

True Faith in Action

Preached by Phillip Kayser at DCC on Sunday, August 21st 2022

Introduction

Lord willing, I want to go verse by verse through this chapter next week and show that this river-crossing was far more spectacular than what most people make it out to be. Most Christians think of the Jordan as a small river that you could wade across. And there are times of the year that you can - especially now that it is being depleted with irrigation. But during flood time the river at this point of crossing is often a mile wide and more than 10 feet deep. Back in 1854, an expert swimmer tried to swim across the Jordan at the exact time of year and the exact point of crossing that Joshua used, and he was not able to swim across because of how wide the river was and how strong the current was. To have the bottom of the river instantly dry (all the moisture sucked out) so that young and old could easily cross it was also a spectacular miracle. And there are a lot of other details that I hope to dig into next week. Most children's picture books do not portray this chapter properly. So, Lord willing, we will go through this verse by verse next week.

But today I want to show how this is a perfect chapter to oppose some of the counterfeit views of faith that are being promoted in some circles. It is a marvelous example of faith in action - or what the literal Greek of Romans 16:26 (and 1:5) calls the "obedience of faith." Faith steps out and obeys God's clear commands even when it seems foolish to do so. Faith trusts that if God commands us to do something, we can do it by His grace. But because this chapter has been used to promote some pretty crazy ideas about faith, I want to spend a few minutes looking at what faith is not and then we will look at what genuine faith looks like. Hopefully this will introduce next week's sermon a little bit better.

I. Background - Counterfeits to Faith

A. A blind leap of faith

Let's go to Hebrews 11:1 to correct the first counterfeit of faith. One of my teachers in Bible School used to teach that faith was a blind leap in the dark. That is actually a liberal definition of faith made popular by Søren Kierkegaard. It is not a Biblical definition. But my teacher, who was evangelical, claimed that since faith is defined as the evidence of things *not seen*, it must be a leap in the dark. After all, we can't see what we are believing - we believe against all evidence. But let's read what the text actually says. Hebrews 11:1 says, **Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.** He doesn't say that faith is leaping *without* evidence (or against evidence-as Søren Kierkegaard would say). In fact, the Greek terms used there are very powerful figures of *solid* evidence. Without evidence; without knowledge, there can be no faith. Faith is not irrational - like Kierkegaard was. This is so important to understand. Faith is not irrational. Faith is founded on the best evidence that men can have - God's testimony in the Bible - the only infallible thing in life.

There are two legal terms used in Hebrews 11:1. The one translated as “substance” is ὑπόστασις, and the one translated as “evidence” is ἔλεγχος. Both are legal terms used for proof or evidence.

The first term, ὑπόστασις, is a *koine* Greek word that is frequently used to mean a title deed. The dictionary defines it as “guarantee of ownership/entitlement, title deed.” It’s a *guarantee* of ownership. When you buy a house, you may make an offer on the house, but until the title deed is signed over to you, you are not sure that you will have it. You hope, but you don’t know. The time leading up to the signing of the title deed is the time you hoped for something, but with the title deed in hand, it is yours even if you have never seen the house. Believe it or not, Kathy entered into a purchase agreement for our first house without ever having seen the house, and she did so based on the evidence I presented. She hadn’t seen it, but she knew it was ours. With a title deed in hand, the house is yours even if people say it is not. It is yours even if people challenge your right to have that home in court. That is the nature of faith. It has the confidence of a title deed. John Calvin said that confidence is of the essence of faith. So the dictionary definition of that term again is that it is the “*guarantee of ownership/entitlement, title deed.*”

The second Greek word that is used in Hebrews 11:1 is ἔλεγχος, and refers to evidence. Faith is the evidence of things not seen. This was the word used to describe court evidence. If you were a juror, you would have heard accusations brought against a given person, but the problem is, you were not at the scene of the crime. You didn’t see what happened. How can you judge the case? The only way that you can make a binding decision is based upon evidence of things not seen. It’s not a blind leap in the dark. Faith is always based on convincing evidence, but it is evidence of things you have not personally witnessed. But you can make a decision based on that evidence if you can trust the witnesses. And it is this word that makes the strong contrast between living by sight and living by faith. Faith is the evidence of things not seen.

