

Coffee with Phil. 40. What is Faith?

Introduction.

Well, good day and welcome to the podcast. Welcome to Coffee with Phil, this is episode 40 of Coffee with Phil, and today I'm asking you, what is faith? And I'm only asking you that because I asked myself that. But here I am this afternoon enjoying, you caught me out, I'm not having a coffee at the moment, I'm enjoying a very nice cup of French Earl Grey tea, which I'm quite partial to in the late afternoon. But I learned my lesson last time I sat here in my office in my home studio and I just put the used tea bag, it's a lovely silk tea bag by the way, it's gorgeous in the way that it helps the tea, but I put the tea bag in the rubbish bin, and then halfway through the recording I had to go and do something, I think someone knocked at the door, or I had to do something anyway. I came back and the dog had dug out of the rubbish bin my tea bag, loved the floral scent of it, and destroyed it on the floor of my office. So needless to say my office got a vacuum that it wasn't expecting, by someone that doesn't usually vacuum it.

Anyway, what are you doing today to enjoy your coffee or your tea? I hope your day's going well. What I wanna do today is I wanna talk about faith. Faith is confusing, but I would say that, you know, often we Christians, we're guilty of saying, well, you know, there's believers and there's unbelievers, or non-believers, or not yet believers, and that's actually rubbish. Because everyone has to believe in something, and if you believe in nothing, then you're believing that nothing is more important than something. So in fact, that's your belief system. So everyone has a belief system, and therefore everyone is putting their faith in what they believe. So, no such thing as an unbeliever, the question is, what do you believe in?

That's the first challenge, and I'm hopefully gonna help you and me on that in this podcast, and I'll talk about that in a minute. But the second thing that I would say right at the beginning is a kind of a, maybe a provocative statement to help you be motivated to listen to this. I would say misdirected faith is never positively helpful, so you better be sure that you're putting your faith in the right kind of belief. And so here's my purpose today, really why I wanted to dive into this is, my whole goal in this podcast, and sitting here, and sharing stories, and thoughts with you, is that by sharing my life, I might help you in your life, but not just practically, most importantly, spiritually.

Definition Of Faith.

So, my goal here today is to help you unpack your faith in a way that might be new to you. You're listening to this, carrying your beliefs, which are shaped by your past and your experiences. What you've read, what you've seen, what you've understood, and how you've interpreted the world around you. But what I'm learning folks, is that I need to constantly challenge myself in the way that I interpret the world around me, and that's the proposition I have for you. So, before I challenge you too much on that, let me just give you a biblical definition of faith. Being a Bible believing Christian I put all my confidence in the Bible as the absolute truth, the challenge is, how do I interpret that truth? Well, that's called the journey of life, and the journey of faith. But the definition of faith, according to Scripture, when I asked a whole bunch of people and checked a whole lot of resources, there was one key verse that is, in

essence, the definition of faith. An easy to follow translation of Hebrews chapter eleven, verse one says this, Faith shows the reality of what we hope for, it is the evidence of things we cannot see. A different translation, the New English Translation, says faith is being sure of what we hope for, being convinced of what we do not see. Just to geek out a little bit on some word and definition stuff here, this being convinced talks about there being proof, being evidence, and what I'd suggest to you in unpacking this, I won't go into all the explanation, but let me say it simply this way, the proof is you and your conviction. So, what makes it true is the conviction you carry over the absolute essence of your faith, and that's why I'm saying your faith is personal. You've got a conviction in it, and that's what makes it your faith, that's what makes it true in your world, otherwise, if you didn't think it was true, you wouldn't put your hope and your confidence in it. That's why I say it's so important to understand that misdirected faith is never positively helpful. Let's say I'm balancing on a stool to change a light bulb and I put all my confidence and my faith in the strength of the stool to hold me while I stretch high to the heavens to change a light bulb. If that stool, the thing I'm standing on is not strong enough to hold my weight, or my imbalance, then it will fail me and therefore my misdirected confidence in that piece of equipment is not positively helpful. So, if you're putting your confidence and your faith in the wrong thing, then you will end up hurting yourself in the long run.

Christianity is a classic example of faith, and in fact, in most contexts, religion is linked to this concept of faith most strongly. But I can show you every aspect of your life as a demonstration of your faith and your belief in something. So let's not just limit it to our talk about religion and spirituality. But the Bible tells us as it's written to us as believers of Jesus, it says you believe in Jesus even though you do not see him, and the reason that I would say that has become true for me, is that I have so much evidence in the story of my life that I have seen the fruit, the fingerprints of Jesus at work in my life. There's nothing that I could find that would explain it, except that the God who loves me, intervened in my life in so many practical ways, so many examples, that I've got substance to the hope that Jesus is in fact God and my saviour.

