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## **An Ever-Increasing Faith**

***By David Wilkerson***

August 6, 2001 "The apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith" (Luke 17:5). The men who comprised Christ's close circle were asking something important of their master. They wanted a greater understanding of the meaning and workings of faith. They were saying, in essence, "Lord, what sort of faith do you desire from us? Give us a revelation of the kind that pleases you. We want to grasp faith in its fullest meaning."

On the surface, their request seems commendable. Yet I believe the disciples asked this of Jesus because they were confused. In the previous chapter, Christ had baffled them, saying, "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much...If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?" (16:10-11).

Jesus knew his followers' flesh wanted to avoid what they considered to be the lesser matters of faith. So he told them, "If you're faithful in the little things, the foundational matters of faith, you'll be faithful in the greater things too. So, prove yourself trustworthy in the basic requirements of faith. Otherwise, how can you be trusted with a deeper measure?"

If we're honest, we'll admit we're much like Jesus' disciples. We also want to proceed straight to the larger matters of faith, to obtain the kind of faith that moves mountains. And, like the disciples, we often judge faith by visible results.

Think of all the people we consider to have great faith. Most such people have accomplished measurable things for the kingdom: feeding programs, ministries to the poor and needy, mega-churches, Bible colleges, missions outreaches.

We think of George Muller, the man who built orphanages in England and helped fund China Inland Missions. Muller never asked for financial support. Instead, he prayed in every penny for these godly works, huge sums that often came in at the last minute. Many Christians today recognize Muller as the epitome of a man of faith.

We also think of Rees Howells, the man known as "The Intercessor." Howells' biography is filled with stories of miraculous answers to his intercessory prayers. This man purchased estate after estate to use for God's kingdom, all by faith. Like Muller, Howells prayed in every cent "just in time." Some consider his great work to be another definition of faith.

Many visitors to Times Square Church feel the same way about God's ministry here. They're awed by the incredible buildings the Lord has provided, encompassing an entire city block on Broadway, and all debt-free. They see our Sarah House program for women, our Raven Truck feeding outreach, and other faithful works. And they tell us, "Your leaders must be people of great faith. Look at the incredible results."

Our ministry recently received a letter from a young prison inmate who's now a Christian and on our mailing list. He'd heard me say on a sermon tape, "The day may come when I'll have to go to jail for preaching against homosexuality." The young man assured me that if this happens, Christian prisoners across the nation would flood the jail system with letters in a campaign to release me. He says I'm known among inmates as a man of great faith, because I established the Teen Challenge drug-rehab program and other ministries for troubled people like himself. Therefore, he reasoned, "You're more needed out of jail."

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I thank God for Teen Challenge and all its outreaches: farms, ranches, care centers, Bible schools. And I'm grateful for every other God-centered ministry the Lord has raised up and blessed on this earth. Yet, I tell you, none of these grand, visible works represents God's definition of faith. Indeed, no work, no matter how great, is of any value to the Lord at all unless the lesser, hidden matters of faith are being done.

Brilliant, clever people have accomplished similar works without God. Sun Myung Moon and his followers have paid for multimillion-dollar building complexes, founded massive charity outreaches, even purchased a national news service. Yet none of these things is God's measurement of faith.

True faith, in God's eyes, has nothing to do with the size or amount of a work you aim to accomplish. Rather, it has to do with the focus and direction of your life. You see, God isn't as concerned with your grand vision as he is with who you're becoming.

Do you believe the Lord has burdened you with a dream that requires a miracle to accomplish? Have you been challenged to step out in a new direction that demands supernatural faith? Do you need God to work a wonder in your home - physical, financial or spiritual?

You're Going to Face Closed Doors and Failure Until You Deal With Jesus' Words. "If ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?" (Luke 16:12). Jesus is saying, in other words, "You say you want a revelation, something to enable you to do greater things. Yet, how can you be entrusted with that kind of faith, if you're not reliable with the things others have given you?"

Jesus' words must have left his disciples scratching their heads. Their master knew they didn't own anything, much less something that another person had given them. They'd forsaken all to be his disciples. And they'd followed him to the best of their ability. His words here simply didn't seem to apply to them.

Yet, the question is, what does Jesus mean when he says, "that which is another man's" (16:12)? He's speaking of our bodies and souls, which he purchased with his own blood. "Ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Corinthians 6:20).

