

Laws of the Faith Life

Faith Life

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We are continuing our study of the faith life, what it means to live by faith, what it means to be a person of faith, and tonight we're going to look at the seven principles that govern the life of faith. Seven principles that govern the life of faith. If you're going to be a person who lives by faith then these principles need to be active in your life. It's not every Christian that walks by faith. It's not every Christian that sees God do mighty things in their life. It's not every Christian that sees the power of God released into their human situation. It's those who understand faith and walk by faith, and these seven principles need to be in your life if you're going to be one who harnesses or touches the power of God and sees it in your life.

The first principle is the principle of vital relationship. Vital relationship. I mean that you need to be conscious of the fact that you have a living relationship with Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior. Not that you just know about him. Not that you just know some facts about the Bible. But that you have that personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. That means that you have been born again. Over in John 3, Jesus was talking to Nicodemus and Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly," verse 3, "I say to you, unless one is born again," and you remember we said that word "again" can also be translated "above," "unless one is born from above he cannot see the kingdom of God." Born again means to be born from above. It means to have your spirit come alive to God.

Now the Bible speaks of death as separation, not extinction. Physical death in the Bible is defined as the spirit being separated from the body. Now you don't cease to be when you physically die. No, you're just as much there as you ever were, you're just not in that body anymore, your spirit has left that body. That's physical death. Spiritual death is also to be understood in terms of separation and it is our separation from God. Our spirit is dead, meaning our spirit is separated from God. When we're born into this human race, we're born with a body, we all know that, we see it, with a soul which is composed of our mind, will and emotions, all right, and a spirit, okay? The spirit is dead separated from God when you're born into this human race because of your sinfulness, right? Now your spirit is alive to the devil, but it is dead to God. That spirit is enslaved to sin and Satan. But when you are born from above, what happens is the Spirit of God comes and quickens your spirit and bridges that separation between you and God. And so that personal

relationship with Jesus Christ is possible because the Spirit of God has brought your spirit alive.

Paul says over in Ephesians 2, he says, "For by grace," he said, "when we were dead in our trespasses and sins," dead, separated from God, unable to respond, death cannot respond, okay? When you were dead in your trespasses and sins he caused you to be born again. He came and quickened our spirit. His Spirit touched our spirit and bridged the connection, bridged the gap and made that connection and we were therefore able to enter into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, all right? And so that is the first principle of walking by faith is you've got to have that personal relationship with Christ. Your spirit must be connected to the Spirit of God, must have that personal relationship. We relate to God primarily through our spirit, all right? You know things first in your spirit even before you know them in your mind. Sometimes you'll just sense something is true although you can't figure it out, you can't even maybe put words to it, but you know it's true in your spirit, and then it gets into your mind and you're able to vocalize it and explain it and understand it. But the spirit is where you relate to God. In fact, the Bible says if we don't have the Spirit of God in us then we don't belong to him. Amen.

So his Spirit comes in and quickens our spirit and there is that connection, that relationship and we have a personal relationship with Christ. So that's first step, first principle. Second, is the principle of maintained fellowship. Now look over in 1 John 1. 1 John 1. Not only must you have a relationship with God, but you must maintain the fellowship with God. Once you are born again into God's family, that relationship will never be broken. You cannot be unborn any more than you could be unborn physically. I've told you God puts things in the physical realm to help us understand spiritual truth, right? He had the process of physical birth and he decided to put that into the physical creation because he wanted us to understand something of the reality of spiritual birth, all right? Just like you didn't decide that you were going to be physically born, did you? Well, you didn't decide you're going to be spiritually born either. When you were dead in your trespasses and sins, he called you to be born again, you see. And just like you can't get unborn once you've been born, you can't get unborn spiritually. Once you've been born again and come into the family of God, you cannot do anything to sever that relationship, right? Just like in the physical realm, your children are always your children; no matter what they do, they're going to always be your children. You can't change that even if you want to change it. You can't change it. It's a fact, right, okay?

All right, so same thing in the spiritual realm. Now although nothing can break that relationship you have with God, the fellowship is a different matter. We all recognize the difference between relationship and fellowship, don't we? Right, you've got that relationship with your wife, but you might not always have the fellowship. Amen? I've been married long enough to know that's right. You will always have that relationship with your children, but you don't always have the fellowship with your children, right? Same thing with God. We're always going to have the relationship with him if we're born again, but the fellowship comes and goes and it's not because of him, it's because of us. Amen?

