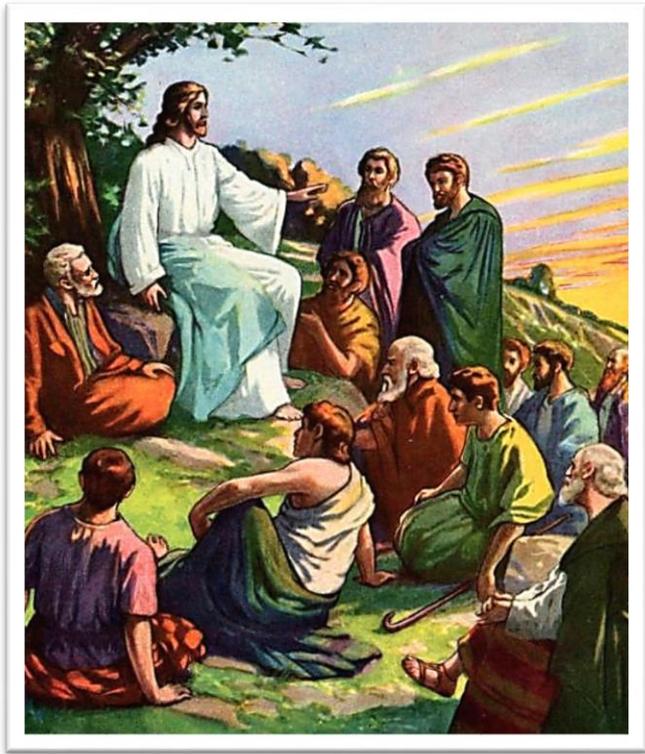


# How to Live by Faith



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This booklet is dedicated to the man who showed me  
most clearly what it is to live by faith — my father,  
Sam Hilborn (1932 – 2006)

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## HOW TO LIVE BY FAITH

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## **1. Where your faith came from**

My guess is since you have picked up this booklet to read you are already a person who has faith in Jesus. Now, you may be feeling discouraged and think you hardly have any faith at all, or on the other hand, you may have the quiet strong confidence of a vital, growing faith, but in any case, you are a person who has faith.

Where did your faith come from? The Scriptures teach very plainly your faith came from God. God Himself gave you the faith you now have. We read this in the Bible:

**For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast.** Ephesians 2:8

Your experience of finding faith in Jesus may have been quite sudden. I happened to be in my fraternity house at college, listening to a recording of evangelist Josh McDowell explain how the tomb of Jesus had been sealed with a Roman guard posted to keep watch, when in a moment of dawning realization, tears running down my face, I understood the resurrection of Jesus really happened. Or you may be the blessed sort of person who grew up simply accepting what you had been taught in Sunday School and in church about Jesus and the Bible. God seems to enjoy bringing His children to Himself in a variety of heart-changing ways. Nevertheless, whether sudden or gradual, the faith you now have in Jesus originated as God's personal gift to you.

## **2. The part you played in having faith**

Just as it would be an error to believe your faith was something you worked up on your own, it would also be a mistake to believe you didn't have anything to do with it. God gave you the desire and insight to believe, and you joined in with a hearty and willing acceptance. At some point you reasoned along the lines, "I know I need Jesus. I believe he is God and he will forgive me and accept me." Based on conviction, you yielded your life to him.

Now this yielding of yourself to the control of Jesus was probably a mixture of relief as well as struggle. Very likely you experienced great relief to be released of the burden of running your own life. You also would have had some amount of struggle with the thought of giving up certain pet pleasures and projects. But short or long, easy or hard, you made the choice to yield. Allowing Jesus Christ to be your personal Lord and Savior meant you entered the Kingdom of God. You were granted the high privilege and calling to live as his apprentice.

Faith is a gift placed in your heart. Faith is also a commitment you made to live the rest of your life trusting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The good news for us who believe is we get to live the rest of our lives trusting Jesus Christ with everything and obeying Him in anything.

### **3. What exactly is faith?**

As friend and mentor Dr. Dallas Willard has written, **“Faith is acting as if something is so.”**

It is so important for you the reader to understand faith is an action -- even if the “action” is to deliberately rest, trusting in the sufficiency of God.

