

Matthew 9:27 -30 "According to your faith it will be done unto you."

Notice it is conditional - you have to believe that God can do it - and you will receive it - according to your faith. Have you noticed that you get what you expect? If you wake up expecting to have a lousy day - you usually do! We tend to see what we expect to see, hear what we expect to hear, feel the way we expect to feel, and when we expect that we are going to accomplish something, or fail at something - that is exactly what happens! Why? Because we believe it will happen, and so it does. See this is why fear works in your life too - because when we fear, we are believing that something awful is going to happen - and so it does. Fear is just as powerful as faith - it is anti-faith.

What is faith? Hebrews 11:1-3 Faith is confidence - being sure, being certain of something. When we are confident in something, we do not hesitate - we just do it. Just live by faith. Romans 8:31 -32 If God is for us, who can be against us? Psalm 46:1-3

So, with all that being said, let me ask you - What are you expecting God to do in your life? God says you get to choose. How do I know this? Because the Bible says, "According to your faith it will be done unto you."

Let's go back to Hebrews 11, this time read verse 6. "Without faith it is impossible to please God."

How many of you are parents? How many of you are pleased when your children trust you? God is the same way. God is our heavenly Father and God is pleased when we trust Him. That's why the Bible says without faith it's impossible to please God.

You can obey God. You can do the right thing and still not be pleasing God because you're not doing it in faith. So it's important to learn how to live expectantly as you learn to live by faith.

Luke 17:5 The apostles ask Jesus to increase their faith. He tells them that they only need faith the size of a mustard seed to do great and mighty things. Faith starts small and grows. We all have a measure of faith - enough to believe that Jesus is the son of God, he died and rose from death to redeem us from our sins, he is now seated at the right hand of God and has given us his Holy Spirit to live in us and guide us. And we believe that Jesus is the only way to heaven and without him we will be thrown into the lake of fire with the enemy and his demons. Ok - so we all start out with that much faith. But it seems that some people have more confidence, more faith than others. Why? Because they exercised their faith and it grew some serious muscle - that's why.

If having faith pleases God, then I want more. I want mine to grow. If faith is what makes my life rewarding and fulfilling and confident then I want to know how to build my faith. Faith is like a muscle - it moves things, it does things. We know that to make muscles stronger, we must put them to work, we must stretch them and test them, and push them to their limits. When we push our muscles to their limits, they grow, and the limits expand. This is how faith grows too.

Reading the Bible will show you what your faith is capable of doing, just like reading a fitness magazine will tell you what your body is capable of doing. But just reading isn't going to be enough to grow those muscles - you are actually going to have to do something, and it isn't going to be easy, but it will be rewarding. God gave you the instructions, and once you begin to

put them into action he will begin to stretch and test your faith. When you test your muscles against resistance, they develop. When you test your faith against resistance, it develops.

You don't develop your faith just sitting on your blessed assurance in church. James 1:3 says this "The testing of your faith [this] develops perseverance ["develops perseverance"] so that you may be mature and complete." He says the purpose of these tests is that our faith, our perseverance will grow and will be mature and complete.

Job says the same thing speaking from experience in Job 7:17-18 "What is man that You make so much of him and that You give him so much attention and that You examine him every morning and test him every moment." [Underline "test him."] Did you realize that God is testing you every moment of your life? Life is a test. It is a temporary residence, and we are to make the most of it while we are here.

Every day we have opportunities to build our faith. The problem is that we don't recognize them as opportunities. We don't grow because we don't even realize we had the opportunity to do it.

I'm going to reveal some of those opportunities so you can recognize them the next time they come around. Once I show them to you, I'll bet you are going to see a whole bunch of opportunities you missed just last week.

DIFFICULTIES

These are the trials, problems, pressures, tough circumstances, all the stresses of life.

1 Peter 1:6-7 This is a powerful verse. We need to realize that everything can be used as an opportunity to grow our faith. We live in a broken world. We bring problems on ourselves, and sometime others bring problems on us and we are innocent victims. But if we see each and every difficulty and problem as an opportunity to grow in faith and bring glory to God, we will get exactly what we expect.

