

message TRANSCRIPT



Understanding Faith

by Bayless Conley

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Are you ready for the Word? All right, good. Open your Bible, please to Mark 11. Our theme this month, on the weekends, is Faith. And we're kind of going to be looking at Faith 101, some very, very basic things that Jesus teaches us about faith.

As you know, the Scripture says in the book of Hebrews, that Jesus is both the author and the finisher of our faith. Hebrews 12:2, looking unto Jesus, the author. And the word *finisher* means *the one who develops it and brings it to maturity*. So, Jesus is the source of our faith, and He is the developer of our faith, bringing it to maturity. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we, with anticipation, look to Your Word today. And help us not to overlook the simple, and the profound, while we search for something spectacular. Lord, we know that the simple truth of Your Word when applied, can change our lives, and change the lives of those around us. We pray that something significant would take place in our hearts today. Give us the spirit of wisdom and understanding as we look at Your Book. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Now, as we read this story, we're going to find that Jesus is actually staying in the city of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, in Bethany. They were some of His dearest friends. In fact, they were the singles club of the New Testament; Jesus, Martha, Mary, and Lazarus.

And their home, Bethany, was about a day's journey, half a day's journey from Jerusalem. And this all takes place during the last five to six days of Christ's life. It's just before the final Passover. He spent those final days in and around the home of His friends there in Bethany. But every day He would travel from Bethany and go into Jerusalem, and then in the late afternoon or evening, He would return and go to Bethany.

Hence, we pick up the story in Mark 12:11. It says,

¹¹ And Jesus went into Jerusalem and into the temple. So when He had looked around at all things, as the hour was already late, He went out to Bethany with the twelve. ¹² Now the next day, when they had come out from Bethany, He was hungry. ¹³ And seeing from afar a fig tree having leaves, He went to see if perhaps He would find something on it. When He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs.

Meaning it was not the season to harvest the figs. They always waited till right after Passover. So that was a week, to two weeks out before the actual time where they would harvest the figs. But the Sycamore fig in that land, the leaves, and the fruit always come out at the same time. There should've been fruit on this tree. This is just prior, days if you would, just prior to harvest time. Jesus comes to the tree; there's nothing on it at all.

And look what happens. Mark 12:14,

Understanding Faith

¹⁴ In response Jesus said to it, "Let no one eat fruit from you ever again." And His disciples heard *it*.

So, they came to Jerusalem, and as it goes on, Jesus overturned the tables and the money changers and told them that the Father's house was to be a house of prayer for all nations, and we come, if you would, to Mark 12:19. And it says,

¹⁹ When evening had come, He went out of the city. ²⁰ Now in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. ²¹ And Peter, remembering, said to Him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree which You cursed has withered away."

²² So Jesus answered and said to them, "Have faith in God. ²³ For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says. ²⁴ Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive *them*, and you will have *them*."

²⁵ "And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. ²⁶ But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses."

Now, Jesus speaks to the tree. The disciples sometime later realize it's dried up from the roots, and Christ uses this opportunity to teach them some of the basic principles of faith.

We are going to look at four things. First, we're going to look at something that's absolutely essential when it comes to understanding faith. And then we're going to look at some of the principles of faith. And then we're going to look at faith's great hindrance.

The first thing He teaches us, that essential thing that we have to know going in is that *we must have faith in God*. Verse 22, have faith in God.

Notice Jesus didn't just say, "Have faith." How many ever hear people say, "Well, you just got to have faith." Jesus said, "Have faith in God." You see, it's not just about working a principle, or putting some cosmic law into motion. It's about trusting a person. It's about having faith in an individual; it has to do with relationship. And if we don't know that going in, and we just go to apply these principles, it may as well just be self-help or positive thinking.

No friend, this is about faith in God. And then Jesus teaches us several ways that faith in God is expressed, or it operates. But we have to know going in; it's about relationship with Him. It's not just about having faith. It's not just about applying a principle. And you know, it's very hard to have faith in someone that you don't have a relationship with; someone you don't know well.