Faith will always involve action on our part. Sometimes the action will be to place ourselves in situations involving risk to ourselves, to the point if God is not with us, we may suffer severely. At other times the “action” will consist in deliberately choosing to NOT act, waiting instead for the unseen God to act on our behalf.

But at its heart, faith is acting as if something you cannot see is so. Faith is not opposed to effort, it is opposed to sight. William Tyndale (the first person to print the Bible in English who was later burned at the stake in 1536 for his efforts!) translated Hebrews 11:1 in this wonderfully descriptive way:

**“Faith is a sure confidence of things which are hoped for, and a certainty of things which are not seen.”**

Illustrations of faith (acting as if certain unseen things are so) abound. You flick on the light switch on your wall, counting on the flow of electricity (which you cannot see) to turn on the lights in the room. You turn the key clockwise in the ignition switch and trust the car engine will roar to life. You type your PIN number on the keypad of the ATM machine, and expect to be able to withdraw your cash.

In fact, you and I assume so much by faith in these things we cannot see, we are always surprised when something doesn't work right. In the past I have owned certain cars though in which I had no faith at all they would start — or at least without prayer!

Faith in Jesus Christ works in the same way. We choose to live our life **ACTING AS IF IT IS SO** that Jesus is in charge of our universe, he is our Savior, we live in an unbreakable covenant of protection and provision with him, and Jesus is our constant sufficiency, living presence, and friend.

#### **4. Increasing your faith**

Every single day we find ourselves using "faith" to negotiate all the little details of daily life, whether driving a car or using a pencil sharpener. Key to this is our ability to understand what we are attempting to do. And the more readily we understand, the more easily we exercise faith.

The reason I did not have much faith in those few cars I mentioned previously is because I understood they were **NOT** reliable. Conversely, my present car has been extremely reliable and I exercise a lot of faith in its performance.

When we don't understand something, we are usually stuck. We don't know what to do. Recently I had to walk through a revolving door in order to enter a store. This door was of a type I had never seen before. I could not exercise "faith" it would open for me, because I didn't understand how it worked. In fact, I had to stand outside the store for a few seconds in order to first watch someone else come through the door!

Take a look at the people at any airport electronic check-in kiosk. Isn't it quite easy to pick out those persons who have faith in the machine — and those who don't? Some will walk briskly up to the kiosk, and with ease and confidence begin to use the touch screen. Those with little faith are obvious by their timidity. Their faith in the machine (or at least their ability to use it) is small, because they don't understand it. After a few tries though, with no disasters, their faith is greatly increased because they now understand what the software does and how to use it.

Our interactions with God work similarly. The more we understand God and his ways, the more faith we will have and the more ease and confidence we will have in approaching God and walking with him. The primary way to understand God is to believe his Word. In order to believe, we need to understand what God says about himself in the Scriptures. As the Bible says:

**Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.**

Romans 10:17

The "word of Christ" through which the message is heard, which in turn creates faith, is the word ABOUT Christ as well as the word FROM Christ. In other words, it is the teaching of the Bible itself. Our understanding of God and his ways will increase to the extent we immerse our minds in his written Word.

For instance, though at the present time you may be in the midst of real suffering, if you come to the clear understanding God has promised He will deliver you, either out of the suffering or through it (Psalm 91:14-16; 2 Corinthians 12:9) your peace and hope and faith will greatly increase.

Or, you may be in a situation in which you are completely at a loss to know what course of action you need to take. When you understand God has promised to give wisdom to those who will trust Him (Proverbs 3:5-6; James 1:5) you can much more readily believe all will be well.

In addition, since God has promised to provide all you need in this life (Hebrews 13:5; 2 Corinthians 9:6-11) and has likewise promised to make all things work together for your good (Romans 8:28) and this promise extends to you beyond the grave (Romans 8:18) nothing more need make you afraid.

We want to surround ourselves with frequent and regular access to the teaching of the Bible. If this means cutting out some of the time we normally reserve for TV, novels, magazines, the internet, well, so be it. We want to memorize key passages of Scripture, meditatively read the Bible for ourselves on a daily basis and listen to the Word as it is being preached and taught by capable people. Again, the more understanding of God we gain from Scripture, the more readily we will believe Him and believe in Him!

