

Help My Unbelief!

Joe Slater

Why aren't we stronger against temptation? Why don't we accomplish more in the Lord's work? Why aren't our prayers more effective? These and other similar questions have the same answer: "Because our faith is weak!"

Who among us cannot identify with the distraught father who pleaded with Jesus, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24)? He had brought his demon-tormented son to the disciples, but they utterly failed to help (v. 18). Now, in despair, he begged Jesus, "But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us" (v. 22). Clearly he wanted to believe Jesus could cast out the demon. But his "if," coupled with Jesus' reply, shows the man wasn't confident. To his credit, however, he used what faith he had to seek the Lord's favor.

God's power knows no limit. The question is not "can He" do the job, but "can we" and "will we" trust Him? Another legitimate question is "Will He?" Mark 1:40 tells of a leper who approached Jesus saying, "If You are willing, You can make me clean." This man didn't say, "If You can." He said "If You are willing, You can . . ." The leper was right. While sometimes God's word tells us exactly what His will is, there are other times that we simply don't know God's will in a given situation. Therefore we, like Jesus, should pray, "Not my will, but Yours be done" (Luke 22:42).

How can we grow in our faith? When Jesus' disciples asked why they had failed, the Lord responded: "This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting" (Mark 9:29). Since He had already rebuked them for their lack of faith (v. 19), we conclude that one of the purposes of prayer and fasting is to increase faith.

Remember also that "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). In addition, keep in mind that works make faith complete (James 2:22). Thus, if we would have strong faith, we must be obeying God's word (not just reading and praying, important as those are).

Like the distressed father, let us use what faith we have to seek from the Lord a stronger faith. God will strengthen our faith as we study His word, pray, fast, and exercise ourselves by obeying His word.

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To Look Is One Thing . . .

A management axiom illustrates a spiritual truth that is important to keep in mind as we read God's word:

To look is one thing.

To see what you are looking at is another.

To understand what you see is a third.

To learn from what you understand is something else.

But to act on what you learn is all that really matters.

It is action based on faith that ultimately counts.

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves (James 1:22).

--via House-to-House/Heart-to-Heart

Forever

"For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy:" (Isaiah 57:15a).

To a small child, an hour is forever. For one who is sick and in pain, the days until he is well can seem to be forever. Our perception of "forever" and "eternity" are extremely limited.

Nothing on this earth lasts forever. If we are sick, it will not be for forever, even if we die. If we are in good health, that, too, is transient. If everything is going well in our lives, it will not last. Sooner or later, life is going to take an upswing or a downswing. No one is immune. That thought gives us a feeling of unease and helplessness, for we like to be in control.

Isaiah said that God lives in eternity. The very thought takes our breath away. We cannot imagine what this means. No one can explain it. However, the significance is that God is in complete control. Isaiah finishes the verse above with "I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite."

We need not fear the future, for God holds us in His hands. He is in control of our time on earth and in heaven. He has told us that "we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens" (II Corinthians 5:1). God has promised that some day we will be with Him. We will suffer no pain or death. Only then will we understand "forever."

-- Donna Richmond Wittlif (Denver, CO)