I mean, what if Uncle Walter passes away, and you find out; you're contacted by the attorney, said, "Look. Your Uncle Walter left you \$100,000." And they say, "You know, it's kind of odd. He actually had it in cash, in a safe in his house, and his specific instructions were to give you the money in cash." So, the attorneys give you \$100,000 in cash, and you're thinking, "Man, I got to get this in the bank." And so, you get a deposit slip; you write it out, and you think, "Well, I've got some errands to run. I really need to get to the store, and I was going to run by the hardware store, so you know what? Maybe I can find somebody to take this to the bank for me."

Understanding Faith

Are you going to entrust that to a stranger? Say, “Look, I got this cash. This windfall came in. Here’s the deposit slip, and what was your name again? Okay. Would you mind?” How many would do that? No, you wouldn’t. Why? You can’t trust someone that you don’t really know.

It’s about relationship. That is the foundational principle of faith. Have faith in God, in your loving heavenly Father.

You remember in Matthew 17 when the disciples tried to cast the spirit out of that afflicted boy and were unsuccessful? And you know, Jesus had already given them authority over evil spirits. And they were kind of stymied. They didn’t know what was going on. And the father came to Jesus, said, “Look, you know, I asked your disciples. They couldn’t help. Can you do anything?” Jesus cast the evil spirit out of the boy, and then privately, later on, the disciples said, “Why couldn’t we do this?” Jesus’ answer to them was, “Because of your unbelief.” Other translations say, “Because of your lack of faith.” He said, “For if you had faith as a grain of mustard seed, you’d say to this mountain, ‘Move over there,’ and it would move. And nothing would be impossible to you.” However, everyone say, however. “However,” Jesus went on, “This kind doesn’t go out except by prayer and fasting.”

Now, He specifically said, “Listen, this is a faith matter. The reason you were unsuccessful has to do with the littleness of your faith. However, this kind doesn’t go out except by prayer and fasting.” My friend, prayer, and fasting are tools that have been given to us to draw close to God.

That’s the purpose of prayer and fasting. It changes us. It doesn’t change God; it doesn’t change God’s mind; it changes us. They’re tools that we have to draw close to God, to know Him better, to become more intimate with Him. And that has everything in the world to do with the littleness or the greatness of our faith. Have faith in God. Relationship.

And then Jesus begins to teach some of the principles of faith. The next thing He says to us is, or teaches us, is that faith works by saying. He spoke to the tree, and then He said to His disciples in Mark 12:23,

²³ For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, (*representing a problem; a difficulty*), ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says.

One of the ways to exercise faith in God is by realizing the power of our words. Speak to the problem.

Now, many people, rather than speaking to their mountain, they ask God to speak to the mountain for them. Or they talk to God and anyone who will listen, about how big their mountain is. They go on and on, and on about the largeness of their mountain. And I think it’s fine if you want to talk to God about how big your mountain is, but when you’re done talking to God about how big your mountain is, you need to turn around and talk to your mountain about how big your God is. Jesus said, “Speak.” You speak. I speak to the mountain. You speak directly to the difficulty. He has given us authority.

We take our cue from Jesus who spoke to the tree. Now, it’s an interesting story. Here they are in Bethany, they’re on their way to Jerusalem, and the Scripture says, “afar off,” Jesus sees this

Understanding Faith

lone Sycamore tree. So, He walks way over, checks through the leaves, there's nothing there. Jesus talks to the tree, and He does it so loudly the disciples hear Him.

Now, imagine the disciples, "I knew we should've got breakfast. There He goes." And all of a sudden Jesus is cursing the tree, really loud. Jesus is shouting at the tree. They're looking at Jesus, looking at each other, looking at Jesus, looking at the tree, looking at Jesus, and here He's walking back to the pathway to go to Jerusalem. And I'm sure they're looking at Jesus, looking at the tree, looking at each other thinking, "What's going on? He's talking to trees now." So, they go into Jerusalem, maybe glance back, look at the tree, and it's there; all green leaves. "I'm just fine, boys. Don't worry about me. Nothing happened."

They go to Jerusalem; they leave in the afternoon. They walk back the same road to Bethany. They pass the tree. If there would've been a change, they would've noticed, but here it is, all with its green leaves. "Here I am, boys. That was a pretty fruitless conversation. Nothing happened when Jesus spoke. Everything's just the same. I'm doing fine."

