

The Irreducible Minimum of Faith

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[0 : 00] Ye gads. I'm usually sitting over here. I didn't realize there's so many of you out there. Well, if you don't know, I'm Nathan's dad. And we'll get that out of the way real quick.

And the best of Nathan is who his mom is, and the worst of who Nathan is, is me. And I got up 6.30 this morning, but I didn't look at any emails until about 8.15.

And lo and behold, Nathan's sick. Well, that's not new news for our family. We kind of grew up that way.

And I remember when I was young, like most of you, you know, I could whip anything. I could do anything. I could climb any tree.

One of my favorites of old is Mr. Muir. Remember Mr. Muir? A Sierra Club come out of him.

[1 : 14] And one of his famous antics, he wanted to experience a storm. So in the Sierra Nevadas and California, he climbed to the top of the tallest tree he could find.

And lightning's flashing and thundering. And the wind is blowing. And he's on the top of this tree. And the tree is swaying just to experience a storm.

Well, that's me growing up. And that's who I was. Strong, you know, ready to take on anything and anyone.

Strong, you know, I'm going to take on anything and anyone.

I'm going to be poached out of Okefenokee Swamp and had a brand new pickup truck. Man, I was living. I was living.

[2 : 34] But then it began to just kind of crumble around me. And for the first time in my life, I really began to notice that I was more fragile than I would have admitted.

And in fact, as time wore on, not too many years out of college, I began to realize that the outside of me and the inside of me were not the same thing.

I was going through the motions of having a good time and having it together, but miserable on the inside. And I hated, I couldn't stand to use the word.

I certainly wasn't going to do it publicly, but I realized I was fragile. And as time wore on, I began to see how fragile I was and how many things in my life and around me was not in my control like they had been just a few years previously.

Now, I grew up down on the Mexican border. That's a hard thing to grasp hold of, you know, to be a man's man and to be fragile.

[3 : 56] But I wanted desperately for the inside of me and the outside of me to be the same person. I didn't want to go through the motions of having a good time, pretending, being a pretender all my life.

I wanted things to be together. I wanted to be a whole person. And I come to the realization that if it was ever going to happen in my life, my job wasn't going to get it done.

My upbringing wasn't going to get it done. And my relationships, because that stunk, it wasn't going to get done. And so I was reaching for anything.

And finally, I come to realize and believe that Jesus Christ was the only way to get the inside of me and the outside of me and to begin to handle my frailty.

But I thought, you know, my strength would be restored. No, I just got more and more frail. And then one day, Julie and I had been married a little over a year, and we had this little thing called Jamie Lee come into our life.

[5 : 22] He gads. What an awesome thing. Soft, fragile. And it was in her frailty that I found more frailty on my own part.

I discovered more things about myself that I really didn't want to admit to, but she had me. Now, I've got to tell you, even though soft and pliable and innocent as she was, she could really stink.

Holy moly, I didn't know that anything that gentle could stink so bad. And yet I'm reminded every day that I'm just a stinky old guy.

So are you. God has unique ways of bringing us back to reality and helping us to see again and again and again how frail we are.

Well, some years ago, a young friend of mine used the term irreducible minimums. I've come to realize through all of my studying that God has created the universe in circles.

[6 : 49] And as you think you're going out through your life, you are only going to understand that it's going to bring you back sometime or another to the beginning. And that beginning has to do with those irreducible minimums.

And as fragile as I am, I realize I've got to have a good, strong foundation under my life in order to live the kind of life that would honor God.

For I didn't get saved in a church. I didn't get saved because of a church. I was saved in my home out of a home Bible study, reading the Word of God and believing what it said.

So as far as I was concerned, Jesus is it. He is the chief cornerstone, our Word tells us, and shows us that the church is built on a strong foundation.

And what constitutes the items of that foundation are these irreducible minimums. 1 Corinthians 13, verse 13 says, Now faith, hope, and love.

[8 : 07] These three. But the greatest of these is love. There's an irreducible minimum in it. Faith and hope are irreducible minimums.

Well, I want to focus today on faith, if you don't mind. Y'all want to vote for it? Because if we choose something else, somebody else is going to have to preach it.

Faith is how we get into this life, and faith is how we're to go on with this life. Faith is how we get into this life. Some folks just get in by faith and say, Well, that part's done.

What's next? And so we, like I was pursuing what's next, we go from preacher to preacher, church to church, you know, version of the Bible to version of the Bible.

We jump all over the place. Jesus said to the Pharisees, he actually was kind of honoring them. He said, You diligently search the scriptures, but you fail to come to me.

[9 : 18] See, when it all boils down, one of those irreducible minimums is, you with me?

When it all boils down, one of those irreducible minimums, is faith. Faith is how we get in.