There is a sublime delight to be found in hearing God speak to you through His Word. Many, many have been the times my own soul, aching with distress, has found relief, comfort and joy through reading the Scriptures, particularly the Psalms, in an interactive fashion with God's gentle Spirit. Read what David wrote in Psalm 19:7-8 as to the blessings of the law (Scriptures):

**The law of the LORD is perfect,  
reviving the soul.  
The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy,  
making wise the simple.**

**The precepts of the LORD are right,  
giving joy to the heart.  
The commands of the LORD are radiant,  
giving light to the eyes.**

If you do not have a regular pattern of daily Bible reading, I suggest the following "three bookmark" strategy. Many years ago a dear pastor in New England taught me this method and it has worked very well for me for many, many years. Place one bookmark at Psalms chapter 1, one at

Genesis chapter 1, and one at Matthew chapter 1. On the day you begin, read each of those three chapters, and then move the bookmarks. The next day you read Psalms chapter 2, Genesis chapter 2, and Matthew chapter 2, and so on.

You can make a wonderful life-long habit of reading a continuous, simultaneous cycle through Psalms and Proverbs, through the Old Testament (Genesis – Malachi), and through the New Testament (Matthew – Revelation). If on any given day, you do not have time to read all three of the bookmarked sections, so what? The bookmarks will still be there for you next time you are able to read.

## **5. Faith sufficient for specific events**

There are two ways I would like to illustrate in which living by faith works out for the believer. The first is most basic and is what I will call “event” faith. In other words, we experience specific circumstances in our day that trigger the opportunity to move through those events ACTING AS IF IT WERE SO that Jesus Christ is sufficient for those events.

People typically come to Christ because of either overwhelming circumstances in which they feel lost, or because of anxious guilt over sin, or both. Once a person finds faith in Jesus, he will continue to seek him for help with life’s circumstances and for relief from the guilt and power of sin.

For example, a believing young man, living as a single adult, may be having a difficult time with chastity. On a recent date, he did not exercise the prior wisdom and self-control he knew he should have. And now he feels terrible about it. Before he was a Christian, he might even have felt proud about what had happened, but now he knows his Lord expects better from him.

What should he do? He could just try to push the event out of his mind. Or he could inwardly punish himself by allowing his thoughts to dwell in the torment of guilt and

shame. Or, he could bring the event of sin to his living Lord Jesus for forgiveness and cleansing. This latter choice will not only repair his breach with God caused by sin, but will restore in him a clean conscience again.

Though he cannot see Jesus with his eyes, he believes he is present. Though he cannot hear Jesus with his ears, he believes he can still talk with him. Though he cannot make up for his sin, he believes Jesus Christ's death on the cross is the sufficient atonement for this sin and all other sins he has committed or may commit in his future.

So he humbly and sincerely admits his wrong doing to the Lord in prayer, and asks to be forgiven, resolving to follow after Jesus once more. And though he cannot "prove" he is in fact forgiven, he takes God at his word when he says so. This is why I always counsel people to thank God for his forgiveness after asking for it!

**If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.** 1 John 1:9

When I was a young seminary intern serving a congregation, a woman in the church told me though she trusted Jesus, she still did not feel forgiven for her sins. I had a moment of insight (which I attribute to the Lord) and asked her, "Let's suppose you really did know you were forgiven. What would you be doing differently?" She thought for a moment and then said, "I guess I would stop worrying about it, thank God for forgiving me, and start being happy again." I suggested she go and start doing those very things.

Two weeks later I saw her again. She was radiant. She had taken my advice and decided to act as if she were forgiven. Almost immediately as she started to act as if it were so, the fear and anxiety and guilt left her, and she once more experienced the joy of her salvation.

For another example of "event" faith, let's suppose you are scheduled for a doctor's appointment. You know from your

past experience you will experience IMPATIENCE at waiting for the doctor and FEAR at what the doctor may say. This is an event then, in which you can choose to act as if Jesus Christ will be your sufficiency — the action you take is choosing to REST in the confidence your indwelling Lord will be for you in this event both the patience and the courage you will need.

