

THE STRUGGLE IS REAL

Many people struggle with their faith at different times in their lives. Some of the most committed and godly leaders have struggled with doubts, just like everyone else. The very essence of faith is to believe in that which we cannot see (Hebrews 11:1). As physical beings, we tend to put faith in what we experience with our senses. Spiritual realities are not tangible and must be experienced outside our senses. So, when that which is tangible and visible seems overwhelming, doubts can shroud that which is invisible.

I think there are many reasons that people struggle in our era. But, for the most part, it boils down to three:

First, they are not really saved. I know this sounds hard, but the truth is, Scripture speaks a great deal about religious deception. In fact, Scripture attests to the fact that some people believe for all the wrong reasons (John 2:23-25; Matthew 7:13-29).

Second, they have not matured properly (I Peter 2:1-2; II Peter 3:18; James 2:14-20).

Third, a lack of knowledge – you will always struggle with your faith if you are not actively involved in properly reading your Bible. Remember, it is not about reading your Bible through in a year. But, it is about reading your Bible in a good and systematic order.

Understanding the fundamentals is crucial. Therefore, let us consider the word, or you may better understand if I say the object of faith. The word faith has become popular in recent years, but the popular meaning is not necessarily the same as the biblical meaning. The term has become synonymous with any religious or irreligious adherence, regardless of whether there is foundational truth upon which to base such adherence.

One writer said it like this: "... someone could claim "faith" in dandelions for spiritual healing, and that claim would be considered equally viable to the Christians' claim that the Bible is God's inspired Word. So, when struggling with "faith," it is vital to define the object and reasonableness of that faith. All faith claims are not equal. Before we can be secure in our faith, we must answer the question: my faith is in what?"

Many hold to the idea of having faith in faith. Faith itself is seen as the object, rather than God Himself. The biblical purpose for faith is to bring us into the presence of God. Hebrews 11:6 says, "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."

And we can only find God when we come to Him through faith in His Son Jesus Christ (John 14:6).

Jeremiah 29:13 says, "And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart."

However, God understands our inability to exercise the faith we need at times. In Mark 9:24, a man admitted to Jesus that he wanted help with His unbelief. Jesus did not rebuke the man, but healed the man's child anyway. He honored the man's desire to grow in faith and was pleased that He, Jesus, was the object of that faith. So, if we have the desire to believe what the Bible teaches, then we have the right foundation for continuing to fight for faith. God has given us countless evidences of His existence and character (Psalm 19:1; Luke 19:38–40). Jesus fulfilled all prophecies necessary to validate His claim to be the Son of God (Matthew 2:15–17; 27:35; John 12:38). The Bible has been proven true over and over again for thousands of years. We have all the evidence we need, but God leaves the believing up to us.

It can be encouraging to remember that, when we struggle with faith, we are in good company. Elijah the prophet experienced such a struggle. One of the greatest prophets of all time had just called down fire from heaven, killed over 400 false prophets, and outrun King Ahab's chariot—a feat that would have been the envy of any Olympic gold-medalist (I Kings 18:36–38, 46). Yet the next chapter finds Elijah hiding in a cave, depressed and asking for death (I Kings 19:3–5). After all those miracles, he gave in to fear and doubt because a wicked woman hated him (I Kings 19:2). During times of stress and exhaustion, we can easily forget all that God has done for us.

John the Baptist was another who struggled with faith when at the lowest point in his life. Jesus had called John the greatest prophet (Matthew 11:11). John had been selected by God before birth to be the forerunner of the Messiah (Luke 1:11–17, 76). He was faithful to that calling all of his life (Mark 1:4–8). Yet even John, after being imprisoned and sentenced to die, struggled with doubts about Jesus' identity (Luke 7:20). He sent messengers to ask Jesus if He was truly the One sent from God. Jesus did not rebuke John in his weakness but instead sent him a message that only a student of the Scriptures as John was would recognize (Luke 7:22). He quoted from Isaiah 61 and reminded John that He alone had fulfilled that Messianic prophecy.

But the greatest power to overcome doubt comes from the Holy Spirit Himself, who bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God (Romans 8:16). We can cry out as the man cried to Jesus, "... Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief" (Mark 9:24). And, we can expect Him to answer.

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