

How To Increase Our Faith In God

Have you ever wanted to have more faith in God? The great patriarchs of the Old Testament had great faith. The first notable patriarch of faith was Enoch. Genesis 5:21 tells us that this man walked with God and at the age of 365 years God took him to heaven. The Hebrew text simply tells us that he was “not.” Hebrews 11:5 says that God took him because he was pleasing to God and then verse 6 adds that “without faith it is impossible to please Him.” Imagine pleasing God so much because of your faith that God wants you to come home to heaven! This man helps us understand that great faith pleases God. Consider the patriarch Abraham who believed God and as a result God granted him righteousness (Genesis 15:6). Faith in Christ results in repentance over our sins, trusting Christ to save us from our sins and submitting to Him. We will do this the more we trust in God. Repeatedly in Scripture we are told that the righteous will live by faith and Hebrew 11 is the hallmark chapter reminding us of the great faith of the saints of past years. Faith has always been the path to pleasing God. Would you like to please God by having more faith? Our study is about how to have more faith. It comes from Luke 17:5-6.

INCREASE OUR FAITH IN GOD. One would think that Christ’s disciples would have been filled with faith since they had been with Him for about three years, but we will soon discover that was not true. They lacked faith and they knew it. Therefore, they asked Christ to increase their faith.

... those suffering with various diseases and pains, demons, epileptics, paralytics; and He healed them. Large crowds followed Him from Galilee and the Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan. Matthew 4:24 (NASB)

The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!” Luke 17:5 (NASB)

This is a very surprising request since they had seen Him do so many miracles and wonders. They

had seen Him calm a storm on the Sea of Galilee twice, walk on water, and rescue a sinking Peter from the cold night sea water. They had watched Christ cast out demons, raise the dead and heard Him preach the gospel of the kingdom. For example, Matthew 4:24 teaches us that Jesus healed . . .

then we would be filled with faith. If we could see a healing or someone return from the dead, then surely we would be men and women of great faith. But many have found that is not true. Now I have a question for you. If miracles and wonders increase our faith, why did the disciples not have enough faith?

Symptoms of “Little Faith”

Symptom	Passage
Worries	Matthew 6:30
Fears	Matthew 8:26
Doubts	Matthew 14:31
Anxieties	Matthew 16:8

Faith like a mustard seed?

One would think that they would have been full of faith. Many preachers, pastors, teachers and Christians believe that miracles will increase our faith. We hear that if we could just see a miracle

Why did they ask for more faith? Why did Jesus not do more miracles and wonders in order to increase their faith? Instead, you will soon discover Jesus rebuked them for their lack of faith!

The gospels tell us that the disciples did see Christ do miracles and wonders, but they were still lacking in faith. Do you know why they were not filled with faith? Do you know why watching Jesus perform miracles, signs, and wonders was not enough? If you do not know, then you will never be a man of faith or a woman of faith. The answer is actually rather simple. We are going to discover how to be men or women of faith. Jesus is going to tell us how to have more faith. The answer is not found by snatching some idea from the sky above, snapping our fingers, by creative thinking or spiritual philosophizing. Jesus is going to tell us!

Before we explain how to increase your faith, notice that the disciples did not ask Jesus to help them know more about the Bible. The Greek word for faith is *pistis* and it occurs without the definite article. If the Greek text had included the definite article, that could communicate that the disciples were asking to know more about "The Faith" once delivered to the saints or the Bible. That is, the objective truth of God. Therefore, the disciples were asking how they could have their personal faith in God increased.

FAITH LIKE A MUSTARD SEED. Jesus' reply to the disciples is startling.