They go stay in Bethany. The next morning, 24 hours later as they're walking on the pathway back, Peter notices the tree is dried up from the roots. And he exclaims, "Master, Rabbi. The tree you cursed, it's withered away." There was no physical evidence that anything had occurred, that anything had happened for 24 hours.

And did you notice Jesus wasn't all caught up with the tree? I don't think He ever looked at it, from the first time He spoke to it. He considered it a done deal. I'm sure the disciples looked at it, you know, when they went back by that evening. And the next day, first thing they wanted to do was look at that tree. This is what I don't think Jesus was doing. After He spoke to the tree, I don't think He was walking away saying, "I hope this works. I believe, I believe, I believe, I believe, I believe, I believe, I believe, I believe, I believe, I believe." No, He just considered it a done deal, and He went about His business in the temple, in Jerusalem and then walked back to His friend's house.

It didn't matter to Him what things looked like if there had been any outward change. And there had been no outward change. It started in an unseen realm and then worked its way into the seen realm; started in the roots. Worked its way to where it could be physically touched and felt. And there's such a lesson of faith there for us all.

There was a man in church; I loved Brother Mitchell. One day after service, this is many years ago, he said, "Pastor, I want you to pray for me. I just got back from the doctor. They found that I have cancer." I said, "Really?" He says, "Yeah, but it's serious." I said, "Okay. Let's pray." I remember he and I; it was at the old Sausalito campus, we're standing up in front of the platform, it would've been like right here. And he closed his eyes, and we're praying, and I just ... this story came to my mind as I was praying with him. And so, I just spoke to the cancer the same way Jesus spoke to the tree. Just felt lead that I was supposed to do that.

Anyway, Brother Mitchell and I both lifted our hands and worshiped God for about two or three minutes. We're done, he said, "Thanks, pastor." Gave me a hug. And then I saw him occasionally over the next few weeks in services but didn't have a chance to talk to him.

A month later, I finally got the chance. I said, "Brother Mitchell." I said, "How are you doing?" He says, "Well, I'm good pastor." I said, "Well, you know, with that issue we prayed about." He says, "Oh." He said, "You know after we prayed, and you spoke, I just sort of forgot about it." He

Understanding Faith

said, “And I was at the doctor a couple days ago, and they couldn’t find the cancer anywhere. It’s gone.”

And I remember when he said, “I just sort of forgot about it.” I remember my jaw dropping open and saying, “You just found out you had cancer, and you just sort of forgot about it?” But then I realized it was a mature expression of faith.

Once we prayed, once the Word was spoken in authority, he just considered it as done. He didn’t become occupied with it. He just believed that God had heard, and in simple faith acted upon the words of Jesus, and it wasn’t about us, it’s about faith in God.

You see, God is the one that brings things to pass when we speak to the mountain. God’s the one that brings things to pass when we’re praying, and we believe we receive. It’s about faith in Him.

Jesus is teaching us these are ways that we express our faith in God, who is the one that actually brings about the desired result. It’s not just some mindless principle or force working out there somewhere, my friend. It’s our loving, heavenly Father.

So, faith does work by saying. And you know, I think most Christians probably have more trouble with the saying part than they do with the believing part. Jesus said, “Whoever of you says to this mountain, “Be removed, cast in the sea, whatever, and doesn’t doubt in his heart ...” The word *doubt* in the Greek language is *diakrino*. It literally means to differ.

So, Jesus said, “If you say something with your mouth, and your heart is saying the same thing, then you’ll have what you say.” If your heart and your lips agree, that’s so important.

Think of the verses from Romans 10:8–10. Begins this way,

⁸ But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith which we preach).

So, the word of faith needs to be two places. In your mouth, and where? In your heart. He goes on and says,

⁹ that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto (or *resulting in*) salvation.

The heart and the lips have to get together. And if you think about it, the Scripture declares that is how we’re saved. The most important, the most significant thing that can ever happen in a human being’s life; tainted by sin; on your way to an eternity without Christ, without God, and then you believe in your heart, and you confess with your mouth.

