

Understanding Faith
Part Three — Persevering Faith

- *The Greek word “little faith” (ὀλιγόπιστος - oligopistos) is used five times in the New Testament and four of those occurrences are found in the Gospel of Matthew.*
- *In each occurrence Christ showed His disciples areas where their faith still lacked the depth and maturity necessary to withstand the rigors, challenges, and trials of life.*
- *Our faith may be stronger in specific areas, but Jesus wants our faith to grow and mature in every area of our lives.*
- *Each time Jesus confronted them with their weak faith He included the rebuke, “O you of little faith.”*
- *Jesus’ motivation for revealing their “little faith” was not to humiliate or discourage them, but to help them to recognize aspects of their faith that needed strengthening.*
- *He wanted them to develop an unshakeable faith, enabling them to stand strong in the face of whatever trials, hardships, or uncertainties life would bring.*
- *From the four times when Jesus said, “O you of little faith” in the Gospel of Matthew, we can identify four things that attack our faith and God’s strategy to overcome them.*
- *There are four aspects to faith and each one releases God’s Glory:*
- *Creative Faith – This is the power of faith – the Glory of His Name*
- *Doctrinal Faith – This is the truth of faith – the Glory of His Word*
- *Persevering Faith – This is the strength of faith – the Glory of His Life*
- *God Conscious Faith – This is the reality of faith – the Glory of His Presence*
- *The first time Jesus rebuked His disciples with the words, “O you of little faith” is found in Matthew 6:30 and it relates to Creative Faith.*

³⁰Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

- *Through Creative Faith, God’s provision is released in our lives whether through miracles, healings, or His divine supply for those areas where we are experiencing lack.*
- *Creative Faith releases the Glory of His Name. As we testify to God’s faithfulness and miraculous provision to those around, God’s Name is glorified in the sight of both believers and unbelievers.*
- *The opposition that comes against Creative Faith is error of vision.*

- *Error of vision occurs when we turn our eyes away from God and His divine provision and focus on our lack or the apparent impossibility of the circumstances we face.*
- *It is evident from reading the context of the reproof “O you of little faith” in Matthew, Chapter six, that it contains a warning against worrying. Of the six times the Greek word for worry is used in the Gospel of Matthew, five of those occurrences are found in Matthew, Chapter 6, in relationship to “O you of little faith.”*
- *Worry is the enemy that attacks us so we are unable to operate in creative faith. Worry causes us to forget God’s faithfulness and to focus on our lack.*
- *Worry paralyzes us so we are unable to step out in faith and trust God for His provision.*
- *The second aspect of faith is Doctrinal Faith.*
- *The opposition that comes against doctrinal faith is error of doctrine.*
- *Doctrinal Faith releases the Glory of His Word.*
- *When we understand and correctly apply God’s Word to our lives, we demonstrate the glory of His Word so the entire world can witness the life changing message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ at work within us.*
- *Wrong doctrine always brings confusion and disgrace to God’s Word.*
- *In Matthew, Chapter 16, Jesus warned His disciples of the wrong doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees with the words, “Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.” (Verse 6).*
- *However, His disciples misunderstood Jesus’ warning and thought He was speaking about bread. Then Jesus rebuked His disciples with the words “O you of little faith.” (Verse 8).*
- *Finally, Jesus’ disciples understood that He wasn’t warning them about bread, but the error of doctrine which had corrupted the Jewish religious leaders.*

“Then they understood that He did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” (Matthew 6:12).

- *The leaven of doctrine that Jesus was referring to is anything that corrupts, misconstrues, or adulterates God’s Word.*
- *Pure and “unleavened” doctrine is always Christ centered.*

John 12:32 NKJV

³² **And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself."**

- *Unleavened doctrine will always draw people to Christ.*
- *The third aspect of faith is Persevering Faith.*
- *Persevering Faith results in the Glory of His Life as the life of Jesus is manifest through His followers who are consistently led by the Spirit and not by the flesh.*
- *When a believer lacks Persevering Faith it results in error of lifestyle.*
- *Matthew, Chapter fourteen contains the third rebuke, "O you of little faith" which speaks of Persevering Faith.*
- *The story dealing with Persevering Faith is the one where Peter steps out of the boat to walk on the water.*
- *Previous to this story, Jesus fed the five thousand with five loaves of bread and two fish.*

