

**REAL FAITH
IN OUR
FAITHFUL
GOD**



unshaken



CRAWFORD W. LORITTS JR.

“If you spend any time with Dr. Loritts, you quickly learn that his greatest joy is serving others with a unique combination of grit, humility, and unwavering faith in God. I’m not at all surprised that his book *Unshaken* provides such an inspiring reminder of how potent our faith can be in every endeavor we pursue—he has lived out its pages for decades and his words are trustworthy.”

Dan T. Cathy, Chairman, President, and CEO, Chick-fil-A, Inc.

“I have known Crawford for many years and count him as a close friend and colaborer in God’s work. I can attest to you that he walks his talk. He handles the Word of God with careful accuracy and fiery passion. As you read, be prepared to trust God at a whole new level.”

Steve Douglass, President, Campus Crusade for Christ International

“I have been impacted by the ministry of Dr. Loritts since 1994. The things this man says and writes, my soul seeks to ponder. I would advise you to do the same! Read this and see what a stabilized faith looks like.”

Eric M. Mason, Lead Pastor, Epiphany Fellowship, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; President, Thriving; author, *Manhood Restored*

“In the Bible, faith is essential to salvation, and no less essential to our lifelong pilgrimage. Here, Crawford Loritts does not so much define faith as provide sketches of the way biblical faith operates. In highly practical terms, he describes how faith engenders obedience, endurance, and an ability to live in the light of the new heaven and the new earth. Faith fires mission; it develops trust and courage. And all such faith is grounded in confidence in what God has already done in Christ Jesus. If faith is for you ephemeral and practically useless, you need this book.”

D. A. Carson, Research Professor of New Testament, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

“My friend Crawford has been used by God to speak into my soul repeatedly. But in *Unshaken*, it seems he has put his arm around me, reasoned with me, and implored me from Scripture to believe God for too much, rather than too little. You’ll find your faith in God will grow as Crawford reminds us of who God is, what God has done, and what God has promised. This book is vintage Crawford: bold, truthful, and encouraging.”

Dennis Rainey, President and CEO, FamilyLife; host, *FamilyLife Today*; author, *Stepping Up*

“I came across my dad’s book *Unshaken* at a pivotal moment. Our family had just taken a few steps of faith, following God’s lead from the known (Memphis) to the unknown (New York City). This book was used profoundly by God to strengthen my resolve and to help me resist the urge to play it safe. If you are determined to embrace risk in your journey with Jesus, you will find *Unshaken* to be a helpful, timeless resource.”

Bryan Loritts, Pastor for Preaching and Mission, Trinity Grace Church, New York City; author, *An Indestructible Life*

“Whether life is tough or going great, how is your ‘real faith’? Crawford opens God’s Word and encourages us to live a life full of faith—as God truly hopes and dreams we will. Don’t miss the chance to live *Unshaken!*”

James Reese, President and CEO, Atlanta Mission

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REAL FAITH IN OUR FAITHFUL GOD

CRAWFORD W. LORITTS JR.

Unshaken: Real Faith in Our Faithful God

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To

Fellowship Bible Church

I am so grateful to God for tying our hearts together
and for the great joy and privilege it is to serve you.

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Preface

Without faith, there is no Christianity and no Christian living. Faith places the glory, power, and presence of God on display for the world to see and his followers to experience. Faith makes God's people noble, divinely regal, and, at the same time, compellingly attractive. While others “crash and burn,” faithful pilgrims keep moving.

These pilgrims are resilient because they know they belong to another world. No matter what happens, they are driven by the pleasure of God and captured by the power and presence of “the Ancient of Days” (Dan. 7:9). Through God's strength and power, they refuse to be defined by circumstances or what happens to them, but, to the contrary, their faith redeems and redefines their circumstances.

And so it should be for us.

But what should be is not always our reality. There is not a follower of Christ who does not at times struggle to reconcile what he knows about God and the seemingly insurmountable challenges and uncertainties he faces. We become fearful, discouraged, and at times frustrated because our faith, frankly, lets us down.

