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## CHAPTER

# 1

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## The Possibilities of Faith

*“Everything is possible for him who believes” (Mark 9:23).*

THESE ARE BOLD and stupendous words. They open the treasure house of the Eternal King to man who was born in sin. To these children of clay, Jesus Christ offers the privilege of God’s own omnipotence and all the possibilities of His infinite resources! Side by side with this promise stands another declaration that is just as astounding: “All things are possible with God” (Mark 10:27).

### **Salvation first**

What are the possibilities of faith? Foremost is salvation. It does not matter how vile the sin or how multiplied or aggravated the guilt. Nor does it matter how deep the corruption or how long was the career of impenitence. “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life” (John 3:36). “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31).

Sanctification is a second possibility to the person who believes. It is the Lord’s will that we “receive . . . a place among those who are sanctified by faith in [Christ]” (Acts 26:18). Sanctification is not a work but

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a gift of grace, and all grace must be by faith. It is not possible by painful struggling, penance or self-torture. It is not possible by moral persuasion, careful training, correct teaching or perfect example. Sanctification is not made possible even by the dark, cold waters of death itself.

How *is* sanctification possible? Only by faith. It is the gift of Jesus Christ, the incoming and indwelling of Him. It is the interior life and divine imparting to us of the Holy Spirit, and it must be by faith alone. All this is possible to anyone who will believe, no matter how unholy he has been. He may be as mean and crooked as Jacob, as gross as David in his darkest sin, as self-confident as Simon Peter or as willful and self-righteous as Paul. Yet he can be and shall be made as spotless as the Son of God.

#### **The possibility of divine healing**

Still another possibility of faith for the one who believes is divine healing. "And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up" (James 5:15). The man or woman of faith still has access to this truth, a truth as true today as when the Master touched the eyes of the blind man to whom He said, "According to your faith it will be done to you" (Matthew 9:29).

It does not matter how serious the disease is. A person may be as helpless as the cripple whose friends lowered him through the roof to Jesus. Or his sickness may be as chronic as that which claimed the impotent man who lay helpless at the pool for 38 years. The malady may be as obscure and as despised as that of the poor blind man who begged by the wayside, whom the multitude thought unworthy of

Christ's attention. Or perhaps the sick one is as sinful as the Syro-Phoenician woman. Yet to her, as to others, healing came when Jesus could say "You have great faith! Your request is granted" (Matthew 15:28).

It is not the faith that heals; it is the God whom the faith touches. There is no other way of touching God except by faith. If we would receive His almighty touch, we must believe!

All power for service is a possibility to the man or woman of faith. The gift of the Holy Spirit is received by faith. The power of the apostles was in proportion to their faith. "Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 6:9) could meet all the wisdom of Saul of Tarsus and those in the synagogue of the Cilicians. The simple story of Barnabas is that "he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord" (Acts 11:24).

The secret of effective preaching is not logic, rhetoric or eloquence, but to be able to say, "I believed; therefore I have spoken" (2 Corinthians 4:13). The success of some evangelists and Christian workers is out of all proportion to their talent or capacity in any direction, but they have one gift of expectancy that they faithfully exercise. They expect God to give them converts, and they are not disappointed.

The examples of a Moody or a Dr. Paul W. Harrison (American medical doctor to the Middle East who went out in 1894) are but types of what is possible for the humblest worker to accomplish if he but believes. If he wants powerful results, he must have his eye set only on the glory of God. He must possess a simple fidelity to the gospel of Christ. Then he will dare to expect the mightiest results.

**Faith's omnipotence**

All difficulties and dangers must give way before the omnipotence of faith. By faith the walls of Jericho fell down. Even today, the mightiest citadels of the adversary must give way before the steadfast and victorious march of faith. By faith Daniel stopped the mouths of lions and was delivered. It was not his uprightness of life or courageous fidelity that saved him—it was his confidence in Jehovah!

Such faith has carried intrepid missionaries through the jungles of Africa and South America. It has held back the stroke of death or some threatened disaster from many of us in the humbler experiences of our providential lives. The God of faith is still as near, as mighty and as true as when He walked with the Hebrew children through the fiery furnace or guarded the heroic Paul through all the perils of his changeful life. There is no difficulty too small for its exercise, no crisis too terrible for its triumph. Shall we go forth with this shield and buckler and prove the possibilities of faith? Then indeed shall we lead a charmed life despite the actions of our enemy and know that we are immortal until our work is done.

