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"The Churches of God Outreach Ministries provides leadership, information, and biblical teaching in spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Matthew 28:19-20"

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TRUST ME – I'M GOD

'Increase our faith' requested the disciples of Jesus. *How?*

by James McBride

The power and authority exercised by Jesus moved his disciples to ask him to increase the deficit of faith in themselves. Faced with a 'spiritual mountain' - casting out a demon - they had failed miserably. Lack of faith, it is clear, hinders our spiritual activity. Yet 'faith' is an essential element of the Christian's life.

Faith, according to the apostle Peter, is the foundation of our life in Christ (II Peter 1:1-7). It is the spiritual basis for our calling to '*glory and virtue*', an assurance that we will be 'partakers of the divine nature'. Upon it we, with due diligence, build Christ-like character.

To faith we are to add virtue (strength, courage), knowledge, self-control, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, love. All character traits of Jesus. Continues Peter:

"For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that you shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacks these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and has forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if you do these things, you shall never fall" (vv.8-10)

Godly Example

The people of God through all ages have lived by faith. Many have suffered persecution, torture, mocking, jail, stoning, destitution, have become wandering refugees. All because they lived their faith for the divine promise of life for eternity (*see* Hebrews 11:36-40). We don't have far to delve in history - even the blood-stained history of Christianity - to uncover 'religious folk' persecuting and killing faithful believers.

Indeed Jesus predicted that persecution of his followers would continue into our own time. Are we prepared? Will our faith be sufficient? How can we 'increase our faith'?

Building Faith

With little effort we can have someone top up our oil tank or our glass. Can we top up *faith* - just by asking? Certainly it can't be bought. No amount of charitable giving or charity work will buy it. But if you do recognize your need and ask Jesus for 'more' - *then be prepared for a challenge!* Muscle isn't built by indolence - *nor is faith.*

Jesus answer to the disciples' request was to point out the necessity of 'prayer and fasting' for the task at hand - the expulsion of that particular and powerful demonic presence. They had already been given the authority by Jesus to expel evil spirits (Matthew 10:1) - this was a lapse of faith and not the sustained faith of maturity.

So, faced with a 'mountain' Jesus prescribes the considerable self-discipline of '*prayer and fasting*'. But there's more. Let's first define faith.

Faith is a quality we use every day. Faith that the bus driver will get us to our desired destination. Faith that the sun will come up. Faith that the lights will go on, that we will survive the day.

Similarly, the word as used in the New Testament (Gk. *pistis*) simply means reliance - reliance on a God who is totally trustworthy. Writes one commentator: 'Such reliance enabled the believer to treat the future as present and the invisible as seen'.

It is, in essence, *trust*. And there's no point in religion unless we have it:

"But without faith it is impossible to please God. For it is right that the one drawing near to God should believe that He is, and that He becomes a rewarder to the ones seeking Him out"
(Hebrews 11:6)

The Unchanging God

The ancient 'gods' couldn't be relied upon. They were fickle, and indeed were mere expressions of human nature, gods created in the image and likeness of man. The Creator

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God is not so. The God of the Jewish-Christian Bible assures us *'I am the LORD. I change not'*. What God has accomplished for us, done for us, how He cares for us, never changes. Jesus is *"...the same yesterday, today and forever"* (Hebrews 13:8).

No matter what era of human history, no matter where we live, no matter what our religious belief or lack of belief - then and there we face uncertainty. Our world is troubled. A relative few are financially stable, but most struggle to some degree. A long life unaffected by disease or injury escapes virtually all of mankind. Stable family life is increasingly but a dream of new love. We can't even trust the ground under our feet.

Jesus recognized these universal needs, and provides the solution: *"Come to Me"*, he said, *"all those laboring and being burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, because I am meek and lowly in heart, and you will find rest to your souls"* (Matthew 11:28-29).

That's a gold star promise. Solomon, too: *"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and don't lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths"* (Proverbs 3: 5-6). He knows us intimately, knows what is best for us in every circumstance of life.

Expect Trouble

In no way, though, does the Father imply a stress-free life for those who believably come to Him. He 'promises' trials, persecution - even death - for maintaining our faith. His concern is for our spiritual welfare: the material is important only as it affects the spiritual. Hence He may not heap on us the riches we desire. He may answer prayer with a resounding 'No' or 'Not now' or 'You are not yet ready for it' or 'You've got to be joking'!. He may allow persecution for our beliefs.

Indeed it is by such means that we 'increase our faith'. Just as an athlete must train, train, train to attain peak performance, so the weight of life's experiences can - if we react to them positively - strengthen our 'spiritual muscle' and prepare us for service in 'our Father's House':

"If you endure discipline, God is dealing with you as with sons; for who is the son whom a father does not discipline? ...And all discipline for the present indeed does not seem to be joyous, but grievous; but afterward it gives back peaceable fruit of righteousness to the ones having been exercised by it" (Hebrews 12:7-11)

Yet *"...No temptation [adverse experience] has taken you except what is human; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted above what you are able. But with the temptation He will also make the way out, so that you may be able to bear it"* (I Corinthians 10:13).

Whatever befalls the faithful is within the bounds of our ability to cope. There is always, says the apostle, *'a way to bear it'*.

Trust God

Wisdom dictates that we don't make blind purchases - we first put them to the test. We don't immediately trust people we meet - only through prolonged experience do we trust them. Yet for as long as mankind has walked the earth God has proven Himself perfectly trustworthy. He does what He promises., If we but believe Him, trust Him.

So trust God. He says:

"...cast all your anxiety upon him, because he cares for you (I Peter 5:7). And: 'Do not be anxious for your life, what you eat and what you drink, nor for your body, what you put on. Is not the soul more than the food and the body than the clothing? Observe the birds of the heaven, that they do not sow, nor do they reap, nor do they gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Do you not rather excel them? But who of you by being anxious is able to add one cubit onto his stature? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. They do not labor nor do they spin, but I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory was clothed as one of these. If God so enrobes the grass of the field (which is today, and is thrown into a furnace tomorrow) will He not much rather you, little-faiths? Then do not be anxious, saying, What may we eat? Or, what may we drink? Or, what may clothe us? For after all these things the nations seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things" (Matthew 6: 25-32)

Just do it. Trust God - it's the best course for you!

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