That's why I've written this book. It is my prayer that as you walk through the pages of this book, our great God will pour encouragement into your heart and strengthen your resolve to both believe and act on what he says.

The content of this book is largely framed by a series of messages I preached several years ago at Fellowship Bible Church, where I serve as the senior pastor. My heart was humbled, moved, and deeply encouraged by the response of the people and the apparent way in which the Holy Spirit used the messages to strengthen the faith of many in our congregation. So I share these things with you.

Although I gave those messages several years ago, the Lord made sure that what I am sharing with you in this book is real and fresh in my life. I have written a number of books through the years, but I have never experienced more distractions, challenges, and crises in a given period of time than I did while writing this book. Often the very emphasis or truth I was writing about was exactly what I needed to hear and apply. The book itself was a call for me to exercise faith.

Before we get started, I want to point out that I have not tried to define faith. There's a good reason for this: the Bible does not define faith. However, it describes faith, and I believe that its descriptions of faith will resonate with our hearts and provide clarity. It is difficult for me to define my love for my wife, Karen, but I can describe it in such a way that its meaning is unmistakably clear. So it is with faith.

Please keep these two foundational perspectives in mind as you read these pages:

- First, our journey in this life is about what God wants to do through our lives, not about our using God to accomplish our dreams.
- Second, our impact and effectiveness as followers of Christ is in direct proportion to our faith-filled obedience as we face the challenges and opportunities God places before us.

May our great God fill your heart and mind with such a glorious vision of his power and love that you will see him as greater than all of your fears and more than sufficient to meet all of your needs.

Every book I have written has been a team effort, and *Unshaken* is no exception.

First, I am grateful to God for those who encouraged me to put what was on my heart on paper. God used what I shared in sermon form to bless and encourage many people in our church, as well as those who listen to my messages via podcast and the Internet. The response stirred in me a desire to put those sermons in book form.

This is my first book project with Crossway Books. It is a joy and privilege to work with the Crossway team. Thank you, Lane Dennis, for your leadership and the mission and ministry of Crossway. Thank you, Dave DeWit, for your help and encouragement each step of the way. You are a dear friend and key to making a possibility a reality. Thank you, Greg Bailey, for your thoughtful and helpful insights and your keen editor's eye. I am grateful for the sales and marketing team at Crossway (Amy Kruis, Angie Cheatham, Matt Tully, Janni Firestone, Anthony Gosling, and Ben Thocher). I so appreciate your desire to serve the message of this book by placing it in the hands of as many people as possible.

Thank you, Brandon O'Brien, for your creativity, insights, and helpful suggestions in preparing the manuscript.

Tawnda Holley is my executive assistant. Thank you, Tawnda, for giving order to the constant flow of responsibilities and opportunities that need attention. You helped me to carve out the time to give myself to this very important project.

And then there is Karen. Always Karen. She is the love and

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joy of my life. We have been on this faith journey together now for more than forty-four years. Her love and support fills my heart and keeps me pressing forward. She is my bride, my partner in ministry, and my best friend. Thank you, Sweetheart, for encouraging me to be all that God has called me to be and to finish what he has placed in our hands to do.

To God be the glory!

Dr. Crawford W. Loritts Jr.
Atlanta, Georgia
Ephesians 3:20–21

God Confidence

Mark Twain once quipped, “All you need in life is ignorance and confidence, and success is sure.”¹ There is a bit of truth in that statement. When you either don’t care about failing or don’t know that you can fail, you typically put your head down and keep plowing ahead.

Do you remember Melanie Oudin? In 2009, the teenage sensation from Marietta, Georgia, took England’s Wimbledon tennis tournament by storm. Virtually everyone in the tennis world thought it was a bit of a fluke when she made it past the first round. Everyone, that is, except Melanie. She played like she didn’t know that she could lose, exuding an engaging confidence that said, “I belong here with the elite tennis players.” There was a passion and sweetness about her that won over the crowd, as well as the announcers. No, she didn’t win the tournament. But she did what many thought improbable, if not impossible—she made it through the third round!

