

Maintaining Good Health (Part 13)

Faith

John W. Ritenbaugh

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This sermon is the next one in the continuing series on "Maintaining Good Health." Whether it is physical, or spiritual, or a purposeful program to lose weight, or to cast off sin, or to strengthen one's heart through exercise, or increase faith through understanding, there must be commitment to a program.

The parallels between these two closely related aspects of a full and abundant life can provide very helpful instruction. An enduring commitment is very greatly dependent upon faith, confidence, or trust that the program one is following will produce what one hopes for.

As usual I am going to be focusing on the spiritual in this sermon, but the same basic principles that drive the spiritual also drive the physical. One of the major reasons people yo-yo up and down on a weight loss or exercise program is a lack of commitment. Briefly and simply, we do not stick to the program to allow it to effectively work. We allow other interests to move us away from our goal. What results is that we do things in fits of starting and stopping, and do not consistently steadily stick to the program.

We are going to begin spiritually here in Ephesians 6:

Ephesians 6:10-12 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Paul then begins to name qualities that we need to clothe ourselves with in order to be able to **stand** against our enemy.

Ephesians 6:16 Above all [above everything else], taking the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.

"Above all." "Above everything else that is pertinent to Christian living, *take the shield of faith.*" In this instance, faith is depicted as a shield that defends us from the attacks of Satan, on which even the outcome of our salvation may hinge.

Faith is seen here in the sense of *trust*. Now what is the greatest virtue, because it is what God mainly intends be produced within our relationship with Him? Faith is a major priority, because without it no love will ever result in that relationship. *It is faith* that motivates and sustains right action. Hang onto that!

In Hebrews 10 is another set of verses important to understanding faith.

Hebrews 10:35-36 Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise.

Notice that having endurance is contingent upon confidence.

Hebrews 10:37-39 For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, My soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who draw back into perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.

We *must* live by faith. Here faith is seen as a necessary tool, a means by which every aspect of life is touched. The kind and quality of life God expects of us absolutely cannot be lived without faith. Hebrews 11:6 says, "Without faith it is impossible to please Him."

Brethren, we can by no means allow ourselves to underestimate the importance of faith. Hebrews 11 is the story of faith, but it is a different kind of faith than most conceive of it. From the above statements showing faith's importance to life, it seems a good idea to have *the best faith possible*.

Let us look at yet another aspect of faith, and why it is so important that it be part of what we have in our lives.

Hebrews 3:12 Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief [the opposite of faith], in departing from the living God.

If there is unbelief, we depart. If there is belief, we draw near.

Hebrews 3:13 But exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence [faith] steadfast to the end.

Here faith is linked to perseverance, stick-to-itiveness, commitment, patience.

Hebrews 3:15-19 While it is said, "Today if you will hear His voice, harden not your hearts as in the rebellion." For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses? Now with whom was He angry forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? [To those who didn't have faith.] So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

If there is any series of verses that shows the importance of faith, I do not know of any that are clearer than these. Without faith, it is impossible to please God. Without faith, there is no entrance into the Family of God. This is a statement that has very broad implications. What it is saying more directly is that sin does not result from weakness as we normally think of it. We say that we are "weak in the flesh." That weakness might indeed be

there, but when it is looked at in the cold light of reality, the root of sin is *unbelief*. It is unbelief that produces sin. It is a lack of faith. What this does is it pinpoints where our *real* foundational weakness lies. It is a lack of faith.

Let me give you an example. Faith in God is the real issue in the calendar question. Some people's credulity has been so damaged, that by and large they can accept that God can successfully preserve His Word through the Jews, but at the same time it is believed to be beyond Him to preserve the calendar necessary for obedience to festival commandments through the same people. The same people did both. They preserved His Word *and* preserved His calendar. These people do not say, "I don't believe that God can do this." What they do is blame the Jews. Do you know that something like this appears in the Bible? It does. It is in Numbers and in Exodus.

The Jews were God's chosen instrument to preserve these things, and like Korah, Dathan, and Abiram and their gang of rebels against Moses and Aaron, they, the calendar-changers, are guilty of sin against God, as Moses correctly perceived it where he fell on his face and said "You people don't know what you're doing!" They thought that they were just picking on Moses, who was God's chosen instrument, when in reality they were picking on God. A lack of faith led to that.