Matthew 14:16-20 (NKJV)

¹⁶ **But Jesus said to them, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."**

¹⁷ **And they said to Him, "We have here only five loaves and two fish."**

¹⁸ **He said, "Bring them here to Me."**

¹⁹ **Then He commanded the multitudes to sit down on the grass. And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed and broke and gave the loaves to the disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitudes.**

²⁰ **So they all ate and were filled, and they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments that remained.**

- *In the story of the feeding of the five thousand we find examples of both Creative Faith and Doctrinal Faith.*
- *First, there was a lack of provision. The people followed Jesus into a deserted place and spent the entire day with Him. In the evening they found themselves without food.*
- *While Jesus' disciples recognized the needs of the people, they failed to recognize that God was able and willing to supply their needs.*

"When it was evening, His disciples came to Him, saying, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is already late. Send the multitudes away, that they may go into the villages and buy themselves food."'" (Matthew 14:15).

- *We see an example of Creative Faith in operation as Jesus took five small loaves and two fish, looked up to His Father in Heaven, prayed, and then distributed them until all were fully satisfied with the provision they miraculously received.*

“He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed and broke and gave the loaves to the disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitudes. So they all ate and were filled.” (Matthew 14:19b-20a).

- *In this story we also see an aspect of Doctrinal Faith. Through Jesus’ deep concern for the welfare of the people and His supernatural provision He provided insights into the loving and faithful nature and character of God.*
- *God meets our needs as we faithfully turn to Him in prayer.*
- *Doctrinal Faith is also seen as Jesus is revealed as the source and central figure of God’s provision. Jesus was the One who “took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed and broke and gave the loaves to the disciples.”*
- *Although the disciples distributed the loaves and fish to the people, they only gave what they had directly received from Jesus’ hands.*
- *When we give to others, we always need to remember that what we give comes directly from God. If we fail to seek God for wisdom or provision we will find ourselves unable to truly meet the needs of those around us.*
- *Doctrinal faith is remembering everything we receive is because of what Jesus Christ has done for us and comes from Him and is for His glory.*

Matthew 14:21–31 (NKJV)

²¹Now those who had eaten were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

²²Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away.

²³And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there.

²⁴But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary.

²⁵Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea.

²⁶And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, “It is a ghost!” And they cried out for fear.

²⁷But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, “Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid.”

²⁸And Peter answered Him and said, “Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.”

²⁹So He said, “Come.” And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus.

³⁰But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, “Lord, save me!”

³¹And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?”

Matthew 14:21–31 (NKJV)

²¹Now those who had eaten were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

²²Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away.

- *It is interesting to note that immediately after the great miracle of the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus “made” His disciples get into the boat.*
- *The Greek word translated as “made” means “to necessitate, compel, constrain.” It indicates the urgency that motivated Jesus as He forced His disciples into the boat and it also implies their resistance to leaving.*
- *The disciples were still enjoying the “after glow” of the miracle they had just witnessed and actively participated in.*
- *Possibly the disciples didn’t want to leave but sought to remain and enjoy seeing the awe of the people and the misplaced admiration the people had for them.*
- *Jesus knew it was essential that His disciples get into the boat so they would not be puffed up by the praises of men, but also to provide them with a realistic evaluation of their own spiritual maturity and the true extent of their Persevering Faith.*
- *It is easy to overestimate our spiritual maturity and strength of character when things are going well, but the true litmus test of Persevering Faith comes when we face disappointments, opposition, or adversity.*

Matthew 14:23

²³And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there.