So, the fruit of the evidence that I carry, is what creates the faith that I direct towards God, because I've got faith in something or someone, and for me it's faith in God. The question is, what are you putting your confidence in? So, my faith, my trust in God is the proof that I believe he is real for me, and he is real for others. And I live my life according to that, and then the reality is that as I live my life of faith I reap the fruit from what I put my hope in. If I put my hope solely in medicine and science, and that man can take all responsibility for life, there is no sovereign being higher than mankind, and mankind's knowledge, and history, then that's what I'll bear fruit from. But if I choose to put my hope, and my confidence, and my conviction, my faith, in something far greater, in fact someone, a person, God, the person. If I put my confidence in him, then my long-term expectation is that I will reap fruit from what I put my hope in, being God as a person.

Now I don't want to get into an argument with you about proving is God true or not, but there's plenty of arguments. Here's one. Look, let me just bend your mind a little bit with this. This argument of causation says this, since everything that begins to exist has a cause, meaning nothing could be in existence unless it first was caused by something. And because the universe began to exist, we know that the universe has a start date. That means something calls the universe to exist, therefore the universe itself, everything we know in our world, must have had a cause, which was not caused, it's outside itself and therefor there is evidence, or argument, that the initiator of all existence was in fact something sovereign far above creation, which we would say is God. Now if that doesn't convince you?

I'm not trying to convince you. I'm just explaining one way we can look at things. If we then say, let's just look at where we live in, the planet earth. Did you know that the thickness of the crust of planet Earth is the perfect thickness to make sure we can exist on Earth without cooking ourselves. If they'd been slightly thicker than the metallic elements in the Earth itself, in the dirt would have just sucked the possibility of animal life including humans from existence. And if there was less crust, less depth and more water on the surface of the earth, then plants wouldn't be able to exist because there wouldn't be, the carbon dioxide wouldn't be able to function. So yeah, all these things are just evidence that God exists. The Earth is the right size, if it was any bigger, any smaller, then our relationship to the sun wouldn't create the temperature that we need, and the oxygen that we need, in order for human beings to exist.

Why is it that the planet Earth is the only planet that we know, that has living, life beings and plantation on it? Why? Because God planted the earth in amongst the solar system in exactly the right place, rotating around the sun at the exactly the right speed and angle in order that the earth would have a function with tides, and seasons, and weather, in order to sustain God's creation, which is you and me. The whole purpose of God's creation is that he would have friendship with mankind, who was created in his image. All of these things I choose to put my faith in, my hoping in, that God is above all, and in control of all. And this is how I choose to live my life. I have to have confidence in something, because I've proven to myself that I cannot put confidence in my own abilities, because I just tend to ruin things or break things, or let myself down, or let others down. I've got to, this is going to sound crazy, but I've had to learn to give up the control, or the ability that I carry to succeed, in order to allow God to define the path of my life, and the ups, the downs, the valleys, the hills, the successes, the victories, the battles, the defeats, the disappointments, the seasons in my life, the losses, the grief I carry, all of these things are outside my control.

I remember when my mum died, she was 46 years old and had had cancer at an early age after the kids were raised, so it was just as left home, and she had surgery, she had chemo, she had radiation, and she went well, and then it came back, and it came back in vengeance. And you know, we could fight it, we could get angry about it, we could curse God for allowing these things to happen. But we also have to accept that God carries the ability to miraculously heal, but he also carries the choice in how he applies that, and his choice is greater than our need or our expectation. And so when my mum passed away, my mum was convinced that God could heal her. My mum was convinced that God had the ability to heal her, but she trusted him in whether he was gonna do it or not. And the rest of the family, you know, we had all had our own expectations. My Dad, you know, lost the love of his life, and his best friend, and he was confused, and he was lonely, and he was just disappointed that it didn't go the way he hoped. My sister lost her best friend, and her mentor, and the one that was guiding her through life, and she was angry because it didn't go the way she wanted. My brother, you know, still finding himself in life as a young, I think he was 18 or 19, and he's like, what is going on in my world? And I don't have Mum to be part of my future, and my marriage, and my children, and all these things we're wrestling with because we've got a perspective on what we think God should be doing, and we carry those expectations, and God doesn't do what we want, we say well he's wrong and we are right, God let us down, or our faith wasn't big enough, or our faith wasn't strong enough, or we had sin in our life, and all of those things are not true when you compare them to the goodness of God, in the nature of God. But also just accepting that God is sovereign, meaning he's far above our circumstances, and regardless of how he chooses to do things in the season of our life, it doesn't change who he is, his nature is to stay, his love is the same.

