

Good Morning His Place! I'm Matthew Tanksley, one of the deacons here. Pastors Joe and Chris are up the mountain on the Men's Retreat this weekend, so I get the **honor of teaching here today**. I was up there on the mountain with them Friday night and got to teach the Men yesterday morning, and I have to say **God is doing some pretty amazing work in our Men right now**. How many have husbands or significant others up on the mountain right now? That's awesome. For the ladies in the house today, how many are going to the Heart Posture conference later this month? Our Women's Ministry team has been pouring into this event, and it's their hope that our sisters here at His Place will **desire to get to know our God more intimately** and to **fall in love with Jesus**, and this conference will feed that desire. If you haven't registered yet, then make sure you do before **June 6th** to take advantage of the early registration pricing of only \$40. Let's open in prayer.

Today, I want to talk with you about **Faith that Withstands the Fire**. I'm going to talk a bit about **what Faith is**, and **what it is not**. I'll also talk about what Faith **looks like**, and **how to build it** and **what it produces**. Lastly, we'll talk about **what this Fire is**, and how it **tests or proves our faith**. Are you ready? Buckle up, because we have a lot of scripture to look at.

How do you define faith? Most people use the term "Faith" quite loosely to mean either "**unfounded belief**" or "**blind trust**". Neither of these, I believe, do the word proper justice. The Oxford dictionary defines "Faith" as either

1. **complete trust or confidence in someone or something, or**
2. **strong belief in God or in the doctrines of a religion**

I prefer to think of "Faith" in terms based on the way we use the word in phrases like "**having faith**" or "**being faithful**". After all, what good is a mere definition? Let's look at how it plays out in reality. What's real about faith? What good is it to know what a word means if you don't use it or see it in action. With that said, I like to think of "Faith" as this definition from Pastor and Author Dr. Larry Osborne:

"Faith is trusting God enough to do what he says"

You see, "Faith" is an action word. Because you have your Bibles, let's look at how the Bible describes "Faith". Let's all flip in our Bibles to the book of Hebrews, and then go to Chapter 11. While you're turning, I'll give a **quick setup for the book of Hebrews**. The book of Hebrews was written as a transcribed sermon, and if read out loud it takes about 45 minutes to get through. We don't actually know for sure who the author of Hebrews was; Many people assume it was Paul because he wrote so much of the New Testament, but others like to think it was another Apostle, like Apollos or Barnabas. However, the **main point of the book** is to show that **Jesus is greater**, or superior to mere religion, specifically using the example of Judaism. The book of Hebrews makes the case that there is **no longer any need to rely on the old forms of sacrifice for redemption**, as Jesus was the perfect sacrifice, the perfect mediator, and the **perfect representation of God in human flesh**. As with most of the New Testament, I highly recommend reading it straight through, and as much as possible, try to ignore the chapter and verse markings and section headers. Try to read it, or have it read to you by your Bible app, so that you get it all together. Ok, are we all there in Hebrews 11? Let's read verse 1, but I want to get a few different takes on it. First we'll look at the NIV, which is usually what I teach from, and it's the version I grew up with:

Hebrews 11:1 (NIV)

“Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.”

Next, let's look at the ESV, which Pastor Chris preaches out of:

Hebrews 11:1 (ESV)

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

Pastor Joe has been favoring the NLT for the last few years, let's give it a look:

Hebrews 11:1 (NLT)

“Faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see.”

Last and certainly not least, is the NKJV which Pastor Daniel prefers:

Hebrews 11:1 (NKJV)

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen”.

There's really only two words different in each of these translations, but I would say that each of them are trustworthy and reliable. Those words are translated as the **“Substance/Confidence/Reality/Assurance”** of something hoped for, and the **“Evidence/Assurance/Conviction”** of what we can't see. If we look at that first word in the Greek, the word being used is Hypostasis, and as it turns out each of those words, **Substance, Confidence, Reality, and Assurance**, are each great translations for it. The etymology of the word derives its meaning from **“to stand under”** something. You see, it's the **fundamental nature or substance** of a thing, the **underlying reality or being** of a thing. The next word(**el'-eng-khos**) means the **proof or test of something's actual reality**. So we see here from this verse, that Faith can be defined both as **the thing that makes something what it is**, and also **that which proves what it is**.

