

THE JOURNEY TOWARD GREAT FAITH

- ✓ One of the things you'll notice as you study the Bible, is how many words it uses to describe people's faith. It mentions little faith, weak faith, strong faith, no faith, lacking faith, growing faith, rich faith, full faith, mature faith, sincere faith, perfected faith, failing faith, dead faith, increasing faith, overcoming faith, sound faith, proven faith, shipwrecked faith, mountain-moving faith, and great faith.
- ✓ Why are there so many "levels" of faith? That's easy! Some people feed their faith, and it grows (Ro. 10:17). Others neglect their faith, and it shrinks. (So you wind up with people at different levels.)

Locating Ourselves

- ✓ In the Gospels, Jesus both rebuked and commended people for their faith level. The disciples were "chewed out" regularly – Mt. 14:31; Mk. 4:40! Every time I see that, I wonder what He'd say to me. (I don't think we have to guess. It's not hard to figure it out!)
- ✓ In the first paragraph, I listed 20 levels of faith. But some of them are *similar enough* that they could be grouped together. They could be condensed into 5 main categories: (From lowest to highest), there's no faith, weak faith, little faith, strong faith, and great faith. Let's define them and see if we can locate ourselves.

1. No Faith

- ✓ This is the lowest level of faith. (You can't get less than "none".)
- ✓ When I talk about people who have "no faith", I'm not referring to atheists. I'm talking about Christians who, when they face a crisis, have "no faith" for the crisis they're in.

Mark 4:35 – "On that same day, when evening had come, He said to them, 'Let us go over to the other side.' Leaving the crowd behind, the

disciples got into the boat where Jesus was sitting, and they set sail. Other boats sailed along with them. But soon a fierce storm came up. High waves were breaking into the boat, and it began to fill with water. But Jesus was in the rear of the boat, sleeping on a pillow.

*So they woke him up and said, shouting over the storm, 'Teacher, don't you even care that we're going to die?' When Jesus woke up, he rebuked the wind and said to the waves, 'Peace! Be still!' Suddenly the wind stopped, and there was a great calm. And he asked them, 'Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have **NO FAITH?**'"*

- ✓ What Does "No Faith" Look Like? (Well, look at what they said!) "Don't you care that we're going to die?" That was their prayer! After assessing the situation, they came to two conclusions: We're going to die, and You don't care!
- ✓ "**No Faith" sees defeat as inevitable.** It expects the worst possible result. ("We're gonna die!") If they pray at all, it's little more than complaining.

2. Weak Faith

Romans 4:19 – "And (Abraham) being not weak in faith, he did not focus on his body ..."

- ✓ Drop the word "not" on both sides of the verse, and then read it *that* way: "And being **WEAK IN FAITH**, he **FOCUSED** on his body."
- ✓ What does "weak faith" look like? **It focuses on the problem.** A person with *weak* faith is one step ahead of the fellow who has *no* faith. He acknowledges that God could do something! He's probably even praying! But **he can't get his eyes off the problem**. It consumes his thinking! To him, nothing else exists. (I've been there at times ... haven't you? I think we all have.)
- ✓ A person with weak faith has more faith in the devil's ability to hurt him, than he does in God's ability to help him.

3. Little Faith

- ✓ Little faith **vacillates between faith and fear**. Peter is our example:

Matt. 14:22 – “As soon as the meal was finished, (Jesus) insisted that the disciples get in the boat and go on ahead to the other side while he dismissed the people. With the crowd dispersed, he climbed the mountain so he could be by himself and pray. He stayed there alone, late into the night. By this time the boat was a long way from the shore. It was going against the wind and was being tossed around by the waves. Around four o’clock in the morning, Jesus came toward them, walking on the sea! When the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified. ‘It’s a ghost!’ they said, and they cried out in **fear**. Immediately Jesus spoke to them. ‘Have courage! It’s me. Don’t be afraid.’ Peter responded and said to Him, ‘Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.’ ‘Come and join me,’ Jesus replied. So Peter **stepped out onto the water** and began to walk toward Jesus. But when he saw the strength of the wind, he was **afraid**, and beginning to sink he cried out, ‘Lord, save me’ Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand, took hold of him, and said to him, ‘You of **LITTLE FAITH**, why did you doubt?’ ”

- ✓ Little faith is wavering faith. Confident one minute and cowering the next. Wavering faith doesn’t produce anything good (James 1:6).

