



Unit 4: Disciple of Christ

Live life as a disciple of Christ and intentionally make disciples for the glory of God.

Lesson 16 Growing in Faith

Day One ***Responsibility***

The Word of God, which we explored in Lesson 15, is essential for both growing and sharing our faith. It holds the full truth about God and the gospel, serving as the foundation and guide for our faith. As the living Word, Scripture is always relevant and dynamic, continually offering deeper insight into God and His plans for the world and its people.

Faith begins by believing the message or report about Christ—His death, burial, and resurrection. This holy message, proclaiming that God’s Son paid the penalty for humanity’s sins, is recorded in the Bible. Whether preached, written, or filmed, the message comes directly from God’s Word.

Read Romans 10:17 and answer questions 2–4:

Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ. Romans 10:17 (Hearing in this context is receiving or believing the message, whether spoken or written.)

1. Where does faith come from?
2. What is the message, and how does one learn about it?
3. How can *you* give others an opportunity to have faith, and how can *you* grow your own faith?

Definition: The Greek word translated *faith, believe, or trust* in English is *pistis* (πίστις). It is a noun that refers to belief based on the reliability of the one trusted. For the Christian, faith is an active trust and confidence in God. It specifically means placing our faith, trust, and confidence in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as Lord and Savior.

Faith is the foundation of Christianity. It is not only the starting point of salvation but also the core of our ongoing relationship with God. Scripture reminds us that “*without faith, it is*

impossible to please God” (Hebrews 11:6) and that “*everything that does not come from faith is sin*” (Romans 14:23).

At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus commanded people to have faith in the gospel: “*The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!*” (Mark 1:15) To believe means more than acknowledging the truth—it means entrusting our lives fully to God. Jesus called for a change in direction, where people would *continually* place their trust and confidence in Him. True disciples, then and now, rely and depend on God alone. It is through this reliance and dependence on God that we are truly made complete.

4. In your own words, write a one-sentence definition of faith.

5. Read Ephesians 2:8–10. Why is it important to regularly reflect on this truth?

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Ephesians 2:8–10

Faith is the total reliance on God and His power to work through us. When He does work through us, we must remember to give Him the credit and glory. Faith is not static—it grows as we learn to trust God more in every area of our lives, including serving and helping others.

Mary Slessor (1848–1915) was the second of seven children born to poor, working-class parents in Scotland. Her father was an angry and abusive alcoholic, squandering the rent and food money for his habit. Since he could not keep a job, Mary had to go to work at 11 years old to help support the family.¹

She and her mother worked as weavers in a local mill while living in the slums. Tragedy struck when four of her siblings died at a young age causing great pain for the family. Although we do not know the exact cause of death, the family was told it was due to a lack of food and sunshine. Mary blamed her father and struggled with forgiveness well into adulthood. By the time she was 14, she was working 12-hour shifts, six days a week.

As Mary grew older, she honed her weaving skills to the point where she was entrusted with operating two 62-inch-wide looms² simultaneously. This was a challenging task in that era’s cotton fabric production—managing two looms required intense focus, speed, and coordination. By the end of each day, Mary was exhausted but grateful for the opportunity and responsibility to earn extra income for her family.

¹ Janet & Geoff Benge, *Mary Slessor: Forward Into Calabar* (Seattle, WA: YWAM Publishing, 1999), 1–36. The story about Mary Slessor that follows on pages 2–4 is summarized from this resource.

² A weaving loom is a device used to interlace threads to create fabric by holding the warp or vertical threads under tension while the weft or horizontal threads are woven through them.

Definition: *Responsibility* is the state or duty of being accountable for something, whether it be tasks, decisions, or obligations. It involves recognizing and accepting what is required of us and acting with diligence, integrity, and reliability. For disciples, *responsibility* includes our duty to God, others, and ourselves—fulfilling our roles with faithfulness and seeking God’s help in carrying them out. *Obligation* is a duty, commitment, or *responsibility* that a person is morally, legally, or socially bound to fulfill. It implies accountability and the necessity of carrying out a required action or task. For disciples, an *obligation* often refers to doing what is right before God and others, fulfilling commitments with integrity and faithfulness.

Each of us has various responsibilities—spiritual, professional, social, or personal. Regardless of the category, the key question is: *How do we approach our obligations?* Sometimes, the first step in our faith journey is simply accepting responsibility and relying on God for the strength to fulfill it.

Read Colossians. 3:23–24 and answer questions 6–8:

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, ²⁴ since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. Colossians. 3:23–24 (An inheritance from the Lord includes eternal life, heavenly rewards, and a place in God’s kingdom as co-heirs with Christ.)

6. How should disciples approach their responsibilities and obligations (v. 23)?
7. Regardless of what you are doing in any area of life, who are you serving (v. 24b)?
8. When disciples fulfill their obligations as to the Lord, what reward will they receive (v. 24a)?
9. Prayerfully review your life and confess any times you have shirked (avoided or neglected) responsibility. How is God helping you now to fulfill your obligations?

One Sunday, while Mary was outside with three friends, an older woman from her church invited them in for tea and freshly baked scones. As they sat together, the woman spoke about the reality of hell, the need for repentance, and the importance of seeking forgiveness in Jesus’ name. Her words deeply moved Mary, leading her to pray and commit her life to Christ. Though her circumstances remained the same, she experienced a newfound peace unlike anything she had felt before. The following Sunday, she began serving at church, helping instruct younger children.

