

## FIRST FAITH RESPONSE

**THESIS:** Think First Faith

**TEXT:** Matthew 5:11-25a

**OPEN:** (Story about a poodle, a leopard, a monkey and discernment amid difficulty)

### A POODLE, A LEOPARD, A MONKEY, & DISCERNMENT AMID DIFFICULTY

A wealthy lady decided to go on a safari in Africa with her poodle. One day the little dog started chasing butterflies and before long discovered that she was lost. Wandering about, she noticed a leopard heading rapidly in her direction with the intention of having lunch. The old poodle thinks, "Uh, oh! I'm about to die!"

Noticing some bones on the ground close by, she immediately settled down to chew on the bones with her back to the approaching cat. Just as the leopard was about to leap, the poodle exclaimed loudly: "Boy, that was one delicious leopard! I wonder if there are any more around here?"

Hearing that, the young leopard halted his attack in mid-strike. A look of terror came over him as he slinked away into the trees. "Whew!" said the leopard, "That was close! That little dog nearly had me!"

Meanwhile, a monkey was watching the whole scene from a nearby tree. He figures he can put this knowledge to good use and trade it for protection from the leopard. So off he goes. However, the old poodle sees him heading after the leopard with great speed and figures that something must be up. The monkey soon catches up with the leopard. He spills the beans and strikes a deal of protection with the leopard.

The leopard is furious at being made a fool of and says, "Here, monkey, hop on my back and see what's going to happen to that conniving canine!" The poodle sees the leopard coming with the monkey on his back and thinks, "What am I going to do now?"

Instead of running, the old dog sits down with her back to her attackers, pretending she hasn't seen them yet. Just as they get close enough to hear, the poodle says: "Where's that crazy monkey? I sent him off an hour ago to bring me another leopard!" The monkey jumped up into the tree, the leopard ran away. The poodle and the lady found their way to each other and lived happily ever after.

In **Matthew 5:11-25a** let's discover how "first faith" responds to difficult people and problems.

#### 1. THINK FIRST FAITH BY FOLLOWING GOD'S WORD WHEN EXPERIENCING DIFFICULT PEOPLE.

A. **Matthew 5:11-12** "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad because great is your reward in Heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

1. *Be glad when people are difficult because of your faith in Christ because there's blessing in it.*

a. **James 1:2-4, 12** "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything...Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love Him."

1. Great is your reward in Heaven—it's the crown of life.

a. ***Historical:*** In Biblical times a crown was a ruler's symbol of power and supremacy; for others it was a token of public honor for distinguished

service; a bride's leafy crown represented nuptial joy; for a runner of a race it stood for victory.

1. **1 Cor 15:51-54** "We will not all sleep (die), but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory.'"

b. **Eternal** (Greek: *aidos*) means immeasurable and uninterrupted. **Life** (Greek: *zoe*) signifies a vitality and not just mere existence. In Heaven, life (the quality) is eternal (the quantity) because there is a complete absence of sin there and thus no death.

1. **Isaiah 65:17-18a** "Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create."

a. What are the "former things" that will not be remembered?

2. **Revelation 21:1-4** "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of Heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. *There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.*'"

2. Why does the Lord allow for His people to experience difficult people and problems?

a. **Deuteronomy 8:2-3** "Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep His commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord."

b. **2 Cor 1:3-4, 6** "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God...If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer."

2. **THINK FIRST FAITH BY FOLLOWING GOD'S WORD WHICH ELEVATES YOUR EFFECT ON PEOPLE.**

A. **Matthew 5:13-16** "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in Heaven."

1. *Be effective with people by doing good to them in the name of the Lord.*
  - a. Speak with good words to others because this brings honor to God.
    1. **1 Corinthians 4:12-13a** “When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly.”
      - a. **Quote from D.A. Carson:** “All of us would be wiser if we would resolve never to put people down, except on our prayer lists” (*A Call To Spiritual Reformation*, p. 29).
    2. **Ephesians 4:29** “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.”
      - a. **Illustration:** (“A Word To The Wise” from *Encouragement Changes Everything*, p. 15).  
 “A Word To The Wise”  
 (By John Maxwell, *Encouragement Changes Everything*, p. 15)

Nineteenth-century writer Walt Whitman struggled for years to get anyone interested in his poetry. Amidst his discouragement, Whitman received a life-changing letter from an admirer of his work. The note read: ‘Dear sir, I am not blind to the worth of the wonderful gift of *Leaves of Grass*. I find it the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed. I greet you at the beginning of a great career.’ It was signed Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Whitman enjoyed a long career and is considered one of the giants of American literature, but when times were tough, he needed encouragement to keep going. When we’re on the brink of failure, the right words at the right time can keep us in the game. When we’re too tired or discouraged to keep going, an act of compassion can give us new strength. There’s no doubt: Encouragement enables us to persevere like nothing else.”

- b. Serve with good works toward others for this brings honor to God.
  1. **Galatians 6:9-10** “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”
    - a. **Illustration:** (*Positive influence of pro athlete Tim Tebow from NY Post/People Magazine*)  
**Positive Influence Of Pro Athlete Tim Tebow**  
 (New York Post 11/23/20 & People Magazine 11/13/20)

(New York Post) Recently the New York Mets announce that Tim Tebow will return to their minor leagues for a fourth season despite batting .233 over 3 seasons. The former college Heisman Trophy winner and NFL quarterback is an outspoken Christian. Mets president Sandy Alderson says about Tebow’s influence: “I think that the organization has already benefited significantly from his involvement with the Mets. I think baseball has benefited.”