But do you know what faith is? If we all had a moment, and we'd go look to find out a definition of faith, some of us, like Sid, in his day and age, he'd go to a dictionary.

His dictionary would be some hard copy out there, a Webster's, a New Collegiate, somewhere out there, he'd go find a dictionary. In most of your cases, you'd just whip out your iPhone, and I was asking Nathan the other day, I said, Where is there a good dictionary that I can get in my iPhone? And he said, He said, Give me your iPhone. And he spoke into my iPhone a memory thing for me to, into my, instead of texting it to me, he just spoke it in there.

[10 : 43] Dictionary.com. I haven't done a thing with it since. In fact, I'm not sure what I'm supposed to do with it next. I could point, tap something.

I don't know. Today, Nathan's, again, reminds me of how fragile life can be. I remember when Julie called me and told me at the office, we'd had a vacation, we'd gone to Disneyland for the first time. You know, that's not in Florida. Disneyland is in California. That's, this is pre-Disney World for some of you. There was a time before Disney World.

And we went over there and had a great time. But he was feeling kind of sick. We thought he had a, maybe a urinary and tract infection. And no, he had diabetes.

And Julie calls and says, You gotta get to the, we gotta take him to the hospital right now. I said, Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa.

[11 : 48] Let's don't be in such a hurry. I had no clue what diabetes meant. Nor why we needed to get to the hospital right now. So I went home, picked them up, took them over to the doctor and then had made him explain it to me personally.

And then we went immediately to the hospital. Gosh, I tell you, his arm wasn't, didn't seem like to me any bigger than that finger.

Sticking needles in there, which is what he had to have, was hard for me. I kept envisioning hitting the bone. And after a few days in the hospital, we got, you know, brought him home.

And I remember that first Saturday, you know, thinking, well, let's sleep in. Now with diabetes, we had to get up, we had to eat on time and have the shot on time and have the finger pokies on time.

And on and on and on it went. And later on, Jamie becomes a diabetic. And this is not my family, is it? Yeah, it was.

[12 : 59] I want to say to you, young'uns, because calamity, stress, struggle, storms come to your life, doesn't mean that you're doing something wrong.

In fact, it may mean that you're doing something very, very right. For the Father brings these things, allows these things to come into our lives in order to teach us, to bring us into the fullness of who He is.

Nathan had to get through all that in order to be able to stand up here and speak to you. There was a time in Nathan's life when he was very bitter towards God.

Went through a lot of high school, college, bitter, because God had done this thing to him. And it was getting to know Clay that made the difference in his life.

God used Clay to help him overcome the bitterness that he was seething with. That's what bitterness does.

[14 : 21] It causes you to, I can't spell seethe. If there's any one rule I'd have for us as a congregation is don't ever use a word you can't spell.

And everybody's up to being challenged. I've even been challenged as I've been preaching. Spell it preacher! And I couldn't.

My vocabulary went like this and then now that I'm a bus driver of elementary kids it's gone way, way, way down.

What is faith? And the only place for you and I to go is to the word of God. Hebrews 11.1 is the definition for faith for you and I.

That is the definition. Somebody read it out loud or if you've got it memorized spout it out for us. Hebrews 11.1 page 1259.

[15 : 33] Somebody, anybody. Now faith is the reality of what's hoped for.

When is is. Y'all ever think about when is is? I'm an English teacher's nightmare so. But I know this much is every time you see it in the English in the New Testament is is like this.

It's not like once in a while. Faith now right now where we're at where you're sitting where I'm standing faith right now this moment is and it never will change.

Praise God. Get excited about that. Our God doesn't change. Our God made up his mind in the beginning and nothing has changed.

That's worth praising him for. That's not that's not oh me. That's an amen. Now I'll be the first to admit to you I've been one of those that if I was if we were asked you know how many of you would like to change have God change his mind about some stuff I'd be I'd be there.

[17 : 07] How many of you would be there? A room full of liars. If you haven't been there yet you will be.

I promise you. Now fate is the assurance the reality of the things you hope for.

It takes those things that we have hopes about in our future and brings them into reality where we're at today.

I see things in my future by my faith. I had a dream of being the same on the inside as I am on the outside and faith brought it into reality but before I saw it in reality I saw it in reality in my head and my heart.

Faith is an incredible thing. It's what brings you into this life but it's what you need to go on in this life.

[18 : 27] What else is it? It is the conviction. What's your Bible say? proof of the things look at it.

If you're looking at me you're not looking at your Bible look at it. Not seen. Circle that word not.

That's a huge word. Sooner or later you're going to realize as you're growing in the Lord Jesus that the little words mean sometimes more than the big words do.

Like when is is. I mean that's that's a big word. Not means a whole lot and you can skip over that thing and not get it.

You cannot be a good Missourian. You know what it says on the Missouri license plate? Show me state.