And the Lord said, "If you had faith like a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and be planted in the sea'; and it would obey you." Luke 17:6 (NASB)

The English reader misses part of the meaning of Jesus' statement. English readers usually think Jesus is revealing that they had no faith. But the Greek grammar actually states that the disciples did have faith. They just did not have very much. They had a very small amount of faith, like a mustard seed. For example, the "if" statement in the Greek is a first class "if." This means that Jesus said, "If you had faith like a mustard seed, and oh, by the way you do." That is, they had some faith, but it was very small. Then the Greek grammar indicates they

did not have enough to move the mulberry tree.¹ That is, they had a little faith; but it was so small that they could not move a tree. Their faith was inadequate to uproot the tree and then command the tree to plant itself in the sea. This is a remarkable statement. Imagine the tree planting itself in the sea and growing in the sea.

About two to three months earlier, Jesus had already rebuked the disciples for having too little faith when they could not cast out a demon. On that occasion Jesus told them that if they had faith they could have moved a mountain.

Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not drive it out?" And He said to them, "Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you." Matthew 17:19-20 (NASB)

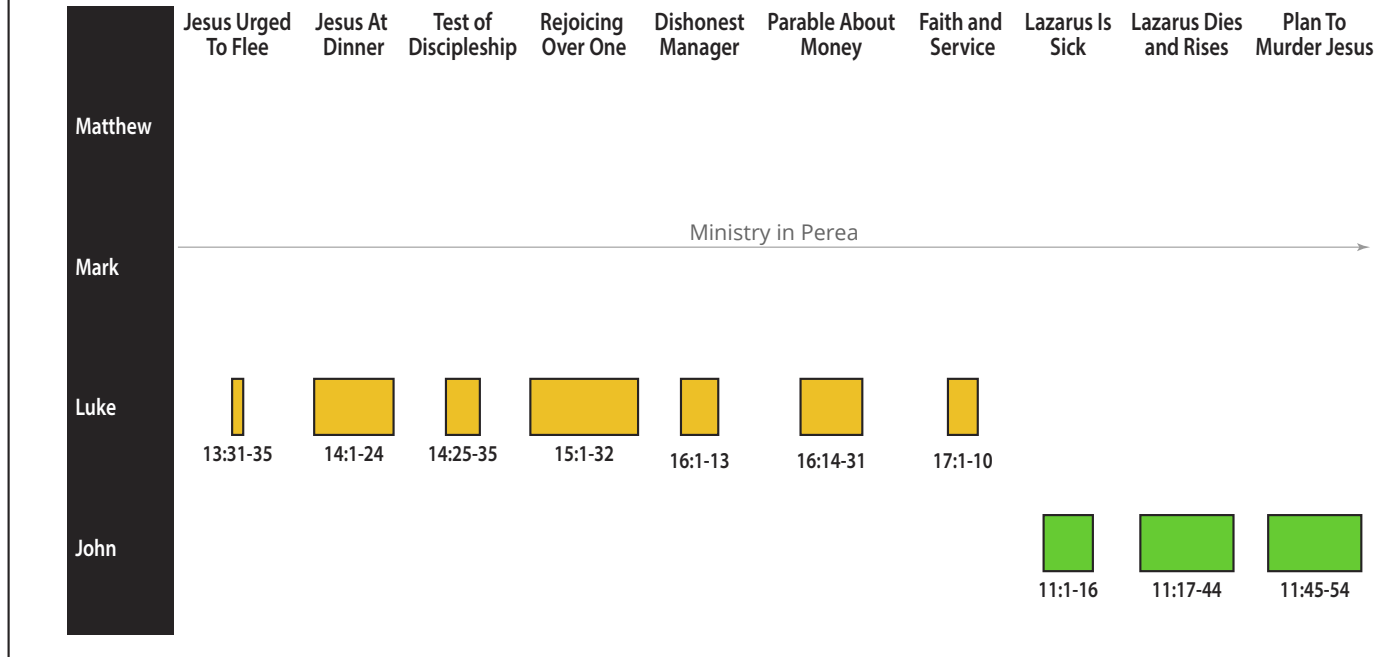
On this occasion He implied that they did not have enough faith. But this time in Luke 17:6, He said they have a very small amount of faith. Their faith had grown a little. But they do not have enough to command the mulberry tree to plant itself in the ocean and we can be sure they could not move a mountain either. Jesus' statement is truly amazing.