- *Jesus’ response to the wonderful miracle and the success that His Father had granted Him was not to sit back and rest on His laurels, but to go to a secluded place on the mountain to pray and commune with His Father.*
- *After a Christian receives a wonderful answer to prayer or a glorious victory, they sometimes falter in their faith.*
- *We must be careful that we do not become so satisfied with what we have already achieved or what God has already done that we make no further effort to press into God or seek to further enrich our relationship with Christ.*
- *Jesus’ response, no matter what the circumstances or what had taken place whether easy or difficult, was always to spend time with His Father in prayer.*
- *Jesus always exhibited Persevering Faith and a consistency in His relationship with His Father.*

- *Jesus is the perfect example of Persevering Faith.*

Isaiah 42:4 NKJV

⁴ “He will not fail nor be discouraged, Till He has established justice in the earth; And the coastlands shall wait for His law.”

Matthew 14:24

²⁴ But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary.

- *Jesus forced His disciples into a boat that was headed right into a raging midnight storm.*
- *The place where the true depth of our faith and confidence in Christ is tested and seen is not on “the pleasant and peaceful shores of Galilee” but “in the middle of the raging sea of life when we are tossed by the waves of adversity and buffeted with winds of foreboding circumstances.”*

Matthew 14:25

²⁵ Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea.

- *The fourth watch of the night is between 3:00 am and 6:00 am. We can reasonably conclude that the disciples had been battling the storm for at least nine hours if not longer.*
- *By this time, the disciples would have been emotionally and physically exhausted.*
- *In contrast to the disciples who spent the evening fighting the storm, Jesus who had spent the night in prayer walked calmly toward them on top of the waves of the sea.*
- *Jesus and His disciples were experiencing the same storm, but while the disciples were overwhelmed by the storm, Jesus was able to rise above the turmoil and fear and literally walk above the waves.*

Matthew 14:26

²⁶ And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, “It is a ghost!” And they cried out for fear.

- *The Greek word for ghost used here is φάντασμα “phantasma” and it means “an apparition, a phantom.” It is only used twice in the New Testament—once here in Matthew and once in Mark, both times referring to the same event.*
- *These disciples, who a few hours earlier had been mightily used by God, had been reduced to a babbling superstitious bunch who even failed to recognize Jesus and instead cried out hysterically, “A ghost is after us!”*

- *Their faith evaporated as they found themselves in the midst of the storm.*
- *Although a few short hours before they had experienced Creative Faith and even to some extent Doctrinal Faith, they clearly lacked Persevering Faith.*
- *It is in the midst of the storms of life that Persevering Faith is developed and tested.*
- *When we are fearful and overcome by the circumstances of life we will fail to even recognize that Jesus is with us.*

Matthew 14:27

²⁷But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, “Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid.”

- *Immediately Jesus sought to help them overcome the waves of fear that were swamping their hearts by identifying Himself and exhorting them to be courageous.*

Matthew 14:28-29

²⁸And Peter answered Him and said, “Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.”

²⁹So He said, “Come.” And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus.

- *Peter was the first of the disciples to recover by turning his attention to Jesus.*
- *Peter demonstrated Creative Faith by believing that if Jesus could walk on the waves of the raging sea that Jesus could empower him to do the same. “Lord, if it is You...”*
- *As Peter watched Jesus walk on the raging waves of the storm, his Creative Faith blossomed and he believed that this same Jesus who healed the sick, delivered the demon possessed, and fed the five thousand could empower him to do the same.*
- *Peter also demonstrated Doctrinal Faith by realizing that the power and authority did not lie within himself but with Jesus and His Word. “Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.”*

1 John 5:14-15 NKJV

¹⁴ Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.

¹⁵ And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.

- *Doctrinal Faith is knowing His will by knowing His Word and not being self-willed nor acting presumptuously, but prayerfully acting in accordance with His Word.*

- *Some people mistakenly believe if “I just believe hard enough” then it will happen. However, our prayers and our desires must be in alignment with God’s will and God’s purposes for them to be effective.*

James 4:3 NKJV

³ You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.

- *Peter did not act presumptuously or rashly but looked to Jesus to say the word.*
- *For Peter to be able to step out of the boat and walk on the water required several things to happen.*
- *Jesus had to speak the word, Peter had to hear Jesus speak the word, and Peter had to obey the word.*
- *Peter could only hear Jesus speak the word above the raging storm if his full attention was on Jesus.*

²⁹So He said, “Come.” And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus.

