

Sermon Notes

Practical Lessons for Understanding the Word of God



Why Do We Waver in Our Faith?

KEY PASSAGE: James 1:1-8 | **SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES:** Deuteronomy 31:6 | Luke 6:38 | John 8:44; 16:13
Romans 8:28 | Ephesians 2:8 | Philippians 4:19 | Hebrews 13:5 | 1 John 1:9

SUMMARY

Faith is essential because it's required for our salvation.

However, even after accepting Christ, believers are to continue living by faith. Some of us may have great faith while others have only a little. But we can also be characterized by wavering faith—up one day, down the next. Genuine faith is the confident conviction that God will do what He promised. However, if we take our eyes off Him and start looking at our circumstances, our confidence in Him could start to wobble. We will all experience situations like this because the Lord tests our faith in order to make it stronger.

SERMON POINTS

The short book of James contains practical advice for those whose faith fluctuates because of difficult circumstances (1:1-8).

When we start doubting, we're driven and tossed about like the surf of the sea. James says a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways and should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. To be double-minded is to go back and forth in our thinking. We may begin with strong confidence in God, but as time goes by and the difficult situation continues, we may start to doubt that He will do what He's promised.

Doubting and questioning are not necessarily the same thing. Questioning is seeking to gain further information or understand whether we're accurately

hearing from the Lord. Doubting, on the other hand, involves believing what we think, see, or feel rather than what we know God has said. It's natural for us to question or doubt when we're suddenly overwhelmed by a distressing event. The Lord understands our struggle and wants us to come to Him with our pain and confusion. We may have to take time to pray, listen, and evaluate before we know what He's saying. Sometimes God has to sift our thinking by reminding us of His truth or His faithfulness to us in a similar situation.

Why do we doubt?

Even if we've trusted the Lord for many years, certain conditions may cause our faith to waver.

■ **A situation goes against our human reasoning.**

A good example of this is Peter's experience of walking on the water. He started out confident, but as soon as he looked away from Jesus and saw the waves, he started thinking humanly—*people can't walk on water*—and his faith faltered. We are just like Peter when we know what God has said but try to add our reasoning to His commands. For instance, if we give part of our income to the Lord, it seems like we won't have enough. But Jesus said, "Give, and it will be given to you" (Luke 6:38). Anytime we rely on our own logic, we'll miss God's best for our lives.

■ **We allow feelings to overcome our faith.** If the Lord calls us to do something that seems impossible or unreasonable, we can be certain that He will equip us for it. However, if we let feelings of fear, inadequacy, or unworthiness cause us to doubt His promise, we could miss the opportunity through disobedience. Because the Holy Spirit lives within

us, we can live a supernatural life in His power if we'll just obey Him. We're called to live by faith, not fear.

- **We don't see God in certain circumstances.** The Lord has promised to take care of us, but it may not be in the way we want. We may think that the Lord couldn't possibly be in the midst of a difficult or painful situation, but He is. According to Romans 8:28, He promises to work all things for our good if we love Him and are called according to His purpose.
- **We listen to negative counsel.** When we're trying to discern the will of God, we must be careful whom we ask for guidance. Some friends might offer to help us seek the Lord's direction through prayer, but others may simply tell us what we want to hear or what they'd do in that situation.
- **We focus on the circumstances.** Little problems can become huge when they dominate our thoughts. That's why we must always consider every situation in the light of our great God. He can handle anything and everything. Worry and fretting demonstrate that we do not trust the Lord.
- **We may be ignorant of God's ways.** When Lazarus fell ill, Mary and Martha called for Jesus because they believed He could heal their brother. They thought they knew how God should work in the situation, but Jesus had something greater in mind. He delayed coming in order to raise Lazarus from the dead. Spiritually speaking, we must ignore our watches and calendars because God's timing is not ours. He alone knows what to do, and when to do it. His delays do not mean He's forgotten us.
- **We might feel guilt over past sins.** Sometimes we doubt that God could possibly forgive us for something we did in the past. Even after we've confessed it, we still carry a heavy load of guilt. The problem is one of unbelief because 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." As believers, there's nothing we have to do to earn His forgiveness since Christ paid for all our sins on the cross. Although we may still

have to deal with the consequences, our guilt has been removed.

- **We could be listening to the devil.** He's always trying to deceive us and put doubts in our minds so we won't trust the Lord (John 8:44).

How do we deal with doubts?

When we face situations that cause our faith to falter, we should ask ourselves the following questions:

- Where do these doubts come from?
- Has God ever failed me in the past?
- Didn't the Lord promise to meet all my needs (Phil. 4:19)?
- Did He give me the Holy Spirit to enable me to believe Him and do whatever He requires of me (John 16:13)?
- Did He not promise to be with me at all times (Heb. 13:5)?
- Is anything too difficult for God?
- Will my unbelief cost me a lifetime of regret?

RESPONSE

- How would you describe your current faith? Is it strong, weak, or wavering? Is anything presently causing you to doubt God? If so, what can you do to strengthen your confidence in Him?
- What kinds of situations typically tempt you to doubt the Lord? What Scripture passages address these issues?
- Have you ever faced a fork in the road that determined your future? If so, did you believe God or allow your reasoning or feelings to govern your choice? What happened as a result of your obedience or disobedience?

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