A few years later, her church decided to go into another area of the city to teach children to read, write, and learn the Bible. The area they chose was the most dangerous in town, plagued by gangs and extreme poverty. Mary immediately volunteered, but her offer was turned down due to the risks. One of the gangs had already let the church know—*this was their territory*.

Mary did not give up and kept insisting that she could do the job. Eventually, the church agreed to let her try, but only if she was accompanied by one of the elders. One week, eager to get an early start, she forgot to wait for the elder. As she made her way to the classroom, she suddenly became aware that she was being followed. When she turned around, four teenage gang members began harassing her.

Although Mary was unaware at the time, she was being given an opportunity to stand firm in her faith and in what God had called her to do. Later in life, she would face many more dangerous situations that would require her to exercise that same faith. Every day presents an opportunity to train ourselves in responding with faith.

Two of the boys held her arms while another boy took a razor-sharp weapon and tied it to a string. They told her she needed to go home and not come back. With courage, Mary replied, *“Do what you want to me, but you’ll not get me to give up my Bible teaching.”*

The leader of the boys swung the weapon back and forth moving it ever closer to Mary’s face. Finally, it slashed across her forehead. Blood flowed down her face, but she kept her eyes open and focused on the boy. Suddenly, he stopped and slipped the weapon into his pocket. The two boys released their grip and prepared to leave.

Mary acted as though nothing unusual had happened. Though she had been afraid, she stood her ground in faith. With a smile, she invited them into her Sunday School class. Before the day ended, the lead boy had accepted Jesus as His Lord and Savior.

10. In light of Mary’s example, what opportunities have you had in the past week to stand firm in your faith?

Notice how quickly Mary forgave the boys in her heart. She did not say, *Goodbye and good riddance*. Instead, she cared enough to invite them into her class. Mary certainly understood the challenge of forgiveness, having struggled with forgiving her father. We all recognize the difficulty—and the impossibility—of forgiving others in our own strength.

11. When the apostles heard Jesus’ teaching on forgiveness, they were amazed at the high standard they were expected to follow. Read Luke 17:5 to see their response.

The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!” Luke 17:5

Take a moment to pray, asking the Lord to strengthen your faith. Seek Jesus for a faith that is strong, unwavering, and steadfast. After you have prayed, write a brief summary of your prayer.

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers #1–11 with your discipleship team.

—End Day One—

Day Two
Strengthening Faith

At the end of Day One, we prayed for the Lord to increase our faith. One way to actively cooperate with God in strengthening our faith is by declaring clear, truth-based statements such as the following.

Faith Statements

- (1) I will grow my faith based on who God is, not who I am.
- (2) I will grow my faith based on what God can do, not what I can do.
- (3) I will grow my faith based on how God wants to change me, not how I want to change.
- (4) I will grow my faith based on the truth of who God is, not on any misconceptions or false beliefs coming from myself or others.

Action Step

12. After concentrating on the four “Faith Statements” above, how will they alter or change your way of thinking about your faith?

I experienced the reality of these faith statements during a particularly stressful season in my life. In 2002, my husband, Anders, joined me in full-time ministry. Believing that God was leading us, we put our large home on the market, expecting a quick sale. We planned to use the proceeds to support ourselves and our ministry financially. But as the months passed the house did not sell, and we found ourselves burdened by a large mortgage and increasing debt.

It was through this difficult time that I experienced what God can do and the truth of His provision. In 1996, God led me to start the ministry, *Christian Library International* (CLI), which later grew into the prison ministry we renamed *Prison Alliance*. For six years, we operated the ministry from our home until we sensed God leading Anders to join me full-time. After a year of fervent prayer, and trusting this was God’s plan, Anders left his job.

Here is our story, as recalled from my journal and memory:

I had been battling discouragement and struggling against the sin of worry. It had been a year and a half and our house still hadn’t sold—we had already exhausted our savings and retirement accounts. Even on a tight budget, we were coming up \$5,000 short for the month.

That same afternoon, Anders and I began to question whether we had made a mistake—*was God really calling us into full-time ministry? Why didn’t the house sell? What we were going to do? What would it say about us and our ministry if our house was repossessed?*

Then we caught ourselves and immediately went to the Lord in prayer, asking His forgiveness for our doubts and lack of faith. We prayed again for God to meet our need for \$5,000. I had heard and read of stories of God providing just the right amount of money at just the right time, but never for such a large sum. I reminded myself that God owns everything—including *the cattle on a thousand hills* (Psalm 50:10). Still, how I prayed for faith!

After we prayed, I settled into the sunroom with the book *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire*, by Jim Cymbala, fully aware that there was nothing more I could do. I had done everything humanly possible—it *really* was up to God. Then the phone rang.

It was a young woman we knew but who had no idea of our financial situation—no one outside our family did. She was on our street and had some Christian books to donate to CLI. When she got out of the car she handed me a plain white envelope, and said, “*The Lord placed you on my heart and asked me to give this to you.*” I took the envelope, thanked her, and we carried the books inside. I really didn’t think much of it at the time.

After she left, I opened the envelope and looked at the check. It looked like \$5,000—I squinted, doubting my own eyes. *Could this really be?* I grabbed my glasses and looked again. WOW! It was \$5,000! It was the exact amount that we had talked and prayed about.

