been a good one for those that are “champions of faith”; those who don’t give a vent for weakness in faith and see nothing happening “except by faith”. It is important to remember that there are exceptions where God uses His

discretion without our participation. It may look like I have “minimized” the requirement of faith more than doing what is usually done to the topic of faith, namely, “You must have faith in order to receive from God”. It was deliberate but not to discourage the hunger and quest for faith. I would therefore like to put faith where it belongs: *A requirement that must be sought and maintained by every believer*. You must just believe. Nevertheless, due to God’s grace that most of the times avail things to us without “deserving” them, I must say that we can still go to God even if we feel we are not champions of faith. And when we go to Him we must not pretend but say just that—‘I am not sure if I have enough faith but here You are and here I am, please help me’.

Honesty is just as precious to the Lord as faith is. We may then realise that it was all we needed to do. Believing that we can talk about our doubts and fears with the Lord is another facet of faith.

In some of the scriptures we saw, it is shown that even those who did not seem to have faith still went to the Lord and kind of said,

Well, we don’t have the faith but we have You. You are the One that counts.

This is probably what the disciples said in their heart when the raging sea threatened life out of them. When Jesus rebuked them for lack of faith, they could have said: ‘Well, thank God, we don’t “need” that staff, when we have You, You are here’; or, ‘We don’t have faith yes, but we have You’.

Having Jesus, and being conscious that He can be called upon in times of need, is important. When we are in a fix and we need to call on the Lord as quickly as possible and yet we are not sure what is going to happen, what do we do? Do we wait until we have the faith and by which time it would be too late? If we believe in God, we can just call on Him.

The things that God chooses to do through us when we are weak, trembling and ambivalent—and we know it—are the things that we will promptly count on His grace thereby giving Him the glory more than having an attitude that, “our faith”, or, “our prayer” has accomplished it.

Of course, even when we operate in strength, God will still get the glory, but how many people have been tempted and even fallen as a result of pride that follows strength? For the great things that God does through His servants when they are riding high in strength, they would need extra grace (and should be very sensitive and conscious of this all the way through) for strength management. Otherwise, there would be always a looming danger of pride. Given a choice, I would rather have God perform wonders through me when I am weak than when I am strong.

When we are weak and yet God, by His indescribable discretion, chooses to do something great, we would be very reluctant to allow ourselves be counted in the line of “merits”. One would almost feel like saying, ‘I had nothing to do with it, it was purely and squarely God in action. This is what I would call giving all the glory back to God. This doesn’t, however, mean that those that approach God in “their strength” cannot give all the glory back to Him. Rather, it is tempting in the latter case to think that one shares in the spoils since, ‘it was my faith that made things happen.’

I remember a brother in the Lord who refused to do something when he was asked to. It was an emergency and we believed that he could step in and help. He explained that he wasn’t the type who would just jump in and do things without having been informed ahead of time so that he could find time to pray about it. The issue was not that he couldn’t do what he was asked to do but that he was careful not to do things without praying about them beforehand.

Though his position sounded theologically convincing, I noted something was amiss. To have an attitude that God cannot use one if one didn’t know about something in advance so as to pray about it, is in a way counting on one’s own preparations more than on the grace. This

is the situation that when things happen, one would count it more on one's own preparation than on the grace of God. In life, we are liable to meet unexpected situations and we just have to trust God for the grace and step in even if we didn't directly prepare for it.

To recap, the purpose of what I have shared in this chapter is twofold:

- i) To loosen the grip many believers have on the excuse, 'We don't have faith', implying that faith is a special gift given to (special) others but not them. This is a witty escape but it may be a result of the fact that faith is a fight and many don't just want to fight, yet the fight of faith is a good fight (1 Tim. 6:12). Many believers would rather just have a go-it-easy religion.
- ii) To open up a space for grace and God's discretion. The idea here is that God still has infinite options open to Him so that He can still choose what to do whether faith is strong or weak.

It can therefore be concluded that the excuse of lack of faith are not always valid. The cases we saw cancel some of the excuses of lack of faith. We don't approach the throne of grace because of merit otherwise it would cease to be grace. We approach the throne of grace because of our inadequacies. We can just avail ourselves before the presence of God in whatever condition so that we can leave everything to Him.

In a nutshell, what I have done in this chapter is to encourage people not to shy away from running to the Father whom they believe exists. Remember, according to Hebrews 11:6, after believing that God exists, the only belief that then remains is that "He is a Rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." This surely shouldn't be a difficult thing to do.