

How Faith Produces Power

Fifth of six sermons in the “Daniel Plan” series

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- Ephesians 3:20-21 ²⁰ To him who by means of his power working in us is able to do so much more than we can ever ask for, or even think of: ²¹ to God be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus for all time, forever and ever! Amen. (Good News Translation)
- Mark 9:14-29 ²¹ “How long has he been like this?” Jesus asked the father. “Ever since he was a child,” he replied. ²² “Many times the evil spirit has tried to kill him by throwing him in the fire and into water. Have pity on us and help us, if you possibly can!” ²³ “Yes,” said Jesus, “if you yourself can! Everything is possible for the person who has faith.” ²⁴ The father at once cried out, “I do have faith, but not enough. Help me have more!” (Good News Translation)
- Sermon-in-a-sentence: Undergirding our belief with faith brings God’s power to bear in our lives.

In the nineteenth century the greatest tightrope walker in the world was a [Frenchman who went by the stage name of] Charles Blondin. On June 30, 1859, he became the first man in history to walk on a tightrope across Niagara Falls. Over twenty-five thousand people gathered to watch him walk 1,100 feet suspended on a tiny rope 160 feet above the raging waters. He worked without a net or safety harness of any kind. The slightest slip would prove fatal. When he safely reached the Canadian side, the crowd burst into a mighty roar.

In the days that followed, he would walk across the Falls many times. Once he walked across on stilts; another time he took a chair and a stove with him and sat down midway across, cooked an omelet, and... [when it was ready, he lowered the breakfast to passengers on deck of the *Maid of the Mist*.¹]

Once he carried his manager across riding piggyback. And once he pushed a wheelbarrow across loaded with 350 pounds of cement. On another occasion he asked the cheering spectators if they thought he could push a man across sitting in a wheelbarrow. A mighty roar of approval rose from the crowd. Spying a man cheering loudly, he asked, “Sir, do you think I could safely carry you across in this wheelbarrow?” “Yes, of course.” “Get in,” the Great Blondin replied with a smile.

The man refused.

That makes it clear, doesn’t it? It’s one thing to believe a man can walk across by himself. It’s another thing to believe he could safely carry you across. But it’s something else entirely to get into the wheelbarrow yourself.²

Belief is an intellectual proposal. Faith is spiritual commitment. Belief without faith is simply a platitude, nice-sounding sentiments, so many words. Supported by faith—utter trust—belief becomes power. We can believe God exists, but that’s an intellectual assertion. When we support that belief with faith, when we live our lives based on trust, God becomes more than a concept; God becomes power.

¹ Bracketed excerpt from “The Daredevil of Niagara Falls,” Smithsonian.com at <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/the-daredevil-of-niagara-falls-110492884/>, accessed 6/8/2017

² “The Great Blondin and True Saving Faith” by the Rev. Ray Pritchard, Crosswalk.com at <http://www.crosswalk.com/blogs/dr-ray-pritchard/the-great-blondin-and-true-saving-faith.html>, accessed 6/8/2017

Does your life – the way you live it – show only belief in Jesus Christ? Or does faith in Jesus Christ drives everything you do? “How do I translate belief into faith? How do I bring God’s power into my life? How can I grow in faith?” Here are four ways.

#1: Faith grows by choosing God’s dream for my life.

Belief is seeing the dream God has for your life. Faith is trusting God to empower you to go after it.

God equipped you the way you are, with the interests and skills and limitations and weaknesses, so that you are able to fulfill what God desires of you. What is God’s dream for you? It’s probably bigger than you imagine because God is bigger than you can comprehend. Figuring out God’s dream for you reminds me of those old Polaroid® instant photos. You might not realize or remember that photographs used to start out on film which had to be chemically processed and then the images were transferred to photographic paper. The Polaroid Company invented a revolutionary process that imprinted the image directly onto the photo paper inside the camera. When the paper came out of the camera the picture started out fuzzy, but in 30 seconds... a minute... two minutes... the image became clearer and sharper.

It’s like that as we try to discern God’s dream for us. It doesn’t happen instantly, when we sit down and resolve to figure it out. It might take us years, even decades to discern what God’s dream is. But maybe that dream will take us decades or even a lifetime to accomplish. It might take that long because God has a big dream for us – a dream that we could never accomplish on our own. As Paul wrote in Ephesians Chapter 3, God’s “power working in us is able to do so much more than we can ever ask for, or even think of...”³ We need God’s power working within us to achieve the magnificent things God envisions for us. “Faith grows by choosing God’s dream for my life.”

#2: Faith grows by being willing to risk failure.