Anders and I immediately went to the Lord in prayer and thanked Him. Tears rolled down my cheeks as I was overwhelmed with God’s mercy, love, and provision. All I could say was, “*O my God, I stand in awe of You.*”

Then the Lord impressed upon me that we were doing the right thing by going into full-time ministry. However, we would not be funded by my husband’s salary, the sale of the house, or any other source—but by God Himself. This is when I came to know God as *the Lord who Provides* (Genesis 22:14).

The next day, as I was still floating on air, the Holy Spirit reminded me of a verse I had prayed yesterday morning: *Cast your care on the Lord and he will sustain you: He will never let the righteous fall* (Psalm 55:22). We give glory to the Father, who takes all our burdens and makes us righteous through the blood our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen!

13. When have you faced a situation where you had to trust God completely? How did He provide for you?

14. What doubts or fears have you struggled with when waiting on God's provision? How can you surrender those to Him in faith?

15. Have you ever questioned whether you truly heard God's calling? How did you seek clarity and reassurance from Him?

Stories of God's provision—yours and mine—often include other participants, like the young woman who gave me the \$5,000 cashier's check. Sometimes we are on the receiving end of God's grace; other times, He uses us as His instrument or conduit. Either way, we must be careful to obey, even when His leading does not make sense to us. It is not that His purposes will be thwarted—God can always use someone else—but we risk missing the privilege of partnering in His work.

As we walk in faith and obedience, we must be aware that there is an enemy who seeks to disrupt our journey. Satan wants to keep people from placing their faith and trust in Jesus. If he and his demons cannot prevent someone from coming to Christ, they will focus on attacking that person's daily faith walk, trying to interrupt their relationship with God.

The devil is a fierce adversary, and trains his army in wicked warfare. His tactics—plans, strategy—are designed to keep Jesus' disciples from growing in faith. He will use a variety of methods to prevent us from placing our daily confidence and reliance on God.

His goal is to keep us stuck, fixed, or static. If we are not progressing in our faith, our personal relationship with God suffers. Others may also be impacted by our ineffectiveness in serving God. Without a strong faith walk, we will be clumsy and useless. We will not be helping others in the way that God desires, nor in the way He has planned to bless us and others through us!

There are times when we all feel stagnant or inactive. We long to do something more but are not sure how to begin. Mary Slessor had dreamed of being a missionary since her youth. Her mother, a devout Christian, often read to her children from *The Missionary Record*, the missions newsletter of the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland. One area that particularly fascinated Mary was Calabar, a region in West Africa. God had placed this beautiful city and its people on her heart.

But she was responsible for her family, so how could she ever move to Africa? She recalled David Livingstone's words, "I don't care where we go as long as we go forward." Dr. Livingston (1813–1873) was a Scottish explorer, medical missionary, and martyr.

Mary thought, "I'm not going forward. I'm not going anywhere. I'm 27 years old, I work in a cotton mill 12 hours a day, six days a week and the little spare time I have I spend helping out at church. But that's not enough. There has to be more to life for me." She prayed, "God, I want to

go forward like David Livingstone. Send me somewhere, anywhere, just send me out to be a missionary.”³

By this time, only her mother and two sisters were still living. Since her sisters were working at the mill, they could support the family. With their blessing, she applied to the Foreign Missions Board and was assigned to Calabar, Africa! Mary was thrilled even though it was an area where many missionaries either died or returned home discouraged and disheartened. Disease, wild animals, witchcraft, brutal customs and warring tribes all played a part in the difficulty.

On the ship to Calabar she heard that the natives had been trading with Europeans for four hundred years and yet no one had ever gone more than five miles inland. They feared warring tribes who were known to kill outsiders on sight. Mary’s heart ached for these people who needed the gospel and she set her sights on going where no white person had ever been before.⁴

16. Mary recognized that, unlike David Livingstone, she was not moving forward. What about you? Are you progressing, falling behind, or standing still in God’s plan for your life? If you are not moving forward, what steps will you take to change that?

Satan seeks to weaken our faith by feeding us lies and leading us into spiritual dysfunction. When we believe the lie instead of the truth, our walk with God is disrupted, making it harder to live out our faith effectively. But when we return to the truth, God restores and strengthens us.

17. Read the following “Faith Blockers.” Which of these obstacles are preventing you from growing in faith?

Four Faith Blockers: Obstacles to Trusting God Fully

(1) Personal Satisfaction

Where do I seek fulfillment? Do I crave approval, love, or acceptance from others more than from God?

(2) Personal Significance

Do I define my worth by what I have (money, family, appearance) or what I do (career, achievements, talents)?

(3) Personal Reputation

How much do I allow others’ opinions to shape my identity?

³ Janet & Geoff Benge, *Mary Slessor: Forward Into Calabar* (Seattle, WA: YWAM Publishing, 1999), 41.

⁴ Ibid., 37–50.

(4) Personal Reality

Am I trapped by my past? Do I let other people define who I am?

17. Read the following ways to overcome “Faith Blockers.” Which of these four truths about God speaks to you the most and why?

Overcoming Faith Blockers: Shifting Our Focus from Self to God

(1) God Satisfaction

I will grow my faith on the basis of who God is and not who I am. I will not allow the pursuit of personal satisfaction—seeking to be gratified, pleased, loved, or accepted—to block my faith.

Scripture: Psalm 16:11, 17:5; Matthew 20:26–28; Philippians 4:11–12; 1 Timothy 6:6.

