

# JOHNS CREEK UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

## Worth Everything You Have

Sunday, October 6

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Most of us feel that faith in God is important. But let's be honest; sometimes keeping the faith is difficult. Life can be painful, scary and uncertain. It's just easier to be skeptical and live in fear or doubt. Sometimes we just throw up our hands and say, "What's the point? Does all this faith stuff really make a difference?"

Today, I am going to show you how faith in God really does make a difference. In fact, it makes all the difference. This series is going to show you how to keep your faith and experience freedom over fear. When this series is over you'll know how to "faith it til you make it!"

This message is very personal to me because there have been times in my life when I have struggled to keep the faith. I have shared with you before how I have struggled with an anxiety disorder through much of my life. I have obsessive compulsive tendencies and my mind can spin over irrational fears. I used to take ten flights of stairs to avoid using the elevator. And I used to have panic attacks before I preached. You know they say that public speaking is the #1 fear for most people. Now imagine adding an anxiety disorder to our number #1 fear! Fun stuff! Now also imagine trying to navigate the troubles of life with a brain that is spinning like crazy? It was exhausting and overwhelming.

Well I am not perfect and I still have my off days but I have been able to overcome my anxiety demons and keep the faith. I have learned to live life with confidence in God and freedom from fear. Today and in this series I am going to share how I was able to do it.

I am sure you or someone you love is desperate for this message. Life feels like it is out of control and you need help. Your doctor ordered some tests and you freaking out about it. You won't know the results until next week and you don't know how you are going to make it until then. School is filled with pressure. There are high expectations on you and you feel overwhelmed. Or maybe you are a teacher and you are exhausted. Perhaps you recently moved here and you feel like an outsider. The culture is so different and you are afraid and lonely. Or maybe you are struggling with your career, marriage or family. Perhaps you are battling with a personal

demon. For whatever reason, you feel discouraged, hopeless and have lost your joy.

You have come to church today to get your faith and joy back but it is not that easy. You don't feel very close to God anymore. You are impatient or angry with God. You have stopped praying. You used to pray and read your Bible all the time but you don't think it does any good.

Then to make it worse maybe you have come across "Super Christians" who look like they have it all together (they really don't). They say, "Just have faith. Just give it to God. That's what I do and look how wonderful life is for me!" And you think, "Really? Who are these people? I can barely make it to worship on Sunday!"

This morning I am going to share something with you that's going to enable you to keep your faith and live with confidence and joy. You might not feel great now but if you apply the message today you will experience the breakthrough you have been desperate for. I know this to be true because I am going to share what I have applied to my own life that's kept my faith and crushed my fears.

What I want to share can be found through a prayer from a man who was no stranger to fear or doubt. His name was David. King David. He is one of the most celebrated kings in this history of Israel, but he did not always have a model faith or live a perfect life. Far from it. He made a lot of bad choices in life. He also struggled with faith. A lot!

We can get up close and personal with David by reading some of his prayers in scripture. They can be found in the book of Psalms. Today, I want us to take a look at one of David's prayers. Some of you might be surprised that David prayed this prayer. This is how it begins:

**How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?**

**—Psalm 13:1**

I know some of you came to worship today with a similar prayer in your heart. If you feel guilty about it, don't. This verse gives you permission to pray it. Anyone who tells you that it is wrong to be angry or impatient with God has not read their Bible. The Bible is filled with prayers like this.

The truth is there is more faith in this prayer than most prayers. For David is being raw about his impatience with God. David is not complaining to a counselor. He is complaining to God! David doesn't feel God moving in his life. He feels forgotten. And not only that – he also feels God is hiding from him. In other words, he feels God is not hearing or responding to his prayers and he is not afraid to tell God about it.

But David has a lot more to say to God:

**How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?**

**-Psalm 13:2**

David is drowning in discouraging thoughts and his heart is heavy with grief. He feels humiliated that his enemies seemed to be prospering while he is in the depths of despair. Ever felt that way? Here I am miserable and all the people who don't deserve to be happy, who are not doing the right thing, are living the good life.

Notice the refrain, "How long? How long? How long?" This is a man struggling to keep his faith. He has waited and waited and waited and nothing. And many of you have waited and waited and waited too.

Well, hold on, an answer is coming, but not before David's prayer becomes even darker:

**Look on me and answer, LORD my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death, and my enemy will say, "I have overcome him," and my foes will rejoice when I fall.**

**-Psalm 13:3-4**

David is telling God that if he doesn't give him some sign of hope, some sign that things are going to get better than he will just die in despair. Literally, the text means he will sink into the grave.

However, there is a huge shift in David's prayer. Something dramatically changes. And we see this change through one of the biggest "buts" in the Bible.

You ready for one of the biggest butts in the Bible? Here it is. David prays:

**But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing the LORD's praise, for he has been good to me.**

**-Psalm 13:5-6**

What happened? One minute David is in the pit. The next minute he is praising God. One minute David is in despair. The next minute he is delighting in God. What happened between the 4th and 5th verses? BUT happened! That's what happened!

