

I. Intro

A. Some things turn out better than expected. Like today's phones. Anyone want to trade this in on the 600-pound monstrosity Cronkite was excited about? Some things turn out to be better than expected.

1. Some things turn out worse: cars still do not fly! I keep waiting. The self-driving thing is cool, but I was promised the car – helicopter combo and I'm thinking it's not going to happen any time soon. Some things are worse.

2. And some things are simply more confusing than expected, like faith.

3. On the one hand, the word faith is easy to define. Jesus contrasts faith with unbelief. And then in Hebrews 11, faith is defined as, "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." That's reasonably straight forward.

4. But the word is understood in different ways by different people and when you pay close attention you realize that there is a lot of confusion out there.

B. And that is a big deal for a host of reasons. For starters, the Bible claims that faith is very important.

1. In Galatians 3 Paul says we are expected to live by faith," and in Hebrews 11 the writers tell us that "without faith it is impossible to please God."

C. On top of this, I've argued that we are going to need faith to navigate tomorrow.

D. I would add, we need faith to navigate today. On Wednesday morning I found myself very discouraged.

1. I started the day like normal. Stumbled down stairs rehearsing some of the prayers I pray in the first minutes of the day. But when I started to pray about the specifics of the day, I found myself growing discouraged and then, in pretty short order, I got angry. With God.

2. This surprised me. It's not my typical m.o. And so I hit pause and tried to figure out, what is going on? Why am I in such a bad mood? I identified a few things pulling me down:

a) Several people in the hospital facing serious challenges.

b) The current political moment, which I find depressing.

c) The things some of my friends are going through: a few weeks ago I mentioned that three good friends are in crisis. Two are doing a bit better. One is not and a fourth was added to the list.

3. All of that is a little unusual but not much, it's not way out of line with normal life. I never fully unpacked that. But I was in a pretty low spot, feeling a bit desperate.

4. So I went to a passage I've been turning to a lot. It's in I Samuel 30:6, where David is having a really bad day. Saul is chasing him. The Amalekites just raided his camp and kidnapped the wives and children of the men he was leading, who now want to kill him. He's mad himself. And what the text says is, "David strengthened himself in the Lord."

E. And I said, "Lord, I need some of that. And so I started to list the good things that were going on and the real reasons I have hope:

1. This ends well. We win. God has everything under control and He has promised that he will bring it to a glorious conclusion.

2. Christian hope is not simple wishful thinking, nor is it based on of escaping from this world. It is grounded in the reality of Christ’s resurrection and the promise of a new – renewed – creation. It is grounded in faith.

F. All of that to say, faith is not simply important for the future. It’s important for today. Some of you need to be encouraged! I want us to drill down on what it means.

II. The topic is faith.

A. In the last month we have explored courage, wisdom and humility. Obedience and community are coming up. Today we turn to faith, which I think is one of the most important and least understood.

B. For what it’s worth, faith is a hot topic, a point I can make simply by noting what has been unfolding on the pages of *The New York Times*.

C. It wasn’t that long ago that prominent atheists – like Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris and Christopher Hitchens – were all the rage. They were blaming most of the world’s problems on faith, and describing people of faith as human pit bulls: small brains, big teeth and powerful jaws.

D. More recently you have the conversion of one of their most celebrated columnists, David Brooks.¹

1. To be clear, Brooks now describes himself as “a believer,” but when asked exactly what he believes in the last thing I heard him say was, “The grass is too new for me to let anyone walk on it. I am not going to say.”

2. Given how often he quotes John Stott, C.S. Lewis and Tim Keller, I suspect he is an evangelical. But I don’t believe he’s said that.

E. Additionally, you have the most recent book by Timothy Keller, one of the more prominent pastors in the country, who serves in Manhattan. In his most recent book, *Making Sense of God* – which is written to skeptics – he writes extensively about faith, arguing that neither atheists nor Christians can win their argument based on science and reason – both worldviews require faith. (I am only part way through, but I can commend it. If you are not familiar with Keller, you need to be).

F. All of that to say, “faith is an important topic; it is a confusing one and it’s also a hot one at the moment. Perhaps it doesn’t generate quite as much buzz on social media as the Kardashians, but it’s up there.

G. And it’s also on display in Daniel – so for those reasons and others, we are focusing on it today.

III. Let me highlight two segments from Daniel. Neither mention the word faith, but both say a lot about the faith of Daniel.

A. The first is the opening line of the book. In Daniel 1:1 we read:

1. In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God.

2. What this means is that, Daniel, who wrote this book at the end of his life, see God's hand in what he certainly would have viewed as a tragedy before – the destruction of the Temple at the hands of the evil Babylonians.

