When Faith Departs...

**Scripture Verses:**

**Hebrews 11:1 – Luke 18 – Colossians 1:6 – Romans 1; 17 – Matthew 5:3, 17:20 – Mark 11:22-26 –**

The dictionary defines faith as: “...belief or trust; belief in, devotion to, or trust in somebody or something, especially without logical proof.”

However, the ***Bible*** defines faith as *“...being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see*” (**Hebrews 11:1**).

Faith is knowing God is guiding you on the path to Him, faith is knowing and trusting Jesus as our Lord and Savior who died on the cross for our sins so we might be in relationship to God once again and join Him in the Kingdom of Heaven.

But what happens when we lose that hope? When we lose our faith, our trust in God?

We all know someone who has lost their faith in God, and in themselves. In fact I know of someone right now who has lost faith in everything and everyone and even now says they doubt whether there is even a God at all. So much of this person’s life has been riddled with bad things: either someone hurt them, or neglected them – and even just the circumstances of day to day life. This person’s faith is so low that even knowing they are loved means nothing to them anymore – it’s as if they don’t care if they died tomorrow - regardless of the effect it would have on their loved ones.

Sometimes, it may seem like we’re doing all the things Christians are supposed to do and yet not experiencing any real changes in our lives. We can then even feel that the only option is to renounce our faith.

A person may say: “I want to follow God but I get so tired of trying all the time – everyone else seems to be getting this. Why isn’t it working for me? Why does it seem like God isn’t even listening to me? Doesn’t He care? Maybe He isn’t even real?"

In the Christian life – we are told in Scripture to expect adversity, persecution and even sorrow. Unfortunately, our selfish, sinful natures tell us the exact opposite - that if we aren’t getting what we want – something is wrong.

Too often, people falter and fall when they encounter hard times, struggles and obstacles in their Christian walk. At these times, many times people around that person will try to soothe the struggling one with “tried and true” sayings, or give them a “Four Strategies to Improve Your Prayer Life” list of things to do.

This isn’t very helpful –in fact, this is a picture of two equally dangerous paths the Christian may take in regards to faith: spiritual pride and the path of disillusionment and despair.

Spiritual pride means those who are working hard to implement works in their lives and they feel really good about themselves – until they meet hard times. They feel close to God because of how well they are doing--sort of like the Pharisee in **Luke 18** who rejoiced in his own moral goodness and despised the sinner praying next to him. But, if a person isn’t careful, they end up simply being moral people who are striving to do the right thing and yet remain blind to their own real need for God’s sovereignty in their lives.

Those who follow the path of disillusionment and despair hear about the things they are supposed to be doing--good, spiritual, Christian things-- but they know deep down that they can't do it. They've tried to change. They've made promises and commitments and resolutions, but each time, the end result is the same: no change except for added guilt and shame. Some resolve to try harder, at first, but eventually they give up all together.

Why does neither of these paths work?

It’s very simple – they are both examples of the same thing – putting ourselves before God and then demanding that God goes along with what we want, instead of what He wants from us.

So, what’s the answer?

The gospel. The gospel not just for the lost but also to the found. Often, we see the gospel as only the entry point into Christianity. We may preach the gospel to lost people, but we then fail to realize that the saved need the gospel just as desperately as the lost!!! The gospel is not simply the starting line for Christianity; it is the race itself!!

Paul said in **Colossians 1:6** – “*In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world—just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God’s gr*ace.”

And again in **Romans 1:17** – “*For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last,[e] just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith*.”

Simply put - if a person is angry at God for seemingly not answering their prayers, it means their focus is on worldly things, not on things of God. The choices they’ve made cause them to get hurt emotionally and this has blinded them spiritually.

Even the Apostles were often spiritually blind. They frequently couldn’t understand what Jesus was trying to teach them – because they chose to focus on the things of ***this*** world, rather than the things of God.

People today wish for “burning bush” miracles – demanding to have proof that God is ***really*** there and listening. But those who seek a “burning bush” miracle from God are on the wrong path. God sometimes uses people or situations to get someone back on track where they need to be with Him – but, sadly, most of the time we as a pride and ego interfere and we can’t recognize God’s hand at work in our lives., No matter if the situation is what we would call “good” or “bad” - we most often fail to try and understand why these things may be happening to us, but we are certainly quick to get angry and blame God, aren’t we?

