

Week Three—Acts of Faith

Words to Live By

“Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

Jesus to the bleeding woman in Luke 7:50

What is faith? “Now faith is confidence in what we hoped for and assurance about what we do not see” (Hebrews 11:1, NIV). Biblical faith involves not simply accepting that something is true, but believing it to the point that we act on it. In last week’s study Jesus said, “No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. . . . For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of” (Luke 6:43,45c, NIV). As you read through our scriptures this week, pay attention to how you see faith play out in the lives of the people who come into contact with Jesus.

Part One Study

In this section of our lesson, we’ll read three stories. N.T. Wright comments that the first two of them “take the commands of the great sermon in chapter 6 and they show what this life looks like on the ground, with God’s love going out in new, unexpected, healing generosity. And they help us move toward an answer to the question that is not actually spoken, ‘Who does Jesus think he is?’”¹

Read Luke 7:1-17, and record your thoughts on the following questions:

- How does the Centurion show his faith?
- Why did Jesus resurrect the widow’s son? What role did faith play? How did the crowd respond?

Read Luke 7:18-35, journaling your insights into these questions:

- How did Jesus respond to John the Baptist’s question passed on by his followers? (You might want to review the scriptures Jesus read in the synagogue in Luke 4:14-21.)

Jesus wasn’t angry about John’s doubts nor did he ignore his question. We should be sympathetic to John’s state of mind during his imprisonment by Herod. In the same way, Jesus doesn’t get angry at us when our faith wavers. He knows our weaknesses. If you have questions, go to Jesus and lay your doubts before him in prayer, as John sent his followers straight to Jesus. The Holy Spirit may assuage your concerns or guide you to speak about it with a person who knows Jesus and the Scriptures well.

¹ Wright, 84.

- Describe the different responses to Jesus' comments about John the Baptist from the two groups of people who were present.
- What is God saying to you through these stories about Jesus or the strength of your own faith?



How do you think these stories picture what Jesus taught in the sermon in Luke 6:20-42?

Part Two Study

Our first story includes our Words to Live By for this week. Keep them in mind as you read.

Read Luke 7:36-50, one of my favorite Bible stories, and write down your thoughts:

- How did Jesus see this woman?² How did the host see her? What do you see of their faith in this story?
- How well do you love Jesus? Would you dare show that love in public? Why or why not?

This woman has come home to Jesus, and he welcomes her with open arms. Do you keep your distance from God because of your past? If so, realize that he welcomes those who turn in faith from the empty loves they've clung to and come home to the only love who provides forgiveness and peace.

Read Luke 8:1-21 in light of the questions that follow.

Don't miss the list of women who supported Jesus' ministry and traveled with him along with the Twelve in vv. 1-3. This story and the previous one show us that Jesus accepted women as his followers in an age when women were not generally included.

- How does Jesus explain the parable in vv. 1-15? In other words, what do the seed and soils represent? Consider which soil describes you.



Read John 15:1-8 and Galatians 5:22-23. Spend time in prayer asking God to show you the fruit he has produced in your heart and life.

Note that Jesus follows up his explanation of the parable with a couple of statements that support the characterization of the productive seed in Luke 8:18 and 21.

If you ever feel that you are alone with no people of your own, Jesus invites you into his inner circle. He and his family become your people, too (vv.19-21).

² Bock says this about the woman: "Traditionally she has been called a prostitute, but the text is not so specific. Nor is she likely to be Mary Magdalene, who is introduced as a new figure in 8:1-3." (Bock, *IVP Commentary*, 141.)

Read Luke 8:22-25, and comment on this question:

- How does this story relate to faith?

Skye Jethani explains to modern readers how the ancient Israelites saw bodies of water:

. . . the sea was a dark abyss to be feared. In their literature, including the biblical narrative, the sea became a metaphor for the forces of evil and disorder that stood in opposition to their God of order. . . . Therefore, when Jesus rebuked the wind and the waves and they obeyed, two shocking things would have occurred to the disciples. First, their rabbi in the back of the boat didn't merely have authority over nature—they had already seen that with the miraculous catch of fish. By calming the sea he proved to have authority over the forces of evil, chaos, and destruction. And, second, the only one who had such power was YHWH himself—the Creator who calmed the dark seas of creation and rescued his people through the flood. This explains why, by the end of the story, their fear of the storm had been eclipsed by their fear of Jesus.³

- How has God spoken to you about your own faith through his Word today?

Part Three Study

In this section we'll read several more amazing stories. Continue looking for evidence of faith and notice what the stories reveal about Jesus.

Read Luke 8:26-39.

The area where Jesus and his disciples landed on the other side of the Sea of Galilee was not Jewish land but Gentile (non-Jew). He appears to have traveled there for one reason only—to free this tortured man.

- How did the various people respond to Jesus' miraculous work? How was faith involved in this story?

Read Luke 8:40-56.

Jesus is headed to the home of Jairus, a leader in the synagogue whose daughter is dying, when he gets interrupted by a woman whose illness made her unclean.⁴

- What part does faith play in these two stories?

Read Luke 9:1-9, and consider these questions:

- What kind of power and authority did Jesus give the Twelve and what was their mission?
- Why was Herod perplexed about Jesus?

³ Skye Jethani, "The Real Meaning of Jesus Calming the Storm" in "With God Daily," May 13, 2022.

⁴ The Mosaic Law set out guidelines for living, and in those laws bleeding made a person unclean, meaning they were required to be isolated and not touched (Lev. 15:25-31).

Read Luke 9:10-17, and comment.

Bock comments on miracles: “The miracles are the audiovisual of God’s power at work in the announcement of the kingdom’s arrival (11:20).”⁵

All of the gospel writers were inspired to record the story of the miraculous feeding of the 5,000.



Bock notes the unusual element of this story: “no reaction from the crowd is recorded—a detail showing that the lesson is for the disciples.”⁶ As Jesus’ disciple, what lesson might apply to your own life from this story?

- Quickly remind yourself of all the stories you’ve read this week (Luke 7:1-9:17), and put yourself in the position of those who experienced or witnessed Jesus’ actions. What most awes you about Jesus?

In our stories this week we saw Jesus amazed by the great faith of a Gentile, of all people! We watched him resurrect a dead man, touching his bier that would have been unclean. We saw Jesus’ concern and love for others: a woman who loved him greatly because he had freed her from the burden of her sinful past, another woman experiencing an extended bleeding illness and her subsequent unclean state, and finally a man bound to the demons who inhabited him. These are all people shunned in one way or another by Jewish society. Yet instead of Jesus distancing himself from them, he actually embraced them.

Are you bound to anything from which you need freedom? It could be a besetting sin, selfishness, pride, bitterness, unforgiveness, patterns of thinking about yourself or others, sins of your past or many other issues. If so, confess your responsibility in it. Then, in faith ask Jesus to show you how to be free and to give you the power to overcome it. He may guide you to other people such as a minister, Bible study leader or counselor because Jesus usually uses the church to do his work today.

Praise God that no matter what we have done, he wants to free us from the shackles we carry so that we can live for him! He welcomes us home with him.

**“ . . . Thou hast taught me
that faith is nothing else than receiving thy kindness;
that it is an adherence to Christ, a resting on him, love clinging to him as a
branch to a tree, to seek life and vigor from him. . . .**

⁵ Bock, *IVP Commentary*, 162.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 164.

I have seen thee by reason and have not been amazed,
I have seen thee as thou art in the Son and have been ravished to behold thee.
I bless thee that I am thine in my Saviour, Jesus.”⁷

⁷ “Belonging to Jesus,” *The Valley of Vision*, 103.