

Faith.

EXPERIENCING

The UNIMAGINABLE

A 90 DAY DEVOTIONAL ON DEEPENING YOUR FAITH

L O R R A I N E H I L L



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Day 1

Our Journey of Faith

And without faith it is impossible to please him, for he who comes to God must believe that he is and that he is a rewarder of those who seek him.

—Hebrews 11:6

Our Christian walk is an exciting journey of faith, the adventure of a lifetime. We will experience more with God than we could ever imagine. Yet, there are also challenging parts to the journey, and we must continually trust the Lord and exhibit faith. So what is faith? The Greek word for faith, *pistis*, means “a firm persuasion, a conviction based on hearing.”¹ Faith is more than just intellectual assent or knowledge. It involves obedience. We believe and therefore act upon that belief.

In our lives, we have to choose to walk by faith. It is a choice that we make daily. Many distractions will appear to prevent us from continuing our walk of faith, but we must persevere. Why is faith so necessary to the Christian walk? Hebrews 11:6 tells us that “without faith it is impossible to please him [God].” It delights God’s heart when we act in faith. As a parent, I have to confess that I love those moments when my child acts in faith and does what I tell him to do. A few months ago, I told my child to sweep the downstairs of our

home, and he did it. There were no arguments, no whining, and no complaining. I cannot tell you the sheer pleasure I felt. In similar ways, our faith pleases God and delights his heart. Can you imagine the sheer joy of pleasing God the next time he calls you to walk by faith?

Faith allows the impossible to become possible, the unattainable to become achievable. It is in our moments of faith that we witness the power of God in our lives and see his miracles. It is in these moments, though difficult and trying, where the glory of God is manifested to the world. So let us step out on faith and ask God for the impossible.

Day 2

Resting in God's Unfailing Love

How priceless is your unfailing love, O God! People take refuge in the shadow of your wings.

—*Psalm 36:7 (NIV)*

As we walk by faith, we must be careful to not equate our circumstances with God's love. When our circumstances go well, we tend to feel like God loves us; but when circumstances are difficult, we feel God is distant or unloving. The truth, however, is that God's love is constant and enduring. "How priceless is your unfailing love, O God! People take refuge in the shadow of your wings" (Ps. 36:7).

God reminded me of his unfailing love several months ago. One day, I decided to make my children breakfast before school. Now, I have to confess this is not my normal practice; my kids are older and usually make their own breakfast, and I give them a hug as they leave. But this morning was going to be different. So there I was in the kitchen making my kids sprinkle pancakes. As the kids came down for breakfast, they were all surprised; but they ate their breakfast and got ready for school. As they were leaving, my husband looked at me and said, "So now, why did you make them breakfast?" Clearly, he was so shocked by my making breakfast that he thought maybe he had missed their birthday or something. Before I had time to answer, my daughter jumped up and down and said, "Because she loves us!" I smiled at her and gave her the biggest hug, but then I said, "you know I love you even when I don't make you sprinkle pancakes, right?" She said yes, and everyone left. I thought about her reaction all morning and how it related to God. He loves us the same on the day we receive the sprinkle pancakes (the house we want, the promotion, the car, the spouse) as the days when we just get the hug. God's love is consistent in our lives; we just sometimes experience it differently. We must stop walking by how we feel and start walking by what we know. Even though we may *feel* God does not love us, we *know* that he does because Jesus died for us. God's love for us was beautifully settled at the cross!

Day 3

Keeping Our Eyes Fixed on Jesus

Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith.

—*Hebrews 12:2a*

One summer vacation, my family went to Zion National Park, which is a wonderful hiking park. The first day, my kids and I hiked many of the easy trails and loved it. The second day, however, we chose a more challenging trail. As we started, the trail became perilous with huge rocks in our path, so I told my children to keep focused on the goal. After we climbed to the top, we rested and enjoyed the beautiful view. It was absolutely breathtaking, but I also realized how important it was to keep the right focus. A wrong focus could have easily resulted in hurt or injury.

Our walk of faith will have many challenges, so we must keep our eyes fixed on Jesus or the circumstances of this life will overcome us. In the Greek, the phrase “fixing our eyes” means to look steadfastly and intently toward a *distant* object. We are not to focus intently on our problems or obstacles but rather to focus intently on our Lord. If we are honest, some of the problems in this life are absolutely overwhelming, and constantly focusing on the problems becomes a big black hole that does nothing but drain us emotionally and spiritually. Instead, we need to keep focused

on our Lord and rest in him. He is more than able to help us. There is no problem so great that he cannot solve it.

