

How do I know if my faith is growing?

If your best friend asked you this question, how would you answer? Have you ever personally wondered about this ageless question?

The answer begins with an understanding of the term “faith.” Faith, as defined by the Bible, has two components: 1) a belief in something that is historically true and 2) a subjective trust in that fact (see the articles: “What is the concept of ‘faith’ in the Old Testament?” at www.Helpmewithbiblestudy.org/9Salvation/FaithOTConcept.aspx and “What are the themes of ‘faith’ in the Old Testament?” at www.Helpmewithbiblestudy.org/9Salvation/FaithOTThemes.aspx). It’s akin to your knowledge of gravity; once you understand and have confidence in that fact, your view of the world takes it into account, and you don’t step off the roof of any building.

With an understanding that your faith is grounded on fact, the meaning of truth is very real and concrete; it is not abstract or subjective as today’s culture would have you believe.

The disciples provide a great example that can help us understand how we know our faith is growing. In this first example, we get a sense that faith is quantified in some manner.

Jesus and the disciples are traveling by boat on the Sea of Galilee when a sudden storm threatens to swamp the boat. The alarmed disciples awaken Jesus beseeching that He save them, which He does by calming the wind and water. But He chastises them about their faith:

He said to them, “Why are you afraid, you men of little faith?” (Matt 8:26)

And He said to them, “Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?” (Mark 4:40)

And He said to them, “Where is your faith?” They were fearful and amazed, saying to one another, “Who then is this, that He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey Him?” (Luke 8:25)

While the disciples witnessed the healing of a leper (Matt 8:1-4) which only God can do (2 Kings 5:1-14) and other miracles (Matt 8:14-17), their conception of the Messiah was lacking. After the storm, they learn another fact about Jesus; the Messiah can control nature (Matt 8:27; Mark 4:41; Luke 8:25).

Faith, however, isn’t just knowledge about the facts of Jesus and His work, but whether you trust in that belief of those facts. Here again, the disciples help us understand how faith grows. It is after Jesus has been crucified and Jewish religious authorities, after learning of the empty tomb, bribed some of the guards to lie that the disciples stole the body of Jesus (Matt 28:11-15). This denial of the truth became the common belief among Jews, and molesting a grave was a serious offense in the first century.

Thus, as early as the first day that the tomb was found empty, the disciples were fearful of the Jews and hid (John 20:19). Despite what the women reported of the empty tomb, the disciples had forgotten about Jesus’ prophetic words of His death and resurrection just a few days earlier:

“A little while, and you will no longer see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me.” Some of His disciples then said to one another, “What is this thing He is telling us, ‘A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me’; and, ‘because I go to the Father’?” So they were saying, “What is this that He says, ‘A little while’? We do not know what He is talking about.” Jesus knew that they wished to question Him, and He said to them, “Are you deliberating together about this, that I said, ‘A little while, and you will not see Me, and again a little while, and you will see Me’? Truly, truly, I say to you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will grieve, but your grief will be turned into joy. (John 16:16-20)

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How do I know if my faith is growing? (page 2)

That same night, the disciples met the resurrected Jesus Christ, and John explicitly points out that Jesus “showed them both His hands and side” (John 20:20). The importance of the historical reality of the resurrection is repeated with the account of doubting Thomas (John 20:25-28). Now the disciples knew without a doubt that their Messiah was truly the Savior whom death has no power over, and because of their trust in that knowledge, they receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (John 20:22) that was promised earlier (John 16:7-15). Thereafter the disciples spoke boldly and evangelized the truth about the gospel. It should be mentioned that the surviving disciples were Believers under the Mosaic Covenant and now, with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, were Believers under the New Covenant.

How does this apply to our lives? It becomes apparent that we should know the historical facts of Jesus Christ and His work of atonement. This emphasis can be seen in the letters of the apostle Paul and Peter:

“So faith comes from hearing and hearing by the word of Christ.” (Rom 10:17)

“... but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter 3:18).

This perspective emphasizes the importance of attending a church that expounds from the Bible and a regular Bible study. Jesus Christ is like gravity. Once you realized the facts and trust in Jesus Christ, it changes your whole view of the world just as it did the apostles. A genuine growing faith in Him leads to a radical transformation of your values and priorities in life.

The process of sanctification is the lifelong discovery of the facts about God, His Son and the Holy Spirit and how we can sanctify ourselves for Them to indwell in us and be in their presence in heaven (Heb 11:1-3). With a growing trust in those facts, benefits, such as the fruits of the Spirit, will manifest (Gal 5:22; 2 Thess 1:3).

And along the way, your understanding may be challenged; you may discover that the concept of righteousness surpasses contemporary views as Jesus teaches with His six antithesis, “You have heard..., but I tell you...” (Matt 5:21-48)

You can see your growth in faith as you grow in biblical knowledge and trust in its absolute truth. With a growing faith, you’ll learn the right view of the world (1 John 5:1-4), moral values and priorities with which you’ll make better decisions in life and be blessed.