

## Everyday Ways To Build Your Faith

In the comic strip "Calvin and Hobbes," a young boy named Calvin often entertained himself for hours by imagining himself as "Stupendous Man." He was courage personified. He was might in tights. He inspired knee-knocking fear in everyone he met. But then bedtime would arrive... and darkness. Suddenly Stupendous Man's heart of valor would turn to jelly. There were monsters under the bed!

Monsters lie in wait for all of us. As soon as the light goes off and we lose sight of our trustworthy God, their whispers begin. "You're going to get sick and your faith is going to fail you." "Wait till you lose your job/welfare benefits/pension! Then we'll see how well God provides." "How can you be sure that your 8-year-old is still going to be okay when he's 18?" "You'll never get that project done on time. You're in way over your head!" With monster messages coming at us from all sides, what can we do to insure that our trust in God keeps growing no matter what challenges it?

A young guy named Timothy faced his own monsters and God encouraged him through a friend named Paul who said, "**For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline**". This message comes with encouragement to all of us who want to trust God more but instead find our faith flagging in the face of disappointment, discouragement, hardship, and daily stress overload. It sees the challenges but also focuses on the resources God give us.

**1. Seek faith-inspiring models.** Paul commends Timothy for his "**sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice**" He reminded Timothy of the inspiring models in his life. When we watch others respond with deep trust in God in a variety of circumstances, we find our own trust strengthened. Are you hanging out with people who boost your faith? Or are most of your friends worriers, complainers, or doomsayers who trash your trust with their pessimism and hopelessness? Look around you and identify the faith builders. We all need these people in our life if we want to grow in trusting God.

**2. Immerse yourself in Scripture.** "**From infancy you have known the holy Scriptures.**" God speaks to us as we read His word whether we feel different or not. We learn what is right and wrong, and how to correct our attitudes and behaviours so we can walk in righteousness. As we read, we see God's plan unfold for people's lives, including our own. And then there are those moments when the very words we read leap off the page to touch us. Memorized scriptures are also a great encouragement. Positive affirmations like, "**I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me**" give us a boost when we are faced with a challenging moment.

**3. Remember God's past faithfulness.** Another faith booster that Paul introduced to Timothy is remembering. "**Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead.**" If anyone had an excuse to feel discouraged and lose faith, it was Paul because he was in prison for preaching the good news when he wrote this. Yet, when he thought of giving up, Paul remembered Jesus, who endured the cross and his trust grew stronger. It's good for us to remember what God has done in our lives and in the lives of our friends. We share stories in meetings. We pray for one another and share answers to prayer. We hear God's work as we worship together in church and spend time with other Christians. We can journal and look back at how God has been there for us. God is reliable and it's a great comfort and encouragement to remember how God has made a difference in our lives.

**4. Stretch beyond your comfort zone.** Timothy was young for the responsibility entrusted to him by Paul yet Paul keeps pushing Timothy out of his comfort zone: "**Do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord. Pass on to others what you've learned from me. Preach the Word; rebuke; correct; encourage; instruct; do the work of an evangelist.**" Some of us are natural stretchers, always poking our heads into something new, always reaching higher and exploring uncharted territory. Others of us prefer the cozy sanctuary of the familiar. Why break new ground when it's so pleasant where we are? How is God trying to stretch you today?

**5. Cultivate a lifestyle of obedience.** In his writings Paul lists characteristics of people who have "**a form of godliness**" but no power. He warns against pride, self-indulgence, ungratefulness, brutality, slander, treachery, and so on. Paul then urges Timothy to have nothing to do with such behavior. A lifestyle of disobedience eats relentlessly at our faith. Disobedience often means taking the easy way out, relying on our own understanding rather than God's. In such situations, our trust muscles get little exercise and soon grow flabby. In contrast, when we obey--when we relinquish our will and our rights--we discover on a deeper level that God is trustworthy. It's no longer head knowledge; it's heart and soul knowledge.

**6. Continue.** One sentence from Paul's letter to Timothy sums up the life of ever-growing trust: "**Continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of**" Something in our human nature loves the one-shot deal. None of Paul's remedies for a flagging faith is a one-shot deal. As George Goodman wrote: "It is not a present experience that ensures fruit unto maturity, but a patient continuance."

Is our trust sluggish? Are the monsters under our bed growing fiercer and louder? Paul's words to Timothy offer the ingredients for a vibrant, growing trust in God: As we build these into our lives we'll experience peace and satisfaction beyond what we've ever known.