

Faith is Essential



Faith (Part 1)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again at the beginning of a new week, sharing with you some of the Keys to Successful Living that God has placed in my hand through many years of personal experience and Christian ministry.

First, let me say thank you to those of you who have been writing to me. Before I finish this talk, we'll be giving you a mailing address to which you may write. Feel free to share with us your personal needs, your problems, your prayer requests.

This week, I'm going to share with you about the one thing that is essential in relating to God—the one thing without which it is impossible to lead a life that is pleasing to God. I wonder how many of you can guess what I have in mind? What is the one thing? It is faith!

Oh, how much is contained in that one short word of five letters—faith! I'm persuaded in my own life I've only just touched the fringe of the limitless ocean which is the potential of faith. Each time I teach about faith, I feel a new thrill of excitement and I always seem to learn something new about faith myself, while I'm teaching others.

The first thing I want to say today is that faith is essential. There is no substitute for faith. Nothing else will do for us what faith will do.

The first Scripture that I'm going to turn to is in that great faith chapter of the New Testament: Hebrews 11:6. This is what it says:

> "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him." (NIV)

That's the basic condition for approaching God. The only condition upon which we can—or dare—approach God; because God has ruled out every other condition, every other basis of approach. God says we're to come to Him, we must believe. That's a divine must. The Lord permits and accepts no alternatives. We must believe. We must believe two things.

First of all, that God exists. I am persuaded that the majority of people really believe that, even some people who call themselves agnostics, or atheists. I believe there are very few people in the world who don't really, somehow or other, believe that God exists; but that by itself is not enough. Many people who believe that God exists do not meet all the requirements for coming to God in faith. For we must not only believe that God exists, we must believe that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him. We've got to come to God believing that if we do what He requires, if we seek Him earnestly with our whole heart, without raising any barriers of obstinancy or prejudice or unbelief; if we seek Him that way, He will reward us.

You see, the ultimate object of faith is God Himself. His goodness and, above all, His faithfulness.

Faith, in the Bible sense of the word, is not directed primarily to a thing, but to a person; and that person is God. We must believe in God's faithfulness, His goodness, His reliability, His love, His mercy. That's why unbelief is a sin. Many people don't understand that unbelief is a sin; but it's a sin because it denies the goodness of God. It impugns God's character; it suggests that God is not reliable, that He is not good, that He is not faithful, that we cannot depend on Him. That is a sin. So, faith goes right to the very heart of God Himself. It reaches out beyond theories and creeds, and dogmas, it touches God—God Himself. God as a Person. God as a Father. God is someone whom we can depend upon. However, the word that's translated Faith in our New Testament, the Greek word is pestes; that word does not mean only faith; it means also faithfulness. As a matter of fact, that's really its primary meaning in secular usage, outside the New Testament. The primary meaning of the word is faithfulness. So, believing in God is not merely something intellectual, it is being faithful to God. God is faithful. We have to believe in His faithfulness, but likewise, we have to prove ourselves faithful. In other words, what I'm trying to explain to you—and it is something that people find hard to grasp because of centuries of church tradition and teaching.

We tend to think of faith as being in a creed, in a doctrine, in a form of theology; but it isn't. It is a relationship to God, and it's a relationship in which we have to meet conditions that go beyond our intellect. It's not just what we think, what we believe with our minds; but it's being faithful to God.

That kind of faithfulness springs out of commitment. In other words, believing in God is not just having an intellectual idea about God, or knowing what the Bible says, or being able to quote Scripture; but believing in God is being committed to God. It's being loyal to God. It's taking your stand with God. It's refusing to side with the forces of evil. It's rejecting compromise, where God's integrity and God's truth is at stake. So, it's never just a question of intellectually accepting a doctrine, but it's a question of committing ourselves to God. And this commitment which is the basis of faith, establishes a direct ongoing personal relationship with God. That's what I want to emphasize in this initial talk on faith.

Don't think in terms of just some dogma, some creed, some intellectual acceptance of some truth, whether it's true or not; that's not sufficient. You have to be committed. You have to give yourself in that relationship to God, and in return, God gives Himself back to you. It's a relationship; it's not a doctrine.