Jesus is telling us, "Your body doesn't belong to you anymore. And if you don't take care of that body - if you won't allow me to look inside you, deal with your sin, and sanctify you - how can you expect me to entrust you with something greater? First, step back and look at what you've done with the things I've already entrusted to you."

Now, as the disciples requested an increase of faith, Jesus had a ready answer for them: "If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamore tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you" (Luke 17:6). Once again, the Lord's primary focus was the lesser matters of faith, signified by a single grain of mustard seed.

This verse about the moving of the sycamore tree has always intrigued me. As we read it, we imagine a person of great faith standing next to a tree and commanding, "Go, be removed, be planted in the sea, and grow there." Then we picture the tree being uprooted, rising from the ground and floating along until it sinks into the waves.

What could Jesus be suggesting with this image? A sycamore tree can't be planted in the sea and

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survive; it would die immediately. Furthermore, our God isn't a showman. He doesn't do or suggest things for the sake of showing off. Yet we know that every word Jesus spoke is meant for our instruction. So, what's the meaning here?

You may say, "This verse signifies that our Lord is God of the impossible." I disagree. Even in Jesus' day, it was possible for a few men to uproot a tree, haul it to the sea and plant it there. Today, such a work is even less difficult, with powerful machines able to uproot large trees in mere seconds. Where's the faith required in that?

I believe this statement is about plucking up the roots in our heart. Jesus is speaking of roots of evil, the hidden things we must deal with as his followers. He's saying, "Before you can believe God to move mountains, you need to remove roots. And you don't need some great, apostolic faith to do that. All you need is the very least amount of faith. I'm asking you to do something very basic: to pluck up your roots of sin. I want you to examine your heart and remove everything that's unlike me."

The First Work of Faith -The One Thing We Must Do Before Any Other Works Can Follow - Is to Be Faithful to What Is God's. We simply can't consider undertaking any work in God's name if our roots of sin are growing deeper. And the challenge to pluck up roots isn't restricted to pastors, teachers and evangelists. It's the job of every Christian. So, ask yourself: what's the root of sin that's dug deeply into your body and spirit? Is it pornography, greed, envy, bitterness, fear of rejection, low self-esteem, a sense of uselessness?

Jesus instructs us, "If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out" (Mark 9:47). Of course, this command is spiritual in meaning. We know it's not our literal eye that causes us to sin, but rather the eye of our lustful heart. Yet how can we uproot something that has grown deep inside us for years? Such strongholds require faith to be uprooted.

Indeed, this is Jesus' message about the mustard seed. He's telling us that, by faith, we can pluck out any root of sin in our life - even one that God has dealt with us about for years.

This is why I wrote my recent book, *The New Covenant Unveiled*. At one point I felt stuck, wondering how we would ever be able to pluck out our sin. I pondered this dilemma one night while on vacation, as I walked along a beach. I sensed the Holy Spirit telling me, "David, look up at the Big Dipper. In your own strength, you have as much chance of removing the sin from your heart as you do of jumping over that row of stars."

The New Covenant shows us we're able to pluck out even the deepest root of sin, but only by trusting the Holy Ghost. By a single grain of faith, we're able to pray, "Father, you promised in your covenant to subdue my sins. Well, you know all about my particular sin. You've dealt with me about it for years. Now I'm asking you to take care of it. I hate it, and I want it plucked out. I believe you're going to do this for me, Lord."

Jesus says if we speak such faith in God's covenant promises, our root will go: "It should obey you" (Luke 17:6). At that point, the Holy Spirit plucks out the evil root and casts it into the sea of God's forgetfulness, never to haunt us again.

All the godly servants we consider to be people of great faith - George Muller, Reese Howells and others - began with this lesser work. Before they set out to do any exploits for the kingdom, they allowed God to deal with their roots. They exercised a small amount of faith, asking the Holy Ghost to

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expose every evil thing in them. And the Spirit faithfully uprooted their sin, stripping them of everything that was of flesh.

In the process, these men learned they were helpless, unable to do even the simplest uprooting work in their own strength. Yet, as they obeyed Jesus' command to pluck out their roots by faith in the work of the Holy Spirit, revelations came, and their understanding of faith increased.

We Pay a Tragic Cost If We Neglect to Uproot Our Sin. If we knowingly allow an evil root to remain in us, we forfeit all our spiritual weapons against the devil. First, we lose our grip on our sword. Then we're stripped of all armor. Finally, we lose the will to fight. Tell me, how can we pull down strongholds if we have no weapons left? "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds" (2 Corinthians 10:4).

