

# Fertilizer for Your Faith

Preached by Phillip Kayser at DCC on Sunday, August 28th 2022

## I. Introduction - Mea culpas from last week

Before I start, I want to make a correction to something I said last week. I said that the definition of the supernatural gift of faith that I quoted was a “standard” definition. But my son pointed out to me that the definitions he saw online did not connect it to Scripture and he was wondering if there were differing views. And sure enough, when I went online and looked at my books, I saw that D. A. Carson and Sam Storms both contradicted that definition. Both believe that this supernatural gift of faith claims things from God that it cannot claim from any promises in Scripture (they explicitly disconnect it from Scripture). I still totally disagree with that, but I wanted to at least make it clear that calling it a *standard* definition was misleading. It’s just *one* definition.

But then secondly, three people said that they were all confused on what I meant by that gift - especially by saying that the gift of faith is always in some way linked to and springs from God’s Word. One person pointed out that some of George Muller’s prayers (such as praying with faith that the dense fog would end since it was going to make his ship late to a meeting, or his prayer to find a lost key) didn’t seem to be directly related to a chapter and verse. But George Muller *himself* insisted that every single time the Lord gave this surge of faith it was something in Scripture (perhaps as simple as His knowledge of God’s generosity) that the Spirit would quicken to his heart in a very tangible way for that moment. You see, the Spirit is the sovereign giver of faith. We can’t make it. But Muller said that the Spirit of God used the Scripture to engender the faith even though the specific situation was not mentioned in Scripture. So I wanted to give three short quotes that hopefully explain what I wanted to say and I think do so much better than I did. Sinclair Ferguson said,

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.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sinclair B. Ferguson, *In Christ Alone: Living the Gospel Centered Life* (Lake Mary, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2007), 109.

John Murray said something similar. He said,

...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.<sup>2</sup>

And he goes on to ask (in effect), “So why don’t we always *seem* to have a verse at the top of our head?” And His answer is the same as Sinclair Ferguson’s. He says that the Spirit of God uses what he calls “the sum total” of our Scripture-saturated thinking about God, His generosity, His acts and attributes as the vehicle for those sudden times when our faith and certainty surges with regard to a brand new issue. But in his extended essay he insists that Scripture and subjective guidance are always tied together in some way - and that we end up in dangerous waters when they are not.

George Muller said the same thing about his miraculous faith experiences. He had thousands of times when he would suddenly have an assurance of faith that God was going to do something, and he says that God would use a Scripture to convey that certainty. Sometimes the Scripture seemed tangential and just related to God’s character or kindness, but the Spirit applied that Scripture to the new situation to produce faith. So George Muller’s advice for others was to immerse themselves in the Scripture if they wanted to have a life of faith. He said,

*...if God has become known to us through prayer and meditation on His own Word, [He] 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.*<sup>3</sup>

The point is that the Holy Spirit loves to give faith to those who are in His Word. I won’t say more or I will add confusion to their well-articulated statements.

But today I want to look at ten factors that undergirded the faith-driven desire of this generation of Israelites to conquer Canaan for God. The more these ten things are present in our lives, the more likely we will begin to be more and more characterized by their faith. Think of these ten points as fertilizer for our faith. And I think last week I did at least clearly demonstrate that they *did* have faith - a faith that led to action.

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<sup>2</sup> John Murray, *Collected Writings Of John Murray 1: The Claims Of Truth* (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: The Banner Of Truth Trust, 1976), p. 188-189.

<sup>3</sup> George Müller, *Autobiography of George Müller: A Million and a Half in Answer to Prayer* (London: J. Nisbet and Co., 1914), 175.

## II. Ten factors that undergirded their faith-driven desire to conquer the land of Canaan (or ten fertilizers in which a culture of faith grows)

### A. Have eager expectation that God is at work (v. 1)

The first factor that undergirded their faith was an eager expectation that God was at work in their lives and was about to do something more. Verse 1 says, “Then Joshua rose early in the morning; and they set out from Acacia Grove and came to the Jordan, he and all the children of Israel, and lodged there before they crossed over.”

