

## **FAITH comes by hearing — OPERATOR COPY**

It really has been quite a faith journey for me to be standing here today. So when I was considering what to share with you the only thing God placed in my heart was to talk about faith.

There are three Scriptures on faith that have had a profound influence on my walk with God and I would love to share them with you. The first one—the one that will also be our key Scripture for today—is Romans 10:17:

### **LOWER THIRD — ROMANS 10:17: “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.”**

Now, in Romans 10, Paul is specifically talking about hearing the message of Christ—the good news being proclaimed. But there’s something here that I think is really important for where we’re going today: Faith begins with what we hear about God—not with what we can produce in ourselves. It begins with God revealing Himself—who He is, what He has done, what He has said—and our response to Him. And I wish I could tell you that I understood all of that as a first-year Bible school student. I did not.

What I did understand was that one of our lecturers was absolutely determined that we would never forget Romans 10:17. He was a guest lecturer who taught a short course on... something. I honestly can't even remember what it was. This was more than 20 years ago. But what I do remember is that he was obsessed with Romans 10:17. He would burst into the lecture hall and loudly say: “Okay, first years! Romans 10:17 says: Faith comes by...?” And we all had to shout: “HEARING!” Then he would continue: “And hearing by the...?” “WORD OF GOD!” Somewhere in the middle of the lecture, he would work it in again: “This is true because Romans 10:17 says, faith comes by...?” “HEARING!” “And hearing by the...?” “WORD OF GOD!” And then, of course, he would end the lecture the same way.

After a few weeks of this, we—a bunch of immature, mostly Afrikaans first-year students—the Afrikaans part will make sense in a moment—decided we were going to prank him.

So the next time he burst into the lecture hall with: “First years! Romans 10:17 says: Faith comes by...?” We promptly replied: “COUNTING! Een, twee, drie, vier... vyf...” I know. It was a silly joke.

I recently told this story at one of our Create Team Nights, and I used it to show that when you repeat something often enough, it sticks. Because more than 20 years later, I will never forget: Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.

But when I came back to this story while preparing for today, I realised something. Sometimes I still have the mindset of that immature first-year student.

Because I still try to get to faith by counting. I might not sit there going een, twee, drie, vier, vyf...

But I count. I count what I've done. - I've prayed. I've read my Bible. I've served. I've been obedient. I count how hard I'm trying. - Maybe if I pray a little harder, worship a little longer, believe a little stronger I count the evidence. - What do the circumstances look like? What makes sense? What can I see? I count my feelings. - Do I feel confident? Do I feel peaceful? Do I feel God?

And sometimes, I count the outcome. - I decide what I think God should do, and then I try to have enough faith to make that outcome happen.

[Show closed fist] – vyf

And that brings me to the second verse that has influenced me. This one goes all the way back to when I was very young, sitting in Sunday school.

### **LOWER THIRD — MATTHEW 17:20: 20: “Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.”**

It was presented to me as an encouraging Scripture. But as a ten-year-old, surrounded by quite a few

mountains she desperately wished she could move, I didn't find it encouraging. Because I thought: What is wrong with me? Why can't I muster up enough faith to move even one mountain —even just ever so slightly?  
Later in life, I went looking for answers in the third verse I want to talk about.

**LOWER THIRD — HEBREWS 11:1: 1: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”**

Somehow, I managed to turn that into almost a scientific formula for faith. And if you know me, I'm a language and arts nerd, not a maths and science genius...  
But there I was trying to solve the equation.  
Okay... faith is the substance of something and if you carry it over the evidence... I should be able to figure out how it works And there I was calculating... Counting.

But God is so faithful and He gently nudged me by placing this thought in my heart -  
What if I've been asking the wrong question?  
What if I don't have to somehow work up enough faith? What if I've misunderstood what faith actually is?  
So I went back to the three Scriptures.  
And I started with the word FAITH itself. (language nerd – I should have played to my strengths from the start)

**FULL-SCREEN SLIDE 1 — PISTIS**

I looked at the original Greek word that was translated as faith in all three of these verses. And for all three it was the word Pistis.  
And pistis has a much richer meaning than what we might associate with the English word faith. It speaks to trust, confidence and reliance. This wasn't only a religious word. Pistis could be used in ordinary Greek for trust or confidence placed in another person. It could also appear in contexts involving good faith, pledges or assurances. So there is a relationship of trust involved.

**FULL-SCREEN SLIDE 2 — BIBLICAL FAITH DEFINITION**

Biblical faith is a trusting reliance on God, grounded in who He is and what He has revealed, through which a person believes Him, entrusts themselves to Him, and lives in response to Him.  
And that got me thinking about how trust actually grows in a relationship.

