

***Fed Up with Flat Faith***  
***10 Attitudes & Actions to Pump Up Your Faith***

**Chapter 1: Fed Up**

I told her things I had always been too afraid to tell anyone before. *My faith felt dead. I doubted my salvation. God seemed so distant.* I saw something in Susan's life that I longed to have in mine. Her faith was vibrant and real. Even the way she talked about God demonstrated a dynamic in her relationship with Him that I lacked. I had been a Christian since childhood. I was active in church. I said and did all the right things. I even taught Sunday School. But my face never lit up when Jesus was the topic of conversation.

Wayne and I met Susan and her husband at church. We regularly spent time with them and several other young couples. From the beginning, I recognized Susan had something I desperately wanted. For instance, she turned to God first in every situation. I asked God for help only if I couldn't take care of it myself. Susan communicated with God constantly like He was a real person. My prayertime and Bible reading were dry and perfunctory.

I had wanted to ask Susan about her faith for a while, but that particular day was the first opportunity I had to talk to her alone. Both young mothers, we planned a play date for our toddlers. While the little ones played on the floor, I tearfully shared with Susan the doubts that had plagued me for nearly two decades. She listened with compassion, but she also challenged me to not be content with my condition.

Now that I had acknowledged to a Christian sister that something was wrong, my lifeless faith wasn't a secret anymore. I could not deny it. Finally desperate enough for God, I had become vulnerable—with a friend and with God. Fed up with my dull, flat faith I could allow God to work. My friend did not "fix" me that day, but our encounter jump-started my journey toward a fiery faith. Along the way, God shifted a few of my attitudes and changed some of my actions to fire up my faith. God can use these same attitudes and actions to start a flame in your life.

Countless Christians experience flat faith. Many—even many who attend church regularly, minister to others, and teach Bible study—long to find excitement in serving Jesus, but continue to struggle. Some, who are discouraged, walk away from church altogether, while others simply settle for this dry ritual of faith. Still others keep searching for the kind of faith Jesus promised—full, abundant, overflowing! (See John 10:10.) That kind of faith is anything but flat!

The word *flat* can be defined as "without vitality or animation; lifeless; dull."<sup>1</sup> Many Christians with flat faith love Jesus and continue to serve Him, but they often feel as though they're simply going through the motions of Christianity. Their love for Christ is short on passion. They serve Him and His church largely out of a sense of duty or because that's what they've always done. The routine of the Christian life may even feel superficial and directionless.

Some believers have *never* experienced a vibrant faith characterized by real intimacy with Christ. Flat faith is all they've ever known. Others, like my dear friend Connie Cavanaugh, were once

on fire for Christ but ended up spending a season in a spiritual wilderness. In her book, *From Faking It to Finding Grace*, Connie bravely tells her story of spiritual dryness. This pastor's wife once passionately shared her faith and lovingly ministered to her family, church members, and neighbors. As she served them, their pain always became her pain too. Finally, overwhelmed, Connie shut down spiritually and emotionally. She "faked it" for a decade, pretending everything was fine to her friends, her family, and her church. After ten years of wearing a spiritual mask, God graciously and lovingly began to show her the way out of that spiritual wilderness.

Does either of these scenarios even remotely describe your life? Do you long for more in your relationship with Christ? Do you crave the abundant life He promised? Fiery faith is not only possible, God wants it to be yours. God never intended for our life of faith to be boring and cold. You *can* connect with God in real ways. You *can* experience His activity in and around you. Your life *can* bear fruit that lasts.

### **Age-Old Problem**

Flat, dry faith is not a recent phenomenon or a product of our contemporary culture. This problem plagued mankind long before the children of Israel grumbled in the wilderness. As far back as Genesis we can spot flat faith in the midst of God's people. Sarah, Abraham's wife, displayed symptoms of flat faith. She believed in God. She even left home with her husband backpack over to Canaan. But Sarah's relationship with the Creator lacked a couple of vital elements. She did not expect God to work and she did not believe He had the power to do what He promised. Both of these "symptoms" result from an insufficient knowledge of God. Sarah needed to get to know her Creator.

When Abraham came home with the news that God promised to give him offspring as numerous as the stars, Sarah set about to make it happen with the help of her Egyptian maidservant. Rather than letting God work His plan in His way, she tried to do it for Him in a way that made sense to her. Years later, when God's messenger made it clear yet again that God's plan included Sarah, she laughed because it seemed impossible to her. Sarah's limited knowledge *of* God limited what she believed *about* God. Sadly, she lived her faith without any expectation of or trust in God's miraculous activity.