One last example. Let's say you have had a quarrel recently with a friend at work. It was a minor argument really, not the sort of bitter exchange that led to real hostility, but on the other hand, you already sense within yourself the desire to distance yourself from the person. But you also know the relationship you have with your friend is too important to let distancing continue. You also know from your own past history, your tendency is to not deal with the conflict and instead to try to act as if nothing had happened (when inwardly, you continue to be fully aware of the break in the relationship).

In this case, the action you choose to take is not one of resting in the Lord to take care of it himself, but rather one in which you yourself TAKE DIRECT ACTION, WITH GOD'S HELP. You choose to go humbly to your friend and share your hurt feelings, apologize for your part in the argument, and explain that your relationship means a lot to you. All along as you do this, you are trusting Jesus Christ to be your sufficiency. In other words, you go to the person assuming the Lord will work through you in the situation, giving you sincerity of heart, keeping you from defensiveness, and enabling you to speak clearly and tenderly. Beyond all this you also count on the Lord Jesus, the Prince of Peace, to bring peace once more between you and your friend. Many times I will go walk a possibly conflicted situation and privately pray, "Lord Jesus, you are my peace here. You are the wisdom I need. You are my self-control."

Faith to handle specific circumstances and events is one of the primary ways God trains our character. As you probably can guess, "event faith" can and must develop beyond specific moments of recognized need to a settled way of living life. Much of life does not announce itself to us ahead

of time! Very often, the moment of trial is upon us without warning. We want to become the kind of people for whom living out of the divine resources in Jesus has simply become the natural and constant turn of our heart.

## **6. Faith as a steady course of life**

Faith as a steady, constant way of life is the goal and prize for the mature believer. To live by faith becomes synonymous with living by Jesus Himself. The Apostle Paul describes this way of living faith autobiographically:

**I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.** Galatians 2:20

When faith in Jesus has become an integral part of who we are, we regularly find ourselves thinking about Jesus, listening for his voice, giving thanks to him, seeking his guidance and wisdom and strength—almost without deliberate effort on our part.

We wake up in the morning and find settled in our thoughts the peaceful reminder that Jesus Christ is in charge of the coming day and he will be more than sufficient for all we will face. This confidence strengthens us to begin the day with courage and even enthusiasm. Throughout the day, we live moment by moment, “looking unto Jesus,” taking each new circumstance with serenity and skill. At night, we lay ourselves down to sleep, knowing he is standing guard. In confidence we experience rest and healing for our body, mind, and soul.

This type of “living faith” grows and enlarges over time. It is a divine in-working that gradually transforms us from the inside - out. It follows the Kingdom principle quoted by Jesus, **“to him who has, more will be given”** (Mark 4:25). In other words, those who live out the faith they do have, no matter how small they feel their faith might be, will over time find faith increased.

There is a continual flow and re-looping to this enlargement of faith. The more experience we gain of living by faith, the more familiar it becomes. New conflicts, distresses, and trials come our way but armed now with our past experiences, we walk right through those difficulties (hesitatingly at times, falling down at times, but always getting up again) with our eyes on Jesus. On the other side of those “tests” of our faith, we find the harvest of righteousness promised by God’s discipline and training (Hebrews 12:11).

We have gained a new level of experience, with an accompanying new level of joy and faith in our Lord, which in turn prepares us for still higher levels of life with God. This gradual transformation of our character by our Lord will, if we permit it, continue on and on and on. As the Scripture says:

**For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.** 2 Corinthians 4:17

## **7. The role of desire**

It needs to be said not all wish to live this kind of life. That may surprise you. Certainly, all believers say they would like this kind of life. But, when pressed, living by faith seems almost like a fairy tale to them. It sounds nice, but just isn’t “practical.”

Unfortunately for these folks, they are on their way to becoming the **“seed sown among the thorns”** spoken of by Jesus in his Parable of the Sower. The life they have in God is being choked out by **“the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth, and the desires for other things”** (Mark 4:19).

What is to be done? A basic principle of human nature is we all make choices depending on the strongest desire at the moment. For example, if we are on a diet, we will stay on the diet as long as the desire to lose weight remains stronger than the desire to eat. But the moment the desire

to eat becomes even the least bit stronger than the desire to lose weight, guess what we do? We eat!

