

participant's guide



6 sessions

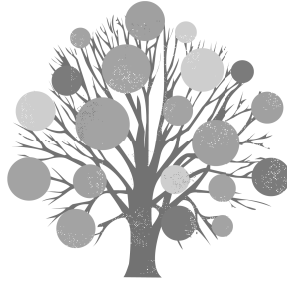
**five things**  
**God uses to**  
**GROW**  
**your faith**

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**andy stanley**

## SESSION I

# BIG Faith



It's all about *trust*.

Right now, God isn't calling us to perfect behavior or to more knowledge about him, but to a *relationship* with him. And every healthy relationship is built on trust.

As we read the accounts of Jesus' life in the Bible, we see that he wasn't recognized and accepted by the most "religious" people—those who knew the Old Testament best, and who were recognized by others as being the best behaved. Their relationships with God were lacking in moment-by-moment dependence and trust.

Jesus pointed out their lack, and he found others who demonstrated in an astonishing way the kind of personal trust that God wants all of us to experience with him. This is about the simplicity of faith—and about God's commitment to expand this kind of confidence in him in our own hearts and lives.

## DISCUSSION STARTER

Do you know people whose faith in God is so strong that you could sometimes describe it as *amazing*? What is it that makes their confidence in God so strong?

## VIDEO OVERVIEW For Session I of the DVD

God wants to take us to a new level of *big* faith—extraordinary trust and confidence in him.

The original break in humankind's relationship with God happened because of a refusal to trust him. God has been working with us on this trust issue ever since. His desire is to draw us into a relationship built around our absolute, perfect confidence in him.

In the Old Testament, God's reason for supporting the Israelites was so that they would show the world what it's like to have a trusting relationship with him. He established a trust relationship *before* giving them his laws and commandments.

Since that relationship broke down through a failure to trust, in the New Testament we see God working through Jesus to reconcile humankind back into a trust relationship with him. Jesus didn't tell us, "If you'll be good, God will love you and be your trustworthy God." Instead, Jesus was saying, "Trust *me* to reestablish your relationship with your heavenly Father."

Throughout the New Testament, God seeks to expand our faith. He's trying to teach us to trust him.

Greater trust makes all our human relationships stronger, and the same is true between God and us. It always comes down to trust.

Matthew 8:10 is one of the few occasions in the Gospels where we see Jesus *amazed* by something—and it's someone's *faith* that impresses him. The man who astonished him was a Roman centurion who indicated how well he understood the divine authority of Jesus. He asked Jesus to simply speak the word that would immediately heal a paralyzed servant back at the centurion's home. Jesus spoke the word, while also expressing his surprise at the centurion's extraordinary confidence in him.

*When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him, "Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith." . . . Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go! Let it be done just as you believed it would." And his servant was healed at that very hour.*

*Matthew 8:10, 13*

God is honored and thrilled by our faith. So what is it that will grow our faith so he'll be increasingly honored?

Again, we believe there are five faith-building ingredients that God consistently uses in our lives:

- Practical teaching from the Bible
- Providential relationships
- Private disciplines
- Personal ministry
- Pivotal circumstances

It seems that God continues to make use of all five of these no matter where we are on the growth spectrum in our relationship with him.

So there's great value in placing ourselves in environments where these five are maximized. Being aware of them makes us more sensitive to what God is doing personally in our lives to expand our faith. And the greater our faith, the stronger our relationship with God and the deeper our intimacy with him.

## VIDEO NOTES

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How would you describe the relationship between *obedience* and *trust*?
2. As you think back on your childhood, how was the *obedience/trust* relationship manifested in your home? Did you trust your parents? How did that impact your response to their authority?
3. Which is more important in a relationship: *trust* or *obedience*? Is the answer different depending on the type of relationship (marriage, parent-child, employer-employee, friends)?
4. Of the five things listed to make your faith grow, which has made the biggest difference in your own confidence in God? Why?
5. Has there ever been a time when your confidence in God—your faith—hit a really low point? Would you be willing to share that story with your group? If so, describe the events surrounding your loss of faith, as well as what helped you regain it.
6. What advice would you give a friend who has lost faith, or whose faith is very weak?
7. Think of someone you know whose faith seems strong. If that person later came to you and said he had lost his faith, what questions would you ask? If he asked your advice, what would you say?

## MILEPOSTS

- Every healthy relationship is built on *trust*, including our relationship with God.
- God wants to take us to a new level of *big* faith—extraordinary trust and confidence in him.
- God uses five primary ways to expand our faith: (1) practical teaching from the Bible, (2) providential relationships, (3) private disciplines, (4) personal ministry, and (5) pivotal circumstances.



## MOVING FORWARD

If you pay close attention while hearing the Bible taught or reading it for yourself, you'll often sense God saying the same thing: *"Trust me."* That's not to say the Bible's message is shallow and simplistic. Rather, in the various ways of responding appropriately and obediently to God, the most important thing he asks is that you trust him. Doing so may not seem to require a lot of faith when things are going well. But when life turns messy, is your faith leading you to depend on God? Or do you put your trust in something or someone else?

In the next several weeks, we'll discuss these five catalysts God uses to build that kind of faith.

For now, reflect on the most faith-building events and relationships in your own life. How have these affected your confidence in God?

## **CHANGING YOUR MIND**

Can Jesus find this level of faith in you as well? God will put it there, if you allow him to.

*When Jesus heard this, he was amazed  
and said to those following him, "Truly I tell you,  
I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith."*

*Matthew 8:10*

## **PREPARATION FOR SESSION 2**

To help you prepare for Session 2, use these suggested devotions during the week leading up to your small group meeting.

### **Day One**

Glance through the “Sermon on the Mount” (the instruction Jesus gives in chapters 5, 6, and 7 of Matthew). What particular actions and deeds does Jesus call for in these chapters?

### **Day Two**

In Matthew 7:24–27, look at the parable that ends the Sermon on the Mount. How would you express in your own words what Jesus teaches in verses 24 and 25?

### **Day Three**

How would you express in your own words what Jesus teaches in Matthew 7:26–27?

### **Day Four**

According to Matthew 7:28–29, how did those who were listening to Jesus respond to the Sermon on the Mount?

**Day Five**

Those who heard Jesus teach were never bored. In Luke 4:16–27, Jesus was teaching in his hometown synagogue in Nazareth. According to verses 28–29, what kind of response did he receive? Why do you think they responded that way?

## **Last Session**

God takes us to a new level of big faith—extraordinary trust and confidence in him—through five influences: (1) practical teaching from the Bible, (2) providential relationships, (3) private disciplines, (4) personal ministry, and (5) pivotal circumstances.