I think that God shows this pattern, that the root of sin is very clearly exposed in Genesis 2 and 3. God created Adam and Eve. God placed them in the Garden. God gave them simple commands. Satan challenged their belief in God and His command, and they sinned. Their weakness was in the area of faith. *They simply did not believe God*. They did not trust God's Word. Right at the beginning of the Book, God exposes the root of sin. It is "unbelief." It is unbelief that produces sin.

Now faith is *confidence in*. It is *trust of*. It is dependence upon God and His Word. But faith, as we often think of it, is the belief that if you ask God to do something according to His will, He will do it. Though this is true, it is also quite limited. Faith involves much more.

James 2:22 Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works was faith made perfect.

It had to be made perfect. There are "perfect" faiths, and there are "imperfect" faiths. Your margin probably says there are "complete" faiths, and there are "incomplete" faiths. That simple faith that I mentioned just a minute or two ago is "incomplete," or it is "imperfect." It is a faith that is lacking, and because it is incomplete, or imperfect, it is unable to endure the commitment or provide sufficient motivation that will be necessary for a full Christian life and producing fruit.

Turn now to Hebrews 5 and we will look at a principle that is there as we begin to pursue this.

Hebrews 5:14 But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use [or practice] have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

Let us apply this principle to faith. Faith is a gift of God, as it clearly states there in Ephesians 2, but it must be perfected, even as love (another gift of God) must also be perfected. It has to be brought to completion.

Suppose God gave you a gift for singing. If you never perfected it, you would never be able to use your voice to produce other good things. So what do you have to do in order to do that perfecting? You have to practice it. You have to develop it. You have to use it in situations until it is honed and is able to produce the good things that are latent, I guess you might say, within the original gift.

Each aspect of life, including faith, is made perfect through practice.

Holding on to that, we are going to go to an episode that involves Jesus in Matthew 9. Because we have been given this gift, and because we want to glorify God, because we want to use faith, it is incumbent upon us to develop it into something greater. We want to bring it to completion over and above what was the original gift.

Matthew 9:27-30 When Jesus departed there, two blind men followed Him, crying out, and saying, "Son of David, have mercy on us!" And when He had come into the house, the blind men came to Him. And Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to

do this?" They said to Him, "Yes, Lord." Then He touched their eyes, saying, "According to your faith let it be to you." And their eyes were opened. And Jesus sternly warned them, saying, "See that no one knows it."

The kind of faith that these men needed was a *simple* faith, and so that was all that God required of them. Now God has the same general requirement for us except that the stakes and the purposes for using faith are *exceedingly* higher than this great, wonderful miracle that was performed on these two men. We find, as we begin to search the Bible, that as trials become more complex, longer, and difficult, a more complete faith is also needed to meet the quality of the trials.

These men needed faith only for a rapid, temporary, physical healing. They were going to get sick and die anyway at a later time, but for the time that then was (in Matthew 9), their faith was used to glorify God, and it brought them something they greatly desired, and that God was willing to give.

But for *us*, faith involves things of eternal value, so we need an *enduring* faith that will motivate us triumphantly even through very painful trials of possibly very long duration, be they sickness, persecution, long unemployment due to Sabbath-keeping, or challenges to our beliefs.

So how can it grow? How can it be perfected? How can it improve, so that when these more difficult trials come along we are able to meet the challenges of them, and overcome?

In Luke 17 Jesus was confronted with this question. Pay very close attention to my explanation here because it contains something that is of inestimable value.

Luke 17:1-10 Then He said to the disciples, "It is impossible that no offenses will come, but woe to him through whom they come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones. Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day

returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him." And the apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith." So the Lord said, "If you had faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this sycamore tree, 'Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you. And which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come from the field, 'Come at once and sit down to eat'? But will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink'? Does he [that lord or master] thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not. So likewise you, when you have done all those things which are commanded you, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.'"

One of the keys to understanding and supplying this demand for a more complete faith begins by understanding what Jesus said in verse 4: "And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him." The disciples were shocked by the magnitude of the requirement that Jesus laid down for His disciples—you and me. Put yourself right into that.

It is not easy for us to forgive, but to do it seven times in a day? To forgive the same person who offended you one time right after the other? Incidentally, about the word "repent," I read in one commentary on this verse that there is absolutely no indication in the Greek, as it is written here, that the repentance was insincere. In other words, the person really did repent. But what about us in our judgment of that repentance when this person kept doing something similar over and over again? That is why they were so shocked. "Do you mean that I have to continue to forgive this person? When does it end?"