That’s confidence.

Confidence is the engine that drives achievement. It pushes us toward the mark, the goal. It is the “it factor” that distinguishes the exceptional from the average. Confidence pushes us toward

focus and causes us to live with assurance and certainty. According to Merriam-Webster, confidence is “full trust; belief in the power, trustworthiness, or reliability of a person or thing.”

But where does it come from?

While it is true that some people seem to have been born with personalities and dispositions that exude a focused self-assurance, for most of us, our confidence has developed over time. Abilities have been sharpened and honed. We have been tested and challenged, and have learned to trust our abilities and capabilities in certain areas. In fact, the challenges have strengthened and refined both our abilities and our will to push forward. The result is a courageous confidence that says, “I don’t have to be afraid; this can be done.”

The professional athlete doesn’t sweat under pressure because he’s sunk that shot, hit that ball, and made that catch thousands of times. Chances are the Academy Award-winning actress nurtured and developed her craft for years in relative obscurity and developed an outlook that says, “This may be a bigger stage, but I’ve been here before and I can do this.” The surgeon is focused and calm under pressure because his education, training, and experience have prepared him for that moment. In short, confidence says: “I’ve been preparing for this very moment. I’m ready. Let’s do it.”

CONFIDENCE FROM ABOVE

As followers of Christ, there is a distinctively different basis, direction, and source of our confidence. The Bible speaks of confidence from a vertical perspective. It is not derived from the relative consistency of our experiences and the development of our gifts, talents, and abilities. It doesn’t come from the strength of our personalities or our track records of success. Likewise,

it is not diminished or damaged by inconsistency, failure, suffering, dysfunction, or what so often appears to be the erratic, unpredictable nature of life.

No. Our confidence is anchored in God. He never changes. He is never out of control. He is never taken by surprise. He never loses. Our circumstances don't affect God; he affects our circumstances. God never missteps. He has no glitches. His ability to function is never overloaded. He never breaks down or crashes. He is our proactive, loving heavenly Father, who not only has a plan for our lives, but also has the resources to make happen everything he intends.

Our confidence does not depend on what we have or what we have done. Our confidence is in a person—our unfailing God, who shows up in every situation, circumstance, and condition in which we find ourselves. This causes us to be resilient, to persevere, to endure.

This kind of confidence is what the Bible calls faith. *Biblical confidence is an enduring faith.*

There's a relationship between the condition and strength of our faith and our view of God. In other words, the condition of our faith is a reflection of our view of God.

But our view of God is often eclipsed by what appear to be insurmountable challenges and difficulties. Added to this is the corrosive cynicism that permeates Western culture. It has become an art form. We have made it intellectually appealing to be doubters. We celebrate our “incisive” negative analysis of seemingly everything and everyone, from the president of the United States to local pastors, from pop icons to our neighbors. Bloggers, magazines, and the tidal wave of talk shows give us a daily autopsy, pointing out what's wrong and why we can't trust this person or that situation. And it affects us. A constant diet

of the downside of life lowers our sights, clouds our perspective, and contaminates our faith.

Our faith needs to be guarded and protected, because it is the currency of the Christian life. The writer of the book of Hebrews says it clearly and directly: “And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him” (11:6). Our God confidence is no casual thing. It is key to experiencing God’s presence and power in our lives and in the circumstances and challenges we face.

Our journey through this life must be viewed through the lens of God’s Word. There we see the truth concerning who God is and how we are to face every issue and challenge in life, including those dark, uncertain times. God is there, and he is our confidence.

ABRAHAM’S GOD-SUSTAINED FAITH

The patriarch Abraham presents a compelling example of a God-sustained confidence—faith—during a dark, seemingly impossible time in his life. He kept believing.