We see a tragic example of this in 1 Samuel 13. In a previous chapter, Saul and his army of 300,000 Israelites had soundly defeated the Ammonites at Jabesh-Gilead. Israel's confidence soared because of their great victory. Yet God warned them: "If ye will not obey the voice of the Lord, but rebel against (his) commandment...then shall the hand of the Lord be against you, as it was against your fathers" (1 Samuel 12:15).

Now, in chapter 13, we find Saul and the people walking in disobedience. This started when Saul offered a forbidden sacrifice. The people aligned themselves with him, saying, "Whoever said Saul shouldn't be our king ought to be put to death."

When the godly prophet Samuel arrived on the scene, however, he spoke these terrible words to Saul: "Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God, which he commanded thee: for now would the Lord have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever" (13:13).

Immediately, we see the result of Israel's disobedience. Just four verses later, we read, "The spoilers came out of the camp of the Philistines in three companies" (13:17). Three units broke off from the Philistines' main forces, spreading over Israel and raiding the villages. These invaders took spoils freely, including Israel's weapons.

Why didn't God's people stand up to the raiders? After all, they had plenty of weapons (including the Ammonites', which they'd taken in battle). The sad truth is, the Israelites had no fighting spirit left, because of their sin. As soon as they saw the enemy coming, they fled in fear.

Israel was left with nothing but pitchforks, plows and other farm implements. But they couldn't forge these into weapons because there were no blacksmiths left: "There was no smith found throughout all the land of Israel: for the Philistines said, Lest the Hebrews make them swords or spears" (13:19).

God's message in this passage is clear: "If you continue to disobey me, I'll no longer walk with you. You may appear to be doing my work. But you won't have my presence, blessing or power."

Faith is primarily about obedience, about possessing the power to obey God's word. And Satan knows this. That's why he wants you to keep clinging to that last remaining root in your soul. He knows it will strip you of all defenses, robbing you of your weapons and neutralizing your fighting spirit.

I see this happening to ministers and lay Christians worldwide. They have all the tools necessary to do their good works. And, as they look over the fields of their labor, they congratulate themselves on a

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great harvest and a full sheepfold. Yet, all the while, they're in danger. There's a spoiler in their hearts, a besetting sin they won't deal with. And it's plundering them, robbing them of the will to fight. Later, when Satan invades their lives, they'll surrender without a fight. They simply have no defenses against him.

Like Saul, all believers with deep roots of sin end up confused, double-minded and afraid. Scripture says of them, "The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion" (Proverbs 28:1). Such people may tell themselves, "I still have two weapons: prayer, and faith in God's word." Tragically, they don't. David states, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me" (Psalm 66:18).

We simply have to say to our evil roots, "Be plucked out." And we have to believe they'll go, according to God's covenant promise. Only then will our fighting spirit return. We'll wield God's two-edged sword once again. And we'll see our prayers quickly answered. Finally, we'll be filled with boldness and joy, causing demons to flee.

There Is Another Step in Receiving an Increase of Faith. Jesus answered his disciples' request for faith in yet another way. He told them:

"Which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink?...So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do" (Luke 17:7-8, 10).

Clearly, Christ is speaking here of us, his servants, and of God, our master. In short, he's telling us we're to feed God. You may wonder, "What kind of food are we supposed to bring to the Lord? What satisfies his hunger?"

The Bible tells us, "Without faith it is impossible to please him" (Hebrews 11:6). Simply put, God's most delectable dish is faith. That's the food that pleases him.

We see this illustrated throughout Scripture. When a centurion asked Jesus to heal his sick servant by merely speaking a word, Christ feasted on the man's vibrant faith. He replied, "Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel" (Matthew 8:10). Jesus was saying, "Here's a Gentile, an outsider, who's feeding my spirit. What a nourishing meal this man's faith is giving me."

Likewise, Hebrews 11 serves up a great feast for the Lord. This famous chapter describes the faith of God's beloved warriors throughout history.

Next, I notice in Jesus' words a blunt statement: "You don't eat first. I do." In other words, we're not to consume our faith on our own interests and needs. Rather, our faith is meant to satisfy our Lord's hunger. "Make ready wherewith I may sup...and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat" (Luke 17:8).

