

## **Faith in Action**

Luke 5:17-26

### **Discussion Guide on pg. 12**

Concerning the power of faith, the Apostle John wrote: *“For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.”* 1 John 5:4

Do you possess this overcoming faith? To overcome the challenges of this world and live a victorious Christian life, we must have faith.

Before giving various examples about people of faith, the author of Hebrews wrote: *“And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.”* Hebrews 11:6

This passage not only teaches us that faith is rooted in what we believe about God, but that without it we cannot please God—we will not experience the rewards of faith or God acting on our behalf as we draw near to Him and seek Him.

Therefore, it’s vital that we understand what biblical faith is and how to obtain it. And as Hebrews 11:6 demonstrates, the key to possessing an overcoming faith is not how much faith you have, but where you’re placing your faith.

Moreover, we must be clear about what true faith is because there is an unbiblical understanding of faith that has infiltrated many churches today and has deceived millions. And because of how wide spread this false understanding of faith is, it’s very possible that there’s a person or more than one person here today that may be negatively influenced.

The unbiblical understanding of faith that I’m referring to is propagated by the word of faith movement. This movement teaches that “faith is a force” and that believers, who are little gods, can tap into this force with words to create their own reality. How does one tap into the force of faith with words? Because believers are little gods, they say, one

can manipulate the faith force through positive confessions to create what they believe scripture promises, namely health and wealth. This is nowhere taught in the scriptures.

How can you identify if you or some else has been influenced by this word of faith movement? One simple indication, for example, is that, if you're sick, you will not confess it with your words because that would be claiming it or speaking it into existence. Rather, you will confess or declare that you're healed.

You see, proponents of word of faith believe that if you're not walking in prosperity, it's because you're not exercising your little god authority to name it and claim it. Again, this is nowhere taught in scripture.

God alone is the Sovereign Creator of the Universe and He does not need faith to bring things into existence. He is the object of faith. Biblical faith is not faith in faith, it's not positive thinking, it's not name it and claim it or believe it and you can achieve.

The key to possessing overcoming faith is not the size of your faith, but where you place your faith. Little faith is better than misplaced faith because faith is as good as its object.

**Main idea:** Faith that pleases God is focused on Christ and functions to fulfill His will in the power of the Holy Spirit.

To unfold this theme, we are going to consider 3 imperatives for possessing overcoming faith and putting that faith into action.

### **1. The fuel of faith is the word of God**

Like a motor vehicle needs gasoline to run, and our bodies need healthy food to thrive, faith also needs fuel. And the fuel of faith is the word of God. This is the first imperative.

After recording that Jesus withdrew from a mob of people seeking healing to get alone with His Father so that He Himself could refuel, Luke writes:

*“On one of those days, as he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there, who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was with him to heal.” Luke 5:17*

In the parallel account of Mark’s gospel, we learn that Jesus was preaching the word not in a synagogue, as was His custom, but in a home. We also learn from Mark’s gospel and later in this chapter that this home was so crowded that no one else could get through the door. And among the crowd of people in this packed house, were religious leaders who had come from surrounding villages.

It’s safe to say that Jesus is drawing big crowds because news was getting around about the authority He had to preach the word and to heal the sick. Exactly what Jesus was teaching in this home we don’t know for sure, but what we do know is that He was preaching the good news of the kingdom.

Remember, that at the end of Luke chapter four, after explaining that a crowd coming to Jesus for healing would have kept Him from leaving, Luke records: *“but he said to them, “I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose.” Luke 4:43*

Let me ask you, what was the ultimate aim of Jesus’ preaching? The ultimate aim was for people to come to faith in Him as Savior and King so that they could be freed from the rule of sin and brought into His kingdom. In Romans 10:17, the Apostle Paul wrote: *“So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” Romans 10:17*

Now we need to hear the word of God not only to come to saving faith in Jesus, but to continue to grow in faith so that we can live an abundant Christian life. Remember in Luke 4 when Jesus was being tempted by Satan in the wilderness to prove His identity by turning stones into bread, Jesus answered: *“It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone.’” Luke 4:4*

Again, like healthy food is to the body, the word of God is to our spiritual lives. Apart from regularly feeding on the word of God, we will be spiritually anemic and our faith will be weak. Sadly, because many professing Christians today are not fueling their faith by the word of God, they have very little power to overcome conformity to the world.