(2) God Significance

I will grow my faith based on what God can do, not on what I can do. I will not allow my desire for personal significance—focusing on what I have (money, family, looks) or what I do (sports, work, talent)—to block my faith.

Scripture: Psalm 33:11, 90:2; Isaiah 46:9–11; Matthew 17:20; Hebrews 13:5.

(3. God Reputation

I will grow my faith based on how God wants to transform me, not on my personal reputation. I will not obsess over how others perceive me, but instead focus on how my actions reflect God’s holy character.

Scripture: Exodus 20:7; Ezekiel 36:25–27; Romans 8:9; 2 Corinthians 5:17; 2 Peter 1:3.

(4. God Reality

I will grow my faith based on the truth of who God is, not on negative attitudes or false beliefs coming from myself or others. I refuse to let my past or the opinions of others define my reality or hinder my faith.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 4:31; Psalm 147:3; Romans 1:17; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 1 John 3:1.

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers #12–17 with your discipleship team.

—End Day Two—

Day Three
Faith over Fear

On Day Two, we discussed *faith blockers*—barriers that hinder our ability to trust God completely. These obstacles, often rooted in personal desires or perceptions, distort our view of God’s sufficiency and cause us to rely on ourselves rather than His promises. By identifying and addressing these blockers, we can remove the hindrances that prevent us from growing in our faith and fully experiencing God’s provision.

The good news is that blockers do not have to be permanent. One of the most common causes of our faith being blocked or ineffective is **us**. We often focus too much on ourselves and not enough on God. We view people and circumstances through our own lens rather than through the eyes of our Lord. In this way, we find ourselves in bondage to self.

Satan and his demons delight when we are consumed by self-centeredness. When we focus solely on our agendas, comforts, safety, likes, and worldly desires, we limit our relationship and service to God. When we serve ourselves, our capacity to serve God diminishes.

You may have noticed that the *faith statements* we discussed on Day One and the *overcoming faith blockers* from Day Two are basically the same. We must grow in our faith based on who God is, not on who we are. To truly grow, we need to remove ourselves from the equation.

However, sometimes the lies of the enemy take root, especially when we have experienced trauma and suffering. You may have endured abuse—whether physical, emotional, or sexual—as a child or adult. Perhaps you have suffered through an accident, been caught in a fire, or survived a devastating earthquake. These painful realities exist because of the fallen world we live in, and it is important to acknowledge this truth and not ignore it.

The reality of evil can be especially distressing when you are experiencing it yourself or someone close to you. This may lead you to questions: *Why would a good God allow such evil and suffering in the world? Where did evil come from? Why doesn’t God intervene and stop the evil and suffering?*

Many of the greatest Christian minds over the last 2,000 years have wrestled with this difficult subject, and no one has fully answered it to everyone’s satisfaction. However, the root of evil lies in our living in a fallen world. For a biblical perspective on evil, please refer to Unit 1: Who Is God?, Lesson One, *God Is Good*. Ultimately, we must choose to trust that God is good. While we may not understand all the pain and suffering in the world, we can trust that God is in control and working for the good of everyone.

There are times in our lives when we feel anxious. We might worry or fear that something bad is going to happen. We may feel nervous about a situation, unsure if it will turn out the way we hope. Anxiety can even manifest physically through stomachaches, headaches, sweating, or other bodily symptoms. Now, we are *not* talking about the psychological classification of *Anxiety*

*Disorder.*⁵ However, even in cases of severe anxiety, God can bring healing—whether directly or through medical or therapeutic professionals. *Nothing is impossible with God.*

We may want to trust God in difficult situations, but inwardly we are struggling. Anxiety can arise from different causes and take on various forms. You may have experienced some kind of deep trauma that lingers in your subconscious. Perhaps you were abandoned as a child, and now fear being rejected or neglected in relationships, even with the Lord.

Mary Slessor, a missionary to Calabar (modern-day Nigeria), was raised in a home with an abusive, alcoholic father. This upbringing left her feeling self-conscious and inadequate around men. When she returned from the mission field on furlough, she found it difficult to speak if men were present in the audience.⁶ Yet, despite her inner turmoil, she leaned on God's strength and spoke with dignity and resolve.

Regardless of her difficult past, Mary embraced her calling. After spending a few years in Calabar learning the language, she moved inland to an area where no missionary had gone before. Standing at just five feet tall with striking red hair, she often startled the local people—some even ran away, thinking her head was on fire!

Mary's faith grew steadily as she faced the dangers and diseases of the jungle. God led her safely to a village where the chief allowed her to stay, administer simple medicine, and even teach Bible stories. One night she heard a lot of noise and went to investigate.

"The villagers were in a frenzy, yelling and screaming. The beating of drums throbbed in her ears and smoke from reed torches burned her nostrils as Mary stood at the back of the crowd. Suddenly a scream pierced the air. A feeling of dread swept over Mary. Was this another one of their cruel punishments? Mary pushed her way to the front of the crowd, where she saw a young woman lying naked on the ground, her hands and feet tied to stakes. Beside the woman was a large pot of boiling oil, with a warrior in a jaguar costume dancing around it. Mary knew what was about to happen. The woman on the ground was about to have boiling oil ladled over her. Without stopping to think it through, Mary ran and stood between the warrior and the woman. Instantly, the drumming stopped, and the laughter and cheering subsided. All eyes were focused on the petite redhead who was interfering in a matter of tribal justice.

