

The Dependent Church: Growing in Faith

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[0 : 0 0] Okay guys, let's wrap the conversations up. Sorry to cut it short. And let's talk about faith. Gotta have faith. Alright, I'm not going to see you going. Okay, full house. So good to see all of you guys.

Here we go. So, Watermark Church, we've just been discussing. What might it look like if we as individuals, if we as a church as a whole, had genuine, strong faith?

As Niels pointed out at the start earlier, as ambassadors for Christ, and as Oscar mentioned, I like that phrase, we have mission impossible in front of us. We're completely dependent on God. And as Oscar followed, the catalyst he uses for that, the power, is the Holy Spirit.

Moving on from that, if not one of, if not the most important things the Spirit gives us for this dependent mission, is faith. The Spirit not only implants faith in our hearts, but it also grows our faith, both individually and cooperatively.

[1 : 1 7] We'll spend the next 15 minutes or so looking at what faith is, why we need it, what it may look like to grow in faith. So, what is faith? In our discussions, we were actually discussing that. It's kind of a vague term often in Christian circles.

The core text we're going to look at is Hebrews chapter 11. We're not going to read the whole chapter, but we're going to look at a few verses. The very first verse, Hebrews 11 verse 1 says, Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Super clear, right? The assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. It's not irrational. Our faith is not irrational by any means.

But it is an undergirding confidence that what the Bible says is true. About ourselves, about God, about the world. Even in the absence of what we would define today as 100% concrete physical evidence.

Let me unpack that a bit. It might actually help to look at what faith is not. The Bible actually mentions a few different kinds of faith. The Pharisees, for an example, have a type of faith.

[2 : 3 8] They believed and had faith in the Old Testament Scriptures. They lived by it. But they certainly did not believe that Jesus was the one they pointed to or will fulfill them. I remember a friend in university, a close friend of mine.

He was a brilliant ancient history academic. He knew more than anyone else I knew about the Bible. But he did not have any faith in Jesus. Then there is the type of faith where one may actually comprehend that Jesus is who he says he is.

But they still do not take the step to believe in Jesus and trust in him. In Matthew chapter 8, for example, Jesus encounters two demon-possessed men. The demons possessing those men acknowledge that Jesus is the Son of God and that he has authority to drive them out.

They understand who Jesus is. They comprehend who he is. But they certainly do not have any faith in Jesus. There is even a temporary faith mentioned in the Bible. The parable of the sower in Matthew chapter 13.

A shallow faith that even though it may flourish for a short period of time, the troubles or persecution that can accompany the Christian life quickly wither the faith away.

[3 : 5 3] I think of previous examples, even a watermark of people who have seemingly come to faith, even shared their testimonies on stage, only to have fallen away soon after when hardship has come.

All of these examples of faith, all equally fall short. They do not save. They do not stand up to scrutiny. They do not stand the test of time.

What is the key ingredient missing here? When the Bible talks about faith, genuine faith, it is talking about saving faith. That is trusting and resting in the person and work of Jesus Christ alone.

As communicated in the Bible, for salvation. It begins with knowing and comprehending the facts, but continues to deep heart conviction and faith.

We didn't see Jesus die on the cross, yet we believe. We haven't seen the glory of his future promises when he returns, yet we are assured of these things.

[4 : 57] It's more than just believing in God. It's believing God. It is admitting we are helpless and dependent on God. Further to this, we often stop there when we think about faith, right?

But further to this, when we are first saved by faith, and we have faith, I think it's fair to say that we have a relatively weak faith, actually. It's not that our salvation is somehow less guaranteed or less valuable.

We are saved. There is no uncertainty in that. But it is that our faith is not necessarily as experienced, battle-tested, as someone who has been a Christian for a long period of time, who has trusted and held on to God through the ups and downs of life.

Faith that grows over time. That's what we should be striving for. A strong faith. It resolves from action. The words of surrender and promise we made when we first became Christians, we make them daily.

What might it look different? What might look different in our lives if we had this strong faith? What might it look different about Watermark if we collectively as a church had this strong faith?

[6 : 13] We'll touch on that soon. But let's look at an inspiring example from Hebrews 11 first. Let's look at Abraham. In verses 8 to 10 of Hebrews chapter 11, we read, By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance.

And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him for the same promise.

See, Abraham's faith resulted in him being willing to go and leave what he knew for this unexpected inheritance. He didn't even know the location of where he was going. It's just wild to think of that kind of response.

We also know that Abraham's faith resulted in him waiting at an already old age with a barren wife for his promised biological offspring, Isaac.

On top of that, Isaac is born. He matures into a young man. In verses 17 to 19, we read, By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac.

[7 : 24] And he who had received promises, Abraham, was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, Through Isaac shall your offspring be made. He considered that God was able to even raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.

God asked Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. As we know, God didn't make Abraham go through with it, but Abraham's faith still resulted in him being willing to give up that which was most precious to him. Abraham is just an ordinary guy. He is by no means perfect. He is by no means extraordinary in and of himself. He had his doubts. He even tried to short-circuit God's promise of natural offspring by agreeing to procreate with and then marry his mate.

And yet he still is seen as a hero of the faith, included and highlighted here in Hebrews 11. You see, strong faith is not perfect faith. Strong faith is consistent faith in our perfect God.

