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The Living by Faith Principle

By David Dunlap

Before missionary J. Hudson Taylor (1832-1905) first began speaking about living by faith in China, Christian leader Anthony Norris Groves (1795-1853) knew it as a dynamic reality. A true and living faith in God was the preeminent characteristic of his life, first as a successful dentist in Exeter, England, and later as a missionary to Baghdad, Iraq. "Norris", as he was called by his friends, came to Christ in his late teens; then later, at age 21, he experienced a deeper work of God in his heart. Although he possessed considerable wealth, the Lord led him to give it all away to those in need and to missionary works. From that point onward, he purposed to live by faith alone, allowing God to provide his family's needs. When he was 25 years old, Norris Groves penned a booklet entitled *Christian Devotedness*, in which he argued that a Christian should give away all his material goods to help the cause of Christ and keep back only what he needed for his daily living. This little booklet influenced generations of committed Christians, men such as Hudson Taylor of China; George Mueller of Bristol; Bakht Singh of India; George Verwer, the founder of Operation Mobilization; William MacDonald the author of *True Discipleship*; and many others. In *Christian Devotedness* Groves explained the essence of a true living faith:

*"What therefore he (a Christian) has freely received, he freely gives; and trusts for the future the promises of his heavenly Father. The Christian's motto should be—Labor hard, consume little, and give much, and all to Christ."*¹

Throughout the 58 years of his life, as both a dentist and a missionary, Anthony Norris Groves was a living example of one who trusted Christ in all things.

A Living Example of a Living Faith

The Bible tells us that "God is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we can ask or think" (Ephesians 3:20). God has proven Himself to be faithful time and time again in the lives of believers. One stirring example is how God provided financially for the missionary to Angola, T. Ernest Wilson (1902-1996). After ten months in Portugal for language training, missionary T. Ernest Wilson felt it was time to leave for Angola, Africa. All his financial needs

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had been supplied and he did not owe anyone. As he counted his financial resources, he found that he had enough money to buy a third-class ticket on a Portuguese ship bound for Angola. The cost was about \$45.00 at the current rate of exchange. After buying the ticket he also bought a few necessary items for his trip. Some friends in Ireland sent Wilson a post office money order for £24 British pounds. Just prior to sailing, he exchanged the money order into Portuguese currency at the local post office. At that time, the currency was very unstable, and the exchange rate had soared to 150 escudos to the pound. The average rate was 5 escudos to the pound. They had only bills of small denomination in the post office, and he received a large parcel of currency for his £24. When he arrived at the ship, he was taken to a large cabin on the upper deck near the sailor’s quarters, in which ten men were to sleep. In his cabin were two degradedos (criminals) going out to Africa to serve a sentence of hard labor for crimes committed in Portugal. They were being escorted by two soldiers. The other five in the cabin were Portuguese peasants. When he saw his traveling companions, he became anxious for his parcel of money which, in cramped quarters, was practically impossible to conceal. After three days, the ship reached Madeira, where Wilson went ashore with his money and explained the problem to a local bank manager. The manager exchanged the money back into British currency, increasing his resources again with a fair exchange rate. On the fifteenth day of their voyage out of Lisbon, the ship reached Luanda, the capital of Angola. Upon his arrival in Angola, Wilson was introduced to a German trader who exchanged his British pounds into Portuguese currency at the rate of 220 escudos to the pound!! He too had only bills of smaller denomination. After he received the Portuguese currency, the value of the original £24 had increased by 40%! Nothing was further from his mind than gambling on the currency exchange market, but it so happened that on the day he arrived in Angola, the exchange rate had soared to its highest rate. In any case, God provided his needs and he had sufficient funds to pay his way through customs and for expenses for his journey to the northern provinces. Indeed, God had wonderfully supplied all his need according to His riches in Christ! ² In this incident, missionary T. Ernest Wilson became a dynamic example of a living faith.

What Is Faith?

