

INDISPENSABLE INGREDIENT #2 FOR TRANSFORMATION—FAITH

With the exception of **one** sermon, I've spent **the whole year** so far talking about our **need to grow** in Christ-likeness after we become a child of God—and **how we go** about doing that. In one sense, it is kind of like **growing a garden!**

Let's suppose that this year—for the first time in a **long** time—or maybe the first time in **your life**—you decide to have a garden. **How** would you go about starting one?

I'm by no means an expert, but there are some obvious "common sense" things you would need to do **after you picked** a good spot.

1) First, you start by **removing the big stuff**, right? You would need to cut down **trees** (if there were any) ...and remove **brush** (if there was any) ... and get rid of any **big rocks** that might be in the spot you want to plant your garden. Then you would have to **break up the sod**—the top layer of the ground—with a plow, rototiller, or shovel. After that, you'd have to **remove the roots** of the trees...and brush...and grass...and weeds—and any more rocks you might find under the topsoil.

2) Second, you would probably have to do some more rototilling—or raking—of the dirt to break it into even smaller "pieces"—if that's the right word—before you do the actual planting.

3) Third, you would probably want to **add** some kind of **fertilizer**.

What comes next? **Planting the seeds**—or plants—that you want to grow in your garden, right?

4) Then what do you do—besides **watering** when needed? **Nothing**—you simply **wait!**

You—physically—**cannot do anything** to make the seeds **germinate**. What does "germinate" mean? It is the fancy name for **the process** whereby a seed "dies to itself" so that the life **within it** can come out! God **put** "life" in the seed—and God will **bring life out** of the seed!

You don't have to **understand how it works** for it to happen...and you don't have to **"talk"** to your seeds to make it happen—and you don't even have to know **how to spell** "germinate" for it to happen! It just happens! Jesus Himself mentioned this in a parable. Mark 4:27 "...and the seed should spring and grow up, he [the planter] knoweth not how."

Trick question (sort of): Do you have to **have faith** for the seed to germinate and sprout a plant?

Depends on how you **define faith**, right?

--You have to believe that the **packet** is labeled properly, right? Most people do not **stand by the seed rack**, look over the packets, and ask themselves, 'I wonder if they **really have** bean seeds in there?'

--And you have to believe that the seeds **you plant** will actually **produce plants**, or you wouldn't **waste your time** planting seeds in the first place!

--But...you **don't have to be** a born-again, blood-bought **child of God** to grow a garden! Atheists...and false teachers...and idol worshippers...and Satanists...**can plant seeds...that turn into plants...** that eventually **bears the fruit—or vegetables**—of the seeds that they planted...**just like us!**

--But **they** can't make it happen—just like **we** can't make it happen! So—without realizing it—they are **depending on God** to do what **only God can do**—even though they **deny His existence** or outright **hate Him!**

Might be a good way to start a conversation about God with someone, right?

So what does all this have to do with **Christian growth**? No illustration is perfect, but I'm sure you can see several applications. Imagine our heart—and life—as **the garden**. If we are going to grow spiritually, we need to first **put off** the "big" sins—the trees and brush and big rocks out of our life; then the "smaller" sins—the grass...and roots...and weeds and smaller rocks.

Repentance—the **recognition** of sin...with **sorrow** for sin...and a desire to **turn from sin** and **live for God**—does what a rototiller does. It **softens the soil of our** heart and prepares it for the seed.

The seed, of course, is the **Word of God**. But... we need to "plant it" in our hearts more **than once**, don't we? If we want "year-round" **growth**, we need to **plant the seed** of the Word "year-round"—and do year-round **fertilizing and watering!**

But we also need **faith!** We **need to believe that God** is going to use what He asks **us to do**—**continually plant the seed of the Word** and keep our hearts tender by **living a life of daily repentance**—to actually **change us** and **produce the fruit of the Spirit** within us!

With that as a rather lengthy introduction, please take your Bibles and turn to Romans 4. This morning, we are going to follow a similar outline as the one I used last week.