Because when I think about the people I trust most, I don't trust them because I've worked really hard at becoming better at trusting. I trust them because I know them.  
And probably the easiest example for me is my husband.  
Now, my husband and I have been married for almost 21 years, and we have this little inside joke. When he says he's going to do something, he's going to do it. I don't have to remind him EVERY six months. Now, obviously, we're talking about the small things here.  
The picture I want put up on the wall. The door hinge I want fixed. Die swembad wat groen is... Those things might require... a little patience. But when it comes to the things that really matter, there is no one I trust more.  
My husband is genuinely one of the most trustworthy people I know. And I find it really easy to trust him. But here's the thing.  
I don't trust him because I did a twelve-week course on Trusting with Excellence. I didn't read a book called Ten Steps to Trusting Your Man. And I'm definitely not standing here because I have some special spiritual gift of trust. Actually, the reason I find it easy to trust him has very little to do with my ability to trust. I trust him because of his character. I know him. I've walked with him for almost 24 years. I've watched how he responds when life gets difficult.  
I've seen him keep his word. I've experienced his character. Over time, he has shown himself to be trustworthy. And because I know him, I trust him.

And suddenly I had to ask myself:

Could I have been putting all the pressure on the wrong side of the relationship when it came to faith?

Because I had spent years looking at myself. Do I have enough faith? Am I trusting enough?

Why am I doubting? How do I believe harder? Maybe faith was never supposed to be about how good I could become at trusting. Maybe I needed to spend a little less time examining my ability to trust... and a little more time getting to know the One I was trusting.

I needed to seek God's face, I needed to seek to have relationship with Him, rather than focusing my energy on seeking his hand to help me move my mountains.

And that took me back to ten-year-old Christine.

**LOWER THIRD — MATTHEW 17:20: "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move."**

She looked at the verse then looked at the mountains in front of her and felt discouraged. But now, looking back, I can see something that ten-year-old me couldn't see yet.

The God I was trying so hard to have faith in was already being faithful to me. I just couldn't see it. And I certainly didn't understand it. But over the years that I have walked with God, I have watched Him move some of my mountains – most of them much much muuuuch later than what I personally would have wanted, but always at the exact right time. And some mountains remained. But then He gave me the strength to climb them.

Ten-year-old Christine was looking at the wrong thing. She was looking at the size of the mountain. Then she was looking at the size of her faith. But she didn't realise that the thing she should have been focused on – was the size of our very big God

And maybe some of us are doing the same thing today. We look at our mountain. Then we look at ourselves. And then we start measuring.

Do I have enough faith for this? Enough faith for this diagnosis? Enough faith for this marriage?

Enough faith for my child? Enough faith for this financial situation? Enough faith for this disappointment?

We spent so much time looking at our big mountains and our little faith... when we should be looking at our big God. In Matthew 17 Jesus wasn't saying faith doesn't matter. He was challenging the idea that God's power depends on us producing some impressive amount of faith. You are not letting God down by not having seemingly enough faith. The truth is - it is not in our ability to produce the amount of faith it would take to sustain ourselves. We are supposed to be dependent on God. The power isn't in the size of the seed. The power belongs to the God in whom that faith is placed.

And that brought me back to that third Scripture.

**LOWER THIRD — HEBREWS 11:1: 1: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."**

When you read Hebrews 11:1 in the context that the original readers would have had you realise: It wasn't written as a formula. It was written as an encouragement to people going through a difficult time. Because if you read Hebrews 10 the people receiving this letter were being publicly insulted and persecuted. Some had stood alongside others who were suffering. Some had suffered alongside prisoners. Some had even had their property taken from them. These were people who had followed Jesus when following Jesus had cost them something. And now they needed encouragement to keep going.

So the writer tells them:

**LOWER THIRD — HEBREWS 10:35: "Do not throw away your confidence..."**

**LOWER THIRD — HEBREWS 10:36: "You need to persevere..."**

**LOWER THIRD — HEBREWS 10:39: "We do not belong to those who shrink back..."**

And then, straight after that, comes Hebrews 11:1:

**LOWER THIRD — HEBREWS 11:1: "Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see."**

Suddenly that verse sounds very different. This isn't a scientific formula explaining how faith works. This is encouragement for people whose circumstances don't necessarily look like the promises of God. It was saying - I know this is hard. I know you can't see everything yet.

But don't give up. And then in the rest of Hebrews 11 the writer does something interesting. He starts taking us through story after story of people from the Old Testament who trusted God—people who heard God, believed what He said and acted on it, often without knowing how things were going to turn out.

It's a chapter filled with this repeated phrase:

“By faith...” By faith Abel... By faith Noah... By faith Abraham... And on and on it goes.

That's why Hebrews 11 is sometimes called the great “Hall of Faith.”

It is a long line of people being held up as examples of what faith looks like. But if you go and read their full stories they become much more relatable.

Abraham had moments of fear. Sarah laughed when God told her she was going to have a baby.

Moses argued with God. Gideon needed reassurance. David failed spectacularly.

These weren't superheroes. They were ordinary, imperfect people. People with fears. People with questions.