Martha, our favorite New Testament hostess, suffered from her own consequences of flat faith. Activity replaced a vibrant relationship with her Savior. While Mary, her sister, sat at Jesus' feet and soaked up His teaching, Martha busily prepared the guest room and cooked a gourmet meal. *Serving* Christ distracted her from *enjoying* Christ's presence (Luke 10:38-42). Martha was too busy to spend time fostering intimacy with Christ. On a positive note, Scripture shows us that Martha's relationship with Jesus grew. After the death of Martha's brother, Lazarus, she makes an incredible declaration of faith in Christ. "I believe you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world" (John 11:27). And this was before Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. Obviously Martha had spent some quality time with Jesus.

We could visit many more examples of flat faith in Scripture. The Bible beautifully preserved stories for us from both ends of the faith spectrum. The passionate and the passionless. Those

who lived with purpose and those who lacked purpose. Those with a deep connection to their heavenly Father and those who felt disconnected.

Eli and Samuel, in the Old Testament Book of 1 Samuel, exemplify this contrast. Eli was from the tribe of Levi, a priest of the Most High God, a descendent of Aaron. Eli ministered at God's Tabernacle all his life. God had chosen the Levites from all the tribes of Israel to be His priests, to burn incense in His presence, and to offer sacrifices for the people. For 40 years Eli led Israel to worship and serve the LORD. Eli was a chosen man of God; a leader of God's people. But as we will see shortly, Eli's *religiosity* hindered his *relationship* with the living God.

Samuel was a boy from the tribe of Ephraim. His mother, Hannah, suffered with infertility for many years before God answered her prayers and blessed her and her husband with baby Samuel. To fulfill her vow of dedication, when Samuel was still very young—probably around three years old—Hannah took him to Eli. There Samuel stayed to learn from Eli his mentor and to grow “up in the presence of the LORD” (1 Samuel 2:21).

Samuel thrived both physically and spiritually. He grew “in stature and in favor with the LORD and with men” (1 Samuel 2:26). In fact, during this period of Israel's history when “the word of the LORD was rare” (1 Samuel 3:1), God spoke directly to Samuel. First Samuel chapter 3 records that the LORD was with Samuel as he grew up; He let none of Samuel's words fall to the ground; and God revealed Himself to Samuel through His word. Samuel enjoyed a full, dynamic relationship with God.

The biblical account clearly shows that Eli's faith was dramatically different from Samuel's. Samuel's vibrant, intense faith fostered a life that was open and responsive to God and His activity. Eli's dutiful, routine faith left a spiritual hole in both his life and his family's life that paved the way for heartbreak.

Our very first encounter with Eli in Scripture demonstrates his lack of sensitivity to spiritual things. As Hannah poured her heart out in prayer to God in front of the Tabernacle in Shiloh, Eli mistakenly assumed she was drunk. He failed to recognize intense, fervent prayer and missed the presence and activity of God.

Eli's two sons were “wicked men” who had “no regard for the LORD” (1 Samuel 2:12). Hophni and Phinehas, treated their priestly ministry with contempt by using their position to satisfy their physical cravings. As High Priest, Eli had the responsibility to prevent this abuse of power. Instead, he ignored his sons' behavior because their temporal pleasures meant more to him than God's honor. By failing to intervene, Eli condoned their sin and dishonored his holy God. The result? God took the lives of Hophni and Phinehas in battle and declared that Eli would be the last old man in his family line. Eli's flat faith profoundly affected those closest to him.

Let's look at one last thing from Eli's life. To me, this may be the saddest result of flat faith. Eli did not hear God speak. Although he had served in the Tabernacle for decades, God chose to speak to the young boy, Samuel, instead of the experienced priest.

What can you and I learn from this ancient Israelite priest and a young Ephraimite named

Samuel?

1. Flat faith derails God's purposes for our lives.
2. We don't have to settle for flat, dry faith.

God wants us to experience a vibrant, fulfilling relationship with Him. If we simply go through the motions of faith, at best we miss out on the abundance of all God has planned for us. And at the worst, our apathy can have far-reaching consequences.

I'd like to read a record of Eli in his early days to know what brought him to where we find him in 1 Samuel. Did he begin his life as a priest with excitement? Did things happen along the way that seemed to throw cold water on the fire of his faith? Perhaps. Maybe what happened to Eli is what I see happening to Christians in churches today.