There were two things that happened *early* in that verse that showed a sense of eagerness and anticipation of what God was about to do. First, Joshua woke up early. And this wasn't the only time that he got up early. He got up early in the morning in 6:12, 6:15; 7:16; and 8:10. And His purpose was to meet with God. Joshua was a man who started his day early with God. It's hard *not* to get up early when you are excited about something. Kids get up early on Christmas day, don't they? They are anticipating something. When I did my first smoked brisket a couple weeks ago, I had a hard time staying in bed. I was up early because I was excited to have my first smoked brisket. You might think that strange, but there are other things that likely can get you going early in the morning. But how much more so should this be the case when we have excitement about the new things that God is guiding us into. Every morning in the Word gives new insights and new guidance from the Lord. And the more you experience that in your devotions, the more you anticipate it.

The second thing that showed eager expectation and anticipation is that Israel went to the Jordan River, and verse 2 indicates that they did so three days early. What's the expression? Early is on time; on time is late, and you don't want to know what late is - right? Well, throughout this book we see an eagerness to enter into God's will. Israel does not want to miss out on anything.

If you develop this sense of eagerness and anticipation of what God is about to do, it will often be the precursor to faith rising in your soul. Why? Because God loves it and blesses it. It's fertilizer for faith.

### B. Submit to God's Lordship - Follow God's directions and live by His grace (ark - vv. 2-4)

Second, daily learn to submit to God's Lordship and live by His grace. I think both sides of that point are beautifully illustrated in the ark of the covenant. It demonstrates God's lordship and His grace, and the more we believe both to be true, the more likely we will be to have the Spirit generate faith within us. Let's read verses 2-4 first.

2 So it was, after three days, that the officers went through the camp; 3 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. 4 Yet there shall be a space between you and it, about

two thousand cubits by measure. Do not come near it, that you may know the way by which you must go, for you have not passed this way before.”

The ark of the covenant was normally not visible to anyone. It was usually hidden behind a curtain in the holy of Holies, and only the High Priest could see it and he could only see it once a year. And God’s glory cloud rested on top of it and soared up above the tabernacle into the sky. But even *here* where it was *outside* of the tabernacle, they were to keep a distance of 2000 cubits, or about 1000 yards. God was to be revered and feared as an awesome King. The fear of the Lord is not only the beginning of wisdom, it is the precursor to faith.

But let me describe the ark because I think understanding what it symbolized will help. It was a box about 3 foot nine inches long and 2 foot three inches wide and high. Douglas Mangum describes it, saying,

The cover of the ark of the covenant was adorned with solid gold cherubim. The wings of the cherubim met in the center, forming the seat of Yahweh’s throne (Exod 37:9). The kapporet formed the throne itself, while the ark functioned as its footstool.<sup>4</sup>

On the Day of Atonement the high priest would sprinkle the blood of a bull on the ark to atone for his own sins and then sprinkle the blood of a goat on the ark to atone for the people’s sins. Inside the ark were the two stone tablets on which God had written the ten commandments (Ex. 25:16,21; 40:20; Deut. 10:2-5), a jar of manna (Numb. 17:25), and Aaron’s staff (Heb. 9:4). And on the side of the ark was stored the first five books of the Bible.

So it was a beautiful symbol of Christ and His kingdom. Hebrews shows that Jesus was symbolized *by* the ark *itself*. The wood represents the humanity of Jesus and the gold that covered the wood represents His deity. The throne represents His sovereign rule. The bowl of manna represents Christ’s provision for us and the closeness of fellowship we can have with God through Jesus (and Revelation 2:17 draws that imagery out beautifully). The ten commandments represent the holiness of Christ’s kingdom and the law of His kingdom. There is no kingdom without law. Jesus said, “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.” (Matt. 5:17). So even though the ten commandments on Mt. Sinai brought fear and condemnation, when the ten commandments were placed *inside* the ark and *under* the sprinkling of the blood, it shows the Gospel. The Gospel is not anti-law. It is the good news that through Christ’s blood we are at peace with the law and can live out the law. The rod represents Christ’s leadership. So there is a lot of symbolism in this ark.

