

Another Look at Faith

Various Passages

Part 1 – Reconciling the “Ask” passages

This is a very important doctrine to understand. Unfortunately, it is often misunderstood due to different passages appearing to make different statements. We need to look at the passages to determine what the real story is.

Hint: It's a lot like determining what is required for salvation. We must look at all the passages to find the whole story.

I'll be very strict about selecting passages for this study. Looking at the following nine will demonstrate that they are all incredibly similar, and any of the other possibles miss at least one key component. We'll also stick to the NT to make sure no one doubts the applicability of any OT promise to the NT believer.

Mt 7:7-11 ⁷“Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. ⁸“For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it shall be opened. ⁹“Or what man is there among you, when his son shall ask him for a loaf, will give him a stone? ¹⁰“Or if he shall ask for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? ¹¹“If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him! (Lk 11:9-13 is parallel)

Mt 18:19 “Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven.

Mt 21:22 “And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive.” (Mr 11:24 is parallel)

John 14:13-14 ¹³“And whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴“If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.

John 15:7 “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you.

John 15:16 “You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give to you.

John 16:23-27 ²³“And in that day you will ask Me no question. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you shall ask the Father for anything, He will give it to you in My name.

²⁴“Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask, and you will receive, that

your joy may be made full. ²⁵“These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; an hour is coming when I will speak no more to you in figurative language, but will tell you plainly of the Father. ²⁶“In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I will request the Father on your behalf; ²⁷for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from the Father.

1Jo 3:22 and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight.

1Jo 5:14-15 ¹⁴And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. ¹⁵And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.

(Other passages that were nearly included are:

Ps. 37:4 – OT

Pr. 10:24 – OT

Ph. 4:6-7 – No specific answer to prayer promised.

Ja. 1:2-8 – Context is specifically asking for wisdom, not “anything.”

Ja. 5:14-18 – Context is specifically about healing of sickness, not “anything.”

It's not that these passages are irrelevant, impertinent, or contradictory. I did not want (or need, given the very large number (9) of passages that fit perfectly) to allow anything but the clearest, most incontrovertible passages to be included so that when we reached a conclusion, it would be certain.)

If you read through the 9 passages, you will find the following components that appear in some or all of the verses.

Ask / pray (9)–

Anything / all things (9)–

You will receive (9)–

Believe (1)–

In My name / according to His will / abiding in Him / two agreeing / obeying (7)–

Glorified / Joy be full (2)–

All of these passages have the first three, and eight of nine add either one or the other of the penultimate two.

So can you say that, for instance, Mt. 7:7-8 is the whole promise? If so, how can the other passages be correct that include various qualifiers?

Consider the following comparison table of the focus passages:

Mt 7:7-11	Ask	It shall be given you				
Mt 18:19	Ask	It shall be done for them	Anything	If two of you agree on earth		
Mt 21:22	Ask in prayer	You shall receive	All things		Believing	
Jn 14:13-14	Ask, ask	That will I do, I will do it	Whatever, anything	In My name, in My name		That the Father may be glorified in the Son
Jn 15:7	Ask	It shall be done for you	Whatever you wish	If you abide in Me and My words abide in you		
Jn 15:16	Ask	He may give to you	Whatever	In My name		That you should go and bear fruit
Jn 16:23-27	Ask, ask, ask	He will give it to you, you will receive	Anything	In my name		That your joy may be made full
1 Jn 3:22	Ask	We receive	Whatever	Because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight		
1 Jn 5:14-15	Ask	We have the requests	Anything	According to His will		

Therefore, it would be very unwise not to consider those a part of the complete promise.

“Ask anything according to His will, believing, and you will receive it, that God will be glorified.”

So what does that mean?

Ask / pray (9) – In one case, it is a present imperative, meaning “keep on asking” (Mt 7:7), but the rest are subjunctive, meaning “if / when you ask.”

Anything / all things / whatever (9) – Every one of the “ask” passages we have selected here are unrestricted in their extent. There is no box placed around what we can ask for. (Mt. 7:7 is implicit)

You will receive (9) – Again, each of the nine passages have one and only one possible outcome: that you receive what you have asked for. There is no possibility of an unfulfilled request.