God uses all kinds of things to test our faith. Notice it says "all kinds." If life were easy then it wouldn't require any faith. If you could feel God all the time then you'd just go by your feelings. Sometimes God removes His feelings -- the feelings of His presence -- just so you learn to trust Him in the difficulties.

Here's a great verse when you're going through tough times. Isaiah 48:10 "I have refined you though not as silver. I have tested you in the furnace of affliction."

What is the furnace of affliction? You've been there. It's when the heat's on. When the heat's on it's a real test. How are you doing in the furnace of affliction? Are you feeling the heat right now? Have you felt it this past week? Are you under pressure? Is it getting a little hot under the collar? The Bible frequently compares our problems and difficulties to a furnace. The furnace of a refiner's fire who heats it up so high that the gold and silver melt and all the impurities are burned away. When all the impurities are burned away, you can see your reflection in the metal. When God can see his reflection in us, our impurities have been burned away.

So what should we do when we are going through difficulties? It is our response that determines our outcome. James 1:2-3 says to "consider it pure joy" when we face trials. God says that when we have a problem, we are to relax, and to rejoice. Thank God because he has a plan, he is going to help us get through it. And the end result is going to be worth everything we are

going through right now. We are not to be thankful for the problem, God doesn't want you to rejoice in bad things - he wants you to be thankful for his help while you are going through it.

So, how quickly do you praise God when things go wrong? We want to make a habit to rejoice in God during the problems so we can grow our faith. The Bible says to rejoice in the Lord always - not just during the good times.

IMPOSSIBLE DEMANDS

God tests our faith through commands. He asks us to do things that seem completely impossible. There are, in just the New Testament, 1050 commands for believers to obey. Of all these commands, some of them seem unreasonable. Some of them seem inconvenient. Some of them seem down right impossible. When we face these things that seems impossible, the question is - who do you believe? Do you believe God? Or do you believe what fear or your emotions are telling you?

Let me give you an example of those impossible commands. How about "Don't worry about anything"? I struggle with that one myself - there is so much in this world that gives us the opportunity to worry. Or how about "Bless your enemies"? Does anyone struggle with "Forgive others"?

Every time God gives us one of these commands in the Bible, it is a demand on our life. We are responsible to respond to the test and we will either grow or fail. And when we fail, we are given more opportunities to try again. Are we going to trust what God says is right? Or are we going to do what seems right in our own eyes? When we make the decision to do it God's way, we grow our faith and trust in him, and the impossible becomes possible.

There are literally hundreds of examples in the Bible of people that God said, "Do this" and they trusted Him, they had faith, even though it didn't make sense to them, even though it seemed impossible to them.

Exodus 16:4 "The people are to go out each day and gather enough manna for that day. In that way I will test them [test] and see whether they will follow My instructions." There were all kinds of reasons why that command didn't make sense. "Just enough for today? Why can't I gather enough for the week? It'd be more convenient that way. It'd be a better use of my time that way. Just enough for one day? What if I get sick tomorrow? What if I trip and hit my head on a rock and a snake bites me? There's all kinds of reasons why I need at least two days worth, God."

But that wasn't the point. The point wasn't does it make sense to you. The point was I want to test you so that you'll trust Me in a day to day kind of way. Follow My commands. I want to grow your faith. That was the point.

Often God asks us to do the impossible. Why? He wants to grow our faith.

A guy by the name of Abraham. You remember his story. He was seventy-five years old. He was about to hang it up and God said I want you to take it down. I want to take you out somewhere to make a difference in this world. I want you to go somewhere where you've never been, you don't even know where you're going. Abraham says, "Where exactly am I going?" God says, "I'll

tell you." "How am I going to get there?" I'll show you. "How will I know when I get there?" When you get there I'll tell you that you've gotten there.

How would you do with a command like that? We might say, "God, could I Google that first? I'd like to check it out. I'd like to get on MapQuest and get a point by point direction. Then I'm ready to follow Your directions."

Faith is always a risk. When it's a risk it means you can't understand it all in advance. Why would God do that? He's not just interested in making us comfortable, helping us to see all the directions and points on the map. He's wanting to test and grow our faith.