Mary glared at the warrior holding a ladle filled with hot oil. For a moment, the warrior stood with a look of confusion on his face. Then with a warlike yell, he began dancing menacingly

⁵ Anxiety Disorders are exaggerations of our normal and adaptive reaction to fearful or stressful events. There are many types of anxiety disorders including Panic Disorder, Agoraphobia, Specific Phobia, Social Anxiety Disorder, Obsessive-compulsive Disorder (OCD); Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD). When you experience the familiar physical and psychological signs of fear and anxiety such as sweating, racing heart, shortness of breath, trembling, worry, or stress, these are clues that something is happening that could be a threat and that you need to deal with it. This "flight or fight" reaction activates the physical and psychological resources necessary to deal with the potential danger. Although this system works well most of the time, sometimes it can go into overdrive and do more harm than good. When this happens, it might indicate you have an anxiety disorder. About.com website: <http://ocd.about.com/od/glossary/g/anxiety_glos.htm>(accessed 3/15/2016).

⁶ Sam Wellman, *Mary Slessor, Queen of Calabar, Heroes of the Faith Series* (Ohio: Barbour Publishing, 1998), 65.

toward Mary. For an instant, Mary was again the young woman in the back streets of Dundee with the bully swinging his sharpened piece of metal at her. Just as she had then, she knew she could not back down; the warrior must not see any fear in her face. Mary prayed silently as the warrior came closer, the hot oil gleaming ominously in the bowl of the ladle. Except for the shuffling of the warrior's feet and the swish of the ladle, everything was quiet.

Finally, the moment came when Mary and the warrior stood face to face. They could not get any closer to each other. Either the warrior would hit Mary with the ladle of oil, or he would have to back away. He stared at Mary, and Mary stared back at him. Then, with a cry of disgust, the warrior threw the ladle on the ground and stepped away from Mary."⁷

Mary then turned to the chief and pleaded for the woman's life. When she received no answer, she quickly untied the woman and took her back to her mud hut. The whole village remained in shock for days. They wondered if Mary's God was more powerful than theirs. They were also captivated with the thought of an all-powerful God, like Mary described, who was also good and kind. They believed their god wanted them to do cruel things as well as practice magic and superstitious rituals.⁸

18. If the warrior had hurt or even killed Mary, would her faith have been any less valuable in the eyes of God? Yes No (Underline One) Explain your answer:

Read 2 Timothy 1:7–8 and answer questions 19–23:

For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.

⁸ So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God. 2 Timothy 1:7–8

19. What qualities does the Spirit of God give us (v. 8)? How do these qualities help us overcome fear and anxiety?

21. Mary Slessor stepped forward in faith despite personal fears and past trauma. What challenges in your own life require you to rely on God's power, love, and self-discipline instead of fear?

22. Paul invites Timothy to "join with me in suffering for the gospel." In what ways did Mary Slessor suffer for the gospel?

23. How did Mary's hardships strengthen her faith rather than weaken it?

⁷ Janet & Geoff Benge, *Mary Slessor: Forward Into Calabar*, 153–155.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 155.

If the warrior had struck or injured Mary Slessor, she would still have had the opportunity to live out her faith in love and humility among the people. If she had died, she would have died serving Christ. The *outcome* of our faith rests in God's sovereign hands. Our role is to be obedient, placing our trust in Him, and continuing to love Him no matter what we face or how it plays out.

God desires our love and obedience above His miracles, gifts, or blessings. But what happens when He either withdraws a blessing or allows it to be taken away? Sadly, most of us react with anger and disappointment. We blame God, question His love for us, or criticize His character.

Yet there are those who continue to love and honor God even through their pain. You may think of individuals whose faith has deepened—and inspired others—through suffering. And how much more our own faith grows as we witness theirs in action? Scripture, too, is filled with examples of such men and women in both the Old and New Testaments.

24. Read Job 1:20–22. After Job lost everything, including his children, how did he respond?

At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship²¹ and said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised."²² In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing. Job 1:20–22

Job's response challenges us: Do *we* worship God because of His blessings, or do we worship Him because He is God? Can *we* stand firm and face tragedy—with that same kind of trust?

Just as muscles grow through resistance, our faith strengthens through testing. For most of us, that testing comes through everyday hardships—loss, rejection, or difficulty. As we face these challenges, we remember that believers around the world endure even greater trials, including persecution and the risk of death, simply for following Jesus.

Life is difficult, but our faith deepens in darkness and adversity. Why? Because instead of relying on feelings, we learn to depend on God. We press through the struggle, seeking the light and protection of our Father in heaven. And as we emerge from the darkness of our testing, we often realize that previously we had been more focused on God's blessings than on God Himself.

25. What fears or difficulties have you faced that increased your faith over fear?

26. How have you learned to be more focused on God rather than on His blessings?

In Day Two, we explored *Faith Blockers* and learned practical ways to remove these obstacles to our faith by shifting our focus from self to God. We must retrain our minds with the truth of Scripture. In overcoming *Faith Blockers*, we replace the barrier to our faith with God's Word. Depending on how tough the obstacle is, you might ponder, meditate on and even memorize relevant verses.

If a particular verse is meaningful, write or print it on index cards or paper, distributing it throughout your residence. In this way, your battle plans are continually before you. There are many Bible verses instructing us in handling fear, but the following two may be helpful.