All right, here John talks about this. 1 John 1, beginning with verse 5.

5 This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. 6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; 7 but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

What does walking in the light mean? Walking in the truth/ Walking in accord with the word of God. Walking in obedience to the word of God, to the Lordship of Christ. Walking in darkness is just opposite. That's walking in your way. If you say you have fellowship with God and you're walking in darkness, you're lying because your sin has broken that fellowship. Now has it broken the relationship? No, but it's broken the fellowship. And you're never going to see God do miraculous things in your life if you're not walking in fellowship with him. If you walk in disobedience, if you're walking in sin, you are not going to have that fellowship with him that's needed to see the faith walk. But if we walk in the light, as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin. This means that we are conscious of the presence of Jesus at all times. That means we first must be obedient to the light that he gives us. In fact, James 4:17 says, "Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin." There you go.

Walk in the light and here's what I'm going to tell you about it. I told you last week about when I found out Lindsey was going to be born and I started figuring out and knew there was no human way we're going to be able to financially pay for the hospital bill. You remember I said I was sitting out in the parking lot of the hospital getting ready to go in and do a visit, and God spoke to me in Luke 6, given it should be given unto you, pressed down, shaken together, running over until there's no more need. At that time, God gave me light. His truth was light to me and I knew it was light. I'd read that verse numerous times before that, but it spoke to me then like it never had before. God had shone the light of the truth into my life at that point. I knew I was at a crossroads, remember? I said it was more than just a few hundred dollars at stake here. I couldn't get back in the pulpit if I didn't choose to believe God right then. I mean, it was either you're going to go with me in obedience or you're going to be put out to pasture, and I was too young to get put out to pasture. I was only about 26-27. So, but that's where it was, you see. It was light and if I didn't walk in obedience to that light, I wasn't going to have fellowship with my Jesus, and if I didn't have fellowship with my Jesus, I couldn't continue to pastor and preach the word. I'd be a hypocrite to do so, right? God would have just taken his hand right off the ministry because he'd say, "Well, you were living in sin." You see, he that knows what is right to do and does not do it, what is it? Sin.

Now God gives us light different times, different places. I've known people who had a habit. Well, just tobacco, for one. And God showed them the light that they needed to give it up. Now that person was at a crossroads. Now they had to either give that tobacco up and walk in fellowship with God or say, no, hold onto that tobacco and lose their

fellowship with God. Now you've known things in your life. God has put his finger on things in your life. Now here's the danger, okay? When God puts his light of the truth in your life, if you're not careful you're going to take that and you're going to try to put it on somebody else, you see, and I'm going to say, "God convicted me, Mark, I shouldn't be smoking. Now you shouldn't smoke either, and if you smoke, if you smoke, then you're just sinning against God." Now see, and so you can get judgmental if you don't watch it, but truth is God hadn't given you that light yet, and that's between him and you why and when he's going to give it to you is up to him. But the danger is you'll start putting that on everybody else thinking that they've got to be like you've got to be, but God hadn't revealed that to them yet, right? You're just responsible for what God reveals to you.

You know, like I remember one time early in my ministry when God showed me the light that I needed to start tithing off my gross income, not my net income, you know, after taxes. I'd been tithing after taxes, okay? And then I forget now, I was studying in the word and whatever and God will just do that to you, you know, he he's gracious. He doesn't shows everything at once, it would destroy, it would just blow us away, right? But in his time he'll show you something and you'll think, "Ah, I didn't realize that." But man, he takes that and he shows you and once he shows you, you either keep walking in the light and have fellowship or, buddy, you start backsliding. That's the truth of it, right? That's where every backslider starts, he doesn't walk in the light that God gave him. He's hearing a sermon and God takes that sermon and says something to him or to her that they need to do and they decide not to do it and they start backsliding right then. That's where it starts.

People need to go back. If you're not walking in fellowship with God, you need to go back to the place you departed. He didn't leave you, you left him. You need to go back to the place of your disobedience and pick it up and confess it and start by his grace to be obedient. Why is he going to show you anything else if you hadn't done the last thing he showed you? You say, "Well, God just doesn't speak to me." Well, when did he ever speak to you? "Well, He did once." Well, if you're not doing that why is he going to say anything else to you, right?