- *Peter literally only needed to hear Jesus say one word—“Come.”*
- *Many times when Jesus speaks it is simple, succinct, and life changing!*
- *Based on just one word from Jesus, Peter’s faith rose up and he stepped out of the boat and walked on the water.*

Peter didn’t just walk on the water but “he walked on the water to go to Jesus.”

- *Peter’s destination was Jesus.*
- *Peter chose to leave the security of what he knew, the boat, and step out onto what appeared to be impossible in the natural, terrifying, and life threatening—the raging sea.*
- *Sometimes we have to leave our comfort zone to follow Jesus.*
- *Peter’s motivation was not a whimsical desire thinking it would be neat to walk on water but a deep stirring and longing in His heart to be a follower of Jesus in every way and fully imitate His example.*

“Therefore be imitators of God as dear children.” (*Ephesians 5:1*).

Matthew 14:30-31

³⁰But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, “Lord, save me!”

³¹And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?”

- *Peter demonstrated Creative Faith by stepping out of the boat even in the midst of a raging sea.*
- *Peter demonstrated Doctrinal Faith as he focused his gaze on Jesus and responded to His word—“Come.”*
- *However, Peter faltered in Persevering Faith as he took his eyes off of Jesus and began to sink.*
- *It wasn't the wind, or the waves, or the water that endangered Peter's life—it was his “little faith.”*
- *Peter stepped out in Doctrinal Faith by obeying Jesus word and was able to experience the miraculous, but he failed to walk in Persevering Faith.*
- *Creative faith can be seen as a sprint while Persevering Faith is like a marathon.*
- *Creative Faith results in the miraculous but Persevering Faith results in faithfulness.*
- *We see three steps as Peter faltered in Persevering Faith:*
 1. *Peter saw that the wind was boisterous.*
 2. *He became afraid.*
 3. *He began to sink.*
- *“For we walk by faith, not by sight.” (2 Corinthians 5:7).*
- *Peter walked on water when he walked by faith, but when “he saw that the wind was boisterous” and walked by sight he became fearful and began to sink.*
- *Even though Peter faltered in his Persevering Faith he still instinctively cried out to Jesus saying, “Lord, save me!”*
- *And of course Jesus being the Saviour saved him—“And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him.”*
- *Even in the midst of our failures and weaknesses Jesus is there to help us. He is just waiting for us to call His name.*

- *However, even while Jesus was rescuing Peter from drowning in the sea, He rebuked him with the words, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?”*
- *Of course there are many ways one could respond to Jesus’ rebuke.*
- *One could respond in self-justification: “The waves, the wind, and the storm were furious. I am only human; of course I was overcome with fear and doubts.” However, such a response magnifies the weakness of the human condition and diminishes the true greatness of Jesus to make us overcomers.*
- *Such a response sets us up to live a defeated life. Self-justification destroys any incentive to grow in our faith, and leaves us anchored in the status quo.*
- *It is our confidence and faith in Christ’s love and faithfulness that enables us to be overcomers by walking in Persevering Faith.*

Romans 8:37

³⁷ **Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.**

- *“O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” The question that Jesus posed to Peter in His rebuke provides us with insight into what causes us to falter in Persevering Faith and fall into error of lifestyle.*
- *When Jesus asked “why did you doubt” He was not implying that doubt was the root cause of Peter’s faith faltering.*
- *In fact, doubt can be an important step on the way to faith. When doubts arise we must decide to either sink in unbelief or look to Jesus and rise to a place of faith.*
- *Jesus was asking Peter to think and consider what had caused him to give in to doubt in the first place so he could avoid the same pitfall in the future.*
- *As Christians we can only walk in Persevering Faith by keeping our eyes firmly fixed on Jesus no matter what is happening around us.*
- *Peter began to be filled with fear and doubt because he took his eyes off Jesus and began to observe and contemplate the storm, the waves, and winds.*
- *As Peter looked at the waves, the terror of the storm totally obscured his view of Jesus. The sheer force of the storm totally blinded him to the reality that Jesus is our help in time of trouble. (Psalm 46:1).*
- *The key to Persevering Faith is abiding in Christ.*

John 15:4-5,7 NKJV

⁴ Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

⁵ "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

⁷ If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.