When heart and lips say the same thing, suddenly the Holy Spirit comes in and changes you. You’re born again; you change your eternal destination from hell to heaven. Everything about you inside changes: the nature of sin is taken out; the greatest miracle that can ever take place when heart and lips get together.

Understanding Faith

Why must we believe it's such a difficult thing that some temporal circumstance can change when we apply the same principle of faith in God? It's with our heart that we believe, but with our words and our actions, we either confirm, or we tear apart our faith. Heart and lips need to get together.

And then the third principle, or the third thing, the next principle Jesus shares with us, is that faith also works by praying. It works by saying, but faith in God works by praying. Mark 11:24,

²⁴ Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive *them*, and you will have *them*.

All right, whatever you ask for, when you pray, believe. Now, what is it Jesus said we're to believe? Believe that you receive them. When? When you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them. The having it part, that's up to God. The receiving it part, that's what we must do. When I pray, not when the situation looks different, not when my feelings change, not with some outward confirmation, but when I pray, believe that I receive it, and God says He'll make sure that I have it.

I like the Amplified Bible. It says this, "Believe that it has been granted to you, and you will get it." You have to believe that God has dispatched the answer and said yes to your request when you pray. Interesting.

You know, I was golfing in a golf tournament, somebody had called up the house, and said, "Bayless, my wife and I, we were going to this fundraiser thing. We've already paid for it at Pebble Beach. There are three nights in the hotel; there are two days of golf at Pebble, and at Spanish Bay. It's all paid for. The meals are all paid for, but we just found out we can't go. Would you like to go in our place? It won't cost you anything." I said, "Let me pray about it. Okay." Yeah.

So, we went, and I got hooked up with a guy I had never played with him before. And in our flight, we actually ended up second. And we got done with the round that day, found out we ended up second, and they said, "Well look, you can either have a brand new driver, or a fairway wood." I said, "Well, you know what? I kind of need a five wood." They said, "Okay, but you know, we don't have any more five woods. Give us your address, we'll send it to you." I said, "Okay." Shook hands and said, "Thank you."

All right. As far as I was concerned, it was a done deal. That was my five wood. If you asked me if I had a five wood, I'd say, "Yeah, I do." Where is it? I can't see it yet, but I have it. I've got it in its unseen form. Just like that fig tree. You know, when Jesus cursed it, it started in the roots in this realm that you couldn't see. That's where the effect began, and then it worked its way into the seen realm.

We must receive our answers in the unseen realm before we can ever have them in the seen realm.

If you think about this, Hebrews 11:1. "Now, faith is the substance of things hoped for; it's the evidence of things not seen." Faith is the evidence of things not seen. The Amplified Bible says, "Faith is the title deed." Its conviction of the reality of the things we don't see. Things that can't be perceived with the senses.

Understanding Faith

You know, someone years ago actually, gave the church a piece of property. We were thrilled. They said, "Look, God's put it on our hearts to give this to you." They gave us the title deed to a piece of property. We'd never seen the property, we'd never walked on the property, but it was ours. We had the title deed.

Faith is the title deed. When I pray, I believe that I receive. I believe God's granted it to me, and I can hold up the promise and say, "I have the title deed." Somebody says, "Well, where is it? Do you feel differently?" I'm not talking about how I feel; I'm not talking about how things look. I'm talking about faith. Faith is the evidence of things not seen. Now, when the thing arrives, I don't need faith for it anymore. Faith only deals with unseen realities.

When I don't see it, when I can't feel it, when everything is contradictory, faith in God is my evidence. Faith in His promise. Faith in His Word is my evidence.

So, I'm not saying that I feel different, I'm not saying the situation looks any differently. I'm just saying I have the title deed. I've received it in its unseen realm. I believe it has been granted to me.

I have a friend. He suffered for years with a terrible skin condition. He was literally in agony every day. He did everything medically he could do, he went to the doctors, had all sorts of special creams that they had prescribed. And he got all that stuff, applied it; didn't help at all. He prayed and prayed and prayed for years. Never got any relief. He was in agony every day.

