Faith is the condition of all the spiritual life, of the entrance into that life, and the steps to progress in that life. It behooves us, therefore, to give it all the nourishment possible. Faith can be strengthened and fed and will grow. But the growth of faith is often the very opposite to our thoughts concerning it.

We often suppose that faith is made strong by receiving great encouragement, by having quick and abundant answers to prayer, by high states of joy, by lofty visions of divine things. In reality these things do not strengthen our faith as much as we imagine. Our faith is to be nourished on the promises of God. Those promises are contained in His written Word. When God first called Abraham, He inundated his soul with a sea of promises. He spoke to him from the starry heavens, and from the soil of Canaan on which he walked, and by the visits of angels, and by the Holy Ghost in the depths of his being. Abraham saw great fields of light—great possibilities of things for himself and his posterity. His soul drank in these promises until his faith became wide and powerful, even before any of them were fulfilled.

God deals with souls today in a similar way. Yet when He calls any one to great degrees of perfection or of usefulness, He begins by opening up to them the promises of His Word, and the possibilities which they may achieve even before there are any outward signs of their fulfillment. The heart that anchors itself in the promises of God until those promises become as real as God himself, will have strong faith.

Another nourishment to faith is the removing from the soul of natural and human props. Naturally we lean on a great many things in nature and society and the Church and friends, more than we are aware of. We think we depend on God alone and never dream of how much we depend on other things until they are taken from us. If they were not removed we would go on self-deceived, thinking that we relied on God for all things. But God designs to concentrate our faith in Him alone by removing all other foundations and by detaching us from all other supports, one after another.

There are many souls which cannot endure this utter desolation of secondary supports. It would be more than they could bear. They would react in open rebellion, so God allows them to have a junior faith and to lean on other things more or less.

But to those who are able to undergo the strain of faith, He allows all sorts of disappointments—the death of bright hopes, the removing of earthly friendships or destruction of property, the multiplied infirmities of the body and mind, the misunderstanding of dear ones—until the landscape of religious life seems swept with a blizzard, to compel the soul to house itself in God alone.

At the time the soul is having all secondary support removed, it does not perceive what is taking place within itself. Afterwards it finds that faith has been growing and expanding with every wave that has beat against it. Faith grows when we least expect it. Storms and difficulties, temptations and conflicts are its field of operation. Like the stormy petrel on the ocean, faith has a supernatural glee in the howling of the storm and the dash of the spray.

Faith not only is nourished by the removal of earthly props, but by the seeming removal of divine consolation. Our answer to prayer seems too long delayed, and faith is tested to its utmost. It seems as if the Lord has turned against us and all we can do is to continue holding on with the pitiful cry of, "Lord, help me!"

Even then faith is expanding and growing beyond all we are aware of, by the very extension of the delay of the answer. The longer the Lord delayed in answering the prayer of the woman of Syrophoenicia, the more her faith became purified and intense. Long delays serve to purify our faith until everything that is spasmodic and ephemeral and whimsical is purged out of it and nothing is left to it except faith alone.

Faith Kindles Faith

Another nourishment to faith is to learn about and think upon the great faith of other people. Read the lives of those who have been sorely tried and who have believed God against all odds. Faith kindles faith. Understanding how God has dealt with other souls enables us to interpret His dealings with us. Our faith is inspired by reading the trials of the Bible saints more than by reading the pleasant and easy things.
Another nourishment to faith is God’s dealings with us by which He is constantly changing the providential channels through which He sends blessings to us. If God’s blessings flow on us in a certain way for any length of time, we unconsciously fix our trust on the way the blessing comes more than on the invisible fountain.

If the Lord gave the Jews water in the wilderness, sometimes it was from the rock and sometimes it was from a well dug in the dry sand. (See Numbers 21:16-18). When God sends us great spiritual refreshings, He will change the circumstances under which they come. When He sends temporal blessings in answer to prayer, He will change the channels through which they flow. He does not want us to become attached to any mode or phenomenon. He wants our faith perfectly united to Himself, and not to His mode of doing things. Hence He will disappoint us on the old lines of expectation and reveal His favors from a new quarter in a new way and surprise us with some great and sweet device of His infinite wisdom.

Thus our faith is strengthened by disappointment until it reaches such perfect union with God that it never looks to anybody or anything or any mode or any old channel or any circumstances or any frame of mind or any meeting or any set of feelings or at any time or season. Strong faith keeps itself swung free from all these things and dependent on God alone. This degree of faith can never be disappointed, can never be jostled because it expects nothing except what God wills, and looks to no mode except infinite wisdom. Its expectation is from God only.

