

Reflections: Facing life's crises with faith

The March 'Reflections' looked at ways of dealing with the adversities of life. In this July-September edition, we return to reflect on how to cope with the trials of life by looking at the role of faith as we seek lessons from the books of Exodus, Psalms, Isaiah, Matthew and Hebrews.

Faith alongside Doubt Regardless of your situation, God's principles concerning faith remain true and unchanging. God understands that most of the needs we have are not so much material in nature as they are issues of the heart. New Christians are often encouraged by their elders to place trust and faith in God. That faith begins and ends in the heart. And of course it is true that when trouble strikes or disappointment grows, even the mature Christian can find him/herself crying out to God, wondering whether God is aware of what s/he is up against. That's a human reaction – the "faith" that we know we should have, we often discover we're lacking in some degree because the strength of our faith is not necessarily directly related to how long we have been a Christian. The fact is that faith often exists in the presence of doubt. The words of the father of the epileptic boy in Mark 9:24 reflect the difficulties of all of us: "*I believe Lord, help my unbelief.*" Earlier the man had said to Jesus "*if you can do anything, help us*" (Mark 9:22). Notice the "if" And Jesus' response was to the effect that '*The issue isn't in my power - it's in your faith!*' The man obviously had some faith in Christ but he still had some doubts and was struggling.

Struggling faith, Reaching faith and Resting faith.

We could think of the development of faith in three stages: little or struggling faith, great or reaching faith, and perfect or resting faith. Little faith tends to say: "I know God can." Great (reaching) faith says, "I know God will." Perfect faith says, "It is

done!" Of course when our circumstances are such that our faith is not really being put to the test little faith has no difficulty. But in adverse circumstances little faith wavers. A person with great faith will not permit his circumstances to affect his trust in God. He will be focused on God and committed to seeking his encouragement and guidance in times of trial. The third level of faith is a whole gear-shift up - it's a position of unshakeable trust. The person who demonstrates perfect (resting) faith has learned to rest in Christ. He sees beyond the visible to the invisible and knows that God is in control of the entirety of his life. Nothing comes to him except by the hand of God and this with the intent of drawing him closer to himself. Rationally, we may be aware of the volatility of our circumstances, but the only way that little faith can grow toward perfect faith is by learning to trust God regardless of our circumstances. And that is not easy. Hebrews 11:1 tells us that faith is the "*assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*" This is perfect faith in action. It is a position of trusting and knowing that God has the ability to alter, if necessary, our circumstance, however desperate.

The true source of faith There is only one true source of faith and that is Jesus Christ. But what do you do when your faith runs dry, when you find it almost impossible to trust in God? Each of us has experienced discouragement and disappointment. We may appear spiritually strong on the outside while on the inside the battle is raging. God wants to teach us how to trust him even when the storms of life come with such impact and volume that we wonder if we will survive. Have you, like me, been through such a period in your life? This is exactly where the disciples found themselves when out on the Sea of Galilee. (Matt 8:23-27) With Jesus asleep in the bow of the boat and the wind and sea churning at gale proportions, they were sure they would die. Their faith was stricken and they cried out to God. George Müller writes "*The beginning of anxiety is the end of faith, and the beginning of true faith is the end of anxiety.*" Which one of us does not know the truth of this from first-hand experience? And yes, it was here, in the storm, that the disciples themselves

learned this truth— this was for them God's classroom of faith. Here they learned that they could call, and God would hear. Here also they learned that Christ needed to become the focus of their faith. However, God will not always lead us into dramatic situations in order to stretch and prove our faith. Our faith is built and seasoned by the everyday occurrences of life. In order for our faith to be perfected, we must first believe that God is who he says he is. When Moses first faced the issue of faith in his own life, he told the Lord, "Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I shall say to them: 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you.' Now they may say to me, 'What is his name?' What shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM;' and he said, 'Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, I AM has sent me to you.' " (Exodus 4) The God who spoke to Moses is the same God who speaks to you and to me . He is "I AM." He is all that he can be and there is nothing more he can be. All that is, is in God.

The difficulty is when we want tangible revelation

The difficulty comes when we insist on receiving evidence for God's existence and ability. We want God to reveal himself to us in a way that will demonstrate his good intentions toward us. Moses was no different. As we read on in Exodus, we find that he questioned God's faithfulness. Yet God is also patient and demonstrates not only his power to Moses, but his position of Fatherhood also, as he deals with each question out of his limitless resources of mercy and grace. God taught Moses the truth about God's own nature.

The strength of our faith is linked to our grasp on who God is

If we do not possess a grasp on who God is, then we will be tentative in our faith, which is why it is so important to(continued overleaf . . .)