When we truly focus on the Lord, everything else will pale in comparison. In Matthew 17:1–3, Jesus took three of his disciples—Peter, James, and John—to the top of a mountain and was transfigured before them so that they could see his glory. As they gazed at him, I doubt they wondered about the minor problems and difficulties of their lives. Instead, they probably stood mesmerized by the beauty and magnificence of their Lord. That is what we need in our lives—that kind of focus; because if you are like me, it is so easy to become ensnared by this world, its hardships, and its entertainment. When life begins to engulf us and completely overwhelm us, let's make sure we keep our eyes focused on our Lord. Let's picture our Lord lifted up in all his glory and majesty.

Day 4

Choosing to Believe God

And behold, you shall be silent and unable to speak until the day when these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their proper time.

—Luke 1:20

Believing God is a choice. We choose whether we will believe God or whether we will believe the lies of the enemy. Luke

1 reveals the sad story of a man who chose not to believe God and the price he paid for his unbelief. Zechariah, a priest, and Elizabeth, his wife, were a godly couple who loved God, but they also had a terrible heartbreak for Elizabeth was barren and well past the childbearing years. As a couple devoted to the Lord, they cried out to God for a child. Years later, while serving in the Temple, the angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah and said that God had heard his prayer and granted his wish for a child. How exciting! After years of prayer, Elizabeth would finally conceive.

Unfortunately, Zechariah expressed doubt at Gabriel's declaration, so he was struck dumb for the duration of Elizabeth's pregnancy because he failed to believe God. How sad that as Zechariah left the Temple, he could not verbally share with Elizabeth one of the most exciting moments of their lives. Can you imagine not speaking for an entire pregnancy? I cannot imagine going a whole day without speaking, okay, a whole hour. But an entire nine months? And can you imagine having to explain to others why you cannot speak and that it is because you chose not to believe God? What a daily reminder to Zechariah and to us of the price of unbelief. Unbelief paralyzes us, and we lose innumerable blessings when we choose not to believe God and his promises. Unbelief always steals God's best for us because we settle for an okay or even a good choice but miss the excellent option. It also forces us backward in

our Christian walk rather than moving us forward to claim God's great promises.

A great deal of our Christian walk rests here: Do we truly believe God? Do we trust in his promises? Do we take him at his Word? God has such amazing things planned for us, things beyond our wildest imagination; but if we do not exercise faith, we will miss them. Only in faith will we see the impossible and witness the miraculous.

Day 5

Overcoming Unbelief

I do believe; help my unbelief!

—Mark 9:24b

We must guard against unbelief because it oftentimes comes prettily packaged through human logic and reason. Yesterday, we talked about Zechariah and his unbelief. When Gabriel told him that Elizabeth would conceive, it seemed reasonable to Zechariah that she would not; after all, she was past the childbearing age. Zechariah looked at his situation, his weaknesses, and his problems. Unfortunately, he forgot to look at his God. But God was greater than his situation; he always is. And what he has promised, he will fulfill (Isa. 46:11). Unbelief always sees

the obstacles and the problems; faith sees the opportunities and the powers of God.

Unbelief is serious because it insults the very nature of God. It casts doubt on his character and maligns his trustworthiness. Charles Spurgeon aptly said, "Every other crime touches God's territory; but unbelief aims a blow at his divinity, impeaches his veracity, denies his goodness, blasphemes his attributes, maligns his character; therefore, God, of all things, hates first and chiefly, unbelief, wherever it is."¹ In essence, unbelief calls God a liar because in unbelief, we say, "We do not believe that you can do what you have said." That sounds terrible, doesn't it? I would never intentionally call God a liar, but that is what unbelief does. Think about how much it hurts when someone calls you a liar or misjudges your character. This is what our unbelief does to God.

Unbelief is often so one-sided. We allow our limited understanding over a situation or person to cloud our relationship with God. Because God chooses to act in a way that differs from our view of him, we become upset and forget his past faithfulness. A friend of mine says that whenever she does not understand something or feels that Satan is making God appear in a negative manner, she asks God to give her wisdom and insight so that she can have the right perspective. Let's decide today that we will *choose* to believe God, no matter the difficulties and the circumstances.