Let’s apply those two words to Joshua. In Joshua chapter 3, did the Jews have a title deed to Canaan? Yes they did. God had given it to them. Did they have evidence of things not seen? Yes they did. In fact, it was far more reliable evidence than anything that we get in a court of law. God Himself was the witness who promised that He would part the Jordan River and that they would without fail dispossess the Canaanites. They didn’t see any change in the river. They didn’t see any Canaanites falling yet. In fact, the Canaanites disputed their claim to Canaan. All that Israel had was legal evidence upon which they would act. So this chapter is a beautiful illustration of Hebrews 11:1 and a powerful overthrow of the liberal idea that faith is a blind leap in the dark.

B. Presumption

But a second counterfeit that is exposed in Hebrews 11:1 *and* in Joshua 3 is presumption. And this is perhaps the most dangerous counterfeit of faith. Sometimes people are confident of things of which they have no basis for confidence. They presume upon things that do not exist. Presumption is not faith. Let me illustrate presumption. A friend of mine from South Carolina told me that he was believing that God would give him a particular model and color of car, and he was going to bring that car into existence by his faith. He had

read some name-it-and-claim-it book. Now if God had promised that car, he could have asked for it in faith. But God had said no such thing in the Bible. So he was eventually disappointed because time showed that he didn't have the power of creation. He was not God. Only God can create things. Our faith cannot create a single thing. All it can do is lay hold of what God has said can exist. Remember that Hebrews 11:1 says that "**faith is the title deed of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.**" In the realm of the invisible eternal, those things are already in existence in God's mind because they were determined from before the foundation of the world that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2:10 says, "**For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.**" Why can we have faith that we will be able to conquer besetting sins? Because those good works were already created before there was time, and our faith lays claim to these good works as *things* which exist in God's plan. So faith takes those things prepared before the foundation of the world and brings them into visible manifestation in space-time history.

Contrast that with presumption. If you stepped into the Jordan River expecting it to part, you would just get wet. Why? Because God has not promised to part the Jordan River for *you*. He had promised to do that for *Joshua* and *that* generation of Israelites, but not for every generation. But what God *has* promised to you and *has* commanded you to do is equally as impossible. He has commanded you to bless those who curse you, to not be overcome by evil, to put off bitterness, anxiety, and other negative emotions. He has commanded us to put off all addictions. To many people those seem like impossible goals. Conquering their sins is *their* Jordan River crossing. But faith ignores our weakness and lays claim to God's promises that He will enable what He has commanded us to do. So faith is not a blind leap in the dark. It is not presumption.

C. Manipulation/Magic

But third, faith is not manipulation. The concept that some Christian sects have of faith is more akin to ancient magic than it is to Biblical faith. Magic has always thought of God or fate or a higher power as something that could be manipulated if you did the right things or said the right formulas or cried out loudly enough or sacrificed enough. But Biblical faith has fear and respect for God. In fact, that is why faith can expect such great things: it has a heightened view of who God really is. And this can be seen throughout the passage.

Look at verse 3. God sets the agenda, not man. The way some charismatic pastors in town yell at God and command God to do things makes me shudder. I don't understand how they can talk to the God who made the Universe in such fashion. We don't set the agenda. God does. God wasn't there to follow *Israel's* wishes. Israel was commanded to follow God's presence in the ark of the covenant - which really was His throne. Verse 3 says, "***And they commanded the people, saying, 'When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests, the Levites, bearing it, then you shall set out from your place and go after it.***'" So they followed God, not vice versa.

Second, verse 4 says that they followed at a distance. Verse 4 says that they were to have a space of 2000 cubits between the people and the ark, which is about 1000 yards. Obviously the clipart picture in your outlines is wrong since they are crowding around the ark. But

this 1000-yard-distance showed a healthy respect for God. Faith sees God as the awesome King of the Universe, and it does not try to manipulate God. It respects God's sovereignty.

Third, verse 5 shows that they were called to sanctify themselves before the Lord.