3. The fall of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar – especially the destruction of the Temple itself – would have been far more devastating to the Jews that Osama bin Laden's attack on the US back on 9-11.

4. The psychological blow of losing the Twin Towers was horrific, but in order to match the importance of the Temple bin Laden needed to take out the White House, Pentagon and a few other buildings as well: the Lincoln Memorial, National Cathedral, Smithsonian and probably a few sports arenas. The Temple was all that and more.

5. It was the worst thing that could ever happen. And yet, by the time Daniel is writing his memoirs, he sees God's hand in it. He has faith that God was big enough to be in a good and all powerful God in control even of bad events like the fall of the Temple.

B. There are examples in almost every chapter. All of chapter two is based on the belief that God is moving in and through the events of the day. But verse 27 is a nice snapshot. Nebuchadnezzar has ordered all of the wise men killed because they cannot tell the king what dream he had or what it meant. Daniel went away and prayed and then went to his supervisor and said, "Take me to the king." When Nebuchadnezzar asked if Daniel had insight:

1. V27: Daniel replied, "No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come. And then he tells the king about his dream and what it meant.

C. Daniel is a man who believed in the reality of a dimension he could not see.²

D. So, what is faith?

1. I have already cited the Hebrews 11 definition – faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Let me sharpen this definition by telling you what faith is not. There are at least eight misunderstandings about faith that I have bumped into.

IV. Eight Things Faith is Not

A. One: Biblical faith is not believing things that you know are not true.³

1. Those who claim that they only believe in things that can be proven by science or reason – which means they really need to read Keller's latest book – often disparage faith, sometimes going so far as to say that faith is believing in things you know are not true.

2. No: Faith is not being told that $2 + 2 = 5$ and you'd better accept it.

B. Two: Faith is not a leap in the dark.

1. Faith is not reason, but faith is not against reason and God doesn't expect us to believe without support. Dallas Willard said it this way: "faith is not a wild, desperate "leap" – it is "confidence grounded in reality." It is not based on nothing. To have faith in God is to trust him, to have confidence in him.

2. Think about Moses, who is celebrated for his faith. If you go back and read about the call of Moses by God – back w/ the burning bush – you see that G provided many signs for Moses. He did miracles in front of Moses as evidence of His call.

a) And when Moses went before Pharaoh, he trusted God and told Pharaoh to trust God also on the basis of what Moses had seen and then he proceeded to do miracles before Pharaoh - 10 plaques that he threatens, delivers & stops. In that sense, Moses' call to Pharaoh was based on evidence.

b) God will then, via Moses, lead the people out of Egypt – a religiously illiterate people at the time. They didn't know much about God at all – And in the process of leading them out and sustaining them in the desert He will perform many miracles again.

(1) Parting the Red Sea

(2) Manna from heaven

(3) Water from a rock

(4) Clouds by day Fire by Night

3. Let's jump ahead to Jesus.

a) He showed up doing miracles and teaching with a power and authority no one could match.

b) In fact, in John 14:11 Jesus said, "Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at the least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves."

4. My point is – we are not expected to make a leap in the dark. God has provided evidence.

C. Three: Faith is not mere intellectual assent. It has legs.

1. It is the assurance of things hoped for AND the conviction of things not seen – which suggests that faith involves both intellectual assent and trust – not just believing something to be true, but acting as if it is. Which takes things to another level.⁴

2. According to Jesus, the faith you have is the faith you show. Your actions show what you really believe.

3. Many people say they are Christ-followers, but there is little evidence of it. They say one thing but do another. They are what some would call, Christian Atheists.

4. In I John 2:3 Jesus says: We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The one who says, "I know him, but does not do what he commands is a liar and the truth is not in him." Real faith results in works. In acts of service, in care for the poor, in generosity, in worship and repentance.

5. Belief is the readiness to act as if what you believe is true. You believe something when your whole being is ready to act as if something is so.⁵

6. Faith is not mere belief. These two words are similar. But technically, belief is intellectual. It lives in the mind. To believe is to agree in principle. And that is fine as far as it goes. But it often doesn't go far enough.

7. There is a story about a 19th century daredevil named Charles Blondin who suspended a wire across Niagara Falls and wowed the crowds by going back and forth across it. He walked. He ran. He rode a bike. He stopped in the middle and cooked an omelet. He went on stilts. He pushed a wheelbarrow loaded with bricks. On one occasion after crossing he asked the crowd?