So you've gotta go back to that light and you've got to walk in that light, whatever it might be, but when God speaks to you like he told me I needed it and I said, "Oh, my goodness." So I got out my budget and it was no way it could happen, Mark. You know, you spend everything you've gotten and a little more, so I'd worked my budget out tithing on the net, see, so when I had to start tithing on the gross before taxes there was no way it was going to be there. And so I said, "God," I said, "You know it's not going to work," humanly speaking. I said, "But I want to go on with You and the choice of disobeying and not going with You, I'd rather starve. So I'm going to trust You and I'm going to start tithing off the gross and You're just going to have to provide what I need." By the next day I got my life insurance premium notice in the mail, and my dad had taken it out on me right before I got married and then he turned it over to me to keep it up. So I said, "Lord, now You know there's no way," I think it was like \$50 but back then, now, we're talking about 1975, \$50 was a lot back in those days. I was making \$12,000 a year, right? And that was considered decent, decent, decent money, you know, when I came out of

seminary. And so I said, "Lord, if this thing gets paid, You've got to pay it." And I just threw it up on the dresser because I said, "It's up to You. There's no way I can do it." About a week later, got a phone call from a man in a church whose pastor had died and he said, "We always have a Thanksgiving service. Could you come over and preach Thanksgiving day at our church for us?" I said, "I'll be glad to." I don't have to tell you how much the gift was, do I? \$50.00, paid it, and the Lord provides in his way, in his time, but when he gives you the light, when he shines that light into your life, whatever it might be, you'd better obey it. And you may at times have to say, "God, I've got to have Your grace to do this. I can't do it on my own. I've got to have Your grace." I mean, I used to always say, "God, if You'll just show me what to do, I'll do it." I was that determined to walk with God and I didn't realize that that was really just a statement of pride. I didn't realize it till God showed me one day something he wanted me to do I couldn't do. God was teaching me that he was my supply, not the church, not the check I got from the church, but he was. And the church at that time we were paid every week, every Monday. Well, you know when you're paid every week you live week to week, right? So you know, so you've got to work that, So well, I know the check's coming Monday so we can stretch it out till Monday, but when Monday comes we need that money."

Well, I was in the prayer time down in the church, we had a prayer room and it was my time to be in there and God told me, he said, "I want you to give your whole paycheck this time back to Me." And I was going to a revival at the time at this church across town and he said, "I want you to give. Tonight I want you to go to the meeting and I want you to give your whole paycheck." And the Lord and I had some talking to do then. I said, "First of all, Lord, You know it's not all mine because I have to take out and pay taxes," because I had to pay all my taxes. Preachers, you know, you have to pay all your taxes. The church doesn't take any out. You have to pay it. And I said, "This isn't all mine. You know, if I give it all then when it's time for taxes to be due the money is not going to be there," because I'd take out each paycheck for the taxes. He kept pressing me and he broke me. He said, "You always said if I just showed You what to do, you'd do it." And I said, "God, I can't do it. I can't do it. I cannot do it on my own. You've got to give me the grace to do it," because I had babies in the house and they needed food and, you know, you go through the week and that's it. You know, that's it.

So I said, "God, You know I don't want to be an idiot and I know I can be, and I know this, you know, I want to make sure it's You speaking to me and not just some wild thing in my mind." I said, "Confirm for me today somehow, some way that this is of You. And the first thing I want You to do is when I tell Terry, she'll be in agreement with it." I said, I figured, hey, I've got a safety net there, right? I said, "So Lord," I said, "She needs to be in agreement with this. I mean, you know, what kind of husband would I be to come in and just say I'm giving it all away?" I said, "So I think, you know, You would want that because You know two can't walk together unless they agree, right?" So I said, "I ask You to do that, Lord." And then I said, "In some other way, some other way You just affirm that You're my supply and not this church and this this check."