And this leads me to a further truth. Christianity, in its totality, is not primarily a religion of right doctrines. It's a religion of right relationships. And the primary relationship is with God Himself. If we think merely in terms of entertaining truth, we're not putting the emphasis where it belongs. The emphasis is on right relationships.

You see, it's a fact of experience and observation, that many people can give ascent intellectually to all the right doctrines, but not have the right relationships; either with God, or with other people.

Let's not think just in terms of what we believe; it goes beyond that. It's in whom we believe; it's how we're related to God, and also how we are related to our fellow believers. Think in terms of the word "believing," as loyal. Loyal to God; loyal to God's people. That really is the basic meaning.

Now, this kind of relationship that this establishes with God, is summed up in one beautiful and familiar verse of the Old Testament, in the book of Psalms. Perhaps the most familiar verse in the book of Psalms. Psalm 23:1:

> "The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want." (NAS)

That's the New American Standard version; it's also, I believe, the King James version. I'd like to quote to you also the Living Bible for that verse. This is what it says:

> "Because the Lord is my shepherd, I have everything I need..."

Isn't that beautiful? "Because the Lord is my shepherd, I have everything I need!"

Now, when David says "The Lord is my shepherd," he's not telling us his doctrinal stand—He is not coming out as a

fundamentalist, or a Pentecostalist, or a Catholic. He's not reciting a creed; he is stating a relationship. "The Lord is my shepherd," I belong to Him. I'm submitted to Him. He cares for me. I know Him personally. That's what I'm talking about. That's what real faith is. At its basis, it's that relationship with God. And notice the total security that that relationship can give us. "Because the Lord is my shepherd, I have everything I need." I shall not want.

If David had added anything after "I shall not want..." he would have spoiled it all. If he had said, "I shall not want money, I shall not want food, I shall not want clothes"—whatever he added would have limited it. But he said, "I shall not want." Period! I shall not lack. The supply of all my needs is guaranteed out of that relationship! The Lord is my Shepherd.

That's what men and women are craving in our contemporary society: it's security. They are so often looking for it in the wrong place. True security stems out of that personal relationship with God. The Lord is my shepherd. It's faith in God. Faith in His faithfulness. That's the basis of our approach to God; our relationship with Him. It's faith, commitment, loyalty—faith in His faithfulness.

Well, our time is up for today, but I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this time.

I'll continue with this theme of faith. Tomorrow, I'll be explaining how faith relates us to the invisible, eternal world.

Radio Program

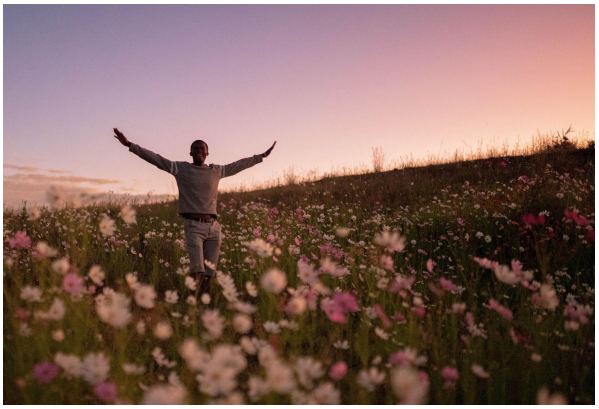
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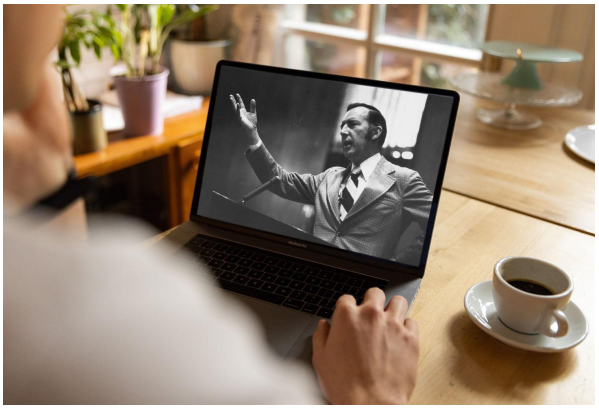
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