And why is it important to have this strong faith? There are many reasons, but we'll focus on one from the text again. Hebrews 11 verse 6 says, And without faith, faith, without faith, it is impossible to please him.

[8 : 46] For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. Faith enables us to please God. We see the examples of Rahab and Esther exalted in their respective stories.

Faith so strong that they were willing to prioritize God over their own personal safety. Rahab, who's mentioned in Hebrews 11, willing to hide and protect Israelite spies, even in the face of the king's question and the king's scrutiny.

Esther, willing to literally put her life on the line in the king's presence for the rescue of her people. It is not that the things we do in and of themselves are what pleases God.

It is that the motivating factor behind those actions. The faith that we have that God is who he says it is, he is, no matter the outcome. Don't we want to be a church that pleases God?

Because we're a church with strong faith. How can we increase this faith? We'll look at three main ways.

[9 : 53] The first thing always, and that's a common theme, I think, appearing over this weekend, is pray. Simon's going to speak about it in more detail. But prayer, I remember Neil's sharing this with me, prayer is essentially just our faith being verbalized.

If we believe God is who he said he is in the Bible, that we are fully dependent on him for absolutely everything, we cannot but pray to him to give us more faith.

Guys, we have the corporate prayer times once a month. For those of us who can make it, I know that not all of us can, my wife for example, we need to be prioritizing this. These times are crucial to us growing in faith individually and as a church.

Now I know not everyone can make it, that's okay. But find other times, find other structures that work for you, which can accommodate with you praying with others. The point is, the picture of a dependent church is a church that not only prays individually, but prays together.

Secondly, community also plays a role in growing our faith. If we talk about, if all we talk about when we get together are the surface level events that are happening in our life, which are easy to do, I suffer from this all the time, that is not going to grow our faith.

[11 : 13] We need to be going deeper, helping each other see the areas of our lives where we do struggle and lack faith, sharing the burden, praying with each other there. Conversely, we may be flourishing and where we are flourishing and have faith, we should rejoice with each other and encourage each other in that.

We can ask simple and direct questions that can be helpful to go deeper, like, what's on your mind more often than not recently? What's been a real pleasure and joy recently?

What's been hard and painful recently? Perhaps we can think of those questions for ourselves.

Having an answer to these questions first, before asking the question of others, can help as well.

I was going to have a last point, but actually, in our group discussion, David made a great point, I think, so I'm just going to kind of go with the flow here a little bit.

He said, a church that has strong faith is a church that doesn't bend to the message and to the culture of the world.

[12 : 16] It's a church that continues to preach the gospel, even in the face of what the world says perhaps is the opposite or goes against the grain of culture, whether it be our own ethnic culture, whether it be the general culture of society.

A church that has strong faith is a church that believes God who he says he is, believes God is who he says he is, and holds true to the Bible and what it teaches. Thank you, Dave. That was great.

Fourthly and lastly, take risks. An essential practice to grow our faith is to take risks. I wonder how many of us are naturally risk-taking people here.

It's definitely not myself. You know, taking risks implies that we are facing the unknown, putting ourselves in situations where something is on the line. We could lose something, and we depend on God no matter what the outcome.

In some ways, if we have strong faith, a life of risk-taking is really the only logical outcome, right?

We have God on our side. If we are unsure where to start in this, we don't need to be like Abraham.

[13 : 25] We don't need to just pack up and leave and go somewhere we don't know where we're going. But it's also important to be reminded that we learn how to live by faith by living by faith.

Just do it. Don't feel like you have to wait until you have enough faith. It grows. And you can start small. Find someone here who seems more mature in their faith than you.

Oscar mentioned people in his talk before who have shown faith and taken risks. Speak to them.

Ask them what has increased their faith. Read God's Word.

Hebrews 11, for example, and the related stories. Your faith will grow through these real life and testimonies through God's Word. Practice things.

Small things, like initiating saying sorry to someone else or reaching out to reconcile with someone we've not been seeing eye to eye with. We may be unsure of the outcome and we're often unsure of the outcome, but we have faith that our sins are forgiven in Jesus.

[14 : 28] We are actually secure in His love. As God guides and protects you through these things, your faith will grow. That's individually. But what about as a church?

A watermark with strong faith may look like watermark as being stretchingly generous, increasing or even starting to tithe and give charitably, giving money away even when we feel the pinch because we have faith that God will provide what we need when we need it as He's proven in His Word.

It will look like watermarks stepping out as a faith, stepping out in faith as a church. Starting second service, which we've done, eventually looking to plan the church. It will be committing to a permanent venue search for the church and moving steadfastly towards that, committing financially and in prayer.

It could look like watermark as being more bold in mission, whether it be locally finding ways to share our faith, as Oscar said, with our friend or neighbour or co-worker, or internationally raising up more formal missionaries and support from within the congregation.

It can look very, it has varied outcomes, watermark being a church of faith. Watermark Church, out of all the Christian virtues, it is not love that saves, it is not joy that saves, it is not peace that saves, it is not hope that saves, it is faith that saves.

[15 : 57] it is only by faith that we are saved. And it is only with faith that we can grow and flourish into spiritual maturity, both individually and as a church, pleasing to God.

Whatever that looks like, let's be a church known for its deep and increasing faith for the glory of God. and why let us ép library my taught i and the university that benefits.