Eli came from a family of priests. His father was a priest and his grandfather was a priest. Essentially, Eli had served God since the day he was born. His faith was expected and routine. It's just what he did. He probably never thought about doing it any other way. Eli believed in God. He wanted to experience Him in a fresh and dynamic way, but his habit of faith got in the way. I can relate.

### **I've Been There**

I started in the middle of my story; now let's go back to the beginning. I was a "church baby." From infancy my parents faithfully took me to Sunday School, worship service, Vacation Bible School, and Wednesday nights. I memorized Bible verses, earned high attendance pins, and wore wire hanger angel wings covered with gold garland in the Christmas pageant. I went to church camp and sang in the youth choir.

At eight years old I accepted Jesus as my Savior. I clearly remember the day when I realized I was a sinner in need of forgiveness. I understood what Jesus accomplished for me on the Cross. I can still see myself sitting in a straight-backed wooden chair across the desk from our pastor, talking through these things while my mother hovered in the doorway. I became a baby Christian that day.

For the next 18 years nothing much changed. I still claimed Christ as my Savior, but I also remained a spiritual babe. I remained active and involved in church. I followed all the rules and did all the right things. In fact, my brother sarcastically called me "Sister Mary Kathryn." And although Mary Kathryn is indeed my given name, I'm sure my parents never meant it to be used as a synonym for Miss Goody Two-shoes.

Even with all my church activity and right living, I experienced little to no spiritual growth. The rich relationship I wanted with Christ eluded me. Something vital was missing. Connected to church, I still felt disconnected from God. I had no real sense of God's presence.

If a world record existed for the most "rededicated" Christian, I would definitely be a contender.

Countless times, during my teen and early adult years, I traipsed down the aisle or bowed my head in prayer to dedicate my life to Christ yet again. Although I accepted Jesus as my Savior at an early age, for almost two decades I struggled to sense God's presence. I could see the kind of faith I longed to have in other's lives. God seemed so personal to them; they enjoyed an intimacy with Christ I envied. Despite my weak attempts for a fresh start with Jesus, my faith remained dry and stale. Many times I wondered, *What is wrong with me?*

My faith languished even more during my college years. After a few futile attempts to find a church and get involved in campus ministry, I gave up. Soon after college graduation, Wayne and I married and found a church home in our new city and got involved. Looking back, I know that, for me at least, it was more because I thought we *should* than because I *wanted* to. My church activity resumed, but my faith remained flat, dull, and lifeless.

### **God's Divine Intervention**

Then came that day with Susan. The day that desperation gave way to vulnerability. Fed up and tired of trying to ignite my faith through my own works and activity, I humbly admitted I could not do it. Honesty with myself, Susan, and ultimately God opened the way for His activity. *I* could not make myself into what God wanted me to be. *I* could not find the abundant life Jesus promised. But God could do it all.

Shortly after my conversation with Susan I joined a ladies' Bible study group for the first time. Through the Book of Romans, God showed me things in His Word I had never really seen before. For the first time in all my churchgoing years I finally understood that my salvation and my faith have nothing to do with me and everything to do with Christ.

Now, you may be asking, "How did you miss *that!*?" Bear with me just a minute and I'll try to explain. Intellectually, I knew the facts. Christ must be my Savior *and* my Lord. God saved me for a purpose—to lay down my life and obediently follow Jesus. My life is not my own, I've been bought and paid for with the blood of Christ. I knew all these things, but still I missed the point.

I spent almost two decades armed with the knowledge of the faith God intends. Like Eli, I simply went through the motions of faith. I attended church; I served in a ministry position; I read my Bible and prayed. But everything was powerless, stunted, boring. Flat. Like Martha, sometimes the busyness of faith hindered me from finding the relationship with Jesus I craved. Many times I thought: *Since I already do "all the right things," then this must just be it for me. Some people are just wired to be more spiritual than others. I will just be happy with what I have.* Sadly, I was also like Sarah. I did not know God well enough to believe He could—and would—act in my life.

Thankfully God used the power of His Word to correct my faulty thinking. Here are a few things He taught me right away:

- Nothing about my faith is about me; everything is about Him and for His glory.
- I have no power to make myself grow spiritually; but God does and it's His job.
- The relationship with Jesus is primary; good works and church activity flow out of this relationship as I obey Him.