So the Bible says in Hebrews 11:8 "By faith Abraham obeyed and went."

A guy by the name of Noah. God comes to Noah one day and says, "Noah, I've got a demand. I want you to build an ark." Remember Noah lived in the middle of a desert. And God says I want you to build an ark because there's going to be a flood. The Bible says that until that time it had never rained. Water came up from the ground, a mist. It had never rained. And God says, "Noah, I want you to build an ark because it's going to rain."

Would you build an ark in the middle of a desert when you've never seen rain and never seen a flood just because God says so? Noah did. The Bible says, "By faith Noah built an ark."

God tests our faith. He does it through difficulties. But He also does it through demands. These demands that He make on our lives. I do it just because I trust Him.

What's the lesson with this one? If I want to learn to live by faith I must learn to not only rejoice continually. I have to learn to obey immediately. Obey immediately. When God says it, I do it. Whether I understand it or not, I do it. Whether it makes sense to me or not, I do it. Because I know it's what God has asked me to do. That's the test of faith. When God tells you to do it in the Bible then you do it.

This is where you hear what God says to do -- in the Bible. There's a lot of people who want to speak for God. Have you noticed that? God's voice in your life. No, you hear Him in the Bible. When God says to do it, you hear it clearly in the Bible then you act on it, you obey immediately.

So how quickly do you obey God? And please - God does not motivate with fear. He doesn't want you to act out of fear - he wants you to act out of faith.

MONEY

I'm talking about money. Did you know that money is one of the greatest tests of faith in your life? Few people understand how God uses our material possessions as a test of character and a test of faith. For many people finances are the greatest of all. They have no idea that God is actually testing them when they get into debt. When they're going through problems. When they're asked to give. All of these things have to do with faith.

Luke 16:11 Jesus says this, "If you haven't been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, [That's dollars, that's money] who will trust you with true riches?"

What is Jesus talking about here? He's giving a truth that's taught all through scripture that there is a definite, direct relationship between how I handle my money and the spiritual depth in my life. There is a direct connection. In fact Jesus says if I'm not faithful in handling material wealth He will not trust me with spiritual wealth. If I'm not faithful with my possessions He will not trust me with spiritual power. Money is a test. I can check out my checkbook to find out how I'm doing.

The fact is what I do with my money really does determine how much God can bless my life. You may have never thought of it but it has a real impact on it. This is taught all through scripture. I have learned it after walking over forty years with the Lord that God determines how much He can bless my life by how faithful I am with what He's put in my hands. Every time I set down and write out a check for my tithes -- ten percent of my income -- knowing that I could be using that money to pay bills, is that a test of faith? Of course it is.

In fact, it was a huge test of faith shortly after we came back to church because we were in a very difficult position at the time. Work was scarce and we had run ourselves into a lot of debt. Knowing that when I was writing that check, that ten percent could be used to pay bills or buy food for my family. It was definitely testing my faith.

When we are willing and ready and able to generously give the Lord knowing that this money could be spent for other things it is a test. Just like God uses difficulties and delays and demands He uses dollars.

Over the years I have seen God move when we are faithful. I have never seen him fail and that motivates me. Our own testimonies and those of others stretch our faith.

2 Corinthians 8:7-8

Paul says he wants to test their love and faith by their giving.

Did you know that Paul compared the giving of the Corinthians Christians with the giving of the Macedonian Christians? Then he challenged them. He said I want you to look and see what the Macedonians are doing. Look at their sacrifice. Look at what they're giving to help the poor. Look at what they're giving to serve the Lord.

This verse says that giving not only tests my faith it also tests the sincerity of my love. How much I really love God. Do you put your money where your mouth is? God challenges us to compare our sacrifices with others. If you've got a problem with that you've got a problem with the Bible. In fact, the only people that ever get upset about verses on giving is just people who don't give. Givers don't get upset about it.

You can't ignore these verses. The fact is every time you give to God your faith grows. Every time you give it breaks the grip of materialism in your life. Every time you give, you grow in love. You grow in love, you grow in faith, you grow in maturity, it builds your life.