One of the greatest measures that we are growing in faith is a longing for the word. The apostle Peter exhorted believers: *“Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.”* 1 Peter 2:2-3

The more we feast on the word, and taste the goodness of God, the more we will long for the word. The opposite is true. If we are not feasting on the word, we will have little longing for God’s word. We are either being transformed by the word or we are conforming to the world.

In the longest chapter of the Bible, which is centered on the soul enriching power of abiding in God’s word, the Psalmist testified:

*“My eyes are awake before the watches of the night, that I may meditate on your promise.”*

Psalm 119:148

What is your relationship to the word of God? Do you wake up with a thirst and a hunger for the word of God?

When Jesus was teaching the word to a packed house, some were there to critique Jesus, like the religious leaders, some were there to hear the word, and some were there because He had power to heal them of their infirmities.

Why do we gather on Sunday mornings? There are several good reasons to gather with the church, like fellowship and prayer, but if longing for God’s word is not at the center, the church gathering will become something God never intended. Entertaining music, for example, often becomes the draw, not the glory of Jesus.

Jesus' primary mission was to preach the word to make disciples who represent His kingdom. But often the people who only wanted to physically benefit from His power were obstacles to His mission. If He would have allowed it, the miracle mongers would have kept Him from spreading the good news to other towns.

Moreover, as John 2:23-24 indicates, Jesus entrusted Himself not to people who were only seeking signs and wonders, but to those who were hungry to know Him through His word.

Similarly, there are many today who gather in a church building on a Sunday morning looking for some kind of physical or emotional experience. Knowing this, some church leaders cater to the desires of the consumer and offer things like entertainment to satisfy their cravings.

Meanwhile, those who may have come to church with a Christ centered purpose, like hearing from God, are starving. Jesus healed people because He cared for them but He did not pander to the crowd.

He focused on giving people what they needed most not what they desired most. And because that was His aim—because He stayed focused on preaching the good news, which is why He was sent, sometimes His preaching didn't draw bigger crowds, rather it thinned out the crowds.

On one such occasion when He spoke some hard truth, we read in John 6:66: *"After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. So Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life,"*

Beloved, to grow strong in faith we must continue in the word of God. God speaks to us through His word. You can read the bible and not have a strong relationship with God, but you can't have a strong

relationship with God if you're not devoted to His word. The fuel of faith is the word of God.

## **2. The focus of faith is the wonder of God**

Secondly, the focus of faith is the wonder of God. While Jesus was teaching the word, Luke records:

*“And behold, some men were bringing on a bed a man who was paralyzed, and they were seeking to bring him in and lay him before Jesus, <sup>19</sup> but finding no way to bring him in, because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the midst before Jesus. <sup>20</sup> And when he saw their faith, he said, “Man, your sins are forgiven you.” Luke 5:18-20*

As I said earlier, people packed the home where Jesus was teaching because His fame was spreading. Word was getting out that Jesus not only preached with an authority that the religious leaders didn't have, but He also had an extraordinary power to heal, which Luke highlights in verse 17.

Additionally, it was not only the wonder of His power to heal that was spreading, but His merciful compassion that made Him willing to do so. We saw His compassion demonstrated earlier in the chapter in the healing of the socially isolated man who was full of leprosy.

Knowing this, the four men, as Mark's gospel notes, would not be deterred in their quest to bring their paralyzed friend to Jesus. These men literally tore a hole in the roof of a packed house that was large enough to allow the paralyzed adult man through. As one bible teacher said, “State Farm ain't covering that!”

Now, although the owner of the house was probably not too thrilled that he had a big hole in his roof, Jesus, on the other hand, was impressed. Their extraordinary actions demonstrated their extraordinary faith. In verse 20 we read: *“And when he saw their faith, he said, “Man, your sins are forgiven you.”*

Before we get into the eternal need that Jesus saw in the paralyzed man, it's important that we understand what impressed Jesus about the faith of his incredible friends. Their faith drove them to act not to seek a blessing for themselves, but to act on behalf of their needy friend.

What's more, it was a faith that was costly. They would not allow thoughts like, "the owner is going to be upset or is going to demand that we fix this big hole that we make in this roof."

Beloved, the kind of faith that brings Christ's power to the needy, is a faith that is willing to take risks and make sacrifices. And what makes men and women who possess this faith willing, is not believing that they have authority in themselves to speak things into existence. Their faith is not in themselves or in positive thinking, or in making declarations, but in the wonder of Christ's power and love.