- *Abiding in Christ is when our hearts are captivated by His love, faithfulness, power, wisdom, and all the wonders of His salvation.*
- *We abide in Christ by falling in love with Him more. As we meditate and consider the revelation of Jesus found in His Word and spend time in prayer sharing our hearts, His faithfulness and love become more real to us.*
- *The opposition that causes a Christian to falter in Persevering Faith and fall into error of lifestyle is distractions.*
- *Distractions cause us to focus on other things which can quickly capture our hearts resulting in us drowning in whatever we are focusing on.*
- *In Peter's case it was the storm raging around him that caught his attention and distracted him from His devotion and focus on Jesus. Peter began to sink into the sea of fear.*
- *However, other things can distract us, for example when we contemplate the uncertainties of the future.*
- *The "what ifs" of life can cause us to sink into doubt and fear. However, Jesus wants us to remember that He is our source of security.*

⁵ Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

⁶ So we may boldly say: "The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?" (*Hebrews 13:5-6*).

- *We may become distracted if we contemplate our past failures.*
- *When we focus on our failures we sink into the sea of regret and shame and become overwhelmed as waves of shame, guilt, and condemnation threaten to drown us.*

Philippians 3:13-14

¹³ Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead,

¹⁴ I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

- *We can become distracted by all the injustice, corruption, and evil that flourish around us and we can become hardened, cynical, and sink into the sea of indifference.*
- *Jesus warns us against becoming cold and indifferent.*

Matthew 24:12 NKJV

¹² And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.

- *We can become distracted by people who have hurt us, betrayed or wronged us. We can harbour unforgiveness and resentment in our hearts. We can sink into the sea of bitterness.*

Hebrews 12:15 NKJV

¹⁵ looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled;

- *Many things can distract us which in themselves are not bad.*
- *We can be distracted by our successes and sink into the sea of pride.*
- *We can be distracted by the riches of this life and sink into the sea of covetousness.*
- *We can be distracted by comfort and pleasures and sink into the sea of lusts and hedonism.*
- *Jesus even warned His disciples not to allow success in ministry to become a distraction. The source of our joy is not to be how successful our ministry is but that Christ has given us eternal life.*

Luke 10:20 NKJV

²⁰ Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.”

- *Our motivation for ministry must never be based on “a need to be needed,” but on the compelling love of Christ.*

2 Corinthians 5:14 NKJV

¹⁴ For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died;

- *We can become distracted when we find ourselves surrounded by pleasant and peaceful circumstances if we rely on our circumstances to be our source of peace instead of Jesus.*

- *The problem with this distraction is that it ill prepares us for the coming storms of life—and storms will come.*
- *If we focus on the sea when it is calm we will become overwhelmed when a storm arises or become unsettled when we observe a few ripples that disturb the apparent tranquility of our immediate circumstances.*
- *However, if our eyes are firmly fixed on Jesus during good times or bad then nothing will be able to shake our Persevering Faith.*
- *The key to Persevering Faith is not to be able to calm the storm or the circumstances around us, but to calm the storm that threatens to rage within us.*
- *When our eyes are firmly on Jesus, no matter what storms may be raging around us, He has promised to give us a peace that passes all understanding.*

Philippians 4:7 NKJV

⁷ and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

- *Sometimes Christians are waiting for Jesus to calm the storm so their inner turmoil will end, but Jesus wants us to look to Him so that we will find the peace that originates from knowing Him.*

Isaiah 26:3 NKJV

³ You will keep him in perfect peace, Whose mind is stayed on You, Because he trusts in You.

- *Persevering faith is living a life of holiness being fully consecrated to Jesus.*
- *Every time we fail it is because we have taken our eyes off of Jesus.*
- *The way we encourage Christians and help them develop Persevering Faith is to point them to Jesus and remind them to keep their gaze and attention fully upon Him and His Word.*
- *When we find ourselves in one of the storms of life instead of begrudging our circumstances or complaining how life is unfair, see it as an opportunity to grow in Persevering Faith and in our relationship with Jesus Christ.*
- *In the midst of the storms of life, picture yourself as Peter, walking hand in hand with Jesus above the waves.*