

September 12, 2010

## **"EXPECTING THE BEST"**

### **Part 1: 50 Days of Faith Series**

Have you ever thought about how we get God's approval? What is it that we need to do to get God's approval? Do we get God's approval by doing more good than bad in our lifetime? No. That's what the Muslims believe. But that's not what the Bible teaches. Do we get God's approval by keeping the Ten Commandments? No. Do we get God's approval by going to church and being religious, saying certain prayers each day, keeping a moral code of conduct and giving an offering to the Lord? No. Those are all good things, but that's not how we get God's approval. The Bible says there is only one way to get God's approval. There is only one way to please God. In Hebrews, chapter 11, verse 6, it tells us the answer. It says, *'Without faith it is impossible to please God.'* That's how we get God's approval 'we have faith in His Son Jesus Christ who alone has purchased our salvation through giving his life upon the cross for us. It is our faith in what Christ has done for us that pleases God. You may do all kinds of great things in your lifetime, but without faith it is impossible to please God.

If this is true, and the Bible clearly says it is, then having faith is the most important thing we could do. If faith is so important, how do you get it? The Bible tells us that faith is developed through understanding the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). Faith comes through hearing, reading, studying, memorizing and meditating on the Word of God. The more you get into God's Word, the more your faith will grow. Having faith is the most important thing to have for without faith it is impossible to please God. But that's not all.

In Matthew 9:27-29 we read, *'As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, calling out, 'Have mercy on us, Son of David!' When he had gone indoors, the blind men came to him, and he asked them, 'Do you believe that I am able to do this?' 'Yes, Lord,' they replied. Then he touched their eyes and said, 'According to your faith it will be done to you.'* This is an amazing verse because it shows us that the blind men had a significant part in their own healing. Their contribution was their faith. *'According to your faith it will be done to you.'* **FAITH IS THE KEY THAT UNLOCKS THE DOOR TO GOD'S BLESSINGS.** That is why it is so important for you to grow, develop, and strengthen your faith.

There is another verse I want you to consider. It comes to us from Hebrews, chapter 1. It says, *'Faith assures us of things we expect.'* (Hebrews 1:1) In other words **FAITH EXPECTS THE BEST**. When you have faith you expect the best from God. When you have faith you can expect His love and approval. Faith is expecting the best.

It's very easy to slip into thinking that faith is just being optimistic. Faith is not merely positive thinking. Positive thinking is good. I know I like to be around positive thinking people more than negative thinking people. Negative thinking people are a real drag. They're just no fun at all. Positive thinking is good but it has its limits. I could put you out in the middle of a snowstorm in just your pajamas and you could have positive thinking all you want but you're still going to freeze to death. All the positive thinking in the world won't make you warmer. While positive thinking is good, it simple can't change some situations. When I say faith is expecting the best, I'm not just talking about wishful thinking. I'm not just talking about making up my mind that nothing bad is going to happen to me and I'm going to accomplish everything I plan to do just the way I planned it. Faith is not just the power of positive thinking. It is far more.

Faith or Expecting the best is the confident assurance that God is in control of the future and that He plans what is best for my life because He loves me. In Psalm 32 God promises us something. He says, *'I*

*will guide you along the best pathways for your life. I will advise you and I will watch over you.* 'This is a promise that is very personal. God will guide YOU in YOUR life, and He will guide ME in MY life. The best pathway for you is not necessarily the best pathway for me. The best pathway for me is not the best pathway for you. We all have different pathways that God has designed for us. They are uniquely tailored to each person. God says, 'Trust me. Have faith in me. Expect the best for I will guide you in the path that is best for you.'

Maybe you're sitting there thinking, 'Why should I expect the best when so many things have gone wrong in my life? Why should I expect the best when so many heartbreaking things have happened to me?'

The reason why you should expect the best from God can be found in a very famous story in the Bible. It's the story of David and Goliath. The armies of the Israelites were fighting the armies of the Philistines. The Philistines had this really big guy, a giant of a man named Goliath. He was the tallest man ever recorded in history. He was nearly nine feet tall. Everybody was afraid of him. He'd come out every morning and challenge someone from the Israelite army to fight him, one on one. But nobody would do it. He terrified everyone, except for a young shepherd boy named David. David said, 'I'll fight you!'

Now the only observable advantage that David had was that he was a smaller target and Goliath was so big which made him a bigger target. I have a little buddy whose name is Josh. Josh is rather small for an eight year old. The other day we were driving past a sign advertising 'Dave's Paint Ball.' It's a place where you can go and shoot little balls of paint at one another for fun. I said, 'Josh, when you get a little bigger I'm going to take you to Dave's Paint Ball and we'll have a good time shooting at each other.' Josh said, 'I want to go now while I'm small, because you're a much bigger target.' I said, 'Thanks a lot, Josh.'

David had faith that God would fight with him. David thought, 'It's me and God against just one. We've got the majority.' So David went out to fight Goliath with just five smooth stones, a slingshot, and an attitude of expecting the best. David won that battle, and He teaches us three important things about having faith and expecting the best from God.

**FIRST, WHEN YOU EXPECT THE BEST FROM GOD IT HONORS GOD .** When you expect God to do the best for you, it's the highest compliment you can pay Him. David expected the best from God because He knew God was the best God around 'the only true and living God. So David said to Goliath, *'This day the Lord will hand you over to me and I will strike you down and the whole world will know there is a God.'* David had faith in God and that honored God. Trusting God to take care of you honors God. It shows your belief in God 'that He is trustworthy to keep His word and to guide you down the best path for your life.