First, we are going to look at...**1. The definition of faith**

Hebrews 11—what many refer to as “The Hall of Faith”—has a **couple of** definitions of faith that we’ll look at in a minute. I had us turn to Romans 4 because I believe these verses give us the **easiest-to-understand** definition of faith. Romans 4 focuses on the faith of Abraham—and Abraham is the one being referred to in **vs 19**. Notice what it says: “And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb:”

--**Why** is Abraham’s age—and Sarah’s womb—mentioned? Because the promise referred to in the next verse was that he—at the age of 100; and Sarah—at the age of 90—would be having the son that God promised them 25 years earlier!

--**Now vss 20-21**. “He [Abraham] staggered not at the promise of God [that they would have a child] through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being **fully persuaded that**, what He [God] had promised, He [God] was able also to perform.”

Faith, then is 1) the belief that God **will do** what He says He **will do**—even if it is humanly impossible! 2) But...faith is more than that. It also is believing that what God says He **has done**, He really has **already done!** **Hebrews 11:3** “Through faith we understand that the worlds **were** [past tense] framed [meaning created; formed] **by the word of God**, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.”

Why do we believe God created—out of nothing—the heavens and earth in six literal days? Because God tells us He did!

So...faith is believing that what God says **will** happen, will indeed happen. And faith is believing that what God said **happened in the past**, did indeed happen in the past!

And...3) faith is believing that what **God has declared as truth** is indeed truth!

Why do we believe we need to be **born again** to go to heaven? Because Jesus told Nicodemus that in **John 3:3** “...Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he **cannot see** the kingdom of God.”

Why do we believe that **Jesus is the only way** for us to get to heaven? Because Jesus said that in **John 14:6!** “I am the way, the truth, and the life: **no man cometh** unto the Father, but by me.” Rest assured, you will not be the **first** exception!

Why do we believe that our **good works** will not get us to heaven? Because God says they won’t! **Ephesians 2:8-9** “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and **that not of yourselves**: it is the gift of God: ⁹ **Not of works**, lest any man should boast.”

So—putting these thoughts together—faith is being convinced that **what God says is true**...and what He has **pronounced was done** in the past has already happened...and what He **has promised will happen** in the future will indeed happen!

Or...we can shorten it up to this: ‘God **said** it—that **settles** it!’

Next, let’s consider...**2. The declaration that faith is required for sanctification**

Take your Bibles and turn now to the book of Galatians. We know God wants us to “work at” living a life that is pleasing to Him. We learned from **II Corinthians 3:18** that we are to **behold God** in His Word—with a **desire to obey** what we see in God’s Word—and the Holy Spirit **changes us**.

We also learned that we are to **put off** our old way of living—by not “feeding the dragon”—and **put in** the Word of God so our mind is renewed—and **put on** a new way of living. And last week, we learned that God wants us to **live a life of humility and repentance** because He resists the proud—but gives grace to the humble! “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God...” it says in I Peter 5:6.

But how does **faith** fit into all this? In one sense, I already mentioned it: We **need to believe that God** is going to use what He asks **us to do—continually plant the seed of the Word** and keep our hearts tender by **living a life of daily repentance**—to actually **change us** and **produce the fruit of the Spirit** within us!

There's more to it than that, though. We are called to **live a life of faith**—not just have faith about spiritual growth! Notice what it says in Galatians 2:20. We've looked at this verse before from angle of "death to self," but Paul also points out the **faith** aspect. Galatians 2:20 "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live **by the faith** of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me." I'll come back and try to explain what Paul means to "live by faith" in a little bit.

Now look at Galatians 3:2-3. We've looked at these verses before, too.

Galatians 3:2. "This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" 'How is it' Paul asks, 'that the Holy Spirit came to indwell you?' In other words, 'How were you **saved**: by **works**... or by **faith**?' The answer, of course, is **by faith**!