If we were to stop there, we would have a quite an interesting situation. God would be required by promise to do whatever we ask, without limit. Not only is that clearly not right, but it also is not happening, either. We need to look at the “qualifiers” to the promise to get the rest of the story.

Believe (1) – Although having faith is not required to get the blessing of God (it can come as a result of others’ faith), it is required to claim this promise. You must believe God can and will do what you are requesting.

In My name / according to His will / abiding in Him / two agreeing / obeying (7)– “in My name” = In accordance with the authority, character, rank, majesty, excellence of the person. And for His purposes, not yours.

“According to His will” = is the central idea of all of these qualifiers. Therefore, discovering God’s will is necessary before you can claim this promise.

“two of you agree” = Agreeing about what? That you want it? Or God?

“abide in Me and My words abide in you” = knowing His will

Glorified / bear fruit / joy be full (2)– That an outcome to prayer will bring glory to God is an included qualifier in one of the passages. In Jn 15:8, our bearing fruit is said to bring glory to God. That seems to be the consistent idea among the qualifiers of this type.

What doesn’t it mean?

James 4:1-3 ¹What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? ²You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. And you are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. ³You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.

Examples of unanswered prayer in the NT:

Mk 10:35-45 – James and John

2 Cor 12:7-10 – Paul

Mt 26:39 – Jesus

What should it mean for me?

Possible misunderstandings from this lesson:

Please understand that a person's lack of healing does not mean that they have a lack of faith. The mention of Paul and Jesus above should prevent anyone from reaching that conclusion.

Some will resist the idea of a 100% guarantee promise of getting what you pray for because of their experience in the past. As tough as it is to take, it just shows the truth of the promise, that you must find God's will to be able to claim it.

You have to pray until you have answer. You can pray for healing, etc., before you know God's mind, but you just can't claim this promise yet.

To determine God's will so you can know how to pray and line up with the promise, first you have to get yourself to a place where you are OK with the outcome of either possibility. Putting your desires on the altar (Ro 12:1-2) is the first step. Then you can pray and will at some point (sooner the closer you are with God) get a sense in your spirit what God's will is. Then you can start praying with confidence. It is possible you can miss God, but the more time you spend with God and the greater your spiritual maturity, the more likely you will be right. The final step and the point at which you can claim the promise with absolute confidence is when you get a promise from God in the Word.

Part 2 – Faith According to Jesus

Gospels

Purpose:

As I was reading through Matthew, and going through some difficult personal challenges, I noticed Jesus talking often about faith. The thing that really caught my eye was that in some cases, neither the situation nor the outcome seemed to fit within the "box" that I had created for biblical faith. I realized it would be not only useful, but very appropriate to study those passages to see if I could discover more about faith – especially to learn what Jesus thought about it.

There seem to be several different types of situations in these passages, so we'll categorize them and then see what we can learn from each one.

A Starting Place:

Mk 9:14-29 ¹⁴And when they came *back* to the disciples, they saw a large crowd around them, and *some* scribes arguing with them. ¹⁵And immediately, when the entire crowd saw Him, they were amazed, and *began* running up to greet Him. ¹⁶And He asked them, "What are you discussing with them?" ¹⁷And one of the crowd answered Him, "Teacher, I brought You my son, possessed with a spirit which makes him mute; ¹⁸and whenever it seizes him, it dashes him *to the ground* and he foams *at the mouth*, and grinds his teeth, and stiffens out. And I told Your disciples to cast it out, and they could not *do it*." ¹⁹And He *answered them and *said, "O **unbelieving** generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him to Me!" ²⁰And they brought the boy to Him. And when he saw Him, immediately the spirit threw him into a convulsion, and falling to the ground, he *began* rolling about and foaming *at the mouth*. ²¹And He asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. ²²And it has often thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!" ²³And Jesus said to him, "If You can! All things are possible to him who **believes**." ²⁴Immediately the boy's father cried out and *began* saying, "I do **believe**; help my **unbelief**." ²⁵And when Jesus saw that a crowd was rapidly gathering, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of him and do not enter him again." ²⁶And after crying out and throwing him into terrible convulsions, it came out; and *the boy* became so much like a corpse that most of *them* said, "He is dead!" ²⁷But Jesus took him by the hand and raised him; and he got up. ²⁸And when He had come into *the house*, His disciples *began* questioning Him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?" ²⁹And He said to them, "This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer."

