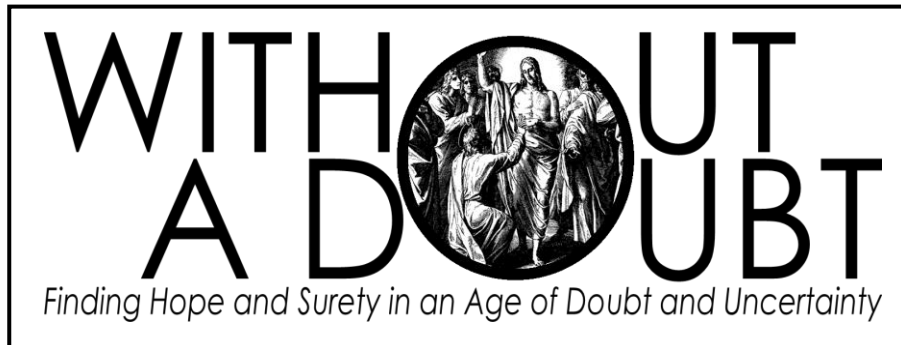


Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, September 5, 2018 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study



THE ANSWER TO DOUBT... FAITH

“How to Stop Shrinking in Doubt and Start Growing in Faith”

1 John 5:13-15, Hebrews 10:32-39 & Hebrews 11:1-6

“¹³ These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God. ¹⁴ Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. ¹⁵ And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.” – 1 John 5:13-15

This passage has been our key text/passage for our study. We have looked at it each week, and if it hasn't become apparent yet it should be crystal clear that what John is giving us is our surest help for our doubts and uncertainties that threaten and may plague us. Notice again what it says (READ: 1 John 5:13-15)

3 Things Our Key Passage for the Study Give Us As Helps for our Doubts:

- 1. God's Word is given to us to aid in our struggle with our doubts – “*These things I have written to you...*”**
- 2. Our faith is the answer to the doubts that plague us – “*... to you who believe...*”**
- 3. Who our faith is in gives us victory over our doubts – “*... in the name of the Son of God...*”**

We have been in our study “Without A Doubt” for some time now, and we have discovered some important things about doubt that need to be remembered:

9 Important Things to Remember About Doubt from God's Word: (various texts)

1. **Doubt gives rise to the enemies ability to mislead and deceive us** – Genesis 3:1 says, *“Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, ‘Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’”* Do you see it? Satan placed a questioning doubt in the woman's mind and was thereby able to craftily mislead and deceive her.
2. **Doubt causes us to question God and His goodness** – Again Genesis 3:1 says, *“Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, ‘Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’”* Here the Enemy raises a doubt about God and His intentions to keep Adam and Eve from something God, and it works. Notice what Eve says in verses 2-3, *“² The woman said to the serpent, ‘We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, ³ but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’”* I don't know if you noticed it by she buys into doubt about God's goodness. She says He will kill us if we eat from that tree. In verses 4-5 the Devil goes on to say, questioning God's goodness, *“You will not surely die,” the serpent said to the woman. ⁵ “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”*
3. **Doubt causes us to miss out on God blessing and promises** – Not only was the relationship between God and Adam and Eve (man) broken (see vs. 8), but they were banished from the place of God's blessing and provision... the garden. Verse 23 says, *“So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken.”*
4. **Doubt blinds our eyes us to the possibilities of what God can do** – (John the Baptist, Uke 1:5-25, 57-66) Did you notice in the story that although God revealed what he was going to do through Zechariah and Elizabeth, Zechariah couldn't see it? Verse 7 tells us that Elizabeth was barren and well advanced in years... way past her child bearing years. Notice verses 11-18, *“¹¹ Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. ¹² When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. ¹³ But the angel said to him: ‘Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John. ¹⁴ He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, ¹⁵ for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth.^[a] ¹⁶ Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” ¹⁸ Zechariah asked the angel, ‘How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years.’”* In other words, “God, I can't see this happening! It's just too impossible!” Remember nothing is impossible with God.
5. **Doubt closes our ears to the voice of God in our life** – Essentially, Zechariah's doubt said, “I can't even hear this! This voice can't be real!”
6. **Doubt silences our mouths as a witness for God to our world** – Literally, Zechariah's mouth was silenced for the entire pregnancy of this child. For 9 months, he didn't get to bear witness for God, which remember was his job!
7. **Doubt cuts off the flow of God's generous and gracious blessing to our lives** – (James 1:5-8) Verse 5 reminds us that God give generously to all who ask, even without finding

