

If you took standardized tests during your elementary days of school you remember just how draining those days were. Hour after hour of intense brain activity, endless instructions, and the little bubbles. The SAT and the ACT were much the same if you took those. One of many feelings may have been, "I wish I was smarter so I would do better."

Your life is really like a series of little tests all strung together, testing your faith. Much like the SAT, ACT, or those standardized tests in your life you probably encounter things you wish you were more prepared for; those times when life seems too overwhelming. How could God ever expect me and my small faith to survive? We want to cry out, "Jesus I wish I were just a little stronger in my faith so I would do better."

The disciples got a crash course in that very lesson in the gospel. They learned from Jesus that life wouldn't always be easy, especially trying to live a life of faith. In fact it would be overwhelming and many times they would become swamped thinking they were done for. Sound familiar? Many times in our lives we are simply forced to say with the disciples...

Jesus increase our faith
We know what we're called to do
We know we don't deserve credit when we do it

"Christians aren't supposed to lie, cheat, or steal." What does it say about Christianity if Christians act like everybody else? Before anyone ever held Christians to this higher standard, Jesus did. **"Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come."** Jesus admitted sin was in the world. It's unavoidable. But don't be the person causing others to fall into sin. And watch out for people who do fall into sin. Jesus says people living by faith are required to do something. **"If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him."** Faith obligates the Christian to step in when someone sins, hear repentance, and forgive them.

My father-in-law is the kind of person who'll put things together without looking at the instructions. He knows he wants the finished product. It's only when he makes a mistake putting it together that he needs the directions. Then he can match up what he made with what he wants. You know what Jesus wants your life of faith to be, but how does that match up with what life you're living? Your sin can cause others to sin. Your children see everything you do. If you fight with your spouse, your children may follow your sinful actions with sin of their own. Wasteful habits at work can lead others into wasting their time and resources too. And when you sin don't throw up your hands and claim you can't do anything about it saying there's no hope for change.

When Jesus laid out his high demands for the person living by faith the disciples quickly realized this was more than they could handle. They looked at their sinful selves and knew they were overmatched. Sin would win every time. Instead of throwing up their hands in defeat they called out for help. **"The apostles said to the Lord, 'Increase our faith.'"** Are you going to fair any better than the apostles? Hardly. Instead of looking to ourselves for answers, or questioning God, we need to be saying Jesus increase our faith.

Jesus knew they didn't need more faith and neither do we. We'd be asking for the wrong thing. Even if you think your faith is small I can still do great things. How? Not because we're so great or so strong. We're staring at ourselves when we need to be staring at the cross of Christ. Quit looking at your faith and look again at God's love for you in your Savior. The size of your faith doesn't matter because your faith always has an object, that object is Jesus. God's unmatched strength is the power sufficient for whatever you need. As Habakkuk said, **"The righteous will live by his faith."** A faith powered by Christ allows you to stand up to sin. Forgiveness from Jesus allows you to forgive others their sins. The cross of Christ urges you, strengthens you, brings about change in your life of faith. Your faith sustained by God's power can do anything because it's not you doing it, but God doing it by grace through you.

I don't ever remember coming home from school and hearing my parents thank me for attending classes or doing my homework. There was an expectation I would, but I never received recognition for it. Why would I or why would you? We know going to school is what we're expected to do. The disciples were trying to live their life of faith and looking for recognition for doing it. Jesus told his disciples what was expected. Live your faith knowing you don't deserve credit when you do it.

On the golf course it's the person with the cart of snacks. Baseball stadiums have the vendors who walk up and down the aisle. You expect to see these individuals selling. What you don't expect is to hear them receiving a lot of praise from their managers for doing their job. You don't get praise for doing what you're supposed to be doing. Jesus wanted the disciples to see themselves like the servant in his story much like that stadium vendor. They were simply doing their job. They shouldn't expect special credit, merit, or ribbons and streamers to celebrate what they were doing. It was what they were asked to do. They worked as servants of the Lord, and servants serve.

Sit at the table once quietly eating your meal and wait to see if mom and dad say something like, "Thanks for not throwing your food up against the wall." I'm thinking it won't happen. Do your schoolwork for tomorrow and wait to see if the teacher calls you forward for a round of applause because you did your homework. I think you'll wait a long time. Parents, when was the last time your kids thanked you for providing a home or food? Probably still waiting. And it's worse in our relationship with God. We want recognition for a job well done. We think we've earned payment for our actions. But is that what we really want? Do we want God to pay us for what our actions deserve?

We're slaves. **"Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do?"** Don't be expecting reward. God doesn't owe us, he owns us. He created us and set the commandments over us every minute of every day for our entire lives. We belong to him, not as slaves destined to a life of hard work and punishment. Rather we're his because God redeemed us. He bought us with Christ's blood. He brought us to faith making us his own by giving his life for us. We owe God our very life. We're unworthy servants who still see God's mercy. He forgives our sins and washes us clean. God loves even when we don't deserve love.

So be what you are, a person who lives by faith in Christ. **"So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'"** Good works aren't optional in your life of faith. For the Christian good works are necessary. Love for neighbor in all their difficulties, help for those needing it, providing for family, raising children, and offering time and money. It isn't optional, but it isn't earning us anything either. You simply do what you owe to the one who saved you by grace. He redeems you, sustains you, and loves you.

How cool would it be to tell a tree to fly out of the ground and be planted in the ocean? How cool would it be to move mountains just by saying it? Impressive? Yes. But your faith already can move mountains and trees. It's not an increase in faith you need, it's an increase in your focus on Christ. Stop gazing at your faith wondering why you seem to fail so often. Instead gaze at Christ and be strengthened. Jesus, increase our faith to do what you would have us do, look to you for our joy and comfort. Increase our faith to know what we do earns us nothing but is what we owe to the one who has given us everything in love.