And notice that they were to follow this ark that had God’s throne. It makes sense, right? If He is the King, you follow Him. It shows that we are called to submit to God’s Lordship - to

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<sup>4</sup> Stacy Knuth and Douglas Mangum, “Cherubim,” in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

follow God's directions and live by His grace symbolized by what the Old Testament called the mercy seat or what Hebrews 4:16 calls the throne of grace. It's impossible to grow in faith if we are not following God's direction daily. I love how Revelation 7:17 applies this to Jesus. It says, "for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne [so He is in, on, and around that ark, and is symbolized by the throne - "for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne"] will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." In other words, you can't go wrong submitting to Christ and following Him all your days. With the knowledge of a Shepherd-King like *that* who has *your* best interests in mind, it stirs up faith, excitement and anticipation of daily blessings from that throne.

### C. Set yourself apart from the world (v. 5)

Yet another thing that undergirds their faith-driven desire to conquer Canaan was a willingness to set themselves apart from the world to God. We sometimes call this consecration. Verse 5 says,

And Joshua said to the people, "Sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you."

Literally it is that the LORD will do amazing things among you. Do you wish God would do amazing things in your life? Wouldn't it be great to see answer after answer to your prayers just like George Muller had? Muller said that you can experience that too. In his journal he meticulously recorded every prayer and then recorded every answer to prayer, and one person's count shows around 30,000 amazing answers to prayer. In his autobiography he insists that the amazing power of God that was at work in his life can be at work in your life too - and then he adds - if you will devote yourself to God, follow Him, and trust Him. James 4:8 says, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you." That's what we want, right? We want God's presence and working in our life. But the rest of that verse shows a condition for God drawing near to you. It says, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded." When we daily cast our sins at the feet of the cross, asking God to cleanse us and make us holy, God delights to draw near to us and begin to do amazing things in our lives.

But usually our consecration to the Lord lacks integrity. It's not real consecration. We are willing to consecrate most things in our lives to Him, but we close our ears to the Holy Spirit's conviction concerning certain corners of our life. A. T. Pierson used an illustration of a farm to show what happens. He said,

Suppose you had a thousand-acre farm and someone offered to buy it. You agree to sell the land except for one acre right in the center which you want to keep for yourself. Did you know that in some areas the law would allow you to have access to that one lone spot? And that you would have the right to build a road across the surrounding property in order to get to it?

So it is with us as Christians if we make less than 100-percent surrender to God. We can be sure that the devil will take advantage of any inroad to reach that uncommitted area of our lives.<sup>5</sup>

In contrast, Jonathan Edwards wrote,

I claim no right to myself, no right to this understanding, this will, these affections that are in me. Neither do I have any right to this body or its members, no right to this tongue, to these hands, feet, ears or eyes. I have given myself clear away and not retained anything of my own. I have been to God this morning and told Him I have given myself wholly to Him, I have given every power so that for the future I claim no right to myself in any respect. I have expressly promised Him, for by His grace I will not fail. I take Him as my whole portion and felicity, looking upon nothing else as any part of my happiness. His law is the constant rule of my obedience. I will fight with all my might against the world, the flesh and the devil to the end of my life. I will adhere to the faith of the gospel however hazardous and difficult the profession and practice of it may be. I pray God for the sake of others to look on this as self-dedication. Henceforth, I am not to act in any respect as my own. I shall act as my own if I ever make use of any of my powers to do anything that is not to the glory of God or to fail to make the glorifying of Him my whole and entire business. If I murmur in the least at affliction, if I am in any way uncharitable, if I revenge my own case, if I do anything purely to please myself or omit anything because it is a great denial, if I trust myself, if I take any praise for any good which Christ does by me, or if I am in any way proud, I shall act as my own and not God's. But I purpose to be absolutely His.<sup>6</sup>