Well, after I finished that prayer time, a guy in the church, his mother was in the hospital. She was not a member of the church, she wasn't even Christian, nor was his father a Christian. She had actually tried to commit suicide and he'd ask if I'd go by and visit with them in the hospital. So I did and I went to the hospital and I went in the room and told them who I was, his son's pastor, and they were nice and cordial and we talked and I prayed with her and the husband was there. And when I got ready to leave, you know, I put out my hand to shake his hand, and he put something in my hand and when I got out of the room, I opened my hand up and there was a \$20 bill. Now I don't know how many people I've visited through the 30 something years of ministry, but it's been more than a few hundred, but I have never before or since had anybody that I visited in the hospital slip any money in my hand when I left. And that man wasn't even a Christian. God said to me, "I can take non-Christians and give you what you need. You don't have to need just a church. I can take unbelievers and give you what you need."

So then the next was going back going to tell Terry about it. So when I got home I explained it to Terry. She said, "If that's what God wants you to do, then you need to do it." So that night when I was at that meeting at the church and they passed that offering plate, I've told people, I said, "One of the best greatest worship experiences I've ever had in my life was during the offering," and folks look at me like I'm crazy. But let me tell you, when that offering plate came by and I put that all the way in there and then God said, "Now put the \$20 in there too." Woo, let me tell you, I worshiped. Let me tell you, I worshiped when I did that, though. It was one spiritual time, and I got home that night and I said, "God, we've got to get together again." I said and I had and just to make sure the preacher at the church, I had talked to him before and I said, "Now do you think that's something that God would do?" I said, "I don't want to do, you know, I really don't want to do this. This is too hard to do it just on a whim. I want to make sure it's God speaking." I said, "Do you think God would want me to do something like that?" He said, "Well yeah, I think so."

So I went home that night. My in-laws were coming that weekend and, you know, we always went shopping at the end of the week, well, there wasn't going to be any money for groceries. And they were coming. That was going to be very embarrassing not to be able to put some food on the table for them. And I did have some babies that needed milk. In fact, I need gas for the car. So I had to go around and gather all the change, loose change around the house to have enough money to put gas in the car to get over to the meeting the next day over at that church. But that night I said, "Lord, I said, "we've got to get together." I said, "I'm going to stay here with You until you speak to me, till You give me a word." And so he led me over to Numbers and I was reading over there where God told Moses, the people were complaining about not having meat and God told him, told Moses, he said, "I will give them meat. It will be so much meat they'll be sick of it." Amen. He said, "But tomorrow you shall have meat." Now when God said that he took that and spoke to me, and he said to me, "Tomorrow," I didn't know what it meant but he said, "Tomorrow you're going to have meat." So I took him at his word and went on to bed, went on to bed, got up next day, went to the meeting. After the meeting was over, the preacher came up to me and said, "Somebody came up to me today and said the Lord had told them to give whoever that was, the Lord told to give his check to give them this

check." And so we had enough to go get some groceries when my in-laws came. They even brought some groceries with them. We had enough milk, and lo and behold, when it came time to pay the taxes, the money was there. I don't know where it came from, but it was there. Hallelujah.

But you've got to walk in the light and fellowship in the light, and that means obedience to the light and it means confessing your sins. It means to confess your sin, receive the forgiveness of God, and walk in obedience to him. And that's the reason that many people don't enter into the faith life because they're walking in disobedience to the light that God's given them. And only you can answer that question if you're walking in obedience to the light, but if you're not, you need to just tonight you need to say, "God, I need to confess You have spoken to me in the past, and I have resisted, I have fought it, I have not done it and it is sin and I confess that before You and by Your grace I want to pick up and I want to start today to obey You and walk in Your light for my life."

Do you remember Israel over in Numbers 14? What did God tell them? What was the light? "I'm going to give you the Promised Land," right? "I'm going to give it to you." Right? "Go up and I'll give you the victories." Well, they sent all these spies out. The spies came back, 10 of them said, "It is flowing with milk and honey alright. Woo, big old grapes, but there are also some big old giants over there. We're just like grasshoppers," right? Now do you think they were walking in the light? No. Joshua and Caleb said, "Yeah, they're grasshoppers but they are nothing but food for us." Spiritual food, buddy. That's what your problems are, just spiritual food for you to trust God and grow for your enlargement. But Israel chose to disobey and not walk in the light and their punishment was every man 20 years old and older who had voted not to go in, and that was all of them but Caleb and Joshua, would never set foot in that Promised Land. Forty years they'd have to wander in that wilderness out of fellowship with God because they would not walk in the light.