4. Strong Faith

Romans 4:20-21 – “He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was **STRONG IN FAITH**, giving praise to God; And being fully persuaded that, what God had promised, he was **able** also to perform.”

- ✓ “Strong Faith” is **fully persuaded that God is able** to keep His promises, and it can **praise God**, right in the midst of the problem.
- ✓ **Before he sees any change (in the natural), a person with strong faith lifts his hands, and praises God for the victory!** (“God, You always cause me to triumph in Christ! The devil is not winning! I’m coming out of this even stronger!”)

5. Great Faith

- ✓ Only two people in Scripture are described as having great faith. One of the individuals had great **faith in the Word**. The other individual had **“bulldog” faith** and refused to be denied.

a.) The Centurion

Matthew 8:5 – “When he entered Capernaum, a Centurion came to him asking for help: ‘Saying, ‘Lord, my servant is lying at home, paralyzed and suffering terribly.’ Jesus responded, ‘**I’ll come and heal him.**’ The Centurion replied, ‘Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. But **just speak the word**, and my servant will be healed.’ When Jesus heard this, he was amazed, and said to those who followed him, ‘I have not found anyone with so **GREAT FAITH**, not even in Israel!’

- ✓ Put yourself in the story! Suppose you have a loved one who’s dying. You come to church, and Jesus appears to you, while you’re here. He offers to come to your house and do a miracle. But you say, “That’s all right, Jesus! Don’t put yourself out. You can go back to Heaven. But, before You go, just quote 1 Peter 2:24 for me.”
- ✓ “Just speak the Word”! Do you have that much confidence in the Word? The Centurion did! (That **IS** pretty impressive! No wonder Jesus marvelled!)

b.) The Syrophenician Woman

- ✓ This woman had every opportunity to get offended and leave. Her daughter was suffering! (That’s hard on a momma!) She came in her pain, pouring out her heart to Jesus. And how did the disciples respond? They turned to Jesus and said, “Send her away! She’s following us and keeps **pestering us with her crying.**” (Mt. 15:23 CJB)
- ✓ Wow! A lot of people would never have gotten past that! To make it worse, because she was a Gentile, Jesus said He couldn’t help her.

Matt. 15:24 – “God only sent me to minister to the Israelites ...” (INT)

- ✓ Jesus wasn’t trying to be mean. It just wasn’t the Gentiles’ time yet. But she refused to be denied. (Because of time, we won’t go through the whole story. But we can see the end result.)

Matt. 15:28 – “Woman, you have **GREAT FAITH** ...”

Stuff You’ve Gotta Know

(i) Your Faith Is Not at the Same Level in Every Area

- ✓ It’s possible to have “great faith” one area and “weak faith” in another. (You can have *great* faith for healing, and *no* faith that God would help you financially.) Every area needs to be developed.

(ii) In Each Area, Your Faith Can Grow Stronger or Weaker.

- ✓ Faith *shrinks* through neglect. It *grows* by feeding it on the Word and exercising it. (When your Word-level goes up, so does your faith level – Romans 10:17.)

(iii) The Goal Is to Assess Where You Are, and Move Up to the Next Level

- ✓ Ask yourself, “What do I need to do, to move up to the next level?”
- ✓ If You’ve Got “No Faith” (*and you see failure is inevitable*) – Stay in the Word until you start to see *winning* as an option.
- ✓ If You’ve Got “Little Faith” (*vacillating between faith & fear*) – Watch what you focus on. Keep your focus on the Word. Then start to implement the principles of the next level. To move from *little* faith to *strong* faith, strengthen your belief that God is *able* (Jer. 32:17, Matt. 19:26), and then start praising Him.