1 Chronicles 29 tells us how David and the people of Israel raised the money to build the temple. In that one single offering they actually raised over four hundred million dollars in today's terms -- the most successful building campaign in history. When people say God doesn't need a building they haven't read 1 Chronicles 29. God told them to raise the money and they gave sacrificially.

What I love about that whole story is verse 14. 1 Chronicles 29:14 David says this after they've all given as a test of their faith. He says, "Who am I, and who are my people that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from You and we have given You what comes from Your hand. O Lord our God for all this abundance that we have provided for building You a temple for Your Holy Name, it comes from Your hand, and it all belongs to You. [In other words, it's all God's in the first place] I know, my God, that You test the heart and are pleased with integrity. All these things that I have given willingly with honest intent and now I see, with joy Your people who are here have given to You."

David says in this passage that giving not only tests my faith, it not only tests my love, it is the test of my heart, the integrity of my heart. Is Jesus Christ the Lord of every area? God wants to be Lord of the difficulties. God wants to be Lord in the demands of life. God wants to be Lord in the dollars of life.

The only thing that stops us from giving is fear - and what did I tell you about fear? It is the exact opposite of faith.

So if we want our faith to grow, we need to rejoice continually, obey immediately, and give generously.

So ask yourselves - When it comes to giving of my money, am I operating in fear, or in faith?

It's interesting that in giving God not only tests our faith but the Bible says in Malachi that giving tests God. Malachi 3, God says, "'Test Me in this,' says the Lord. 'Bring all your tithes into the storehouse [that's the place you worship] and test Me in this. See if I will not provide for you, throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out a blessing that you won't even be able to handle.'" In other words, I'm going to play a game with you. You give to Me and I give to you and we'll see who wins.

Giving not only tests me, it actually tests God. I dare you to test God. I dare you to put Him to the test to see that He will keep His promises. This is the one and only time God says you can test him. So that means he is serious and he knows how hard it is going to be for you, so he's giving you a little challenge.

DELAYS

If every prayer were immediately answered, if your every need were automatically met, if every problem were instantly solved you wouldn't need faith and your faith wouldn't need to be stretched. But it is not that way. We have to wait on things. It is human nature that we hate to wait. I hate to wait. I hate it!

Do you do this? You're driving up to a red light and there are two cars there one in each lane. As you're driving up you're figuring out, which one is going to get off faster. I'm going to get behind that one now. Do you do that? We hate to wait. We hate waiting lines. We hate traffic. We hate everything about waiting. It's why fast food restaurants flourish even though we know they are no good. We would rather eat something bad for us than wait to eat. It's why we continue to click on a button on a website even though we know it is loading - because it's too slow and we don't want to wait.

Yet a large percent of your life is spent waiting. If you and I can't learn how God wants to stretch and grow our faith during times of waiting we miss out on much of the faith lessons that God wants to teach in our lives.

A good example of this again is the people of Israel in the Old Testament as they're on their way from Egypt to the Promised Land. Going from Egypt to the Promised Land -- they could have made it - they could have traveled that distance in two or three weeks. But it ended up taking them forty years. Why all the wasted time? Because the Bible said God led them in their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. Why all the wasted time? Because God was more interested in developing their faith than in getting them from point A to point B the most quick way, the fastest way. So it took forty years.

The Bible says in Deuteronomy 8:2 "God led you all the way in the desert these forty years to test you in order to know what was in your heart." That's what happens in times of waiting. We get to see God gets to see what is in our heart.

Do you ever find yourself in situations -- I'll bet we all have -- where you feel like you're in a hurry and you get the definite idea that God is not in a hurry. Anybody else feel that way? It happens all the time. Why does that happen? Because God is more interested in growing our faith than anything else.

So we start asking the 'when' questions while we're waiting. If you are praying for your marriage going to get better, or your health. (There are things you have to do in the natural too) But you get impatient - When is it going to turn around? Or if you're single, When am I going to find that right person and get married? Or, How long is it going to take until I get what God prophesied for me? Or, When are we going to have a baby? Or, When am I going to find just the right job?

