

# The Key of Faith

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*Faith is the key to life and enlargement, and it is the governing thought of God, who desires to fill all things with His presence and power.*

**Scripture:** Genesis 15:1

**Topics:** "Faith", "Spiritual Growth"

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## Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the significance of faith as the key to spiritual enlargement, establishment, and life, using Abraham's journey as a prime example. He illustrates how God's promises to Abraham hinged on his faith, which led to the fulfillment of God's covenant and the multiplication of his descendants. Sparks argues that true spiritual growth requires tested and proven faith, as seen throughout biblical history, from Genesis to Revelation. He warns against the dangers of spiritual emptiness and encourages believers to trust in God's ability to fill their lives with His presence and purpose. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a deep reliance on faith to experience the fullness of God in every aspect of life.

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## Transcript

"After these things the word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying, "Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." And Abram said, "O Lord God, what wilt Thou give me, seeing I go childless, and he that shall be possessor of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" And Abram said, "Behold, to me Thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir." And, behold, the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, "This man shall not be thine heir: but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir." And He brought him forth abroad, and said, "Look now toward heaven, and number the stars, if thou be able to number them:" and He said unto him, "So shall thy seed be." And he believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him for righteousness" (Genesis 15:1-6; A.R.V.).

"And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, "I am God Almighty; walk before Me, and be thou perfect. And I will make My covenant between Me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly." And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying, 'As for Me, behold, My covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be the father of a multitude of nations. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for the father of a multitude of nations have I made thee. And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. And I will establish My covenant between Me and thee and thy seed after thee throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after

thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land of thy sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God" (Genesis 17:1-8).

"For this cause it is of faith, that it may be according to grace; to the end that the promise may be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all (as it is written, "A father of many nations have I made thee") before Him Whom he believed, even God, Who giveth life to the dead, and calleth the things that are not, as though they were. Who in hope believed against hope, to the end that he might become a father of many nations, according to that which had been spoken, "So shall thy seed be." And without being weakened in faith he considered his own body now as good as dead (he being about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb; yet, looking unto the promise of God, he wavered not through unbelief, but waxed strong through faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what He had promised, He was able also to perform. Wherefore also it was reckoned unto him for righteousness.

Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was reckoned unto him; but for our sake also, unto whom it shall be reckoned, who believe on Him That raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, Who was delivered up for our trespasses, and was raised for our justification" (Romans 4:16-25; A.R.V.).

"By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed to go out unto a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing whither he went" (Hebrews 11:8; A.R.V.).

In these passages, we find five things. One, enlargement; two, establishment; three, life; four, faith; five, consummation. All this is to be brought into fulness at the end of the dispensation. The Word of God gives us to understand that at the end God will have a state of Divine fulness corresponding to the word 'enlargement': at the end, God will have things established, fixed: at the end, God will have things wholly characterized by life: and all this will be through tried and proved faith. You will recall how this end is brought into view in the symbolism of the city - the holy city, new Jerusalem, seen as coming down from God out of heaven in the last chapters of the Bible. Here is Divine fulness: everything brought to a state of finality, establishment, and all characterized by life - illustrated by the tree of life, the river of water of life, and other symbols. But leading up to this, all the way along, is the matter of tried and proved faith.

As we look at the Christian world in our time, we realize that these are the great things which are supremely necessary. There is need for spiritual, Divine, enlargement - things are so small spiritually; for spiritual establishment - things are so weak and uncertain, so variable and inconsistent, without assurance, without certainty; for Divine life - how great is the need for more life, heavenly life, a greater fulness of life amongst the Lord's people! But, while we recognize these things to be the crying needs, we should probably all be prepared to admit that the only way to these things is for the Lord's people to be really tested, really tried. We do not like the idea, but we realize that everything needs to be put to the test, to be proved, in order to be established. And we are in fact already very conscious of a new movement of God amongst His people really to test their faith, to try their faith, to bring faith to maturity.