A lot of us say we're acting and we're living out of faith but we don't really believe anything until we see it. Until it's tangible.

[19 : 33] I guess that thing isn't on is it? Could have moved it. Until it's tangible. Until you can touch it. See I say well yes I have faith but here's my faith.

No no. The thing's not seen. I had faith that God was going to give me give me a godly family. A godly wife. And godly children. Did that say okay well now that's done I don't have to do anything about that? No absolutely not.

Every day of Jamie's life. Every day of Nathan's life. Even before they were born. Every day of Jan Lynn's life. Even before she was born I prayed for them.

Every single day that they would grow up to be men and women of God and marry men and women of God.

[20 : 43] But I saw it in the beginning what it could be like. And God has brought it to pass. I don't feel the need like a lot of preachers do preaching every Sunday.

I enjoy sitting over there and listening to my son open the word of God. Joy fills my heart when I hear things tumbling out of him that I was in my 40s and 50s before I ever got it and could preach it. it is true that your children can truly stand on your shoulders and get to places in the relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ and with the body of Christ that you couldn't have got to until you got much, much older.

Praise God. Faith does remarkable things. It leads us into remarkable prayer times with the Father. Faith does things for us that we would have never believed. There was a time in this auditorium when it looked like there would never be a time at all where every chair would be filled to overflowing.

[22 : 11] thing. I remember when we were a little circle right here and in those days I did all the talking but believing that one day it would be like this and beyond and that it would be about family.

So much so that in the beginning we didn't even add the name church. Because in my opinion I've been a church planner and an apostolic ministry for a long time and in my mind the word church has almost become a dirty word in our culture.

Almost completely meaningless. people without faith think terrible things when they hear the word church.

What is church? It should be family. And who does it belong to? Jerry? Nathan?

Elders? It belongs to Christ Jesus. It's His church. church. This isn't mine. I don't believe in ministries.

[23 : 31] There's only one ministry and it belongs to the Father. And we get to be part of it. Praise God. Can you get excited about that?

He's got an invitation for you to come join Him in your future. We don't know where that's going to be. When I gave my heart to Jesus I said anything you want God.

And I told friends over and over again if I thought that meant being a Baptist preacher maybe we would have negotiated this a little bit. Because that was the farthest thing from my mind.

I thought I was going to become a rancher. Surely God wants me to be happy and He would agree with me about that. Wouldn't He? He showed me the opportunity and then He went nope I'm going to send you to seminary instead.

And He expected me to be happy about that. When I got out of college I determined I was never going back to school again for any reason. I dare you to tell that to God.

[24 : 43] He'll prove you wrong every time. how do you get faith? Well I've heard people pray for faith.

I've heard that people do that. I remember one time years ago there was this TV evangelist and he said if you'd send me 1995 he said I've got this handkerchief that I've touched and you just touched that handkerchief I'll send it to you.

Your faith will increase. He made a great case for it but it was more about the 1995 than it was about faith.

Romans 10 17 says faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.

You're not going to increase your faith by praying for it. asking God for it. God's given you one way and one way only for your faith to be bigger tomorrow than it is today and that's by getting your nose into the word of God and taking your eyes and setting them on him the word of God and letting him connect those two together in the relationship that you have with him and then allow his leadership to prevail for he's not the Lord who said on the mount y'all do your best I'll see you later our God is still at work on this planet and he's not left us on our own but instead what he's doing is inviting us into his activities and that's what excites me when I hear about some of you going to literally the ends of the earth but it's even most important if

[26 : 50] I hear about what God's doing and ministering through you right here in the Lamiga they're both exciting to me you're my joy when I see your bright and smiling faces when I see the fellowship that you're having with one another before we start and after we finish God takes delight in your relationships with one another faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God you get faith but here's the problem Christianity today has fallen back on a position that says the faith I have today is enough for tomorrow and the day after that and the day after that and the day after that well that might be true if your life is just going to be absolutely the same day in and day out and it's never going to change that could be the truth but I guarantee you right here now the old guy is telling you it's going to change we live in a world of change but even if we didn't live in a world of change things would change new things would come storms will happen earthquakes will happen floods will happen droughts will happen all kinds of things good and bad will come and cross the path of your life and you cannot lean back on yesterday's fate to stand up and walk through tomorrow's challenges you can't do it the only way which is the position of much of Christianity today the only way that people attempt to escape it is by doing nothing there's nothing that breaks the heart of

God more in my opinion than a believer who will not stand up and walk by faith but merely spends their life sitting in a pew listening to sermons and going out and saying well I got that part of my life done for the week now what's next there can't be a more miserable person we think the person without Jesus in their life is the most miserable person on the face of the planet but I don't think it is I think it's the person that has Jesus in their life has Christ as their savior has a Lord to give them leadership and everything and just ignores it now that's got to be misery in my humble opinion for you've by now decided I'm not God and so I have no God almighty statements to make to you except to offer to you 40 some odd years of walking with the