The BUT marks a huge pivot in David's thinking and faith. In verse 5 David is saying, "You know what, I feel awful, BUT I know God's character. I know his unfailing love. I have experienced it. I know I can count on it. He has been good to me in the past so I know I can count on him in the present and future. I feel terrible BUT God is greater than how I feel. God is greater than my experience. God is greater than my despair. I will choose to trust him."

David got to the place where he figured out that God's character was greater than how he felt. He thought about all the times God had been good to him and he chose to trust that goodness rather than how he felt in that moment.

So here is what I want you to know:

**Faith is not a feeling; it is a choice to trust God's character instead of your condition.**

Faith is never a feeling. If you wait to feel like having faith, you might never have it. I know so many people who feel guilty because they measure their faith by their feelings. Don't ever measure your faith by your feelings. God is bigger than how you feel. The faithfulness of God is not determined by how you feel.

This is why "follow your heart" or "trust your heart" is terrible advice. Sometimes our hearts tell us to get revenge. Sometimes our hearts tell us to give up. We can't always trust our hearts. You can't trust your feelings. Feelings are fleeting. They are based on the whims of life. But you can trust God's character and his faithfulness. You can trust that. You may not feel like it, but you can choose to trust it.

God is not asking you to feel like having faith. He is simply asking you to choose to trust him in spite of how you feel – to trust him in the midst of your feelings and

doubts – to move forward even though you are terrified – to take that first step when you can't see the rest of the staircase. Sometimes this choice will lead to a new feeling of faith that you've been searching for. But it's only by choosing to trust God, not your feelings, that you can move to a state of unflinching faith.

In his book *The Case for Faith* Lee Strobel tells of 30-year-old preacher getting ready to preach his first major crusade. Even though he felt called this preacher was wrestling with doubts and struggling to keep his faith. He doubted the Bible. He struggled with theological and philosophical questions. For weeks he wrestled with his faith. Then one evening that preacher was walking in the San Bernardino Mountains and experienced a shift in his faith and thinking. He prayed, "Father, I am going to accept this as Thy Word—by faith! I am going to allow faith to go beyond my intellectual questions and doubts, and I will believe this to be your inspired Word."

And a few days later Billy Graham would begin one of the greatest ministries in world. Faith is not a feeling; it is a choice to trust God's character instead of your condition.

Some of you may be thinking, "Well Charley that sounds good, but how do you do that? How do you make that choice? I can understand that intellectually but how does this really work?"

I am going to share how you do it and it is going to be so liberating to many of you. Here is how you do it: You Hold On By Letting Go. We have to let go, to take hold. Sometimes we must disconnect in order to reconnect.

What do I mean by that? Some of you feel burned out and disconnected to God because you are holding on to unhealthy things you need to let go of They are sapping your spiritual and emotional energy. Each of us has only so much energy to give, and if what you are holding on to is taking most of that energy, there is not much left for God is there? It's hard for God to give you strength when something is always sapping your energy.

What do you need to let go of in order to hold on to your faith? What do you need to disconnect with in order to reconnect with God?

It could be your smart phone or iPad. You know there was a recent study done on smart phones and our brains. The conclusion of the study was that our smart phones increase our levels of anxiety to alarming levels. Just being in a meeting and feeling our phone buzz with a

message and not being able to check it causes chemicals to be released in the brain that increase fear, anxiety and blood pressure.

They have also done studies that show that the ambient light that comes from our devices effect our sleep patterns. I try not to look at any screen for at least an hour before going to bed.

If you are someone who is constantly connected to your smart phone, just think of the precious time and energy it is taking from you, your faith and your family. Some of us need to take a Sabbath from technology.

Of course it may not be technology. For you it might mean letting go of the toxic people you are hanging around with. Have you considered how the people in your life affect your faith? You might need to demote some people in your life.

For some of you it might mean letting go of the toxic faith you grew up with. Nothing can destroy faith quicker than fundamentalism and bad theology. If you grew up with it, it can be hard to let go of, but the truth will set you free.

Of course there are some of you who just need to say NO! You are someone who takes on too many things, too many tasks and you are worn out. You have to say no to grow. Just say no and take a vacation.

Some of us need to let go of the resentment that is eating us up inside. Some of us need to let go of the regret that we have been dragging around forever. It is time to forgive ourselves as God has forgiven us.

You see, usually our freedom from fear and confidence in God is just on the other side of letting something go. What do you need to let go of?

I learn the meaning of this message every time I hold Paul and he falls asleep on me. I can put him down to nap or I can hold him while he sleeps. Most of the time I choose to hold him. How long will I get to do this? And something special happens as I rock him to sleep. There is that moment when he finally lets go and rests his little body and weight in my arms. You can feel it. He makes that choice. He lets himself go. He is utterly and completely dependent on me. He trusts me completely.

As I hold him while he sleeps I often think about what I shared today. I thank God for this miracle, this gift. I thank God for his faithfulness. I remember his unfailing love and goodness to me. And I think, "Charley,

whenever you doubt or struggle just hold Paul and remember to trust in God's character not in your condition."

While holding Paul I also think of my Heavenly Father who holds me and never lets me go. I pray, "Lord I don't

know what the future holds but I know you hold me and my future, and I choose to trust in your unfailing love."

Trust God's character, not your condition .