Charles Spurgeon beautifully illustrates the faith of these faithful disciples: "Faith goes up the stairs that love has built and looks out the windows which hope has opened."

It was knowing of the love and hope of Christ and believing that He was the answer that drove these four men to find a way to get their friend to Jesus, even if it cost them.

Again, what fuels this kind of faith is not simply the word of God, as I demonstrated earlier, it's the wonder of Christ, which is what the scriptures from Genesis to Revelation all points to.

In Luke 24, which records a post resurrection encounter Jesus had with two discouraged disciples, before Jesus made Himself visibly known to them, Luke writes: "*And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.*" Luke 24:27

And later, after Jesus vanished and they came to realize that the man talking to them was Jesus, Luke records: "*They said to each*

*other, “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?” Luke 5:32*

You know, what ought to make the experience of these two disciples encouraging which caused their hearts to burn within them, was not only that Jesus talked to them while they walked along the road, but that their faith was set on fire while He opened to them the scriptures. And keep in mind that He opened the scriptures to reveal to them that it’s all about Him—it’s all about the wonder and glory of Jesus.

What makes this so encouraging is that we don’t need to be in the physical presence of Jesus to behold Him. If you’ve come to saving faith in Jesus, you have the person and power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in you, and His primary ministry is to make the glory of Christ known to you through His word.

Our faith grows strong not only by reading the word of God but by meditating on it so that we come to know the God of the word. This is why the Psalmist prayed *“Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.”* Psalm 119:18

O how I want to challenge you to make the psalmist’s prayer your prayer too. Like the two disciples who encountered the living Christ, our hearts will burn within us and our faith will be set on fire when we prayerfully read, study, and mediate on the word not just for information, but transformation—a transformation that takes place as we, through the Spirit, hear Christ’s voice and behold His wonder.

And this faith that is focused on the glory of Christ, that tastes and sees the goodness of Christ is a faith that functions. It’s a faith that, among other things, seeks to bring others to Jesus.

### **3. The function of faith is the will of God**

Lastly, true faith that impresses Christ and pleases God is not only fueled by the word of God and is focused on the wonder of God, the function of this faith is the will of God. We read in verse 17 that when



Jesus saw their faith, *“he said, “Man, your sins are forgiven you.”* Luke 5:20

Now the faith of these men compelled them to bring this needy man to Jesus. This is also God’s will for us all. But although their knowledge of Christ and the physical need of the man activated their faith and compelled them to bring him to Jesus for physical healing, Jesus saw a greater spiritual need.

Far, far more than physical healing, this man needed His sins to be forgiven so that He could be reconciled to God and made a part of His kingdom. Again, this is the main purpose for why Jesus came into the world.

In 1 Timothy 1:15-6, the Apostle Paul, who before he encountered Jesus persecuted Christians, wrote: *“The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.”*

It’s important to note here that the paralyzed man who was lowered from the roof by his four friends, no doubt also had faith in Jesus. If he didn’t, he would not have asked them or permitted the four men to do what they did.

Jesus’ granted the paralyzed man forgiveness because He also saw his faith and knew what his greatest need was. As Jesus said in Mark 8:36: *“For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?”*

One commentator put it this way: “Better to limp into heaven than run into hell! Paralysis is nothing compared to eternal separation from God. “Our main need is spiritual forgiveness. So Jesus forgives the man’s sin.” Thabiti Anyabwile

But notice that everything seemed to be going smoothly until Jesus declared the man sins to be forgiven. Luke continues:

*“And the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, saying, ‘Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?’”<sup>22</sup> When Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answered them, ‘Why do you question in your hearts?’<sup>23</sup> Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Rise and walk?’” Luke 5:21-23*

Again, it doesn't appear that anyone had a problem with Jesus' teaching or even the big hole in the roof. But when Jesus started talking about the forgiveness of sins, the religious leaders had a major problem. They didn't say it out loud, but in their hearts they accused Jesus of being a blasphemer. Why? Because in their minds, only God could forgive sins.

Now they were right in believing that only God could forgive sins. But they were wrong to think that Jesus was taking the place of God. He was God!

