



As we continue our series on the book of Mark, I would like you to consider how you might answer this question:

What do you think are qualities that would indicate a believer has a healthy or a strong faith?



This list of four is not exhaustive, but in this passage, we will see these four qualities. In Mark 6:1-13 Jesus gives the disciples a pretty faith stretching task to do, and if we were asked to do it, it would be tough.

Here are four words related to each of those qualities to further stir your thinking. Emotions, familiarity, future, uncertainty.

You may have noticed, if you have been keeping up with our series through Mark, that I am skipping a section, Mark 5:21-43. I will return to this passage next week because next week we will take a look at the sanctity of human life, as next week is Sanctity of Human Life Sunday. I will bring a clear message about what the bible says about life, and it will come from Mark 5:21-43. But here we will be looking at Mark 6:1-13.

Just prior to this Jesus had healed a demon possessed man, raised a girl from the dead, and healed a sick woman, some significant spiritual successes.

¹ Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples. ² When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed. “Where did this man get these things?” they asked. “What’s this wisdom that has been given him, that he even does miracles! ³ Isn’t this the carpenter? Isn’t this Mary’s son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren’t his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him. ⁴ Jesus said to them, “Only in his hometown, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honor.” ⁵ He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. ⁶ And he was amazed at their lack of faith. Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village.

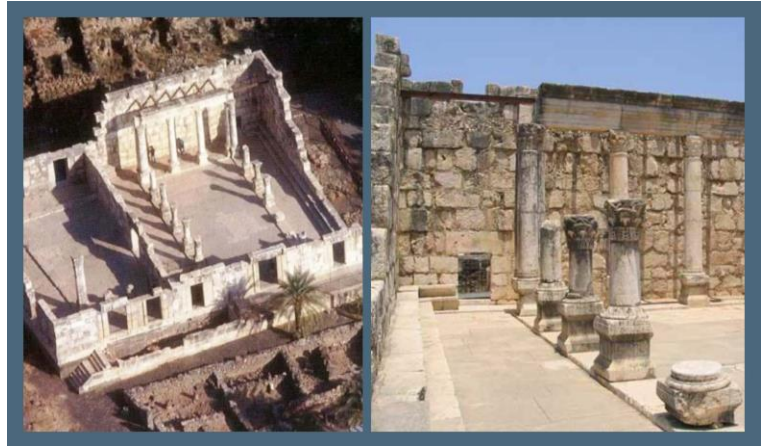
⁷ Calling the Twelve to him, he sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits.

⁸ These were his instructions: “Take nothing for the journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. ⁹ Wear sandals but not an extra tunic. ¹⁰ Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town. ¹¹ And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave, as a testimony against them.” ¹² They went out and preached that people should repent. ¹³ They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.

Mark 6:1, “Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples. When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed.”

Jesus was born in Bethlehem, but he grew up in Nazareth. In those days it was common to allow visiting teachers to teach in the synagogue. The Gospels record that Jesus did this 10 times. Here are pictures of the ruins of a later synagogue.

A synagogue in biblical times meant much more to the community than what a church now means to a community. Not only was it a center for worship and teaching, but it was also like a community center where the people gathering for social life, classes were held there, some had schools in them, it was a meeting place, a courtroom, and even some had places where travelers could stay.



Typically, they were built on the highest point in the town or on a raised platform. Inside there were benches on three sides of the room. There was a small platform where the speakers or readers would stand. The common people probably sat on mats on the floor, while the important people sat on the stone benches. This was probably the first time Jesus’ family and those he grew up with heard him teach. And they were amazed. When they saw what Jesus did and the power with which he taught, there was some real emotion going on there.

Yet, there was also an undercurrent of doubt and contempt.

As they began to think about it, their amazement quickly cooled when they began to ask these questions which revealed their hostility toward Him.

Mark 6:2-3, “Where did this man get these things?’ they asked. ‘What’s this wisdom that has been given him, that he even does miracles! Isn’t this the carpenter? Isn’t this Mary’s son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren’t his sisters here with us?’ And they took offense at him.”

They knew him as a carpenter in their village as he grew up. Carpenters were in the working class.

I can imagine the people in this village as they sat in the synagogue began to whisper these things as Jesus taught.

They are not disputing them. They saw his miracles and heard his teaching. They are dumfounded that they come from a hometown boy. They thought, Jesus couldn’t possibly know more about the scriptures than the rest of the locals since they all received the same synagogue training. And what Rabbi did he learn under?

Someone from the working class telling me how to live my life and interpret the Torah? No way.

Even the second question, “Isn’t this Mary’s son?” was a derogatory question since it was not customary among Jews to describe a man as the son of his mother even when the father was not alive, as at this point Joseph may have already died.

And how could someone with a dubious conception (remember the virgin birth) be able to interpret the Torah like this.

