

REAL FAITH Part 4

ACTS OF FAITH

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Faith is a journey, a lifelong walk with God.

Faith's object is Jesus Christ, who was crucified for our debt of sin and raised from the dead for our liberation. Anything less than this as its center of focus is a religious aberration, a fruitless distortion of truth.

Whatever holds your gaze, whatever you look at repeatedly, is what you tend to become.

This principle can be seen at work in the sheep and goats that Jacob tended for his Uncle Laban. Whenever it was mating season, he set before the stronger animals tree branches that appeared striped or spotted. As a result, the skin of their offspring was also striped or spotted. These, though stronger, were regarded as less desirable because of their coloring, and they became Jacob's flock. In this way he raised for himself a large and strong flock of mottled sheep, while Laban kept the good-looking but weaker sheep.

What an illustration this is of the Christian life! Followers of Christ may not appear to have it all together, may not be regarded as the "beautiful people" of this world, but inwardly they are courageous and strong. It is as Paul wrote: *"Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day"* (2 Corinthians 4:16).

How can this be so? It all depends on where we fix our gaze! Hebrews 12:2 says, *"We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus."*

Colossians 3:2 *Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.*

As we do this, we are changed by the power of God.

NKJV 2 Corinthians 3:18 *We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.*

So when I say, "Keep your eyes on the goal," that's what I mean. Not your own personal, short-term goals, but God's eternal goal.

Romans 8:29 *For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.*

Keep the Book before your eyes, and look for signs of Jesus as you read it. Focus on them when you find them. Contemplate what He is like — how He thought, how He spoke and how He acted.

An Act of Faith

It is plain that Jesus trusted in God. He and His Heavenly Father shared intimate fellowship. It was this relationship that guided His actions. Let's see just how such faith operated in real-life situations.

John 5:1 Afterward Jesus returned to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish holy days. ² Inside the city, near the Sheep Gate, was the pool of Bethesda, with five covered porches. ³ Crowds of sick people—blind, lame, or paralyzed—lay on the porches waiting for a certain movement of the water, ⁴ for an angel of the Lord came from time to time and stirred up the water. And the first person to step in after the water was stirred was healed of whatever disease he had. ⁵ One of the men lying there had been sick for thirty-eight years. ⁶ When Jesus saw him and knew he had been ill for a long time, he asked him, “Would you like to get well?” ⁷ “I can’t, sir,” the sick man said, “for I have no one to put me into the pool when the water bubbles up. Someone else always gets there ahead of me.”

Some might think Jesus’ question insensitive. After all, the man had been sick his whole life. Now, at last, he had made his way to a contemporary healing center — clearly, he hoped to recover.

But then, men always look on the outside, while God looks on the heart.

Jesus’ question reveals His insight to the man’s greatest need: to learn to put his trust in God in a real-life dilemma.

“Would you like to get well?”

“I can’t,” the man replied, “for I have no one to help me.”

So near, yet so far. He saw the water bubbling. He saw others stepping in and rejoicing, but he could not. He could only see one way to be healed and it was impossible to him. All he could see was his impossibility.

There was another way. Jesus knew it. He knew what the Father was doing for this man and He declared it.

John 5:8 Jesus told him, “Stand up, pick up your mat, and walk!”

⁹ Instantly, the man was healed! He rolled up his sleeping mat and began walking!

God can work miracles on any day at all. Even if you have waited your whole life without seeing one, God can work a miracle yet for you.

John 5:9 But this miracle happened on the Sabbath, ¹⁰ so the Jewish leaders objected. They said to the man who was cured, “You can’t work on the Sabbath! The law doesn’t allow you to carry that sleeping mat!”

¹¹ But he replied, “The man who healed me told me, ‘Pick up your mat and walk.’ ”

¹² “Who said such a thing as that?” they demanded.

¹³ The man didn’t know, for Jesus had disappeared into the crowd. ¹⁴ But afterward Jesus found him in the Temple and told him, “Now you are well; so stop sinning, or something even worse may happen to you.” ¹⁵ Then the man went and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had healed him.