(People Magazine) Describing being kind as “life-changing” and that he always tries to “live a lifestyle that is full of kindness,” Tebow notes that being a positive person “has the ability to radically shift a lot of perspectives.” He adds, “When you go out of your way to do something, you have no idea of the ripple effect. You have no idea of the lifelong impact that it could have.” The 33-year-old tells People Magazine: “It could be for

someone that is having a tough day, someone that has just lost their job or someone that is going through a really traumatic time. One of my favorite Bible verses says, 'What is desirable in a man is his kindness,' and I think it's important, whenever and wherever, to be able to spread it.'"

### 3. THINK FIRST FAITH BY FOLLOWING GOD'S WORD WHEN ENCOUNTERING RECONCILIATION SITUATIONS WITH PEOPLE.

A. **Matthew 5:21-25a** "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother (without cause) will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell. Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift. Settle matters quickly with your adversary..."

1. *Don't be known as an angry person instead be a proactive promoter of reconciliation.*
  - a. **Angry** (Greek: *orgizo*) means to be enraged, to provoke, or wrathfulness.
    1. **Proverbs 15:1** "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger."
    2. **Ephesians 4:26-27** "In your anger do not sin; Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold."
  - b. **Reconcile** (Greek: *diallatt*) means to be changed throughout.
    1. **Philippians 4:5 (NASB)** "Let your forbearing spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near."
      - a. **Forbearing** (Greek: *epieikes*) means agreeable, yielding, moderation, or agreeable. "The word signifies a humble, patient steadfastness, which is able to submit to injustice, disgrace, and mistreatment without hatred and malice, trusting (rejoicing) in God in spite of it all" (Fritz Rienecker & Cleon Rogers, *Linguistic Key to the Greek NT*, p. 560).
    2. **Php 4:2** "I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord."
      - a. Paul calls both ladies to reconcile with each other. They have more in common and good to hold on to versus dividing over perceived wrongs and differences.
    3. **Philippians 4:3** "Yes, and I ask you loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life."
      - a. Paul moderates by commending both ladies for adding value to others. They are "loyal yokefellow"—shoulder to shoulder—doing the same thing ("cause of the gospel") heading in the same direction—Heaven ("Book of Life").
      - b. Paul calls for the congregation to moderate by serving with both hard working women.
    4. **Philippians 4:4** "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!"
      - a. God calls us to be compliant and contagious people not contentious nor complaining.
  - c. **Illustration:** ("A Dad's Stunning Response When His Son Told Him Off" by Joshua Rogers *foxnews.com*)

**A Dad's Stunning Response When His Son Told Him Off**  
(By Joshua Rogers, Opinion column *foxnews.com* 06/16/18)

A few weeks after my first child was born, I told my dad off. At the heart of my complaints was one central failure: Ever since I was a kid, he had failed to show up. My dad was an affectionate father but he just couldn't stay put. When things got ugly between him and mom (and they often did), he would suddenly pack up and disappear for a while. We might know where he was; we might not. Dad and Mom divorced when I was in eighth grade. Soon thereafter dad left again and I didn't see or hear from him for three years. By that time, I had decided I hated him; but when he finally showed up again, I was lost in another one of his bear hugs in no time. Although dad lived in another state, he got much better at keeping in touch, thanks to the proliferation of cell phones. But technology couldn't save him from his old habits. Just when I would think I could trust him, he would drop the ball again. At my college graduation, I searched the stadium, looking for him in the thousands of attendees – he forgot to come. He came to my wedding but skipped my low-key bachelor party the night before, opting to read a book instead. He was supposed to meet my wife and me one Thanksgiving but bailed at the last minute. That kind of stuff happened time after time; and all the while, the pressure of unforgiveness was building inside of me until I finally blew up one night.

Dad and I were on the phone, and for some reason, he brought up an awkward memory he had mentioned many times before. “Joshua, you know, I still can't forgive myself for that time I spanked you so hard when you were a little boy. I still remember the way you cried, and it just kills me.” I found it odd – if not annoying – that dad held onto one, memorable mistake, not the whole list. He needn't worry. I was keeping up with it and I decided to confront him with every item. I told him off, recounting every failure like I was a prosecutor in a closing argument. Finally, I rested my case, took a deep breath and waited for dad to push back. He didn't. Instead, he did something beautifully bizarre: In his soothing, tenor voice, he sang a line out of an old song about being sorry for hurting the one you love. Then he apologized. He meant that apology, and I knew he meant it because he changed his behavior. He bought a plane ticket to come see his new granddaughter, even though he didn't have much money. He got Christmas presents for my kids. He started asking questions on the phone and really listening to the answers. Most importantly, he offered to apologize again if I ever needed to hear it. I didn't. Dad's genuine contrition took the fun out of holding offenses against him. In choosing weakness, his love became stronger than my hurt. All of us dads have damaged our kids in some way, and those father wounds run deep. Our children were born believing it's our job to protect them, and it's one of the most hurtful, confusing things when we've done the opposite. We can extract some of the poison of our failures by offering an apology to our kids, no matter what their age – and I'm not talking about, “I'm sorry if I ever did anything that hurt you.” You know what you did. Apologize for that and do it with a specific, unequivocal admission of guilt, expecting nothing in return – not even their forgiveness. You've got nothing to lose but your pride, and you've got everything to gain if there's even a chance it will bring healing. Your kids ought to honor you – it's even one of the Ten Commandments. But if you want to make it easier for them to do that, have enough honor to be like my dad, say you're sorry and make things right.

**CLOSE:** Think first faith by following God's Word in all that you do and don't do so your reward will be great.