None of those things are compatible with the notion that God can be manipulated to do our will. We don't pray that our will would be done. We pray, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

So those are the three counterfeits of faith. In contrast, where there is true faith, there will be a convergence of three opposite things: God's promises, God's commands, and God's providential leading.

II. Faith And God's Promises (3:10-13)

Let's look first of all at God's promises. And we will start with verse 10. "***And Joshua said, 'By this you shall know that the living God is among you, and that He will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites.***'" This was a promise that without fail their military conquest would be successful - without fail. That means that they *would* get across. Look at verse 11. "**Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is crossing over before you into the Jordan.**" Here was a promise that God would lead them over the Jordan. How, they don't know yet. But just that promise would have been enough basis for them to have faith. Verse 13 gives more details. "**And it shall come to pass, as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests who bear the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of the Jordan, that the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off, the waters that come down from upstream, and they shall stand as a heap.**" So it is clear that what the book of Hebrews describes as faith in this generation is a faith that was based on promises. There can be no faith where there is no promise in the Scripture that it can lean on. There can certainly be counterfeit presumption, but not true faith. It is of the very nature of faith to believe God will be true to His Word.

Now remember what we said about the counterfeit of presumption. If these Israelites had stepped into the Jordan without God's *promise* to part the waters they would have been drowned. Drownings happen all the time, even to Christians. We are not exempt from getting drowned just because God loves us. It doesn't matter whether you are a believer or an unbeliever, if you jump off the tallest building in downtown Omaha, you will get hurt or die at the bottom. If you try to part the Missouri river and go across to the Iowa side without a promise of God that He will take you across, you too will drown even though you are supposedly "stepping out in faith." In verses 10-13 God gives the basis for their faith. "**So Joshua said to the children of Israel, 'Come here and hear the words of the LORD your God...'**" Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. That is so important to emphasize.

I challenge you to find any example in the Bible where there was faith expressed without some promise or assurance from God. Now I don't deny that there is a subjective side to faith where God may take some general promise in the Scripture and give us confidence of its application for a specific situation today. George Muller had that all the time. And we

will get to God's guidance in a bit. But Scripture is the standard by which the subjective is tested and it is the fertilizer out of which God engenders faith. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.

What practical difference does this make? It makes a huge difference. I have seen Christians and even churches take out loans that were far more than they could wisely handle, and yet they felt good about it because they said that they had prayed about it and were stepping out in faith that God would provide. That is not faith. That is presumption. I have seen Christians (and to my shame I was one of them), who in a rash moment promised a vast sum of money for missions because of the emotion of the missions conference I was attending at age 20, and I had no idea where the money was going to come from. I *thought* I was stepping out in faith, but it was presumption. And it took me a long time of hardship and hard work to pay back that debt to the Lord, because I believe in fulfilling my vows even if they are rash vows. This is one of several reasons why I am opposed to Faith Promise giving. Faith Promise Giving is a very popular way to raise money in some churches. But it often presumes upon the Lord and seeks to bind *His* hand in some way - that God is *obligated* to come through for what I have promised. No. That's not the way it works. God does sometimes specifically lead us to vow things out of the ordinary (the subjective side of faith), but the Faith Promise concept manipulates people go vow things out of the emotion of the moment. It implies that if you pledge it, God will be obliged to give it to you - if you believe.

But someone might respond, but hasn't God promised to provide for us? Yes He has, just as He has promised to have His angels bear us up lest we dash our foot against a stone. But what did Christ answer when Satan quoted that verse out of context and tempted Christ to cast Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple? **"You shall not tempt the Lord your God."** Satan had divorced the promise from the commands of God. And when you do that you have presumption, not faith. God had not commanded Christ to cast Himself down from the temple. This is the difference between faith and presumption. Faith rests in God's Word, presumption adds to God's Word. Faith holds God's promises and God's commands together; presumption tears them apart. So we have got to have all three: promise, command, and providential leading.

I met a student at Covenant College who used the services of a doctor, a dentist, a barber and others saying all the while that he could not pay for the services since he was "living by faith." My response is that disobedience to God's economic commands cannot possibly be faith since it is disobedience. The Bible indicates in 1 and 2 Thessalonians that you don't mooch off of others and excuse it as faith. That's a counterfeit.

