



SERMON NOTES

From In Touch With Dr. Charles Stanley

LEVELS OF FAITH IN THE LIFE OF THE BELIEVER

KEY PASSAGE: Mark 11:20-24 | SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES: Matthew 6:25-30; 8:5-10, 23-26; 11:20-24; 16:5-8; 17:19-20 | Mark 9:17-29 | Hebrews 13:5

► SUMMARY

When you encounter adversity, do you react with doubt and fear, or do you confront your trials in faith?

If you respond by trusting God, you're on the right path. But, as followers of Christ, we can always deepen our relationship with Him. Scripture plainly reveals that there are different degrees of faith.

► SERMON POINTS

Certainly, the longer we live, the more we should function at a higher faith level. However, some people don't even realize there are degrees of faith. Even if they do, fear can hinder their trust, and they will remain at the lowest level, needlessly missing out on God's best.

God offers the gift of faith to every person, Christian or not. In fact, we all exercise faith every day: We turn on a faucet, believing it will produce a flow of water; we go to the office, expecting to have a job there; and as Christians, we pray because we trust that God hears and answers His children. The believer's faith is God-directed while the unbeliever's faith is self-directed. The non-Christian simply chooses not to exercise faith in the Lord.

Faith in God is vital to our relationship with Him. It determines whether we have peace or anxiety and can mean the difference between courage and fear. Trusting God impacts every aspect of life. Even the way we handle minor, everyday decisions is closely connected to what we believe. Faith can be a struggle because we naturally react according to what we see and feel. But when we respond by trusting God, He blesses us.

Levels of Faith

■ **Level One: Little Faith** is restless faith, which is characterized by struggling and wavering between hope and uncertainty. It says, "I know God can, but I'm not sure He will." We see numerous Scripture passages where Jesus mentions the weakness of someone's faith, not as criticism but with a sense of encouragement to move to a deeper level (Matt. 6:25-30; 8:23-26; 16:5-8; 17:19-20). Many people remain at this stage because their focus is on themselves, their circumstances, and their own resources or abilities instead of on the Lord. They are unable to believe God for much, and they become fretful.

James 1:6-8 warns against this type of hesitant faith—he says that the person who doubts "... ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways." That is not to say God will never answer your prayers unless you reach the highest degree of faith. Since He desires the best for us, He doesn't want us living on this lowest level. We must also realize that being spiritually mature does not mean a Christian will never waver. There are times when we are confronted with new or confusing situations, and it is then that we may labor to know God's will.

For the Christian who is struggling with level one faith, the questions to ask are, *Where is my focus? Do I really believe that God is who He says He is—that He is omnipotent and omniscient, that He loves me unconditionally and has promised never to leave or forsake me?* (Heb. 13:5). Some of the obstacles to higher level faith are: 1) not knowing what Scripture says about the Lord and 2) thinking according to the world's pattern instead of "programming" the mind with God's Word. In

either case, the solution is the same—regular intake of biblical truth.

Mark 9:17-29 gives a clear example of wavering faith. In verse 24, the father of a demon-possessed boy cries out, “I do believe; help my unbelief.” He was simply saying, “I’m believing You, Jesus, but I’m having a hard time of it.” God understood his struggle and honored the faith that he had. The Lord is aware of our struggles, too, but He wants us to move to a deeper faith level, where we will expect—and receive—His best.

■ **Level Two: Great Faith** is reaching faith, which is demonstrated by maturing believers who are unwilling to remain on a level of doubt and fear. Great faith stands on the truth of Scripture and needs no proof other than the Word of God. The focus is on the Lord, not on the difficulty. The issue is not how bad the situation is, but that our sovereign God is bigger than anything we face and is powerful enough to change any circumstance.

As a result, great faith is willing to wait. On level one, people fret and fume when things don’t turn out as hoped, and then they give up. Be aware that it is not a sin to struggle with your faith. However, to give up is sin because it expresses pure unbelief. Great faith is willing to persevere. It says, “I’m not giving up” and trusts God with full expectancy that He will do exactly what He has promised.

Matthew 8:5-10 illustrates this level of faith. The centurion so trusted the Lord’s ability to restore his servant’s health that he didn’t even consider it necessary for Jesus to heal the man in person. When the officer declared, “Just say the word, and my servant will be healed” (v. 8), Jesus’ response was to marvel at such great faith (v. 10).

■ **Level Three: Perfect Faith** is resting faith, which says, “Not only can God do this; it’s a done deal.” A person operating at this trust level knows he has what he requests, because he stands on God’s Word in

absolute assurance (Matt. 21:22). There is no more fretting, no more manipulation, no more trying to figure things out and make them happen.

Perfect faith is the goal for every believer. In Mark 11:14-20, the disciples noticed that the fig tree Jesus had cursed (v. 14) was now withered from the roots up. Jesus’ response was, “Have faith in God ... all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them [past tense], and they will be granted you [future tense]” (vv. 22-24). Perfect faith knows what God says and doesn’t question it, but confidently assumes it is as good as done.

The Lord wants our faith to be such that we will consistently watch divine promises become a reality. Of course, a person living in sin or praying for something outside of God’s will cannot expect his request to be granted. But the obedient Christian with level three faith rests in the promises of Scripture—he doesn’t feel the need to beg; what God has already promised will occur.

Little faith frets because circumstances look bleak and assumes that God must not be listening. Great faith reasons, “Father, You said You would supply my need, and I am trusting You to do it.” Perfect faith says, “You have promised You would supply my need, and I know You have already prepared the provision You have in mind. What is a struggle for me is no struggle for You at all—You have it all worked out. Thank You very much.”

► RESPONSE

- Do you believe there is one omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, faithful, and loving God who is the sovereign ruler of the universe?
- How do you move to deeper levels of trust? What would happen if you focused on God rather than your circumstances?

To purchase this message on CD or DVD, please visit store.intouch.org or call 1-800-789-1473.
To download these Sermon Notes, visit intouch.org/sermonnotes.

