

Faith from the Heart

[God said,] I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh (Ezekiel 11:19, *KJV*).

Scripture: Ezekiel 11:17-21

Song: “O for a Heart to Praise My God”

Who would take a beating for a favorite shirt? Mike Christian did. But his was no ordinary shirt. With a bamboo needle, Christian—an American prisoner of war in Vietnam—had sewn a rough version of the Stars and Stripes on it. He then hung his makeshift flag in a corner of his cell and, with his patriotic cellmates, would recite the Pledge of Allegiance. When the Vietcong discovered this, they took the flag-shirt away and beat Christian mercilessly. His response? He began sewing a flag on *another* shirt. For Christian, his difficult circumstances couldn't change the love in his heart for his country.

Ezekiel ministered to the Israelite exiles in Babylon. Although God allowed Israel to go into captivity because of sin, He sent Ezekiel with a message of hope. One day, the Lord would gather His people to their land again and give them a new heart—one that would follow God faithfully.

We too may feel knocked down and beaten up by circumstances in life. But God has given us a new heart that can sustain us through any trial. When our hearts are filled with love for God, the faithfulness it produces honors Him.

Father, thank You for a new heart by which I can seek to please You. In Jesus' name, amen.

Faith Through Seeing God Work

[The man born blind] answered and said, Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see (John 9:25, *KJV*).

Scripture: John 9:17-25

Song: “God Will Take Care of You”

God’s timing is perfect . . . even when we don’t see Him working until the last minute. Author Solomon Benjamin Shaw (1854–1941) recounted the story of a poor frontier pastor and his wife who had nothing for their children at Christmastime. Listening to their little daughter’s prayer for a doll for herself and skates for her brothers broke their hearts, as they knew she would be disappointed. The couple began doubting God’s care for them until a knock at the door on Christmas Eve brought an unexpected box of goodies from a church back East—including a doll and skates! Seeing God work in their situation renewed their faith.

After Jesus gave sight to a blind man, this man was brought before the Pharisees for questioning. Despite the Pharisees’ obvious hostility toward Jesus and their disbelief in His deity, the man pointed out the undeniable: Jesus had given him his sight! The Savior’s work in His life gave Him faith that Jesus was who He said.

Discouragement and doubt can easily creep into our lives amid life’s disappointments. Yet when we consider the times when we have seen God’s work in our lives through answered prayer, unexpected blessings, or divine provision, we can more easily entrust our lives to His loving care.

Father, thank You for Your work in my life that encourages my faith. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Trusting God's Directions

Ye shall inherit their land, and I will give it unto you to possess it, a land that floweth with milk and honey: I am the LORD your God, which have separated you from other people (Leviticus 20:24, *KJV*).

Scripture: Leviticus 20:22-26

Song: "Trusting Jesus"

Running out of gas can be a problem—especially at 4,000 feet in the air! My former pastor told of such a harrowing experience as navigator in a large World War II bomber. Returning from a mission, the plane was desperately trying to reach an aircraft carrier before running out of fuel and crashing into the ocean. But thick clouds meant zero visibility, and the commander expressed doubt the navigation equipment was taking them in the right direction. Yet just before expending the last of the fuel, the plane broke through the clouds in sight of the carrier and landed safely. The navigator's directions were right after all!

When God brought the Israelites out of Egypt, He promised them a land flowing with milk and honey. The Lord himself would cast out the ungodly inhabitants so that Israel could walk in obedience to Him without hindrance. Sadly, the Israelites doubted God's plan, fearing the land's inhabitants, and Israel rebelled, consequently spending the next 40 years wandering in the wilderness.

God has given us the Bible as our compass for life. However, sometimes our own notions and ideas may tempt us to doubt His plan. But God's directions can always be trusted to lead us the right way, and He is pleased when we follow Him in faith.

Father, help me to trust the directions You have given me in Your Word. In Jesus' name, amen.

A Heart of Repentance

Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit (Psalm 51:12, KJV).

Scripture: Psalm 51:1-15

Song: “Create in Me a Clean Heart”

Old dogs really can learn new tricks . . . and old politicians can even learn new values! Former Alabama Governor George Wallace (1919–1998) went down in infamy for his hostile defense of racial segregation in the 1960s. However, Wallace, who served a total of four terms as governor, surrendered his life to Christ in the late 1970s, resulting in a complete change of heart on race issues. He admitted he was wrong to support segregation, and he appointed record numbers of Black professionals to important state offices. True repentance resulted in a genuine change.