Look closely at the apostle Paul’s description of Abraham’s enduring faith in Romans 4:16–21:

That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, “So

shall your offspring be.” He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.²

I believe four words summarize Paul’s description of Abraham’s faith. I believe these words represent the core characteristics of enduring faith. Frankly, this is powerful, liberating stuff. It is my prayer that as you embrace these characteristics and their meaning, hope will burst forth in the midst of your trials and opposition.

Based

The first of the four words is *based*. Abraham’s faith was based on something. Verse 21 says that what kept Abraham believing was his conviction “that God was able to do what he had promised.” Abraham’s confidence was in God’s integrity, God’s unfailing consistency in doing what he says. God had made a promise to Abraham, and Abraham knew that God always keeps his promises. Notice that *God* had made the promise. Abraham’s faith was based on what God had said.

Too many of us have grown discouraged because we have concluded that this faith thing doesn’t work. We say: “I desperately wanted God to do something for me. I believed that he would do it. I was full of hope and optimism. But God let me down.” The question is, what did we base our faith on? Was it anchored in God’s Word? Did he promise to do what we wanted?

Genuine faith and optimism are not the same thing. Granted,

they sometimes appear to be identical since both build our confidence and hope, but that's as far as the similarity goes. Faith is not naive optimism. Optimism can be the wrong kind of faith. At times, it is a foolish confidence that is solely based on desire and not on the promises of God in his Word. As author Paul Miller puts it, optimism can be "childlike trust without the loving father."³

Faith does not come up with things for God to do. Faith responds to what God wants done. Faith releases the plans and purposes of God through our lives. Further, there is a relationship between the clear statements and promises in the Word of God and what he places before us or on our hearts to do, become, or accomplish. This is one of the most important anchor lessons in the Christian life.

Some years ago, a man shared with me that his wife had come to believe that if she had enough faith, God was required to do anything she wanted. They had problems in their marriage and were struggling financially. (Hmm, I guess she didn't want God to fix the marriage problems and their finances.) She felt that she and their small child needed to visit relatives in another city. When he told her that they didn't have the money for the trip, she told him—I kid you not—that she and the child were going to the airport, and, by faith, tickets would be waiting for them there. She packed their bags and her husband dropped them off at the airport. Once there, she kept claiming their tickets "by faith," but each time she checked with the ticket agent, there were no tickets. Hours later, she called her husband and asked him to come and take them back home. He did.

Are we sure that our faith is supported by the truth of God's Word? Abraham pressed on because he knew for sure that what he was looking for had been promised by God. He could point

back to the clear statements and assurances of God. Let's check the basis of our faith. God honors our faith because he honors his Word. Remember, we're not standing on conjecture or our assumptions. Authentic, life-transforming faith says that we are standing on the promises of God.

Defies

The second word is *defies*. Enduring faith defies circumstances.

Look again at verses 18 and 19: "*In hope he believed against hope. . . . He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead* (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb." This is extraordinary.

A key word here is *considered*. Faith is not denial. Abraham stared at his condition, his reality, and said, in essence, "I'm going to believe God anyway." Think about it: God had promised Abraham and Sarah that they would conceive a child through natural means. Abraham was fully aware that he was one hundred years old and that Sarah was ninety. The plumbing didn't work anymore (his body "was as good as dead").

Abraham knew better than to repackaging what God had said and try to make the promise happen on his own terms. Remember, he and Sarah had tried that and caused a bit of a mess (Genesis 16). That's a very important lesson for all of us. We shouldn't change what God has said to fit our circumstances. We shouldn't try to make faith "reasonable." The fear of being considered foolish and naive will make us rational but superficial and powerless Christians. Our legacy will be a dead orthodoxy that knows nothing of the supernatural intervention of God and his power to smash through our "realities." We need the impos-

sible and insurmountable so that our concept of God will not be theoretical.