This whole chapter, and the one right after it, are actually a great primer on what Faith is, and it gives examples of people who lived by faith. Meaning they both **had Faith, AND were Faithful**.

Another way that I like to describe Faith to people is through the use of a picture, or analogy, of a **small child standing beside a pool with their floaties on**. The child's parent is in the pool **calling them to jump in**, and saying "I'll catch you". The child may fret over the action for some time, **afraid that falling in the pool when not knowing how to swim, they will drown**. They've been in the water before, they've gone under and been unable to breathe. Their **knowledge has them convinced** that falling in the pool is a **BAD idea**. Yet their parent continues to beckon them to jump, and **assures them** that they will be caught, and they will be fine. They know their parent, they have **knowledge of their trustworthiness**. Their parent **protected them** from walking into the street when the cars were coming. They **fed them** when they were hungry, **soothed them** when they had booboos, and gave them **love and comfort** every day. They have two competing ideas in their head, **fear of the water** and **trust in their parent**.

Faith is when they act on their trust

..and make the jump.

Faith is not trust, but it is built on it. Faith is the product of that trust, and it is **proof that the unseen thing (the trust)** even exists. Let's look now at the second chapter of the letter, or epistle, from James. **Who knows who James is?** There are actually a few James' mentioned in the New Testament, including **two different apostles** and **one of Jesus' brothers**. This letter was written by the one that was a **younger half-brother to Jesus**. So, a little backstory here while we all turn in our Bibles to James. As I said, James was one of Jesus's younger brothers, and we read about this family in a few of the stories in the Gospels. One story, which can be found in **Mark chapter 3**, starts with **Jesus teaching in a home** in the region of the Galilee, one of the many Jewish villages near that lake. In this story, **Jesus's Mother and brothers** come to collect him because, as they put it "**he was out of his mind**". In another story, this one found only in the Gospel of **John, chapter 7**, tells of his brother ridiculing him because "**even his own brothers did not believe in him**". So, it was one of these very brothers who had **previously doubted him** that ended up being a **pastor of the church at Jerusalem**, and **wrote this letter**, which is also **likely to be the first book written in the New Testament**. Ok, are we all there?

James 2:14-26 (NIV)

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds."

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.

In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

So, James tells us that "Faith", if it is **separated from subsequent action**, is **dead**. Based on our previous definition, and example this makes perfect sense. If you "**have faith**" it means that you **trust enough in something to do something about it**. Your **actions will prove the "Faith" that you have**. James' point is that if you claim to "have faith", but **don't show it by your actions, you're a liar**. In fact, the Apostle John writes the same exact thing in 1 John chapter 2, where he says very simply:

1 John 2:4 (NIV)

Whoever says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person.

By contrast, we can also see in the Gospel of Mark, Chapter 2, the story of paralyzed man being carried by his friends and lowered into Jesus' presence in the hope that he would be healed. This is one of my favorite pictures of Faith in the Bible. These four friends had no doubt heard many stories about Jesus. Stories of how he had healed the sick and the leper, cast out demons, etc. These stories gave them hope, hope that they trusted in and acted upon. That hope and trust then produced an act of Faith. They climbed up on the roof, dug a hole in it, and lowered the man right in front of Jesus. This is the best part, in verse 5:

Mark 2:5

When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

...when Jesus "**saw**" their faith, it was **His power** that brought about the miracle of the man's healing.

We often use the term "**Blind Faith**" to refer to someone's actions that are **not based on a supportable hope** or trust. **This is not the kind of Faith that God requires of us.** In contrast, the evidence, whether laid out in History as recorded in the Bible, or provided by **witnesses that we know** of his faithfulness can help us to build our trust. But what is it that **we** do with that trust? **Do we act in faith or not? If our trust does not produce actions, then we have no faith.**

So how much faith do we need? In the gospels, Jesus' disciples often **ask Him to increase their faith** or ask how much faith is required. Jesus' answer is actually meant to **relieve their concerns** by assuring them that only a **small amount of faith is necessary for big things to happen.** He does not want to shame them for not having enough faith, but instead he points out that only a small amount of obedience(**an action driven by trust**) is necessary, because it's not the faith/obedience that does the great thing; **it is the power of God that will accomplish the result!**