fault. That speaks of grace. But according to verses 6-7, doubt interferes with that generous and gracious flow. “⁶ *But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.* ⁷ *That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord;*”

8. **Doubt causes us not to be able to see things clearly** – Think about what James is saying in verse 6 when he says, “⁶ *But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.*” Think about what happens when someone is blown around, jostled, tossed about, spun around and around in a boat in the middle of the sea. He or she become disoriented, confused, and unable to see where they are going. That is the certain effects of doubt on the life of a believer. It causes us to lose our bearings.
9. **Doubt creates an uncertainty and unsteadiness in our daily walk and life** – Verse 8 says of this doubt filled one, “...*he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.*”

Doubt, actually poses a great threat to our walk and life as believer, as we have been seeing. It assaults our assurance of salvation and faith, it is closely tied to paralyzing worry and fear. Remember the great preacher, **Charles Haddon Spurgeon** said this about doubt, “*Doubt discovers difficulties which it never solves; it creates hesitancy, despondency, despair. Its progress is the decay of comfort, the death of peace. "Believe!" is the word which speaks life into a man, but doubt nails down his coffin.*” And I might add that doubt defeats and disillusion the lives of many professing believers and keep them from enjoying the full benefits of their faith and the victorious Christian life that Christ died to give them. But not only that, our ultimate enemy, the devil will use our doubt to cast doubt in the minds of many who would perhaps come to Christ, but all they see in our doubts instead. As **Dr. John MacArthur** says, “*Every temptation, directly or indirectly, is the temptation to doubt and distrust God.*” Doubt may be one of the devil’s most powerful tools.

THE DEVIL’S TOOL SALE

“There's an old fable that says the Devil once held a sale and offered all the tools of his trade to anyone who would pay their price. They were spread out on the table and each one labeled... hatred, malice, envy, despair, bitterness, lust, fear, and anger - all the weapons that everyone knows so well. But off to one side lay a harmless looking old and wooden shaped instrument marked "doubt." It was old and worn looking but it was priced far above all the rest of the tools. This puzzled one of the buyers there, so he asked the reason why the unreasonable price, for such a worn-out, old tool. To that the Devil replied, "Ah-ha, that is the most prized tool in my chest. It is worn because it is often and so successfully used. I can use this one so much more easily than the others. No one knows that it belongs to me, so with it I can open doors that are tightly bolted against the others. Once I get inside a heart with this tool I can use any tool that suits me best." That is doubt!”

Now think about this question very carefully: “*What is the opposite of doubt?*” Take a few moments a write you answer to that question and why you believe that to be the opposite of faith.

Now before you jump to many conclusions concerning your answer to the opposite of doubt, it is important for you to know that it is a much debated and disagreed upon subject, even among Biblical scholars and thinkers.

Some Quotes of Opposing View of the Opposite of Doubt:

1. **Philip Yancy, “The opposite of faith is not doubt, but fear”** - It’s easy to think, while feeling doubt, that my faith is weak. Not necessarily so. It may just mean “I’m having doubts.” Some believe that doubt is a normal part of a life of faith. "For many people, the opposite of faith is doubt. The goal, then, within this understanding, is to eliminate doubt. But faith and doubt may not necessarily be opposites.
2. **Unknown, “Doubt is often a sign that your faith has a pulse, that you’re owning your path, engaged, thinking, feeling, that your heart is alive and well and exploring and searching”** -
3. **Frederick Bueschner, “The opposite of faith is not doubt, the opposite of faith is unbelief. Doubt is the ants in the pants of faith. It keeps it alive. It keeps it moving.”** – What is Bueschner saying? Is he suggesting that “doubt” could actually spur our faith on as it agitates and cause us to dig deeper, challenge our faith that can handle the challenges and stand up to our doubts... that in some way doubt could possibly “grow” our faith.
4. **Anne Lamott, “The opposite of faith is not doubt, but certainty”**-

