

Unwavering Faith

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Seven UnCharacteristics That Can Change the World in 2017 – Lesson Four

To date, we have examined three of seven areas of the Christian life referred to in this series as “*UnCharacteristics That Can Change the World in 2017*”. (Links provided below.)

unconditional love **undying**
gratitude **unspeakable joy**

Today, we drill down on the fourth one that may be the most difficult of all—***unwavering faith***. Let’s begin by defining *unwavering faith*. Many Christians are familiar with the verse in Hebrews that defines faith:

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” (Hebrews 11: 1 NASB)

The KJV uses the word ‘evidence’ instead of *conviction*. I prefer that because it sets up the definition as somewhat of an oxymoron, causing us to stop and think about the meaning. How can you have evidence that cannot be seen? Isn’t that the point of presenting evidence—so people can see what you are using to support your argument? Yes, but that is not faith.

Jesus defined biblical faith in His post-resurrection conversation with Thomas. You recall Thomas was the one who did not believe Jesus had done what He told them on several occasions He would do – rise from the dead on the third day. Though the other disciples had seen Jesus, Thomas refused to believe making the outrageous statement he would never believe that unless he, not only saw Jesus but, put his hands in His wounds. No wonder he was known as Thomas the Doubter.

It could be said Jesus appeared again to the disciples to

help Thomas. Jesus invited Thomas to do what he said it would take to convince him. After Thomas confessed Him as Lord, Jesus said to him,

"Have you believed because you have seen Me? Blessed are those who have not seen (Me) and yet have believed." (John 20:29 ESV)

Jesus blew up the old adage, "Seeing is believing." That may be true for some, but it requires no faith.

Biblical Examples of Unwavering Faith. Although there are many, consider these two great examples.

♦ **Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.** (Daniel 3) This is one of the first and most beloved children's Bible stories encountered in Sunday School. Yet its meaning points a finger right in our adult faces when it comes to exercising unwavering faith. Thrown into a fiery furnace to burn to death for insubordination toward the king—they refused to worship his gods—they showed little regard for their own lives but great honor and respect for their God. Two profound statements of unwavering faith were made during their trial.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar...our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand. "But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."... (from vs 16-18)

Those bodacious boasts inflamed the king and confirmed their death sentences. But that is not how the story ended. They were bound and throw into a furnace so hot the men who threw them in were killed by its heat. As the king watched their roasting, he was stunned. They were not being consumed by the fire. In fact, they were walking around unharmed and accompanied by a fourth man. Many think it was Jesus (a

theophany which is a pre-incarnate appearance found in the Bible on other occasions as well). Some think he was an archangel sent by God to encourage them. The end result was this:

They demonstrated unwavering faith in the face of certain death.

♦ **The Apostle Peter.** His is the most interesting of all *faith* stories (Matthew 14) because we are going to use him in both examples. When Jesus called Peter to come to Him, he got out of the boat in the face of very strong winds and waves, and walked on water toward Jesus (v29). He did what no one else had or has ever done—walk on water! Therein lies the unwavering faith attributed to Peter because he knew if Jesus told him to do it, and he kept his eyes on his Master, all would be well. And it was...for a brief time.

Biblical Examples of WAVERing Faith

♦ **The Apostle Peter.** We are not told *why* he did it, but it must have occurred to Peter what he was doing. He took his eyes off Jesus and looked around at his circumstances. “*What am I doing? I must be crazy,*” he probably screamed in horror to himself. That is all it took for *unwavering faith* to become watered-down, wavering faith, and he began to sink.

Panic stricken, Peter cried out, “*Lord, save me.*” (v30) Immediately, Jesus reached out and saved Peter, but not without a strong rebuke. “*O, you of little faith, why did you doubt?*” Hold that thought.

There are many other examples of *wavering* faith. Abraham and Sarah losing faith that God was going to keep His promise of an heir. Gideon. David. Zacharias. Even John the Baptist had his moments of doubt. And we already discussed Thomas. If I added all our names to the list, the lesson would be far

too long to hold interest in reading it!

This issue of wavering faith has consumed considerable time in my thought and prayer lives, creating a conundrum of sorts. Assuming some of you wrestle with similar issues, I share the following with the hope that what the Holy Spirit has used to help me through such times will do the same for you.

When it comes to the essentials of the Christian faith, I do not waver. Even things I do not understand, and there are many, like the Trinity, attributes of God, virgin birth, resurrection, and other important tenets of our faith do not bring about doubts or crises of faith. Nor do I doubt my salvation and eternal security. That said, here comes the rub.

If I believe God for the important, critical issues of our faith, why do I waver in my faith when it comes to what most consider the 'small' stuff? Examples (too many to list) include financial strain when there is more month left than money, marital or familial issues, stress and strain at work, and unanswered prayers or times when God shows up late or not at all. My unwavering faith not only wavers; it quivers and quakes! That begs the question, *why*?

Why questions are always the hardest to answer, especially when they come from children. Perhaps God has the same challenge with our *why* questions. Here is some of what I have learned—answers found on my knees or studying the Word and listening hard to the Holy Spirit. Unfortunately, such answers are often hard to swallow and even harder to digest. They peel back the skin on the onion to get to the heart of the matter — our hearts. Peeling onions usually brings tears as we cut through the layers. That can be a good thing because God loves tears born from a contrite and repentant heart. He catches every one! Consider these four answers that are prone to get stuck in our throats.

1. I want what I want more than I want what God wants for me. *Speaks to our motives.*
2. I am afraid God will not answer my prayer the way I want Him to. *Speaks to our hidden agendas.*
3. I am afraid of what it could cost me. *Speaks to that which I cling to-what I hold dearer than God.*
4. I think I know what is best. *Speaks to our pride (lack of humility)*

I cannot end this challenging lesson without closing with words that encourage our hearts and examples of how our Lord Jesus handled His people in and through 'storms of faith' that create such waves. Again, we look to Peter for lessons we can learn from his wavering faith and with which we can so closely relate.

Great news for those of us whose faith wavers between rock-solid and pudding.

1. **Jesus rebuked Peter for his wavering faith, but He did not reject him.** In fact, Jesus helped him back into the boat and the wind stopped. This test was over and Peter failed, but Jesus continued to invest in his life.
2. **Even though Peter took his eyes off Jesus and began to sink, he knew who to cry out to.** Peter could have called out to the eleven men in the boat, thinking "there is safety in numbers". Instead he called out to the One walking on the water. We need to learn from that. Sometimes we foolishly look to the "men in the boat" to throw us a life-preserver or pull us out of the water instead of looking to the only One Who can reach down and rescue us from the wind and waves.
3. **God does not quit on men He has chosen to serve His purposes.** Despite his boastfulness that he would never deny or abandon his Lord, Peter did just that when things got tough. He denied even knowing Jesus three times and ran away, nowhere to be found at the Cross. Even so, Jesus restored Peter. He knew how He would use him to build

His church once the Holy Spirit took control of his life.

When your faith wavers and you fail, lock onto this truth: Jesus said, "He will never leave or forsake you." If you will surrender your life, failures and all, He will use you to accomplish everything He has planned for you. That is a promise in which we can have unwavering faith!

It is appropriate to close this lesson with the same key verse I used for the last one, *Unspeakable Joy*, so eloquently written by Peter (1 Peter 1:8). He wrote these **words from a heart of unwavering faith** to people (like you and me) who had not seen or walked with Jesus as he had. But what a journey he took to get there!

"Though you have not seen Him, you love Him. Though you do not now see Him, you believe in Him and rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

Walking in faith with you,

Walter