We actually get the word scandal from the word offense here. Here it is the idea of being offended and repelled.

However, later on, once His family later saw Jesus in His resurrected body, many of them ultimately believed. So, do not give up on your family who may be far from God.

Mark 6:4-6, “Jesus said to them, “Only in his hometown, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honor.’ He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. And he was amazed at their lack of faith.”

When you study Jesus’ healings, he healed those that showed faith and those that did not show much faith. He healed when someone wanted to be healed and when someone wasn’t seeking healing. But here, he made a conscious choice to heal only in response to those who exercised faith.

Their low view of Jesus resulted in their not receiving some blessings they could have received. They just couldn’t believe He was who He was, so they had low expectations and therefore Jesus self-limited His teaching and healing in that place.

Jesus was even amazed and their lack of receptivity in a place that should have been a friendly environment.

Mark 6:6-7, “Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village. Calling the Twelve to him, he sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits.”

By this point Jesus had spent sufficient time with the 12 to train them to become fishers of men. They had seen him teaching and preaching and performing miracles. Now the rubber would meet the road. Jesus was going to send them out as His authorized representatives.

He sent them out 2 by 2 because this reflected the Old Testament law that required two witnesses to validate the truthfulness of any statement and with two people, they could give each other mutual support.

One of the ways that confirmed the message of Jesus in the Gospels was through miracles like casting out demons. For some, it was enough to hear Jesus teach and see him perform miracles for them to believe. For others (like these hometown folks) even miracles could not convince them.

Next, Jesus gives the disciples a pretty scary task.

Mark 6:8-9, “These were his instructions: ‘Take nothing for the journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. Wear sandals but not an extra tunic. Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town. And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave, as a testimony against them.’”

Put yourself in their shoes. There is lots of uncertainty in their doing what Jesus asked.

In those days a Jewish person would have with them at any one time several articles of dress:

- An inner garment
- An outer garment which was used as a cloak by day and as a blanket by night
- Another outer garment somewhat like a girdle which would have pockets for money
- A headdress that protected them from the sun and heat
- Sandals
- And a bag, either an ordinary travelling bag or a beggar’s bag

Those are pretty meager provisions to have to go out on a missionary journey.

These were specific instructions to His disciples at this point in His public ministry and He is not laying down expectations for future missionaries or for believers in general. God does not expect us to be paupers.

So, what can we draw from this?

I mentioned the beggar's bag. It was some kind of bag that beggars used and various itinerate Greek philosophers and teachers also used as they begged for support. Jesus was saying, you must trust me that I will provide for you. You do not need to beg. You do not have to do what the culture does.

You can take the essentials like a staff to fend off bandits or wild animals, shoes, and one set of clothes.

They were to trust God to provide shelter, food, and clothing through the hospitality of other believers in the villages they went to. The minimum of provisions was meant to call out the maximum of faith.

They faced great uncertainty: Would the people respond to their teaching? Would the peoples' lack of faith inhibit miracles? Would they have a place to spend the night? Would they have food? Would they have enough clothing to keep warm?

In those days this 'shaking off of dust' was a practice for Jews to shake off the dust from before they entered Jewish territory because to bring in dust from a non-Jewish territory was seen as defiling.

Here, though, it is used to indicate that those who reject Christ are not His people.

Mark 6:12-13, "They went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them."

So, they trusted Jesus at His word, that would take care of their needs, and Jesus patterned their task after his own ministry, to preach repentance, drive out demons, and heal the sick.

So, what does a healthy faith look like? Let's go back to our Big Idea: Four Qualities indicate that your faith is healthy.

I gave you four key words:

- Emotions
- Familiarity
- Future
- Uncertainty

A healthy faith...

Quality 1: ...does not falter in the absence of feel-good emotions.

We do not have to have good emotions to do follow Jesus well. Remember how the home folks first responded to Jesus. They were amazed, but those positive emotions quickly faded, and their lack of faith hindered Jesus' work there.

A healthy faith is strong not only when we experience good emotions. It is strong even when and in spite of those times when you don't have those feel-good emotions and when we experience the unpleasant ones like fear, anxiety, or anger.

I am not implying that we ignore or stuff negative emotions. And I recognize that sometimes we go through periods called the dark night of the soul when we do not feel God's presence at all. That happens sometimes. Rather, I am saying that when we do experience these kinds of painful emotions, we acknowledge them, which counter-intuitively turns down their intensity.

If you have a healthy faith, you still will walk with and trust Jesus even when you don't feel like it.

We walk by faith and not by feeling.

I call the kind of pseudo faith, flash faith: It is, I believe it while I see it, if I experience it.

In my forty plus years of ministry I have seen many people make “so called” professions of faith and get really excited about God. But over time as the emotions cool, bad things in life happen, disillusionment with God sets in, such faith is revealed for what it was. No faith.

