

Eight Levels of Faith Lesson 4
Faith that Builds Bridges

Luke 7:8-9

*8 For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.
9 When Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.*

I. Review

1. In our first lesson of the 8 levels of faith, we looked at the lowest three levels which we called, Underwater Faith: no faith, little faith, and weak faith. [slide]
2. Last week we looked at the three Rise Above levels of faith. [slide]
3. **Level 4 is Measure of Faith** which is the level of faith that God gives to people so they can be saved. But more than that, it allows a new believer to immediately begin to use some of the gifts, spiritual gifts and service gives, the Lord gives them by His grace.
4. **Level 5 is the Gift of Faith.** This is one of the 9 spiritual gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 11. It is part of a group that includes the gifts of wisdom, knowledge, healing, and miracles, among others. God imparts this gift often to bring down heaven into a crisis or a critical situation so God's purposes can turn around what would have been a tragic situation.
5. And finally we looked at **Level 6, Strong in Faith.** As we saw with Abraham, strong faith is a way of life that consistently pushes the individual through great obstacles and often sorrows, toward the promises of God, especially when they seem impossible to reach.
6. But as we saw with the Strong Faith Abraham lived in, these higher levels of faith come through a journey that did not always resemble godly faithfulness.
7. But that is why we call these, Faith that Rises Above.
8. Tonight we will look at the last two levels, **Great Faith** and **Full of Faith** which we will call: **Faith that Builds Bridges.**
9. As humans, we have a tendency to form biases that need to be bridged.
10. When I use the word, bias, I am talking about how we all as humans, tend to form preconceived ideas or preferences about things or people without having a complete knowledge of them.
11. Like with the foods we refuse to even try because of their color or texture, or like with people we want to get away from based on appearance.
12. But after you try that green vegetable, or after you get to know that person, you have a different opinion than you had before. You moved from a biased opinion to an informed opinion.
13. You may still not like that green vegetable or still feel uncomfortable around that person, but at least you now have an unbiased opinion.
14. When it comes to dealing with people, there is level of faith that builds bridges that help cross over many difficult people issues in order to advance God's purposes.

II. (7) Great faith

1. Moving up from no faith, little faith, weak faith, measure of faith, gift of faith, strong faith, we now come to **great faith.** [slide]

2. Even though strong faith is that level of consistent plowing forward comparable to the great icebreaker ships breaking through nearly impossible situations, as we will see tonight, Great faith rises higher than strong faith.
3. Jesus identified two people at this level of faith that we will talk about.
4. What I find interesting in these two stories, and what is a “divine coincidence” for our times, is how Jesus dealt with what we call today, racial, national origin, and cultural prejudices.
 - A. Roman Centurion—unlikely mutual understanding and respect
 1. First, not only was this man a Gentile, but he was also a Roman Centurion, which makes this even more unusual. Imagine a World War II German SS officer walking the streets of the recently conquered and occupied nation of Poland.
 2. SS officers were the enemy occupiers who had just inflicted untold atrocities in their land and had unjustly stolen their independence. The Poles feared and despised the Nazi SS soldiers.
 3. Well Roman centurions were junior-level officers in the fighting and occupying force of Rome who had dirty jobs of enforcing the Roman Emperor’s wishes among the people.
 4. So while you might expect this centurion to be hated by the Jews, there was an unlikely mutual understanding and respect that surpassed these barriers.
 5. In fact, when a Jewish elder heard of a serious trouble this centurion was facing, he had to tell him about Jesus. After all, faith spreads by sharing your own:
Luke 7:3-5
3 And when he [the centurion] heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant.
4 And when they [the Jewish elders] came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, That he [the centurion] was worthy for whom he should do this:
5 For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue.
 6. Note how the differences were overcome here—a mutual respect had developed as one individual opened his understanding to see what was important to the other.
 7. This beloved Roman “enemy” had donated funds and perhaps even provided manpower to build a synagogue. And in a similar kind gesture, the Jewish elder took the Roman’s concern seriously and carried it to Jesus.
 - B. Centurion sees connection of faith to authority
 1. When Jesus received his request, He agreed to go to the centurion’s home. Then as He approached the home, the centurion sent a message to Jesus that caused Him to marvel:
Luke 7:6-8
6 Then Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not thyself: for I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof:
7 Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed.
8 For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.
 2. He believed so strongly in Jesus, whom he had not met, that he didn’t even find it necessary that Jesus come to His house. **He understood how authority worked and He knew Jesus had it.**