¹⁶ So the Jewish leaders began harassing Jesus for breaking the Sabbath rules.

Now, we will discover how this miracle was done.

John 5:17 But Jesus replied, “My Father is always working, and so am I.” ¹⁸ So the Jewish leaders tried all the harder to find a way to kill him. For he not only broke the Sabbath, he called God his Father, thereby making himself equal with God.

¹⁹ So Jesus explained, “I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself. He does only what he sees the Father doing. Whatever the Father does, the Son also does.” ²⁰ For the Father loves the Son

and shows him everything he is doing. In fact, the Father will show him how to do even greater works than healing this man. Then you will truly be astonished.²¹ For just as the Father gives life to those he raises from the dead, so the Son gives life to anyone he wants.

Perhaps your father, or someone like him, taught you in a similar manner how to do things. You watched him do them, and then he showed you how to do them. Then, you began to put his lessons into practice.

Jesus explained that acts of faith are learned this way.

Perhaps you are thinking, “I do not see the Father doing *anything*. How am I to imitate Him?”

I would answer two things: (1) You are looking in the wrong places, and (2) you must look with eyes of faith. Let me explain.

Where Are You Looking?

I think we can agree that, in times of need, our eyes are focused on the need, our lack, the obstacles, our fears.

We may mentally scan our history and find little to nothing to lean our hope upon. We may consider our relatives and friends and find that no one can help. The encouragement of horoscopes and fortune cookies, should they hit the mark, is short-lived, for they have no power to produce a miracle. We may search the Internet for a testimony or an answer, but they are usually accompanied by more questions and cannot remove our uncertainty.

We could spend a lifetime considering all the possibilities and end up where we began: helpless.

If we want to see what faith in God can do, we must look at what God is doing.

Colossians 3:1 Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God's right hand.² Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth.³ For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God.

Your *real life*. Your new life is not this life. Your real life is hidden. Acts of faith reveal it.

Where is it hidden? With Christ in God.

If you want to see what God is doing in your real life, you must look to Christ. You won't find it in your outward circumstances. God's work is hidden because it is in your *real* life, not your natural life. It may impact your outward circumstances, but it is taking place in your real, hidden life with Christ.

Therefore, we must look beneath the covers; we must look to Jesus.

Hebrews 12:1 Let us run with endurance the race God has set before us.² We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne.³ Think of all the hostility he endured from sinful people; then you won't become weary and give up.

Acts of faith are not acts of self-confidence. Acts of faith are not acts of self-reliance.

My faith — your faith — has been authored by Jesus' faith. It is also brought to completion, or fruition, by Jesus. To assume that God wants what I want, apart from actively considering what Jesus wants is futile.

Every act of *real* faith is an act of dependence — dependence on God. Watching what He is doing, listening for His voice (direction), obediently following the leading of His love — all so that He may be honored and represented well.

Jesus' Acts Of Faith

I have tried to capture the essential message from three dozen of Jesus' acts of faith. They demonstrate (1) His *dependence* on God the Father, (2) the essential *love* of all God's actions, and (3) the ultimate *honor* that God receives from acts of real faith.

Submits to Baptism

Matthew 3:15 Jesus said, *"It should be done, for we must carry out all that God requires."*

Doing what God requires is absolutely fundamental to acting in faith. The person who simply acts on their own impulse cannot be said to be acting in real faith.

Overcomes Temptation

Luke 4 *"It is written.."*

Three times Jesus resorted to quoting Scripture in the face of adversarial taunting. The devil appealed to Jesus to satisfy His own natural desires for food, power, and privilege. He chose to let God choose and provide — that's real faith in action.

Cleanses a leper

Luke 5:12 *And it happened when He was in a certain city, that behold, a man who was full of leprosy saw Jesus; and he fell on his face and implored Him, saying, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean."*

¹³ *Then He put out His hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing; be cleansed." Immediately the leprosy left him.*

In spite of social and religious taboos, Jesus reached beyond the norm to touch an untouchable, because He wanted to help him. That's real faith and real religion.