We can be sure that some people today would love to have great faith so that they could have great power. That is, they really want the power. They would love to be able to redesign the world - maybe with a pink sky and eliminate snow. Maybe they would love to have loud rock music playing from every tree in the wilderness. We can be sure some people would like to redesign their bodies and change their hair color. Angry spouses might kill their spouse and some parents might destroy their rebellious children. Some people might like to take vengeance on an enemy or someone who has hurt them. Imagine driving down a street only to discover that someone had redesigned the street while you were driving on it. Maybe

1. R. C. H. Lenski states, "The sentence is unusual because it has three types of conditions: "If you have faith" (a protasis of reality; and, indeed, you have, Jesus admits it), "you would say" (apodosis of present unreality, the imperfect with *av*; Jesus declares that in spite of having faith they are not using it), "and it would have obeyed you" (a second apodosis, now of past unreality, the aorist with *av*; it did and could not obey because you are not telling it to do so)." Luke. Commentary on the New Testament. Hendrickson. 1998. p. 867.

Life and Heart of Jesus

Ministry In Perea - Fall of A.D. 32



you are speaking to someone and instantly their body changed shape. Therefore, should we really believe that Jesus means God would give us enough faith to do anything? Even the most righteous of us are very evil at some moments in life.

When the apostle Paul said he could do all things through Christ, we can be confident that he did not mean God would enable him to live for 1,400 years.

I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

Philippians 4:13 (NASB)

His message was that God the Holy Spirit would enable him to do all that God the Father has asked him to do. God the Father would grant him his prayer requests, if they were consistent with His will. The Holy Spirit can enable us to please the Father. The Holy Spirit can help us do the Father's will. We must understand that we cannot simply do anything we wish! God will not allow that to occur since His will has limits that we must live within. James 4:2 says,

You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives,

so that you may spend it on your pleasures. James 4:3 (NASB)

God is not in the business of granting us three or more wishes to do whatever we wish by rubbing the magic lantern of faith. In 1 John 5:14 we are told that God only grants our prayer requests if they are according to His will.

This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. 1 John 5:14 (NASB)

That is, even you had enough faith to move a mountain, God would not let you move it if He did not approve. Jesus was speaking theoretically when He said, "If you had faith like a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree." Only God can do anything. The message to the disciples was that they had very little faith. Jesus wanted them to understand how little faith they had. They needed to trust more! Jesus was not encouraging them to have power. Yet, He was encouraging them to have more faith. We could say to be more trusting!

YOU OF LITTLE FAITH - MATTHEW 6:30. Now we will discover how to have more faith. The gospel of Matthew

includes four events in which Jesus told people that they had “little faith.” The gospel of Matthew is the only gospel that records all four events. The first time the gospel of Matthew tells us that Jesus told someone they had “little faith” is in Matthew 6:30. Starting in Matthew 6:25, Jesus told a crowd of followers that they should not worry about their lives. He repeatedly encouraged them while He was speaking to not worry about how long we will live (v. 27), to not worry about clothing (v. 28) and to not worry about what they would eat (v. 26). Near the end of His message He encouraged them again to not worry. Jesus told them that those who worry have “little faith” (v. 30).

But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith! Matthew 6:30 (NASB)

That is, if you are a person who frequently worries, then you do not have much faith. It may hurt for you to admit that you have little faith, but that is the starting point to having more. Admission of the truth can lead to having more faith and that is our goal — to have more faith. This reveals that a symptom of a lack of faith is worry. We worry because we do not really believe that our God loves us and will take care of us.

YOU OF LITTLE FAITH - MATTHEW 8:26. The second time that Jesus spoke of “little faith” is found in Matthew 8:26. It occurred about three months later (Winter of A.D. 32) when Jesus and the disciples were in a boat out on the waters of the Sea of Galilee when a great storm occurred. Here are verses 23-26.

