

But If Not ...

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Men accomplish marvelous things by trusting in the Lord and keeping His commandments—by exercising faith even when they don't know how the Lord is shaping them.



As a young man, I returned home from an eighth-grade basketball tournament dejected, disappointed, and confused. I blurted out to my mother, “I don't know why we lost—I had faith we'd win!”

I now realize that I did not then know what faith is.

Faith is not bravado, not just a wish, not just a hope. True faith is faith in the Lord [Jesus Christ](#)—confidence and trust in Jesus Christ that leads a person to follow Him. [1](#) Centuries ago, Daniel and his young associates were suddenly thrust from security into the world—a world foreign and intimidating. When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego refused to bow down and worship a golden image set up by the king, a furious Nebuchadnezzar told

them that if they would not worship as commanded, they would immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace. “And who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?” ²

The three young men quickly and confidently responded, “If it be so [if you cast us into the furnace], our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and *he will deliver us out of thine hand.*” That sounds like my eighth-grade kind of faith. But then they demonstrated that they fully understood what faith is. They continued, “*But if not, ... we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.*” ³ That is a statement of true faith.

They knew that they could trust God—even if things didn’t turn out the way they hoped. ⁴ They knew that faith is more than mental assent, more than an acknowledgment that God lives. Faith is total trust in Him.

Faith is believing that although we do not understand all things, He does. Faith is knowing that although our power is limited, His is not. Faith in Jesus Christ consists of complete reliance on Him.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego knew they could always rely on Him because they knew His plan, and they knew that He does not change. ⁵ They knew, as we know, that mortality is not an accident of nature. It is a brief segment of the great plan ⁶ of our loving Father in Heaven to make it possible for us, His sons and daughters, to achieve the same blessings He enjoys, if we are willing.

They knew, as we know, that in our premortal life, we were instructed by Him as to the purpose of mortality: “We will make an earth whereon these may dwell; And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them.” ⁷

So there we have it—it’s a test. The world is a testing place for mortal men and women. When we understand that it’s all a test, administered by our Heavenly Father, who wants us to trust in Him and to allow Him to help us, we can then see everything more clearly.

His work and His glory, He told us, is “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.” ⁸ He has already achieved godhood. Now His only objective is to help us—to enable us to return to Him and be like Him and live His kind of life eternally.

Knowing all this, it was not difficult for those three young Hebrews to make their decision. They would follow God; they would exercise faith in Him. He would deliver them, *but if not*—and we know the rest of the story.

The Lord has given us agency, the right and the responsibility to decide. ⁹ He tests us by allowing us to be challenged. He assures us that He will not suffer us to be tempted beyond our ability to withstand. ¹⁰ But we must understand that great challenges make great men. We don’t seek tribulation, but if we respond in faith, the Lord strengthens us. The *but if not*s can become remarkable blessings.

The Apostle Paul learned this significant lesson and declared, after decades of dedicated missionary work, “We glory in tribulations ... knowing that tribulation worketh

patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed.” [11](#)

He was assured by the Savior, “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.” [12](#)

Paul responded: “Most gladly therefore will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ... I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.” [13](#) When Paul met his challenges the Lord’s way, his faith increased.

“*By faith* Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac.” [14](#) Abraham, because of his great faith, was promised posterity greater in number than the stars in the heavens, and that that posterity would come through Isaac. But Abraham immediately complied with the Lord’s command. God would keep His promise, *but if not* in the manner Abraham expected, he still trusted Him completely.

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“*By faith Moses* ... refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; “Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season;

“Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt. ...

“*By faith* he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king. ...

“*By faith* they passed through the Red sea as by dry land. ...

“*By faith* the walls of Jericho fell down.” [15](#)

Others “*through faith* subdued kingdoms, ... obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,

“Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight.” [16](#)

But in the midst of all those glorious outcomes hoped for and expected by the participants, there were always the *but if not*:

“And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, ... bonds and imprisonment:

“They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about ... being destitute, afflicted, tormented; ... [17](#)

“God having provided some better things for them through their sufferings, for without sufferings they could not be made perfect.” [18](#)

Our scriptures and our history are replete with accounts of God’s great men and women who believed that He would deliver them, *but if not*, they demonstrated that they would trust and be true.

He has the power, but it's our test.

What does the Lord expect of us with respect to our challenges? He expects us to do all we can do. He does the rest. Nephi said, "For we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do." [19](#)

We must have the same faith as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego.

Our God will deliver us from ridicule and persecution, *but if not*. ... Our God will deliver us from sickness and disease, *but if not*. ... He will deliver us from loneliness, depression, or fear, *but if not*. ... Our God will deliver us from threats, accusations, and insecurity, *but if not*. ... He will deliver us from death or impairment of loved ones, *but if not*, ... *we will trust in the Lord*.

Our God will see that we receive justice and fairness, *but if not*. ... He will make sure that we are loved and recognized, *but if not*. ... We will receive a perfect companion and righteous and obedient children, *but if not*, ... *we will have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, knowing that if we do all we can do, we will, in His time and in His way, be delivered and receive all that He has*. [20](#) I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.