Day 6

Leaving a Legacy

Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

—*Philippians 1:27a*

We have before us one of the greatest opportunities ever: to pass down a spiritual legacy to those who come after us. A legacy is “something transmitted by or received from an ancestor or predecessor or from the past.”¹ What type of spiritual legacy will we leave for our children and our children’s children? Will they see lives of faith or lives of unbelief? Will they see lives of victory or defeat? Will they glimpse the greatness of God through us?

In Philippians 1:27, Paul urged us to conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel because he knew the gospel’s power to transform lives. The Greek word for conduct involves acting in accordance with the laws of a country. Because we are citizens of heaven and not of the earth, we should conduct ourselves in a manner consistent with the laws of heaven. When we do, we provide a powerful, consistent testimony to those around us—friends, family members, church members, coworkers, and our community. Nothing can compare to the power of a consistent Christian testimony, and no amount of pretty words can compensate

for the lack of one. We must start living up to our name as Christians and as Christ believers and followers. The following story provides a vivid illustration:

Alexander the Great, one of the greatest military generals who ever lived, conquered almost the entire known world with his vast army. One night during a campaign, he could not sleep and left his tent to walk around the campgrounds. As he was walking he came across a soldier asleep on guard duty—a serious offense. The soldier began to wake up as Alexander the Great approached him.

Recognizing who was standing in front of him, the young man feared for his life. “Do you know what the penalty is for falling asleep on guard duty?” Alexander the Great asked the soldier.

“Yes, sir,” the soldier responded in a quivering voice.

“Soldier, what’s your name?” demanded Alexander the Great.

“Alexander, sir.”

Alexander the Great then looked the young soldier straight in the eye. “Soldier,” he said with intensity, “either change your name or change your conduct.”

We must start walking by faith and living up to our great calling. Then we leave a godly legacy for our children and our children’s children as well as impact those around us.

Day 7

Embracing God's Truth

Listen to advice and accept instruction.

—*Proverbs 19:20a (NIV)*

One of the greatest qualities that Christians can possess is a teachable spirit—a willingness to embrace truth, even the truths that we do not like. First, we must be willing to hear God's truth, no matter how difficult or challenging the truth may be. Each of us has our own preconceived ideas and opinions fostered from our backgrounds, interactions with others, and life experiences. These ideas and opinions, however, do not always agree with the Bible, so we must allow the Lord to reveal his truth to us without becoming defensive and antagonistic. We cannot cling to the comfortable if the comfortable is wrong. The truths we like least are often those that we need most. And remember, as God reveals truth to us, his intention is not to hurt or discourage us but rather to edify and encourage our maturity. He knows that truth always brings freedom and lies always enslave. Refusing to accept God's truth will leave us in bondage.

Proverbs 19:20 reminds us that we must not only hear God's truth but also *accept* it. We must allow truth to penetrate our hearts and change our behavior. Sometimes, we are willing to receive truth but on our terms. God, however, gets to determine

the means and the manner of our instruction. For instance, we may accept criticism from a friend because we know that our friend loves us and seeks our best interest. But what happens when God chooses to use someone we dislike? We must be willing to learn truth no matter the source of instruction.

Because God's truths are not always palatable, we sometimes embrace the ones we like and harden our hearts to the other ones. Most of us do not intentionally seek falsehood; rather, we seek the kind of "truth" that allows us to remain within our comfort zones. But truth is truth, and we must not artificially separate it. We cannot embrace the truths we like and disregard the ones we do not. A. W. Tozer aptly remarked, "Truth is a glorious but hard mistress. She never consults, bargains or compromises."¹ God's truths are not always easy or palatable, but they are always true and bring great freedom.

Day 8

Using Eternal Eyes, Not Earthly Eyes

As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.

—Genesis 50:20

In our walk of faith, perspective is crucial because how we perceive situations and people impacts our actions.

Too many times we view situations through “earthly eyes” and not “eternal eyes.” What do I mean by earthly eyes? Earthly eyes are focused on our comfort and convenience. They view life through a short-term perspective, the here and now. Eternal eyes, on the other hand, view situations through God’s perspective. They focus on eternity and the character that God is building in us. They see situations as opportunities to reveal God’s glory to this world. For example, if our neighbor calls us because she has a flat tire and needs our help, is that an inconvenience because it messes up our busy day or is it an opportunity to demonstrate the love of Christ to someone?