Notice, Abraham squarely faced the reality that there was no way that he and Sarah were going to have a baby on their own. God was going to have to do it.

To refuse to allow the difficulties we face to squelch and temper our faith does not mean that we are living in denial. To be sure, there are those who refuse to accept the harsh reality of their condition or the full weight of their circumstances. Faith does not deny that you have cancer. Faith does not deny that you've lost your job and you're upside down financially. Faith does not deny that your marriage is in a very bad place. Faith does not deny that your children have walked away from the faith. You name it, and faith does not deny its existence. It looks at it. It "considers" it. It examines it. It stares it in the eye, but it says: "*You* don't stop or determine what God wants done. So I stare through you and see my great God, who is able to do what he has promised."

And that's the point. God is most glorified when we are most dependent. All other options are off the table, and the choice is to either throw our hands up in despair or trust all that we have—God. And he's more than enough. He proves himself again and again so that we develop that delightful, defiant resolve that says nothing stops our God.

In a sense, what God called Abraham to believe him for was absurd. But faith is linked to absurdity. If we view faith through the lens of the world, we will be "reasonable" people pleasers, held hostage to conventional wisdom. But in the words of the apostle Paul, "God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God"

(1 Cor. 1:28–29). If we are afraid of looking foolish, we will see little if anything of the power and provision of God. Abraham was being set up by God for a miracle.

Anchored

That leads us to the third word: *anchored*. Enduring faith is anchored in God’s omnipotence.

The word *omnipotence* comes from two Latin words that mean “all” (*omni*) and “powerful” (*potent*). God does not just have power; he is the source of all power.

In Romans 4:17, Paul describes the object of Abraham’s faith: he is the God “who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.”

A friend of mine owns a successful auto-repair shop. He has very loyal customers because he guarantees his work. If he fails to fix a car to a customer’s satisfaction, he makes it right at his expense. In the same way, God stands behind every promise he makes. But unlike my friend, God does not have to correct his work.

We must remember that when God gives us his promise, he is on the line, not we. You see, with God’s promises comes his presence. He leads us into impossible, dead situations so that we will experience his power and presence. Every fulfilled promise and deliverance is a declaration of God’s glory. So when we choose to turn to God in faith and refuse to allow fear and doubt to cause us to cave in, it’s as if God says, “Stand back and watch this.” The result is awe and wonder.

Abraham and Sarah’s dilemma was designed by God. God did not want them to have a hand in this miracle. He designed their crisis so that his power would be revealed and they could experience it. In fact, this story of God’s supernatural interven-

tion was both an anchor and a building block upon which the future of God's people in this world would be built. That's the reason why Paul includes this account as a powerful example of life-altering God confidence.

Abraham represents every follower of Christ. Once we have trusted Christ as our Savior and Lord, we no longer belong to ourselves. We are now his biography. God is writing his story in and through us as we journey through this life. At every turn, he is making a statement concerning his ability, sufficiency, and power to deliver us and lead us through anything we face.

So many of us have become discouraged because we are not in control and we are powerless to do anything about what we face. Because God doesn't seem to be "showing up" when we think he should, we give up. The husband and wife who struggle with infertility wonder whether God has forgotten about them. The Christian stuck in a bad marriage wonders, "Will I ever see the power of God change my husband?" You could add to the list. But difficult, dark days are not an indication that God can't deal with what we're facing and that he has abandoned us.

God has many ways of delivering us and demonstrating his power. I think of Daniel's friends (Daniel 3), who refused to bow to worship the image that the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, had made. When the king made the statement, "And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?" (v. 15), Daniel's friends responded, "Our God whom we serve is able" (v. 17). They refused to question God's ability. They knew he was able.

Sometimes God chooses to demonstrate his power by supernaturally changing our circumstances. And sometimes he chooses to leave us in hard, difficult places, but gives us his sustaining power.

