

Faith is a little word, but often difficult to explain or embrace. What does the word “faith” mean to you? Is it a word in search of a meaning or is it a gift that needs no explanation?

Do you depend on faith, or do you wonder why it seems others have more faith than you? Is faith “enough?” Where does your faith come from? What is the object of your faith?

People can have faith in the stock market, a political party, certain brands, and certainly on one’s spouse or friends. But I want to talk about a specific use of the word “faith.” I want to discuss the faith which comes from believing God’s love for you and me is so great that he was willing to live, die and rise in the person of Jesus; all that we would never be separated from that love. That is the basis of “Christian faith.”

Now, two friends had a long and ongoing discussion about such faith. One felt faith changes and gets stronger or weaker, while the other felt that faith never changes but we either grow into or out of faith. The difference comes from whether faith is something we control or something that is greater than we can humanly imagine.

I believe that FAITH is NOT something we do, but something we DON’T do. Faith is not anything we control but something that takes over when we quit trying to control! This understanding of what faith is, comes not from my own wisdom, or rational or philosophical arguments, but comes from the inspiration of what is shared in Scripture and God’s presence in my own life. It is all about accepting a gift that is beyond human understanding. Faith is all about surrender.

It is like a baby who stops crying when picked up. There is no rational way or need to explain to an infant who you are or what you will do, it all has to do with surrendering to the comfort and strength and familiar presence a baby hasn’t yet had time to rationally explain.

Hebrews was written for Jews who had come to believe Jesus is the Messiah. It explained how Jesus had replaced all the old rules and rituals that many felt had to be observed in order to gain God’s love. Instead, Christ proclaimed that his actions, once for all, were sufficient for any of us to be completely tied to God. Faith, in other words is not based on what we can give God but what God has given freely to us.

Written for a Jewish audience, Abraham was lifted first as the perfect example of faith. He answered the challenge of God to leave home for a new land, learning to listen to God’s guidance rather than believing that his actions would bring God close to him. Abraham had no proof that God’s promises of land, a great nation, and a blessing to the world would ever happen to the childless couple he and Sarah were, but BY FAITH, he believed.

Centuries later, at just the right time, God showed himself to an entire world in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the Messiah – God in the flesh! Imagine the gift of becoming human only to suffer, die and rise again with no proof that even one human would ever believe or accept the precious gifts that God has brought out earth. Even in his life, Jesus reveals the surrender of faith, as a model and example for you and me.

*“Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”* How is that for an explanation? Faith is the energy and the power that carries us through a broken world full of

disappointments and disease and allows us to know (without even seeing how) that God will never leave us alone and that he will lead us safely to him again and again.

Years ago I had a conversation with one of my members, whose husband had just died. She was terribly upset and worried and said, "I am starting to question things I have never questioned before. Things like where in universe is heaven? What does resurrection really mean? Can my loved one see me?" Those were all powerful statements that all of us wrestle with, and so dependent on living in a world that trusts facts and experience and has a real difficulty with the concept of the surrender we call faith. You know how it feels in your own experience, we want proof, something to touch, a picture, an explanation – faith is so difficult because we don't like to step into the dark.

Such questions and doubts and fears are normal in a broken world. It doesn't mean that we have a weak faith, it simply illustrates the tension between what the world teaches and what faith believes. Our world wants proof first and then belief. And so we hear people ask, "If God exists, then why is there cancer? Why do terrorists get away with murder? How can any child ever be abused? Why do loved ones die?

The reality is that there are no answers that will ever satisfy those questions. Faith is trusting in God's love rather than my ability to reason or understand. It means I believe that God will help with what I can't prove. Faith remains because it is dependent upon God's love rather than my understanding of that love!

I once saw a sign that said, "Pray until something happens." Now that isn't "faith" but an attempt to manipulate God. Faith believes something IS happening, and so we pray!

Some worry that if they have questions or doubts it means their faith is weak. But faith allows our questions to frame the debate and know that God will act.

Hebrews makes that clear: *"Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."* Once we acknowledge the "gift" of faith, life changes! Faith never changes, it simply allows our struggle to be in God's house rather than in a dark corner.

As we embrace faith, it is like the power we find as we plug an appliance into an outlet. We don't need to understand how electricity works, but we know if you plug in, lights glow! A child is no less human than a 70 year old, and just as being human is something we mature into, so it is with faith. Faith isn't something that grows but gift we grow into!

Remember Jesus' promise in Luke 12: "Do not be afraid, little flock, your Father WILL give you the kingdom." Faith isn't something we do – it is the undeserved gift when we embrace whatever GOD is doing. It is like learning to ride bike, which is so difficult to grasp until you finally trust. And once you do it you don't even think about how you do it.

*Have faith, and you will always have peace! Amen*