

GROW Faith: 1. Practical Biblical Teaching
Matthew 8:5-10; Matthew 7:24-27
February 3, 2019
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Has anybody ever jumped out of an airplane? Anybody? Do you have a list of things that you want to do before you die? Some call that a bucket list. I have one. It is not a written list, but I have a number of things that I hope to accomplish before I die, and jumping out of an airplane – is that on anybody’s list? It’s not on mine! There have been a few times when I thought it would be a cool thing to be able to do, but I’m too scared. I don’t even like to sit in the window seat on the airplane! I could never do it. What is it in someone that makes it possible for them to step off a cliff or jump from an airplane? What is it that makes someone able to take that leap and in spite of all of the things that could go wrong, they jump?

And what does it take to live a life that is so fully engaged and so ready to make a difference in this world – to do what otherwise you would not be able to do? What would give me the boldness to strap on a parachute, fasten a helmet, and step off the lip of an airplane ready to fall 17,000 feet? You might get all the right information: here’s how to pack the chute and when to pull the cord that will open the chute and here’s what to do if that doesn’t open the chute. But getting the right information would not be enough. I would need to trust the manual and trust the instructor, believing the parachute will absolutely deliver on the promise.

This morning, I’m not inviting you to go parachuting, but I’m inviting you to do something that will last longer than a two minute descent from the sky. What would your life be like if you had absolute, perfect faith that there is a God and that God knows your name and will lift you up and sustain you every moment of every day no matter what happens. I’m talking about absolute, unconditional faith. What would your life be like? What would your next challenge be like or your greatest challenge be like? How would you respond to the sudden, unexpected death of a loved one if you had absolute, perfect, 100% faith? To find yourself in the middle of crisis, and to know without question that you would be okay. No fear. No anxiety. Worry is not even a word in your vocabulary. Others think you are not facing reality, but you see reality, and you know God will lift you up and support you every moment of every day no matter what.

How do we get that? That kind of out-of-the-box, parachute jumping faith. Because as I read the Bible, that’s what God is trying to grow in all of us. It is a relationship of trust and confidence. Aren’t your best relationships in life characterized by trust? Show me the best marriage relationship and it is grounded in trust. “I know you didn’t come home last night, and I trust you completely.” Or your son or daughter comes home an hour after curfew, and “I know you had a good reason, and I trust you completely.” Any great relationship is founded on trust. God wants BIG faith, big out-of-the-box, parachute jumping faith for you. If you have big faith in God, it will influence every aspect of your life. Your life will be different, the way you view relationships will be different. The way you view tragedy will be different. The way you view prosperity will be different. The way you view money and morality will be different. God is in the process of trying to grow BIG faith in you.

There’s a story in Matthew, chapter 8, where Jesus is amazed by what someone else does. There are a lot instances in scripture when people are amazed by what Jesus does. This is the only time when Jesus is amazed. **When Jesus went to Capernaum, a centurion approached, pleading with him. “Lord, my servant is flat on his back at home, paralyzed, and his suffering is awful.”** A centurion was a Roman commander of 100 soldiers and servants, and those 100 soldiers and servants lived under his absolute authority. He says stay here and they

stay. He says get me lunch, and they get his lunch. He says attack the city and they attack. He says, fall on your sword and they fall on their sword. Whatever he tells them, they do. Remember, the Romans are the bad guys. They force you to pay taxes to Rome. They could come to your home in the middle of the night and say I want you and you and you, and you would never see those family members again. The Romans have invaded your city, and they don't care what you believe. If they tell you not to worship, you better stop worshipping. They are the bad guys. So when the centurion approaches Jesus, this cannot be good. And when he mentions his servant is paralyzed, the disciples are thinking – good! We hope he never gets well. But the centurion says to Jesus: I need your help. The guy with the authority of Rome needs help? **Jesus responded, "I'll come and heal him."** no.no.no.no, Jesus, that's one of the bad guys! But Jesus says, "I'll heal him." **But the centurion replied, "Lord, I don't deserve to have you come under my roof. Just say the word and my servant will be healed. I'm a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and the servant does it."** In other words, the centurion is saying, "Jesus, I've been watching you, and I believe so much that you are who you way you are and can do what you say that you don't need to go to my house, you can do it *wirelessly*. Just say the word. Jesus, I believe you can do it. I know what it is to have authority. When I tell people to do something, they do it without question. And the reason they do it is that I represent Rome, but you, Jesus, also have authority and what you say happens but you represent something bigger than Rome."

When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to the people following him, "I say to you with all seriousness that even in Israel I haven't found faith like this. The Greek word for amazed is *ethalmos* and it is the only time in the Bible when Jesus is amazed. Why is Jesus amazed? Because he has just met someone who is saying – I am convinced that you are who you are and you will deliver on your promises. Jesus, I trust you complete. I'm ready to jump because I trust the pack on my back. Jesus, I trust you. And I would love to be a church that amazes Jesus. Wouldn't you like to be the husband or the wife or the child – to be someone who amazes Jesus? And when you do something, Jesus goes "wow" – look at his or her Big faith.