Galatians 3:3. "Are ye so **foolish**?" He wasn't calling them forgetful—and he wasn't calling them uninformed. He was basically saying, 'You know better—but are making a foolish choice regarding what to believe!'

--"...having **begun in the Spirit**..." Here Paul himself answers the question he had just asked them in verse 2 about how they had received the Spirit! Why was he answering his own question? Probably to make sure they couldn't accuse him of not "spelling it out" to them!

--"are ye now made **perfect** [meaning complete, mature] by the flesh [meaning self-effort]?" The implied answer is obviously "No!"

So Paul is saying we are **saved by faith**—not works—and we **live our Christian life** by faith—not works.

Now look at Galatians 3:11 "But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith." Paul here is quoting Habakkuk 2:4. He does the same thing in Romans 1:17. And the writer of Hebrews does the same thing in Hebrews 10:38.

But is Paul talking about **saving** faith—meaning faith in Christ for **salvation**—or...is he talking about **living a life** of faith after salvation? How can we tell? By looking at the **context**, right? Here it seems to be pointing to **saving** faith...or is it? I would argue that he is talking about "living the Christian life" by faith because that is what he is talking about at the end of chapter 2 and the beginning of chapter 3.

Not only that, what does the verse **say**? Does it say, "The unjust shall become just by faith?" **No; that's not** what it says! It says those that **are just**—meaning **declared right** in the sight of God—are to live their life by faith! We certainly know that to be the case in Hebrews 10:38 because it introduces Hebrews 11—an entire chapter that emphasizes **living** by faith!

And speaking of Hebrews 11, we have verse 6 which is familiar to many of you. **Hebrews 11:6** "But **without faith it is impossible to please Him**: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." I think you'd agree that this is referring to **more than** saving faith. It has to do with **living a life** that is pleasing to God—and seeking to know and do His will.

Lastly, let's consider... **3. The development of faith**

How—in a practical sense—do we **depend on God** to work in us to grow us at the same time we are **diligent** in doing our part? I am by no means an expert, but God has been patiently growing and teaching me over the last few months. I mentioned a while back it is like having "spiritual cataract" surgery whereby I am **seeing something better** than I've ever seen it before!

Please know that I'm going to be talking quite a bit **about myself** for the rest of the sermon. I'm not a big fan of doing that, but in this case, it is the best way I know of to bring these concepts from mere "theory" to being **relatable and practical**.

The first thing we need to do to live a life of faith is to... A. Renounce dependence on ourselves

Can you live a life of dependence **on God** if you are depending on **yourself**? Obviously not!

I mentioned a few weeks ago that I've been reading a number of books and one quote—among many—that kind of “grabbed me by the nape of the neck” was this: “If living the Christian life is a burden to you, that is a clear revelation that you are **dependent on the flesh**” (*Engine Truths*, John R. Van Gelderen, pg 41).

It wasn't so much that the **Christian life** had become a burden to me—I'm being extremely transparent here—it was that the **Pastor life** was becoming a burden to me! **Why?** Two reasons.

1) First—like Martha—I was “cumbered about much serving.” Without getting too detailed, my mind was filled with thoughts like: “I **have** to do “a, b, and c.” And I **should** do “d, e, and f.” And **my wife wants** me to do “g, h, and i.” But I **want** to do “j, k, and l!” And this self-imposed pressure led me to be crabby—and often times impatient—with my wife. Sadly—on more occasions than I care to admit—Louise would come into my office to tell me something and her parting words would be, “Why do you always make me feel like **you're annoyed with me** when I come in here?” And some of you thought I was a good husband!

2) A second reason my “Pastor life” was becoming a burden was this: I was **depending too much** on me—even though I knew better! I've memorized verses like:

John 3:30 “He must increase, but I must decrease.”

--And **John 15:5** “...without me ye can do nothing.”

--And **II Cor 3:5** “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; **but our sufficiency is of God;**” But even though I **knew better** than to depend on me, I was still **depending on me!**

--I did my best to get my **sermons** “just right;”

--And I tried hard to **counsel people** “just right;”

--And I when I **witnessed to people**, I tried hard to do that “just right,” too!