It was only a flash in the pan. They disappear from church. They drop out of any semblance of following Jesus and some even recant their faith. John 6.66 records that when Jesus explained the cost of following him, many quit. Some people quit on God when they realize it is costly. They reason it is just not worth the price.

Quality 2: ...resists over-familiarity.

The friends and family in Jesus’ hometown were too familiar with him to see His greatness. That is why He said that only in his hometown is a prophet without honor. Familiarity breeds contempt.

Sometimes we can inadvertently become over-familiar, so used to the Bible, worship in church, our devotions, services, that we take things for granted, our faith becomes *ho-hum*, *blasé*, *stale*. We are no longer amazed at grace and forgiveness and heaven and Jesus and the glory of God...Heard that. Been there. Got the T-shirt.

Healthy faith will recognize this and not go there.

Quality 3: ... seeks certainty during periods of uncertainty.

When Jesus sent them out 2 by 2 and gave them the instructions to take little with them, that was hugely uncertain, no money, no food, no reservations at the hotel. They just had to go and trust the Lord to care for them.

When you think about it life, in general, is uncertain. And our brains don’t like uncertainty. When uncertainty gets the best of us, we assume the worst, delay decisions, get distracted from what’s most important, don’t think as clearly, we worry, get fearful and get chronically stressed.

Christian worry is the unsuccessful human attempt, through cognitive and behavioral efforts, to obtain certainty about an ambiguous future because of the struggle to believe in, trust, and submit to the benevolent care of an omnipotent God. (Knabb, Frederick, and Cumming 2017)

Although the brain does not like uncertainty, the scriptures remind us of its reality. The Bible teaches that we live in a world often filled with uncertainty because ultimately, we don’t know what tomorrow holds.

When uncertainty gets the best of us, worry and anxiety and fear result and lead to stress. And Jesus tells us not to worry about tomorrow (Matthew 6) because our faith in him gives us certainty. “Faith is the reality of what we hope for, the proof of what we don’t see” (Hebrews 11:1).

God’s promises are certain because God does not lie (Numbers 23:19), and his promises are a yes to you in Jesus Christ. “All of God’s promises have their yes in him” (2 Corinthians 1:20).

In addition, the Bible often uses vivid metaphors of things to illustrate God’s faithfulness and dependability: He is our rock (Matthew 16:18), our foundation (1 Corinthians 3:11), a tower to which we can run (Proverbs 18:10).

We cannot presume to see ourselves in any circumstance in which we have never been. Certainty is the mark of the commonsense life; gracious uncertainty is the mark of the spiritual life.

To be certain of God means that we are uncertain in all our ways, not knowing what tomorrow may bring. This is generally expressed with a sigh of sadness, but it should be an expression of breathless expectation.

We are uncertain of the next step, but we are certain of God. As soon as we abandon ourselves to God and do the task He has placed closest to us, He begins to fill our lives with surprises. (Oswald Chambers)

Research studies have shown that when we surrender/abandon ourselves through surrendering prayer to the unchanging God of our faith, worry decreases, well-being increases, and tolerance for uncertainty increases. When we abandon ourselves to God, we, “accept situations as they are, rather than what [we] think they should be” (Ferguson, Willemsen, and Castañeto 2010, 313).

To practice this can be as simple as, “Lord I surrender to you right now, in this circumstance. I know you are a loving God. I know you will take care of me. I release this uncertainty to you.”

Make this a prayer you begin your day with. Often pray it in stressful situations.

This point really hits home for us during this stage of life. I finish my role here as lead pastor the last Sunday of March. I am not stopping ministry, just slowing down a bit and changing what I do. We are moving back to the United States probably in April. We face lots of uncertainty in our move:

- selling our house here (pray that it will sell),
- finding a new church home,
- developing my new ministry job of coaching/writing/teaching/consulting because I’m not getting a salary from some church, I still need to bring in income a few more years,
- new friendships.
- And of course, How we will deal with no milk in a bag.

Quality 4: ... looks forward to the future.

This point refers to keeping our sights on the long horizon, heaven.

We have been talking about faith. If you want to learn a lot about faith read Hebrews 11. The author lists all these people who exercised faith. For many, they did not receive the promises in this life. He wrote, “All these people died still believing what God had promised them. They did not receive what was promised, but they saw it all from a distance and welcomed it. They agreed that they were foreigners and nomads here on earth” Hebrews 11:13.

This is not our home. We are simply passing through. Travel light.

A HEALTHY FAITH:

1. Does not falter in the absence of feel-good **emotions**
We walk by faith and not by feel.
2. Resists **over-familiarity**
Familiarity can breed contempt.
3. Seeks certainty during periods of **uncertainty**
Life is uncertain. God is not.
4. Looks forward to the **future**
Travel light through this life.