And one day, and he actually told the story to me and a couple other guys. He was in a meeting, and somebody was preaching from Mark 11, and specifically about verse 24. Whatever you ask for when you pray, when you pray, when you pray, when you pray, believe that you receive it. Believe it's been granted to you, and you'll get it. He said, "You know, I'd always been practicing that, but I practiced it in reverse. I was going to believe it when I got it. I was always saying, 'God, when? When, when, when are you going to do it? When are you going to do it? God, I'm waiting, I'm waiting, when are you going to do it?'"

"And God was waiting all the time for me to receive it. And to thank Him for it; to receive it in its unseen realm. To actually exercise faith, the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." He said, "It was just like a lightning flash. I realize I was waiting until I could feel it, and see it before I believed it. But God wanted me to believe it before I could see it before I could feel it." He said, "I changed at that moment." He said, "God, I repent of my unbelief, and I ask You again, to take care of this skin condition, in Jesus name, I believe You dispatched the answer, and You hear my prayer now. Thank You."

And then he said, "I spent a few minutes lifting my hands and worshiping God, and thanking Him that I had it by faith." He said within a couple of days, the condition completely cleared up. Now listen, he had that condition for 10 ... he had prayed for 10 years, waiting and waiting. But when he received it, when he exercised faith, and again, this is about Jesus said to have faith in God. Here's how it works.

Just like Jesus spoke to the tree, nothing physically changed at all. 24 hours later. But it began immediately in an unseen realm, even though it couldn't be detected, it couldn't be felt, and the tree might've been just waving its little leaves, saying, "Ha, ha, ha, didn't work, not going to work. I haven't changed. Not going to change." And maybe that's what your circumstance is doing to you right now, "Hey, you've been this way for years, not going to change, nothing's

Understanding Faith

going to change, look at me, look at me, be occupied with me.” No friend be occupied with God. Be occupied with His promise. And spend some time thanking Him.

Now, that brings us to actually the great hindrance of faith, and that is not forgiving. Jesus went on to say, “And whenever you stand, praying...” That is when you’re believing that you receive when you pray. “...if you have anything against anyone, forgive him. Forgive her.”

I was reading something that a minister had written years ago. When he was a 10-year-old boy, he found a cigar. And he went into a nearby alley, lit the cigar up. He was only 10 but felt like a big shot. He said it was awful, but he was smoking this big cigar in the alley. And then sort of a shadowed figure entered one end of the alley, and he’s looking. All of a sudden, his father sort of coalesced. And he went, “Oh no.” Puts his cigar behind his back, terrified daddy’s coming, going to catch him with a cigar, and he’s desperate. And he looks on the wall of the alley, and there’s a poster that’s been pasted up there about the circus coming. He says, “Dad, look. The circus is coming to town. Dad, can we go to the circus? Will you take me to the circus?” And he said, “I learned a life lesson that day.” He said, “My father looked at me and very calmly but very sternly, said, ‘Son, never make a petition while at the same time you’re trying to hide a smoldering disobedience.’” My friend, we must forgive if we want to see our prayers answered.

And not like the old guy, Bill. His faith, his health is broken down, he’s in hospital. And the doctor says, “Look, you’ve got a 50-50 chance this might not go your way, so my suggestion, we’re going to do all we can. See if the medications we prescribe are going to kick in, but you maybe need to think about getting your house in order.” So, he talked to his family, and something was really bothering him. Bill and a friend of his named Tom had fallen out some years before, gotten mad at each other. So, he rings Tom up on the phone, says, “Tom, could you come to the hospital and see me? I have to talk to you.” Tom said, “Sure.” So, Tom comes to the hospital; Bill says, “You know, that issue we had a few years ago? I just want you to know I’m sorry, and I want you to forgive me. And I forgive you.” And Tom said, “Of course.” And so, they shook hands and talked for a few minutes. And so, Tom starts leaving the hospital room, and as he’s going out the door, Bill said, “Hey, if I get better, none of this counts.” That’s not the kind of forgiveness we issue.

In fact, the Greek word *forgive*; the word used in these verses forgive, and throughout the New Testament, literally in the Greek language means *to release and to send away*. It doesn’t mean to keep close to you so you can pick it up again.

