



ARTICLE BY **JEFF HOPPER**

FUELED BY THE TEACHING OF **JEFFREY CRANFORD** AT THE 2014 GATHERINGS OF THE RED DOOR COMMUNITY IN BERMUDA DUNES, CALIFORNIA

The Red Door Community is a Links Fellowship, planted as a Bible study where people enjoy golf. More than 150 such Fellowships meet around the country under the guidance of Links Players International. This article is produced by Links Players but may be reprinted and distributed free of charge, or passed along online as this full pdf file.

I had the pleasure of growing up in golf around one of the bluntest, funniest lovers of the game you could ever meet. He'd give you the world in helping you to get better—but his world included a dose of reality that kept you on your toes.

Among this mentor's continuing themes was this: Show me the numbers. He loved a good meal and was willing to sit through all the stories of the day told over dinner, but if you started to tell your story before coming clean with your score, he'd cut you off. "What did you shoot?" he demanded. "That's all I asked."

Numbers are a big part of the game we love. Eighteen numbers make up your scorecard's total. And twenty scores are sorted to form your handicap index.

Now let's stretch your knowledge about that index, because among golfers it can be a mark of prowess.

Handicap indexes are not meant for general consumption. They don't compare so well from course to course, especially if the courses are regularly played from quite different distances. More than that, the USGA explains that their purpose isn't really meant for large stroke play events, where one higher handicapper will typically shoot a great round aided by plenty of strokes and run away from the field. No, indexes were principally designed to facilitate one-on-one match play.

All of which leads us to say, even the best statistical measure of who you are as a golfer is not a great measure at all. Besides, you might be a whole lot happier about golf if you invented an "enjoyment quotient" and succeeded at that!

What can be harder still is to find a measure for your growth in the faith—by which we mean, your walk with Jesus Christ. Supposed

measurements like church attendance, participation in a small group, or “personal time in the Word” can seem like modern forms of legalism, where the purpose of practicing these disciplines might be little more than the feeding of our pride.

be “in the faith,” a term we can cease placing in quotation marks if we take it as our own and not just Paul’s.

First, we should recognize that to be one who is now in the faith is to say that you were formerly one who was not in the faith. Paul’s own change of

began to preach that Jesus was the Promised One, both Savior and now Lord. It didn’t take long for this reputation to spread. About those who got wind of Paul’s change, he himself wrote: “They only heard this report: ‘The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy’” (Galatians 1:23). Paul had quite definitely moved from outside faith in Jesus Christ to inside that faith.

Next, we recognize in Scripture that “the faith” came with a set of parameters and that people could be encouraged to develop their understanding and practice of these matters. Chief among these was that their faith be placed in Jesus and in the fact that his grace-enacted crucifixion and resurrection had purchased their salvation. The practice of this faith came through a patterning of one’s life after Jesus’ teachings and personal example.

**S**uch a faith had several notable components. First, it could be encouraged:

*They preached the gospel in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. (Acts 14:21-22)*

Second, it could be strengthened (or, in the Greek *stereoō*: made solid or firm):

*So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers. (Acts 16:5)*

And third, it was to be contended for:

## ***The most adamant way to “contend for the faith” is to speak of it clearly and live it visibly.***

The difficulty, however, is that we are supposed to have a sense of how we’re doing when it comes to our faith. The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?” (2 Corinthians 13:5, ESV).

This passage tells us three important things:

- 1) We can run a test of whether we are “in the faith”
- 2) We can conduct this test by examining ourselves
- 3) Those who pass the test are indwelt by Jesus

That final promise is wonderful, and obviously what Paul was desiring his readers to find for themselves. And since those readers now include us, we too should be heartily interested in whether we have Jesus resident in us. After all, there is no other authentic description of a “Christian.”

But ahead of that promise comes the test. So let us turn to more of Scripture to find a definition of what it means to be “in the faith” and to see how we might determine whether we are truly there.

### **TO BE ‘IN THE FAITH’**

We do good work by beginning with an investigation of what it means to

heart<sup>1</sup> is helpful here, for we know from the accounts of Acts that while he was devout in his following of the Jewish traditions of the Pharisees, he was a leader in persecuting—and arranging for the persecution of—what was a new Jewish sect, the Way. Those who professed to be part of the Way differentiated themselves by saying that the awaited Messiah (Savior or King) of the Jewish people had indeed arrived and that he was Jesus of Nazareth. For this reason, he was no longer only a carpenter or rabbi, but rather “the Anointed One”—in Greek, *Cristos*; in English, *Christ*.

Paul was among the many Jews of his time who made no such room for Messianic claims in regard to Jesus. They saw him as dead, crucified by the Roman government, and thus impossible their king. Those of the Way, however, claimed Jesus to be risen from the dead. What eventually happened is that Paul, while traveling the road to Damascus to extend his persecution, had a firsthand encounter with the risen Jesus and immediately

---

<sup>1</sup>While the expression “change of heart” can be a soft one, we mean it here spiritually and quite strongly, with the wholesale work of change being done by God, and we employ it as opposed to the term “conversion,” which is sometimes offensive to our friends in the Jewish community.

*Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people. (Jude 1:3)*

The faith, then, was not just a nice idea, held to in the minds of those who believed. It had transcendent purpose and practical functionality. It could waver in its strength, with both conflicting teachings (such as legalism in Paul's time and universalism in our own) and a person's own sinful living contributing to a weakening of one's adherence to the faith. Certainly if a

person makes habits of acting apart from faith or in dismissal of the clear examples of Jesus, this can establish contrary masters to the Lord and undermine both one's own faith and the faith as a whole in the eyes of those who watch supposed believers act in unbelief. The most adamant way to "contend for the faith" is to speak of it clearly and live it visibly.