- a) “Who believes I can do it again?” Everyone raised their hand.
- b) “Who thinks I could put someone in this wheelbarrow and push them across?” Everyone kept their hand up.
- c) And then he asked, “Who will get in the basket & ride w/ me?” The hands all went down.

8. They believed that he could do it. But they were not willing to put their belief into action. What they lacked was faith. Because faith – biblical faith – is not just intellectual assent. It’s that intellectual assent in action.

9. In a very important way, faith is a verb. The faith that you have is the faith that you show. This is what James meant when he wrote, “Faith without works is dead.”

10. Because faith without works – faith without action – isn’t faith.

D. Number Four: Faith is not magic

1. Number One: Faith is not believing things we know are not true. Number Two: Faith is not a leap in the dark. Number Three: Faith is not mere intellectual assent. Number four: faith is not magic.

2. It’s not the ability to make $2 + 2 = 5$ because you somehow will that to be true.

3. There are some who imply this. They talk about the power of faith or suggest that with enough faith you can will things to happen. This is faith in faith not faith in God.

4. The suggestion is that if you believe something sincerely enough it will happen. If only you believe that you will be healed, if only you believe that God is going to bless you.⁶

5. No. The important thing about your faith in God is God, not your belief.

6. When Jesus, Paul or James writes about faith it’s clear that they believe that a person’s faith is only as good as the object in which we invest it.

7. I can believe with all my heart that $2 + 2 = 5$. But my faith – my sincere belief – doesn’t change the fact that I’m wrong.

E. Number Five: Faith is not optimism:

1. I like optimism. It beats pessimism.

2. Furthermore, I am hopeful. I believe that those who place their faith in Jesus have a bright future. I am convinced that even the worst events are only a temporary setback – that God can bring good out of them and that in the end we head to a world that works, where there is no more death, crying or pain.

3. But optimism is not hope. Optimism is a belief that good things will happen. And it’s based on what I’m going to call “hope-so” hope rather than “know-so” hope.

4. I am optimistic that the Cubs will close out the Giants. And I have “hope-so” hope that they will win the World Series. They are due.
 5. But I have “know-so” faith that the sun will come up tomorrow. I have a much greater certitude about it.
 6. Faith is not “hope-so” hope. It is “know-so” hope. Faith is not optimism.
- F. Number Six: Faith is not a feeling.
1. We shouldn’t be down on feelings. Emotions can be wonderful things. But like our body (or will, our mind) they have been affected by sin. They do not work perfectly. Emotions can be fickle.
 2. Over time, as we grow in spiritual maturity, our emotions tend to fall in line with our faith. But in a fallen world we have to be careful about following our feelings.
 3. Sometimes being married is the easiest most natural thing in the world. It is completely in tune with my emotions. Sometimes it’s not.
 4. But when it’s not, I am no less married. Because I do not base my marriage on my feelings. In fact, I wear a ring to remind me that there are other factors in play.
 5. There are days when I feel spiritually alive and close to God.
 6. There are Sunday mornings when I am profoundly moved by the music and caught up in the current of worship. And there are Sunday mornings when that doesn’t happen.⁷
 7. Again, feelings are not bad. And not always wrong. But they are not faith and we shouldn’t confuse them.
- G. Number Seven: The Christian Faith is not whatever we decide it is.
1. Please note the shift. I have been referring to the word as a verb. I am now going to talk about it as a noun. I wrote about this at some length in the book, under what I labeled cafeteria religion.
 2. Let me come at this from another angle. Imagine for a minute that there are four people in this room instead of 400 and I am ask a series of questions.⁸
 - a) Starting with, “How many marbles are in this jar?” And then I wrote down the answers.
 - b) And then I asked, “What is your favorite song?” And also wrote down the answer.
 - c) And then I said, “Well, there are actually 464 jelly beans in the jar. And we looked to see who was closest.”
 - d) And then I asked, “Who was closest on the song?”
 - e) At that point people would protest that there is no right answer for a favorite song.
 - f) People are entitled to pick their own favorite song. A person’s favorite song is a matter of taste.
 - g) And then finally I ask, “When you decide what to believe in terms of your faith, is that more like guessing the right number of beans in this jar or more like choosing your favorite song?”

3. Today most people say, choosing your faith is like choosing your favorite song. There is no wrong answer.⁹ Just so you know, that is not the way the Bible (Daniel or Jesus or anyone else in it) uses the word. That is faith in faith. That is a belief that our sincerity is going to work magic when it comes to spiritual issues.¹⁰

H. Number Eight: Faith is not a Slice of the Pie

1. Many people assume that my goal is to get you to add a wedge that says “religion” to the pie chart of your life. Or, if you already have one, to get you to expand it. I want you to:

- a) Do more religious things.
- b) Attend more religious meetings.