But some will say, "Well, there was an open door." Well, there were probably several open doors. The question is, why did you go through this open door which leads to irresponsibility rather than through one of the other open doors that would not have involved you in sin? As I have often said, some open doors lead to dangerous elevator shafts. Didn't Jonah have an open door when a ship going to Tarshish (the opposite direction of where he was supposed to be going) just *happened* to be present at the harbor of Joppa? Using this faulty reasoning he could have said, "It's an open door. It must have

been God's providence leading me to Tarshish." And of course we know that was not the case.

Let me illustrate the danger of open door excuses. Hebrews 11:29 says of the Israelites "**By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land**" [OK, that was an open door that God had commanded them to go through. But the verse goes on to say]**, "whereas the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned.**" For the Israelites to go through this open door was faith because it was founded on the promises and the commands of God. For the Egyptians to go through that same open door was presumption with disastrous consequences. When you step out in faith be sure that you are doing so consistent with Biblical principles rather than tempting God and presuming upon His mercy and the mercy of others when you fall down. My parents had to bail a fellow-missionary out in Ethiopia who was going hungry because that family was determined to not ask for money and to live by faith. I met another person who believed God had called him to hitchhike across America. The problem was, he was spending the entire year mooching off of other people with no purpose or goal in mind. It was strange.

But, let's deal with the opposite extreme. Before we move on to the commands of God, let me make it as clear as I can that what we have just said is not a caution against embracing dangers, or taking risks, or hardships or even taking on impossibilities. We are *not* saying that you only do what seems reasonable to do. That isn't faith either. Faith has everything to do with impossibilities. In fact, in this chapter, God challenges the faith of these Israelites by making the crossing even more impossible - they were going to cross the Jordan during the time when the Jordan river was raging and roaring at its highest. I don't know if you have been on rivers like the Jordan during flood stage, but I would have been nervous about crossing. The last phrase in verse 15 says, "**(for the Jordan overflows all its banks during the whole time of harvest).**" This was flood stage when the waters were raging. Impossibilities are precisely the time when faith begins to shine, because that is when we lay hold of God and God alone. We are not trusting our own flesh.

Well, God has called us to be involved in all kinds of impossible things in Dominion Covenant Church - things that are equally as impossible as crossing the Jordan. And some of you have experienced personal victories in your *own* life (praise God) that previously you had thought were impossible to conquer. People have struggled with sexual temptations that seemed impossible to resist, and they would have given up if it had not been for faith laying hold of God's promises to take them through their impossible Jordan. Those who are naturally shy may think it an absolute impossibility for them to witness. The thought of witnessing terrifies them. But as they stepped out and did it, God came through, and they were excited. I talked with one man who told me he had struggled with anger so long he was convinced that it was impossible to conquer. I told him that it didn't matter what *he* thought he could do, the Bible promised that by God's grace and using God's blueprints he *could* do it. He moved to another state, so don't try to guess who he was. But he can testify that God has so thoroughly dealt with his anger that he hasn't flown off the handle in years.

Some people have given up on the salvation of loved ones because they seem like impossible cases. But you know what? Christ said that the salvation of *all* men is impossible. He said, **with men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible..**

III. Faith And God's Commands

A. God's Commands Always Require Faith (3:6,13,15)

But the next thing that is always present where there is genuine faith, is the context of God's commands. I've already dealt with that to some degree, but let's look at it in the text. Did these Jews have commands which filled out God's promises? Yes they did. Verse 3 says, "***and they commanded the people, saying, "When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests, the Levites, bearing it, then you shall set out from your place and go after it.**" These Israelites needed to know whether or not *they* were *commanded* to do what was promised. And we do as well. I know women preachers who claim Biblical promises with regard to the power God in public pastoral ministry. The problem is, those promises don't relate to women. God prohibits women from being pastors. So commands set the context of who, when, where and why we are to do things. They think they have entered into the ministry by faith, but since it is a violation of God's commands for them to even be ministers, it is a counterfeit faith. By definition it is a counterfeit. Do you see how all of these things must merge together for there to be genuine faith?

