

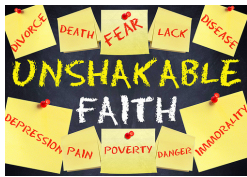


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How Do We Develop Unshakable Faith?

Jeremiah 6:16: (NRSV) *Thus says the LORD: Stand at the crossroads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way lies; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls...*

Faith. It is the basis of all religion, for it is faith in something larger than oneself that draws people to a common belief. Faith. It is a necessity in any functional society, for it creates the environment for citizens to rely upon their leadership. Faith. It is a key in any deep and enduring relationship, for it provides the fertile soil that feeds a lifetime of growing together. Faith. It is critical in the bringing together of two at odds parties, for it provides a bridge that both parties may equally travel upon. Faith. It is a staple of our lives - so how do we make it firm, unshakable and permanent?

Faith: Strong's #4102 persuasion, credence, conviction. Reliance (especially upon Christ for salvation), constancy (in such profession). By extension, the system of religious truth.

"Faith" is always from the same Greek word in the entire New Testament.

Credulity: *noun*

Readiness or willingness to believe especially on slight or uncertain evidence (gullibility)

Does faith come in degrees or stages?

Yes! True deep and powerful faith must be built and developed as any muscle must be built and developed.

The following story is VERY tragic - we will tell it throughout this program to illustrate unshakable faith in an "average" person.



Introduction - one year later, CBC Heather Hiscox interview with Marc Woerlen

- (Interviewer) *It can be incredibly hard to cope with losing one family member in a tragedy. Losing eight is almost impossible to imagine. Mark Woerlen knows tremendous loss. One year ago a fire killed his entire family, eight people in all. How does a person deal with such a tragedy and find the strength to carry on? CBC's Heather Hiscox spoke to Marc Woerlen recently. Here's some of their conversation.*
- (Marc) *It's been a nice project. It's kept me busy picking this out, picking that out.*
- (Interviewer) *Building a house, rebuilding a life, a life that Marc Woerlen could never have imagined a year ago; a life without the people that were supposed to live in this house near Ottawa with him.*

The Apostle Peter and the learning curve of faith: Matthew 14:22-33: In our journey of faith, we are often told by Jesus to take courage. Sometimes we respond as Peter did - with insecurity - with an "if," for we need an "extra" reassurance to truly step out in faith. Faith was successfully executed! *But...³⁰But seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, Lord, save me! ³¹Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand and took hold of him, and said to him, you of little faith, why did you doubt? ³²When they got into the boat, the wind stopped. ³³And those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, you are certainly God's Son!*

This was not a failed faith; it was merely an immature and untested faith that needed work.

Are there specific steps necessary to build an unshakable faith?

We would like to suggest a four-step approach based upon our theme text:

STEP 1: KNOW THERE ARE CROSSROADS IN LIFE

This may seem like a useless step - after all, everyone knows there are crossroads. The key here is to know *which* crossroads are life-altering crossroads versus the crossroads of mere preference or convenience.

If you want to lead a life of great faith, there are life-altering crossroads to which we have to pay attention. We need to recognize these as they come up. It is easy to go with a default decision.

Sometimes the crossroads are subtle and therefore dangerous: Jude 1:3-4: Unshakable faith has to have the right foundation so we do not put our faith in the wrong things.



Let's help one another - one year later, *CBC Heather Hiscox interview with Marc Woerlen*

- (Interviewer) He had seven kids. His wife, Monica, was pregnant with their eighth. But one year ago this week, Marc Woerlen buried them all. They died as they slept, in a fire in the family farmhouse. Woerlen survived because he wasn't home. He was in Ottawa preparing for his family's imminent move.
- (Marc) Some have a trial one way, and some have a trial another way.
- (Interviewer) Even in those black first days, Woerlen was willing to answer my questions.
- (Marc) God planned it the way He planned it, and let's help one another get through it.

The decision to accept all things from God stated "matter-of-factly" reminds us how subtle true faith could be.

Sometimes the crossroad is clearly laid out: Ruth 1:8-11: This was an easily defined decision. Literally, she could go either one direction with Naomi or the other without her with no subtle in-between. We will continue this story later.

Sometimes the crossroad is outlined by history: Joshua 24:14: We will continue this story later as well.