Some believe that we need to stop treating doubt like it is the enemy of faith... that questions need to be asked by us to make faith our own, that doubt is not deadly to faith, but silence is. Some think that pretending that we have to be “certain” about everything prevents us from asking those tough questions, and that it is actually those tough questions that get answered that eventually turns those doubts into the strongest anchors to our faith. What do you think about that?

Is doubt the opposite of faith and vice versa? We may not finally answer that question definitively, but it’s not hard to see that it may be an assault to our faith, that it may paralyze our faith or that as Spurgeon put it “doubt digs the grave of faith.” Jesus, Himself, certainly put the two at opposites when he said to the sinking faith of a sinking Peter, **“You of little faith, why did you doubt?”** in **Mark 14:31**.

As we close out this study on “doubt” it may not be important for us to define the opposite of doubt as faith, but is surely of paramount importance to see that our greatest answer and help for doubt is “faith.”

Our day has been appropriately dubbed “the aspirin age.” Physical exhaustion runs a close second to hypertension. Stress, anxiety, and uncertainty rule the day. To help us cope, we swallow pills by the handful... sedatives, relaxers, stress reducers or energy boosters and adrenaline enhancers... whatever it takes to speed us up, keep us going, or slow us down and get us to relax a little bit and not take life so hard and fast. Ironically, no period in the history of man has ever had more leisure opportunities, creature comforts, better foods, or greater financial possibilities really... yet the faces of people in our day reflect torment, fear, crisis, worry and “doubt.” Our tendency is to “shrink,” to escape, to crumble beneath the crushing weight of our times, our problems, and our doubts. We have formed habits for coping that absolutely stifle

growth and cause us to shrink rather than flourish, blossom and bloom. God speaks to this issue. The answer is “faith.” The answer to doubt is “faith.” **How do I stop shrinking (shriveling, drying up, non-growth, swallowed by doubts) and start growing? FAITH!**

HOW FAITH AND DOUBT INTERACT?

Dr. Charles Stanley gives us a couple of reasons that he sees that even Christians/believers... those who claim to have faith, may struggle with doubt sometimes. These may give us an idea of how faith is impacted by doubt.

3 Reasons Believers (those of faith) May Struggle with Doubt: (Dr. Charles Stanley)

1. **Our faith may be affected by a failure to see God work in our circumstances may cause us to doubt** – Dr. Stanley says, “One reason we are so prone to doubt is that we fail to see God at work in our circumstances. We asked, and nothing happened. But the Lord is not some cosmic bellhop who jumps in response to our requests. He sees past, present, and future and knows the right time for every answer. His invisible hand is already at work on our behalf—arranging situations to accomplish His will, opening hearts, and preparing us to receive what He wants to give.” When we pray and anguish over circumstances, be they trials or heartaches or struggles, and we don’t seem to see God doing anything to immediately help us, it may lead us to doubt... doubt Him, doubt His care, doubt His presence, doubt His ability to help... doubt!
2. **Our faith may be affected by a lack of understanding in God’s ways may cause us to doubt** – Dr. Stanley says, “Another cause for uncertainty (and doubt in our life) is ignorance. If we don’t know God’s ways, we will be disappointed in His response. All too often our prayers are accompanied by (our) expectations of how He will work. When He fails to intervene according to our timetable or anticipated method, we start to doubt.” But placing our faith in the Lord and trusting in His good and perfect ways gives us stability as we wait for His answer.
3. **Our faith may be affected by a neglect of time spent in God’s Word may cause us to doubt** – Much comfort and help can be found in God’s Word when we face circumstances in our life that could lend themselves to doubt. When we spend time in God’s Word we gain a greater understanding of how God works, of His ways, and of principles that may help us to navigate trying times. Dr. Stanley says, “To overcome doubts, spend time in the Word to learn God’s principles and ways. Then you’ll begin to grasp what He wants to achieve in your life and how He goes about it. Examine your past from a biblical perspective—faith will grow as you see the unexpected ways He answered your prayers.”

