

The Gift of Faith (7)

A gifted story: All Christians have to learn how to ride out the various tests to their faiths that occur in adversity. During difficult times it is helpful to know of others who have maintained their faith through the worst of times. Betty's life was slipping away very quickly at too early an age-- the cancer could not be reversed. As her many friends and family visited her in the hospital, they were struck with the peace she displayed. Betty was not afraid to die, as she knew she would soon be with Jesus. She just wanted to comfort all of her visitors and say good-bye. The testimony of her courage in the last days was an inspiration to all that knew her that faith gives us victory over death.

Biblical references:

1 Cor. 12:9— *One and the same Spirit gives faith to one person, while to another person he gives the power to heal.*

1 Cor. 13:2 -- ...I may have all the faith needed to move mountains, but if I have no love, I am nothing.

Heb. 11:1-3—*To have faith is to be sure of the things we hope for, to be certain of the things we cannot see. It was by their faith that people of ancient times won God's approval. It is by faith that we understand that the universe was created by God's word, so that what can be seen was made out of what cannot be seen.*

Definition and comment:

The gift of Faith: the special gift whereby the Spirit provides Christians with extraordinary confidence in God's promises, power, and presence so that they can take heroic stands for the future of God's work in the church. The person with this gift is able to envision what God wants to happen and to be certain he is going to do it in response to prayer, even when there is no concrete evidence. There is discernment of the will and purpose of God for the future of his work. The believer with this gift is able to see the Spirit at work and trust the Spirit's leading without knowledge of the path ahead.

Jesus made some extraordinary statements regarding faith. He tied faith to believing expectantly that prayers would be answered: "...if you have faith as big as a mustard seed, you can say to this hill, 'Go from here to there!' and it will go. You could do anything!" (Matt. 17:20) He also declared that "... when you pray and ask for something, believe that you have received it, and you will be given whatever you ask for." (Mark 11:24) Often missed in discussions about the power of prayer is Jesus' admonishment in the very next verse to "forgive anything you may have against anyone, so that your Father in heaven will forgive the wrongs you have done." He said to do this when praying.

Most Christians have heard that prayer brings results if faith is present, but they feel a bit amateurish in the prayer and faith department. A quick word of encouragement should be added here—sincerity is the key, not eloquence. Faith is essential for all Christians. We know that it must be exercised with love, and we don't need much of it. It is so powerful, that even just a little will do. However, some Christians are given an abundance of faith by God's grace in the awarding of the spiritual gift of faith. Those so gifted have the capability, when

exercising their gift, to address expectantly the greatest of concerns, plead for intervention in the largest of needs, and undertake prayer requests that seem mountainous.

Affirm that you have this gift; questions to ask yourself:

Have you had the experience of knowing God's will with certainty in a specific situation?

Have you felt assurance that God would do what seemed unlikely?

Do you have a sense for moments when prayer with deep faith is needed?

Are you able to go on believing God will act in a situation in spite of evidence to the contrary?

Do you depend upon God's resources and guidance to an unusual degree?

Areas for study and personal growth:

As a receiver of the spiritual gift of faith, you need to become expert in what faith is. There is no better way to do this than to review the full text of Hebrews 11 where Paul recounts the history of faith in scriptural stories. Internalizing these stories will give you a sense of comradeship with people who had faith of great proportions.

The peculiar strength of your gift needs to be explored. Document what you can remember of prayers answered, and begin a log of prayer requests for the future. Few people trouble to do this, but you have every reason to do so. Evidence of prayers answered is powerful encouragement for Christians in need to trust the power of prayer and God's loving response.

Seek out and read works that describe how prayers have been answered for others. Learn all you can about the power of prayer and how to use prayer in an intercessory fashion. Understand that it is harder for some, who do not have your gift, to maintain faith, and look for ways to build up the faith of fellow believers through the sharing of your faith stories.

Cut out for yourself an informal role of "prayer expert," and offer help to others regarding various approaches to prayer (meditative, contemplative, intercessory, petition, praise, ...).

General ways to use the gift of faith:

Personally: be available to anyone desiring your prayers.

Within the church: offer hope in the face of any discouraging situation, listen to the still small voice of God for a word of guidance for his church (see more specific church service opportunities in the Booklet *Channels for Using the Gifts*).

Within the wider community: seek God's will for new community ministries

For reflection:

Some believe that the supernatural gift of faith was bestowed on believers in the early church to help get it started. They are less certain that it is given today in larger measure to certain believers because of the need for all Christians to have at least some faith to validate their membership in the Body. The counter perspective is that God isn't finished with us yet. He has continual and creative plans for us. He needs people of extraordinary faith to counter evil and to spread his influence dominantly throughout the world. Extraordinary faith inspires healing vision in individuals and courage for action. God uses the gift of faith to bring glory to himself, to encourage the church to believe in a prayer-answering God, and to meet crises

faced by individuals and by the church.

Love is the fuel that empowers faith. Thus empowered faith inspires hope. And there is no place, however cold and dark, that cannot be penetrated by the warmth and light that radiates from a hopeful soul. It is God's plan that coldness and darkness be thus eradicated in this fashion. Exercise your gift of faith with a loving heart. That will bring a larger measure of hope into our community of faith. When hope is abundantly present, God's plan for our church will be more fully revealed and our ability to know his purpose for us will be assured.

Reveal your faith in the ways that you can so that members of the congregation may witness it in action. Revealed faith strengthens the whole Body by example. Your faithful actions make tangible what is not so easily seen. Your lessons in faith will offer encouragement and hope. And in hope, one's face always turns Godward.