Faith is always a choice! Unshakable faith is always a harder choice. Faith is not a feeling; rather, it is a decision to live a certain way based on our understanding.

We can tell if we know there are crossroads by the questions we ask: Habakkuk 1:1-4: Sometimes we think that unshakable faith never doubts. Here we see that unshakable faith is courageous enough to ask the hard questions that provoked its doubt, expecting a powerful answer, for our vision of the road before us is truly imperfect and therefore fuzzy.

Unshakable faith verbalizes to God with brutal honesty what we see! ³Why do You make me see iniquity, and cause me to look on wickedness? Yes, destruction and violence are before me; Strife exists and contention arises. ⁴Therefore the law is ignored and justice is never upheld. For the wicked surround the righteous; Therefore justice comes out perverted. More questions, now in a challenging fashion: "Do You see how bad this world is?!" Habakkuk 1:12-13: Habakkuk: "You ARE God, so help me understand!" These are the same questions people ask today, but more out of desperation than faith: Why does God permit evil? Why do bad things happen to good people?

STEP 2: WHEN YOU RECOGNIZE YOU ARE AT A CROSSROAD, STAND THERE AND LOOK

To "look" means to perceive; to take a breath, put away feelings and bring out our godly vision. The Hebrew word, *Seleh*, used in the Old Testament Psalms means to pause and consider what was just spoken so you find what you need to move forward.

Back to Ruth and Naomi: Ruth 1:12-15: Naomi makes the two young women truly consider what is at stake. Naomi continues to give Ruth a way out, assuring she will decide what to do rather than just follow a feeling.



Inner peace a process - one year later, *CBC Heather Hiscox interview with Marc Woerlen*

- (Interviewer) With the beard, his outward appearance is different now. But his inner calm, his unshakable faith, are just the same.
- (Marc) I have a peace that...there's no words for it. I don't know how else to be in my situation, right?
- (Interviewer) How long did it take for you to come to that peaceful place?
- (Marc) Oh, it's an ongoing process. You know, every day...you know, there's some times that are tougher to go through than others, so you remind yourself that continually.

Sometimes you can lose that peace or the circumstances of the moment get to you - that is human nature. The key to unshakable faith is having the ability to look down the road and see something solid. That becomes "home base" for you.

Many would blame God and lose their faith after such a tragedy. The very reason people blame God is the reason we should have rest and peace in God.



Back to Joshua: Joshua 24:15: What is *agreeable in our sight* when we stand at a crossroad? What do we see that provokes us to move one direction or another?

Here is another example of faith in adversity...A crossroad at which someone technically did not even have a right to stand and yet, unshakable faith delivers! Matthew 15:22-28: Jesus engages the woman - he tests her faith and she is unshakable! Hebrews 11:6

What observations do we have so far about developing unshakable faith?

- Recognize the Crossroads of Faith in our lives.
- Stop, breathe and look at the crossroad - slow yourself down, because faith is never in a hurry!

STEP 3: ASK FOR THE "ANCIENT PATHS" FOR THAT IS WHERE THE "GOOD WAY" LIES

The *ancient paths* are NOT necessarily the traditional paths; rather, they are the paths of those who walked in the blessing of the Almighty.

Do not confuse *ancient paths* with tradition. Sometimes they can be the same, but more often than not, they are different. We have to go to the source - the Old and New Testaments.

Back to Ruth and Naomi: Ruth 1:16: Ruth decided based upon her understanding of God through Naomi and not on her own heritage. She left behind the gods of her past and clung to the God Naomi proclaimed. She left behind tradition and found something stronger.

Back to Joshua: Joshua 24:15: Human nature is SO inclined to always look for a new way or an untried way, and sometimes this is good. However, when it comes down to the deepest core values of life, the ancient ways of God Almighty always ring true.

Isaiah 26:3: (NASB) *The steadfast of mind You will keep in perfect peace, because he trusts in You.*

We can truly know which path is the "ancient one" by taking humanity out of the way:

1 Corinthians 2:3-5: The Apostle Paul made sure they were not following the wisdom of a man but instead the wisdom of God. Tradition is resting our faith in the power of men. The "good way" of the ancient paths is the power of God!