Nothing could ever separate us from God's love, nor height, nor depth, or demons or principalities, or sickness, or death, or failure, or financial ruin. None of these things change who God is, and that, my friends, leads me to another thought that I really want to share with you today.

Faith Is Who Not What.

So, one of the things that I've really had to get my head around in life, and repeatedly I've gotta say, I'm a slow learner, a little bit thick. I carry expectations and filters through which I try and put God through a filter, and it's just never gonna work out for me. But one of the things that is a phrase that I've had to carry in my life is, I've got to define my faith in who God is, not what he does for me. And this is the essence of faith. When I say, what is faith? It's my unwavering dedication to the belief that God is good, not God is my servant. And Abraham, the father, he's called the father of our faith for a reason. For thousands of years, 3 or 4000 years, we have, we believers in God, those who have faith in God would declare that Abraham is the father of our faith, and it reports that in the Bible, and in many different examples, and I'll give you a couple of them today.

But in Romans chapter four, I think I want to start there, you know where, the writer of the book of Romans, Paul, he's talking about faith, and he's giving an example, and he's speaking of Abraham, and he says no unbelief made him, Abraham, waver concerning the promise of God. But he, Abraham, grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God. Well this is really convicting me, the scripture it then says, he's fully convinced, Abraham is fully convinced, that God was able to do what he had promised. So, for those of you like reading the Bible, I would like you to go and find out, it's in Romans chapter four and verse twenty and twenty one. Let me just say this, there was a struggle in Abraham's journey, but it says then, no one belief made him waver. No one belief. So, what does that mean? Unbelief came. He was doubting himself. He was doubting God. He wasn't sure, he was never quite sure how this was gonna work out the way God said. But we know the Bible also says that Abraham believed God, and it counted Abraham's as righteous or right standing before God. So, it was his belief of God that made him stand before God in such a way. Which is all we need to do right? We need to believe God, but we need to accept that wavering comes. Unbelief comes, and no unbelief made him waiver concerning the promise of God.

So, for me, what I've had to go, and I've said this to you all the time, when I'm wavering, when I'm doubting, when I'm wrestling with unbelief regarding something, I just need to say to myself, what do I know God said to me? Which is the promise of God. So if I'm wavering, if I've got unbelief, I'm like, OK, stop, Phil, you need to stop, and you need to turn around and say, what was the last thing I know God said to me around this situation or in this matter? What's the promise of God? What's the word of God that I hold on to? And then, that's what I've gotta hang myself on. But look, understand this, look, the next part says. This is really unpacking for me, even as I'm recording this, so I'm having a great time, I hope you are, but this is speaking to me, so I hope it speaks to you. Abraham grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, that's the middle part of that sentence. He grew strong in his faith, which means you can believe more, and more, and more, you can be more and more convinced. You can have more and more strength in the confidence that you put in what God said. He grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God. So, he's like, guys, look I'm hands off, it's not me, it's all God. God will do what God has said. Glory to God means we're not working it out ourselves. We're not doing it by our own strength. Look I don't want to get into the story of Abram and his wife's servant and Ishmael, and all those sorts of things, you've had enough sermons on that, or you can read that story, beginning at Genesis chapter 16.

But I want to say this, he grew strong in his faith, meaning you can, I can make my faith stronger, my gosh, as he gave glory to God, as he was convinced that God was doing it, and then the third part of the sentence says this, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.

Now, this is the clincher for me, and this is why I say, my second point to you, which I will repeat, it's about having faith in who God is, not what God does for you. So here, he's fully convinced that God was able to do what he has promised, and that was where my mum was when she passed away. She, I remember Mum, was lying in her bed upstairs, they lived in Mount Maunganui, she was crook, she was sick, she couldn't get out. Basically the cancer was eating up her brain. And I remember lying on the floor, looking up at her, so she was lying horizontal, I was also lying horizontal, but I was below the bed, so she was lying with the head on the pillow looking down at me, as we were look into her eyes, and I don't remember the conversation, but I remember the feeling I have right now, is the feeling I had then that mum was fully convinced, that God was able to heal her, but she had given him the power, or the right, or the authority, she trusted his authority to choose what he did, and I would say, my argument, this is not a cop out. My mum was free of cancer. My mum was fully healed. She's dancing with Jesus in heaven, because she looked at him as her saviour, not what she wanted it to look like.