27. Read Psalm 56:3–4. What should you do when you are afraid?

When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. ⁴ In God, whose word I praise—in God I trust and am not afraid. What can mere mortals do to me? Psalm 56:3–4

28. Read Isaiah 41:10. Why should we not fear?

So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. Isaiah 41:10

God is with us and promises to strengthen and help us. No matter where we are or what enemy we may face, we can always turn to Him in prayer. Nehemiah was not facing a physical enemy in this moment, but he knew that asking the king of Persia for permission to leave his service and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem was risky. Although he had already spent time in prayer, Nehemiah did not hesitate to call on God again— even if it was only through a quick, silent arrow prayer in a moment of fear or anxiety.

29. Read Nehemiah 2:4–5, 8c. When anxiety rises in a difficult moment, how can you follow Nehemiah’s example and turn to God with a quick prayer for courage and clarity?

The king said to me, “What is it you want?” Then I prayed to the God of heaven, ⁵ and I answered the king . . . Nehemiah 2:4–5

And because the gracious hand of my God was on me, the king granted my requests. Nehemiah 2:8c

30. What areas of your life are still affected by fear or anxiety?

31. What steps can you take to replace fear with faith

Faith in God is not dependent on our circumstances. Fear and anxiety may come, but we must choose to trust in God’s promises rather than our emotions. Faith over fear is not about the absence of fear but about moving forward in obedience despite it.

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers #18–31 with your discipleship team.

—End Day Three—

Day Four
Faith as a Gift

In the previous day, we discussed the importance of prayer and Scripture in strengthening our faith. These are foundational for our walk with God. But as we continue growing, it is important to realize that faith is also a gift—something God nurtures in us over time, especially as we open ourselves to His work in both our conscious and subconscious mind.

Real change begins in our inner being. We need to allow the Holy Spirit to bring truth not only to the thoughts we are aware of, but also to those deep, hidden places that shape how we respond to life. For godly transformation to take place in our thoughts and actions, we must start with a posture of surrender and expectation.

In addition to prayer and Scripture, here are a few practical ways to help prepare our hearts and minds to grow stronger in faith, expecting to see God work in our lives:

(1) Change your body posture.

Your physical posture can affect your emotional and spiritual state. If you are discouraged, try sitting or standing tall. If your face is downcast, lift your head and smile. If you feel tense, stretch or take deep breaths. If you feel sluggish, move, walk, or even dance—express joy in your body.

But you, LORD, are a shield around me, my glory, the One who lifts my head high.
Psalm 3:3

(2) Surround yourself with worship.

Music has a unique way of ministering to our spirit. Whether you sing or simply listen, praise music and hymns can lift your soul and refocus your heart on God's faithfulness.

Sing to the Lord, all the earth; proclaim his salvation day after day. 1 Chronicles 16:23

(3) Replace harmful thoughts with truth.

When negative or anxious thoughts take over, write down positive, faith-filled truths instead. Recall all the Lord's faithfulness. Consider all the Lord has done in the past and what He will do.

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Romans 12:2a

32. Which of these three actions—changing your posture, surrounding yourself with worship, or replacing negative thoughts with truth—do you most need to practice right now?

All faith, including saving faith is a gift from God. Saving faith is the foundation of our relationship with God through Jesus (Ephesians 2:8). All believers have been given saving faith, but not all believers are given the “spiritual gift” of faith.

Definition: *Spiritual gifts* are God-given abilities, skills, or talents imparted through the Holy Spirit to empower all believers to serve Him and build up others. The apostle Paul listed about 20 *spiritual gifts*, including the gift of faith (1 Corinthians 12:9), however these lists are not meant to be exhaustive or limited.

“The gift of faith may be defined as the special gift whereby the Spirit provides Christians with extraordinary confidence in God’s promises, power, and presence so they can take heroic stands for the future of God’s work in the church. The spiritual gift of faith is exhibited by one with a strong and unshakeable confidence in God, His Word, and His promises. Examples of people with the gift of faith are those listed in Hebrews chapter 11. This chapter, often called “the hall of faith,” describes those whose faith was extraordinary, enabling them to do extraordinary, superhuman things. Here we see Noah spending 120 years building a huge boat when, up to that time, rain was non-existent and Abraham believing he would father a child when his wife’s natural ability to do so had ended. Without the special gift of faith from God, such things would have been impossible.”⁹

33. Do you have the spiritual gift of faith—a deep, unwavering confidence in God’s promises, power, and presence? Yes | No (Underline One)

34. If you have been given this gift, how are you using it to strengthen and encourage other believers?

Whether we have been given the spiritual gift of faith or are growing in everyday faith, it is something we can nurture. Even a small amount of faith can encourage others and make a big impact. Our faith grows stronger as we intentionally trust God in the ordinary moments of life.

It is like receiving the latest smartphone—equipped with powerful features and potential—but never turning it on. If we do not use what we have been given, we miss its purpose and impact. Faith is not only a gift of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:9), given to some for specific purposes, but also a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22), developed in all believers as we walk with God. Both expressions of faith are vital and work together in our spiritual growth and ministry to others.

