

HOW DO **YOU** SPELL FAITH? Scripture: 1 Peter 1:3-12

Now you may think – what a silly question. Of course I can spell faith. But I would like you to take just a moment, this morning to think about the letters that make up the word Faith.

What do the letters represent for you? Here are some examples.

F= frantic; A = agitated; I = impatient; T = troubled and H = harassed. You may come up with a few different ones.

Perhaps though you spell Faith with these words?

F = forgiveness; A = acceptance; I = identity; T = trust and H= hope.

Faith, hope and love are virtues that come from God – not by our human efforts, for none of us is capable of faith, hope and love unaided.

We can trust but that is different to faith; we can be optimistic but that is different from hope and we can do good but this is different to love. We need something more to help us face life's struggles – this is faith. together.

Do you have faith? Responses vary from I have no faith; I have a little faith; I don't understand everything so how can I have faith amid my unanswered questions? Faith is a journey we all take, it is a movement which asks us to let go of certainties.

It is a direction not an explanation. It guides us through our trials – it is the road we need to travel.

The question is not if we have faith, everyone has faith. The atheist has faith that his rational reasoning has removed the possibility of God. He has faith in his intellectual ability. Others have faith in their abilities, skills, connections, friends, family and themselves. Everyone has faith.

The question is where is your faith anchored?

As humans none of us can escape experiencing trials that challenge the fabric of our faith in God. The Bible includes many examples.

Moses once argued with God, not cut out to challenge the Pharaoh. Yet he had confidence in God and through God's guidance he overcame the obstacles and limitations he faced and successfully led the Israelites out of Egypt.

Abraham waited years for a son and when Isaac was just a teenager, God asked him to sacrifice Isaac. Now that took real faith in God to follow His instructions but deep inside having the faith that no matter what happened, God had promised he would have a son enabling him to have many descendants who would multiply and become great nations.

Job suffered much anguish, loss and illness yet he remained confident in God and stood firm as a witness for God and God blessed him.

The **Canaanite** woman had faith in Jesus and believed that He could drive out the evil spirit from her daughter; she made her plea to Jesus and her daughter's sickness was cured.

If we wish to possess true faith, we need to recognize that God is present with us all the time, during the good and bad times. God has the best intentions behind the life He sets up for us so that we can gain something from everything we go through. Our confidence in God will gradually become more and more genuine just like the faith of Job who gradually grew by experiencing God's rule in everything that happened in his life.

Peter talks about how we love Christ even though we have not seen Him. In Hebrews we have the definition of faith, "Now faith is the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen." (**Hebrews 11:1**).

Something you cannot grasp doesn't mean you cannot know it. To know it, you need to open your arms wide – in contemplation. You cannot wrap it in incomprehension – you need to remain constantly open.

Imagine you fell into water and you don't know how to swim. You fear you are drowning, water swirling all around – a little like living in today's pandemic. You will not stay afloat by your own efforts – you need outside help, you need someone to throw you a lifejacket from a boat. You believe the lifejacket will save your life but only if you grab hold of it. It would be pretty stupid if you refused the lifejacket because you did not have all the answers as to how to wear it properly.

Faith is like the lifejacket given to us freely from God. But He doesn't throw faith at us like a grappling hook to grab hold and pull us to Him. It is up to each one of us to reach out and accept faith. And just like refusing the lifejacket because you don't have all the answers – many refuse faith in God because they want all their questions answered beforehand.

How important is it to have faith? Where do we find a faith strong enough to make it through the storms of life? Peter knows how important faith is and he gives us a great picture of faith and an insight into how to live an authentic Christ centred faith in the midst of some difficult times. When we have faith in Christ nothing can take it away from us – it is impenetrable because faith in Christ is kept in Heaven where it cannot be destroyed. If our faith is set upon the things of this world, then our faith will perish.

Even so, we will all experience trials during our lifetime, but we can develop trust in God, confident that God knows, plans and directs our

lives for the good. It is hard to see and understand sometimes, but God always provides His love and strength for us as He leads us toward a better future.

What is faith? Faith is not simply believing that God exists. Faith is believing God loves me. Remember Abraham – he knew that God loved him and he believed in it even when commands seem to contrast with this love. Abraham’s story is an act of faith in the love of God, not the absurd execution of a command such as to kill his son. In his heart he knows this is irrational but he does not know yet how God will resolve the contradiction. Even if everything God is saying appears the opposite, Abraham believes in His love against everything and everyone. God faced Abraham with his worst fear, losing his son, in order to heal this fear.

This is why Christ brings about salvation for all, because in His sacrifice we are healed of every root of evil, fear and non-meaning. Jesus asks us to believe in His love not in our perception of things. Jesus says – out of love for you I am ready to give you this. It is no longer absurd when everything is read in the logic of love.

When you give into doubt and questioning this can lead to forgetting that God loves you over and above everything and anyone, and you must never doubt this love even when everything else is urging you to do so. Our faith must be anchored in the timeless nature of Christ where we develop courage because with Jesus as our brother and Saviour, we need not be afraid. Jesus who suffered for us will never ever abandon us – He will carry us through everything. Faith is the planting of a promise which the Lord places in our heart.

You may ask - how do I know that a faith in Christ will hold up during the storms of life? Why should I trust Christ?

Because, this is no ordinary faith, it is a tested faith. Countless people have placed their faith in Christ and found the anchor holds. Peter put his faith totally in Christ and put it to the test – this helped him survive some incredible storms in his life.

Peter found a tested faith which was valuable, revealing, and centred on love. Peter says that our faith is like gold, as it is tested, it will begin to bring the impurities to the surface. When the impurities are removed our faith becomes more valuable.

A faith in Jesus Christ will carry us through this life and even into the world to come. A faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of God's only Son is far more valuable than gold. Our faith is in something eternal, not in something that can be destroyed.

There is a story in the Bible of the woman who had faith in Jesus and believed all she had to do was touch the hem of His garment and she would be healed – and it was so. But the story doesn't end there because Jesus stops and asks who touched Him.

Because just encountering Christ's grace is too little; too little just to touch His cloak; too little to use God to do me a favour. This is not faith.

Faith is eye contact with Jesus, building a personal rapport with Him, not with His grace but with Him, in person.

Consider the reasons you go to church – is it just to receive grace. That's not it – it is to meet the person of Christ. We need to bring ourselves from the hem of His garment to Christ – face to face who has want to encounter each one of us personally.

As a minister I have often sat with people who say – I can't pray because I am feeling nothing. They are confusing it with their emotional state, thinking I can only come to prayer when I feel something. And because they are not feeling anything they cease praying. But faith and the experience of the spiritual life and prayer go much deeper than our emotional state.

We have feelings and we have thoughts but we are not our thoughts nor our feelings. So instead of saying I can't or won't pray because I have a feeling negative – acknowledge that yes, I have a negative feeling but I am not a negative feeling. Faith is knowing that God loves you, not that He simply exists somewhere.

So how do you spell faith this morning.

Forgiveness – you are forgiven when you come humbly and repentant to God and ask for His forgiveness through the sacrifice of Jesus. You will be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit who will then be your guide and intermediary to God.

Acceptance – your belief and faith means you are accepted into God's family and that Jesus died for you personally.

Identity – God calls you His child – you are given this identity – a child of God.

Trust – as you journey onward you will learn to trust God more and know His faithfulness.

Hope – through your trials and joys the Holy Spirit moves you to know the hope that abounds in Jesus Christ as your Saviour.