Let’s probe a little deeper to understand how we may strengthen our faith in the faith of the “doubt” we may experience. How do we deal with the pain of doubt... and “doubt” is and can be very painful to deal with? When life gets hard, and doubt assails us, what are we to do? Let’s take a look at this particular trial that we may all face from time to time, and see how we can grow and mature in the faith even in the face of the painful trial of doubt.

A LOOK AT THREE CATEGORIES OF FAITH AND THEIR EFFECTS ON DOUBT

The term “faith” is a little five-letter word that we sometimes have trouble fleshing out in our lives – yet it falls freely from our lips. It is used more than 200 times throughout Scripture. For the purpose of this study, we need to categorize the meaning of faith a little so that we

understand exactly what we are talking about when we speak of our growth and how to grow despite life's pains.

3 Categories of Faith:

1. **Saving Faith** – In Mark 4 Jesus described a farmer distributing seed across a variety of soils. Some of that seed fell on good soil and germinated, rooted, and yielded a huge crop. In several biblical instances, saving faith is represented as a small seed that, when planted, grows to be something large and abundant. Such is the mustard seed. Jesus spoke of this seed as being the size of faith it takes for a person to be converted (saved) (Mk. 4:30-32). When coming to personally know Jesus Christ by faith, we come to know God. We learn from a variety of Scripture passages that the blend of God's grace and our faith result in salvation.

- Romans 5:1-2, *"Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand."*
- Ephesians 2:8-9, *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast."*
- Galatians 3:26, *"You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus."*

Is this kind of faith (saving faith) ever threatened by doubt? Give examples! Yes, saving faith may come under assault from our doubt in the form of doubting one's salvation, a lack of assurance, not being sure if one is indeed saved or lost.

2. **Doctrinal Faith** – This is the composite of Christian truths that make up our basic beliefs... what we believe. We might call it "doctrinal" truths or beliefs. References to such faiths are found in:

- 1 Corinthians 16:13, *"Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong."*
- Colossians 2:7, *(Be) rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness."*
- Jude 3, *"Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints."*

Is that kind of faith (doctrinal faith) ever threatened or assaulted by doubt? Give examples! Yes, there are many today who call into question "doctrinal faith" challenging the reliability and inerrancy of God's Word, creation vs. evolution, the universality of sin, the fall of man, the existence of God, Jesus as God, Jesus as Savior/Messiah, how a person is saved, etc.

3. **Practical Faith** – This category refers to the faith principles upon which we must operate in order to rise about the drag, the depression, the heavy weight of daily cares and concerns, the pains that come... you know, "doubt." We could call it "deep, abiding, unswerving confidence in God rather than in ourselves, our circumstances, and our world." It has to do with relying upon God to handle "me" in troublesome times... times we do not understand, times of waiting, times of failure, times of misunderstanding, times of loss, times of mistakes, times of weakness, times of discouragement and depression, times of feeling inferior, times of fear, times with ends we cannot see... doubts!

Is that kind of faith (practical faith) ever threatened or assaulted by doubt? Give examples! Yes, practical faith is assaulted and threatened by the circumstances and uncertainties around

us every day. Our faith must be put into “practice”... our “saving faith” and “doctrinal faith” but be put to practical use if we are to find hope and help for our doubts.

