

Following Jesus
A Perfected Faith

Introduction—*No one's faith is perfect, but a perfected faith is possible*

NOTE—Faith development is a class that every Christ-follower is automatically enrolled into and the class isn't just a semester-long course or the equivalent of a four-year college degree, but instead it's a lifelong experience and one worth living

- Abraham—faith tested experienced God's provision
- The three Hebrew boys—faith tested and experienced God's protection
- Paul's missionary strategy—encouraged churches in their faith

Finally, when we could stand it no longer, we decided to stay alone in Athens, ² and we sent Timothy to visit you. He is our brother and God's co-worker in proclaiming the Good News of Christ. We sent him to strengthen you, to encourage you in your faith, ³ and to keep you from being shaken by the troubles you were going through. But you know that we are destined for such troubles. ⁴ Even while we were with you, we warned you that troubles would soon come—and they did, as you well know. ⁵ That is why, when I could bear it no longer, I sent Timothy to find out whether your faith was still strong. I was afraid that the tempter had gotten the best of you and that our work had been useless. 1 Thessalonians 3:1-5, NLT

⁹ How we thank God for you! Because of you we have great joy as we enter God's presence. ¹⁰ Night and day we pray earnestly for you, asking God to let us see you again to fill the gaps in your faith. 1 Thessalonians 3:9-10, NLT

A perfected faith is possible, it's even desired by many, but what does it take for our faith to grow, develop, mature, and reach perfection? From another post-resurrection narrative, one that focuses in on the disciple John, we learn three valuable lessons regarding a perfected faith.

I. Our faith is best perfected when we live in constant and close fellowship with Jesus

A. John was a close friend and follower of Jesus

1. One of the early disciples called to follow Him with brother James (Sons of Thunder)
2. John's commitment to Jesus was more than a loose attachment to "an exciting new miracle-worker," he was sold out to Christ and His cause

⁶⁶ At this point many of his disciples turned away and deserted him. ⁶⁷ Then Jesus turned to the Twelve and asked, "Are you also going to leave?" ⁶⁸ Simon Peter replied, "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life. ⁶⁹ We believe, and we know you are the Holy One of God." John 6:66-69, NLT

3. He was more than a mere follower, John was a coworker with Jesus leaving all to proclaim the Good News (good stuff)

⁵ *Jesus sent out the twelve apostles with these instructions: “Don’t go to the Gentiles or the Samaritans, ⁶ but only to the people of Israel—God’s lost sheep. ⁷ Go and announce to them that the Kingdom of Heaven is near. ⁸ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cure those with leprosy, and cast out demons. Give as freely as you have received! Matthew 10:5-8, NLT*

4. Like Peter, John was part of the inner three who got to witness and experience a deeper intimacy with Jesus (i.e. Transfiguration, Jairus’ daughter, Gethsemane)
5. Likely John is the unnamed disciple in John’s Gospel called “whom Jesus loved”

²³ *The disciple Jesus loved was sitting next to Jesus at the table. John 13:23, NLT*

²⁰ *Peter turned around and saw behind them the disciple Jesus loved—the one who had leaned over to Jesus during supper and asked, “Lord, who will betray you?” ²¹ Peter asked Jesus, “What about him, Lord?” John 21:20-21, NLT*

- a. Internal and external evidence points to John being this disciple
- b. Reported to be the ONLY one present at the crucifixion of Jesus
- c. He actually took Jesus’ mother into his home after crucifixion

²⁵ *Standing near the cross were Jesus’ mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary (the wife of Clopas), and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother standing there beside the disciple he loved, he said to her, “Dear woman, here is your son.” ²⁷ And he said to this disciple, “Here is your mother.” And from then on this disciple took her into his home. John 19:25-27, NLT*

6. He was the first of the twelve to see the empty tomb (John 20:3-5)
7. He became an early leader and pillar of the church

⁹ *In fact, James, Peter, and John, who were known as pillars of the church, recognized the gift God had given me, and they accepted Barnabas and me as their co-workers. They encouraged us to keep preaching to the Gentiles, while they continued their work with the Jews. Galatians 2:9, NLT*

NOTE—One could argue, that John experienced a closeness with Jesus that no other disciple did

B. Our closeness with Jesus will strengthen our ability to recognize God’s hand at work

ILL—The closer I am to my wife the better I know her distinct personality, what makes her tick, her baking masterpieces, and I am even able to identify her handwriting—I could pick out her chocolate chip cookies in a cookie line-up because I have a close relationship with her (and her cookies)

1. Notice what takes place when John, the close follower of Jesus, arrives at the empty tomb of Jesus

a. John “stooped and looked in” and noticed the grave clothes, but he didn’t go in (John 20:5)