People who didn't always get it right. People like you. People like me. So what made them people of faith?

Look at the pattern. God warned Noah. Noah built. God called Abraham. Abraham went. God made a promise. Sarah trusted. God called Moses. Moses responded.

God spoke. And they responded. Not perfectly. Not without questions. Not without fear.

But they responded.

And there's this beautiful line in Hebrews 11:11 about Sarah:

**LOWER THIRD — HEBREWS 11:11: “She considered Him faithful who had made the promise.”**

She considered Him faithful. Not her faith strong enough. Not herself free from doubt. Him faithful.

And there's something else in this Hall of Faith that I think we sometimes miss.

Not everybody's story ended with their mountain moving.

Hebrews 11 tells us about people who conquered kingdoms, saw promises fulfilled and experienced incredible deliverance. But then it also tells us about people who suffered. People who were imprisoned.

People who were persecuted. People who didn't see the promise fulfilled in their lifetime. And yet Hebrews calls both of them people of faith.

The ones whose mountains moved... and the ones who had to keep walking with God while the mountain remained.

The Hall of Faith isn't about mighty people who managed to have mighty faith. It's a testimony to ordinary people who chose to trust a mighty God.

Because the hero of Hebrews 11 isn't Noah, Abraham, Sarah or Moses.

The hero of Hebrews 11 is God. The God who speaks. The God who calls. The God who promises. The God who leads. The God who remains faithful.

And ordinary, imperfect people hear Him... trust Him... and respond. And that brings me all the way back to where we started.

More than 20 years ago, there was a lecturer standing in front of a room full of first-year Bible school students shouting:

“Faith comes by...?” And we shouted: “HEARING!” “And hearing by the...?” “WORD OF GOD!”

I knew the verse. I could quote the verse if you woke me up in the middle of the night by pouring ice cold water on me. I just don't think I fully understood what it was inviting me into. Because for so much of my life, when it came to faith, I kept looking at me.

And I counted. Een twee drie vier vyf

Faith was ever supposed to look like this.

[Hold clenched fist.]

Because these three Scriptures that have shaped my understanding of faith have slowly taught me something very different.

Faith isn't confidence in my ability to trust God. Faith is confidence in the God I am trusting.

And I'm not saying that we shouldn't put effort into growing in our faith. I'm saying that maybe we've been putting the effort in the wrong place.  
Instead of constantly trying to build up my faith—trying to believe harder, feel more certain, get rid of every doubt—what if I put that energy into seeking the face of God?  
Knowing Him. Spending time in His presence. Listening to His Word. Learning His character.  
Remembering His faithfulness. Because the more I know Him, the more I discover that He can be trusted.  
And something else begins to happen. The mountain doesn't necessarily become smaller.  
It may move. It may not. But whether it moves starts to matter differently, because my confidence was never supposed to be in the mountain moving. My confidence is in the God who is with me in front of it. When I know Him, I can trust Him if He moves the mountain. I can trust Him if He asks me to climb it. And I can trust Him if, for now, He simply asks me to keep walking with Him while it's still there. Maybe growing in faith isn't primarily about becoming better at believing.  
Maybe it's about knowing more deeply the One we believe in. And He is good. He is faithful. He is trustworthy.

The God who was faithful to ten-year-old Christine is still faithful today.  
The God who called Abraham is faithful.  
The God who spoke to Noah is faithful.  
The God who kept His promise to Sarah is faithful.  
The God who met Moses in all his insecurity is faithful.  
And the God who has walked with you through every mountain and every valley is faithful.  
Maybe today the invitation is simply to open your hands.

[Slowly open hand.]

To hear. To trust. And when He speaks... to respond.

So...

Faith comes by...?

[Allow congregation to respond: "HEARING!"]

"And hearing by the...?"

["WORD OF GOD!"]

More than twenty years later...

I think I'm finally beginning to understand what that means.

I would like to pray for us and after that we are going to end with worship And as we go into that last song, I want to give you an opportunity to respond.

Not to me. Not even necessarily to this message. But to God. Maybe you've realised today that you've been counting too. You've been measuring your faith.

Looking at your mountain.

Looking at yourself.

Trying harder.

Holding tighter.

Trying to somehow produce enough faith for what you're facing.

Maybe God is simply inviting you today to take your eyes off your ability to believe... and put them back on Him.

Or maybe, as I've been speaking about this God who is faithful and trustworthy, you've realised: I don't actually know Him like that.

Maybe you know about God.

Maybe you've been around church.

Maybe you've heard these Scriptures before.

But you don't know the God I've been talking about today.

And if something in you is saying: "I want to know this God."

Then respond to that.

And if you would like someone to pray with you—whether you're standing in front of a mountain today, whether you're struggling to trust, or whether you simply want to know this God I've been speaking about—

there will be people available in the Prayer Lounge. They would love to pray with you.