Some Helps on Practical Faith:

1. **A Biblical picture of practical faith in the face of doubt (Romans 4:19-21)** – An illustration of practical faith and how it was used in the face of doubt and uncertainty can be found in Abraham in **Romans 4:19-21**, *“Without weakening in his faith, he (Abraham) faced the fact that his body was as good as dead – since he was about a hundred years old – and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.”*
 - **How is this an example of practical faith?** *Abraham and Sarah not only had the heartache of desiring children and being childless, but they also had this “out of the blue” and seemingly unreasonable promise from God given their age that they would have a child and a great nation would come from him (Abraham).*
 - **What was the doubt they may have been dealing with?**
 - **What was the greatest sign that Abraham (and Sarah) had found an answer to their own doubts, fears and worries?** *Practical faith acted out*
 - **Could they have shrunk back and what would have been the effects of their shrinking back?** *They would not have grown, their faith would have died, they would not have been the ones through whom God raised up His chosen people and ultimately the promised Messiah, Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord.*
2. **A Scriptural truth of practical faith in the face of doubt (2 Corinthians 5:7)** - A Scriptural truth for us to grasp (something to grab hold of and hang onto in times like these) is found in **2 Corinthians 5:7**, *“We live by faith, not by sight.”*
 - **What does it mean to live by sight in relation to the doubt and uncertainties we may face in this life?** *It means we put our focus on the circumstances, pains of this life, whatever they may be, and we quickly become paralyzed, growth is stunted, overwhelmed and defeated... we stop growing, become doubt filled. “I can’t do this!”*
 - **What does it mean to live by faith in this context?** *Trust and believe that God is bigger than these challenges that come our way and growing in them through Him.*
3. **A provided help for practical faith in the face of doubt (Ephesians 6:16)** - **Ephesians 6:16** helps us understand the practical effects of this sort of faith, *“In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.”* Faith is seen here as “a shield” that holds off from us those darts of Satan which can pierce and immobilize us... in this case the fiery dart of doubt. Remember that “doubt” is one of the enemies most prized tools. God has provided us with everything we need to deal with the “doubts” of life... our faith put into practice.
 - **What is the relation of the evil one (Satan) to these pains and challenges of doubt that we face?** *Well, the truth is “doubt” is pretty common to all of us at some time in our lives. We all struggle with doubts at times. They are just a natural part of living I think. But what the darts are that he may throw at us are the darts to trip us up, slow us down, cause us to fall and falter under the struggle with these doubtful thing. God desires to use these things as stepping stone of growth... faith growth in our life, but you can be sure His enemy, Satan, wants to throw darts at you to make falter and struggle through this life and keep you from growing in your faith. You are dangerous when your faith is healthy!*

- **So this “shield of faith” (practical faith) does what for us in the midst of our doubts and struggles?** *Shields up, protects us so we can grow. Faith protects us so we can grow no matter what the “doubts” of this life. It goes like this, “I don’t understand why these things are happening to me, why I am having to play the waiting game, why things aren’t working out, why life is so hard and difficult right now, but I have faith that God is in control and He will take care of me.” You see how that is a “shield” to the dart of the enemy who want you to cave to the problems.*

THE ANSWER TO DOUBT... FAITH SEEN AT PLAY IN TWO GROUPS OF CHRISTIANS (Hebrews 10:32-39)

Historically, the letter to Hebrews was penned around A.D. 64. Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus (Nero) was in power. He was 27 years old when we watched Rome burn (July 18, 64). Rumor had it that Nero himself had torched the city; consequently, there was a conspiracy against his life. Seeking a scapegoat, he turned to the Christians – upon whom he placed the blame. Persecution and martyrdom became harsh realities. When we read guidelines in this text for living in hard times, we read about reality. In front of this backdrop were two groups of Christians; those who stood and therefore their faith grew and flourished and brought victory over their doubts... others who were shrinking back and doubt paralyzed their faith, and their faith shrunk.

2 Groups Identified in Hebrews 10:32-29

- 1. Those who stood firm in their faith in the face of doubt and uncertainty (Heb. 10:32-38)**– Christians had victoriously endured, yet several exhortations were directed toward them for their encouragement, but also for their growth. You and I can grow through our pains and hardships when we put these things into practice in our own lives during the challenges we have been discussing.
- 2. Those who shrank back in their faith in the face of doubt and uncertainty (Heb. 10:38-39)**– These had defected. Without courage they faded into the pressure-cooker world about them, becoming absorbed in the society indifferent to Christ. Those who shrank experiences two growth stunting, faith killing results:

3 Keys for a Faith that Grows in the Face of Doubts:

- (1) Remember the former days (READ: vv.32-34)** – Looking back (remembering) they had done what was right and they had seen God’s hand and promise in the midst of it all. **Key lesson: Avoiding shrinking in the faith and rather growing in the faith in the midst of doubts in this life requires focusing on past victories that God pulled off during difficult times.** We’ve seen Him do it before and by faith we know He will do it again.
- (2) Do not throw away your confidence (READ: vv.35-36)** – The term “throw away” has the idea of “yanking something up by the roots and throwing it aside.” How can a plant grow if it is pulled up by the root and tossed aside? It will die... so will faith if it gives up and gives into our doubts. The word translated here as “confidence” means “being free and fearless, having cheerful courage, boldness, assurance, and determination, certainty, no-doubt .” By contrast, the author encouraged his readers in verse 36, “*You need to persevere (endure, patient perseverance, abiding under) so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what He promised.*” Listen, what takes a few seconds to read here may take years to develop. We have to grow in this kind of patient endurance through these doubt in life that

we have been talking about. **Key lesson: Endure the test with boldness and confidence. Let God have His perfect work.**

- (3) **Exercise the faith within you (v.38)** – The remainder of Scripture is given again to those who had endured in verse 38, *“But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him.”* Emphasis is upon the responsibility of the one living. Did you notice it? He could either “live by faith,”... that is exercise his faith or he could “shrink back”... that stagnate, retreat, yank up his faith, give in his or her doubts – the result of the latter being that God withdrew His pleasure and therefore no growth would be possible. **Key lesson: Exercising our faith... putting it into practice in our lives enables us more and more to have the ability to face the doubt and uncertainties that may try to undo us with victory.**

2 Warning Signs of a Faith that Shrinks Back in the Face of Doubt:

- (1) **A faith that shrinks back gives evidence more of a lost person who is ensnared by his or her doubts (v.38)** – *“... But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.”* In the context of verse 38 the writer is quoting from God’s own words through the Old Testament prophet, Habbakuk in Habbakuk 2:3-4. Verse 38 says that the “just”... in other words, those who have been justified by God through faith... shall live (or walk) by faith. *“... But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.”* The individual who draw back from the knowledge of the gospel and faith give evidence that they aren’t His. It is not saying “God doesn’t like them!” or that God doesn’t want to see them saved. It saying that a faith that shrinks back or draws back in doubt, may be giving evidence that they were never saved. Remember we said that sometimes those who “doubt” need to because somethings not right.
- (2) **A faith that shrinks back and gives into his or her doubts will be a miserable faith and a faith cursed with torturous doubts (v.39)** – *“But we are not of those who draw back and to perdition...”* Do you see it? Growth stunted, faith-life dies (destroyed), cursed to experience the tortures of doubt. **Key Lesson: To not exercise your faith in of the pains of this life is to shrink back from God’s blessing and growth in in your life in the midst of them.** Shrink back and your growth as a believer will be stunted and your faith dies.

A FAITH THAT CONQUERES DOUBT (Hebrews 11:1-6)

The great faith chapter, give us not only a picture of what faith looks like, but much hope for conquering the “doubt” and uncertainty that confronts us in this this walk of faith we are on. Practical faith enables us to let go and let Him have the rope in the midst of our doubts and fears. Perhaps the exercise of this kind of faith will work more easily when we understand some basics. (READ: Hebrews 11:1-6)

5 Observations about Practical Faith for our Growth: Verse 1 stands as a clarifying frame around these six verses, *“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”* Keep this in mind as we proceed through these 5 observations

1. **Practical faith for our growth involved assurance and conviction (v.1)** – The first of these words (assurance) means to stand under something so that it is supported.” It was used in the first century for a document like a title deed. Let’s put it this way, when your faith is solid, it stands under every situation and support it with assurance. The second term (conviction) means “proof.” Faith is conscious, living proof in the mind that something is going to

happen... that God is going to take care of our life experiences. It is being convinced, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that He will take charge of the situation.