Verse 6 says they were to have the ark of the covenant go first. What do you think would have happened if some Israelites had run ahead of the ark and tried to cross first? They would have gotten wet. Verse 13 commanded the *priests* to be the first ones to the edge of the water.

It is a popular notion in today's Christianity to say that faith is the opposite of the law; that those who live by faith do not need the law of God. But listen to this. Paul says in Romans 3:31 **"Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law."** Faith establishes the law. There can be no true faith without a command, and conversely every command that God has ever given requires faith; the two go hand in hand. Think about it for a minute. Would you have dared to go through the Jordan if God had not commanded you to do so? I wouldn't. It was God's *command* that brought such surety to their faith. Remember what Peter did when he saw Jesus walking on the water? He didn't jump into the water right away. That would have been presumption. Matthew 14:28 says, "***And Peter answered Him and said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.**" He wasn't going to jump out of the boat unless he knew that Christ wanted him to go. It was not enough to know that Christ was *able* to make him walk on the water. He knew *that* was true. He could see that with his own eyes. He wanted to know that Christ *wanted* him to do so; that Christ was *commanding* him to do so. And if God commands something of you, then it is *never* presumption to obey God.

For example, when God calls for the tithe, it is an act of faith to obey that command. To some it seems suicidal; unreasonable; impossible. Think of the widow with the mite who gave everything she had because she couldn't subdivide it any more. It goes contrary to what our senses tell us to do. But faith does not look at life that way. Faith is so confident that God's ways work best that to *not* tithe is unreasonable and the sure way to lose out. On Thursday morning Joel pointed out that Malachi 3:10 is the only positive command to test God. He asks us to test him by tithing and watch the windows of heaven open up and watch

God pour such blessing into our lives that there is not room enough to receive it. It's not *hoping* things will turn out financially. It's not tithing because we have *seen* many other people prospering. We do it in faith because God commands us to do it.

But here's another dimension to God's command. *When* did God part the waters in this chapter? It was not until there was action. Right? Verse 15 says, "**and as those who bore the ark came to the Jordan, and the feet of the priests who bore the ark dipped in the edge of the water (for the Jordan overflows all its banks during the whole time of harvest), that the waters which came down from upstream stood still, and rose in a heap very far away at Adam...**" etc. We think of faith as waiting for God to do something. Now faith *does* expect God to do something, but it isn't passive. Scripture speaks of faith working through love. If you read Hebrews 11 you will see numerous action words describing faith. By faith Abel *offered* a sacrifice. By faith Abraham *obeyed*. By faith he *sojourned*. Every example includes actions. Romans 16:26 speaks of the "obedience of faith." James says that faith without obedience is dead faith or useless faith. James in effect says "Don't think that you have faith if you have been praying up a storm and asking God to bless the naked and the hungry when you have it in your power to clothe and feed them. That is hypocrisy."

And thus it is not enough to believe a promise of God's provision and passively wait for it. If the Israelites had said, "Lord, you promised to give us the land, we'll wait here on this side of Jordan until you have finished the conquest and handed it to us on a silver platter," obviously God would condemn them for that waiting. Why? Because of unbelief. Faith doesn't just take the promises. It takes the whole Word of God; it embraces the commands. And God's commands are just as impossible as His promises are. When God commands you to cease from anger, to flee from fornication, to put off addictions (to tobacco, porn, or whatever), to confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, for some people it feels like He is commanding impossibilities. Only His grace can enable you to fulfill those commands. But the point is, until in our weakness we step out in the obedience of faith (in other words, we take the steps God has given in His Word), nothing is going to happen. God didn't part the Jordan and then have them walk over. Notice what He says in verse 13.

B. Faith Always Results In Obedience (The "Obedience Of Faith") (3:13-16)

Verse 13 says **And it shall come to pass, as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests who bear the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of the Jordan, that the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off.** The point is that God doesn't provide grace in your life before it is needed. It is as you both trust His promises *and* step forth in obedience to His commands that the promise comes to fulfillment. If you are waiting for boldness to come to you before you start witnessing, or if you are waiting for strength to come before you start resisting a temptation, then it will not come. I like the illustration of the man with the withered hand. Christ told him to stretch forth his hand. He could have responded, "Lord, I can't. It's crippled. You need to heal it first." If he had said that, there would have been no healing. Christ wanted there to be faith in action. It was *when* the man was willing to do the impossible (to stretch forth his withered hand - as commanded) that God made the impossible happen. That is a principle in life.

