

Dear Friends,

Human nature, even that nature at work in sincere believers, is prone to imagine what we want from God and our faith, substituting those ideas for what we learn from Scripture. A popular idea of our time claims that a believer can alter their unpleasant life experiences or situations merely by "Naming and claiming" their faith. They might find brief comfort for their idea in the first examples of Hebrews 11, though a careful read of those Old Testament people contradicts their idea, but the closing verses of Hebrews 11 emphatically contradict this idea. Hebrews 11:36-38, quoted below, teaches the mirror opposite. In our study passage for this week, Peter doesn't hint that the persecuted Christians to whom he wrote might eradicate their persecution by merely "Naming-claiming" their faith. Quite the opposite, he rather reminded them that their faith was the only way they could endure persecution in a manner that would glorify and praise the Lord.

Life experience joins and supports Biblical teaching that godly faith often strengthens believers to endure their painful trials, not avoid them or eradicate them.

On the positive side of our study passage, Peter assures us that our God remains faithful to stand with us and give us His grace and strength when we face our troubles with Him, following His example in our minds and actions. We shall face no trial that is greater than our God's grace to empower us to endure them and, in the end, overcome them, either by living through them, but not overcome by them, or by leaving them behind and entering our glorious inheritance with Him. We are victors either way.

Lord help us to be faithful to our faithful God,
Joe Holder

Faith in a Faithful God

Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.
(1 Peter 1:6-9 KJV 1900)

Our study passage presents us with contrasting personal responses. On one hand, despite intense persecution, Peter's first readers kept the prospect of their inheritance firmly in their minds. Even in the midst of their trial, they could rejoice in the thought of their inheritance. When we read the word "Inheritance," our western minds think only of a will and someone receiving something because the person who wrote the will remembered them with something of his/her estate. For first century Jewish people, the word would more remind them of the Levirate order of permanent family possession of land. By means of the will, the land would pass to the next generation. For them, to receive an inheritance would remind them that they were members of the family of the one who died and left them this valuable property. In the second chapter, Peter refers to these people as a "chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people." Not only were these people members of a family, but they were members of the King's family, royal.

However, even as they rejoiced at the thought of their secure, heavenly, and family inheritance, they also struggled with "**heaviness through manifold temptations.**" As used in Scripture, "temptation" may refer to an evil enticement to sin, but it often also refers to the testing ordeal of difficult seasons in the life of a believer in Jesus. This meaning matches Peter's context in this verse, and in the greater context of the letter.

Peter refers to “temptations,” multiple trials, not the single ordeal of persecution for their faith. We in this country have no real sense of persecution for our faith, but, if we live our faith faithfully, we encounter many contrary and hostile trials to our healthy faith. They may relate to our work environment, or even to unbelieving members of our family. They may arise from within in the form of conflict that you experience because of divided interests, loyalties, and emotions. You want to serve the Lord, but you also want to invest time and energy in any number of ideas that have little or no grounds in Scripture and the faith-way of living your life. Think of some personal passion that tends to either dilute or stifle your joy in your eternal inheritance.

“That the trial of your faith.” What is a “Trial of faith”? We may think that God occasionally sends us into a specific, divinely framed test of our faith. The Lord did test Abraham, but why. He did not test Abraham so that He might know if Abraham would be faithful or not. He is omniscient, all-knowing. He knew how Abraham would respond. But Abraham needed to learn more about His God and the power of the Lord’s keeping, delivering power and mercy. For most of us, our “Trial of faith” is not divinely framed or sent. It is rather the almost constant flow of unfriendly-to-the-faith-way challenges that we encounter and must choose either to remain faithful to our God or ignore Him and compromise our faith for our personal appetite.

Faith itself, despite appearing prominently in the Christian vocabulary, is sadly not well understood. Faith is not our belief in a set of doctrines about God. Biblical faith defines our deepest attitude toward God Himself. If you have faith in your faith, your faith shall fail. Further, our faith in a person is no better than that person’s character. Solomon understood this thought.

Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint. (Proverbs 15:19 KJV)

Far more “Uncomfortable” is one’s faith in what they believe is an unfaithful or incompetent god. How comfortable can one possibly

be with a god whom they describe as wanting to do something incredibly good, but he doesn't have the power to do it?

Biblical faith addresses our knowledge of and confidence in our God Himself. Paul manifested this faith in God in the face of a fierce storm.

Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me. (Acts 27:25 KJV)

When your life-storms seem to be imploding around you, do you believe what God said in Scripture?

Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. (Hebrews 13:5 KJV)

Do you believe God, what He said? Or do you believe your own doubts and unbelief? The Old Testament people named in Hebrews 11 were not remembered because of their personal determination or will-power. They were remembered because they trusted in the character of their God when circumstances all around them challenged that trust. And their faithful God proved His love and faithfulness every time. Not one exception.

Our trials of faith may rip us to shreds and leave us near faithless, or they may leave us stronger than ever in our faith in our faithful God. The difference is grounded in how we react to trials. Do we follow the example of these unnamed 1 Peter faithful believers and rejoice in our inheritance even as we face our Goliath giants? Or do we become so overwhelmed by our trials that we forget our God and His faithful word to us?

When I see the word "Test," I am inclined to think of my school days and the many "Tests" I took. You can pass your test with a perfect score, or you can fail it miserably. Why? It depends on how much preparation, how much study, you give to the material covered in the exam. When our life is easy and comfortable, we are inclined to spend

less time with Scripture. We take God and His Book for granted. But life seldom remains so comfortable. When the pains and trials invade our life, how well are we prepared to react in faith according to Scripture? You see, life doesn't warn us a month or a year in advance that a test is coming. Most of life's "Tests" are "Pop" tests. They confront us without warning. Whether we pass or fail is largely determined by how we spent our time during those quiet comfortable seasons. The more we learn of our God and His faithfulness during quiet peaceable times the more we enter those daunting tests fully persuaded of our God's faithfulness to stand by us in our trials.