All the victories of prayer are possible to the person who believes. "If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer" (Matthew 21:22). "I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours" (Mark 11:24). It is not the strength or length of the prayer that prevails, but the simplicity of its confidence.

It is the prayer of faith that claims the healing power of the unchanging Savior. It is the prayer of faith that reaches the soul that perhaps no human hand can ap-

proach, sometimes bringing from heaven the answer even before the echo of the petition has died away. In Cleveland, Ohio, a brokenhearted wife prayed earnestly with an evangelist for the soul of her lost husband. At that hour, the husband was led into a noon-time Chicago prayer meeting. While the two in Cleveland prayed with faith, others in Chicago dealt with the man, and he was gloriously saved. The next day he sent the good news to his happy wife.

The prayer of faith raised enduring monuments on Ashley Down where 2,000 orphan children were fed daily by the hand of God in answer to the humble, believing cry of George Mueller. These are but patterns of what God, although hindered often by His people's unbelief, has always been ready to do.

These possibilities are open to each of us. We may not be called to public service or qualified for instructive speech or endowed with wealth and influence. But we are all given the power to touch the hand of omnipotence and minister at the altar of prevailing prayer. One censer we must bring—the golden bowl of faith. As we fill it with the burning coals of the Holy Spirit's fire and the incense of the great High Priest, there will be silence in heaven as God hushes the universe to listen. Then the living fire will be poured out upon the earth in the mighty forces of His providence and grace.

### **All joy and peace**

All peace and joy are possible to the person of faith. The apostle's prayer for the Romans was that the God of hope would fill them with all joy and peace in believing (Romans 15:13). It is God's will and purpose that the unbelieving soul shall be an unhappy soul and

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that those whose minds are stayed upon God and trusting in Him shall have perfect peace. Would you like to be happy even in the darkest hour? Then trust in the Lord and dwell continually in Him (Isaiah 26:3). Would you like to know the peace that is beyond understanding? Then be anxious about nothing and steadfastly believe that the Lord is at hand, supreme above every circumstance and causing all things to work together for good to those who love Him (Philippians 4:6-7; Romans 8:28).

Would you like the perennial overflowings of joy? Then learn the truth of First Peter 1:8 — “Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.” The joy of mere paroxysmal laughter and motion is like the cut flower on a brief winter’s day. It is separated from the root and withers before another sunset. The joy of faith is the fruit and perpetual bloom that covers the living tree or the rooted plant in a watered garden.

The evangelization of the world is yet another possibility of faith. The most successful missionary operations are sustained wholly through faith in God and the power of prayer. There is no field of faith as vast and sublime as the mission field today, and the possibilities which faith may claim are unlimited. What great opportunity this presents to those of us who would be workers together with God for the greatest achievement of all the Christian centuries!

The Lord’s coming will doubtless be founded at last on faith. There will be a generation who will say, “Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us” (Isaiah 25:9). As yet it is our blessed hope, but it will some day be ours in its fullness. Reading

both earth and sky—the tokens of His coming—His waiting Bride will hear the glad cry, “The wedding of the Lamb has come” (Revelation 19:7). To Simeon of old it was made known that he should see the Lord’s Christ. In like manner, to the righteous in the last times the Morning Star shall rise. May the Lord help us to so understand our times and the work our Master expects of us in preparation for His coming that we shall share in the recompense of faith and even hasten that joyful day.

### **All things**

Beyond all that has been said, this scriptural promise means that *all* things are possible to the person who will believe God. It is possible to have any or even many of the achievements listed here and still miss the *all* things of God’s highest will. The full meaning of this promise is that faith may claim a complete life, where nothing shall be lacking, a finished service and a crown lacking no jewel of recompense. Some lives are not wholly lost, but they are not saved to the uttermost. Many of us are coming short of all that God has had in His highest thought for us.

When the king of Israel stood by the bedside of the dying prophet of the Lord, Elisha put his hand upon the hands of Joash and helped him shoot the arrows that were symbolic of faith and victory. Then the prophet required that the king should follow up this act of mutual faith by a more individual expression of expectation. Sadly, as it is with most of us, his faith evaporated long before its needed work was done. He struck the ground only three times and stopped. It was too late for him to recover his lost blessing. The grieved and actually angry prophet upbraided him for



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his smallness of heart. He told him sorrowfully that his blessing would be limited according to the measure of his faith (2 Kings 13).