When He got into the boat, His disciples followed Him. And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being covered with the waves; but Jesus Himself was asleep. And they came to Him and woke Him, saying, “Save us, Lord; we are perishing!” He said to them, “Why are you afraid, you men of little faith?” Then He got up and rebuked the winds and the sea, and it became perfectly calm.” Matthew 8:23-26 (NASB)

The Greek word in verse 26 for “afraid” is *deilos*. It literally refers to someone who is cowardly. That is, these sea-worthy

men were afraid or cowardly during this great storm. They were afraid and intimidated by the storm. That is why they asked Jesus to “save us!” That is why they said they were perishing. Jesus responded with, “Why are you afraid, you men of little faith?” Their fear revealed that they were men of little faith. They did not trust Jesus to save them. They should have understood that they were safe even in the midst of a terrible storm because Christ was with them. Jesus could also save them from physical death. Instead, they should have calmly asked Christ to stop the storm, but they did not. Instead they were fearful. This reveals that another symptom of a lack of faith is fear.

YOU OF LITTLE FAITH - MATTHEW 14:31. Three months later (Spring A.D. 32) the disciples had another terrible experience during a storm on the Sea of Galilee. It is recorded in Matthew 14. Beginning with verse 22 we read the disciples got into a boat and headed out to sea. While they were rowing to Capernaum, a storm occurred and they kept struggling to make progress across the sea. But the wind was so strong that they could not make much progress. In the late morning hours (4 to 6 A.M.) after the disciples had struggled against the storm all night and while it was still dark, Jesus came walking on the water. Verses 28-33 capture what happened when Peter asked to walk on the water toward Jesus.

Peter said to Him, “Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.” And He said, “Come!” And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!” Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” When they got into the boat, the wind stopped. And those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, “You are certainly God’s Son!” Matthew 14:28-33 (NASB)

Notice that after Peter had been successfully walking on the water, he began to sink. He shouted “Lord, save me!” What did Jesus do? He did not give Peter a lecture before rescuing him. Instead, Jesus immediately reached out His hand to save Peter from sinking. Afterward Jesus did not talk about techniques for walking on the water in order to avoid sink-

ing, or how to move mountains or a mulberry tree. Instead Jesus immediately said to Peter, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” Peter did not need to ask Jesus to rescue him. His doubt revealed his lack of faith in Christ. This reveals another symptom of a lack of faith is doubt.

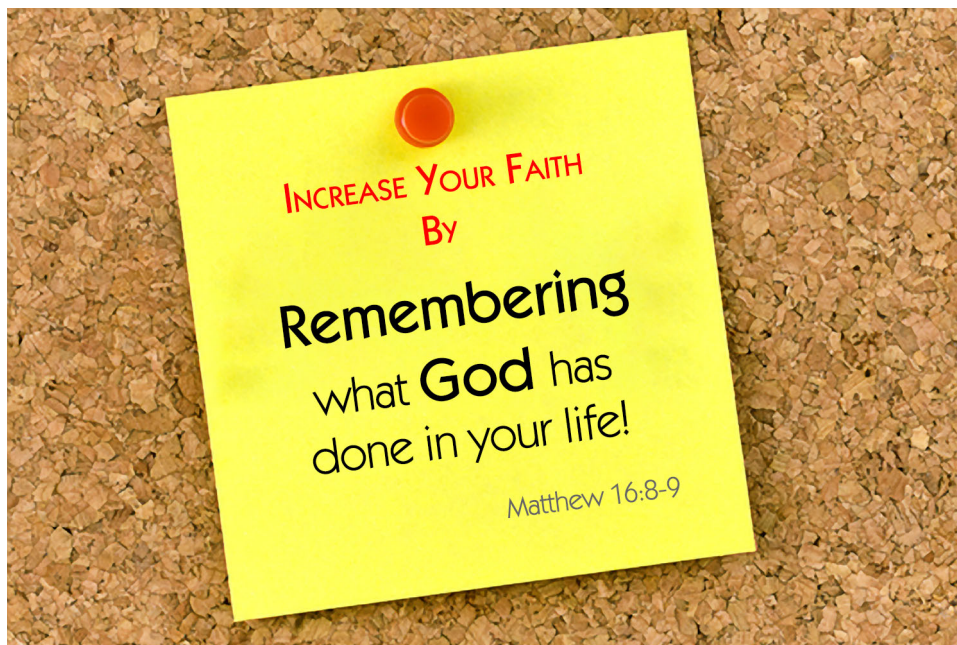
HOW TO HAVE MORE FAITH. The last example of someone having “little faith” is found in Matthew 16:5-12. It will reveal how you and I can have more faith in God. On this occasion, all the disciples had little faith.

