



A Critical Skill to Develop

Are You Interested in Upgrading Your Faith?

Perhaps you remember that first day you got behind the wheel of a car to learn how to drive. Were you nervous or excited? Did you consider how great a step this was in your development or was it just another day? It actually took a certain amount of faith on your part to give it a try and for whoever was teaching you, it may have required a lot of faith to get in the car with you. Do you remember the first time you jumped off the diving board on the deep end of the pool? Perhaps you took what seemed like hours staring down at the water below as your life flashed before your eyes. But then you did it! You took the leap. The second time I went out water skiing, I couldn't get up on my skis. In fact I landed down flat on my face as the boat pulled me along and I swallowed half the lake before I had the good sense to let go of the rope. I did not have enough faith to try again so I spent the rest of my day on the shore as everyone else kept water skiing. Looking back, I wish I had lived by faith a bit more that day because I missed out on a lot of fun.

Faith is essential to moving forward in life, to getting started. Faith is the great motivator, the instigator. It recharges you when you are stuck with a dead battery. Faith is the telescope that enables you to see beyond the horizon. Faith pushes you to try one more time when you are ready to quit. Faith stabilizes your heart when anxiety threatens to pull you into depression. It is the force that unlocks your potential and opens your eyes to how things actually are. You could make the case that Elisha was the greatest person of faith in the Old Testament...with greater faith than his mentor Elijah or even Moses in some respects. Elisha had become a formidable nemesis of the king of Aram. Aram had gone to war against the northern kingdom of Israel but was stymied at every turn. Each time the king of Aram made a strategic move in the war, Israel countered it. Soon it was clear to the king that somehow the Israelite king knew in advance what Aram was planning. The Aramean king was irate, thinking there was a spy in his inner circle. That wasn't the case though. Elisha, the prophet was told by God what the Arameans were planning and he passed along the information to the king of Israel.

When the Aramean king was told that it was Elisha who was passing on his battle plans to the Israelites, the Aramean king became enraged and gathered his army to attack the town where Elisha was staying. It seems like that was a bad plan from the start because somehow Elisha knew every move the Aramean king was about to make in advance yet the king was so furious, he probably didn't let common sense stop him. Showing up at the outskirts of Dothan with thousands of soldiers and chariots, the king confidently prepared to attack. The servant of Elisha looked out at the huge army surrounding the town and panicked. **"Oh, my lord, what shall we do?" the servant asked.** (2 Kings 6:15 NIV) Elisha's response was legendary. **"Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them."** (2 Kings 6:16 NIV) For the servant to become unafraid, he had to have faith in Elisha's words. Elisha prayed for the servant to see what he saw and immediately the servant realized the hills were covered with horses and chariots of fire.

You probably won't ever come across chariots of fire but the principle is clear. When you are in a hopeless situation, maintain somehow your faith in God because you do not know the resources He has available to you. It could be a person who knows of a job. It might be a doctor who has just what you need to recover. It

may be a pay raise is around the corner or a change of heart is coming in one of your children. When the British and French armies were surrounded by the great numbers of German forces, it seemed that it would be impossible for them to survive. But perfect weather combined with thousands of little British boats came to their rescue. You never know what God might do to save you from catastrophe but hold on to your faith in Him and watch what happens.

Jehoshaphat was one of the lesser known kings of Judah but he was someone of great faith. The armies of three kingdoms came to attack his tiny country. The Bible calls it a "vast army". The king called for a fast among all the people and together they met in Jerusalem to pray and seek the Lord. The Spirit of God came upon one of the prophets as the people stood before the Lord and announced that God had spoken to him and they were to go out and march against the gigantic armies. He told them, **"You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give you, O Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the Lord will be with you."** (2 Chronicles 20:17 NIV) So that is what Jehoshaphat and the little army did. As the group set out, the king exhorted the people. **"Listen to me, Judah and people of Jerusalem! Have faith in the Lord your God and you will be upheld; have faith in his prophets and you will be successful."** (2 Chronicles 20:20 NIV) As the people sang songs of worship, the three armies that had come against Judah started battling each other. Before long, they were all dead and Judah didn't have to lift a hand to protect themselves.

Sometimes it goes like this. God intervenes and we don't have to do anything. Other times we must work hard and it is not easy. The most important point here is that when we are practicing faith, we move forward as we are led, assuming God is in what we are doing. Faith is believing God is with you and is for you. His power is on your side. It is hard to believe this with so much heartache and trouble and pain in this world. Faith is not always easy but it is the right road to take. Jesus insists that it is a problem for us as it was for the disciples when we are not practicing enough faith. The disciples had failed to cast out a demon plaguing a young man and they were greatly upset with their failure. Jesus' reply was a stern but sympathetic rebuke of their lack of faith. **"Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."** (Matthew 17:20 NIV) Much has been said and written about this promise and perhaps you have prayed for literal mountains to shake loose from the ground and move but were disappointed when it did not happen. It is interesting that this promise says that nothing will be impossible for you...not God. Faith is at the heart of our success and failure, not God's ability.

No one can create faith in you. That is your job to practice it. Faith in God can change your life, it can move mountains for you but it is up to you to hold to faith in God, realizing He is with you and He is for you. Right now, faith is dwindling among Christians. Churches are getting smaller. Closeness to God is becoming less prevalent. It takes effort in this time to capture that faith in Christ that moves mountains for you. You must do it though. You must work at faith in God as if it is the most important task you have. When a poor dad was desperate to find help for his son who was terrorized by a demon that possessed him, the father came to Jesus. The Lord told him that He most certainly could cast out the demon but the dad had to do something too! **"Everything is possible for him who believes."** (Mark 9:23 NIV) The loving dad had to believe Jesus could. But the father admitted his struggle here. **"I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"** (Mark 9:24 NIV) Perhaps you have a hard time believing Christ can or will intervene and help you with your situation. Most of us have that same difficulty. Admit this to Jesus. Tell Him you have a hard time with real strong faith. Then pray anyway for what you need. Practice this today. Ask Christ for something legitimate, something that really matters to you. Repeat your request a few times during the day to intensify your faith and make it come alive in your heart. Mountains are moved through faith in Christ and that is your job to maintain!