See also Mt 17:19-20

The Faith:

Lu 18:1-8 ¹Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart, ²saying, “There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God, and did not respect man. ³And there was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, ‘Give me legal protection from my opponent.’ ⁴And for a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, ‘Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, ⁵yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, lest by continually coming she wear me out.’” ⁶And the Lord said, “Hear what the unrighteous judge ^{*}said; ⁷now shall not God bring about justice for His elect, who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them? ⁸“I tell you that He will bring about justice for them speedily. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find **faith** on the earth?”

Lu 22:32 but I have prayed for you, that your **faith** may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.”

Big Faith:

Mt 8:5-13 ⁵And when He had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, entreating Him, ⁶and saying, “Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering great pain.” ⁷And He ^{*}said to him, “I will come and heal him.” ⁸But the centurion answered and said, “Lord, I am not worthy for You to come under my roof, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed. ⁹For I, too, am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, ‘Go!’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come!’ and he comes, and to my slave, ‘Do this!’ and he does *it*.” ¹⁰Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled, and said to those who were following, “Truly I say to you, I have not found such great **faith** with anyone in Israel. ¹¹“And I say to you, that many shall come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven; ¹²but the sons of the kingdom shall be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” ¹³And Jesus said to the centurion, “Go your way; let it be done to you as you have **believed**.” And the servant was healed that very hour.

Lu 7:9 Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled at him, and turned and said to the multitude that was following Him, “I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great **faith**.”

Mt 15:21-28 ²¹And Jesus went away from there, and withdrew into the district of Tyre and Sidon. ²²And behold, a Canaanite woman came out from that region, and began to cry out, saying, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed.” ²³But He did not answer her a word. And His disciples came to Him and kept asking Him, saying, “Send her away, for she is shouting out after us.” ²⁴But He answered and said, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” ²⁵But she came and began to bow down before Him, saying, “Lord, help me!” ²⁶And He answered and said, “It is not good to take the children’s bread and

throw it to the dogs.” ²⁷But she said, “Yes, Lord; but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.” ²⁸Then Jesus answered and said to her, “O woman, your **faith** is great; be it done for you as you wish.” And her daughter was healed at once.

Interesting that the only two occasions where Jesus was impressed by someone’s faith were both with Gentiles.

What was it about these two that made their faith so impressive? **A certainty of His power. Understanding of the supernatural, unlimited nature of His power. Wouldn’t give up. Humility. Lack of pride. Understanding of authority. The outcome was a given. Recognized who Jesus was.**

Life-changing Faith:

Lu 7:50 And He said to the woman, “Your **faith** has saved you; go in peace.”

Mt 9:22 But Jesus turning and seeing her said, “Daughter, take courage; your **faith** has made you well.” And at once the woman was made well.

Mr 5:34 And He said to her, “Daughter, your **faith** has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your affliction.”

Lu 8:48 And He said to her, “Daughter, your **faith** has made you well; go in peace.”

Mt 9:27-30 ²⁷And as Jesus passed on from there, two blind men followed Him, crying out, and saying, “Have mercy on us, Son of David!” ²⁸And after He had come into the house, the blind men came up to Him, and Jesus ^{*}said to them, “Do you **believe** that I am able to do this?” They ^{*}said to Him, “Yes, Lord.” ²⁹Then He touched their eyes, saying, “Be it done to you according to your **faith**.” ³⁰And their eyes were opened. ...

Mr 10:52 And Jesus said to him, “Go your way; your **faith** has made you well.” And immediately he regained his sight and *began* following Him on the road.

Lu 18:42 And Jesus said to him, “Receive your sight; your **faith** has made you well.”

Lu 17:19 And He said to him, “Rise, and go your way; your **faith** has made you well.”

What do you notice about every single instance above? What made the difference? **They were healed. Their faith healed them.**

Limited Faith:

“Of little faith” (ὀλιγόπιστε) = literally “little of faith. Trusting too little.

Mt 6:30 “But if God so arrays the grass of the field, which is *alive* today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, *will He* not much more *do so for* you, O men of little **faith**?”

