

Faith

Rising Above

Matthew records four times that Jesus referred to the disciples as "O you of little faith" (Matthew 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8). These extend from the Sermon of the Mount to the final days in Galilee, some two to three years later. Rather than rising above the initial belief that Jesus is the Messiah as pointed out by John, they continued in doubt and lack of a growing faith. Even though they were eyewitnesses to the miracles of healing, feeding thousands, and commanding nature, they did not understand what Jesus expected of them. They understood that Jesus had "the words of eternal life" (John 6:68) but doubted His death, burial, and resurrection (Mark 16:11). However, they rose above disbelief to become the apostles that gave their lives to spread the gospel to the world.

Looking at various people in the Bible who did extraordinary things, one thing common to all is the faith that gave them courage. Some began with little to no faith. However, step-by-step, and from one level to the next, their faith grew until they were the workers and servants God wanted them to be.

Abel is the first example of a courageous faith doing God's will. The second son, born to the couple made by God, shows how to honor the creator by believing and obeying Him (Genesis 3). As Able offered worship that God approved, he was killed by a resentful brother. One brother had saving faith, and the other was interested in his own opinion. Maybe Able learned from his parent's disobedience with the forbidden fruit. Regardless, his faith serves as an example for everyone. *"By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks"* (Hebrews 11:4).

Joseph was a young boy when his brothers sold him into slavery. He did not understand that God would accomplish wonders through him during his days in Potipher's house and years in a dungeon prison. But Joseph had faith in the God that had shown him dreams. He received the meaning of Pharaoh's dreams and the actions needed to prevent starvation. The strong faith he had as a boy continued and grew until he could forgive his brothers and provide the necessary safety for the infant nation promised to Abraham.

Moses needed much convincing to go to Egypt and confront Pharaoh. When God talked to Moses from the burning bush, Moses gave many excuses for not going. But as he used the signs God provided, his faith grew until Moses led Israel out of bondage, received the law on Sinai, and led the people in the wilderness for an additional 38 years. He rose above fear and doubt to become the prophet and lawgiver, making him an example of the promised Christ. (Deuteronomy 18:15-19).

Rahab believed the rumors about the God who defeated every obstacle placed in the path of His people. She looked forward to their appearance, although most people in Jericho did not. She hid Israel's spies and sent them safely away. Rahab's faith resulted in the survival of herself and those with her as Jericho was destroyed. Her faith continued to grow; she married into the tribe of Judah and became an ancestor of David and Jesus.

Gideon is a hero of Israel, chosen by God to judge Israel. The book of Judges, chapters 6 to 8, tells his story. When the angel first appeared to him, Gideon believed God had abandoned Israel to the Midianites. There is a progression of "confidence-building" proofs given to increase his belief and

trust that God was with him and would provide the victory. Gideon rose above his doubts to lead only 300 men to cause the Midianites to flee, resulting in 40 years of peace.

The Bible tells of many other prophets, kings, and apostles that believed God and developed a strong faith in Him, His words, and His directions to all. The needs of the people and the words were different at different times. But only one man had to build an ark to be saved, and only two prophets had to go to Nineveh to preach. At all times, the truths of God's word commanded and encouraged people to do something. The apostle Paul believed and acted on the false beliefs of the Jews in Jerusalem until he met Jesus (Acts 9). Learning the truth about Jesus and the gospel from Jesus, Paul then carried the message of salvation to the world. We see the result of Paul's years of learning as he spoke in Athens, recorded in Acts 17.

The person that learns that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and believes it, has taken the first step to becoming a worker in the kingdom. Rising above that step, they are baptized. Rising from the waters, the journey to complete knowledge and understanding begins. As learning continues, they rise above learning to take action. Learning the gospel makes a workman ready to serve God as Christ teaches and commands (Ephesians 2:10). The book of Acts is full of people doing just that. Apollos is a good example (Acts 18:24-28).

Are we rising above our current level of faith through study, then applying what we learned? Are we rising above faith to righteousness?