

TRUST

The Healing Power of Faith

The evidence is mounting.

The research is convincing.

Faith makes a difference in our physical as well as our spiritual lives.

For the last 25 years, researchers have been examining the relationship between our faith and our health. They have concluded that faith makes a positive difference in our physical, mental, and emotional health. Although the research is continuing and we do not have all the answers, we know enough to know that faith matters. Well-known universities, national public health research institutions, and privately funded health organizations are all coming to similar conclusions. A strong belief system can be a foundation for improved health.

Here is a sampling, according to some researchers, of what a dose of spirituality can do for you.

STRESS

A comprehensive study conducted in Alameda County, California, followed the lifestyle practices of nearly 7,000 Californians. It revealed that West Coast worshippers who participated in church-sponsored activities were markedly less stressed over finances, health, and other daily concerns than non-spiritual types (*Journal of Gerontology: Psychological Sciences*, 1998).

BLOOD PRESSURE

Senior citizens in a Duke University study who attended religious services, prayed, or read the Bible regularly had lower blood pressure than those who did not pray or study the Bible (*International Journal of Psychiatry in Medicine*, 1998).

MORTALITY

Research on 1,931 older adults indicated that those who attended religious services regularly had a lower mortality rate (*American Journal of Public Health*, 1998).

IMMUNITY

Research on 1,700 adults found that those who attended religious services were less likely to have elevated levels of interleukin-6, an immune substance prevalent in people with chronic diseases (*International Journal of Psychiatry in Medicine*, 1997).

LIFESTYLE

A recent review of several studies suggested that spirituality is linked to low suicide rates, less alcohol and drug abuse, less criminal behaviour, fewer divorces and higher marital satisfaction (*Religion and Clinical Practice*, 1996).

DEPRESSION

Women with devoutly religious mothers were 60% less likely to be depressed in adulthood than women whose mothers were not so reverent, according to a Columbia University study. Daughters belonging to the same religious denomination as their mothers were even less likely (71%) to suffer the blues; sons were 84% less likely (*Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 1997).

FAITH MAKES A DIFFERENCE

The evidence is mounting. The research is convincing. Faith makes a difference in our physical, as well as our spiritual, lives. But significant questions still remain. If we have enough faith, can we live as we please and still be healthy? Does faith give us license to violate the laws of health and still expect to live longer?

QUESTIONS REGARDING FAITH

- What is faith?
- Why does faith seem to work wonders for some people and accomplish little for others?
- Is faith some sort of a good luck charm that gets us whatever we want?
- Is faith some kind of hyped-up psyched-up, jacked-up positive thinking?

Evidently authentic faith, or biblical faith, will be in short supply just before the return of our Lord. Jesus asks this all important question: "Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8). Why is genuine faith so scarce? What is it, and how can we grow our faith?

LET'S LOOK AT HEBREWS 11: WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES FAITH MAKE IN OUR LIVES?

Hebrews 11 clarifies some of life's most fundamental questions and answers some of life's deepest issues. It cuts to the heart of the essence of how to live our lives.

Let's explore genuine biblical faith together. We will study what faith is and what faith isn't. We will also consider the source of faith and the result of faith. To understand the meaning of faith we will look at Hebrews 11:1 – "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

What is faith? It is the *substance*. The Latin word *substance* comes from two words *sub* and *stance*. *Sub* means 'under', as in *submarine* - a boat which travels under the sea - and *subterranean* - something under the earth. The word *stance* refers to the essence of a thing. The *substance* is the thing that stands under everything else in your life, supporting, sustaining, and securing it. Faith is the very foundation of our lives.

Faith stands under everything else. Faith supports all of our hopes. Faith sustains us in the perplexing questions of life. Faith is the essence of spiritual life, which keeps it from crumbling. These Bible characters - Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Joseph, and the other heroes of Hebrews 11 had one thing in common - FAITH - a faith that sustained and supported them throughout their lives. They lived lives of trust.

Let's define faith.

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WHAT IS FAITH?

Faith is a relationship with God as a well-known friend, which leads us to do whatever He asks and accepts whatever He allows with the absolute assurance that He only wants the best for our lives. Faith believes God will strengthen us to triumph over every difficulty and overcome every obstacle until the day when we receive our final reward in His eternal kingdom.

A favourite author states it succinctly: "Faith is trusting God - believing that He loves us and knows what is for our good." (*Ellen G White, Education*, page 253).

Faith energizes our entire being. Faith lifts our spirits and encourages our heart. Faith renews our hope and lifts our vision from what is to what can be. Faith believes God's promises and receives His gifts before they are realized. In Hebrews 11, God lists the heroes of faith down through the ages and their names hang high in heaven's *Hall of Fame*. Follow as we now take a brief journey through Hebrews 11 and examine the results of the faith of these champions in heaven's *Hall of Fame*.

HEAVEN'S HALL OF FAME

It is surprising that the first example of faith that God gives in Hebrews 11 is of a person who dies. There is no miraculous deliverance here: "By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts and through it he being dead still speaks." (Hebrews 11:4)

According to the Bible, Abel was a righteous man and what was the result of his faith? It got him killed. If he had not had faith, he would have lived. Cain did not have faith, and he lived. Abel had faith, and he died. This may seem strange to some people who have a mistaken understanding of genuine faith for they believe that if you have enough faith you will always be healed.