Hindrances To Faith

The unbelief of the human heart startled and amazed Jesus at every turn. It pierced His sensitive nature on every side.

One hindrance to faith is that of looking at our surroundings and not to the fixed promises of Jesus. When Peter walked on the water and began to sink, Jesus said, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" (Matt. 14:31). There were two things upon which Peter might fix his attention. One was the word "come," uttered by the Saviour. The other was the waves of water.

Peter was not destitute of faith, for he asked the Lord to bid him walk on the sea. He felt an inward inclination to go out to Christ on the water, but wanted the authority of the Master's word like a plank under his feet to authorize him in doing so. That sublime inward prompting which was evidently of God did not break down until his eyes were diverted to take in the danger of the waves.

Here we have the conflict in every life—that between the prompting of the inward Spirit to trust God without reserve and that of the senses which survey the instability of outward things. It is a battle between the invisible truth and the visible shadow, the stability of the rock and the motion of the sea. The appearance of the waves and the significance of the word "come," were to human reason directly the opposite of each other.

Through all ages the waves had never failed to drown, and on the other hand, God's word had never deceived any one. Here were two invariable things that met as opposites. The only question was, which of these was the stronger? Which law should have the precedence—that of natural gravity or that of the word of God? The word "come," from the lips of Jesus had more authority than all the rolling seas, for it was the power of His simple word that set every sea in motion. The water had the appearance of power, but in the word of Jesus was the real power.

Most of our life is illustrated by this incident. We live on a rolling sea. We are repeatedly shut up to the alternative of trusting either the appearance of things or the invisible truth of God. If we listen to the blowing of the wind, it will shut out the omnipotent voice of Jesus. If we look at the white-capped waves of circumstances, we shall not see the outstretched hand of Jesus. Each of us must come for himself to a fixed, irreversible decision as to which is reality, the wave or the word, and fasten ourselves to unchangeable truth.

Another hindrance to faith is that of receiving honor of men. Jesus asks us, "How can you believe which receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that cometh from God only?" (John 5:44). It is not seeking honor but receiving it, that is, opening our heart to the cordial reception of human praise or flattery or fame. This utterly comes against the repose of the soul in God.

Receiving honor from men is a great virtue in the eyes of the world, but this is an instance in which things highly esteemed among men are an abomination to the Lord. It may not be seen at first glance how receiving worldly honor can prevent true faith in God. A little reflection will show us, however, that receiving worldly
honor is an insidious, subtle and malignant form of idolatry. It has in it the element of man-fearing as well as man-worship. It is a subtle way of putting self in the place of God. It implies that our chief happiness comes from man. This is an ignoring of the true fountain of joy and instead the hewing out of broken cisterns.

This catering to man, this fearing or cringing to man, this love of place and distinction for self severs the soul from Christ, diverts its trust to some other object and destroys true faith.

Another hindrance to faith is the low state of faith in those around us, and especially the unbelief of those occupying high places in the visible Church. In the days of Jesus it was asked, “Have any of the rulers...believed on Him?” (John 7:48).

The great mass of nominal Christians today are in such an infantile state of grace as to lack the independence to launch out boldly and alone and trust God bravely in spite of the coldness and half-heartedness of those in religious authority over them. How often it occurs in every age that those who are set to guide the affairs of the Church and its education and economy have no warm, living faith in God.

Faith kindles faith. Fervent holiness inspires others to pursue it. Saints multiply in great revivals. In the world, great authors rise in clusters. The same thing is true of inventors, and there have been epochs in Church history where saints rose in constellations. We need to be aroused by those of faith, but let us beware of toning down our trust to the level of the half believers and doubters that swarm around us.

Lack Of Personal Consecration To God

Perhaps the greatest hindrance to faith is a lack of personal consecration to God. We are taught this in the twelfth of Hebrews, where in order to look to Jesus as the “beginner and perfecter of our faith,” we are to lay aside every weight and the easily besetting sin. As long as there is defect in our consecration there will be corresponding defects in our faith.

We can trust God only to the extent that we are given up to Him. Your risk in a bank is up to the limit of your deposit. Consecration puts us right on believing ground. Consecration is cutting the shore lines, and faith is launching out into the deep. The real question is not why should I trust all to God, but why should I doubt anything of Him?

Have His promises ever broken down? Has He ever disappointed or deceived us? True, He often tests our faith, but at the last moment, in the worst extremity, His infinite mercy and provision have come. The finale in many a psalm of life has been, "Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him!"