Now this would seem to have been God's pathway for His people all down the ages: by tried, tested, proved and established faith to bring to enlargement, establishment and life more abundant. These are laws of the ways of God, principles of His dealings with His people. Let us, then, in the first place, take a comprehensive view of this matter, before coming to the practical applications. The Bible has many angles. If you take it, and look at it from one standpoint, you may think that that is all that the Bible is about. You seem to be able to gather up the whole of the Bible into that one thing. It might be sin,

judgment, death - it is an aspect, an angle. Or it might be righteousness and life - it is another angle. Give the Bible another turn, and the same thing seems to be true again. It has many such angles, and every one of them seems to be comprehensive. If the Bible is like that, you can see the whole of it by just turning it a little from one angle to another.

### Faith The Key To Life And Enlargement

Now, you will see how true this is in the very clear instance that we have before us - the matter of enlargement by life through faith. It would be very easy to gather all the Bible into that, and to say that is what the whole Bible is about. Of course, it is not, but it is one very comprehensive angle. You will at once see how that theme runs right through. But suppose we change the metaphor, and say that there is a whole bunch of keys to the Bible - quite a large bunch of keys - every one of which seems to be a master key to open the whole of the Bible; and on this large bunch of keys there seem to be three that are linked together, so to speak, on their own separate ring. Those three keys are - faith, life, enlargement.

Faith opens the first door. That door leads to the next, which is life, and through life to the next, which is enlargement. Those three things always go together through the Word of God. Of course, this is clearly seen by the opposite. Unbelief is always shown in the Scripture to result in limitation. Where there is unbelief, you just do not get any further - you stop short and stop dead: there is no enlargement, and therefore there is no life, no greater, fuller life, beyond. You cannot separate these things; they always hang together - faith, life, enlargement.

All the great crises in the history of God's people, as recorded in the Scriptures, had these three features. Beginning right at the beginning, with Adam, in the first chapters of Genesis, it is perfectly plain there that the whole question of establishment, of enlargement and of life hung upon faith, and that when he refused, or ceased, to believe God, that was a dead stop, a full stop. There was no more. At that point death entered in. The possibility of fellowship with God, and of all that God can mean in the life, hung entirely upon his faith - or upon his refusal to believe. If only he had believed God, the way would have been wide open to enlargement, establishment and life, continuous and unceasing.

Moving on in the Book of Genesis to chapters 15 and 17, some passages from which we have placed at the head of this meditation, we come to Abraham. The Lord comes in with Abraham on this line of enlargement, of establishment and of life. Those are the three great things that sum up Abraham's life with God. And everything hung upon faith. All that God said about this multiplying, this tremendous increase and enlargement; about the finality of things - establishing him in the covenant for ever; and about this wonderful principle of life - so apparent in the case of Abraham, when death would argue that there was no prospect at all in himself or in Sarah or any situation, yet life is in view in spite of it all - all those things just hung upon faith. He believed God. If he had not, there would have been nothing.

In the Book of Exodus, we find the great crisis in the national life of Israel - the deliverance from Egypt. Chapter 12 of Exodus just rests upon this: 'The whole question here is that of your release with a view to your enlargement; it is a question of your being established and brought to finality, to fullness; and it is a question of your life.' The central thought of that chapter is perhaps life, is it not? The slaying of Egypt's firstborn, on the one side, and the deliverance of Israel into life through death, on the other. But it all hung upon this matter of faith - faith in action: whether they would take the lamb, whether they would sprinkle the blood, whether they would gird their loins and take their staff in their hand. Everything depended upon an attitude and spirit of believing God.

Passing through Numbers into the Book of Joshua, we find that here it is the land that is in view--the land of promise, with all that it meant to them historically and all that it means typically and spiritually. What a matter of enlargement that was! From the wilderness, with all its emptiness and 'pent-upness', into the largeness, fullness and liberty of being established in the land. There was never, in God's mind, any thought or purpose of permanence in the wilderness at all. That was only a phase of things to be got through quickly as the spiritual condition of His people would allow. His thought for them was - into the land and established for ever. The promise to Abraham was that the land was covenanted for ever: finality. And then through Jordan, running there between Numbers and Joshua, between the wilderness and the land, and overflowing all its banks, speaking of death to be overcome in its fulness, in its depths; and into the land: here is life triumphant over death. But again, everything hung upon their faith. Would they move in faith? One generation could not do that, and perished in the wilderness. It was left to the next generation to enter the land. These three things rested upon faith.