Now if I just stopped there it could lead you to the false conclude that you only have to consecrate yourself once and it clear sailing after that for the rest of your life. And this could lead to one of two extremes. It could lead to some form of perfectionism (such as Pierson had, where he claimed to live above known sin) or it could lead you to despair. But Jonathan Edwards took neither extreme. I started this section by saying that we need to *daily* cast our sins at the feet of the cross. It's not a one time step to a higher life or to any other kind of perfection. No. It is *daily* asking God to cleanse us and make us holy in every corner of our lives. Think about it: just as Canaan was not conquered overnight, and there needed to be constant vigilance lest there be loss of territory (which they sometimes did), the battle against our flesh is not won overnight. So yes, it is good to make an unreserved consecration to God at some point in our lives, but every day we must take up our watch. Jonathan Edwards followed this initial consecration with his Resolutions. I love Resolution #56. It said, "Resolved, never to give over, nor in the least to slacken my fight with my

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<sup>5</sup> As quoted in Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc., 1996), 270.

<sup>6</sup> As quoted by John F. MacArthur Jr., *Matthew*, vol. 2, *MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 215.

corruptions, however unsuccessful I may be.” In other words, he knows he won’t be perfect, but he wants to keep fighting on every quarter.

A young teenager named Deborah Hatheway wrote Edwards for advice on how to live the Christian life. Though she was not in his church, he wrote her a letter with 19 points of resolution that he recommended that she take. He ended the letter by saying, “In all your course, walk with God and follow Christ as a little, poor, helpless child, taking hold of Christ’s hand, keeping your eye on the mark of the wounds on his hand and side.” And in Joshua this is beautifully symbolized by the ark of the covenant. They were not to fix their eyes on themselves (that would be depressing). They were to fix their eyes on the ark - on the grace of God through Jesus. It was in knowing *God* and following *God* that they would find motivation to be consecrated on a *daily* basis. Daniel 11:32 says, “...the people who know their God shall stand firm and do great exploits.” So consecration is one of the essentials that undergirds a lifetime of faith.

#### **D. Be willing to follow the God-ordained leadership if (and only if) they are willing to follow God (v. 6)**

Next, be willing to follow the God-ordained leadership *if they are willing to follow God*. Don’t follow them if they refuse to live out what they preach. Verse 6 says,

Then Joshua spoke to the priests, saying, “Take up the ark of the covenant and cross over before the people.” So they took up the ark of the covenant and went before the people.

There is nothing that kills faith as quickly as a church that is satisfied with the status quo. And this is true even if the clergy are challenging the people to act, but they themselves refuse to act. Obviously this book will illustrate division of labor and different callings (not everyone will act in exactly the same way), but everyone was called to be sold out to the Lord. When the leadership are, then follow them.

So how do you know that the leadership has faith? Confidence alone means nothing. You can measure their faith by Scripture. There are key things believed and lived out by the leadership that can enliven faith: such as a faith-filled eschatology, a faith-filled confidence in the sufficiency of Scripture, a faith-filled confidence in the power of God’s grace to transform anyone, a faith-filled confidence that God’s Biblical blueprints can give us success, etc. When the leaders have faith it provides a context for the faith of the people to grow. No leaders will be perfect, but as Kevin Swanson asks, are they going the right direction? Direction, not perfection.

#### **E. Determine that God alone will receive the glory through you (v. 7)**

Next, determine that God alone will receive the glory through you. This is so important. At first glance, verse 7 may seem to say the exact opposite. After all, isn’t it Joshua who is being exalted in this verse? Yes it is. But if you think about *why* he is being exalted and *how* he is being exalted, I think you will see that it definitely supports this principle. Verse 7:

And the LORD said to Joshua, “This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with you.

What kind of exaltation was it? Was it an exaltation that would make people see how wonderful Joshua was? No. It was an exaltation that enabled the people to see how great *God* was. They were going to see that *God* was with them just as *God* had been with Moses. And by the way, Scripture says that Moses was the most humble man upon the face of the earth. And what does Scripture say God does with the humble? Ezekiel 21:26 says, “Exalt the humble, and humble the exalted.” Matthew 23:12 says, “And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” 1 Peter 5:5-6 says, “Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for ‘God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’ Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time...”