I will tell you this. It humbled them to realize how inadequate they were in the meeting of this requirement. Help then came from Jesus in the form of a clearer understanding of the relationship between God and us. That is what occurs in verses 7 through the end of verse 10.

Let us remember something important to salvation and our relationship with Him. Let us go back to faith being a gift. Faith is a *gift* of God. It is an act of *favor*, of *grace* on His part, that He gives us faith, that He gives us the ability to have *saving faith*. That comes from Him! It is not something that we can work up like flipping a light switch. That faith is a faith that can grow. It must be exercised continuously as part of life, along with a very important understanding of the basis of the relationship. This is the key to understanding verses 7 through 10. This dimension of forgiveness is given as an instance in which it can be exercised.

Faith in this context is not merely a mental sense, but rather it is faith in the sense of *faithfulness*; that is, faith that is continuously operating, trusting. Perhaps the key word here is "continuously," because *faithfulness* implies *ongoing* rather than just an instance of faith that the men had in Matthew 9: 27-30. That is a very simple faith. They said, "Yes." They were healed. It was over. But here, the circumstance involves a faith that must be in operation continuously. That is why Jesus said "seven times in a day." You just do not have this kind of faith once and it is over, but rather this kind of faith is one that is operating through the process of life. So we are dealing with faith here in the sense of *faithfulness*.

Now faith increases. It grows, and it comes to completion as one steps out in trusting obedience. However, there is a caveat. Do you know what a caveat is? It is a warning. I looked it up in a dictionary just to make sure. It is a warning that is intended to send the flags up so that the thinking is cautious. You know, "Slow down." This is the caveat to the relationship.

Our relationship with God, contrary to common understanding, is that Jesus clearly shows that human obedience does *not* put God in our debt. Human obedience does not put God in debt to the ones obeying Him, because the ones obeying are only doing what is required of them in the relationship under any circumstance. This is what I want you to get out of this. This is what Jesus said will increase faith. It is this understanding and attitude that should underlie our obedience to God and will permit faith to be perfected.

Every aspect of our relationship with God is always, always, *always* to be understood as an act of grace on His part. Anything He wills to give is an act

of grace. God owes us *nothing*. He is never, ever, under any circumstance, put into our debt. This is a very humbling note, and contrary to normal human thinking, because we have a very powerful tendency to think of ourselves as earning things from God when the reality is we are only doing our duty under *any* circumstance.

The way that we normally think of things does apply to human employers. We do things for them, and they *owe* us. But with God, the relationship absolutely is not based on this term, and understanding this, and still obeying Him regardless of circumstance, is going far beyond human standards, and it will permit faith to be made complete because the relationship has the correct basis.

Do you remember the scripture in Isaiah 66:2? "But on this one will I look. . ." What does that mean? It means "*This* one will I favor," "*This* one will I give gifts to," "*This* one will I be graceful to . . . him that is humble and of a contrite spirit, and trembles at My word,"—the person who recognizes that God owes Him *nothing* under any circumstance. That sets up the kind of relationship that God will respond to. And what does God do? He gives the person more faith.

How does God do that? He does it by revealing a clearer and clearer picture of Himself to that person so that God becomes a reality; that is, walking with, talking with, involved with that person in every aspect of life anywhere at any time. God becomes *real*, and not merely a figment of one's mental state. That is why Jesus said that kind of an attitude will increase faith. This attitude is when the person recognizes he is only meeting the basic requirements under *any* circumstance.

To those who maintain the right relationship, God will favor them with a clear revelation of Himself, thus making faith that much more solid, because how well one knows God is at the very heart and core of "perfect faith."

Do you see God? The people who see Him most clearly are those who have this attitude toward Him, and obey Him anyway, expecting nothing in return. They are doing it simply because they believe that He loves them, and they believe that He is with them, and they believe that He requires these things.

There is an anomaly there, because those are the very people who receive the greatest reward, but they are not doing it to *earn* it. They allow God, within the relationship, to bless them as He sees fit, and they will accept, humbly and thankfully, whatever He chooses to give. It is quite an attitude. It is one of very great purity.