And the disciples came to the other side of the sea, but they had forgotten to bring any bread. And Jesus said to them, “Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” They began to discuss this among themselves, saying, “He said that because we did not bring any bread.” But Jesus, aware of this, said, “You men of

little faith, why do you discuss among yourselves that you have no bread? Do you not yet understand or remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets full you picked up? Or the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many large baskets full you picked up? How is it that you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread? But beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” Then they understood that He did not say to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Matthew 16:5-12 (NASB)

Here we discover that the disciples were anxious about how to respond to Christ. Anxiety is another symptom of a lack of faith. It is surprising that the disciples of Christ had little faith

after having been with Him for almost three years. In another six to nine months, Jesus will be crucified. It is truly amazing to realize that the disciples had already watched Jesus perform the incredible miracles of the feeding of five thousand and the feeding of four thousand and they still lacked faith — “you of little faith.” Jesus had created food on two different occasions. He had used five loaves of bread and two fish on one occasion to feed five thousand men (probably twenty-five thousand men along with their women and children) and seven loaves of bread to feed four thousand men (probably as many as twenty thousand with women and children). Who can create food, but God alone?



Why did they not have enough faith? Do you know how to have more faith? Jesus said the reason that they did not have enough faith was that they did not “understand or remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets full they

picked up.” They did not seem to remember the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many large baskets full they picked up! That is, they did not understand the message of the miracles and did not remember them. Jesus has told us how to have more faith.

How can we have more faith? First, we must understand the message of what God has done in our lives. Having more faith requires that we remember what God has done in our lives. That is the basis for trusting God for the present and the future. Since God has cared for us in the past, it gives us reasons to trust Him for the future. Trust starts with the Word of God. First, we understand that the prophecies of the Bible are true. Second, the historical facts recorded in Scripture are true

and trustworthy. Therefore we can trust the Bible in everything that it teaches. When we read about the miracles and wonders that God has performed and what He has done in our own lives, then we can trust Him for every event in our lives. You see little faith becomes more faith the more we remember and understand that God has proven His love and grace and care for us — repeatedly! There is no need to worry, fear, doubt, or be anxious.

CONCLUSION. We do not need to worry, be fearful, doubt, or be anxious because we have a God who even cares for the flowers in the field and the birds in the sky! We simply need to remember God's faithful acts in our lives and trust Him. We are reminded in 1 Peter 5:6-7 that we need to humbly trust our God because He cares for us.

Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you. 1 Peter 5:6-7 (NASB)

This verse teaches another important truth about faith. First, humility submits to God and it is He who fulfills our prayer requests. Great faith trusts greatly!

Therefore, Jesus' teaching in Luke 17:6 about faith being able to transplant a mulberry tree is not really about us obtaining power to do whatever we want; it is about trusting God greatly. Yes, James 5:16 says that the prayer of a righteous man accomplishes much, but it is not because the man obtains power.

The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. James 5:16b (NASB)

But we must remember that Hebrews 11:6 tells us that we cannot please God without 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 (NASB)

Our faith pleases Him and He rewards our faith according to His will. Great faith trusts greatly!! Jesus encourages us to have great faith in God! That is His message. Lord, please give us great faith in You!