This is a series in which we are looking at five things God uses to grow that kind of faith. And the first way that God uses to grow your faith is **practical biblical teaching**. Not just knowing more, but putting what we learn into practice. I was never headed toward a career in engineering. It's not that I didn't do well in math, I did really well in math but it never interested me. The first time I remember questioning what I was being taught was when I was in my high school geometry class. Why do we need to learn this? And the answer, so you can graduate. And for the next twenty years, I don't think there was a single moment when I found myself in a place where I was grateful for what I learned in geometry class. But one summer, I was on a mission trip to Appalachia and I was leading a group of senior high students assigned to construct a landing and the steps to that landing so a family could get in the front door of their mobile home. And as we talked about how to construct the steps I suddenly remembered the Pythagorean Theorem: $a^2+b^2=c^2$ and we sat down with a sheet of paper and figured it out how to construct the steps. It was not a moment that changed my life, but suddenly my high school geometry had meaning and the students were amazed that a youth pastor not only knew the Pythagorean Theorem but knew how to use it!

When it comes to the Bible, it's not just learning but putting what we learn into practice. If we believe Jesus is who Jesus says he is – if we truly trust Jesus, then we will do what he says. And when we do that, when we leap – and do what he says – that grows faith. This is what Jesus is saying in the verses we heard earlier from Matthew 7. Jesus has just completed his

Sermon on the Mount which is found in chapters 5, 6, and 7. His message was all about what to do – not what to believe but what to do, because Jesus knew that simply knowing things didn't make a difference. It's what you do. Not to gain God's favor – not because that's what will get you to heaven. This is how to live with Big faith – which is the way you were made to live.

Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice... Faith grows when it is put into practice. Some of you have told me what a difference it has made when you suddenly understood what to do – your whole life you thought you believed, but you didn't know what to do and once you began doing, your whole world changed. You can believe in nutrition and not eat healthy. You can believe in exercise and even get a healthy club membership and have the perfect workout wardrobe, but if you sit on the couch and eat twinkies, you will not be one bit healthier until you put what you believe into practice.

Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise builder who built a house on bedrock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the wind blew and beat against that house. It didn't fall because it was firmly set on bedrock. The reason the house didn't fall is not because they had the right information and they were watching the Weather Channel to see what was coming. The house didn't fall because it was built on bedrock. Listen and do. Listen and do. If you want your life and your relationships and your work and your money to be like that house on a solid foundation, then do this stuff – not to earn your place in heaven or so God will love you more – but so you see God in your life and you can become who God created you to be – to make a difference in this world.

Everyone who hears these words of mine and doesn't put them into practice will be like a fool who built a house on sand. The rain fell, the floods came, and the wind blew and beat against the house. It fell and was completely destroyed. You can have perfect attendance and be a fool. You can have perfect attendance and build a home, a relational home, a financial home, make all kinds of decisions that are a disaster and say, "God how could you? I never miss church, I read my Bible." And God says, I know but do you trust me? If you did, you would do what you hear and that's what makes the difference.

This book is not about knowing, but doing. Lane Jones says: **Unapplied truth is like unapplied paint. It doesn't do anybody any good. The value of paint is in the application.** And frankly, that's the reason to come here. We all need environments where someone brings in a can of paint, takes off the cover, stirs up the paint, and hands you the paint and a brush and says, go home and start painting. Practical biblical teaching. You've got to apply this, to show up at school and do this, to show up at work and do this, to go home and apply what we've heard. If we don't, we are like the person who built house on the foundation that will not survive the storms of life. You may look good on the outside, but eventually there will be a storm. Who are you going to trust? Trust is not knowing but applying what we hear because the authority in whom you trust is absolutely 100% trustworthy. **Grow, Pray, Study for Week of February 3, 2019**

Weekly Prayer: Teach us, O God, and increase our faith. Stir up in us a willingness to listen for your guidance and direction that will take our trust and confidence to new levels. Help us to engage our minds and our hearts, so that we might experience your touch upon all aspects of our lives. We pray this because of, and in the name of, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Monday, February 4

Scripture: Matthew 8:5-10

When Jesus went to Capernaum, a centurion approached, pleading with him, "Lord, my servant is flat on his back at home, paralyzed, and his suffering is awful." Jesus responded, "I'll come and heal him." But the centurion replied, "Lord, I don't deserve to have you come under my roof. Just say the word and my servant will be healed. I'm a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and the servant does it." When Jesus heard this, he was impressed and said to the people following him, "I say to you with all seriousness that even in Israel I haven't found faith like this.