Never will I forget the solemnity with which God brought this passage to my soul. It was in a crisis of my life, and this text seemed to ask how much I would take from God and how little would satisfy my faith. Thank God, He enabled me to say with a bursting heart, "I want nothing less than all of Your highest will, all of faith's greatest possibilities!" May the Lord help us to live each day under the power of those holy aspirations and see their true value. This will bring us to cherish the same lofty ambition with Paul, "I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace" (Acts 20:24).

Christian, are you missing anything from your life, your one, precious, narrow span of earthly opportunity, the pivot on which eternity revolves—the one eternal possibility that will never return again? God is waiting to give you all, and all things are possible to everyone who believes.

### **Everything depends on faith**

Because the ruin of the race began with the loss of faith, its recovery must come through the exercise of faith. The poison Satan injected into the blood of Eve was the strychnine of unbelief. She questioned God's faithfulness. The one prescription the gospel gives to the lost is this: "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31).

Faith is the law of Christianity, the vital principle of the gospel dispensation. Paul calls it the law of faith,

in distinction from the law of works. The Lord Jesus expressed it in the simple formula that has become the standard of answered prayer and of every blessing we receive through the name of Jesus. God is therefore bound to act according to our faith *and* our unbelief!

Faith is the only way known to us by which we can accept a gift from God. All the blessings of the gospel are the gifts of grace; therefore, they must come to us through faith. Furthermore, they will come only in the measure of our faith.

Faith is necessary to strengthen and prepare our own hearts for the reception of God and His grace. Without it, how can the Father communicate His love to a timid, trembling heart? How can God come near to a frightened child? A tiny bird may actually die of terror in the hand of one whose only intent is to caress it and win its love. Even so, the heart without faith would faint from terror in the presence of God, unable to receive the overflowing love of the Father whom it could not understand.

Faith is an actual spiritual force. It is no doubt one of the attributes of God Himself. We find it exemplified in Jesus in all His miracles. He explains to His disciples that it was the power by which He withered the fig tree. And it was the power by which they could overcome and dissolve the mightiest obstacles in their way. There is no doubt that while the soul is exercising, through the power of God, the faith that commands what God commands, a mighty force is operating at that moment upon the obstacle. God has put into our hands one of His own implements of omnipotence and permitted us to use it in the name of Jesus, according to His will and for the establishment of His kingdom.

The preeminent reason why God requires faith is that faith is the only way through which God Himself can have absolute room to work. This is true because faith is that colorless, simple attitude by which man ceases from his own works and enters into the work of God. It is the difference between the human and the divine, the natural and the supernatural. The reason faith is so mighty and indeed, omnipotent, is that it makes way for the omnipotence of God.

The two sentences are strangely and exactly parallel: "All things are possible with God" and "Everything is possible for him who believes." The same power is possessed by both God and the person who believes. This is so because the latter is lost in, and wholly identified with, the former. Surrendering our own insufficiency, we link up with the all-sufficiency of God and go forth triumphantly exclaiming: "I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13), and heaven echoes back, "Everything is possible for him who believes!"

### **The hindrances to faith**

Of course, we need scarcely say that faith is dependent upon obedience and rightness of heart and life. We cannot trust God in the face of willful sin. Even an unsanctified state is fatal to any high degree of faith, for the carnal heart is not the soil in which it can grow. The fruit of the Spirit is always hindered when the heart is overgrown with the weeds of sin and willful indulgence. The reason a great many Christians have so little faith is because they are living in the world and in themselves and are living to some degree apart from God and His holiness.

When an observatory is about to be built, the site

selected is always on some high mountain. The aim is to find a place where there is a clear, unobstructed view of the heavens. Similarly, faith requires for its heavenly vision the highlands of holiness and separation, the pure sky of a consecrated life.

Faith is also hindered by the weak and unscriptural way that so many excuse their unbelief and lightly speak of the sin of doubting God. If we would have strong faith, we must recognize it as an imperative, sacred obligation. Then let us steadfastly and firmly believe God and refuse to ever doubt Him.

Let us never say we cannot believe. While in ourselves we are unable, God has provided us with that power to believe Him if we will only choose to do so. Let us no longer condone and palliate our doubts as harmless infirmities and sad misfortunes. Rather "see to it, brothers, that none of [us] has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God" (Hebrews 3:12).

Faith is further hindered by reliance upon human wisdom, whether our own or that of others. The devil's first bait to Eve was an offer of wisdom, and for this she sold her faith! "You will be like God," he said, "knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:5), and from the hour she began to "know" she ceased to trust.