There are other aspects of faith besides this particular understanding, and works will aid considerably in building an enduring faith. Many of us I think are weak in these areas, and thus weak in the elements that will perfect faith. I am going to go through several of them here that will help us to build upon the understanding of the right relationship that we need with God in order to have the faith that will please Him. Two of these that I am going to mention are ones that require meditation.

Recognition: The intellectual belief in the existence of something.

Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

See, the intellectual belief in the existence of something—*something that is not seen*.

Hebrews 11:2-3 For by it the elders obtained a good testimony. By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.

Once one has what one hopes for, faith is no longer relevant to the matter. See, it is confidence in things that are *not* seen, or *not* held. Faith is the evidence, or conviction of things not seen, including the unseen reality of God and His promises. Faith is the thorough comprehension and understanding that there are beings and concepts—realities that we cannot see, touch, taste, smell, or hear. For example, we were not here—there were no material beings here before God created. Even Adam and Eve were not witnesses to the events that occurred before they existed.

One of the reasons this is important is in verse 3, which says, "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are *seen* were not made of things which are visible." That particular verse is really not adequately translated. The word "worlds" should have been translated *aion*, or *ages*. The word "framed" is better translated by the English word "prepared." What the verse is speaking of is periods of time—*aions*; periods of time, including that period of time, events, and personalities in man's history.

In other words, verse 3 is saying that God is the Mover and Shaker. It is He who formed and shaped each period of time, each *aion*. It is He who prepares the events. It is He who prepares the personalities within those periods of time. It is just like President Bush read there today: "There is an *Angel* in the whirlwind." It is that Angel [God] in the whirlwind who is really in control of what is going on, and He is moving and shaking things toward His end.

It is important that we understand this. We do not see God. We do not see Him moving and shaping things, but He is nonetheless there. He sets kings up on thrones. He puts presidents in power. And on and on it goes. This is important to our faith. It helps to form our world view as to the way we look at things, the way we look at the world, and this imposes the choices upon us. Of course God wants us to come to look at the world the way He does, because that will help us to make the right choices in life, because we see things from His point of view.

Faith is that aspect through which we recognize God as the Creator of life and the Author of the Bible. We did not see one single event that is recorded in the Bible, but if we are going to have our faith perfected and go on to salvation, we must be convicted that those things recorded are realities, and that they surely occurred. This provides the foundation for what we need in the way of faith in life. We can combine this with that attitude of knowing that God owes us nothing, and that any obedience required is simply doing our duty. It is not earning us things. We do not put God in our debt.

Let us go back to Hebrews 1, and we will see how Paul opened the book of Hebrews, pointing to this very principle that is in verse 3 of chapter 11.

Hebrews 1:1-3 God, who at various times and in various ways spake in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things [including human history] by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.

Hebrews 11:6 tells us very clearly that without faith in these kinds of things it is impossible to please God. This particular point requires a lot of meditation and effort in thinking—that salvation is not a matter of merely *acceptance* of something, as this world's Christianity proclaims. "Oh, accept Jesus Christ and you will be saved." It sounds so easy, but that mere acceptance will not produce the kind of faith that is necessary to produce eternal values within us and allow us to have the right relationship with God.

Faith in God, and faith in the Word of God, is not something that we should simply assume and take for granted. God tells us to prove all things, to test them, and hold fast to that which is good. We should always have our mind open for reinforcement that we can get from God's creation, in the work of scientists, in the pages of the Bible, and in the events that are occurring in the world. Are you doing that? I think that by and large most of us are doing that at least to some degree. Keep it up, because what that tends to do is to reinforce the foundational things.

James 2:19 You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!

Their faith is "acceptance." They accept that God exists, but that is as far as it goes. So if we get that far, we are at least up to the demons in terms of faith. Are the demons going to be saved with that faith? Not on your life! You see, we will not either. We have to go beyond that, because God wants faith to be perfected because that will give us the motivation and sustaining power to keep going and building the relationship.

I once read of a man who died, and his minister went with the dead man's wife to arrange the funeral. The wife was anxious to assure the minister about her husband and his relationship with the church, and so she told him her husband believed in God. So, a question: What if earlier in the marriage she had asked the husband, "Henry, do you believe in me?" and he replied, "Yes, Florence. I believe that you exist."

