

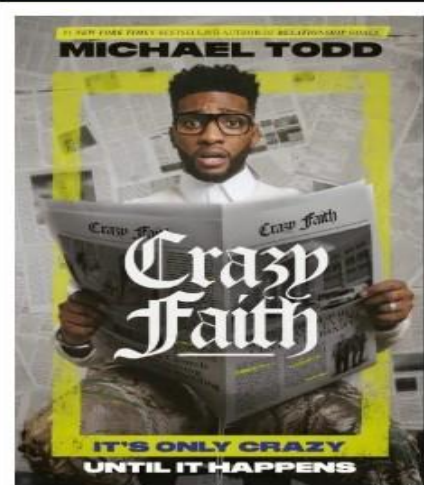
## LESSON ONE

# It's Only Crazy Until It Happens

*The beautiful thing about faith is that  
it's never too late to build it.*

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ZOOM



## PRAYER & BIBLE STUDY

**Series: "CRAZY FAITH" by Michael Todd**



**EVERY WED | 7PM - 8 PM**

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Ignaz Semmelweis was a Hungarian doctor who started practicing around 1846 in the maternity ward at General Hospital in Geneva, Switzerland. Soon Dr. Semmelweis noticed something strange happening: many mothers were dying of a mysterious disease called “childbed fever.”

After digging into the problem, Ignaz discovered that women giving birth in one specific ward were dying at a rate five times higher than women in a second ward. At first, he could not figure out the cause. The wards used nearly the same techniques, the climate was the same, and “overcrowding” was not the issue, as the second ward was always more crowded than the first ward. The only discrepancy that Ignaz could find was that the first ward was staffed by male doctors and medical students while the second ward was staffed only by female midwives.

Eventually, Ignaz had a breakthrough when one of his fellow doctors became ill and died after performing an autopsy. It was a tragedy, but Ignaz noticed the pathologist had died from the same illness as the patient he was examining. (Ironically, that illness was childbed fever.) Ignaz also realized the male doctors and students on the first ward regularly handled corpses and then went to deliver babies without washing their hands or anything in between—while the midwives on the second ward never performed autopsies or touched cadavers.

Ignaz suddenly had a revelation. *Maybe the sickness was somehow transferred from the patient to the doctor. Maybe the pathologist “caught” something while he was examining the body of the women who had died. Could that really be the cause?*

Of course, this is an obvious connection for you and me. We know today this is how disease is transmitted. But a couple hundred years ago, even doctors still believed that illnesses were caused by “bad air” or “bad blood.” Without realizing it, Dr. Ignaz Semmelweis had discovered *germs*. He started having all the male doctors and students on the first ward wash their hands and instruments with a chlorine solution before delivering babies.

Mothers stopped dying. Lives were saved. It should have been good news.

However, as it turns out, the doctors of Ignaz’s day didn’t like being told that they needed to wash their hands before practicing medicine. They felt that Ignaz was accusing *them*—the doctors—of giving diseases to their patients. So, out of pride, the medical establishment rejected Dr. Ignaz Summerweis. They refused to hear him or adopt any of his recommendations. They cancelled him before cancelling was a thing.<sup>1</sup>



A few decades later, Louis Pasteur would publish his work on germ theory, which revolutionized the medical practice and proved Summerweis correct. By then, Ignaz had suffered a nervous breakdown and been consigned to an asylum. He died at the age of forty-seven from sepsis—the same bacterial infection that he had spent his life trying to fight.

It's a depressing story, but it illustrates an important principle: crazy is often a matter of perspective. What people consider crazy right now can be customary tomorrow. And much of what we consider normal in this moment was crazy in the past. The same idea applies to your life—including your spiritual life. Those goals or dreams or plans that seem impossible to you right now may feel different once you grasp the power of this thing we call faith. Why? Because things are only crazy until they happen.

## Connect

*Faith* is a word that is common in both our culture and the church. It's a word you've used many times yourself. But what does it mean? When we talk about "having faith" or "living by faith" or those other phrases that come so naturally to us, what are we actually saying?

The Bible gives us an answer to that question in Hebrews 11—a chapter that many people call "The Hall of Faith." As you will see, this passage of Scripture not only provides a concise definition for faith but also reveals what faith looks like through the lives and examples of several heroes from the Old Testament. Let's examine the first half of that chapter:

<sup>1</sup> Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. <sup>2</sup> This is what the ancients were commended for.