You know, we have the old term well, let’s bury the hatchet. Some people bury the hatchet, but they leave the handle sticking out for immediate use. No, you send it away. You release it, and you send it away.

I think that unforgiveness is the single greatest hindrance to faith that there is. And I think we would see some astonishing things happen in our prayer life and in our spiritual growth if we’d clean house and get rid of all bitterness. And unforgiveness.

Chuck Dean, who is the international director of *Point Man International*, it’s a ministry to Vietnam vets, tells the story how years ago, when Chuck, being a vet himself, was in a meeting teaching an anger management class to 200 Vietnam vets. These guys were there because they were all having issues, having a difficult time, kind of, getting back into society, and just leftover issues from what they’d experience in Vietnam. And as he’s talking about anger management, Chuck said, “I did the unthinkable.” He said, “I mentioned a particular person.”

Understanding Faith

And those of you that are my age, you will remember this well. You know, we lost just under sixty-thousand young men in the Vietnam War. They sacrificed their lives. And there was a particular Hollywood personality that became the poster child spokesperson against the war. But they went so far out of bounds that many people feel, even to this day, that they absolutely betrayed the country. Didn't just speak against the war, but specifically spoke against our troops, and did some other things that were just outrageous. It not only dishonored those that had given their lives and those that had sacrificed, and fought. But it actually undermined certain things in this country.

So, he brings this person up, and he says to these vets there, "You need to forgive this person." He said people began to shuffle. Some of them started looking for the doors. He said, "Some of them looked at me like they were going to take me outside and beat me up right now." And then he said, "Let me tell you my story." He says, "I was angry and bitter at this person, just like you." He said, "And God began to deal with me." He said, "That my bitterness had affected my relationship with Him. That it affected my relationship with God in a very negative way." He said, "And, I had tied myself to this person in a very unhealthy manner, and as long as I hadn't forgiven them, I'd tied myself to them." He says, "Frankly, I didn't want to be tied to that person. So I chose to forgive them." And he says, "And I experienced great liberty."

And he asked the crowd, "How many of you no longer want to be tied to this person?" He said every hand in the house shot up. And he led them in a prayer of forgiveness. And as he was finishing the prayers, he heard the crash bars on the back door go, and he looked up. And there was a big Marine going out in his wheelchair. It was a guy named Rob. He'd only been saved for I think maybe a month. A big sort of a hard-charging Marine until he'd gotten a bullet in the spine. And he'd been confined to the wheelchair, hadn't walked for 20 years because of his wound that he'd received in Vietnam.

And Chuck thought, "Well, he's either going out to get a gun to come back and shoot me, or he just is so disgusted with what I presented he just couldn't take it. Nothing I can do about it." So, the meeting went on another half hour, 45 minutes, and then Chuck said, "I stayed afterward for about an hour, talking to guys. I'm talking to a couple of the vets in the hallway, and all of a sudden those same doors open up, and Rob came in." Said, "But he came in without his wheelchair. He walked in, under his own power and came up to us. We ran up and said, "Rob, what happened? What happened?" he said, "Well, you know, I realized that I was bitter in my heart towards that person, and I prayed that prayer." He says, "And when I did, I got this tingling feeling in my legs, and it scared me. So I went out to the VA hospital. I left and went to the VA hospital, and they poked around and realized all the feeling had come back." He said, "I stood up out of my wheelchair, and I left it at the hospital, and I came straight back here."

And it was interesting. Chuck, had Rob share his testimony in many places and many times, and he said a number of times, he had to remind Rob to share the part about his healing. Because in his mind, it was minor. He said, "The main thing that happened is my faith in God, my relationship with God skyrocketed as something stupendous, something significant happened to me when I released that bitterness." And he said, "The healing was just sort of a by-product of that."

My friend, forgiveness is the way to go. And that's not saying that the pain you or I experience is not real. That is not somehow denying the agony you went through or saying that it was a little thing. And I know there's some here, the very people that should have been your protectors were your violators. Some people have had some unspeakable things happen. Some of those

Understanding Faith

that have been closest to you, you trusted the most, betrayed you. I know wounds can go very, very deep. But the grace of God goes deeper.