Passing over the terrible four hundred years covered by the Book of Judges - the most terrible book in the Bible, I think - into the Books of Samuel, we find a transition toward a new state of enlargement. This phase will end with David and Solomon, with the enlargement of the kingdom beyond anything that had ever been before, with establishment and life. Again, it is all on the basis of faith. It was faith in Samuel's mother, for instance, that brought in Samuel. But we cannot stay with all the detail. At last, as we know, faith was lost, and unbelief prevailed. Once again we see a return to limitation, to bondage, to uncertainty, to spiritual death. It all hangs upon faith.

As we take up the New Testament, we find that the issue is still that of enlargement, of establishment, and of fulness of life, and the question now is - Believe it! - a question of faith. These are the things, for instance, governing the first chapters of the Book of the Revelation, where the churches are dealt with. It is a matter here of spiritual enlargement or spiritual limitation: either of being established, or of having the lampstand moved out of its place, with nothing established, nothing final. It is a matter of life, through the Living One Who became dead and is alive for evermore. The challenge is on whether it is to be life or death, and it is focused in the one question of faith. Finally, as we reach the last chapters of the Revelation, we find these things brought to fulness, in the great City as a symbolic representation of the Church. How great it is, how full, how enlarged, how solid! It is established. How living it is, too! Abundant life is its most central feature. And it is the very embodiment of tried, tested and proved faith.

Here, then, is the whole Bible gathered into this, and our Christian lives are based upon the Bible, the whole Bible. What does that mean? It means this, that our lives are concerned with spiritual fulness, as we shall see as we go on; with our being established to eternity, and not carried away with time; and with the great matter of Divine life brought into complete triumph over the last enemy, death. And the thing that governs and comprehends the Christian life in these three aspects is the whole matter of faith: tried faith, proved faith, established faith, perfected faith.

#### God's Reaction Against Emptiness

Let us now look for a few minutes at these words, these terms, that we have been employing. We will take for the present just this matter of enlargement. We can use the alternative word 'fulness' - and we shall do so, quite extensively - but I have here a special thought in my mind in preferring this word 'enlargement'. This whole matter of enlargement, whether the Lord is going to enlarge us, whether we are going to be enlarged, is a very living question and issue, for enlargement is a governing thought of God. All the way through the Bible, as we have seen, God's thought is enlargement. God is always thinking in terms of

enlargement, of increase, of final fullness. God never finds any pleasure at all in emptiness and in smallness. God dislikes emptiness, and always reacts against it.

As we open our Bibles at the first page of Genesis, what is almost the first thing that we read? After: "In the beginning God...", and then a few words more, we read: "And the earth was without form and void" - that is 'waste and empty' - "and the Spirit of God..." The earth was empty, and the Spirit of God - did what? - reacted against the state of emptiness. It was as though God said, 'This is not My mind at all; this is altogether contrary to My thought. I am against this, and I am going to do something about it.' God would have everything in Divine fullness - that is, in abundance. That is His thought for the earth, and for His people. And so the Spirit of God, brooding over this void, this emptiness, begins to work, and every stage and phase of the Divine activity is to fill. He fills the earth with the vast range of the vegetable kingdom - seeds in abundance and life within the seeds capable of endless production and reproduction. He fills the earth with the immense variety of the animal kingdom. He fills the sea, and says: "Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures" (Gen. 1:20). And then, creating man, He says: "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth" (v. 28). 'I am against this emptiness, this void'. And on He moves on that principle, governed by that thought. Reaching Abraham, He says: "I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is upon the sea-shore" (Gen. 22:17). Comprehend that, if you can! That is Divine thought. Beyond all comprehension, God thinks in terms of enlargement.