The account of Jesus and the father of a possessed young man: Mark 9:23-24: So, to develop an unshakable faith requires us to - through humility -acknowledge where we are weak, all the while focusing on the strength we can access through our Lord!

Unshakable faith can be displayed by being asked to do what is different

(to say the least!): Hebrews 11:7: God saw Noah's faith and trusted him with the task of preserving life in the face of worldwide judgment. God had to find the right man with the right faith. Rest for our souls in faith does not necessarily mean ease of life; rather, it is a rest in knowing that you are walking in the will of God. Life does not become easy with unshakable faith, but it does become more peaceful.

Psalms 119:105: (NASB) *Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.*

STEP 4: WALK THE "ANCIENT PATHS" FOR THERE YOU WILL FIND THE REST OF FAITH...



Faith in God and His plan - one year later, *CBC Heather Hiscox interview with Marc Woerlen*

- (Interviewer) *When we met last year, we talked often about how prayer was sustaining you, and you said to me a year ago that this test had in fact reinforced - had strengthened - your faith. Is that the same thing today?*
- (Marc) *Most definitely, yeah. If it wouldn't be for my faith, I would be in a mental ward.*
- (Interviewer) *Have there been times, though, in this past year where you've been angry at God or have questioned His plan?*
- (Marc) *I've never been angry with God right from the first day, but we do sometimes wonder why He got...*
- (Interviewer) *Why you?*
- (Marc) *Why...yeah, exactly.*
- (Interviewer) *And have you come to be able to answer that, for yourself?*
- (Marc) *No, I don't know why He's picked me for the situation, but I'm at peace about it.*



Back to Ruth and Naomi: Ruth 1:17-18,22: Ruth truly does walk the walk of unshakable faith, standing against what would have been natural. But she saw something deeper and stronger, and therefore more desirable for her life.

Back to Joshua: Joshua 24:16-17: The people of Israel at this time displayed unshakable faith based upon what they knew to be true. How are WE doing with that...?

Walking the walk of unshakable faith: 1 Corinthians 16:13-14 1 Peter 5:8-9 James 1:2-4

A comparison between unshakable and untraceable faith: 1 Kings 18:20-22

Faith needs to drive us. Matthew 12:20: God knows how fragile we are.

Remember the example from the beginning of the program of Peter walking on water? This was not a failed faith; it was merely an immature and untested faith that needed work.

Peter and the Apostles, after Pentecost at the Crossroad of Contradiction: Acts 5:17-39: (NASB) ¹⁷But the high priest rose up, along with all his associates...and they were filled with jealousy. ¹⁸They laid hands on the apostles and put them in a public jail. ¹⁹But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the gates of the prison, and taking them out he said, ²⁰go, stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this Life. ²¹Upon hearing this, they entered into the temple about daybreak and began to teach. **Would he still preach even though he was just thrown in jail? Peter and the Apostles at the Crossroad of Holiness vs. Convenience:** Now when the high priest and his associates came... and sent orders to the prison house for them to be brought. ²²But the officers who came did not find them in the prison; and they returned and reported back... ²⁵But someone came and reported to them, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people! ²⁶Then the captain went along with the officers... ²⁷When they had brought them, they stood them before the Council. The high priest questioned them, ²⁸saying, we gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man's blood upon us. ²⁹But Peter and the apostles answered, **We must obey God rather than men.** ³⁰The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging him on a cross. ³¹He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins...**Physically we want convenience, but Peter's faith had grown substantially. This brings the Pharisees to a crossroad...!** ³³But when they heard this, they were cut to the quick and intended to kill them. ³⁴But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the Law, respected by all the people, stood up in the Council and gave orders to put the men outside for a short time. ³⁵And he said to them, men of Israel, take care what you propose to do with these men. ³⁶For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody... ³⁷After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census and drew away some people after him; he too perished, and all those who followed him were scattered. ³⁸So in the present case, I say to you, stay away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or action is of men, it will be overthrown; ³⁹but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God. **Peter and the Apostles at the Crossroad of Obedience and Avoidance:** ⁴⁰They took his advice; and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and then released them. ⁴¹So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for his name. ⁴²And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

A life of faith will inevitably bring us to countless crossroads. It is only through humility, prayer, understanding and grace that we can wisely choose the ancient paths of faith and peace...

*So, how do we develop unshakable faith?
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!*