Is believing someone exists really adequate for a relationship? Believing in God as a person is absolutely necessary, but by itself it is shallow. That relationship, and thus that faith, is incomplete, because relationships consist of a great deal of interaction by and with those involved in it. Unfortunately, some stop the relationship with God right there. Therefore, what I call "recognition" has to do with a development of the relationship through reinforcement of the intellectual aspects that support God's existence and His continuous working to bring about the successful conclusion of His purpose.

Evaluation:

This is another very important thinking step that must be included if our faith is going to be brought to completion. This point has to do with the relative value that we place on the object of our faith, and I might add here, love.

This is extremely important because whatever value that we place on the object of our faith will determine how *we* will be affected by it. This is far more than intellectual recognition of the fact of God's existence.

Let us turn to I Peter 3. This is talking about husband/wife relationships.

I Peter 3:7 Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.

There is a very interesting lesson within this. Let me remind you that what Peter is talking about here is a relationship—a *marital* relationship. We are in a relationship with God. It is not a marital relationship yet. It is a *courtship* relationship, and it is a *Father/Son* relationship within a family already. So

with those two Beings, who are God, a relationship exists. We are going to draw the lesson that is here in I Peter 3:7 to show the value of honor within a relationship. That word "honor" is *time (teemay)*. It is *Strong's #5092*. It means in English *value; esteem to the highest degree; precious; price*. It can be used in any one of those senses.

Turn now to I Peter 1. We are going to see the word used here.

I Peter 1:18-19 knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

That word "precious" there is the comparative sense of the same word translated "honor." Here they have shown "value" much more clearly. *Precious* shows *value* in contrast to that which is *worthless*. What Peter said in I Peter 3 is, "In order to have a good relationship with your wife, husbands, you have to value her as *precious*."

I Peter 2:6 Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, "Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on Him will no means be put to shame."

That word there translated "precious" is exactly the same word that is translated "honor" in I Peter 3:7. I do that just to show you what the word means. It is placing a value upon the other within a relationship.

If you were shown a one dollar bill, you recognize that it is money, and is something that is highly esteemed by most. You see, it has value. Now if I also showed you a twenty dollar bill and asked you which one you prefer, which would you choose? You undoubtedly would choose the twenty dollar bill because you believe in the value of money. You see, it is already beginning to motivate you to act upon the value that you are placing on something. You *honor* the twenty dollar bill more than you do the one dollar bill. It is more precious to you, and it motivates you to make that choice.

Now what if I gave both the one dollar bill and the twenty dollar bill to you, and then you lost both of them in the house somewhere? Which one would

you work hardest at finding? Would you not look for the one that you *valued* the most? "Oh, I like the one dollar bill because George's picture is on there!" No! You would like the twenty dollar bill because it has more, greater real value than the one dollar bill. That is what we are dealing with here.

Things that we consider, things that we evaluate as being precious, motivate us to do everything in our power to please what it is that we hold to be precious. We are much more earnest about that which we hold to be of greater value. You see, the value that we place on something affects our emotions, our feelings.

We are going to go back to Matthew 13 where we have an example here.

Matthew 13:44-46 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man has found and hid, and for joy over it goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. [Notice the word "treasure."] Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

Emotions definitely come into play when an object of our affection is considered to be of great value to us. Notice here in these three verses "that *with joy* he invested all that he had." There is no hint that the sacrifice is painful. How much does this world mean to you as compared to what we have been given by God? What is our value that we place on God, and the things of God, as compared to the things of this world? If you have merely "accepted" something, you can be sure that you are not going to be very motivated to really seek God out and to use what you believe.

One may even want to be identified with what they value, because they believe that it is right, but at the same time not really be motivated to really stand up for it privately. Well, there is a hypocrisy born, because in reality the person is not really valuing very highly what he has in God, in the church, and in the Scriptures. He shows up at services, but when he gets home the value does not have to be exhibited before people, and it falls apart, and he does nothing about it. If one merely prefers this way of life, one will begin to seek it out somewhat, but may not really be burning with zeal

to live it to its fullest understanding. Most I feel, out in this world anyway, are in this category.

Matthew 6:19 Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal.

Treasure is that which we hold to be valuable. We honor it. It is precious to us.

Matthew 6:20-21 But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

And there it is. Our heart is going to follow that which we hold to be precious, and it will dictate to us our choices and the use of our time. It will dictate to us our conduct, and we will take care of that which we hold to be precious. You see, we have a choice. What kind of a value do we place upon the relationship with God? Nobody can decide that for you, but it is one of those qualities that is necessary for the completion of faith, because it will be a major motivation toward what we do with our time and the making of choices.