Lord Jesus so we get faith but how do you put your faith into motion here's a good example I like this one Mark chapter 5 see I got you back to Mark so if Nathan asks and I'm not here for any reason you can say yeah we were in Mark Jesus is healing Jesus is talking in parables he's gone across the sea of Galilee once again to get away from this huge crowd following him yet to just discover another huge crowd on the other side of the bank and a leader of the synagogue comes up to him Jairus and says my daughter is sick will you come and in Mark 5 there he starts going and there's all these people around him all these people following along with him look what it says there in verse 25

Mark 5 25 page 1032 and he went off with him a great multitude following him pressing in on him and a woman who had had a hemorrhage for 12 years and endured much at the hands of many physicians and had spent all that she had and was not helped at all but rather had grown worse after hearing about Jesus came up in the crowd behind him and touched his cloak for she thought if I just touch his garments I shall get well and immediately the flow of her blood was dried up and she felt in her body that she was healed of her affliction and immediately Jesus perceiving in himself that the power proceeding from him had gone forth turned around in the crowd and said who touched my garments I can just imagine the disciples at this time they're still babies

I can just imagine them saying what are you talking about are you nuts everybody's touching you everybody's pushing in on you we're in a crowd don't you see the crowd we're we're trying to get to Jairus' house but look at everybody they're in our way they're touching you and they're touching you and what do you mean who touched me if you don't remember another thing I say you remember what I'm saying right now Jesus always always always knows the difference between a touch of sincerity and a touch of insincerity the crowd was wanting wanting wanting wanting wanting gimme gimme gimme gimme gimme gimme I'm hungry feed me feed me feed me but this woman when she touched him it was saying to him something much different this woman had fate and by this time in her life that's about all she had a lot of the women who've come to us and set free were just like this woman

[33 : 48] I remember Linda coming Linda was so weak she could no longer push the cart with her stuff in it the typical bag lady thing that we think about she was curled up in a ball in a dark alley in Atlanta and a couple of our guys found her in that alley and she couldn't walk her dress was so thin that you just hardly touch it and it wanted to fall off of her she had been abused she probably weighed no more than I don't know she weighed 85 pounds time they got her to Gainesville and called me I'd come to get her to take her to our women's house and set free and all she could do they carried her out she got in the front seat of my pickup truck and curled up in a ball and never

moved she stunk so bad that I had to run for days with the windows down in my truck just to get the smell of her off those seats and when she got to the women's house they carefully picked her up and these women who picked her up were women who just a couple months earlier had been in the same position and they carried her in and they told me her clothes just fell off of her and they hand bathed her very very carefully fearing she would die on them

I guess we would have been smarter if we had taken her to a hospital but I've never been known for intelligence unlike my children today Linda probably weighs 200 pounds got the prettiest smile of any woman I've ever seen who's come through set free or otherwise how her teeth got so pearly they were pearly and she married a fine Christian man and she's in a vivacious Bible believing Jesus loving church in Gainesville where a group of women just got around her and loved her and loved her and loved her become the woman that

God always wanted her to be starts with a dream this lady here had a dream she spent all of her money trying to see that dream come true she was doing everything and had given up on physicians and everything else nobody nobody was in her life any longer she's standing there on the side of the road in a weakened state and yet one more ray of hope comes to her if I just touch the hem of his garment that'll make me well she not only dreamed it but she said it she said it she confessed with her mouth what she was beginning to believe in her heart and odds against odds with this crowd all wanting Jesus attention she worked her way into that crowd I mean she could have been the person who got knocked down in that crowd and trampled under their feet to only die there she was risking her very life to do what she said she would do to do and carry out what she was dreaming would happen

I just touch the hem of his garment most preachers at this point would tell you tons and tons about the hem of his garment and it makes absolutely no difference what his hem was or where it was but she got to it and immediately Jesus knew here is someone something different and he turns around and he says who touched my garment here goes the disciples again what do you mean everybody's touching you and he could have said no no no no this is a different touch this is a real touch this is a touch birthed out of out of hopelessness with one just ray of hope left in their lives this is a touch of faith and he required her to tell it she had a dream she confessed it she said it she did it and he required her to tell it see

I don't think your faith and mine are whole until we tell it because a lot of times what we want to do is we want to take this act of God and keep it quiet because what it will do remember the circle it will reveal how frail we have been how in need we really are of someone bigger than we are a godly daddy who will take us in his arms and pick us up get us through the crowd let us touch that garment and allow us to be whole in our lives that's my hope and prayer for you is that you'll see faith as a dynamic activity in your life something to attain to daily something to work for forever
[40 : 10] I pray for you now a