In Scripture, I love the story of Joseph because it is a beautiful display of a man who used eternal eyes. Joseph endured great trials and hardships because his brothers sold him into slavery at the tender age of seventeen. Then he ended up in prison because he chose to act righteously and honor God. In the end, God exalted him and placed him in a position where he could either hurt or help his brothers. Rather than succumbing to anger and bitterness, he made the righteous choice and forgave his brothers. Can you imagine forgiving someone, your own flesh and blood, for selling you into slavery, for stealing thirteen precious years of your life? As this occurred, Joseph said the most remarkable thing: “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive” (Gen. 50:20).

Joseph had eternal eyes and saw that God was working in him and through him for God's glory. He did not focus on his current situation, the hardships, and the betrayal he experienced, but he trusted that God would work things out for his good. Eternal eyes see the invisible God and patiently cling to his promises. If we truly want to walk by faith, we will have to stop using earthly eyes. God is working in us and through us in ways we cannot even begin to imagine.

Day 9

The Crucible of Time

Wait for the Lord; be strong and let your heart take courage; yes, wait for the Lord.

—*Psalm 27:14*

Waiting on God is so hard, isn't it? In our minds, we think that we are missing beautiful opportunities, not realizing that the Lord is working in us, through us, and around us. He is changing and molding us. Some of our most profitable times of learning occur during our valleys of waiting. And yet, if we do not understand God's purpose in waiting, we will end up frustrated, discouraged, and feeling abandoned. We will not understand God's greater plan for our life—that our character is more important than our comfort.

Genesis 15–16 reveals a season of waiting that Abraham and Sarah endured. Like any married couple, Abraham and Sarah wanted children, and the Lord assured Abraham that he would have an heir. As the years passed, however, Sarah remained barren. Her patience wore thin, so she suggested that Abraham sleep with Hagar, her maidservant. Satan will often tempt us to short-circuit God's will, dangling another means before us and causing us to stray from our true path. As time progresses, we rely on our wisdom and abilities instead of trusting in the Lord and waiting on his deliverance. Like Sarah, we may even scheme and manipulate to achieve our goal.

Whether we realize it or not, impatience reveals a lack of faith in God. It implies that either God is a liar or incapable of providing for our needs. God had told Abraham and Sarah that he would provide an heir; they only needed to wait patiently on his timing. Impatience often causes us to act hastily, blinding us to the perils of the quick fix. As a result, we can force ourselves into difficult situations and experience unnecessary heartache and pain. So rather than experiencing God's best in a situation, we settle for the world's worst. It is *never* a good thing to move ahead of God, *never*. As we move ahead of God, we are forcing ourselves to settle for an earthly counterfeit instead of experiencing a divine blessing. We must stop listening to those deceitful whispers that beckon us to act. Good things come to those who wait, not to those who impatiently act before God's perfect timing.

Day 10

Expecting the Unexpected

He came to his own, and those who were his own did not receive him.

—*John 1:11*

The King of glory had come. The long-awaited Messiah of Israel had appeared. The promised of ages had finally arrived. But an interesting thing happened when Jesus came to the Jews: most of the Jews did not receive him (John 1:11).

From the earliest of times, the Jewish people had anticipated the coming of a Messiah, a conquering ruler who would establish his kingdom. Parents told their children about the Messiah, passing the story from generation to generation. The rabbis spent their lives studying the Law and anticipating the Messiah. The people even cried out to God to be delivered from their oppressors. For hundreds of years, the Jews steadfastly believed in their Messiah.

Then the Messiah, the true hope of Israel, finally came to her people; but most of her people did not accept him. Why? Because he did not come in a way they expected. Jesus was a Messiah like no other. He confounded the Jewish expectations because he did not come as a conquering king but rather as a lowly servant; and so, many of the Jewish people missed their own Messiah. Though we may struggle to understand how so many Jews could miss their own

Messiah, perhaps instead we need to ask ourselves if we ever miss the workings of God because we expect him to act in a certain way. Do we limit God to our own traditions, cultural backgrounds, and societal norms, and then get upset when he does not respond the way we think? For instance, we may pray for revival and for a great work of God in his people. Then suffering and persecution comes, and we may think that God has not answered us. Church history, however, reveals that most revivals have not come during times of ease and comfort but rather during times of hardship and difficulty. We must be careful to not limit God to our expectations or we can miss his magnificent acts and works. We have to leave room for God to surprise us.

Day 11

Taking Refuge in God's Goodness

O taste and see that the Lord is good; how blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!

—*Psalm 34:8*

Do you believe that God is good at all times and in all circumstances? Most of us would say that God is good when we receive a job promotion, buy our dream house, or obtain a new car. But is God also good when we receive a job demotion? When circumstances do not happen as we envision, is God still good?