<sup>3</sup> By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

<sup>4</sup> By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did. By faith he was commended as righteous, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith Abel still speaks, even though he is dead.

<sup>5</sup> By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death: "He could not be found, because God had taken him away." For before he was

taken, he was commended as one who pleased God. <sup>6</sup> And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

<sup>7</sup> By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that is in keeping with faith.

<sup>8</sup> By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. <sup>9</sup> By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. <sup>10</sup> For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. <sup>11</sup> And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise. <sup>12</sup> And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.

<sup>13</sup> All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. <sup>14</sup> People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. <sup>15</sup> If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. <sup>16</sup> Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them (Hebrews 11:1–16).

- What definition does this passage offer for the word *faith*? What else does this passage teach about faith? What principles are contained in these verses?
- If you had to describe faith to someone who had never heard the term, what would you say? How would you explain it?

- Which of the stories mentioned in these verses catches your attention the most? Why?
- How do verses 13–16 specifically add to your understanding of why faith is important?

As noted, this is only half of “The Hall of Faith.” The rest of the chapter is filled with stories about women and men who not only *had* faith but also *lived* it. Their lives were expressions of a deep-seated, foundational, powerful belief that God was both with them and for them.

As the author concludes: *“By faith these people overthrew kingdoms, ruled with justice, and received what God had promised them. They shut the mouths of lions, quenched the flames of fire, and escaped death by the edge of the sword. Their weakness was turned to strength. They became strong in battle and put whole armies to flight. Women received their loved ones back again from death. But others were tortured, refusing to turn from God in order to be set free. They placed their hope in a better life after the resurrection”* (Hebrews 11:33–35 NLT).

Let’s focus a bit more closely on just one of those stories: Abraham and Sarah. We read these surprising verses about the couple in the book of Genesis:

<sup>1</sup> *When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, “I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. <sup>2</sup> Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.”*

<sup>3</sup> *Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, <sup>4</sup> “As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. <sup>5</sup> No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations.*

*<sup>6</sup> I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. <sup>7</sup> I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your*



*God and the God of your descendants after you. <sup>8</sup> The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God” (Genesis 17:1–8).*

Don’t overlook that first verse. Abraham was ninety-nine years old when God said that Sarah would give birth to a son and that he would become “the father of many nations.” In fact, this wasn’t the first time God had made this promise—this was just a confirmation. Abraham was seventy-five years old the first time God said he would have a son (see Genesis 12:1–3). Now, twenty-four years later, Abraham was still waiting for the fulfillment of that promise.

In our minds, we would consider this to be nothing less than crazy. It’s unfathomable to think of a seventy-five-year-old man fathering a son. It’s impossible to imagine that same man waiting twenty-four more years, all the while believing a son was coming. It’s downright crazy to think that anything was going to happen once Abraham hit ninety-nine years of age.

But let’s keep reading the story of Abraham and Sarah:

*<sup>1</sup> Now the LORD was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah what he had promised. <sup>2</sup> Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. <sup>3</sup> Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him. <sup>4</sup> When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God commanded him. <sup>5</sup> Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.*

*<sup>6</sup> Sarah said, “God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me.” <sup>7</sup> And she added, “Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age” (Genesis 21:1–7).*

- What were the terms of God’s covenant with Abraham?
- Why did it require faith for Abraham to hold up his end of the bargain?

- How do you typically respond when you have to wait for something you want? What about something you've been promised?
- How does Abraham and Sarah's story add to your understanding of what faith is and why it's important?

Remember: *it's only crazy until it happens*. This is why we need to get a better understanding of "Crazy Faith."

## Reflect

A simple definition of *faith* is "trust in something you cannot explicitly prove." This might sound straightforward. But today, people google everything and tend to believe only things they can prove without a doubt. This makes having faith a challenge, so actually witnessing people act on faith is increasingly rare. Too often, the facts that we see erode the faith that we need.

I'm sure you would agree that this world we live in is pretty out of whack. There are giant problems out there for everyone to see: violence, war, greed, racism, sexism, prejudice, inequity . . . the list goes on. For things to get right, we need miracles taking place more often. If we really want crazy results, we've got to put in a crazy amount of faith—even if it's hard.