I'd say that it's in this area, this area of waiting that God works to develop our faith more than any other area. He's tests us again and again in this area of waiting and uses it to develop our faith.

Some of you are waiting on something right now. Maybe you've been waiting a long time. While you're waiting God is there. He does not leave you alone. It just may be a test. Because God does use difficulties and demands. He uses dollars. But He also uses delays to build your faith.

Look at what God does, Isaiah 64:4 "God acts on behalf of those who wait for Him." It pays to be patient. Just remember this: while you are waiting God is working. You're not waiting alone. Waiting in faith God is working. God is doing things behind the scenes, in your heart and other people's hearts that you cannot even see.

So if we really want to learn to live by faith we've got to learn to rejoice continually. We have to learn to obey immediately. We have to give generously. And we must learn to wait patiently.

If we are really going to grow in faith we have to wait patiently. Because God is not going to snap His fingers and give instant answers to our every prayer. Why not? Because He wants us to grow in faith.

In Luke 17:5 the apostles asked "Lord increase our faith." Are you willing to pray that very dangerous prayer "God, increase my faith." If you are then let's get practical about it. Which of these four areas that we talked about do you need to specifically pray for God to increase your faith?

Some of you are going through incredibly tough times right now. You're not alone. If you're going through that kind of a time then you need to pray, "Father, help me to learn to rejoice continually because I know You're in control. I know that I'm not alone. I know that You have a purpose and I know You will give me the strength to make it through." So I'm going to rejoice continually not that this is happening but in this is happening because I know You're with me.

Maybe God's testing your faith right now through demands. Let me put that in another way. Let me put that as a question. What is it in your life that you know God has told you to do but you haven't done it yet? That's the place to put faith. Maybe it's get in shape. Maybe it's be baptized. Maybe it's start reading the Bible. Maybe it's to forgive a person you hold a grudge against. Maybe it's something I haven't mentioned but you know what it is. It's in your heart right now. What is it that you know God has told you to do but you haven't done it yet? And you pray, "Lord, help me to obey immediately. Not tomorrow. Not next week. Today. Give me the faith to do that."

Maybe God's testing your faith through dollars. You can hardly make ends meet and you know what the Bible teaches about tithing. Give ten percent of your income to God as a sign of your faith. You're thinking, "But God! Don't You know what I make?" And God would say, "Yeah, I know what you make. I know what everybody in the world makes. That's not the point. That's not the issue. The issue is your faith. I want to test your faith." Why is it that God touches this sensitive financial nerve in our body? Why does He do that? Because He wants to see how we'll react. When He touches it do we get mad? Do we run away? We get bitter? Do we get angry? Do we get afraid? Or do we turn to Him and in generosity give and say, "It all came from You in the first place." Maybe that's the test you're facing right now. We've all faced that one.

Maybe you're facing the test of a delay. What is it that you've been expecting God to do in your life and it just hasn't happened yet? You're thinking, God when? God, how long? God, why hasn't it happened yet? God, why haven't You answered my prayer? There's this test of a delay.

God's encouragement to you again and again in the Bible is, Don't give up. Don't give up. Look up to God. And realize that He is with you. As you and I wait on Him He not only increases our faith but He works out His plan. So pray, Lord, help me to wait patiently.

As we close I'd like to give you the chance to personally have a few minutes with God and talk to Him.

I want to encourage you to pray that dangerous prayer, Lord, increase my faith. It's dangerous because the way God increases our faith is by working, stretching, and testing our faith. But if you're willing to pray with courage, that prayer, just say it to God right now. "Lord, increase my faith." Now just between you and God ask him for help in the specific areas you need to exercise your faith.

Father, together we thank You. We thank You for Your word that builds our faith. We thank You, Jesus, for Your unconditional love for us. Thank You that we do not have to earn Your love. That

just in faith we can receive it. Lord, I pray that we would trust You to use these tests in our lives to make us more like You. We pray this together in Jesus' name. Amen.

I encourage you to take the steps from this moment on to recognize the opportunities to grow your faith. Live by faith, not by fear any longer! Amen!