How much can be gathered up in the Bible on this matter! The Lord Jesus, for instance, came to express the thoughts of God in practical terms, and, amongst many other things, He spoke of a great feast which was made. The guests were bidden, but they did not come - they made excuses. And so the man who gave the feast said to his servant: "Go out into the highways and hedges, and constrain them to come in, that my house may be filled" (Luke 14:15-24). Here we see Christ bringing God's thoughts into this world - 'That my house may be filled.' But perhaps in the New Testament the day of Pentecost is the greatest example and expression of this Divine thought. When the Spirit came, a mighty, rushing wind "filled all the house where they were sitting" (Acts 2:2). And then it is applied to each believer: "Be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18).

### The Danger Of Passivity

It is thus clear that enlargement is a governing thought with God. But the Lord Jesus has not only pointed out that this is what God would have, but He has said on the other hand that it is exceedingly dangerous to be empty. He spoke of a certain 'house', which was a man, possessed of a demon, an unclean spirit; and He visualized the casting out of the unclean spirit: but, although the house is 'swept and garnished', it is left empty; and, because no other occupant takes possession, the unclean spirit comes back to his old home, taking seven other more evil than himself, and fills the empty house (Matt. 12:43-45). It is a dangerous thing to be empty, to leave a void. If God does not fill, the Devil will. Beware of negative conditions, of not being positive and not being definite. Beware of vacuums in your heart, in your mind, in your life. David was one day on the house-top in a state of 'vacuum', at a time when kings go out to war (2 Sam. 11:1-2) - and he was a king, and a warring king. But instead of being occupied in a positive way, he was in a passive state, and we know the disaster that overtook him, from which he never recovered all his life. It is a dangerous thing to be empty. The Devil will see to the filling up of any space that he can occupy. The Lord wants to fill to the exclusion of all else.

### The Fulness Of God

The ultimate word in this matter in the Bible is: "that ye may be filled unto all the fulness of God" (Eph. 3:19). Think of that! This is said to believers together in their corporate, related life - to the Church, which is "the fulness of Him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:23). Think of it: the fulness of God! - that is, God coming in such a way that there is no room for anything else. It was like that at the dedication of Solomon's temple, in the Old Testament. When the priests moved out of the sanctuary, the glory of the Lord moved in and filled the house, and the priests could no longer stand to minister (1 Kings 8:10-11; 2 Chron. 5:11-14). When the Lord fills, there is no room for anything or anyone else. That is the fulness of God.

### Emptiness The Result Of Judgement

Returning to that word 'void' or 'empty' that we find at the beginning of the Book of Genesis, it seems to me that this represents the result of a judgment. That, of course, has already been surmised on other grounds. But the following considerations are perhaps confirmatory. When the Lord sent His people Israel into Babylonian captivity for seventy years, the land became waste. The land fell into a state that could well be described in the terms used to describe the state of the earth at the beginning - void, waste and empty. Now, the Babylonian captivity of Israel was a judgment upon their unbelief and their idolatry, and the waste state into which the land fell was surely a part of that judgment; and it would therefore seem that "in the beginning", also, the desolation was the result of a judgment upon a former creation.

But what is the point of this? The issue must have been this - as it has always been--that God was not allowed to fill all things. God's place was either shared with other things, or God was driven out. The end of this present world, as is shown to us in the New Testament, is going to be like that. There will be a point at which God will be finally rejected by this world, and will have no place. We are moving fast toward that time. What will be the result? It will be the burning up of this world - judgment, destruction - and a longer or shorter period of desolation before there is a new heaven and a new earth, and all things are created anew. Judgment is always upon this one thing - as to whether God is all and in all, or not. Therefore enlargement - the fullness which is God's thought - rests upon this matter of God having full place; and that is the basis of all testing of faith. God presses this point closer and closer as we go on: whether we will believe God sufficiently to let Him have His place in an impossible situation.