So I've got one question for you: *How badly do you want it?* Put another way, *how badly do you want to see things change for the better—and what are you willing to do to make it happen?* Take a moment to ponder that question and record your thoughts. Remember, don't write something "normal" here. Don't write something reasonable. Write something crazy!<sup>2</sup>

- Where do you want to see things get better in your personal life?
- Where do you want to see things get better in your spiritual life?
- We each have beliefs, standards, philosophies, and habits, and these are all built on some sort of foundation, whether from family, friends, education, religion, or culture—or a combination of all the above. The integrity of that foundation will determine the type of structure that can be built on it. Check the box for the kind of structure your current faith can support:



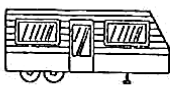
- ☐ **SKYSCRAPER:** a soaring structure filled with huge visions, giant goals, and daring dreams; a lifestyle of faith on display that is focused on serving others



- ☐ **MANSION:** a large, strong framework; designed to last; aesthetically pleasing to attract others; set up to leave a legacy for future generations



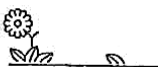
- ☐ **FIXER-UPPER:** pretty solid belief structure but compromised integrity due to doubt, disappointment, and damage over the years; needs some work



- ☐ **TRAILER HOME:** easily moved and not anchored down; susceptible to damage from outside circumstances; doesn't have much room for others



- ☐ **PORTA-POTTY:** structure used only as a last resort; requires a lot of maintenance; has just enough room for one



- ☐ **VACANT LOT:** no apparent vision or direction; available; filled with potential<sup>3</sup>



- Why did you select the structure you chose? What structure would you like to have? Why?

If you and I want to be part of a generation that actually *does* something for God's kingdom, we're going to need more than a tame, garden-variety, over-the-counter kind of faith. We're going to need *Crazy Faith*. I define this type of faith as "having thoughts and actions that lack reason but trusting fully in what you cannot explicitly prove." It's faith like Abraham and Sarah demonstrated. Faith like Noah. Faith like David and Daniel. Like Peter and Paul.

Maybe some of the things you wrote above seem crazy now. But remember that they only seem crazy until God shows up.

Maybe you're faithfully working a job you don't really like so that you can remain financially stable until the entrepreneurial venture you've been passionately pursuing takes off. People around you are telling you to give it up and settle for a nine-to-five. But something inside you can't let go of what you believe God told you would happen.

Or maybe it seems crazy to save yourself in purity right now because the world tells you to just go out and do whatever you want with whomever you want. Or maybe there are relationships you believe will never be restored. Dreams you believe will never come true. Promotions you are sure will never be offered to you. Homes you know are way out of your price range. People you love who could never repent and come to Jesus.

But maybe—*just maybe*—what seems crazy in one season will be counted as faith in another. Maybe the fact that you stick to your guns and stand firm in your faith will be the deciding factor in someone else's heart and help turn that person's eyes toward Jesus!<sup>4</sup>

- What are some things that you would like to actually *do* for God's kingdom?

- Based on what you've read and considered so far, is "faith" something that is easy or difficult to demonstrate? Explain.
- In chapter 1 of the book, I relate several "true stories of **Crazy Faith**."<sup>5</sup> Take a few moments to review those stories. Which of them resonates with you the most? Why?
- Who in your life is someone who lives by faith or took a stand that required great faith?

## **Act**

There's an old DC Talk song that says, "Love is a verb." The idea is that love isn't just something we just feel or experience. It's something we *do*. The same is true of faith. Faith is a verb. It's not just something we "have" in the same way we have emotions or a pet. It's something we *do*.

For that reason, we're going to end each lesson by talking about *doing*. We're going to think through ways we can apply what we're learning about **Crazy Faith**.

Remember that God wants you to be his modern-day hero. He wants other people to look at the faith you have and model their own after it. Your **Crazy Faith** is what he wants to use to make a miracle happen. He's not looking for somebody to give him all the reasons why it can't happen. He's looking for somebody to believe that if he says it, it *will* happen.

So get ready!

- What are some obstacles that have hindered you from experiencing a deeper level of faith?
- What is one step you can take this week to start knocking down one of those obstacles?
- What are you most hoping to learn or experience during this study of *Crazy Faith*? Why?

**Prayer:** *Jesus, I affirm what I read in your Word: faith is the reality of everything I am hoping for and the evidence of things I cannot see. Faith is understanding that you created everything and that you are in control. Faith is believing what you say, and faith is living my life in a way that bets on you. Fill me with that kind of faith not just in the weeks to come, but right now.*