1. Without a command it is presumption

Without a command it would be presumptuous for us to tackle the impossible. But without obedience to His commands that have been given, we don't even have faith. And without faith it is impossible to please God. Do you need stronger faith? Then begin to ground your faith in the Scriptures and begin to exercise your faith through obedience. The more times you do that, the more your faith will grow.

2. Without obedience we have a dead faith

3. Without faith it is impossible to please God

IV. Faith And God's Leading

But if you only look at the promises and commands of Scripture without depending on the Spirit to apply them in the specifics of your life, then you still have a problem. For example, God commands ministers to preach the Gospel, but how does an individual know he is called to the ministry? How does one who is already called to the ministry have faith to start a new venture? There is a subjective application of the Word that God the Spirit makes in our hearts. There is a subjective element to faith that comes from guidance.

Now, let me be clear that this guidance does not stand by itself. It operates in, with, and through the Scriptures. Some people might question everything I have said when it comes to the supernatural "gift of faith." They might assume that the gift of faith can bypass the Scripture and just have a direct channel to God. But that is not the case. Listen to the following standard¹ definition of the gift of faith, and I think you will find the issues we

¹ After the sermon someone questioned how standard this definition from a Gifts Workshop was, and I started looking for definitions. He was right. Others disagree. D. A. Carson defines it as a special faith that "enables a believer to trust God to bring about certain things for which he or she cannot claim some divine promise recorded in Scripture, or some state of affairs grounded in the very structure of the gospel" and a "God-given ability, without fakery or platitudinous exhortations, to believe what you do not really believe, to trust God for a certain blessing *not* promised in Scripture." D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), p. 39. Sam Storms defines it as follows: "The gift of faith is that mysterious surge of confidence that rises within a person in a particular situation of need or challenge and that gives an extraordinary certainty and assurance that God is about to act through a word of an action." Wayne Grudem, *Are the Miraculous Gifts for Today?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 1996. But I believe that being immersed in the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit takes those Scriptures and applies them to the moment with a supernatural assurance. But as John Piper points out, what George Muller and Hudson Taylor credited their faith to was immersion in the Word of God. See John Piper, *A Camaraderie of Confidence: The Fruit of Unfailing Faith in the Lives of Charles Spurgeon, George Müller, and Hudson Taylor, vol. 7, The Swans Are Not Silent* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 104. In his autobiography, Muller over

have been discussing to be present. “[The gift of] Faith is the mysterious surge of confidence which arises within a person as he claims God’s Word for a specific situation or need and becomes certain of God’s answer.” A Scripture verse was in George Muller’s mind when the Spirit would give him a surge of certainty about something. John Murry pointed out that the Spirit’s impressions, urges, inhibitions, impulses, and burdens may not always be recognized as coming from and through the Scriptures, but the Spirit is still taking something from that Scriptural background to produce the guidance within us.² Sinclair Ferguson explains this mysterious surge of confidence saying,

and over points to Scriptures that gave him faith in the moment for God to supply his needs. Sometimes the Scriptures that become an anchor seem like strange ones, but the Spirit sovereignly used those Scriptures to give him an assurance that he would find a lost key, or meet a person, or find the finances needed. At one point he says, “The careful reading of the Word of God, combined with meditation on it. Through reading of the Word of God, and especially through meditation on the Word of God, the believer becomes more and more acquainted with the nature and character of God, and thus sees more and more, besides His holiness and justice, what a kind, loving, gracious, merciful, mighty, wise, and faithful Being He is, and, therefore, in poverty, affliction of body, bereavement in his family, difficulty in his service, want of a situation or employment, he will repose upon the ability of God to help him, because he has not only learned from His Word that He is of almighty power and infinite wisdom, but he has also seen instance upon instance in the Holy Scriptures in which His almighty power and infinite wisdom have been actually exercised in helping and delivering His people; and he will repose upon the willingness of God to help him, because he has not only learned from the Scriptures what a kind, good, merciful, gracious, and faithful Being God is, but because he has also seen in the Word of God, how in a great variety of instances He has proved Himself to be so. And the consideration of this, if God has become known to us through prayer and meditation on His own Word, will lead us, in general at least, with a measure of confidence to rely upon Him: and thus meditation on the Word of God, will be one special means to strengthen our faith.” George Müller, *Autobiography of George Müller: A Million and a Half in Answer to Prayer* (London: J. Nisbet and Co., 1914), 175. E. M. Bounds said, “Faith grows by reading and meditating upon the Word of God.”