Lu 12:28 “But if God so arrays the grass in the field, which is *alive* today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, how much more *will He clothe* you, O men of little **faith**!

Mt 8:26 And He *said to them, “Why are you timid, you men of little **faith**?” Then He arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and it became perfectly calm.

Mr 4:40 And He said to them, “Why are you so timid? How is it that you have no **faith**?”

Lu 8:25 And He said to them, “Where is your **faith**?” And 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?”

Mt 14:31 And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and *said to him, “O you of little **faith**, why did you doubt?”

Mt 16:5-12 ⁵And the disciples came to the other side and had forgotten to take bread. ⁶And Jesus said to them, “Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” ⁷And they began to discuss among themselves, saying, “It is because we took no bread.” ⁸But Jesus, aware of this, said, “You men of little **faith**, why do you discuss among yourselves that you have no bread? ⁹Do you not yet understand or remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets you took up? ¹⁰Or the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many large baskets you took up? ¹¹How is it that you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread? But beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” ¹²Then they understood that He did not say to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. (Mk 8:14-21)

What was true about every instance above? **“Little Faith”** The person missed out because of their lack of faith. **No real expectation. Normal circumstances will continue as they normally do. (But Jesus’ involvement will not be business as usual!)** These people should have had faith – they had been with him for years. The overall summary here is they did not have a real understanding.

Limiting Faith:

Mt 13:53-58 ⁵³And it came about that when Jesus had finished these parables, He departed from there. ⁵⁴And coming to His home town He began teaching them in their synagogue, so that they became astonished, and said, “Where did this man get this wisdom, and these miraculous powers? ⁵⁵Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? ⁵⁶And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this man get all these things?” ⁵⁷And they took offense at Him. But Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his home town, and in his own household.” ⁵⁸And He did not do many miracles there because of their **unbelief**.
Mr 6:5-6 ⁵And He could do no miracle there except that He laid His hands upon a

few sick people and healed them. ⁶And He wondered at their **unbelief**. And He was going around the villages teaching.

These passages reveal a very chilling possibility – God’s ability to perform miraculous works is limited by our unbelief.

The Matthew account reminds me so much of us. They thought they knew everything about Jesus, but the limited amount they did know about Him actually distracted them from being able to get in on what they didn’t.

Theology vs. spirituality. They were purely walking by sight.

Others’ Faith:

Mt 9:2 And behold, they were bringing to Him a paralytic, lying on a bed; and Jesus seeing their **faith** said to the paralytic, “Take courage, My son, your sins are forgiven.”

Mr 2:5 And Jesus seeing their **faith** *said to the paralytic, “My son, your sins are forgiven.”

Lu 5:20 And seeing their **faith**, He said, “Friend, your sins are forgiven you.”

Mt 8:5-13 – Roman Centurion for his servant

Mt 15:21-28 – Canaanite woman for her daughter

Lu 8:41-55, Mt 9:18-25 – Jairus’ daughter

Lu 8:50 But when Jesus heard this, He answered him, “Do not be afraid any longer; only **believe**, and she shall be made well.”

And every other dead person who was raised!

What is the implication? **Pray for others. This is equal in importance and outcome to the individual having faith.**

Outcome of Faith:

Mt 17: 20 ... for truly I say to you, if you have **faith** as a mustard seed, you shall say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it shall move; and nothing shall be impossible to you. (Mk 9:14-29)

Mt 21:21 And Jesus answered and said to them, “Truly I say to you, if you have **faith**, and do not doubt, you shall not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea,’ it shall happen.

Mr 11:22-24 ²²And Jesus *answered saying to them, “Have **faith** in God. ²³Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but **believes** that what he says is going to happen, it shall

be *granted* him. ²⁴Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, **believe** that you have received them, and they shall be *granted* you.”

Lu 17:5-6 ⁵And the apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our **faith**!” ⁶And the Lord said, “If you had **faith** like a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and be planted in the sea’; and it would obey you.

Jn 14:12-14 ¹²“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who **believes** in Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go to the Father. ¹³“And whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴“If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.

All of these verses illuminate us to better understand what Jesus was talking about when He talked about faith.

We’ll put all of this together when we conclude this series with the final installment, “Baby Steps of Faith.”