It was precisely the humility of Moses that made God shine through Him so much. And we saw in chapter 1 that it was precisely because of Joshua’s willingness to be a servant’s servant for so many years that made God trust Joshua to be exalted. He knew that when Joshua was exalted to leadership, people would see *God* at work in Him, not *Joshua* at work in Joshua. If you want to see God’s mighty hand at work in your life as it was at work in Joshua’s life and George Muller’s life, be willing to do the humble work that Muller did and be passionate that God alone receive the glory. *That* is a precursor to genuine faith.

#### F. Step out in obedience of faith (v. 8)

Verse 8 shows yet another context in which faith continues to grow. Step out in obedience before you see the answer, and keep doing that. Verse 8 says,

You shall command the priests who bear the ark of the covenant, saying, “When you have come to the edge of the water of the Jordan, you shall stand in the Jordan.”

Remember what we said last week? The Jordan was at flood stage - probably a mile across at this point. But these priests were asked to walk into that river and to stand in its middle. And the word for “stand” means to hold your position. In chapter 4 it shows exactly *where* they held their position. It was smack dab in the middle. Now here’s the thing: God hadn’t parted the waters yet when they stepped into the river. And in chapter 4 we will see that once they got to the middle and stood their ground while the rest of Israel passed by, it would have taken courage to do so because the waters kept piling up in a heap to their right. But they took God at His Word. They stepped out in what Romans calls the obedience of faith.

Now God had actually been preparing them for this in the wilderness by making them take smaller steps of faith. And Scripture says that we grow from faith to faith. When we went through the book of Numbers we saw that this was God’s boot camp training ground. As their faith was tested and they passed, God gave them another test. And over time their faith grew and grew. The more times you take the step of faith, the more it reinforces your



faith and makes it stronger. George Muller's faith was much stronger toward the end of his life than it was at the beginning of his Christian walk.

### G. Pay attention to God's Word (v. 9)

Verse 9 gives another important factor that undergirded their faith. And this is something that men of faith down through the centuries have emphasized over and over. This precondition to faith is that we come under the influence of God's inspired revelation. It's what we started with, right?

So Joshua said to the children of Israel, "Come here, and hear the words of the LORD your God."

The inspired Word of God is what keeps our subjective guidance from going off the rails. And having leaders who are grounded in God's Word is critically important as well. Down through Israel's history, leaders who were not grounded well, led the whole nation astray fairly quickly. As Kathy mentioned, just because people have confidence or faith does not mean it is a genuine confidence or a genuine faith. You can think of the local pastor who made the papers by insisting for days that a dead boy would rise from the dead, and when it didn't happen, blamed the parents for lacking faith. Being Scripture-anchored helps us to not treat our subjective leading as infallible. There can be confidence that is ill-founded.

But I have met people who have said that they are more interested in hearing from God subjectively than they are in immersing themselves in the Scriptures. One of those people told me that he was following in George Muller's steps. I'm sorry, but George Muller spent hours in the Word of God. He was so intent on understanding the meaning of the text that he became fluent in ancient Hebrew, Chaldean, modern Hebrew, and in Greek, memorizing large portions of the Hebrew Old Testament. He read through the entire Bible close to 200 times according to his close friend, who credited every single occurrence of his faith to receive things as being grounded on the Word of God. Speaking at his funeral, he said of Muller:

One chief feature of that faith was that it was based upon God's written revelation, 'Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.' For every item of our beloved departed one's faith he had a warrant—the inspired Word of God. He reckoned revelation to be God's choicest gift next to the gift of the Holy Spirit.<sup>7</sup>

If you want to grow in faith like Muller did, immerse yourself in God's Word, read it, memorize it, meditate upon it, pray it, believe it, and apply it.

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<sup>7</sup> George Müller, *Autobiography of George Müller: A Million and a Half in Answer to Prayer* (London: J. Nisbet and Co., 1914), 702–703.

## H. Commit yourself to following God in His opposition to the world (vv. 10-11)

In verses 10-11 we see yet another essential for taking your Canaan. We must commit ourselves to following God in His opposition to the world. We call this antithesis - standing for something and standing against something. Starting at verse 10:

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 and the Hittites and the Hivites and the Perizzites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Jebusites: 11 Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is crossing over before you into the Jordan.