Jesus said in **Matthew 17:20**, "*Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.”*

Let’s face it if you start having doubts, doubts can cause you to stumble, to have fear and not trust in anyone including God. That is a bad place for anyone , Christian or non-Christian, to be.

 Vance Havner once observed, "Faith will not always get for us what we want, but it will get what God wants us to have." Remember what Jesus told the woman who reached out and touched His cloak? She knew she would be healed because she had faith in Jesus. Afterward, Jesus told the woman her faith had been what healed her – and for the first time in 12 years, she was whole again, because she chose to put her trust in that hope and certainty of what we do not see that is abiding faith.

Martin Luther wrote, "For grace and faith are infused apart from our work, and when they are infused, then the works follow." In other words, when someone saved by the grace of God, through faith, he or she will practice good works as a result. With faith we will have the confidence to go out and do the work God has called us to do; hence the phrase faith without works is dead just like work without faith is also dead.

When His disciples questioned Jesus about faith, He told them in **Mark 11:22-26**; “Have faith in God. Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.”

And here we see what we must do if we come to a point of losing faith and trust - When Jesus began His ministry of preaching the gospel of the kingdom, He laid a crucial foundation with these words from **Matthew 5:3**: "*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*" Guess what He's talking about? ***Repentance***.

M any Christians view repentance as something oppressive, a negative word for something we do when we really mess up. However, repentance is anything but oppressive – it is life giving!

To be poor in spirit is to see the depth of our brokenness, to see the depth of our need. This is not a one-time event but rather a continual response. When we as believers truly understand the gospel, it forces us to face the truth that we are a lot more sinful than we realize.

We need the gospel every moment of every day, because our flesh is instinctively drawn toward self-absorption and idolatry. We need to realize and see the depth of our daily, moment-by-moment need for Christ. We all need our eyes opened to see how self-absorbed and self-centered we truly are, how often we look for life in all sorts of things rather than God.

And when someone cries out that they’ve been trying to do all of the “right things” and getting nowhere – Scripture’s answer to that cry is: “Seek God first”.

How often are we as Christians trying to find life and meaning and significance and security in things other than God? How often do we look to shopping, our relationships, our own attractiveness, our possessions, or our success in work or even at church – to find our ultimate joy?

Sin is so much more than doing bad things; it includes the multitude of ways we replace God with ourselves as the center of our lives. When we no longer place our complete trust in God – when we lose our faith in Him because we’ve replaced Him with so many other things – it’s little wonder that someone begins to wonder why their life is empty, meaningless and even wonder if God is real.

Faith is the fuel that drives our walk with the Lord. Without it – we cannot move. Without it, we have no hope, we can’t trust – and doubts become despair & hopelessness.

Let’s look at Romans 1:17 again – and pay close attention to the last four words: "*For in the gospel, a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith* ***from first to last***."

From first to last. The entire Christian life is about faith. We are to live by faith. In other words, we are to continually place our trust in Christ alone.

Now this is where the brokenness of repentance becomes so important. If a person doesn't see the depth of their sinfulness and need, how deeply will they live their lives in dependence upon Christ? What kind of foundation are they standing on when the floods and storms of life come along?

It's easy for people to lose sight of both their need for a Savior and what an incredible Savior He really is. The difference is that in focusing on following certain “principles”, or depending on your own efforts rather than embracing a Person – one leads to self-sufficiency that becomes doubt, despair, hopelessness and results in lost faith, and the other to dependence on Christ-sufficiency and results in an abundant walk with God. As we see the depth of our need, we can more fully embrace Christ in that moment.

The two life-giving truths of the gospel are: we are far more sinful than we realize, AND we have a Savior who is far more wonderful than we ever dreamed.

If Christianity only becomes a list of things to do in order to please God, that will then drive us further from the gospel. We need to be reminded of our own inability to live how we should live. Our self-absorption and idolatry make this impossible, which should then lead to acknowledging Jesus as our only solution. In the midst of our inadequacy, we can look to the One who is adequate. In the midst of our weakness, we can look to His strength. For it is in His strength that faith is found – not in our own selves. We no longer have to continue on the treadmill of performance, trying to make God smile and we no longer have to pretend we are doing better than we really are.

When the storms of life come – our trust must be placed in the One Who can command the storms, our faith firmly anchored in He Who is the author and finisher of our salvation. Without Christ at the center of our lives – we are at the mercy of this world.