Now let's consider Enoch, the next in this royal line of faith – "By faith Enoch was translated so he did not see death, and was not found because God had translated him, for before his translation he had this testimony that he pleased God." (Hebrews 11:5).

If Enoch had not had faith, he would have died. Enoch has faith and he lives, but Abel has the same quality of faith, and he dies. Throughout Hebrews 11 each of these worthies of faith teaches us how to trust God. Enoch trusts him in life, and Abel trusts him in death.

Now let us look at the contrast between Noah and Abraham - "By faith Noah being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, and prepared an ark for the saving of His household." (Hebrews 11:7). Noah's faith led him to do just what God said, even though to the majority of people in his day it must have seemed ridiculous. Noah obediently followed God's instructions. He trusted God and

remained where he was for 120 years building an ark in spite of the fact that there was no rain. Now, that is faith.

Abraham's experience is just the opposite – “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would afterward receive as an inheritance. And he went out not knowing where he was going.” (Hebrews 11:8).

Abraham's faith led him to leave the security of his homeland and venture out into the unknown. What contrasts. Abel died by faith, and Enoch survived by faith. Noah stayed by faith, and Abraham ventured out by faith. And the contrasts continue through the chapter. Sarah conceived a child by faith when she was 80 years old, and years later Abraham took the child, Isaac, to Mount Moriah at God's command to sacrifice him. God honoured Abraham's faith and delivered the child. The same God who asked these parents to believe He would give them a child, asked them to believe when He commanded them to sacrifice the child.

Here is another contrast found in the chapter. Joseph was faithful to God in spite of the difficult circumstances of his life, and as a result of his faithfulness, God honoured Joseph. He lived as a witness of the true God in Egypt among wealth and opulence. Moses had the opposite experience. God led him out of Egypt to wander in the wilderness in total dependence on God. Moses “chose to suffer affliction with the people of God, rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.” (Hebrews 11:25-26). Joseph had faith and remained in Egypt, while Moses had faith, and God led him out of Egypt. Through faith Joseph became rich, and Moses became poor.

Faith is seeking God's will for your life whether it is death like Abel or life like Enoch. Whether it is staying like Noah or moving like Abraham. Whether it is living in the luxury of Egypt like Joseph or being a homeless wanderer in the desert like Moses.

FAITH IS AN ABIDING TRUST IN GOD

I don't know what circumstances you may find yourself in today. You may be enjoying good health or facing a life-threatening illness. You may be perfectly content in your home or facing a move and dreading it. You may be prospering financially or struggling to pay your mortgage. You may be enjoying a great marriage or suffering in a strained relationship. You may feel very close to God or you may feel distant from Him.

However, faith is not dependent on our feelings. It is not dependent on our circumstances. Each of the heroes in God's *Hall of Fame* in Hebrews 11 went through different circumstances in their lives. Faith is not dependent on what is going on around us. It has everything to do with what is going on inside us. Each of the worthies of faith in Hebrews 11 had one common thread running through their lives: they trusted God. Faith is trusting God for:

- **Strength in our weakness**
- **Hope in our depression**
- **Guidance in our doubt**
- **Joy in our sorrow**
- **Peace in our anxiety**
- **Wisdom in our ignorance**
- **Courage in our fear.**

Faith does not know defeat. It does not understand the word IMPOSSIBLE. It is filled with courage. Faith trusts God in all of life's circumstances.

FAITH'S SOURCE

Faith always has a source. It is not faith in our abilities or faith in our faith - it is faith in God. Faith is not some kind of hyped-up positive thinking. Faith is not some self-induced warm feeling.

Faith has a source and Hebrews 11:6 describes the source of all faith: “But 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 diligently seek Him.” (Hebrews 11:6).

The source of all faith is an all-powerful, all-knowing, all-loving God. A trusting relationship with God begins with the realization that He loves us and desires only good for us.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer remained faithful to God during Hitler's Third Reich in Germany. This godly pastor clung to his faith at any cost. He was cast into prison. German towns were being continuously

bombed by the Allied Forces. In his memoirs, Bonheoffer described his feelings as the prison he was being held in shook. In the midst of one of these intense bombing attacks he wrote, "I sensed the presence of God." On the brink of death in a German prison camp, Bonheoffer sensed the presence of God. His faith soared beyond what was to what would be. It looked beyond his life-threatening condition to a loving God who had better plans in mind for him.

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INCREASING OUR FAITH

What do you do when your faith is weak? You may be thinking, "That's just my problem. I don't have much faith." Well, I have some good news for you, you have more faith than you realize. The problem is not that you do not have any faith, but the problem is that you have not exercised the faith you have. Listen to the apostle Paul's words in Romans 12:3: "As God has dealt to each one a measure of faith." When we make a conscious choice to reach out to this all-loving, all-powerful God and trust Him, He places within our hearts a measure of faith.

Faith is a gift that God gives us, and the more we exercise that gift the more it will grow. Faith grows as we learn to trust God in the trials and challenges we face in life. Sometimes our moments of greatest desperation are our moments of greatest faith growth.

Our faith also grows as we meditate upon God's Word. As the truths of the Bible fill our minds, our faith grows rapidly. The scriptures affirm this divine reality in Paul's letter to the Romans: "So faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." (Romans 10:17). The more we fill our minds with God's Word, the more our faith will increase. His Word dispels our doubts.

Would you like to open your heart to God and by faith receive His power today? Would you like to enter into a new relationship of trust and confidence in God? Would you like to bow your head with me right now and place your life in His hands?

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