To follow God is automatically to be at war with the Canaanites because *God* was at war with the Canaanites. You can't follow the God of war without going to war yourself.

Now, just as a side-note, people sometimes think that they are fighting to maintain a right balance between following God and doing their duties (as if they are two different things), but that is a mistake. If the living God is among you, He is among you in your duties. Following Him ensures that all your duties are done in His strength rather than in your own strength.

But back to the main point, when God guides you in your duties, you won't be doing schooling, work, pleasure, entertainment, sex, eating, drinking, or anything else in imitation of the Canaanites. God's goal is to drive them out and replace that culture with a radically God-centered and Scripture-saturated culture. That was the goal of God in Daniel 2's vision of the Messianic kingdom - to so thoroughly replace the kingdoms of Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome with Christ's kingdom that not even the dust of those kingdoms remains and not even the memory of those kingdoms remains. Why are we resurrecting the pagans in classical education? It makes no sense. Christian classics, yes, but even there we need to be constantly pressing for a more and more consistently biblical worldview.

But the bottom line is that when we are committed to this kind of antithesis, we will begin having faith in every area of your life like Muller did. There won't be any secular-sacred divide. Every moment of the day will be lived before the Lord and will stand in stark contrast to the thinking and actions of the Canaanites. Again, each of these points is a context in which faith flourishes. Each of these points is fertilizer in which faith grows.

### I. Plan ahead for memorials (that is, anticipate God's answer; act as if the answer will come; bring an umbrella when you pray for rain) (v. 12 with 4:1ff)

There are two more essentials for faith-driven conquest. The first is to plan ahead for memorials of victory. The thought that was started in verse 12 doesn't get finished until later. Verse 12 says,

Now therefore, take for yourselves twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one man from every tribe.

And then he passes on to another subject without mentioning those twelve men again until chapter 4, verse 1. Why are they mentioned here? Why are the twelve men selected before they even cross the river? These are the men who would take twelve stones from the center of the river and put them in a memorial on the other side of the river and then take twelve other stones from outside the river and put them into the middle of the river for a memorial. By selecting them this early, Joshua is already anticipating that the river will be crossed and those stones will need to be carried by those twelve men. He is *anticipating* God's miracle. He is *counting* on God's miracle. He is already *acting* as if the miracle will certainly take place.

This too is a way to encourage and strengthen our faith in the Lord. There are various ways we can pick out our twelve men, so to speak. If we are anticipating in faith that there will be converts when we go out and witness, we will pick out the curriculum needed to disciple those converts before we even go out to evangelize them. It's like the African church that called for a prayer meeting to end the drought and to petition God for rain, and everyone showed up with an umbrella - except for the missionary. Talk about embarrassing! But those nationals were expecting God to answer, so they brought an umbrella. That's anticipating the results before the results come in. This step is so closely connected to faith that sometimes it is the evidence of faith, while other times it is the precursor to faith. I hate to use one person as an illustration so frequently, but I will use another one from George Muller because it fits this point so well.

Let me read to you a longer section from Janet & Geoff Benges's biography:

"I hate to bother you, Mr. Muller," began the matron, "but it's happened. The children are all ready for breakfast and there is not a thing in the house to eat. What shall I tell them?"

[I'll just interject here that George's close friend's eight-year-old daughter, Abigail, was playing close by, so he called for her to come with him as a teaching lesson, and he went into the dining room. The biography goes on:]

Inside they found three hundred children standing in neat rows behind their chairs. Set on the table in front of each child was a plate, a mug, and a knife, fork, and spoon.

So obviously the matron was taking actions of expectation just like George had modeled to her. By putting the plates on the table she was already selecting her twelve men to take rocks out of the middle of the river. Or to use another analogy, she was preparing the field for rain - preparing for God to provide. It's sort of like that African church praying for rain with umbrellas. Anyway, the story goes on.

But there was no food whatsoever to be seen. George watched as Abigail's eyes grew wide with astonishment. [Abigail was his friend's daughter] "But, where's the food?" Abigail asked in a whisper.

"God will supply," George told her quietly, before he turned to address the children. "There's not much time. I don't want any of you to be late for school, so let's pray," he announced.