Think of it this way, if I walk into this room in the middle of the night, **how much action is required** by me to illuminate the whole room? **Very little.** The only thing required of me is to simply **flip that light switch right by the door.** The light is created by the power that the electricity provides, coursing through the lamp fixtures, and all made possible by the effort that was put in previously to get them all hooked up. **How much faith do I need? Very little.** When Jesus tells us in **Luke 17** that if we had "**faith even as small as a mustard seed**", we could command a mulberry tree to "**be uprooted and be planted in the sea**" and it would. The point was to **comfort them** that a small amount of faith is enough, **despite the fact that they still had so little faith.**

Let's look at another example from the **Gospel of Mark**, in **chapter 4**, and get a glimpse of just who we have Faith in. Jesus had just taught a large crowd from a boat just off the shore, and taught the parable of the sower, casting seed on to the different soils. Later, when he was alone with his 12 Apostles, he would explain his parable. It's a great parable about faithful obedience, and that we will be blessed based on our obedience rather than the outcome. You can go check it out on your own time, what I'm getting at happens next.

Mark 4:35-41 (NIV)

That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"

He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

When the storm arises, the **faith of Jesus is seen in his action** to sleep on a cushion in the bow of the boat. The **faith of the disciples, or lack thereof, is seen in their exclamation** "Do you even care if we drown?" **Jesus' response here is key.** The first thing he does is to stand up and silence the waves **to ease their fears.** He **accommodates their lack of faith**, then asks them to evaluate why it is that **their experience so far still hasn't produced any faith.** It's important to note here that Jesus, and by extension God, **never asks a question because he doesn't know the answer.** If he is asking us a question, it's because **he wants us to know something.** In this case, he's pointing out to the disciples **that they should have some faith in Him at this point.** As documented in the first four chapters of Mark, they've already seen him **heal many, many people, cast out demons, and teach about the Kingdom of God.** They've been **gaining knowledge** and experience to **build trust upon.** Now, when they see **Jesus calm in the boat** in the **middle of a crisis**, what is their response? **To accuse him of not even caring about them.** They may not have had trust that he could calm the storm, but took his nonchalance about the storm as a **lack of feeling or concern for their well being.** They just wanted him to **join them in their fear** and work to protect themselves from the **all-powerful storm** like they were doing. In contrast, Jesus' response is to **do the unthinkable**, and in so doing he shows that it was **not a lack of concern** for their well being, but instead a **lack of fear** of the **weak and impotent storm.** He has faith, yes, but it is His power that saves the day. Through the exercise of His Power, the disciples learn that they were **wrong** in assuming he didn't care, and **wrong** in thinking that it was their power that would protect them. Just like the child by the pool.

Let's look at another example of great Faith, this time from the Old Testament. In the **book of Daniel**, we meet **four Hebrew friends** who are captured out of Israel, and taken to Babylon where they were forced to take on new names, study the Babylonian religions, learn Astrology, and work in royal service to their king Nebuchadnezzar. While there, in **chapter 3**, we have a story of **three of these friends**, as they are asked to **bow down and worship a golden statue** by that king. They **refused**, even though the penalty was to be **thrown into a blazing furnace.** We pick up the story in verse 16 as King Nebuchadnezzar gives them a second chance to do as he commands:

Daniel 3:16-29 (NIV)

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, "King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. The king's command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.

Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, "Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?"

They replied, "Certainly, Your Majesty."

He said, "Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods."

Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!"

So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire, and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them.

Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way."