In a similar fashion, to live by faith in Jesus Christ consistently means he must become the overarching, central desire of our life. Otherwise "living by faith" becomes only a nice phrase in our minds. The danger is we can deceive ourselves into believing we are living by faith, when in fact we are only holding onto the phrase as a nice idea. Without meaning to, we can become well-intentioned hypocrites.

## **8. How the desire for Jesus can grow**

Some people simply love Jesus Christ more than other people do. Why is that? Like the sinful woman spoken of in the Gospels, overwhelmed Jesus had accepted her, fell at his feet and washed them with her tears and hair (Luke 7:36-50) some people love Jesus more because they have been forgiven more.

Others, like Mary Magdalene, having been delivered out of great evil, know there is no other sane life available to them (Mark 16:9). Still others, preeminently Mary the mother of Jesus, seem to have always loved God. Mary loved God before her angelic visitation at Nazareth, and only grew in her love and devotion as she accepted and lived out her place of highest privilege.

Let us be clear here. We love God because he first loved us (1 John 4:19). Like everything else in his Kingdom, God initiates and we respond. But though God initiates, we have a significant role to play. If we do respond to the love of God in kind, with our own love back towards him, there will be no central, overarching desire to live by faith. There may be isolated times of crisis-induced faith, but no lasting motive.

Years ago a man told me he would not become a Christian because he "couldn't go around thinking about God all the time." Silently I agreed with him. He could not go around thinking about God all the time, because he would not. And he would not, because he didn't want to.

## **9. What we do when our love is weak**

I trust it is clear to the reader if we love Jesus a great deal, the desire for him will be absolutely central in our life. If the desire for Christ is central, then that desire will steadily fuel our inner capacity to consistently live all of life in faith.

What do we do when an honest appraisal of our own heart indicates a rather thin and meager love for Jesus Christ?

This condition of “little” love for Jesus almost always comes about because we have been living life unto ourselves busied with our pet pleasures and projects, rather than the pursuit of what might please God. Small sins are quite serious. If lived in and piled up without repentance, small sins can have a greater hardening effect than even more serious sins that are quickly turned from.

The Biblical answer to insipid love for God is to repent. But how might this repentance come about?

### **“Love is born in the vision of the lovely.”**

I first heard this wonderful phrase from Dr. Dallas Willard. It is a profound truth. I began to love my daughter Katie and my son Nathan the moment they were born — when I SAW them. I began to love my dog SandyBear when I first SAW her as a puppy, tugging the cuff of my pants with her teeth. My love for the outdoors came about from SEEING its beauty in forests, meadows, lakes, streams, and canyons.

While it is true that love for God has differences from love for the outdoors, and love for family and pets, the different types of love do have common beginnings. Those beginnings are found in a “vision of the lovely.” We who love God came to love him out of a dawning vision of the loveliness and kindness and goodness of God. This vision was not something we saw with our physical eyes, but rather came to believe in our spirits and realize with our understanding.

A divine flow of truth emerged in our mind which we accepted in our heart. God became for us no longer an IDEA of a supreme being, but a present REALITY. In particular, it was the experience of the tender kindness of God that brought us to repent of our sins and to trust his son Jesus (Romans 2:4).

May I suggest when your love feels weak, you can seek out ways to “see” again the loveliness of God? Love is not only born in the vision of the lovely, it is renewed in that sight. Perhaps a season of struggle and weakness and discouragement has been permitted you just for this very reason – that you might find a new, more lasting appreciation of the goodness and blessedness in God.

Don’t assume what others have found to “work” for them will necessarily work for you. Ask the Lord Jesus Himself. Tell him you know your love is not strong and that you want it to be stronger. Ask Him what you should do about it. Wait on his answer. His answer will come, if you continue to sincerely seek it.

You may want to combine praying with a brief time of fasting – one meal, or possibly two consecutive meals. Many have found a renewed vision of God after a time of fasting. Others through praise and worship, or solitude in the beauty of nature, or meditatively reading in the Psalms or the Gospels, or giving oneself in humble service for others where there is no thought of personal reward or even thanks.