Cleanses the Temple

John 2:17 *Then his disciples remembered this prophecy from the Scriptures: "Passion for God's house will consume me."*

Jesus' faith was not aimed at pleasing people, but pleasing God. He did not serve His religion; His religion served His faith.

Witnesses to Nicodemus

John 3:3 *Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God."*

Another fundamental truth: real faith begins with a new birth, otherwise it does not even see the real Kingdom of God, let alone enter it.

Witnesses to the woman at the well

John 4:23 But the time is coming—indeed it's here now—when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for those who will worship him that way. ²⁴ For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth."

Real faith is about worship — worshipping God from the heart in every arena of life — your real spiritual worship.

Witnesses to His disciples

John 4:34 Jesus explained: "My nourishment comes from doing the will of God, who sent me, and from finishing his work."

What nourishes you? Real faith is nourished by expressing God's love.

Heals a paralytic

Luke 5:24 But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins"—He said to the man who was paralyzed, "I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house."

Forgiveness from God is the first fruit of real faith, and also its most basic expression. Forgiveness requires faith, otherwise it is simply excusing someone. But when there is no excuse, when there is genuine wrongdoing, then forgiveness requires faith in God's righteousness.

Eats with sinners

Luke 5:24 Jesus answered and said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ³² I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

Acting in real faith reaches out to sinners, in spite of their unloveliness or unlovingness. It is God's love on fire.

Heals deformed hand

Luke 6:9 Then Jesus said to them, "I will ask you one thing: Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy?"

This emphasizes what real faith is all about: doing good and saving life — showing mercy.

Calls His disciples

Mark 3:14 He appointed twelve—designating them apostles—that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach ¹⁵ and to have authority to drive out demons.

The first call of real faith is "to be with Him" — to love fellowship with Jesus — and the final call of real faith is to "go out in His authority" — to represent Him in the real world.

Heals centurion's servant

Luke 7:7 But say the word, and my servant will be healed.

Real faith does not require a sign, nor demand a sign; it is based on the recognition of God's sovereign authority through Christ to act in kindness in an unkind world.

Receives anointing

Luke 7:47 Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little."

Love and mercy are the essential expressions of real faith, and its essential rewards. Until you receive them, you cannot give them away.

Stills the storm

Luke 8:25 He said to them, "Where is your faith?"

The real sleepers in that boat were the disciples, whose faith could not be roused, even by the presence of Jesus Christ. His real faith speaks to winds and waves.

Casts out demons

Luke 8:38 Now the man from whom the demons had departed begged Him that he might be with Him. But Jesus sent him away, saying, ³⁹ "Return to your own house, and tell what great things God has done for you."

Real faith goes where Jesus sends to do what Jesus asks. Telling others what Jesus has done for you may not be popular, but it pleases Him, when they are told with love and mercy.

Heals woman with hemorrhage

Luke 8:46 Jesus said, "Somebody touched Me, for I perceived power going out from Me."

God's power flows along the lines of real faith, both directly (when we intend it) and indirectly (when the faith of others draws it out).

Raises Jairus' daughter

Luke 8:50 He answered him, saying, "Do not be afraid; only believe, and she will be made well."

Real faith conquers real fears. Keep your eyes on Jesus and the stormy winds will grow calm.

Feeds 5,000

John 6:12 He said to His disciples, "Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost."

Real faith conserves and redeems what others would deem worthless.

Delivers a man's son

Mark 9:23 Jesus said to him, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes."

All things become possible to the heart and mind that are fixed on Jesus. If you can trust him, He can help you.

Forgives the adulteress

John 8:11 Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."

Real faith releases people from guilt, both real and perceived. Love delivers. Kindness heals.

Heals a man born blind

John 9:39 Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind."

Real faith is *not* blind, but facing reality squarely, sees beyond it to the God who holds our future in His hand.

Heals a crippled woman

Luke 13:16 Ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound—think of it—for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?"