² John Murray said, " 1. “It needs also to be recognized that, as we are the subjects of this illumination and are responsive to it, and as the Holy Spirit is operative in us to the doing of God’s will, we shall have feelings, impressions, convictions, urges, inhibitions, impulses, burdens, resolutions. Illumination and direction by the Spirit through the Word of God will focus themselves in our consciousness in these ways. We are not automata. And we are finite. We must not think, therefore, that a strong, or overwhelming feeling or impression or conviction, which we may not be able at a particular time to explain to ourselves or others, is necessarily irrational or fanatically mystical. Since we are human and finite and not always able to view all the factors or considerations in their relations to one another, the sum total of these factors and considerations bearing upon a particular situation may focus themselves in our consciousness in what we may describe as a strong feeling or

The result of the Spirit working with and through the Word of God to illumine and transform our thinking is the development of a godly instinct that operates in sometimes surprising ways. In a well-taught, Spirit-illuminated believer, the revelation of Scripture becomes so much a part of his or her mindset that the will of God frequently seems to become clear instinctively, and in that sense “immediately.” Just as a well-trained and experienced musical ear recognizes whether a piece of music is played well or badly, so spiritual exercise in the Word of God creates discernment (see Heb. 5:11–14).

This may help to explain why well-meaning Christians have sometimes mistaken illumination for revelation. Confusing the labels sometimes can lead to potentially unhappy practical consequences.³

impression. In many cases such a feeling or impression is highly rational and is the only way in which our consciousness, at a particular juncture, can take in or react to a complex manifold of thoroughly proper considerations. In certain instances it may take us a long time to understand the meaning or implications of that impression. 2. It is here, however, that careful distinction is necessary. The moment we desire or expect or think that a state of our consciousness is the effect of a direct intimation to us of the Holy Spirit’s will, or consists in such an intimation and is therefore in the category of special direction from him, then we have given way to the notion of special, direct, detached communication from the Holy Spirit. And this, in respect of its nature, belongs to the same category as belief in special revelation. The only way whereby we can avoid this error is to maintain that the direction and guidance of the Holy Spirit is through the means which he has provided, and that his work is to enable us rightly to interpret and apply the Scripture in the various situations of life, and to enable us to interpret all the factors which enter into each situation in the light of Scripture. 3. There are two observations to be made in this connection. The first is that the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit is specific. The guidance which he affords us is in the concrete of our daily lives. The Word of God and the illumination of the Spirit in and through the Word are in the truest sense existential. That is inherent in the belief that the Bible is revelation and that the Holy Spirit constantly seals that revelation in our hearts and minds. The second observation is that our dependence upon an infallible rule and our reliance upon the infallible Spirit do not eliminate all error in judgment or wrong in decision on our part. We are always fallible, imperfect, and sinful. But this doctrine of guidance does eliminate the error of an erroneous criterion. If our criterion or standard of judgment is wrong, then we are deprived of the means whereby our wrong may be corrected. It is one thing to come short in the application of a right rule; it is another to have a wrong rule. It is one thing to limp in the right way; it is another thing to run in the wrong way. In the one case we have a basis for progress; in the other we have not started to make progress.” John Murray, *Collected Writings Of John Murray 1: The Claims Of Truth* (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: The Banner Of Truth Trust, 1976), p. 188-189.

³ Sinclair B. Ferguson, *In Christ Alone: Living the Gospel Centered Life* (Lake Mary, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2007), 109.

