

When You Are Struggling with Faith

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Scripture Hebrews 11:6-11 (NIV)

⁶ 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.

⁷ 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.

⁸ 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.

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

¹¹ 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.”

Our focus is on verse 6, “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.”

Introduction

One day John Wesley was walking with a troubled man who expressed his doubt as to the goodness of God. He said, “I do not know what I shall do with all this worry and trouble.”

At the same moment, Wesley saw a cow looking over a stone wall. “Do you know,” asked Wesley, “why that cow is looking over the wall?”

“No,” said the worried man.

Wesley said, “The cow is looking over the wall because she cannot see through it. That is what you must do with your wall of trouble—look over it and avoid it.”

Faith enables us to look over the wall of our circumstances and focus on Christ. And that faith comes from God, to each of us, as a gift.

Body

The biblical purpose of faith is to bring us into the presence of God.

But what if it feels as if I don't have enough faith? Will my lack of faith prevent me from coming into the presence of God? Well, if I was relying purely on my own, maybe ... but faith is a gift from God. Let's revisit Ephesian 2:8-9, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.” “Not from yourselves...” What is Paul referring to? What is “not from yourselves?”

Once, all of us were spiritually dead. Even though we were physically alive. Dead people have no inherent – i.e., of themselves – faith in Jesus. They can't; they are dead. The dead person's faith in Jesus has got to come from somewhere outside of him/herself since a dead person cannot create the life condition for a living belief and living faith.

A new heart is needed, a heart that turns away from the world and toward Christ. Through the Holy Spirit life is spoken into death and at that moment faith is given to call upon the name of Jesus with the faith just given by the Holy Spirit.

It is God who speaks life into death, and it is us who are made spiritually alive by the Holy Spirit, a forgiven people by His grace. Both grace and faith are therefore not of yourself.

It is also true, that despite being born again, many people, at different times in their life will struggle with faith. New and old believers, leaders, pastors and lecturers are not immune to this struggle. Hebrews 11:1 says, “...faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.” Faith is beyond our 5 senses.

Faith is a spiritual reality that we – as physical beings – have. Initially, I wanted to use the word “experience” ... that we experience. But this would also reduce our faith in God to

merely an experience, as opposed to the factual reality in which we stand, despite our feelings! And that is precisely where doubt can make its presence known: the moment we put our confidence in what we experience with our senses. Spiritual realities are not physical and must therefore not be limited to and by our five senses. So, our weakness then is when those things that we can experience with our 5 senses appear large and overwhelming and in so doing, cloud our spiritual reality. In other words, what we experience with our 5 senses has the potential to shroud that which is invisible – faith – through doubt.

If the biblical purpose of faith is to bring us into the presence of God, then you need to define that in which your faith is. Without defining matters, full security is absent. Let me give you an example, you hear (1 of the 5 senses) that government is banning attending church services. Now answer this, “is your relationship with God based on the reality of Him who reconciled Himself to us in love through grace and faith or the hope that government will allow you to go to church?”

Elijah, called fire down from heaven, killed over 400 false prophets and outran King Ahab’s chariot – all in 1 Kings chapter 18 – was not immune to the struggle with faith. In the very next chapter, chapter 19 verses 3-4 we read, “Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, while he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. ‘I have had enough, LORD,’ he said. ‘Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.’” Why? Because Jezebel sent him a message, “‘ May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them.’” Elijah was looking at a wall of circumstance and what understood by his 5 senses, caused a shadow of doubt to cloud his faith in God, and fear set in. We cannot step off of this point without reminding ourselves that God nourished Elijah and spoke with him. After the “reset” God, not Jezebel or fear, was the object of Elijah’s faith.

There was a man whose faith was a little “thin”; you read all about it in Mark 9:17-29. The child’s father cried out to Jesus, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” Up to the point where Jesus became the object of his faith, the disciples of Jesus (verse 18) were the object of his faith.

Let's look at the case of John the Baptist. He reached a low point as we read in Luke 7:20, "When the men came to Jesus, they said, 'John the Baptist sent us to you to ask, 'Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?'"

Jesus' answer? "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me."

No rebuke. Only a firm answer ... from Isaiah 61 to be exact.

Many people hold onto the impression of having faith in faith. By this, I mean that it is as if faith becomes the object, an object in front of God. In other words, no faith, no God, so to say. The biblical truth, however, is that God is always the object since He has reconciled Himself to us (2 Corinthians 5:18-19) and therefore, nothing stands in between God and us, not our lack of faith, not even our sin.

Therefore, we must, as this morning's Scripture says, earnestly seek Him. It's not that He has gone anywhere, it is our focus that is wondering!

Conclusion

It is true that during times of exhaustion and stress that we can allow our faith in Jesus to become clouded over as the storms of life rage. Did I just say "allow?" Yes. In every situation, we have a choice to make.

God is patient with us when we desire to believe. When we start to struggle with faith, move up and over the experiences of your 5 senses and immerse yourself in the truth. Always turn to His Word – the Bible – and allow God to speak truth into your doubt, truth into your struggles and truth into the happenings of life.

The greatest power to overcome our struggle with faith is always God Himself. At that moment when it feels (i.e., you experience) that God is distant, immerse yourself in the truth of Romans 8:16, "the Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children." God the Holy Spirit who has filled us testifies that we belong; we are children of God and God is not in the business of abandonment. In fact, God's record is impeccable, Numbers

23:19 reminds us, "God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?"

The truth of the matter says that you can cry out like the man of Mark chapter 9 cried out to Jesus, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" He will answer you.

I close with Psalm 86:15, "But you, Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness."

Amen.