That's the second principle. Third principle, the law of recognized Lordship. Right, first we have vital relationship, then we have maintained fellowship, now we have recognized Lordship. Over in Romans 14, Romans 14:9, Paul writes some words that speak to all of us about the Lordship of Christ. Romans 14:9 says, "For to this end," to this purpose, "Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living." You see, recognized Lordship tells us that Christ is Lord and that means that everything that comes into your life must come through his sovereign hands.

Hebrews 12 talks about God chastening, disciplining his children, the ones that he loves. In fact it says if you don't experience it, you're not a true son. Hebrews 12:5, listen, "and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, 'My son do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord nor faint when you are reprov'd by Him for those whom the Lord loves He disciplines and He scourges every son whom He receives. It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be

subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness."

Recognized Lordship recognizes that every situation that comes into your life is brought into your life by a loving Father for the purpose of enlarging you in your walk with him. Everything that comes into your life is brought in there for your maturity and for your growth into Christ-likeness. You remember when the devil went out to get Job? You remember when he came back what he said? He said, "You've got a hedge around him, God, I can't get to him. You've got a hedge around him." God's got a hedge around every one of us who are his children and nothing can penetrate that hedge unless it is according to his sovereign will for you. Now the devil may be the delivery boy but that's all he is. You've heard me say the devil may light the furnace of affliction in your life but God always has his hand on the thermostat. Can't get any hotter than what God wants for you. Whatever comes in, we must realize God has a purpose and a reason. Romans 8:28, God causes all things, loss of a job, all things to work together for good to those who love him to those who are called according to his purpose, and he goes on to talk about that purpose is to be conformed to the image of Christ.

And so if you're going to walk by faith, you've got to recognize that anything that comes into your life God is going to use that, he's promised to use it to bring good, to bring you into spiritual maturity as you look to him and trust him for your spiritual enlargement. Just like those giants were nothing but food for them, spiritual food, they would grow in their spiritual walk as they trusted God to give them the victory if they would walk with God. That means God uses everything that comes into our life to refine us for his glory. Just like that crucible that you put ingredients in there and you have to crush it and you have to heat it to get it purified. Life is God's crucible that he uses to purify us and knockout the dross and burn out the impurities and everything that's not like Christ and pressure is what's used to do that. He's putting his stamp on us, and if you're going to put a stamp in something, you've got to press it and make it really make its mark.

If he's going to shape us like Jesus, he's got to knock off the rough edges and the way he does that is adversity, difficulties, hardships. That's where we grow. That's where we learn. The lilies grow in the valley, not on the mountain top. It's in the valley, that's when we grow closer to Jesus. You look back in your life when you've grown closer to him is when you've been going through the worst times. It's now when everything is going great. No. It's in the hard times. It's in the adversities. And from God's standpoint, every correction, every discipline is from his love, and it is for your spiritual enlargement, okay?

So that's what recognized Lordship is, that we can trust him that no matter what is happening in our lives, even though we may because of our own sin have brought it about, that doesn't mean he cannot in his wisdom and in his grace bring good out of it. He can. And to walk under his Lordship means you believe that and you trust him fully to do that. We can never trust fully unless he is fully Lord. Unless you realize his complete

Lordship in your life, you can't trust him fully because if he's not Lord, then how do I know somebody else isn't doing it? How do I know it's not the devil? How do I know it's not some enemy doing it to me, right? I can't trust him unless I know he's all-powerful, all-sovereign and he is Lord and absolutely nothing is more powerful than he is and can work outside of his will. That's the only way I can trust him. I mean, I can trust you guys but only to a certain extent. And don't you ever put your complete trust in any human either because there's a limit to what you and I can do. But there's no limit to what our Lord Jesus can do and therefore we can fully, we can completely trust him. He is trustworthy and that's what it means to recognize his Lordship in your life. Do you remember when Job lost everything? Do you remember what he said? He said, "The Lord gives the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." Now the devil was doing it but Job realized the devil couldn't do a thing unless the Lord allowed it. The Lord gives. the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord. And he did not sin, the scripture says and he did not blame God.

So we've got to maintain the fellowship, we've got to have the personal relationship, and we need to recognize the Lordship. Those are the three principles. Next week, Lord willing, we'll look at the next four principles of the faith life.