35. Have you ever thanked God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit for your gift of saving faith and your faith to trust, obey, and remain steadfast? Yes | No (Underline One)

36. Whether or not you have ever done so before, take a moment to thank God for your gift of saving faith and daily faith to trust and obey. I thanked God: Yes | No (Underline One)

Read 2 Thessalonians 1:3 and answer questions 35–36:

⁹ <<https://www.gotquestions.org/gift-of-faith.html>>(accessed 4/9/2025)

“We ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more . . .” 2 Thessalonians 1:3

35. Why does the apostle Paul give thanks for the believers in Thessalonica?

36. In what ways is your faith growing more and more?

37. Read Luke 17:5 / Who did the apostles ask for help to increase their faith?

“The apostles said to the Lord, ‘Increase our faith!’” Luke 17:5

Even the apostles—those who walked closely with Jesus—recognized their need for greater faith and knew exactly where to turn. They asked the Lord Himself to increase their faith, reminding us that faith is a gift that begins and grows through our relationship with God.

Faith grows as we hear God’s Word, obey what He reveals, and trust Him in both ordinary and difficult times. It strengthens when we act in obedience, even when we cannot see the full picture. The more we rely on God and witness His faithfulness, the more confident and secure our faith becomes. Faith is not something we manufacture on our own—it is something God develops in us as we walk with Him daily.

Living by faith means trusting in God’s promises and aligning our lives accordingly. It is a radical obedience grounded in deep trust that God is always working for our good. In hard seasons, faith becomes a sustaining force, helping us endure trials and remain steadfast. Paul reminds us, *“The righteous will live by faith”* (Romans 1:17), and *“We live by faith, not by sight”* (2 Corinthians 5:7).

38. In what areas of your life are you currently relying on sight rather than faith?

Living by faith also means not sitting on the sidelines. Scripture points to a working —faith that leads to obedience and action. James reminds us, *“As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.”* (James 2:26)

As we have seen, Mary Slessor did not sit on the sidelines. She lived a life of bold faith in a dangerous place and time. Armed with relentless trust in God, she served inland tribes in Calabar, teaching the Bible and confronting cruel practices. Anyone else might have been killed for challenging tribal customs and chief authority, but God rewarded her faith and commitment to Him.

Over time, tribal raids to capture slaves ceased. Human sacrifices at funerals ended. Sobriety became more common. And twins were no longer automatically killed. When Mary died at the

age of 66, her funeral was filled with people from three tribal regions of Calabar—tribes she had faithfully served for 39 years. What a powerful tribute to the woman they called *Mother of Us All*—former enemies gathered in peace, without violence or conflict.¹⁰

39. How does Mary Slessor’s example challenge or inspire your own walk of faith?

Faith is believing Jesus has the power to save, transform, and empower. Faith is not a one-time event—it is a way of life. Mary Slessor’s example of discipleship, bravery, and courage reminds us to continually seek and dwell in the power of Christ.

You may feel like your faith is small or not sure where to begin. But remember—faith is a gift, and it grows as we practice it daily. We *can* grow our faith! And Jesus has an incredible, hope-filled message for us all.

Read Matthew 17:20 and 1 Corinthians 13:2 answer questions 40–43:

He replied, “Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.” Matthew 17:20

If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 1 Corinthians 13:2

40. What image (figure of speech) does both Jesus and Paul use in describing a strong faith?

41. How do you know that Jesus and Paul did not mean for believing saints to go around moving mountains of dirt and rock?

42. What did Jesus and Paul mean by using this phrase, “move mountains”?

43. What is the relationship between faith and love? Why is love essential? (1 Corinthians 13:2)

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers #32–43 with your discipleship team.

—End Day Four—

¹⁰ Ibid., 189–203.

Day Five

Presumption and Perseverance

Faith is an active trust and confidence in God. As we learned in Day Four, even a small amount of faith in God's ability can move mountains—accomplishing things that seem incredibly difficult or even impossible. The impossible becomes possible, not because of our strength or knowledge, but because we rely on God's power, wisdom, and perfect timing. Mountains may represent personal struggles, spiritual battles, or seemingly immovable circumstances—but faith reminds us that nothing is beyond God's reach.

But what if, as disciples of Christ, our faith falters or fails? When our trust in God weakens, it often reveals a struggle to fully believe in His goodness, mercy, or promises. Yet Scripture shows us that even when our faith is weak, God remains faithful. In moments of doubt, we are invited to be honest with God—just like the father who cried out to Jesus, “*I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!*” (Mark 9:24).

When John the Baptist was imprisoned by Herod, he too wrestled with doubt. Despite having once declared Jesus as “*the Lamb of God*,” John now questioned, “*Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?*” (Luke 7:19). Jesus did not rebuke him. Instead, He sent a reassuring message: “*The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor*” (Luke 7:22). Jesus, knowing John was familiar with the Scriptures, pointed him back to fulfilled prophecy—reminding him that God's Word could be trusted, even in a prison cell.

44. When your faith falters, what do you learn from Jesus' response to John the Baptist above?

Jesus meets us in our doubts with compassion and truth. He does not dismiss our questions—He gently brings us back to what is true. So if you struggle with faith, turn to God in prayer and immerse yourself in His Word. Study the Scriptures that speak of His goodness, mercy, and love. Surround yourself with truth—through Christ-centered books, podcasts, teachings, testimonies, and encouragement from fellow believers. Faith grows with the truth. No matter the outward circumstances or inward fears, God is sovereign, and His plans are perfect. The enemy will do everything possible to convince you otherwise, but the truth of God stands firm—even when we are shaken.

When struggling with faith, draw near to God—seek Him with all your heart, soul, and mind. Anticipate His presence. Acknowledge His faithfulness. Rest in His promises. Worship Him in His holiness.