Part 3 – Baby Steps of Faith

Practically speaking, “we are a group of unbelieving believers.”

(BTW, these baby steps presume a need.)

Baby Step 1 – Have Faithful Friends

Mt 9:2 And behold, they were bringing to Him a paralytic, lying on a bed; and Jesus seeing their faith said to the paralytic, “Take courage, My son, your sins are forgiven.”

Even when we have no faith, having friends full of faith can be our path to see God’s work in our lives.

If we are a person of faith and we know someone who has a great need, we should feel a responsibility to pray for them and have faith for them.

Baby Step 2 – Spend Time with Jesus

John 15:7 “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you.

As our relationship with Jesus gets closer and closer, our faith will increase. As was evident for many in the Scriptures, their being close to Jesus physically was key to their having access to Him and His power. So is it for us spiritually.

Baby Step 3 – Read God’s Word

John 15:7 “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you.

You will find faith, hope, and God’s general will in His Word. The next critical step in your increasing faith is to spend focused, attentive time in His Word. It will increase your faith, develop your understanding, and help you to get to know God’s character and ways. As those things occur, you will be more apt to find and accept His will.

Baby Step 4 – Discern God’s Will in Your Spirit

Col 3:15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.

As you pray about something or for someone, often you will receive a peace in your heart concerning your request. The Holy Spirit will often lead your prayers in a particular direction, and as you become further removed from your own agenda, and also as you become more mature

and experienced in your faith, you'll be able to more and more accurately discern God's will in this way.

Baby Step 5 – Get a Word from God

Every time we see someone in Scripture doing great works of faith, it is in response to having a clear word from God (e.g., Abraham, Samson, Samuel, Moses, Elijah, Jesus, Peter, Paul). In the Bible, that was generally a direct statement from God, Jesus, or one of God's prophets. We have just as sure a word as they through the Holy Spirit. The same Holy Spirit that inspired the authors of Scripture is alive and active inside of you!

Sometimes when you are praying about a matter, typically when it is a very serious need, or one where your faith in God's provision will be challenged, God may give you a special word from His Word about the matter. Since by this time you have already reached and are actively practicing baby step 3, you will be spending lots of time reading the Word. It is very important that you not specifically seek a word. This isn't something we manufacture or even drive. If God chooses to, He'll do it, and often in the last place we'd ever expect. Yes, the general revelation that you receive each time you read the Bible will benefit and encourage you, but when God gives you a special word about a matter, a special revelation, it is a supernatural event that will resonate with your Spirit in a way that gives you a confidence that can be unshakeable if you choose to believe it. Once you receive a word from God in this manner, you will know His will and can confidently claim the "Ask" passages and know you will be receiving what He has promised you.

Baby Step 6 – Ask

Mt 7:7-11 ⁷"Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. ⁸"For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it shall be opened. ⁹"Or what man is there among you, when his son shall ask him for a loaf, will give him a stone? ¹⁰"Or if he shall ask for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? ¹¹"If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him! (Lk 11:9-13 is parallel)

Jas 4:2b You do not have because you do not ask.

Many times we do not have because we do not ask. Sometimes we fall into the trap of "He already knows what I need," which, while certainly true (Matt 6:8), does not negate the command from Matthew 7:7 telling us to ask.

We should always ask God when we have a need, and we should keep on asking, as suggested by the present imperative form of the command, "Keep on asking," and also suggested by the parables Jesus used picturing those who finally received their request due to their persistent asking.

Baby Step 7 – Receive

In every one of the "Ask" passages we covered in part 1, the anticipated next step is to receive what we have requested. If you have a word from God, then the outcome is certain. You only need receive what God WILL give you, be it healing, restoration, provision, or any other need.

In nearly every New Testament example, God's work is immediate. In a few of those cases, the recipient had one or more steps to complete before the miracle was realized.

Important! In some Old Testament and New Testament examples (e.g., Abraham, Elijah, Zacharias) the person did not receive the miracle until long after the promise was given. In those instances, the person was expected to "walk by faith." That meant that they were to behave as if they had received what was promised, even before it was realized. To use the words of Manley Beasley, "You have to act like it is so when it is not so in order for it to be so."