What do we mean when they speak of living by faith? When someone tells you that you need to have faith, your question should be, “Faith in what? What is the truth, the facts? Who is the person you’re asking me to have faith in?” If someone expects me to believe in something, the object of faith must be worthy and reliable. In one sense, faith is not the issue—it is where your faith rests that is important. So, what is it that we are called to believe? Simply stated, we are called to believe the revelation of God, even when His truth contradicts what we can see and touch and measure. Admittedly, that is not always easy to do, because we are earthbound creatures. The author of *My Utmost for His Highest* and respected Bible

teacher Oswald Chambers (1874-1917) writes:

“Faith is a tremendously active principle that always puts Jesus Christ first. The life of faith says, “Lord, you have said it, it appears to be irrational, but I am going to step out in boldness, trusting your Word.”³

This is the dilemma of faith. We must choose what God says is true, even though we can't see it, and reject what we can see and that which appears to be more true than what God says. Scripture exhorts believers that “without faith it is impossible to please Him” (Hebrews 11:6). What do we mean by faith? The closest the Bible comes to a definition of faith is the opening verse of Hebrews chapter eleven. “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1 NASB). The King James Version translates the word assurance as “substance.” Faith is not some hazy concept hanging out there on nothing; it has substance. Another word for substance might be facts or truth. Faith is related to facts, to something that is concrete.

It should be remembered that true faith must be based solely upon scriptural facts, for “faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God” (Rom 10:17). Unless our faith is established upon facts, it is no more than mere conjecture, superstition, speculation, or presumption. Hebrews chapter eleven leaves no question about the nature of this kind of faith. Faith which stands on the facts of the Word of God substantiates and gives evidence to things not seen. Evidence by its very character is founded upon facts. Our Christian life began as we placed faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. This faith which brought salvation is the same faith wherein we “stand” (1 Corinthians 16:13); and “walk” (2 Corinthians 5:7); and “live” (Galatians 2:20).

Now this true living faith is always based upon some promise of God, some portion of His Word. This is important. The believer first reads or hears some promise of the Lord. The Holy Spirit applies that promise to the believer's heart and conscience in a very personal way. The Christian becomes aware that God has spoken to him directly. With utter confidence in the trustworthiness of the One who has promised, he reckons the promise as sure as if it were already fulfilled, even though, humanly speaking, it is impossible.

Faith and Impossibilities

It is reported that George Mueller once said in a sermon, “Faith does not operate in the realm of the possible. There is no glory for God in that which is humanly possible. Faith begins where man's power ends. The province of faith begins where probabilities cease and where sight and sense fail.” Faith brings God into the great trials of life, and therefore, it knows absolutely nothing of difficulties—it laughs at impossibilities. In the realm of faith, God is the grand answer to every question—the grand solution of every difficulty. It looks to God in all things. It doesn't matter if the need is \$6,000 or \$6,000,000; the believer knows that God is all sufficient in all circumstances. He finds all his resources in Christ.

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George Mueller
(1805-1898)



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Unbelief sees only a thousand "impossibilities," and faith sees God. When God called Abram, in His divine plan, He promised Abram and Sarah a son. Humanly speaking, it was impossible for Sarah to give birth to a child in her old age. But God had promised Abraham that he would have a son, and God would be absolutely faithful to His promise. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the God of the impossible, improbable, and miraculous; is there anything He cannot do?

Our God is the God who specializes in impossibilities (Luke 1:37). There is nothing too hard for Him (Genesis 18:14). "The things that are impossible with men are possible with God" (Luke 18:27). Faith claims the promise, "All things are possible to him that believeth" (Mark 9:23), and exults with Paul, "I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

Conclusion

There can be no true discipleship without profound and unquestioning faith in the living God. He who would do exploits for God must first trust Him implicitly. All God's spiritual giants have been weak men who did great things for God because they reckoned on God being with them. Since faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God, the Christian's desire should be to saturate himself in the Scriptures—to read them, study them, memorize them, meditate upon them day and night. They are his chart and compass, his guide and comfort, his lamp and light. In the life of faith, there is always room for advancement. When we read of what has been accomplished through faith, we realize that there is no limit to that which God can accomplish through us.

Endnotes

1. Robert Bernard Dann, *Father of Faith Missions: The Life and Times of Anthony Norris Groves*, (Waynesboro, GA: Authentic, 2004), p. 72
2. T. Ernest Wilson, *Angola Beloved*, (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1967), p. 59
3. Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House, 1992), Oct 30

Adapted from "The Battle Is the Lord's" by David Dunlap, Gospel Folio Press