Observation: A centurion was a Roman soldier who had 100 men under his command. He knew what it was to have authority and to live under authority. Although he had command of the 100, his authority was not absolute. He answered to Caesar, but he recognized that Jesus had an even greater authority. This is the only time in the gospels when Jesus was "impressed" (some translations say astonished) by someone's faith.

Application: What did Jesus find in this man's life that impressed (or astonished) him? The greater Jesus' authority, the less necessary his physical presence to accomplish his will. The centurion had absolute faith – something even the most religious at that time did not have (or at least they did not see Jesus' link to a greater authority). Is your faith able to overcome your hesitation and doubt? How might Jesus describe your faith?

Prayer: Jesus, thank you for entering our world and helping us see the power and glory of God. When I am tempted to rely on my own ability and take care of myself, help me to see that you are with me to point me to a God who is greater and able to accomplish far more than I can hope or even imagine. Amen.

Tuesday, February 5

Scripture: Matthew 4:25-5:12

Large crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from the areas beyond the Jordan River.

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up a mountain. He sat down and his disciples came to him. He taught them, saying: "Happy are people who are hopeless, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs. "Happy are people who grieve, because they will be made glad. "Happy are people who are humble, because they will inherit the earth. "Happy are people who are hungry and thirsty for righteousness, because they will be fed until they are full. "Happy are people who show mercy, because they will receive mercy. "Happy are people who have pure hearts, because they will see God. "Happy are people who make peace, because they will be called God's children. "Happy are people whose lives are harassed because they are righteous, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs. "Happy are you when people insult you and harass you and speak all kinds of bad and false things about you, all because of me. Be full of joy and be glad, because you have a great reward in heaven. In the same way, people harassed the prophets who came before you.

Observation: If you can, read Matthew chapters 5-7 which contain the teachings of Jesus that are called the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew was writing to a Jewish audience who would immediately see the parallel between Jesus going up a mountain and Moses who also went up a mountain. Like Moses, Jesus was teaching with authority. Matthew wanted those who heard

this gospel to see Jesus as the “new” Moses, the One whose authority was even greater than Moses’.

Application: These verses are called the Beatitudes (“blessed are” or “happy are”). These are a series of promises to those who exhibit the attributes of God’s kingdom. Which promises are counter to what our culture promises? Which attributes speak to what may be a growing edge for you? To find hope and joy, the deepest form of happiness, we must follow Jesus no matter what the cost.

Prayer: Jesus, thank you for your teaching. Help me to hear what you want me to hear and then give me the courage I need to put your words into practice in my life. I want to follow you. Amen.

Wednesday, February 6

Scripture: Matthew 7:24-27

"Everybody who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise builder who built a house on bedrock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the wind blew and beat against that house. It didn't fall because it was firmly set on bedrock. But everybody who hears these words of mine and doesn't put them into practice will be like a fool who built a house on sand. The rain fell, the floods came, and the wind blew and beat against that house. It fell and was completely destroyed."

Observation: The Sermon on the Mount concluded with a parable. He was speaking to people who lived in a dry and arid land. So one might be tempted to build a home on land that appeared solid until it rained and that dry creek bed suddenly became a torrent of water that would wash the house away. But Jesus wasn’t providing home construction tips! “Bedrock” and “sand” signified two different ways of living one’s life.

Application: Jesus’ words were not meant only to be heard but to be put into practice in one’s life. It is one thing to know the right way to construct a house (or a life), and it is quite another thing to do it (or to live that way). The good news is that Jesus is always with us to encourage, direct, and help us start again. What aspect of your life needs “remodeling”?

Prayer: God, you have provided what is needed to give my life purpose and meaning. Be patient with me as I listen intently for what you want for me. May others see in me a person who is guided by One who is greater than me – that One being you, O Lord. Amen.

Thursday, February 7

Scripture: Matthew 7:28-29

When Jesus finished these words, the crowds were amazed at his teaching because he was teaching them like someone with authority and not like their legal experts.

Observation: The legal experts in Jesus’ day interpreted the law and were especially concerned about the *halakah* or rules for life that were as binding as the God’s written law in the Torah. Their self-assured authority became a stumbling block for them as they denied Jesus’ ability to reinterpret the law (“but I say to you” – Matthew 5:43-45). They rejected Jesus because they believed he had no authority.

Application: These verses provide a contrast to the verse we read on Monday from Mark 8:10. Here we find that crowds were amazed by what they heard from Jesus, and in Mark 8, Jesus

was amazed by what he heard from the centurion. In both places, the source of amazement was the recognition of authority. Where do you look for authority on how to live, how to respond to the challenges of living, and how to treat others? What could Jesus still teach you?