How often is our faith consumed on our own concerns rather than on God's? How many of our prayers consist of, "Lord, I'm working faithfully in your harvest fields, plowing for you. And now I need this or that from you, in order to continue my work."

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Over the years, scores of pastors have come to my office to visit me. The majority walked in carrying not their Bible but some great plan. Such men were consumed with a grand vision, yet they never talked about Jesus. All they could think of was their dream: a church building, a feeding program, a ministry outreach.

I thank the Lord for heaven-sent dreams and desires. Most God-exalting ministries in operation today are visions fulfilled, accomplished through God-given burdens. Yet, many burdened believers don't realize that before a dream can be brought to pass, God often does years of stripping, exposing, breaking. That's simply his way.

Jesus is telling us, "I want you to feed me, to give me full rein to shape and remake you into my image. Just bring me your faith. I'll bring about a true vision."

We Can Gain Victory Over Our Roots, But We May Forget That God's Mercy Obtained the Victory for Us. Jesus continues, "Doth (the Lord) thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded of him? I trow not. So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do" (Luke 17:9-10).

The word unprofitable here means without merit - having earned nothing by works or self. Jesus is saying, "After you've dealt with your roots of sin by faith, don't say, 'I accomplished it. I got victory.' No, your father's grace alone delivered you."

Some people become proud when they gain victory over sin. They think, "I've straightened out my life. God ought to be grateful he's got a clean vessel in me."

But Jesus replies, "No, the truth is, you're only beginning to fulfill your duty. From the day you were saved, I've commanded you to forsake your sin. So, why have you waited five, ten, twenty years to obey me? You have no right to self-congratulation."

I know a Christian brother whose wife left him for another man. Throughout that difficult period, this man stayed morally pure. Afterward, he claimed, "I've earned my righteousness. I paid a price for it." No, never. No matter how painful or difficult our trials may be, our obedience can never make us righteous. It's simply our basic duty.

Yet, even the simplest obedience is food to our Lord, because it's born of faith. It's a feast that causes him to rejoice, saying, "You're feeding me, satisfying my hunger."

Victory Comes When We Acknowledge Our Roots, Repent and Trust in God's New Covenant Promises. Have you gotten honest with God, acknowledging that your roots are destroying you? Have you truly repented, exercising faith in his covenant promise to subdue your sin? Only then will the Lord bring you into victory.

During my lifetime, I've met two cult leaders who had large followings. (Both cults are still in existence.) These men were visionaries, full of charisma, boldness and zeal. They were tireless evangelists, and they ministered to the poor and needy. They built Bible schools and communal compounds and sent missionaries around the world. Their devoted followers left everything behind to minister alongside them.

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But both of these greatly gifted men had deep roots of lust. And because they refused to deal with their roots, each of them spiraled into horrible sexual addictions.

One of the men traveled by a specially equipped bus. He once invited me in, and as soon as I stepped inside, I sensed a heavy demonic oppression. Later, that minister's awful immorality was exposed.

The other cult leader was a powerful preacher with a clear calling to evangelize. He also was a gifted discipler, attracting hundreds of young people into ministry and missions work. Moreover, this minister was a dedicated husband and family man.

But he was addicted to porn. And because he wouldn't deal with his sin, his lusts ran wild, leading his organization into sexual madness. He made a rule that every young woman who got married had to spend her first night with him. Then he turned some of the women into prostitutes, sending them out to do what he called "love evangelism."

This once-anointed man spent his last days pacing back and forth in his trailer home, like a caged lion. His deep roots had turned him into a depraved madman.

Both of these men had wanted to move mountains. They preached and taught faith. And hundreds were touched through their ministries. Yet, I tell you, God had no part in their works. Why? Their zeal was of the flesh, because they refused to uproot their sin. As a result, their great works ended in utter destruction.

Jesus says of such people, "Many will come, saying, 'We have healed the sick, cast out devils, accomplished many great works'". But he will say, "Depart from me, you workers of iniquity. I never knew you" (see Matthew 7:22-23).

Is Jesus speaking to you about your roots? If so, heed his voice, at all costs. He urges you, "Forget about evangelism right now. Set aside your dreams and visions for a season. I've trusted you with a single grain of faith. And I want you to be faithful with this one, small thing. Come to me now, and ask me to uproot your sin, by faith. Then feed me, by your obedience. Do this, and then you'll see my holy vision come to pass in your life."