Look again at Romans 4:17, where Paul says that God "calls

into existence the things that do not exist.” This puts Abraham and Sarah’s dead situation in context. They were dealing with the Creator of the universe. The message: the One who had called all things into existence had the power to resurrect their “dead” situation and give them a baby, no matter how old they were.

How about you? Have you given up? Have you ever said to yourself, “This one just might be too big for God”? Or perhaps you’re saying, “I’m growing weary, nothing has happened, and maybe it won’t.” But don’t forget that the process is part of God’s plan. As we wait for something to happen, we become something. We experience his transforming power.

Strengthened

The fourth word is *strengthened*. More often than not, God’s process is to make us strong through that which either threatens to destroy us or cannot be overcome in our own strength. Put another way, weakness and opposition are the pathway to strength and confidence.

Pay very close attention to what Paul says about the development of Abraham’s faith in Romans 4:19–21: “He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead . . . but . . . *grew strong* in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.”

A faith that is not tested is like a muscle that is not used. Both atrophy. Christianity is not simply a body of truth to be believed; it is a supernatural life that is meant to be lived. Our growth does not take place in the wonderful confines of our Bible studies, conferences, and fellowship groups. To be sure, we need these events and resources to encourage us. Our strength

is found, however, in the heavy lifting of application. This has to happen when we are tested not only by the gap between our current reality and where God is calling us to be, but also when the winds of adversity are fiercely blowing against us.

Did you notice what Abraham did as he stared down the opposition? While he was waiting, “he gave glory to God” (v. 20). In context, this means that he kept worshiping God and acknowledging his awesome greatness and power. This active worship and ever-expanding vision of God began to transform Abraham even as he waited for God to come through. His worship produced strength and resolve. It placed the focus where it needed to be: on God and not on the opposition. The more he gave glory to God, the stronger his faith became. As Abraham waited, he worshiped. And the more he worshiped, the more the greatness and power of God gripped his being. Again, God changed Abraham before he changed Abraham’s circumstances—so much so that he became “fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised” (v. 21).

LOOK TO GOD ALONE

Don’t waste your waiting. The time between where we are and the fulfillment of the promise is designed to transform us. I want to encourage you to turn your waiting room into an altar or a tent of meeting. Take your fear, anxiety, and uncertainty to God our Father, the Ancient of Days. Pour out your heart before him and worship and praise him for who he is. You will find your faith and strength growing in proportion to your praise. The presence and power of God will become a deeply personal reality even before the miracle happens. Perhaps I should say that that *is* the miracle. On our way to receiving something, we become more than we had anticipated and our faith stronger

than we thought possible. The test drives us to God, and in turn, he pours out his grace and strength on us.

When it comes to God, we never have to play it safe. He is not intimidated by anything we face. He can handle it, and then some. We get through and overcome not based on anything that we bring to the table. God, and God alone, is our strength and confidence.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR REFLECTION

1. What does it mean to say that “our faith is a reflection of our view of God”? Do you agree?
2. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 1:20, “For all the promises of God find their yes in [Christ].” What promises of God have been confirmed in your life?
3. Think of a time in your life when trusting God required defying your circumstances. If you are reading this book with others, share your experience with the group. If you are reading alone, write down the experience in a journal.
4. Abraham faced many obstacles as he walked toward the future God had for him. What part of Abraham’s story resonates most with you?

“THIS BOOK IS VINTAGE CRAWFORD: BOLD, TRUTHFUL, AND ENCOURAGING.”

Dennis Rainey, host, *FamilyLife Today*

Calling Christians to a faith that does not waver in a God who does not lie, popular radio host and pastor Crawford Loritts challenges us to live fully for Christ, confident in God and his unshakable promises. Highlighting God’s faithfulness in the past, plan for the future, and presence for the here and now, Loritts will help you cultivate a bold faith capable of enduring whatever the world throws your way.

“*Unshaken* provides an inspiring reminder of how potent our faith can be in every endeavor we pursue. The author has lived out its pages for decades and his words are trustworthy.”

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