2. **Practical faith for our growth always relates to something yet future (v.1)** – *“... of what we hope for.”* The word “hope” points to the future. Instead of enjoying the certainty available to us through faith, we ask questions like, “What if? We worry. We see tomorrow in light of our own abilities, not God’s. Faith prepares us for adventure instead of fear, because of our assurance that God can capably handle all things... all things.
3. **Practical faith for our growth has as its object “things not see” (v.1)** – Faith is fixing our attention on what we cannot see. It is thinking broadly, beyond the realms of tradition and history. Pessimists look to the past and cannot live by faith. They also maintain the status quo, they never soar to the heights which God has in mind for them... they can’t see. That is because it is not seen, it is believed by “faith.” Focusing only on “the seen,” we lose our faith-thinking that is often characterized by fresh creativity and soaring thoughts... a vital trust that God can and will do as He promised.
4. **Practical faith for our growth is basic to pleasing God (vv.2-6)** – *“And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”(v.6)* The author cites situations where different ones started with nothing and wound up with the marvelous provision that only God was able to provide: Abel (v.4) and Enoch (v.5). He goes back to the beginning of time, when there was nothing; when a precedent was established by God Himself as He created visible things out of that which was first unseen... things prepared “at God’s command” (v.3). If God can do that, then He can take our lives, our dreams, and plans, our struggles, our failures and on the basis of our faith, make something of them. He can bring glory to Himself by doing so. Faith pleases Him.
5. **Practical faith for our growth means that we believe God exists and rewards the seeker (v.6)** – The word “exist,” used in the phrase *“...because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists...”* means that He is “present” and “real.” A good question to ask yourself is this, “If God suddenly ceased existing, would it make any difference in my life?” Would your life be shattered, or would it be only slightly affected? Faith means that we believe He exists and rewards the seekers. One who seeks “searches diligently, requires, and demands.” In other words, by faith I require, my life requires God to come through. I depend on God. I trust Him. It that were my arrangement... my idea, that would be presumption upon God, but that’s His arrangement... He wants it that way... He desires to seek Him in all of life’s avenues. He is the one who can grow us.

2 Check-up Questions on Practical Faith: Practical faith that is the key to victory in the midst of the doubts and uncertainty of this life, cannot operate until we take things seriously and say, “I will not quit until I have developed this habit of unilateral trust in God... trusting God fully even in the face of my doubts.” This trusting must be performed in our home life, in our work life, in the intellectual realm, in relationships, in everything... every avenue. Here are a couple of questions to ask yourself periodically.

1. **Why is practical faith such a struggle for me?** We know it is a must for getting through the pains of this life and growing, but it’s just hard sometimes to let go and really trust God. Ask yourself why?

2. **Why is it so difficult to live one day at a time?** A great question when we are really struggling... God may reveal some areas where you haven't really let some things go and turned them over to Him.

TWO PRACTICAL HELPS FOR DEVELOPING A FAITH THAT FINDS VICTORY OVER DOUBT

Life should be lived like this. Yesterday is a cancelled check; we cannot negotiate it again. Tomorrow is a promissory note; it can't be utilized until it arrives. Today is cash in hand; it must be invested. The psalmist expressed it this way in **Psalm 118:24**, *"This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it."* Let's look at this way.

2 Practical Helps for a Faith to Conquer Doubt:

1. **Faith... use it** - Faith is like a muscle... it must be exercised if it is to grow and be usable in our fight against doubt. If you don't use it you will lose it. If you simply lay in bed and never use your muscles they will atrophy. Same with your faith. If we don't walk our faith, we will atrophy and when the doubts, and pains, heartaches, when life happens we can't do it. If we will exercise our faith it will grow. We exercise our faith through the Word of God, through prayer, through His church, through worship, and fellowship with other believers, through sharing our own faith with others, etc.
2. **Faith... embrace it** - Faith is like a sunrise... it is fresh every morning. We must embrace each new day God give us by... faith, and He will give us all we need for the challenges of the day. *"Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness"* (Lamentations 3:22-23)