

What does the word faith mean to you? How would you define it if someone asked? Is it something to make you feel good or does it really work? Is it the basis for life or simply something to try when you have no other answers? If you are like me it is so easy to take it for granted that often it never comes up until our world is shaken or someone criticizes people of faith for being weak.

So many of you have had to deal with the pain of earthly losses of various intensity and degree. And while we know that faith is always the answer, we wonder why sometimes it just doesn't seem to be enough. The attitude of many is as long as I have what I need, I don't need to even think about faith. Or the converse which is when I have nowhere else to turn then I will open the curtain marked faith and hope it has what I am looking for.

The story of Naaman is a genuine opportunity to explore the gift and role of faith. He was a gentile. He was rich and powerful. He could go wherever he needed and had servants and power to get what he wanted. He was the epitome of earthly fame and fortune. He had everything money could buy and power could demand but could not escape the prison of his disease.

That might be why he went to Jerusalem, knowing it was the center of worship for the God of Israel. Likely he had tried many times to pray to his gods begging for healing and he was still a leper. Maybe this was a desperate effort that didn't seem to have worked. His expectation was that if the God of Israel could heal, it would take a mighty action on his own part get God to respond. The powerful always assume that power is the only and best answer to everything!

So, when told to submit to a washing in a muddy brook, he was angry, confused, and dispirited. Used to earthly power he couldn't understand that humiliating himself in front of his servants by washing in a dirty creek could bring any good results. It just didn't make sense.

But his servants were perfect examples of earthly weakness. They had no control and knew it. They waited for orders from others, doing what they were told; no questions asked. If told to do something they knew not to ask questions but to act. If a superior told them to bathe in the river, they would.

If a man of God said wash, then wash! If that is what it takes, do it! Knowing they were powerless they didn't waste time with philosophical arguments or debates. If God's prophet said a river bath was the ticket made perfect sense.

They understood the need to surrender, and that is where our exploration of faith must begin. *Faith is all about surrender! Giving up my power for that of another. Faith is trading one set of chains for another. Giving up what I can control, understand, or feel, and trust completely in the power and actions of another.*

For instance, full-ness in marriage is not based on my demands, but what I am willing to surrender out of love. In such a relationship, there is faith in the other

which is what makes the relationship full. When faithful love is the motivation, surrender is not a sign of weakness, but the most powerful gift one can share!

Naaman had to be convinced by a little girl to let go! (And so, our first lesson is that faith is different than belief!) Faith is not an attribute but an action! It is not something we know but something we do (or more accurately don't do!) Faith is all about surrender to a higher power than me!

We all have faith, it is God's gift after all, but sometimes our refusal to surrender keeps it chained. When faith is only what we believe, like a series of statements, or fill in the blank answers, we lock up its power. When faith is how we live, the gift is opened fully!

When we worry about how to change the negativity or selfishness of our culture, or fight disease, or strengthen a marriage, or forgive someone who seems unrepentant. we are chained by our weakness. On the other hand, when we are willing to turn anything over to God and ask how he might bless and lead our living, then we are living by faith!

Faith is not head knowledge but a habit of the heart.

The point of faith is not in its guarantee of power, so I get what I want, but in my willing surrender and praise to my God whose love is beyond what I deserve.

Faith is the gift that cures all of my incurable diseases. Faith is giving up what I can control to the God who can heal and strengthen my living -- so that God becomes MY life, rather than my life becoming my God!

Faith isn't something we capture in a jar, It is something that captures me! Faith is all about surrender. We are so fearful of giving up control when all Jesus says is let go and let my power change whatever I touch.

This story of Naaman is a parable fulfilled (or filled full) by Christ. Jesus chose to wash himself in the muddy brook of undeserved humiliation and crucifixion in order to gain the healing miracle of Easter's empty tomb. That perfect faith of surrender becomes not only our future but our present example.

Jesus was more than a victor. He was also the perfect role model of surrendering everything in order to be blessed with even more. If sacrifice and servant love was the price of faith in his heavenly Father, why would we not embrace that surrender out of his loving promise that faith is the ticket?

Faithful living is like taking a bath! It is giving up my protection and washing away the sin that clings to us like a curse. Faith is surrendering control and power and being surrounded by the loving God who will change who you are and how you live. Think how the difference that would make in how Congress operates, or nations negotiate treaties, or neighbors who have no clue who lives

next door. The only way we can achieve Christ's peace is by beginning with a surrender of the brokenness that brought conflict in the first place.

Remember the words of that little girl: "If the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult, you would have done it. Why then do you complain about something so simple?"

Faith isn't as complicated as it seems. Love is more powerful than anyone knows. And peace is the gift that comes in return. Faith is not something we do but what empty tomb does to us!

When I let go, then faith takes over. And when faith is my song, then my life is filled with peace. And, as Naaman found out, in such sweet surrender we find out how truly free God enables us to be!

Fred Beuchner said it this way: "Faith is a way of waiting—never quite knowing, never quite hearing or seeing, because in the darkness we are all but a little lost. There is doubt hard on the heels of every belief, fear hard on the heels of every hope, and many holy things lie in ruins because the world has ruined them and we have ruined them. But faith waits even so, delivered at least from that final despair which gives up waiting altogether because it sees nothing left worth waiting for. Faith waits—for the opening of a door, the sound of footsteps in the hall, that beloved voice delayed, delayed so long that there are times when you all but give up hope of ever hearing it. And when at moments you think you do hear it (if only faintly, from far away) the question is: Can it possibly be, impossibly be, that one voice of all voices?"¹

¹ Secrets in the Dark. Frederick Buechner 2006