Prayer: God, you have provided a way for me to live and I am grateful. Help me to hear from you each day. Grant me the grace and forgiveness that I so desperately need so that I do not quit when I fail to follow or stumble. I want to follow you this day. Amen.

Friday, February 8

Scripture: Luke 4:16-30

Jesus went to Nazareth, where he had been raised. On the Sabbath he went to the synagogue as he normally did and stood up to read. The synagogue assistant gave him the scroll from the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me. He has sent me to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to liberate the oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the synagogue assistant, and sat down. Every eye in the synagogue was fixed on him. He began to explain to them, "Today, this scripture has been fulfilled just as you heard it." Everyone was raving about Jesus, so impressed were they by the gracious words flowing from his lips. They said, "This is Joseph's son, isn't it?" Then Jesus said to them, "Undoubtedly, you will quote this saying to me: 'Doctor, heal yourself. Do here in your hometown what we've heard you did in Capernaum.'" He said, "I assure you that no prophet is welcome in the prophet's hometown. And I can assure you that there were many widows in Israel during Elijah's time, when it didn't rain for three and a half years and there was a great food shortage in the land. Yet Elijah was sent to none of them but only to a widow in the city of Zarephath in the region of Sidon. There were also many persons with skin diseases in Israel during the time of the prophet Elisha, but none of them were cleansed. Instead, Naaman the Syrian was cleansed." When they heard this, everyone in the synagogue was filled with anger. They rose up and ran him out of town. They led him to the crest of the hill on which their town had been built so that they could throw him off the cliff. But he passed through the crowd and went on his way.

Observation: Jesus began his ministry in Galilee, moving among the small towns near the Sea of Galilee. He returned to his hometown of Nazareth, and at first the people who had known him since he was a child were proud to welcome him. He spoke in the synagogue, but they didn't really listen to what he was saying. Instead, as Jesus suggested in verse 23, they were waiting for him to perform the miracles that he had done in other towns. Surely, he would do even greater things in his hometown!

Application: But Jesus had not come to Nazareth to perform more of his "magic." That's what the people expected. The crowd became angry by Jesus' suggestion that as a prophet he would bring God's good news to others, not to his own hometown. Why do you think they responded as they did? What message do you think Jesus was communicating to his hometown? And to you?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you brought a message to this world that upset many who thought they already knew God's will. Keep me open to your words and teaching, not so I will hear what I already believe, but so I will be ready to grow ever closer to your perfect will. Amen.

Saturday, February 9

Scripture: James 2:14-26

My brothers and sisters, what good is it if people say they have faith but do nothing to show it? Claiming to have faith can't save anyone, can it? Imagine a brother or sister who is naked and never has enough food to eat. What if one of you said, "Go in peace! Stay warm! Have a nice meal!"? What good is it if you don't actually give them what their body needs? In the same way, faith is dead when it doesn't result in faithful activity. Someone might claim, "You have faith and I have action." But how can I see your faith apart from your actions? Instead, I'll show you my faith by putting it into practice in faithful action. It's good that you believe that God is one. Ha! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble with fear. Are you so slow? Do you need to be shown that faith without actions has no value at all? What about Abraham, our father? Wasn't he shown to be righteous through his actions when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? See, his faith was at work along with his actions. In fact, his faith was made complete by his faithful actions. So the scripture was fulfilled that says, Abraham believed God, and God regarded him as righteous. What is more, Abraham was called God's friend. So you see that a person is shown to be righteous through faithful actions and not through faith alone. In the same way, wasn't Rahab the prostitute shown to be righteous when she received the messengers as her guests and then sent them on by another road? As the lifeless body is dead, so faith without actions is dead.

Observation: James addresses the relationship between faith and good works. For faith to be alive, it has to be expressed in good works. James provides two examples in Abraham and Rahab. God promises Abraham a family (Genesis 15) but Abraham does not believe God will fulfil that promise, thus fathering a child with his slave-girl Hagar. But later when God fulfills that promise through the birth of Isaac, Abraham is commanded to sacrifice his son, Isaac (Genesis 22). Isaac is spared when Abraham passes the test of faith. In the second example, Rahab is an unlikely example of faith. She is a pagan prostitute, and yet she provides refuge to Israel's army because she had come to believe in Israel's God as the only true God.

Application: It is not enough to know what is good. In fact, faith lacks no value until it is put into practice; only when it is put into practice is it possible to see what your faith really is. Has there been a time when a belief was called into question by your actions? How have your beliefs been confirmed by your actions? In Matthew 22, Jesus offers the greatest commandment. It has two parts: Love God AND love your neighbor. Faith in action.

Prayer: Lord God, I am amazed by your faithfulness to a world that seems so broken and strays from your will. Help me to look to you each day, grateful for your grace and love, and then to allow what I have received from you to flow through me in the ways I behave and treat others. Amen.