This all may beg a key question that we will address before closing this section and that is, *What is the difference between living "in the faith" and living "in faith?"* Undoubtedly, "the faith" includes faith, that is "the assurance of things hoped for and the evidence

of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). But one may place faith in one's self (as in having faith in one's ability to pick the next profitable investment or hit a ball straight down a narrow fairway). To be in the faith, as we are discussing it, is to place one's trust in Jesus Christ for all things, beginning with faith for eternal salvation, but advancing in faith that he will lead and equip you in all matters as you walk out your days on this earth. You may place your faith in something other than this, including in a different religious leader, but this is not "the faith" that Paul and the other apostles were pursuing.

## — THE EXAMINATION —

If at this point you are convinced of the excellence of being one who is in the faith, you may be urgently asking the questions provoked by Paul's words to the Corinthians. *How can I know? How can I put myself to the test to see if I am in the faith?*

For a moment, pause and recognize two important precursors to the evaluation we are going to offer.

First, the test is one given first and foremost to one's self. "Examine yourselves," Paul wrote. Only God knows a person's heart better than they know it themselves. If we are to be honest before God, we must be honest in his presence, laying our souls bare to his examination, but also to his provocation and encouragement. When you survey the evaluation, then, do so with eyes to yourself and ears to the Lord.

Second, the encouragement of the faith comes in community with others, as we saw in the examples from Acts. God's people were strengthened and encouraged together. While we know ourselves best, the experiences of others, especially those who are mature in the faith, can allow us to see through their eyes things that we would not otherwise see about ourselves. Committing yourself to a group of Christ-followers (members of the body of Christ) for the purpose of personal spiritual growth is the pattern of the New Testament church and the practice of healthy

men and women of God today.

With those understandings in mind, we can turn to a list of observations that allow us to examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith. This list is by no means comprehensive, but it is strongly representative. You may identify with other "proofs" from Scripture, but if you do not also identify with these, you must consider again the position of your faith.

### When a person is in the faith...

**1 They express an increasing interest in "God stuff" (Romans 8).** Those who are in the faith earnestly seek God. They want to know more about who he is and what he is doing among his people and in the earth generally.

**2 They desire to be led.** In Romans 8:14, we read that "those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God." Before people give their lives to Jesus, they are ruled by their own passions and desires (Galatians 5:24). After they surrender their hearts to Jesus and he indwells them, they recognize the catastrophe that has come through their self-government. They want instead to be governed by the Lord of their lives, who is Jesus.

**3 They are increasingly aware of the darkness in their life (Romans 7:21).** While this is not a welcome truth among those who have not given their hearts to Jesus, every follower of Christ sees quite clearly that their human condition means this: they are a sinner. In fact, as God peels back the layers of your heart, this becomes increasingly clear. Thankfully, we know as well that Christ is doing his great work in us, that we “are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another” (2 Corinthians 3:18). That is, in God’s formative hands, we are a waxing moon, with the light increasing and the darkness decreasing.

**4 They are growing in the confidence that God truly loves them.** The Spirit living in us “testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children” (Romans 8:16). When you sense that God is your Daddy and that you can cry out to him for every little bit of help, knowing that he will respond as one who loves and cares for you (Matthew 7:9-11), this is a good sign that you are in the faith.

**5 They are attracted to the unseen kingdom of God rather than the vanities of earth.** Before Christ, we cannot even make sense of what God is doing (1 Corinthians 2:14). But when the Spirit lives in us, our ability to discern the ways of God is ignited. We see what God is doing and we want to function in the flow of that work.

**6 They are eager to keep learning about God.** The wealth of this world decreases in their eyes, and they want to become active in eternally significant pursuits. It’s time to set aside the “old junk” and chase after God (1 Peter 2:-3).

**7 They begin to take notice of other people’s needs.** In fact, this sudden love can seem to come

“out of nowhere,” though we know that it must come from God (1 John 4:7). You find yourself willing—and even excited—to lay down your agenda to take time to help others.

**8 They want to talk to God—a lot.** Paul encouraged the Thessalonians to “pray continually” (1 Thessalonians 5:17), an exhortation that is easily received when one recognizes the joy of friendship with God.

**9 Their heart and their words increasingly demonstrate thanksgiving.** In our old life, apart from Jesus, we are given to faithlessness and thus complaint. Small irritations are a big deal. But when the hope of Christ prevails in our hearts and minds, we are thankful even in affliction and give way to God’s design for our lives, knowing that he in all things “works for the good for those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28).

**10 They cannot wait for “the other side.”** Death is the great bane and fear of those who have no hope in Jesus. But for those whose assurance of salvation and eternal life are in his hands, “to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21). This does not mean that there is no great work to be done on this earth, for Paul also said that “to live is Christ.” But we no longer worry about what is to come; indeed, we welcome it, knowing that we will in physical death be in the presence of our Savior.

As we said, this list is not exhaustive. When you read the Bible for yourself, if you are thinking always of putting yourself to the test, you will find many other matters where God will seize your heart and turn your mind to him and his ways. But we hope this gives you a launching pad for pointing your eyes to the work God really wants to do in your life.

In the end, we realize that we have not given you an “index” for your faith. We cannot say of one believer, “she is a 6.4” while another is a 12.1.

As with golf, those who are new to “the game” will have many rough edges and be prone to error. Yet these are

often the people with the most energy for the work and the greatest enthusiasm for getting it done. In the community of the faith, the mature in Christ mentor those who are newer, and the young bring excitement to us all!

What we hope to have done is

allow you to see that Paul was not speaking metaphorically when he challenged the Corinthians to put themselves to the test. By the lens of God’s Word, we can see ourselves as God sees us and move to becoming more like his Son, Jesus Christ.