The love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, and we can if we choose to, release those that have trespassed against us. Now, that doesn't mean we trust them. Trust always has to be earned. There's a difference between trust and forgiveness. Forgiveness is a free gift that's given. Otherwise, it's not forgiveness. If it has to be earned, it's not a gift. Forgiveness is given freely. Trust always must be earned. Listen, for our benefit; we need to forgive.

So, Jesus teaches us to have faith in God. And then faith in God works by saying; when our heart and lips agree. Faith in God works by praying; believing that we receive and that God has granted it to us when we pray. And then when we stand praying, we need to forgive.

And you know, just sort of circling back for a moment, that word *forgive*, that Greek word that literally means to release and send away, it's reminiscent of one of the types and shadows in the Old Testament. There's this thing in the Bible called a scapegoat. That's where we get the word in our culture from. It comes right out of the Bible. And under the old covenant, the high priest would have a goat, and they called it the scapegoat, and he would lay his hands on the goat's head, and symbolically pronounce the sin of the nation on the head of this goat, and then the goat would be taken away into a land not inhabited, and released.

And it's a picture showing what Christ did for us as He hung upon Calvary's tree. He became our substitute, and in essence, the Father laid His hands on Jesus, and He pronounced my sins on the head of Jesus. He pronounced our will for rebellion, everything we've done wrong, said wrong, thought wrong, been wrong, was placed on Jesus. And Jesus took that sin away as far as the East is from the West, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.

We began with having faith in God. It's about relationship. John 17:3. Jesus said, "This is eternal life. That they might know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."

At the core of Christianity is relationship. It's about us knowing God, walking and talking with God, and with His Son Jesus Christ. And listen, there's nobody in the house, no matter what you've done, that you shouldn't have done, no matter what you didn't do that you should've done, that you promised to do that you failed to do. There's nothing that would make God turn you away if you chose to come to Him today. You can have a fresh start, my friend. This is a do-over in life. It's so radical, the apostle Paul called it becoming a new creation. It's so radical Jesus called it becoming born again. Salvation, works from the inside, out. Jesus has already paid for our sin. It's a matter of us, by faith, accepting His sacrifice and inviting Him into our lives.

Won't you bow your heads, close your eyes, just for a moment. I want to lead you in a simple prayer today.

You may have come with a family member, may have come with a friend. You may have been coming here for a while or frequenting different locations, different churches, maybe different things, looking for answers, but you're here today. I think there's a reason for that.

Understanding Faith

There's a God in heaven who sees the hunger in your heart, and He's brought you here today to this moment, to this time. I speak on His behalf, as His ambassador, if you would. Will you not open your heart to Christ today? This is so important; you don't want to put it off, my friend.

And to the prodigal sons and prodigal daughters in here, the ones that you've had an encounter with Jesus, genuine, you wouldn't deny that He's real, you know He's real. But you've slipped back into your old ways. Maybe you started hanging around with your old crew, and you've picked up some of those old patterns of life again, and your heart has gotten cold toward God. Maybe you let bitterness, as we talked about today, sort of become a wedge between you and God, and the thing is, there's no such thing as being static, or staying in one place in our relationship with God. If we're not moving forward, we are sliding back.

And if you're here today, and you're a backslider, I mean, you realize you're in the danger zone. You're like a prodigal son, a prodigal daughter whose heart is in a far country. I just want to encourage you. It's time to come home. God's not mad at you.

Why don't we lift our hearts together. If it helps, maybe put a hand on your heart.

I want to lead you in a prayer. Let's tie our heart around these words, and if you're watching anywhere across the country, anywhere in the world right now, why don't you pray with us. God is there with you in that hotel room. He's there with you in your living room, your kitchen. If you're watching in a pub right now, friend, God is there. Won't you be bold and do this. You know you need to. Let's pray. Just say,

Oh, God, I come to You. Thank You so much for sending Your Son Jesus. I believe that He lived a sinless life, but then He was sacrificed for my sins. Jesus, thank You for loving me so much that You would die in my place and bear the penalty for my sin. I believe You have been raised from the dead. And I ask You now come into my life. Be my Lord and my Savior. It's in Your name, I pray. Amen. Awesome.

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