As the children bowed their heads, George simply prayed, “Dear God, we thank you for what you are going to give us to eat. Amen.”

George looked up and smiled at the children. “You may be seated,” he said. He had no idea at all where the food he had just prayed for would come from or how it would get to the orphanage. He just knew God would not fail the children.

A thunderous din filled the room as three hundred chairs were scuffed across the wooden floor. Soon all three hundred children sat obediently in front of their empty plates.

No sooner had the noise in the dining room subsided than there was a knock at the door. George walked over and opened the door. In the doorway stood the baker, holding a huge tray of delicious smelling bread.

“Mr. Muller,” began the baker, “I couldn’t sleep last night. I kept thinking that somehow you would need bread this morning and that I was supposed to get up and bake it for you. So I got up at two o’clock and made three batches for you. I hope you can use it.”

George smiled broadly. “God has blessed us through you this morning,” he said as he took the tray of bread from the baker.

“There’s two more trays out in the cart,” said the baker. “I’ll fetch them.”

Within minutes, the children were all eating freshly baked bread. As they were enjoying it, there was a second knock at the door. This time it was the milkman, who took off his hat and addressed George. “I’m needing a little help, if you could, sir. The wheel on my cart has broken, right outside your establishment. I’ll have to lighten my load before I can fix it. There’s ten full cans of milk on it. Could you use them?” Then looking at the orphans, sitting in neat rows, he added, “Free of charge, of course. Just send someone out to get them. I’ll never fix the cart with all that weight on it.”

How did the matron prepare the fields, or select her twelve men? She set the table and had the children get ready to eat. In the movie, *Facing the Giants*, the football coach was discouraged by the way things were going. And another teacher came up to him to give him encouragement, saying,

“There were two farmers who desperately needed rain, and both of them prayed for rain. But only one of them went out and prepared his fields to receive it. Which one do you think trusted God to send the rain?” The coach replied, “The one who prepared his fields for it.” Then the question was asked, “Which one are you? God will send the rain when He is ready. You need to prepare your field to receive it.”

Brothers and sisters, some of you pray for things that you are not yet prepared to receive if God were to answer right now. You would be scrambling if God answered. You wouldn’t know what to do.

We pray that God would convert entire nations, but is the church of Jesus Christ ready to disciple nations to think Biblically in civics, math, science, and in every area of life? This is one of the passions that keeps me researching and writing for long hours after I have

finished my 50 hours of work for the church. I want to set the table for the bread. I want to choose the twelve men to move the stones. I want to prepare the field for rain. I believe God will convert nations as nations, and I want to start preparing materials for every area of a nation's life from the Bible. And I need more time. And I'm going to be asking the congregation if they would be willing to give me an extra two study weeks next year. I'll trust God if it can't be, but this is my way of preparing the fields for rain.

Each of you has your own calling, and I would urge you to prepare your own fields for rain. Select your own twelve men to be immediately ready to remove stones from the river when God answers. If we want to be a congregation of faith, we need to begin implementing all ten of these principles more consistently. These all act as fertilizer for faith.

### **J. Trust God to do what He said He would do and move forward (vv. 13-17)**

The last principle is the most obvious one - trust God to do what He said He would do and move forward in faith. There is so much packed into verses 13-17 that I have decided to reserve those verses for next week. But I want to at least end by reading this remarkable miracle one more time. Beginning at verse 13:

13 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." Josh. 3:14 So it was, when the people set out from their camp to cross over the Jordan, with the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people, 15 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), 16 that the waters which came down from upstream stood still, and rose in a heap very far away at Adam, the city that is beside Zaretan. So the waters that went down into the Sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, failed, and were cut off; and the people crossed over opposite Jericho. 17 Then the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan; and all Israel crossed over on dry ground, until all the people had crossed completely over the Jordan.

Now, I will hasten to say that we don't need a *repeat of old* miracles. We need God's power afresh in our midst. We need the Spirit to grow faith in our midst. May the fertilizer of these ten points become so pervasive among God's people that our faith becomes strong to expect great things from God and to attempt great things for God. Amen.