3. He showed a level of faith that amazed Jesus:
Luke 7:9-10
*9 When Jesus heard these things, he **marveled** [was pleased and amazed] at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him, I say unto you, I have not found so **great faith**, no, not in Israel.*
10 And they that were sent, returning to the house, found the servant whole that had been sick.
4. Jesus answered great faith with exactly what was asked.
5. Note these 5 characteristics of great faith we just saw:
 - a. the centurion sent a prayer request with others showing **trust**;
 - b. the centurion requested help for a servant showing a **tender heart**;
 - c. the centurion's **generosity** helped build a synagogue showing **genuine love** for God and God's people. **Mutual faith** overcomes cultural differences.
 - d. the centurion didn't feel worthy asking Jesus to come to his house showing **humility**
 - e. the centurion understood that **faith operates through delegated authority**
6. It is important to note that the word "great" that Jesus used to describe the centurion's faith, **Great Faith**, is the Greek word, tos—oo'-tos meaning, "so vast in quantity or size".
7. It is like the difference in saying, "that person is amazing," and "that person is so amazing."
8. And it works toward the negative as well. When you call in It is like tell your boss when you call in, "I'm feeling so sick," not just "I'm sick."
9. Although the previous level of faith was **strong faith**, **great faith** pushes to a level of higher intensity and quantity, expanding beyond capacity.
10. If you want great faith, couple your belief with **sacrifice yet humility, confidence yet a pure heart**, and boldness yet based on authority.

C. Canaanite woman's twisted approach

1. The next example of **great faith** is another Gentile, a Greek woman from Canaan. And as we read Mark's introduction of the woman, we see once again that faith spreads by sharing your own:

Mark 7:25-26

*25 For a certain woman, whose young daughter had an unclean spirit, **heard of him**, and **came and fell at his feet**:*

26 The woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician by nation; and she besought him that he would cast forth the devil out of her daughter.

2. And reading this story, by paying careful attention to the language used, you will see otherwise hidden hints of racial tensions that existed in that day.
3. There was open and hostile hatred expressed between Jews, Gentiles and Samaritans.
4. And as was often the case, Jesus stepped right over these man-made prejudices and drew people to a deeper faith in God, regardless of their race.
5. In this instance, Jesus brought to the surface the underlying prejudice in a wise way:

Matthew 15:22-28

22 And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him,

saying, *Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.*

6. As a people, Canaanites were historically idol worshipers and enemies of the Jews, so she stepped out of her cultural norms in approaching Jesus using the phrase, “Son of David.”
7. She began their conversation by borrowing Jewish religious terminology to address Him.
8. With that in mind, notice the uncharacteristic response of Jesus—silence. But as you will see, His silence actually drew out into the open, a hidden racial tension that existed so it could be overcome:
*Matt 15:23 But he answered her **not a word**. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us.*
9. First, let me say this about God’s silence. It is often misunderstood, even here by the disciples who thought it meant Jesus wanted her to leave.
10. When it appears that God is ignoring your cries, **divine silence** is merely a method God uses to cause us: **[slide]**
 - a. to search in hidden places of our heart to deal with buried issues,
 - b. to develop our determination and patience, and
 - c. to test and grow our faith.

D. Canaanite woman moves to truth

1. As in other interactions with people, Jesus used the woman’s words as a starting point to lead her toward a true and honest relationship with God:
Matt 15:24 But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.
2. While that sounds like Jesus **was** showing racial prejudice, we need to remember the story we just read of Jesus and the Gentile centurion. That man’s approach began as an expression of faith, not by highlighting cultural differences.
3. Jesus words to here moved the woman to demonstrate an important characteristic of great faith similar to what we saw with strong faith: **persistence**. She still responded with worship and another cry for help even after she hit a wall:
*Matt 15:25 Then **came she and worshipped** him, saying, Lord, help me.*
4. Hear this: worshiping Jesus when backed up against a wall, changes the spiritual dynamics of your situation. And this word *worship* literally means bowing down to the ground in reverence.
5. Moving beyond pretense and coming toward Jesus in worship and desperate pleas, prepared her heart to receive truth even when it hurt:
Matt 15:26 But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs.
6. She was desperate to claim a promise of God made to the Jews.
7. But by her next response, she wisely perceived that Jesus was trying to move her from the racial considerations she began with, toward a response of faith.
8. So now we see another characteristic of great faith, **honesty** about self:
*Matt 15:27 And she said, **Truth**, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.*
*28 Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, **great is thy faith**: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.*