"...being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire." Peter describes the Christian experience when we "Pass the test," when we face our difficulties fixed on our God and His faithfulness. Straw (1 Corinthians 3:12-13 KJV), subjected to fire or intense heat will ignite and burn into ashes. Gold subjected to that same heat is purified, becoming even more precious than it was.

None of the New Testament inspired writers taught the popular "Health and wealth" or "Name it and claim it" ideas so popular in our time. Consider. In this lesson, Peter doesn't tell his readers that their faith will neutralize their trials and give them an ideal life of comfort. He rather taught them—and us—that our faith can endure the trials of life that do come because it is anchored, not in us or in our faith, but in our faithful God. Likewise, Paul, despite praying for the Lord to remove his "thorn in the flesh," learned that the thorn would remain. He couldn't merely name his thorn, and God would remove it. In fact, the Lord's response to Paul's repeated request for the Lord to remove his thorn was **"My grace is sufficient."** (2 Corinthians 12:9 KJV) Scripture's promise—God's promise—is not instant removal of all our problems. It is that He shall faithfully stand with us and give us abiding grace to face those difficulties if we abide in His faith and rest our troubled hearts in Him.

"...might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." Here Peter adds a key thought in the walk of faith. How we face our trials in life should be governed by our desire to praise and honor our God by our conduct in the trenches of our

problems. Simply put, is my Christian life all about me, or is it all about Jesus? Do I strive to gain for myself, or do I work to glorify Him in my life?

Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. The Christian life, beginning to end, is a life of faith. Our daily task is to ensure that our faith always anchors in the person of the Lord Jesus, not in ourselves and not in our faith. Peter and the other apostles lived with Jesus for over three years. They heard Him preach and teach. They were eyewitnesses to His miracles. They could approach Him face to face with their questions. Not so you and me. We don't see Him. Yet we love Him, we believe Him (And in Him), and He is the cause of the joy of our faith life.

Non-Christians, especially those who are actively hostile to Christianity, belittle our dependence on faith. However, think of the multitude of areas, science included, that require faith to function. You plug an appliance into the electrical outlet in your home with "Faith" that the plug will deliver current to your appliance. No one could live a single day without faith. Unbelievers have faith in gravity, in electricity, and the multitude of other activities of daily living. Believers need not shrink at their faith-reliance on the Lord Jesus. If God created the behavior of natural forces, gravity, light, etc., to be constant in their behavior, Biblical faith equally believes that God's spiritual character, especially His interaction with His beloved children, is no less fixed and faithful. A belief in God that claims He does "A" today and "B" tomorrow contradicts Biblical teaching and should be rejected by godly believers. This unbiblical idea often appears in conjunction with errant teaching regarding the "Secret" will of God. "God's revealed will in Scripture is "A." But He may contradict that revealed will for mysterious-to-us reasons and do "B" based on His "Secret" will. (Job 23:13 KJV)

The basic Biblical principle of faith shines in this lesson. Authentic faith relies on our knowledge from Scripture, affirmed by life experience. When a believer describes an idea not taught in Scripture, followed by "I have faith in the Lord that this will work," they fail the Bible faith test. Faith doesn't validate our imagination or our ignorance of

Biblical truth. Godly faith, validated by Scripture, relies on our knowledge of God and His faithfulness, not on our wishful thinking that ignores or contradicts Scripture.

Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls. In this point, salvation is not what we shall enjoy in eternity, but what we have right now. Further, “Receiving” is present tense. What was true for those first century believers in their present moment is no less true for you and me in our present tense. When Peter wrote to those faithful strangers dispersed throughout the regions named, they were in the present process of “Receiving” this salvation, the “end” or fulfillment of their faith. Despite intense persecution, they were experiencing the reality of their faith. Similarly, when the Lord declined Paul’s three-time petition to remove his thorn in the flesh, he received the “end” of his faith, “**My grace is sufficient.**” When the numerous Old Testament people named in Hebrews 11 endured their many trials, they too received the “end” of their faith. In every case, faithful believers, folks who live their daily lives by the faith of Scripture, looking to, following the example of, and walking with the Lord Jesus, realize the reality of their faith. Why? How? Their faith is in their faithful God. He does not promise in Scripture that He will remove every obstacle or relieve every pain or problem. He teaches us to look to Him, imitate His faith-example, and trust Him despite the difficulties of life. He promised in Scripture, “**I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.**” (Hebrews 13:5b KJV) He did not promise in Scripture to shield us from life’s pains and troubles. We see this pattern in Paul’s joy in the Lord’s sufficient grace, in the faith of Old Testament believers who trusted their faithful God, even as they suffered endless trials. I have seen it in the face of suffering dying faithful believers who, when I visited them, more ministered to me than I to them.

And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they

wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. (Hebrews 11:36-38 KJV)

You see, the Hebrews 11 record affirms powerful faith in those who experienced the cruelties and suffering of life no less than in those who experienced deliverance by faith. The measure of faith is not that we are delivered from life's pains and troubles, but that we realize the Lord's faithful and sufficient grace "In" our troubles.

Present tense, "Receiving," means that we continually experience, "Receive" the end or fulfillment of our faith as we order our lives according to Scripture's teaching about our faithful God. We need this reminder today. We need to strengthen our response to life by these Biblical examples and teachings. God speed, Pilgrim.

Elder Joe Holder