### The Fullness Of God As Light

Now, what do we mean by the fulness of God? It is nothing less than the nature of God filling all things. "God is light", the Scripture says (1 John 1:5): then where God is there is no darkness, there is no room for darkness; and when God comes in in fulness there is "no darkness at all." It is all "light in the Lord" (Eph. 5:8). And the Lord is moving on this line with you and with me. He is seeking to get us completely out of our darkness into His light; to bring us into the light as He is in the light. And how great a factor is faith in this matter of coming into the light of the Lord, coming to know the Lord, coming into understanding, or whatever expression you may use for light. It is seeing, it is knowing, it is understanding.

But you and I never come into one additional ray of real light - I do not mean information, I mean spiritual light - except along the line of tests of faith, faith really tested. A sister in the Lord, who felt that she was far too short-tempered, too quickly provoked, said to a dear servant of God, 'Oh, I do need more patience - do pray for me that I may have more patience!' The servant of God said, 'All right, let us get down and pray now', and so they knelt down and he prayed, 'Lord, do please send more tribulation into this dear sister's life.' And she stopped him and said, 'No, I did not say I wanted tribulation - I want patience.' 'Ah, but', he replied, 'the Word says: "tribulation worketh patience"!' (Rom. 5:3).

Yes: we want more of the Lord, but we are not always so ready to go the way that He would take us in order to have more of Himself. But it is that way - the way of tribulation; and what is tribulation if it is not the testing of faith? We are put into situations where only faith in God will enable us to live and to go on. Yet it is possible - it is so possible. Early last year, during my visit to California, a brother there proposed that we should go to see some dear friends, living about sixty miles away, who had begged that we should visit them. These dear children of God were living in perhaps one of the most worldly, unpropitious, impossible situations imaginable - the week-end resort of all the Hollywood stars. I cannot describe the utter abandonment to the flesh. Our two friends were living in a large trailer, or caravan, right at the centre of a great trailer park, surrounded by all these worldly people in their luxurious trailer homes, in an atmosphere of the utmost sensuality, fleshliness, indulgence. We went in, and had a most blessed afternoon with them on the things of the Lord - a most precious time, with a real touch of heaven - and when we had spent the whole afternoon with them, a brother said: 'Perhaps you will not believe it, but there are sixteen out-and-out Christians in this trailer park. I am going to fetch some of them'. He went across to another trailer, and brought back two dear children of God, elderly, saintly people; and, without any going round matters at all or talking on generalities, we were right on the things of the Lord instantly, and we could have gone on all night. The brother told us, 'We all meet here in this trailer, sixteen of us, and have most blessed times of fellowship.'

Why am I telling you about this? In the most unlikely place on earth - yes, the most impossible place for anything of a spiritual character, for anything really of the Lord - there, right in that terrible place, are saints walking in white raiment, in living fellowship with the Lord. Do not say, 'Oh, the place I have to live and work in is impossible for any spiritual life or spiritual growth - everything is against me.' Remember that the Lord can enlarge you anywhere if He calls you to be there. Never use the argument of the impossible. Just think of Abraham and the impossible. He came into enlargement, but not because everything was propitious, not because everything made it so easy and was so helpful. No, there can be light in the darkest place if the Lord is there. When I first heard of that situation, I had expressed the wish that those dear friends could have been got out of it, but when I left them I changed my view entirely. I do not know that they would really be the better for getting out of this. This is the thing that is enlarging them spiritually: it is throwing them on the Lord, it is making them prove the Lord. There is nothing here for them but the Lord; everything else is against Him.

The fulness of God is in terms of light, even in darkness; of love - for God is love - in a realm of hatred; of life in a realm of death; and of holiness in a realm of unholiness. "That ye may be filled unto all the fulness of God."

There is much more about this matter of enlargement. It was the governing thing in the sovereign gifts of the ascended Lord. "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men... and He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets;... and some, pastors and teachers" - for what? - "for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ: till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a fullgrown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4:8, 11-13). Every Divine gift in ministry has fulness as its object and its governing motive.

Let me close with this for the moment, that the test as to whether a thing is of God is always spiritual measure. It is not the measure of our doctrinal knowledge, nor even the measure of our Bible knowledge as such. It is not the accuracy or correctness of our technique in form and procedure. It is the measure of God. We can have all those other things, without there being really any measure of God. That is what

counts.

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