



SERMON NOTES

From In Touch With Dr. Charles Stanley

THE STAGES OF FAITH

KEY PASSAGE: Romans 4:18-22 | **SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES:** Genesis 17:15-18; 18:1-15; 22:1-13
Matthew 6:25-30; 8:5-10, 23-27; 9:20-22; 15:22-28 | Mark 9:19-24 | Ephesians 2:8-9 | James 2:21-22

► SUMMARY

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus commended those who believed in Him.

At one point, His disciples asked Him to increase their faith. That's a request we should all make of the Lord because every Christian needs strong faith to go through challenges and walk in obedience to God.

► SERMON POINTS

Due to our limited knowledge of the Lord and His Word, we all begin our new life in Christ with little faith. Throughout the Christian life, we'll face times when our faith is weak, but as we grow, the struggles will diminish, and our trust in the Lord will increase.

The Three Stages of Faith

Abraham is an example of a man whose faith grew as he walked with God. As we examine his life, we'll see how he moved from one stage of faith to the next over the years. Romans 4:20 summarizes Abraham's experience: "With respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God."

Stage One—Little Faith

This stage is characterized by restlessness because we're influenced by what is felt, seen, or heard. As a result, we're burdened with doubts. Our faith is small because the focus is not on the Lord, and many times there's a lack of understanding of God and His Word. If we aren't growing

in our knowledge of the Lord and are not meditating continuously on God's Word, our faith will stay small. Godly people in Scripture were focused on Him and sought to understand His character, works, and will.

Illustrations of Little Faith

As Jesus interacted with people, He identified some who had small faith.

- **Matthew 8:23-27.** When a violent storm developed as Jesus and His disciples were in a boat, the disciples were afraid, but Jesus said to them, "Why are you afraid, you men of little faith?" (v. 26). The obstacles to their faith were what they saw (a raging storm), felt (fear), and reasoned would happen (death). But they failed to focus on Jesus.
- **Matthew 6:25-30.** When Jesus addressed a crowd of people who were anxious about their basic needs, He told them God would provide for them and addressed them with "You of little faith!" (v. 30). Their faith was small because they were worried about having enough rather than focusing on the God who cares and provides for His children.
- **Mark 9:19-24.** The father of a demon-possessed boy came to Jesus for help saying, "If You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!" (v. 22). His faith was weak because of the apparent hopelessness of the situation and the length of time it had persisted. But Jesus told him, "All things are possible for the one who believes" (v. 23). The father immediately cried out, "I do believe; help my unbelief!" (v. 24). Like this father, we too want to believe, but our gaze often shifts away from God and onto the situation.

Stage Two—Great Faith

Little faith is part of the process of spiritual growth; we can move on to a higher level by shifting our focus. Those with great faith have minds centered on the heavenly Father, and they meditate on God's Word to understand His ways. Since faith at this stage is God-focused, we're not thrown off balance by circumstances because we've learned to see beyond the visible challenges to the invisible, but sure, faithfulness of God.

Illustrations of Great Faith

- **Matthew 8:5-10.** A centurion came to Jesus asking Him to heal his paralyzed servant. He said, "Just say the word, and my servant will be healed" (v. 8). Jesus responded, "Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel" (v. 10). What made the centurion's faith great was his confidence in the authority of Christ.
- **Matthew 9:20-22.** On another occasion, a woman suffering from a hemorrhage believed she could be healed by just touching Jesus' garment. When He turned around to see her, He said, "Daughter, take courage; your faith has made you well" (v. 22). Her focus was on Jesus' power, not on the hopelessness of her condition.
- **Matthew 15:22-27.** When a Canaanite woman repeatedly begged Jesus to heal her daughter, He responded, "O woman, your faith is great; it shall be done for you as you desire" (v. 28). We see from her example that when our focus is on Christ, our faith skyrockets, and we finally see our problem in proper perspective.

Stage Three—Perfect Faith

In James 2:21-22, we see Abraham as an example of perfect faith. The word "perfected" in this passage means completed. It is faith that has been tested and found strong. When the Lord called Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac, by faith he was willing to obey. As a result, his faith was perfected or completed. Perfect faith rests in God's

faithfulness, even in the midst of turmoil, struggle, and hardship.

Illustrations of the Three Stages of Faith

The record of Abraham's life shows how he moved from one stage of faith to the next.

- **Stage One.** When the Lord promised Abraham that he'd have a son through Sarah, his doubt made him laugh and ask that Ishmael be accepted instead (Gen. 17:15-18).
- **Stage Two.** In Genesis 18:1-15, the Lord said Sarah would give birth within a year. She too laughed and doubted God, but when she conceived, her faith and Abraham's soared as they saw the Lord fulfill His promise.
- **Stage Three.** By the time God told Abraham to offer Isaac as a sacrifice, his faith had become so strong that he obeyed immediately even though the Lord had said that Isaac would be the heir to all the promises (Gen. 22:1-9). Abraham was so confident in God's faithfulness that he believed the Lord would raise Isaac from the dead if necessary to keep His promise. Abraham even told his servants that he and Isaac would worship on the mountain and that they'd both return.

To progress in faith, it's helpful to keep a record of what God has done in your life as you've trusted Him. Remembering past experiences that demonstrate His faithfulness increases your confidence in the Lord today. You should also faithfully meditate on God's Word to know His mind and heart. Then watch to see how He consistently answers your prayers and intervenes in situations in your life. And finally, thank Him every day for His faithfulness.

► RESPONSE

- Which characteristics of the stages fit you best?
- In what areas of life do you struggle to trust God? What obstacles keep you from great faith?
- How well do you know the Lord's character, ways, and desires? Do you meditate on His Word daily? It's difficult to trust God if you don't know Him well.

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