But here I want to caution the reader. Our love for God is never something meritorious. Our loving of God does not in turn bring his love down upon us. The Apostle John writes this quite clearly to remind his readers that God’s love evokes our love, and not the other way around:

**This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins... We loved because he first loved us.**

1 John 4:10, 19

What we seek is a RENEWAL of our love for God so our lives can fit as they should into his kingdom. It is his divine purpose that we grow to the point where we freely and naturally and consistently choose to do what pleases him, living by great confidence in him, fueled by love for him, sustained in turn by a growing knowledge of his tender and loyal love for us.

This progression is exactly what we find in the prayers of the Apostle Paul for believers in the churches he established – that they might have grace to GROW in the knowledge of the love of Jesus Christ.

**I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.** Ephesians 3:17-19

## **10. Persevering in faith**

Our life of faith in Jesus, when grown to maturity, will enable us to pass through the seasons of darkness that come upon us all. Periods of sickness, injury, mistreatment by others, loss of things and people we love most, and the solemn approach of death are events we all pass through. Everyone suffers.

Faith does not exempt us from pain and suffering. God has good reasons for our participation in suffering. Understanding this will not take away the pain. But understanding will greatly increase our ability to KEEP GOING. The trials of life shape us into the likeness of Jesus – if we let them. Everyone suffers but not everyone makes use of their suffering. The old saying is true, that pain can make us bitter or better. Years ago when I realized I will suffer anyway, I decided to ACCEPT whatever suffering comes my way so it would have a point to it. Accepting suffering does not mean we don't pray for and seek relief. Instead it means we choose to use the suffering to draw close to God. My pain makes me aware of my essence – I

am a living being, vulnerable and dependent, upheld in this present moment by God. A child of God trusting his heavenly Father. The pain of others moves me to compassion and ministry. A child of God joining with his heavenly Father redemptively touching this world.

Look closely at the following passages:

**Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.** 1 Peter 4:12-13

**If you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.** 1 Peter 4:16

**Now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.** 1 Peter 1:7

**Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.**  
James 1:2-4

**But we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.** Romans 5:3-5

**Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that**

**we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows.**

2 Corinthians 1:3-5

The believer's goal in the midst of trials and temptations is to remain **STANDING** in faith as the season of suffering passes over us (Ephesians 6:13). It is the will of God that every one of us, at the end of our lives, be able to rejoice as did the Apostle Paul:

**I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.**

2 Timothy 4:7

Jesus Christ is fully aware of our suffering and has taken it to heart. Our Lord is not requiring anything heroic from us. He calls us simply to **STAND**. To stand in faith, looking to Him, trusting, and ready to obey – this is our call in the midst of suffering.

God **WILL** deliver us in His time.

**"A righteous man may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all"** (Psalm 34).

God will not let us be tested beyond what we can bear. Our Lord Jesus will not let anyone or anything take us away from Him. Nothing will separate us from Him. God will work in all our suffering for our eventual good. God will reward us if we do not give up! (see Psalm 91:14-15; 1 Corinthians 10:13; John 10:27-30; Romans 8:35-39; Romans 8:28; Hebrews 12:1-3; 2 Timothy 4:7-8; Revelation 2:7, 17, 26, 3:21.)

One final word about persevering in faith. Our Lord Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount tells us that the time to prepare to stand in the midst of suffering is **NOW**. We prepare now to be able to stand in the eventual times of darkness by **PUTTING INTO PRACTICE** his teachings and overall lifestyle. We build our lives on the rock of Christ as we trust in order to obey, and obey in order to trust.

**Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash. Matthew 7:24-27**

### **11.The role of feelings in our life of faith**

For many believers, the role of our feelings as we live by faith can be very confusing. I admit for many years, I too have agonized over this. Here is the dilemma: there are indeed special feelings we experience associated with faith, such as peacefulness, serenity, confidence, and joy. What are we to think then when those feelings are not present? Or even more upsetting, when our feelings are the exact opposite – such as worry, agitation, anger, bitterness, hatred, or even despair?