So, to prove to them that He had the authority of God to forgive sins: *“he said to the man who was paralyzed—‘I say to you, rise, pick up your bed and go home.’”<sup>25</sup> And immediately he rose up before them and picked up what he had been lying on and went home, glorifying God.” Luke 5:24-25*

What was the point of this miracle? The point was not for people to be amazed about the man picking up what he was laying on and walking away on his own two feet, but that Jesus had the power to forgive sins.

But although Jesus' power to forgive sins was the main point and the greater blessing that the paralyzed man received, it doesn't appear that the people got it.

Notice their reaction in verse 26: *“And amazement seized them all, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, ‘We have seen extraordinary things today.’” Luke 5:26*

It's important to note here that although everyone in that packed house were amazed by the miracle that Jesus performed, no one

acknowledged their greater need to also be forgiven. Do you remember that in the beginning of this chapter, after Simon Peter witnessed Jesus perform the miracle of the great catch of fish, Luke recorded: *“But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”* Luke 5:8

Knowing that Peter was a true disciple of Jesus, and that His sacrifice on the cross would atone for Peter’s sins, Jesus assured him not to be afraid. And the point is that the miracle Jesus performed not only amazed Peter but also made him aware that He was a sinner who apart for Christ’s forgiveness, was unworthy to be in His presence.

Let me ask you, do you see Jesus as more than a miracle worker that has the power to give you health and wealth? Have you acknowledged your sinfulness before His holiness and trusted Him as your redeemer and Lord?

Again, not one person in that packed house who witnessed the paralyzed man get instantly healed, which proved that Jesus had power to forgive sins, said, “Lord, I’m also a sinful man. Please forgive my sins, too!”

“They experienced general amazement, and gave general praise to God,” says one commentator, “but they did not worship Jesus or seek forgiveness for their sin. That is amazing and tragic. How often in our day is the gospel preached and sinners will not hear? How often do people say, “We heard a good sermon today,” but no one says, “Forgive me my sins, Lord”? Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. He took on flesh to offer God the righteous obedience we owed. He died in our place as an offering to satisfy the wrath of God against our sin. God raised Him from the grave to prove His sacrifice was accepted. Now God calls men everywhere to repent of their sin and seek His forgiveness by placing their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord. All God requires is that we admit our sin and trust in Jesus. How often do men tragically turn away!” Thabiti Anyabwile

## Conclusion

Beloved, if you have seen Christ for who He is and received by faith the miracle of salvation, you have been forgiven of your sins and reconciled to God—you've come into a real relationship with God almighty.

And from the moment you were reconciled, you have everything you need in Christ to grow strong in faith. How? You grow strong in faith by fueling your faith in the word of God, as you prayerfully seek to behold the wonder of Christ.

What's more, the evidence that you're growing in faith is that your faith functions to do the will of God. Growing faith views the will of God not as a restriction to your life but as an expression of His love. Growing faith seeks God not just to make your earthly life better, but to use you to make the lives of others eternally better.

O may the wonder of Christ's love give us the faith of those four men—a faith that made them true friends, that enabled them to work together to resourcefully find a way to bring sinners to Jesus, even if it costs us.

## Discussion Guide

*Read 1 John 5:4 and Hebrews 11:6.*

- In regards to possessing a faith that pleases God, why is where you place your faith more important than how much faith you have? To put it another way, why is a little faith better than misplaced faith?

*Read Luke 5:17, Luke 4:43, Romans 10:17.*

- Why is the word of God the origin and fuel of our faith?
- How do we read the Bible for transformation and not just information?
- Why is hunger and longing for the word of God evidence of a maturing faith? (See 1 Peter 2:2-3)

*Read Luke 5:18-20.*

- What impressed Jesus about the faith of the four men who carried the paralyzed man?
- What kind of faith brings God's power to the needy?
- Where did the resourceful faith of these men come from? What was the focus of their faith? (see Luke 24:32; Psalm 119:18)

*Read Luke 5:20-26 and James 2:16.*

- Why is faith without works dead?
- What kind of actions demonstrate mature and dynamic faith?
- What is man's greatest need?
- How does Christ's words and actions demonstrate His ability to meet man's greatest need?

Although others in the packed house were amazed by Jesus, they seem to miss the main point that Jesus was making.

- What was the main point and what actions or inactions show that they missed it?
- What should our faith be working for?
- How do you need to put your faith into action so that you can see the power of God and His purpose for your life being fulfilled?