Now that's **Faith that Withstands the Fire!** They show their faith by their actions and trust that **God is able to save** them, but "**even if he doesn't**" their faith remains resolved: they will ***never*** worship Nebuchadnezzar or his gods. **God honors that faith, and is able to sustain and preserve them in the fire.**

Paul describes this kind of Faith, when writing to the Church that he planted in the city of Corinth. You see, after he had planted that Church, another preacher by the name of Apollos came to town, and continued the good work that Paul had started. If that name sounds familiar, it may be because I mentioned him earlier as a possible author for the book of Hebrews. Apollos was a well respected preacher, who was a Jew raised in Alexandria, Egypt and was very well educated. So, after Apollos came to Corinth, some of the Corinthians started dividing and taking sides, jealously quarreling about which preacher was better. Paul wanted nothing to do with such childish squabbles, and let them hear about it in his letter. So Paul explains that both he and Apollos were merely obedient servants to the same Holy Spirit, and it is the Spirit of God that provides the power to both of their ministries. Paul's work laid a foundation, and Apollos was building on that foundation. Neither of them is superior to the other, but it is the Spirit that does the actual work which proves the validity of their efforts. Let's pick up the the dialog in verse 12:

1 Corinthians 3:12-15 (NIV)

If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.

You see, God puts us, and our work through tests of fire, to prove what they're made of. Is our faith strong enough to survive? Like Daniel's friends in the furnace? Is it real? Or like the disciples in the boat, do we still have no faith? Remember Jesus' brother James? He has more to teach us about our faith, and the testing of it.

James 1:2-4 (NIV)

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

Remember how I said earlier that God never asks a question because he wants to learn something? In this case, God is testing our faith, but not because he needs to know how faithful we are. He wants *us to know*. James is teaching us that the **testing is actually producing perseverance**. And just a few verses later, he tells us the reward that Paul was talking about...

James 1:12 (NIV)

Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.

So how do these fiery tests produce such perseverance? The Holy Fire of God is both a **Consuming Fire** and a **Refining Fire**.

Isaiah 48:9-11 (NIV)

*For my own name's sake I delay my wrath;
for the sake of my praise I hold it back from you,
so as not to destroy you completely.
See, I have refined you, though not as silver;
I have tested you in the furnace of affliction.
For my own sake, for my own sake, I do this.
How can I let myself be defamed?
I will not yield my glory to another.*

The Lord God had **claimed us as his own**, and **deposited His Holy Spirit in our hearts**, He is **in covenant** with us and He has **linked His Name** to us. **We are His children, His people, and He is our God**. This High Voltage God consumes and incinerates on contact all impurities, unrighteousness, and all manner of evil. **Woe to us, if that's all we are made of**. Hallelujah! He holds back, so as not to **destroy us completely**. His purpose is to **refine us, as painful as it may be**. **The Lord disciplines those He loves**. Let's look again at that sermon to the **Hebrews chapter 12**, where that author will quote from **Proverbs chapter 3**:

Hebrews 12:5-7 (NIV)

And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says,

*"My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline,
and do not lose heart when he rebukes you,
because the Lord disciplines the one he loves,
and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son."*

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father?

The author of Hebrews goes on to close out that chapter saying that the day is coming when God will shake the Heavens and the Earth, and that only "**unshakable things will remain**" and that we are "**receiving a Kingdom that is unshakable..For our God is a consuming fire**".

In fact, when John the Baptist was questioned about if he was the Messiah, he answered them by explaining how the one coming after him had a different baptism. Wait a sec, **what does baptism have to do with this?** Well, the word baptize means to **submerge in something that causes change**. For example, the word was often used to describe **washing**, both ceremonial and hygienic. It's also used in non-biblical writings like a **recipe for making pickles**. You see you baptize cucumbers in a brine, and the **cucumber changes to become a pickle**. Let's see how John describes how these two baptisms make such a difference.

Matthew 3:11-12

“I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

John baptizes with water, which brings about repentance, but this is only symbolic, the real change comes when Jesus baptizes with the **Holy Fire**, which is an unquenchable fire that burns up the chaff. As we pass through that fire, it burns up all our sin, dross, and impurities. All of the fruits of our flesh. It purifies us through the process of sanctification. What it leaves behind, the fruits of the Spirit(**love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control**), we work out in obedience, with fear and trembling, so that God’s work **may be complete**.

Philippians 2:12-16 (NIV)

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, “children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.” Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain.

In closing, we’ve explored what Faith looks like(**trust in action**), and how to build it(**obedience**) and what it produces(**good deeds**). Next, we talked about what this Fire is(**Consuming and Refining**), and how it tests or proves our faith, and finally what the testing of our faith produces(**perseverance**), and ultimately our **maturity, purity, and sanctification**.

<Closing Prayer>