Real faith loosens all sorts of bondages. It liberates.

Cleanses ten lepers

Luke 17:17 Jesus answered and said, "Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? ¹⁸ Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?"

Real faith develops real gratitude, for both flow from humble submission and trust in God.

Blesses the children

Luke 18:16 Jesus called them to Him and said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. ¹⁷ Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it."

Real faith is so simple that a little child can exercise it. "Religious professionals need not apply."

Witnesses to Zaccheus

Luke 19:9 Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham; ¹⁰ for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."

Seeking and saving that which was, and those who are, lost are the purpose and work of real faith.

Raises Lazurus from death

John 11:25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. ²⁶ And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

Real faith unwinds the wrappings of our death and refreshes the fragrance of life, for real faith touches the heart of the Lifegiver.

Triumphal entry to Jerusalem

Luke 19:41 Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, ⁴² saying, "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes."

Real faith is moved by what moves the heart of God; nothing else shakes it.

Celebrates Last Supper

Luke 22:19 And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

²⁰ Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you."

Jesus offered Himself for others, because God asked it of Him and He trusted God's intention, as well as God's ability even to raise the dead. That's real faith.

Washes the disciples' feet

John 13:12 So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? ¹³ You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. ¹⁴ If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you."

"Serving one another in love" is the aim of real faith, re-presenting Christ, generation after generation.

Prays for His disciples

John 17:20 "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; ²¹ that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me"

Real faith flourishes in the environment of spiritual unity.

Prays in the Garden

Luke 22:41 He was withdrawn from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and prayed, ⁴² saying, "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done."

I want certain things and God wants certain things. Real faith makes the distinction and chooses what God wants.

Testifies before governors

John 18:36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here."

Real faith serves in the here-and-now, but it is not tethered here. It is anchored in God's eternal plan, serving purposes beyond this moment or the next.

Surrenders to crucifixion

John 19:11 Jesus answered, "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above.

All of man's powers are borrowed; God's sovereign power is settled forever. Real faith banks on this fact.

Rises from the dead

John 20:22 When He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." The energy and the strength of our faith is sustained by the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to us. It is the energy and the strength we require to forgive others.

Commissions His disciples

Matthew 28:18 Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Real faith is on the go. Reaching, preaching, teaching, healing, transforming are all on its agenda. Real faith goes *with* Christ.

Ascends to the Father

Luke 24:49 Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high."

We cannot grow in faith, nor go in faith, apart from the powerful presence and activity of the Holy Spirit. We *must* receive Him. This is not optional.

These, then, are examples of real faith — Jesus' faith — at work. Examples from which we may learn. Examples which we may imitate, as He directs us.

Now, It's Your Turn

Before I conclude, I must ask you this: Have you been born again? To take the journey of faith you must first register for the race!

You cannot take the journey of faith without this necessary initiation. Remember, Jesus said, "Don't be surprised when I say to you that you must be born again."

The new birth is the result of your initial surrender to God's plan for your life, beginning with salvation through Jesus Christ alone. He paid your moral debt on the cross so that nothing would remain to separate you from God your Creator. He rose from the dead to give you the power of an endless life for the journey.

Put your life in His hands today: "Jesus, I put the whole of my life — my past, my present, and my future — in your hands. Forgive me for my wrongdoing and self-will, and help me as I now transfer my trust to you. Be the Leader of my life from this day forward, that I may fulfill God's purpose for my life. Thank you. Amen."

Now, it's your turn to follow Jesus, as He follows the Father.

God is wise. You can shift your reliance from yourself to God — asking what *He* wants of you and *how* He wants you to do it, and learning to *wait* for His prompting.

God is kind. You can make God's love the center of your actions, instead of self-preservation or self-gratification. Move past your natural prejudices and fears to embrace those He is embracing.

God is great. You can make God's reputation more important than your own, and choose to act for His honor in every situation, no matter the cost.

Then, your life will be your real life — a journey of real faith that fills your heart with real joy and real peace and builds God's real Kingdom to last forever.