9. She was persistent, and as a result, followed Jesus' lead to a truthful, humble, and insightful faith response.
10. The promise was not to her, but she reached beyond the promise, and pushed beyond Calvary to when the Gentiles would freely take advantage of the promises.
11. **[slide] Great faith** pushes beyond perceived boundaries, learns and improves from painful situations and painful truths, is humble and teachable.
12. So that is why great faith is beyond strong faith.

III. (8) Full of faith

A. Internal conflict in the church

1. We will begin looking at the last of the 8 levels of faith tonight, and will finish it in the next lesson along with a final review.
2. The Book of Acts records two individuals who reached what we are calling the highest level on the faith spectrum, **full of faith [slide]**.
3. These two were the very influential workers for God: Stephen and Barnabas.
4. Let us first look at Stephen. Stephen's first mention in scripture was in the book of Acts following a conflict that arose in the early church among different culture groups.
5. Keep in mind that we just looked at two cases where faith bridged bias based on national origin. In this next passage, we see how **full of faith** also bridges cultural bias.
6. The chapter begins with words: "there arose a murmuring".
Acts 6:1 And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied [revival], there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, ...
7. The two groups mentioned who were murmuring were both Jewish groups, but the Grecians were Jews who came from outside of Judea and who spoke only Greek. They were likely Jewish immigrants who been saved and joined the Jerusalem assembly.
8. The second group is called the Hebrews. They were also Jews but were from right there in Judea, which included the regions surrounding Jerusalem, and these would have spoken the native Aramaic/Hebrew.
9. As an example, the apostles would have been a part of the Hebrew group, and Timothy, the co-laborer of Paul, would have been part of the Grecian group.
10. So these are people who would normally work well side-by-side if bias did not get in the way. But if there is someone on the team who is full of faith, it can bridge that bias.
11. What was the source of the conflict between these groups?
...because their widows [the Grecian widows] were neglected in the daily ministrations.
12. The church conflict arose after the early church started a new ministry to the many new people who came in the church during great revival. They began serving daily meals to the widows of the church.
13. The immigrant Jews who were just as much a part of the church as the native Judeans, found that the workers overlooked them in the meal.

B. Faith-fullness, a solution for crisis

1. The apostles came up with a solution: appoint some Holy Ghost filled people who could take charge and fairly manage this need.
2. This was apparently the first appointment of department directors, sometimes called deacons, who organized around various projects to give the pastors room to focus on the

Word and prayer.

Act 6:2-3

2 Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.

3 Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.

3. The crisis needed leadership, vision, and some **faith-filled** people to rise to the occasion. And Stephen was among the seven chosen to serve tables.

Acts 6:5, 8

*5 And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man **full of faith** and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: ...*

*8 And Stephen, **full of faith** and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.*

4. While Stephen was serving faithfully as a table waiter for widows, his faith-fullness of his **full of faith** level, gradually developed into greater influence from more spiritual levels of ministry, like public speaking.
5. Next time, we will finish with Stephen's story as we continue to study what this full of faith level involves.

IV. Conclusion

1. We have now looked in detail at 7 of the 8 levels of faith, [slides] starting with the first three, no faith, little faith, and weak faith, these three being the underwater levels of faith.
2. Last time we looked at the three levels of faith that rise above: the measure of faith, the gift of faith, and strong faith.
3. Tonight we introduced the last two levels: great faith, and full of faith. These are levels of faith that build bridges.
4. **Great faith** is a step above strong faith in how it crosses over what would be difficult barriers between people, even those caused from hurtful words, in order to see God's miracles and deliverance accomplished.
5. **Great faith** also understands the connection between given authority and a miracle. When God delegates authority, great faith picks it up and uses it.
6. **Full of Faith** is the final level we introduced and will pick up on next week. So far, we have seen how this highest level of faith helps a person work at the lowest levels of service, but while there, builds bridges to keep peace and ministry going.
7. And speaking of ministry, we also saw that **Full of Faith** operating like an apostle in miracles and wonders.