Life is very much like the gathering of wealth, and the choices for what to go for is what confronts us day in and day out. Let us look at a good example of the apostle Paul in I Corinthians 9.

I Corinthians 9:16 For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!

That man was *driven* by his faith. He said, "Woe is me! I have to do it!" It was like if he did not do it, he would blow into a million pieces. You can tell that he was a man *convicted* of the reality of God, and the reality of God's Word, and the reality of his calling and what he needed to do. What he needed to do was to preach to the world primarily.

I Corinthians 9:26 Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty.
Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air.

"I don't shadowbox." He was a driven man. Herbert Armstrong was a driven man, and I have to say that to some degree so am I, and I hope *you* are. But I am not driven to go to the world. I am driven to go to you with the gifts that God has given me.

We can see this same thing in Jesus. We can look at examples of His life in John 2 when He overturned things in the Temple, or at least in the grounds adjacent to the Temple.

John 2:17 Then His disciples remembered that it was written,
"Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up [*has consumed Him*]."

John 4:31-34 tells of Jesus meeting with the disciples after talking with the woman at the well and said, "I have food that you don't have yet," and it energized Him.

Turn to Psalm 40. This one is best understood as Christ speaking to His Father.

Psalm 40:7-9 Then said I, "Behold, I come; in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do Your will, O my God, and your law is within my heart." I have proclaimed the good news of righteousness in the great assembly; indeed, I do not restrain my lips, O LORD, You Yourself know.

Let us go back and see an application to you and me in Romans 1, and maybe you will understand why this verse says what it does.

Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also for the Greek.

Whether we will do as Christ did, and as Paul did, depends largely upon whether we think the gospel is worth anything. You see, that is something

that requires meditation. What kind of a value do we put on it? So we have *recognition* of the reality of God, and the reality of concepts, and we have *evaluation* of its value to us.

Action

Remember James 2:22 says "by works was faith made perfect." It does not say that the works are perfect, but if we are committed to using our faith, they too will become perfect. Doing them over and over again, if we will endure, will accomplish God's purpose in us.

Let us go back again to verse 6 of Hebrews 11 and we are going to see this formula right in this one verse.

Hebrews 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

"Believe that He is." (There is recognition.) "He is a rewarder." (Evaluation.) It is worth something. "That diligently seek him." (That is action.) All three steps are right there: Recognition, evaluation, and action.

Let us go to Acts 21 because I want us to see the measure of Paul's commitment to these things. This is the chapter in which Paul was saying goodbye to the Ephesian elders, and they were appealing to him to not go to Jerusalem.

Acts 21:13 Then Paul answered, "What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

Paul's commitment level was to the highest order because he comprehended the value of God's favor and the relationship given to one as unworthy as he was of it. He was humbled to the extreme by knowing who he was, as well as knowing who God is. That presents a very clear picture of the kind of person that we ought to be.

We are going to look at a couple of examples in Hebrews 11, because what we see there, as I said earlier, was a faith that is not common. It is extraordinary, and that is why these examples are given to us here. We will look first of all at Abel.

Hebrews 11:4 By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and by it he being dead still speaks.

What we have presented to us in this chapter is an issue that is quite vital to us. It is faith working within human experience. We have to start off by understanding that these were not extraordinary people before God began working with them. If that were so, grace would be nullified in their calling. God would then have used them because they *were* great, and not because they *needed* grace even as you and I need grace. God does not call us because we are great, because we are talented, because we have been good people. None of those things can qualify as being the basis of the relationship with either us nor these people here.

Abel did what he did because he placed a value upon the relationship God afforded, and what God said. Cain did not. It is that simple. Both knew that God existed. The difference was in the value that they placed upon it—the value that they placed upon the word that God commanded them, and then the action that was taken. Abel humbly believed God. Cain did not. There is nothing complicated about that. Abel took action and submitted to his part in the relationship, and he is written up in the Book of Life here.

Hebrews 11:7 By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

The factors that made Noah's faith enabled him to do something that he probably would otherwise have been unable to do by natural ability. But because he did respond in the right way and placed the right value upon the relationship, God gave him the gifts enabling him to do what would have otherwise been beyond him.

Hebrews 11:8 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.

Faith operates during that period of time when we do not have what it is that we desire.