Who *doesn’t* have an aerosol can of WD-40 somewhere in the house or garage? WD-40 is a rust-inhibiting lubricant invented by a small company in San Diego in the 1950s. Its original purpose was for use in the aerospace industry. The product got its famous name because it took the scientists thirty-nine unsuccessful attempts before they were able to create the substance they envisioned.⁴

And surely you’ve heard that Thomas Edison is said to have had 1,000 unsuccessful attempts before he struck on the right combination of materials and techniques to create the incandescent light bulb. And no less than Dr. Seuss received not one, not two, but twenty-seven publisher rejections for his first book To Think that I Saw It on Mulberry Street.⁵

When you decide to pursue God’s dream for your life, you need to be willing to risk failing. It’s easy to say, “Failure is okay.” But it doesn’t feel okay. And yet when we have setbacks, when our goals don’t materialize right away, when what we’re striving for eludes us, we learn. We learn what doesn’t work. Pursuing God’s dream for our lives by faith enables us to trust in God even when things don’t turn out as intended. Though God doesn’t throw failure at us as a punishment, we trust that God somehow will offer us an opportunity to learn and grow when by faith we take risks in our effort to achieve God’s plans for our lives. So faith grows when we choose to pursue God’s dream for our lives, and faith grows when we are willing to risk failure in attaining that dream.

#3: Faith grows when I expect God to bless me and use me.

This six-week sermon series is inspired by The Daniel Plan and the 115 people who are on this forty-day journey toward healthier living. For four weeks now these people have been meeting weekly for support and encouragement as they seek to make changes in their lives – changes that will yield healthier bodies and minds and spirits. But let me ask a question to those in the Daniel Plan that actually applies to each of us in one way or another: Do you expect that The Daniel Plan is going to be a mere six-week blip that soon will disappear from the radar screen of your life? Or have you found the faith that God wants to *keep* working in your life to encourage and empower you? “Daniel Planner” or not, faith grows when you expect God to be absolutely active in your life, blessing you and using you for God’s purposes.

³ Ephesians 3:20 Good News Translation

⁴ <https://wd40.com/cool-stuff/history> accessed 6/8/2017

⁵ <https://www.uky.edu/~eushe2/Pajares/OnFailingG.html>, accessed 6/8/2017

Not everybody wants their faith to grow. When Jesus first took his traveling ministry back to his hometown of Nazareth, the people couldn't believe that the little boy they'd watched grow up was filled with God's spirit and power. They couldn't imagine Jesus bringing God's power to them to bless them and use them. And so, as Matthew's gospel reports, "And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith."⁶

When Paul wrote a letter to the Philippian Christians, he had been imprisoned because of his preaching. Paul commented, "My deep desire and hope is that I shall never fail in my duty, but that at all times, and especially right now, I shall be full of courage, so that with my whole being I shall bring honor to Christ, whether I live or die."⁷ I'm sure Paul would have preferred freedom over imprisonment, but by faith he was convinced that God would figure out a way to bless him and use him even while behind bars in order to spread the gospel. And when the opening verse of Hebrews Chapter 11 declares, "To have faith is to be sure of the things we hope for, to be certain of the things we cannot see,"⁸ it echoes Paul's confidence that faith grows when we expect God to use us and bless us.

#4: Faith grows as we resolve never to give up.

How many times the Bible urges us never to give up:

- Psalm 31:24 "Be brave. Be strong. Don't give up. Expect God to get here soon."⁹
- Proverbs 24:16a "The righteous may fall seven times but still get up..."¹⁰
- Galatians 6:9 "So let us not become tired of doing good; for if we do not give up, the time will come when we will reap the harvest."¹¹

And as we heard from this morning's gospel reading, the father of the boy with chronic seizures had been seeking remedies for years, and even though nothing had worked so far, he hadn't given up when he encountered Jesus. He not only believed that something could be done, he had faith that Jesus possessed the power to do it. What's more, even as the father presented his son for yet another attempt at healing the father prayed that his faith would be strengthened even more.

This week a friend sent a video from the TV show "America's Got Talent." It featured a singer named Mandy Harvey. [Watch to see why this particular performer exemplifies how faith grew because she refused to give up. (Show video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZKSWXzAnVe0>.)]

So what? Another singer.... Except that 29-year-old Mandy lost her hearing when she was 18. For years she gave up her love for music, but about four years ago she resolved to reclaim that part of her life. She retrained her voice using visual tuning devices. She finds the beat from the vibrations of her accompaniment by standing barefoot on the stage. Through the weeks and months and years of strenuous training and practicing in order to become a performer again, she never gave up.

Faith transforms belief into power because we open ourselves to God's power working through us. Faith grows when you choose to embrace God's dream for your life, when you are willing to risk failing, when you expect God to bless you and use you, and when you refuse to give up on God's dream for your life. When you undergird what you believe with the trust of faith, God gives you power to accomplish more than you can dare or dream.

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⁶ Matthew 13:58 New International Version

⁷ Philippians 1:20 Today's English Version

⁸ Hebrews 11:1 Good News Translation

⁹ The Message

¹⁰ Common English Bible

¹¹ Good News Translation