But then God opened my eyes to that fact that if I was **counting on me** to do something “just right,” I was **not counting on Him!** So—in a way that I cannot necessarily put into words—God has enabled me to **renounce**—or at least greatly **decrease**—my desire and tendency to depend on me.

What did that change look like for me? Here's one tangible **example**. I have a daily Bible reading schedule that I follow—and a prayer list that I use for Monday through Saturday. Before—when I was depending too much on me—I would skip my Saturday reading (and sometimes even Friday) and “catch up” on Sunday. And often times the people I prayed for on Saturday would get skipped, too! After all, I told myself, I'm literally **studying the Bible all day long**—and praying as I'm studying. But...it wasn't the same—and I knew it! So I made a decision to **forgo extra sermon prep** time in favor of my normal Bible reading and prayer time.

That is one example of what “renouncing dependence on me” looked like for me. It will obviously be different for you. But... in order to live a life of faith, we can't just **renounce dependence** on ourselves.

We also need to... B. Resolve to have dependence on God

How do we do that? And what does that **look like?** In one sense, the example I just gave you demonstrated that I was depending on God to help me get my sermon done in **less time** than I took to get ready before. Here are a couple of other examples.

Again—just being transparent here—I'm pretty selfish **with my time**. I'm not proud of that—I'm just telling you that time is something I **value**—and sometimes too much. About a month ago, my wife and I were at a Pastors and wives meeting on a Monday and Tuesday. On Wednesday, I agreed to help some people for what I originally thought would be just a **couple of hours**. Instead, it took pretty much the whole day! I was really looking forward to “catching my breath” on Thursday morning and woke up to a text from my neighbor lady that runs the Food Pantry. “Any chance you can help this morning? One of our delivery guys is sick.”

My heart sank—and I almost got sick 😊! Just kidding, but I **did not want** to go help at the Food Pantry! But I can honestly say that God “adjusted” my attitude and I said, “Lord, my times are in your hands. If this is what you want me to do, I will do it!” And thankfully—all credit goes to God—I did not have a **complaining/grumbling** attitude about it.

I texted her back and asked if she had any other back-ups she could check with first—and that I would help if no one else was available. She immediately came back with, “Yes, I just heard from so and so and he can help.”

Here are a couple of other examples. I don't "stress out" about trying to get my sermons just right anymore because ***I know I can't***—and God the Holy Spirit is the One who does the ***convincing and convicting***, not me! --I don't wonder anymore if God is working in people's hearts during our Sunday services. Why? Because Isaiah 55:11 says, "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it **shall accomplish that which I please**, and it **shall prosper in the thing** whereto I sent it." --And I don't "stress out" anymore about trying to say the right ***thing***...at the right ***time***...in the right ***way*** to help someone because ***I can't really help them***—but God can!

It is wonderfully freeing—it is liberating—to believe...and feel...and know that even though I can't do certain things—God can do anything!

Romans 15:13 "Now the God of hope **fill you with all joy and peace in believing**, that ye may **abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.**"

--Are you filled with joy and peace? Are you abounding in hope? ***You can't be*** if you are depending on you!

--But...if you renounce dependence on yourself—and resolve to depend on God—you can have joy...and peace...and an abundance of hope!

So what is it that God would have us do?

1. First, take a good hard look at your life. Is it joy-filled—or joy-less? Is it peace-filled—or peace-less?

--Does it abound in hope—or are does it seem hopeless?

--Mark it down—you can't be truly joy-filled...and peace-filled...and abound in hope if you are depending on you! Renounce your dependence on you—and resolve to depend on God!

2. Second—if ***you are not a believer***—a life of joy...and peace... and an abundance of hope is impossible for you to have. You cannot have the peace ***of God*** if you have not made ***with God***.

--How do you make peace ***with God***? By giving up on trying to ***get rid of your own sin***—and coming to Jesus Christ in repentance and faith.