Hebrews 11:9-10 By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he looked for a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

Abraham went out not knowing where he went. He had not traveled that way before. Everything was new. He was in a strange land. He never owned a land or house, which are symbols of stability. He never found that city, yet he never stopped striving. He is quite an example. All of it hinged upon the reality of God to him, and the value he placed upon it. That is why he did what he did.

Have you heard the story about the man who lost his footing right on the edge of a precipice? He would have fallen a thousand feet, but at the last minute, just as he was going over the edge, he grabbed a bare tree root jetting out from the face of the cliff. Now this fellow had not been a religious man, but in his desperation he cried out to God to save him, vowing to do anything God asked if He would just get him off the hook in this life-threatening situation. "Oh well." God said, "That's interesting." So He asked the man, "Do you really believe that I can do this?" "Yes! Yes!" the man said. "And are you willing to do anything that I ask," God repeated. "Yes! Yes!" said the man. "Anything!" "Well," God said, "Let go of the root."

That is what Abraham did. It is no wonder he is "the father of the faithful." He went out not knowing *where* God was going to take him. He went out and was never rewarded with a house. Even a family had to be given to him by faith. Even though God gave him tremendous wealth, he could not even buy a plot of ground except to bury Sarah and himself on it. That relationship was not based on what God could give him. It was based on the humble acceptance that whatever God wanted was Abraham's duty to do regardless

of what it was, even if he was required to kill the heir. Now *there* was a relationship—the kind that God desires that we have. bIt says in Romans 4: 17-25 that Abraham was fully persuaded that whatever God said, He would do, and he did not hold back.

It becomes very clear that because these people put their faith in God and were motivated to keep God's commandments in spite of the difficulties, that it was in reality God who worked out the problems they found themselves caught up in. It matters not whether it was Abel, or Noah, or Enoch, or Abraham, or Sarah. They did not work out the problems. God did. That was His blessing as He created them into what He wanted them to be.

Hebrews 11:32-34 And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and of Barak and of Samson and of Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and of the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, *out of weakness were made strong*.

These were not strong people that God called. They were like you. They were like me. That is God's pattern. They *became* strong in faith as it was perfected in their lives, because they continuously sought recognition of more and more of God's reality, and evaluated the relationship as being the most priceless thing that they had. The result was the right kind of works that were gradually perfected, even as the faith was perfected.

I want you to apply this physically. I want you to think of these principles in our relationship with God, but in relation to maintaining and building physical health. I do not care whether one is attempting to lose weight, to maintain an exercise program, or simply to follow a good balanced diet. The same basic principles are involved.

If you do not really believe that what you want to accomplish can be done, the value you place on what you hope for will not be high, and will be easily adjusted downward. Your goal will be fuzzy at best. Commitment will be pitifully weak. You will find yourself easily being lured by other interests into eating and drinking too much, and easily finding excuses to not exercise,

and eating things you well know that you should not, simply on the basis of how they taste at the moment. You will lose the battle. You will yo-yo. You will not stick to a routine consistently. It all goes back to faith and the value that we place on what it is that we hope for.

Let's close on the first two verses of Hebrews 12.

Hebrews 12:1-2 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

I want you to notice that there are several principles in these two verses.

A runner has a goal. He is not a drifter. He is not a tourist. His aim, like Christ's, is on the end of the race.

What is it that you hope to accomplish physically or spiritually?

There is inspiration. There is a great cloud of witnesses who have already made it. We have to understand that we run in a crowded stadium. Others have done it. Why cannot *we* do it? Again, it matters not whether it is losing weight or whether it is a spiritual thing. Others have done it. Why cannot we? We can. It depends on the value that is placed on what we hope for.

We do have recognizable handicaps: our sins, whatever they are. You would not climb Mount Everest with a load of bricks on your back, so discard bad habits, self-indulgences, and bad associations.

We have the means just like those men and women in Hebrews 11, enduring faith through a relationship with God, mixed with a great hope, a patience that does not accept things. It *overcomes* things. Draw on God's Spirit.

We have the example of Christ. The Author and Finisher of our salvation has already made it, and He is on the right hand of God as our High Priest—an ever-present Help.

There is the presence of Christ. He promises that He will never leave nor forsake us. Draw near to Him, and He promises that He will draw near to us. He is not saying that it would be easy. He is saying He will be there.