You do not need to be a psychologist to understand that like the weather, our feelings always changing. Some of us seem predisposed to wide fluctuations in our emotional life, while others seem to change within a narrower spectrum. But regardless of our personalities, all of us experience emotions in flux. We cannot change our feelings on the spot. However, we can apply ourselves to directing our thoughts and lean into our faith.

Even while you are reading this, you could begin to place before your mind certain things that would almost immediately stir up feelings of anger, fear, worry, lust, or guilt. On the contrary, you could also choose to re-direct your thoughts to things that if dwelt on for even a little while, would bring forth feelings of peacefulness, contentment, and happiness.

The more we direct our thoughts to dwell on the things of God and of Jesus himself, the more our emotions will follow along, bringing new feelings of confidence, hope, and joy. Our feelings follow our thoughts. Emotions won't change instantly, but if one continues to set God before the mind (Psalm 16:8), feelings associated with faith WILL return. This is one of the reasons the Apostle Paul insisted upon the renewal of the thought life:

**Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.** Colossians 3:1-2

**Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things.** Philippians 4:8

One of the reasons the Lord allows us to experience times of miserable feelings is so we can learn to trust and obey him by faith alone, not because we are experiencing nice feelings. We live by faith, not feelings.

The fact that from time to time, you may not "feel" very much like a Christian, does not alter the fact that you are a Christian! Remember, you are a Christian because God entered your life and you placed your trust in Jesus – not because you have had special feeling experiences. In fact, our Lord receives great honor in the heavens when it is seen that we, not based on any pleasurable or comfortable emotions, nevertheless continue to praise God and to look to Jesus for guidance, seeking to trust and obey Him. C.S. Lewis has a wonderful statement in his book, THE SCREWTAPE LETTERS. Two devils are discussing how best to ruin the faith of a certain young man who has recently come to faith in Jesus. The more experienced devil says to his apprentice:

*"Our cause is never more in danger than when a human, no longer desiring, but still intending to do God's will, looks*

*round upon a universe from which every trace of Him seems to have vanished, and asks why he has been forsaken, but still obeys."*

Our feelings do factor into our life of faith, but only a little. We give thanks when we experience joy and peace and other feelings of well-being, but should not fret when we don't. The life of trust and obedience is a matter of the heart, of increasingly settled character, not of our emotions. Emotions energize us, but must not determine our choices.

## **12.What is gained by the life of faith**

The Bible teaches that nothing honors and pleases God more than when he sees his children obeying him in trust and trusting him in obedience. To believe him and to believe IN him is the most meaningful form of love we offer to God.

When our Lord Jesus taught his disciples to pray the Lord's Prayer, "**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by thy name**" He was directing them to see that the "hallowing" of God's name (to treat everything of the Lord with the deepest awe and respect) as their first and most important duty. How can a believer best hallow God's name? BY TAKING HIM AT HIS WORD.

On another occasion, when asked what "works" God required of people, Jesus said:

**The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.** John 6:29

The Apostle John, the last of the original Apostles, writing at the end of his long life, said this about what was most important:

**And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.** 1 John 3:23

The Apostle Paul likewise summed up what he considered the essence of our life in Christ:

**The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.** Galatians 5:6

I want to conclude with the following wonderful convictions of the Rev. John Wesley, extraordinary founder of the Methodist Church and leader in England and America's first Great Awakening in the mid-1700's. May his words be true of all of us who live by FAITH in the Lord Jesus Christ!

Wesley was once approached by a man in the grip of unbelief who came to Wesley for help.

*"All is dark; my thoughts are lost,"* the man said to Wesley, *"but I hear that you preach to a great number of people every night and morning. Pray, what would you do with them? Whither would you lead them? What religion do you preach? What is it good for?"* Wesley gave this answer to his questions:

*"You ask, what would I do with them? I would make them virtuous and happy, easy in themselves and useful to others. Whither would I lead them? To heaven; to God the Judge, the lover of all, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant. What religion do I preach? The religion of love; the law of kindness brought to light by the Gospel. What is this good for? To make all who receive it enjoy God and themselves: to make them like God; lovers of all; contented in their lives; and crying out at their death, in calm assurance, 'O grave, where is thy victory! Thanks be unto God, who giveth me the victory, through my Lord Jesus Christ!"*

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