- i. Greek word for this phrase is “parakupto” which means to “look carefully into” something or to “inspect curiously”
- ii. John was carefully examining the empty tomb and the evidence of Jesus’ absence (grave clothes neatly folded) in front of him
- iii. He stopped and began to reflect on all that was taking place
- iv. It was in this moment of reflection and examination as a close follower of Jesus that John came to an important conclusion
- v. This was NOT a grave robbery (though that wasn’t uncommon) but this was something that God’s fingerprints were ALL over

b. He was able to recognize the work of God in that moment because he was close to Jesus allowing him to distinguish between the work of man and the work of God

⁸ Then the disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in, and he saw and believed — ⁹ for until then they still hadn’t understood the Scriptures that said Jesus must rise from the dead. John 20:8-9, NLT

NOTE—Though his faith wasn’t perfected completely in this moment, he believed God was up to something; he recognized God’s work!

2. Am I close enough to Jesus to recognize His work in my life, to identify His divine purpose, and to see Him even when it may not be clear?

II. Our faith being perfected is a process, so we must not become discouraged when we don’t have it all figured out

A. In our narrative alone, we witness several who are at different places on this faith perfecting journey

1. **Mary Magdalene**—quickly hurries to Peter and John to report that the Lord’s body had been stolen or transferred, she’s discouraged (20:2)
2. **John**—arrives to the tomb first, but takes it all in initially from the outside and is processing the events (20:5)
3. **Peter**—he arrives after John, but he doesn’t stop at the entrance, he busts right into the tomb (20:6)

NOTE—They are ALL experiencing and witnessing the same miraculous event, but they are at different places on their faith journey which results in different responses to the event

B. This was certainly a critical faith development event in John's life but he still didn't walk away with perfect understanding and comprehension

1. Saw and believed (believed God was up to something just didn't know what)

⁸ Then the disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in, and he saw and believed — ⁹ for until then they still hadn't understood the Scriptures that said Jesus must rise from the dead. John 20:8-9, NLT

2. His understanding of EVERYTHING that had just taken place was still limited
3. There was a recognition of God's work but not full understanding of God's work— faith is being perfected
4. Went home (20:10), but there is NO indication that they reported anything to anyone

C. Faith that is being perfected should not discourage us but instead should motivate us to keep pursuing Jesus

1. Will all of His plans make sense? No!
2. Will we always understand the reason something happens? Likely not!
3. Will you walk away certain about a decision? Not always!
4. But if we acknowledge the process and know that our faith is being perfected through each and every moment, then we can walk away with a deeper trust in Jesus and greater confidence in His divine work!

NOTE—Jesus is the “author and perfecter” (or finisher) of our faith

5. He will bring this work to completion

⁶ And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns. Philippians 1:6, NLT

D. How should we position ourselves so this process of our faith being perfected can do its best work?

1. Must make time in the presence of Christ a priority
 - a. Might require shifting around some priorities in life
 - b. Make a point of emphasis the corporate worship gathering AND personal devotions
 - c. Be actively engaged in a discipleship community (Bible Study, Small Group)

d. In these places, God moves and works in unique ways—*means of grace*

2. Need to have our perspective changed and placed in alignment with God's perspective

a. Godly perspective is ONLY found in God's presence

¹⁶ So I tried to understand why the wicked prosper. But what a difficult task it is! ¹⁷ Then I went into your sanctuary, O God, and I finally understood the destiny of the wicked. Psalm 73:16-17, NLT

b. Help me to view trials as opportunities for my faith to become stronger

c. Help me to recognize, just as John did, that God was up to something

III. A perfected faith will come when we see the Resurrected Lord

A. To see the Resurrected Lord and have a faith that is perfected, we must walk with Him NOW

B. In His eternal presence, our faith is perfected

C. We will no longer see through a glass dimly, but we shall see Him as He is

Conclusion—If we want our faith to be strengthened now and for the work that God began in us to be brought to completion, we must submit and surrender ourselves to Jesus—the author and perfecter (finisher) of our faith!

What Now?

- Be intentional about cultivating (or beginning) a close relationship with Jesus, so you can better recognize His work, His voice, and His ways
- Acknowledge that faith development is a process so submit to the work of the Holy Spirit in you and foster other godly relationships where this process can be worked out in Christian community
- Pray for the spiritual lives of our families and church family to be strengthened by God's grace and power

¹⁵ Ever since I first heard of your strong faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for God's people everywhere, ¹⁶ I have not stopped thanking God for you. I pray for you constantly, ¹⁷ asking God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom and insight so that you might grow in your knowledge of God. ¹⁸ I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope he has given to those he called—his holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance. ¹⁹ I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him. Ephesians 1:15-19a, NLT