2. No. That is not it at all. As I have said in the past, God is not particularly interested in your Sunday mornings - or, God is not particularly interested in your religious life. He cares about everything everywhere.

3. If you want to use the pie diagram, then faith is the pie pan. It shapes everything.

V. So far I have told you that faith is and also given you a list of things that it is not. I want to end by showing you what faith might look and sound like.

A. This is a brief video clip of the comments of Monty Williams – a former NBA basketball player and coach for New Orleans, whose wife was killed in February of this year when a woman who was high on Meth, crossed the center line and hit the car she was driving.

B. This comes about five minutes into his remarks.

C. Run Video

VI. Campus Pastors come up to close and pray.

A. Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. I do not want to suggest that if you spouse dies you have to be as composed and stoic as Williams. But you can have his confidence and peace.

B. Indeed, I want to suggest that that is what you want and need.

C. All of which begs the question: do you have faith? Do you have the settled confidence that God is for you and that you can trust him.

D. PUT IN ABOUT A MINUTE HERE ABOUT YOUR OWN STORY.

E. There are several categories of people here today.

F. Some of you do not know God and you know that you do not know God. I want to give you a chance to place your faith in Jesus. To put your weight down on him. In a moment when I pray I am going to give you a chance to pray a simple prayer like I did. I am not going to ask you to raise your hand or come forward. But I do want to give you that chance. I want to assure you that God is for you and that you can have your past forgiven, you can have a purpose for living, you can gain a home in heaven.

1.

2. A second group of you have been living like Christian Atheists. You say you believe but there is little evidence of it. That's not the plan or goal. You need to yield control of your life again.

3. And there is a third group that can go further. You can take a next step. That is always a win. I want to challenge you to live a life more in line with what you say you believe.

G. I'm not sure what step of faith you need to take today. But I want to encourage you to take a next step of faith.

¹ In a speech given not long ago, Brooks argued that faith is on the ascendency and he speaks about the Christian faith in glowing terms. David Brooks, "The Cultural Value of Christian Higher Education," *The CCCU Advance*, Vol. 7. No. 1.

² The relationship between divine sovereignty and human free will is layered and certainly not something we can unpack in a footnote.

³ H.L. Mencken, a popular skeptic back in the 20s & 30s – he was a newspaper columnist who liked to belittle Christians – stated that, faith is "an illogical belief in the occurrence of the improbable."

⁴ By the way, a chair can be used to illustrate this. Intellectual assent is recognizing that a chair is a chair and agreeing that it is designed to support a person who sits on it. Trust is actually sitting in the chair.

⁵ Faith is opposed to sight, not knowledge. Faith extends beyond knowledge on the basis of knowledge.

⁶ One of the ways we see that this is not true is Jesus's statement that if we have faith like a mustard seed we have enough to move a mountain.

⁷ Hey, there are songs we could sing and stories I could tell that are designed to play to your emotions. To get you pumped up or to make you cry. But we don't design services with these in mind. It's not the goal. Because faith is not a feeling. And Jesus didn't spend much time playing to people's emotions. He said, "You will know the truth & the truth will set you free."

⁸ Tim Stafford, Favorite Song Theology, *Christianity Today*, Sept. 14, 1992, p. 36.

⁹ Tim Stafford, writing ten years ago in *Christianity Today*, said that the pastor who has been conducting this experiment in his confirmation class, reported that every time the high school students he asked this question to, said, "Choosing one's faith is like choosing a favorite song."

¹⁰ The Bible would reframe this and say: 1) God is who God is. He is not who we decide He is. He has revealed himself to us in Jesus; 2) our decision to "have faith" in another God – or to believe we can have a relationship with God in whatever way we want to – doesn't change who God is or how He has established the relationship with His creation. Our faith doesn't change God; 3) to believe that it does is to confuse faith with magic; 4) the object of our faith is what is important. Our faith needs to be placed in something – or someone – who is faithful. Also, please note: we don't feel that way when it comes to the "real world." If we see someone standing on a ledge getting ready to jump we try to talk them down, no matter whether they believe they can fly or not. But when we see people believing spiritual or philosophical things that we believe are not true, we are supposed to not say a thing. To say something is to be intolerant. I would suggest that to not say something is to be unloving. Now I am not suggesting that we force people to believe as we do, nor am I suggesting that we be unloving or disrespectful in the way we advocate for truth.