The spies were the ones who lost the land of promise to Israel. It was their foolish proposition to search out the land and find out whether God had told the truth that led to the awful outbreak of unbelief, thereby shutting the doors of Canaan to a complete generation. It is significant that the names of nearly all these spies are suggestive of human wisdom, greatness and fame.

So it was, too, in the days of Christ. The traditions

of the elders and the opinions of men kept them back from receiving Him. "How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?" (John 5:44). This, today, has much to do with the limitations of the church's faith. The Bible is measured by human criticism, and the promises of God are weighed in the balances of natural probability and human reason.

Our own wisdom is just as dangerous if it takes the place of God's simple word. Therefore if we are determined to trust the Lord with all our heart, we must not lean on our own understanding (Proverbs 3:5).

### **Hindered by our own strength**

Another hindrance to faith is self-sufficiency and dependence on our own strength. Before we can be brought to trust in God, He has to reduce us to helplessness. The hour of His mightiest interposition is usually the time of our greatest extremity.

Has God brought you to the end of your strength? Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for it is the beginning of His Omnipotence! If faith will but fall into His mighty arms and cry out like those of old, "Lord, there is no one like you to help the powerless against the mighty. Help us, O Lord our God, for we rely on you, and in your name we have come against this vast army" (2 Chronicles 14:11).

Faith is hindered by sight and sense and our foolish dependence upon external evidences. The very evidence in which we must live and grow is the unseen. All outward things, therefore, must be withdrawn before we can truly believe. Then, as we look not at the things that are seen but on the things which are not

seen, they grow real—more real than the things of sense. God then makes them real in actual accomplishment. But first, faith must step out into the great unknown and walk on the water to go to Jesus—no, it is more like walking on nothing but air. In the center of emptiness, faith will still find a rock beneath its feet!

There is a story of a traveler in the Alps who had reached the end of a long mountain path. The path had suddenly disappeared beneath a great mass of ice and snow and a subterranean torrent. There stood the towering mountain sternly blocking his way ahead. Miles of desolation lay behind him. What should he do? With only a word of instruction, his guide exclaimed, "Follow me!" Then he plunged into the churning water and disappeared from sight. It was a dreadful thing, but he must follow or die! There was the sudden shock of the icy water, the whirl of that plunging current, an awful darkness and then a sudden, beautiful burst of light! Catching his breath, he found himself lying on the sunny banks of a quiet stream. He had made it to the other side of the mountain through the very channel dug by that mighty flow of water! The unseen way had led to life and light.

Even so, faith still walks frequently in paths of mystery, but God will always make it plain. Is it not a hindrance to our faith when we hesitate to believe God before we venture upon the naked word of His promise? Your faith alone is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1). God help us to walk by faith and not by sight!

Because these things are true, God has to train us in the way of faith by difficulties, trials and seeming

refusals, until, like the Syro-Phoenician woman, we simply trust on and refuse to be refused. He is always waiting to recompense our trust by the glad words, "You have great faith! Your request is granted" (Matthew 15:28).

### **Hindered by our own faith**

Finally, faith is hindered most of all by what we call "our faith." In a fruitless effort, we struggle to work out a faith that, after all, is but a make-believe, desperate trying to trust God. But this will always come short of His vast and glorious promise. The truth is that the only faith that is equal to the stupendous promises of God and the measureless needs of our life is "faith in the Son of God" (Galatians 2:20). The faith we need is that which God will breathe into the heart that intelligently, expectantly looks to Him. His faith will give us the power to live, obey and perform any other exercise of the new life.

Blessed be His name! He has not given us a chain that is one link short of aiding our poor, helpless heart. His chain of love is just as divine where it binds the human side as where it links us up to His throne of promise in the heavens. "Have faith in God" (Mark 11:22). "I live by the faith of the Son of God." That was the victorious testimony of one who had proved it true.

In the light of this great provision, listen to the mighty promise now, and in His faith rise up to claim it. "Everything is possible for him who believes." Then cry out to Him, "I do believe. Help me overcome my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24).

This mighty engine of spiritual power is placed in our hands by Omnipotent Love. Shall we claim it and,

by the help of God, rise to its utmost possibilities? From this hour, shall we turn this heavenly weapon upon the field of Christian life and conflict? Let us use it for all that God has called us to in the great conflicts of the age and for the kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.