His correction and redirection immediately started my faith in a new trajectory. I began to hunger for God's Word; I started growing spiritually; and I even wanted to tell others about Jesus. Throughout the rest of this book we will explore the attitudes and actions that will position you before God so He can fire up your faith. Since God broke through to my heart all those years ago He has done a lot of work on me. But there is so much refining still to do.

### **Still Growing**

I have certainly not become all God wants me to be. "Mountaintop" experiences are not a daily occurrence! My spiritual "feelings" continue to ebb and flow. However, now, a sense of God's presence and an excitement in serving Him is the norm for me instead of a rare—or never—occurrence.

In fact, many of our biblical heroes display a passion for Christ I long to share. For instance, David's longing for God is evident in both his writing and in the record of his life. We know from Scripture that David sinned. His passion for God did not make him perfect, but it did keep him coming back to the One who offered forgiveness. I believe David's relentless and passionate pursuit of the Father is why God described him as a "man after his own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14).

My favorite expression of desire for Christ in Scripture comes from the Apostle Paul. I have committed this passage to memory because I long to share Paul's intensity in my pursuit of Christ.

*But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord for whose sake I've lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death (Philippians 3:7–10).*

Paul's intense longing for Jesus charted the course of his life. Christ's calling filled each moment with relevance. Although Paul lacked material belongings, he was rich. Paul suffered in prison for the sake of the gospel, but he was freer than most people. And when Paul endured one hardship after another, he rejoiced that the power of God would be displayed through his weakness.

We could use many words to describe Paul's faith. *Zealous. Fiery. Intense. Inspiring. Significant. Meaningful.* But *flat*? Never. Paul's life displayed passion and purpose in abundance! Do you ever look at some of the great people of God in the Bible and wonder, *How*

*do I get some of that?*

## **Are You Fed Up?**

Do you struggle with finding real passion and purpose in your relationship with Christ? Like Sarah, do you expect too little from God? Perhaps like Martha, you are too busy with the works of faith to foster your relationship with Jesus. Maybe like Eli you simply go through the motions of faith. Even if you don't experience the same tragic results, the loss is still great.

How do you know if your faith needs a boost? If the title of this book captured your attention, that's a good indication you're already looking for more. If you feel like you've simply been doing church and have missed out on an active relationship with a real Person, then keep reading. You can also take a quick faith inventory. Below is a list of characteristics, derived from Scripture and my own experience that indicate your faith is more routine than robust.

- Relationship with Christ is not deepening and growing.
- Religious activities overshadow your relationship with Christ.
- Life of faith feels boring, tired, or overwhelming.
- Feeling of disconnect from God; no real sense of His presence.
- God seems silent.
- Little excitement over or awareness of God's activity.
- Little or no anticipation that God will work.
- Dry, forced worship; praising and acknowledging God's nature do not come easy.
- Little or no personal worship outside of corporate worship; you rarely find yourself spontaneously worshipping God.
- Nagging sense you should be experiencing more in your relationship with God.
- Notice fiery faith in others' lives that you desire.
- Efforts and activity produce few results of eternal value.

Perhaps a few—or many—of these could be used to describe your faith. Do you want more? Do you want to experience the full life of faith that Jesus offers? You don't have to settle for flat faith. You don't have to give up or pretend. God wants to replace your flat faith with fiery faith!

I want to emphasize one important truth: We cannot grow our own faith. From beginning to end, faith is strictly God's work. We can't even muster up faith to believe in Jesus. God gives us our faith (Ephesians 2:8). And only God's Spirit can change, grow, and transform our faith (2 Corinthians 3:18; Colossians 1:29). But God expects our cooperation. He calls for our active and obedient participation in His work in our lives (1 Corinthians 9:24–27; 1 Timothy 4:7; Philippians 3:12–14). That's the purpose of this book—to learn to position ourselves before God so He can accomplish in our lives the things that only He can accomplish.

This book highlights key attitudes and actions found in Scripture that help God's people position themselves for Him to work in their lives. The truth principles may challenge you. They still challenge me! Much of what's in this book you may have heard before, particularly if you've been in church many years. If you're anything like me, I can *know* a lot that I never *apply*. That's

why my faith was flat for so long. I pray that this time God will help you apply His truths to your life.

Are you ready to be vulnerable? Remember, you can't do it, but God can. Perhaps some of your Christian friends or family members have faith with those qualities you desire. They can be an invaluable source of encouragement and prayer. Ask one or more to partner with you as you seek to cooperate with God in your faith transformation.