And so I'm wrestling with this right now, I've got a challenge where I'm like, man, life's not going for me the way I thought it would. And I go, okay, well, what's the last thing I believe God said? I believe God said this will be a journey of faith, I need you to trust me. And I go okay. And then Kathy and I were driving around on the weekend and we're talking about this. Oh no, it was just even this afternoon actually, and I said to her, you know what I've realised is that faith is not about the outcome, it's just about the faith. So, if the purpose, I mean God said to me, this will be a journey of faith for you, what God is most concerned about is me having faith, not about me reaching an outcome that I might desire or hope to see.

And so here am I thinking, what is my choice when I face, you know, what choice do I face when the answer I hope for does not manifest before me? What choice do I have? Do I doubt God? Do I question God? Do I say he's not capable? Do I say that I'm not good enough? When my expectation is not being met by the evidence of the reality that's before me, that is not faith, that is not a conviction. God is able to do what he's promised. That doesn't shake me. And if my reality is not an evidence of that answer, then that's on God, not me, and he's able to choose, and I give him the power and the right to choose, and I yield to his choice. I'm not demanding that he do what I want, because I think he knows better than I do, and so we gotta have faith in who God is, not what he does for us. And I'm wrestling with this, and I hope my wrestle and my testimony helps you as you wrestle, because I'm sure the stuff out there that you're believing for, that you're not yet seeing, and I want you to know that God is above your circumstance, and he's better than your outcomes, and he loves you no matter what your life looks like.

Not Faith By Effort, But Including Partnership.

My final thought, and I'm not gonna unpack this for too long, but I would say this, my third point is it's not faith by effort, but it does include partnership. So, faith is a gift from God. We know that it says in the Bible, faith only comes to us because God gives us the gift of faith. You can't conjure up faith. You can't be good enough to have faith. You don't need to earn credits with God. You just need to believe him, and that's it, that's all it is. You know, we've got people running around thinking they've gotta fix things. They've gotta do things. They gotta say prayers in the right way, and if they don't say prayers in

the right way, God can't move. That's absolute rubbish. God moves even when we don't pray. God moves because he's working in our lives. But I would say this, so it's not faith by your effort, but it does include your partnership. Because it says in Hebrews eleven verse six, it's impossible for us to please God without faith, and anyone who wants to come to must believe he exists, and he rewards those who seek after him. And so in this I'm wondering what my journey looks like. I'm thinking, well, do I have to do more to get what I want, or what I expect to be the outcome? But do I do less? Do I lean back into my confidence that God loves me, he's good all the time, and he knows better than I do what the pathway should be for me? So do I do more? Or do I do less? and I gotta tell you friends, at this in stage my journey I'm thinking less is better than more, and trust looks like God working sovereignly, so he gets the glory and the credit, not me.

And so, it's not faith by your efforts, but it does include your partnership. It means reaching out your hand to God and saying, God, you're bigger than me, you're bigger than my circumstances, and I want you to, I just hand over to you all my expectations, all my imaginations, all my hopes, all my dreams, and all my preferences for what this would look like. I'd just give it to you, and I trust you, and I stand on the word of God, which is the promise of God, that you are faithful, everlasting, and I rebuke any lie that would say otherwise in my life. And so, I want to kind of leave that there, and I suppose I'm leaving with a question to ponder, and I'm leaving you with the same question, is, what am I putting my faith in? Or who am I putting my faith in?

Because if you're putting your faith in the what? Now this is what I said to myself, last night I said, if you're putting your faith into what you see, then your faith is not in God, it's in the idol, or the hope that you have, the outcome you want, and that's idolatry. And I've got to repent of that, I've got to put idolatry aside, I've got to bow before God and yield to him saying, I'd rather put my faith in who God is, a loving father who surrounds me with his grace and his goodness, his love and his kindness, which is often demonstrated through other people, and I trust him in that, and outcomes be outcomes. But I put my hope in him.

What About You? Faith In What Or Who?

And so my challenge to you is, what are you putting your faith in? Or who are you putting your faith in? And faith is a journey, and I'm enjoying it. I'm enjoying it, but it's not going the way I planned, but that's okay, I'm OK with that. So, I really want to leave this with you. I wanna just bless you in the name of Yeshua, the God who saves us, and if you don't have a personal relationship with God at this stage in your journey, by the time you've listened to this podcast, I would hope that you would be searching for ways to find a doorway that you can walk through, that would help you to have a relationship with God. Because Jesus wants to be your friend, and if I can help you with that then reach out to me. Find me on whatever channel you found this through, you'll be able to find your way back to the full thread. Follow it back and you'll find me, and I'd love to have a coffee with you and talk about it some more. But in the meantime, enjoy your journey of faith. God is good, always good, and may you see his goodness around you every day. May God richly bless you as you discover more about who he is and who you are in partnership with him. Take care and I look forward to catching up with you on this channel sometime soon.