In our search for God and longing for change, we must guard against coming up with our own solutions to our faltering faith. This may open a door to sinful action: *presuming on God* instead of trusting Him in faith.

Definition: The word *presume* means to accept something as true without proof or to act arrogantly or overconfidently. Spiritually, presuming on God means we are not acting in faith,

but taking things into our own hands rather than humbly depending on God through prayer and His Word.

False prophets presume to speak for God. They presume to know what God desires of His people in a particular situation. Even though they have no evidence or clear direction from the Lord, they speak and act as though they do. They are arrogant and overconfident of their position and authority before God. They fail to remember that their position is one of humble servanthood and their authority rests in God's pleasure.

There were false prophets in the past, at present, and there will be false prophets in the future. But presumption is not limited to false prophets. Any of us can fall into the sin of presumption. If I were to jump off a cliff expecting God to rescue me, I would not be acting in faith—I would be presuming on God's mercy, trying to force His hand to act when it was never His will for me to jump. This is exactly how Satan tempted Jesus at the temple: *"If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down"* (Matthew 4:6). But Jesus responded firmly with Scripture, reminding us not to put God to the test. Another example is found in Number 14.

Read Numbers 14:42–45 answer questions 45–46:

"Do not go up, because the LORD is not with you. You will be defeated by your enemies, ⁴³ for the Amalekites and the Canaanites will face you there. Because you have turned away from the LORD, he will not be with you and you will fall by the sword." ⁴⁴ Nevertheless, in their presumption they went up toward the highest point in the hill country, though neither Moses nor the ark of the LORD's covenant moved from the camp. ⁴⁵ Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who lived in that hill country came down and attacked them and beat them down all the way to Hormah. Numbers 14:42–45

45. What do you learn about the sin and danger of presumption?

46. How would you determine whether you are acting in faith or presuming on God?

God is under no obligation to bless delayed obedience or impulsive action. The Israelites failed to proceed into the promised land when they were originally given the mission. God's door of opportunity closed and when they finally went forward, they were not in God's will. They were not acting in faith but disobedience. They acted rashly presumptively, ignoring both God's Word and His prophet, Moses.

How do we make sure we are living in obedience and not presumption?

Determine to trust this fact—God *wants* us to know His will. We should seek Him daily, reading and meditating on the Word—asking Him what we are to do. Expecting God's answer and not being discouraged when God does not act in the way we had hoped or desired. Be still and know that God acts perfectly and in His timing. We need to also recognize that our knowledge and understanding of God's ways may not always be complete or accurate.

Perhaps your faith is being tested right now. You may be facing a serious trial—physical danger, financial pressure, chronic illness, or emotional stress. Or you may be struggling with a deeper issue, such as the temptation to please yourself rather than God.

No matter the challenge, we can be tempted to take matters into our own hands. In doing so, we choose a *fix-it-yourself* scheme, instead of relying on God to rescue, provide, or heal. These *quick-fixes* often bypass God and His help. But when we avoid God—even briefly—we are not living by faith, but in faithlessness. And faithlessness is considered unrighteousness in the eyes of God.

Read Romans 1:17 and answer questions 46–49:

For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’ Romans 1:17

46. Define righteousness and unrighteousness?

47. Why does God view faithlessness as unrighteousness?

48. Why must faith be a continual and ongoing part of your Christian life?

49. How does your response to life’s challenges impact your relationship with God?

To live by faith means that we persevere—even when we have doubts or want to give up. Perseverance in faith is the steadfast endurance and unwavering trust in God during trials and hardships. It is continuing to believe, trust, and obey God’s will regardless of how we feel or what we face. This kind of endurance is not passive—it is a resilient, Spirit-empowered choice to keep going, firmly anchored in God’s character and promises.

50. Read John. 8:31 According to Jesus, how are His true disciples expected to persevere in faith?

To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. John. 8:31

51. Read James 1:12. What is the result for those who persevere in their faith under trial?

Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him. James 1:12 (See also Colossians 1:23; Revelation 2:7)

52. What challenges have you faced, and how have you persevered in your faith?

53. Read 1 Corinthians 1:8–9. When you face challenges to your faith, what promise from God can you hold onto?

He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.
1 Corinthians 1:8–9

54. Read Philippians 1:6. What assurance do you have as a disciple of Christ?

... being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. Philippians 1:6

Action Step

55. Write an outline of how you would encourage someone struggling in their faith. Include how you would listen, what Scripture you would share, and how you would support them. If someone comes to mind, reach out and encourage them this week.

Growing in faith is not a one-time decision—it is a lifelong journey of learning to trust God more deeply. As we persevere through trials and challenges, our faith is refined and strengthened. God never asks us to walk in our own strength. He faithfully sustains us, builds us up, and completes the good work He began in us. Whatever you are facing today, take heart: you are not alone. God is with you, and He is faithful.

56. In closing Lesson 16, pray the following prayer. I prayed. Yes | No (Underline One)

Lord God, thank You for the gift of faith and for the assurance that You are always at work in my life. When trials come, help me to stand firm—not in my own strength, but in Your promises. Teach me to trust You more each day, to hold to Your Word, and to walk as a true disciple. Strengthen me to persevere and remind me that You will carry me through to the very end. I place my hope in You alone. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers #44–43 with your discipleship team.

—End of Day Five and Lesson 16—

Next—Lesson 17: Love, Unit 4: Disciple of Christ

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