**SECOND, EXPECTING THE BEST FROM GOD INCREASES YOUR ABILITY IN LIFE.** Having faith and expecting the best from God strengthens you for the challenges of life and brings out the best in you. When David went out to fight Goliath he hurled a stone from his sling. That stone hit Goliath in the head and sunk in. Goliath stumbled and fell face downward. God gave David the ability to accomplish that because of his faith. So many times in life an attitude can make all the difference. The person with the winning attitude ends up being the winner. I was watching some replays of Mohammed Ali fights the other day. Many regard him as the greatest fighter who ever lived, and one of the greatest athletes that ever lived. There were two fights that he lost in his professional career. He said that before those two fights he thought 'If I win'.' Before all the fights where he came out the winner he thought, 'When I win'.' It was that confident attitude that gave Mohammed Ali the edge when fighting. A person's attitude can make a big difference. Faith strengthens your ability in life and gives you the extra edge you need when doing battle with the Goliaths of life.

William Carey, the great missionary to India, had a saying. He said, 'Expect great things from God, attempt great things for God.' Our faith in the kindness and goodness of God encourages us to attempt

great things for God. Our understanding of the character of God and how He has worked through others throughout history inspires and compels us to attempt great things for Him. David teaches us that when we act in faith, we receive the additional strength we need to face the difficulties of life and accomplish great things.

**THIRD, WHEN YOU HAVE FAITH AND EXPECT THE BEST IT ENCOURAGES OTHERS .** The Bible tells us that when David defeated Goliath the whole Israelite army gave a great shout of triumph and they rushed after the Philistines and they chased them as far as Gath. The whole army was encouraged by David's success. It energized a whole nation. That's the power of faith. Everyone gets excited. Optimism is contagious and faith has an incredible power to make us optimistic.

George Gallup did a survey several years ago. He found that when people have faith it makes them more optimistic about life. He discovered that the people who have the greatest faith are also the happiest, the most helpful and the most generous toward others. It's great to be around faith-filled people. They're so encouraging.

Faith doesn't come easy, though. It's often hard work. David certainly understood that. He did four things to strengthen his faith. These are four things you can do to prepare you to face the giants in your life. Maybe you have a financial Goliath you're battling. Maybe you have a medical Goliath you're battling, or a relationship Goliath. Maybe you're facing a Goliath at work. David did four things and we need to do these four things to help us face the Goliath's in our lives.

The **FIRST** thing is **TUNE IN TO GOD EVERY MORNING.** That's the first secret to David's optimism. Start your day off talking to God and listening to God. That will make you more positive. That will make you more optimistic. That will increase your faith and unleash God's power in your life. This is what David did. He tells us, *'In the morning, O Lord, You hear my voice. In the morning I lay my request before You and wait in expectation.'* Psalm 5:3 Where does David get his sense of expectation? He spends time with God in the morning, telling God what is on his heart, reading God's Word. He starts his day with God. Before he tries to face the Goliath's of the day, he talks with God and lays out his concerns.

Some of you are saying, 'Oh I'm too tired in the morning to talk to God.' Then try this. Go to bed earlier . That's really a no brainer. If you're too tired in the morning, you're not getting enough sleep. Sleep researchers say, 'If you have to wake up with an alarm clock every morning, then you're not getting enough sleep.' It's hard to be optimistic when you're sleep deprived.

Something else you can do is to stop turning on the news in the morning . It's no wonder your negative if that's your routine. If you get up each morning and turn on Bad News America and you watch all the crime and tragedy that happened while you were sleeping, the murders, the fires, the natural disasters, the bombings, its no wonder you're having a hard time being optimistic. The news is so negative. If it bleeds, it leads. You don't really need to know all that bad news as you're starting your day. You need to start your day with good news not bad news. Instead of turning on the news, start your day with worship. Turn on some praise music. Take time to talk to God. Read His Word.

The **SECOND** thing we need to do to be optimistic is to **REMEMBER GOD'S PROMISES THROUGHOUT THE DAY .** That's what David did. He said, *'Though the wicked hide along the way to kill me I will quietly keep my mind on Your promises.'* Psalm 119:95 David was facing constant threat of assassination. He didn't use that as an excuse. He focused instead on God's promises and that's what got him through the day. He said, *'I bank Your promises in the vault of my heart.'* That's the secret to what kept David optimistic.

The **THIRD** thing we need to do is **TRUST IN GOD'S LOVE EVEN WHEN THINGS LOOK BAD.** David wrote, *'O my soul, don't be discouraged! Don't be upset! Expect God to act. For I know that I shall*

*again have plenty of reason to praise Him for all that He will do.* Psalm 42:11 We don't know what God has planned for us, but faith enables us to believe it will be something good because his love for us is so great.

The **FOURTH** thing we need to do is **TALK TO PEOPLE WHO EXPECT THE BEST FROM GOD.** Spend time with them. **MEET REGULARLY WITH THEM TO READ GOD'S WORD, SHARE AND PRAY TOGETHER.** That's the best thing you could ever do to grow your faith? Get yourself into a small group that meets weekly to study God's Word, share concerns, and pray for one another. If you're not in a small group, you're wasting the greatest opportunity to grow in your faith and find the support you need to live the Christian life.

After years of making excuses, Dick McCombs, a member of a Presbyterian Church for 38 years, joined his first small group study fellowship. They met at 6 a.m. on Tuesday mornings. He had been reluctant to try a small group experience until one Sunday he received an unexpected invitation. He admitted later, 'I couldn't come up with a good excuse fast enough, so I agreed.' Now he admits, 'This [decision] comes under the heading of 'One of the Best Things That Ever Happened to Me.' If you're not in a small group study fellowship, you're not growing like you could be. Jesus had one. Jesus had a small group he met with regularly. Luke makes an interesting note regarding the Lord's final visit to Gethsemane. He says, '*Jesus had often met there with His disciples.*' Jesus Christ met regularly with His small group study fellowship! If Jesus needed a small group, why do we think we can live as His disciples without one?