After Nathan the prophet confronted David about his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah, her husband, David repented of his sin. Psalm 51 records David’s complete confession of his wrongdoing, his plea for God’s forgiveness, and his desire to be renewed in fellowship with the Lord. Although David had to bear harsh consequences for his sin, his true repentance resulted in a genuine change—a contrite and broken heart before the Lord.

True repentance from sin always produces real change in our lives. God is gracious and, when we fall, He is waiting to forgive and restore us. As with David, honestly confessing our sin and calling on God for restoration will result in a changed heart that brings forth what is well-pleasing to God.

Father, help me to truly repent when I sin so that my relationship with You can be restored. In Jesus’ name, amen.

The God of the Impossible

[God] said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, thou knowest (Ezekiel 37:3, *KJV*).

Scripture: Ezekiel 37:1-14

Song: “God Can Do Anything”

Leading elephants over snow-capped mountains may not make sense to us, but it made perfect sense to Hannibal Barca (247–182 BC). The famous commander of Carthage’s army made a daring move to surprise the Romans during the Second Punic War (218–201 BC). He set out to take his army—including dozens of war elephants—from Spain to Italy by going over the dangerous Alps, a route thought impassable. This surprise move helped Carthage win decisive battles against Rome and made Hannibal one of the greatest military strategists in history.

During Ezekiel’s ministry, God showed the prophet a valley full of dry human bones. With this evidence of death all around, the Lord asked Ezekiel whether the bones could live again. To Ezekiel, the question may not have made sense, and he wisely replied that only God could know the answer. By His sovereign power, God brought the bones together, placed flesh on them, and breathed life into the bodies. What seemed impossible was possible with the Lord.

As believers, we may sometimes face seemingly impossible situations. There might even be times when the instructions God provides in His Word and the Holy Spirit’s guidance don’t seem to make sense to us. Yet we can trust that whatever God calls us to do, He is able to accomplish it, making even the impossible possible.

Father, I praise You for Your power to do what is impossible. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Living Out God's Love

Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren (1 John 3:16, *KJV*).

Scripture: 1 John 3:14-24

Song: "This Is My Commandment"

In 1878, England experienced a diphtheria epidemic, and not even the royal family escaped its ravages. All but one of Princess Alice's children contracted the disease, and although she tried to care for them, she was careful to avoid physical contact. However, when her daughter Marie was the first to die, her son Ernest became so distraught that Alice comforted him with a kiss. This may have resulted in the princess contracting the disease herself, and she succumbed to it not long after. But to Alice, *love* meant caring for her children in their time of greatest need, regardless of personal cost.

In his first letter, the apostle John encouraged believers to live out their faith by giving to the needy in their midst. He noted that just as God demonstrated His love in sending Christ to die for us, so Christians should show their love for one another by caring for each other selflessly. John clearly teaches that love is not a theory but a sacrificial action to meet practical needs.

As believers, we are called to look for opportunities to help our sisters and brothers in Christ. Like God's sacrificial love for us, we can demonstrate our love by generous action toward others, knowing that this pleases the Lord.

Father, help us to love one another as You have loved us. In Jesus' name, amen.

Exercising Our Gifts

We, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another (Romans 12:5, *KJV*).

Scripture: Romans 12:3-8

Song: “The Family of God”

Billy Graham (1918–2018) was a household name for decades. The world-famous evangelist preached in auditoriums and stadiums around the world. But most people may not know that his first sermon as an 18-year-old was less than inspiring and lasted only eight minutes. After that experience, Graham “wrestled with God” about his calling to preach but finally obeyed. His autobiography discloses that he would paddle his canoe to a little island where he practiced his preaching skills on whatever audience was at hand—alligators, birds, or even cypress stumps.

The apostle Paul told the believers in Rome that God had gifted each of them in different ways. Like the human body has many parts—all of which are needed—Paul said that each believer’s gift is important and needed for the Church to function well. As such, Paul encouraged the believers to exercise their gifts, recognizing that they were given by God and could be a blessing to others.

In the same way, believers today should put their gifts into practice so that the church can be edified. Believers can be confident that whatever gifts He has given are an important part of His work in this world. Regardless of how God wants to use our gifts, we can be assured that actively exercising them for the Lord’s work will produce fruit for eternity.

Father, help me to use my gifts to glorify You. In Jesus’ name, amen.