But their point is that it is extremely dangerous to disconnect the objective Word from our subjective guidance. The Holy Spirit often takes God's general promises and commands and applies them to specifics within our lives. How did God give specific leading in this chapter? It wasn't just the promise. God's promise of conquest and His command of conquest had been standing for 40 years, but His *timing* was now. And some of that timing even went down to what *day* they would cross. In verse 2 it says they waited for three days before they had any go ahead from the Lord to cross the Jordan. How does God lead? Sometimes it is through circumstances. Sometimes through the burdens that he places in the hearts of the leaders. We see that several times in this book, such as Caleb's burden to take Hebron. That was a consuming burden that God had given to him. God gave an entirely different burden to his son-in-law Othniel to tackle Kirjath Sepher. So God often leads through the burdens He places on people's hearts. In verse 3 the leaders set the stage, so sometimes He guides us through leadership. In verse 4, there is something about the ark that allows the Israelites to know where to go. **"Do not come near it, that you may know the way by which you must go, for you have not passed this way before."** In verse 7 we see God's leading in the citizen's lives by way of miracles. There are a number of ways that God leads His people, but it is leading through the Word. OK - enough on that.

V. Faith Glorifies God

Lastly, I believe that unwavering faith brings God glory. God doesn't want people saying to Christians, "I'm amazed at your faith; I'm amazed at the things you can do." God wants Christians to look at the powerful things that are being done by weak, struggling Christians and to have no doubt in their minds that God alone was doing it. Look at how this call to faith would glorify God. Look at verse 10. **"**And Joshua said, "By this you shall know that the living God is among you, and that He will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites.**"** This exercise in faith taught them that God was the one who would get the glory for the conquest. Verse 11. **"Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is crossing over before you into the Jordan."** Here was a visible reminder that it was *God* who was doing this. And I think that chapter 4:19-24 makes it clear that God alone received the glory for the things that were done. Let me read that.

"Now the people came up from the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and they camped in Gilgal on the east border of Jericho. And those twelve stones which they took out of the Jordan, Joshua set up in Gilgal. Then he spoke to the children of Israel, saying: "When your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, 'What are these stones?' then you shall let your children know, saying, 'Israel crossed over this Jordan on dry land.' for the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had crossed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which He dried up before us until we had crossed over, that all the peoples of the earth may know the hand of the LORD, that it is mighty, that you may fear the LORD your God forever."

Now *there* is a real missions statement: "that all the peoples of the earth may know the hand of the LORD, that it is mighty." Do you have a faith that glorifies God or a faith that glorifies yourself? That's yet another distinction between the real and the counterfeit. I'm

going to give you five summary conclusions that can help you to examine your heart, and if there are deficiencies to ask God to strengthen your faith.

VI. Five conclusions:

1. First, don't "step out in faith" unless you are sure that God has commanded you to do so and has promised His help. Some "open doors" lead to elevator shafts!
2. Second, don't take your cues for faith from your impossible circumstances. Impossibilities are irrelevant. If God has commanded and promised, then step through those impossibilities in the obedience of faith and watch God come through!
3. Third, never pit God's promises against His commands. I knew a minister who wanted to divorce his wife and marry another lady. We confronted him on how unbiblical it was, and his response is classic. He said, "It may not be God's perfect will, but God is leading me to do it, so it must be God's permissive will. God has promised me this lady." Wrong. God's promises always correspond to His commands, and His leading will never contradict His Word. His faith in the rightness of that divorce was a counterfeit faith.
4. Fourth, be open to being challenged subjectively to take hold of things that may take you beyond your comfort zone. God is more interested in your growth than He is in your comfort. Be willing to do hard things. God many times puts burdens upon our hearts to do new challenges.
5. Fifth, faith never leaves open an escape hatch. It burns its bridges behind it. That's what God did with the Israelites. Once they crossed and the river started flowing again, they were committed to conquest because they couldn't get back until the flood season had subsided. They were now committed to the conquest.

May God grant to each of us an unwavering faith in the face of difficult circumstances. And to Him be all the glory. Amen.