

The Testing of Our Faith

By Jim Davis

Have you learned to look at trouble in life as opportunity to exercise faith? Only on this side of the grave will we have opportunity to exercise faith in God. The Psalmist declared, "What profit is there in my blood, if I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise Thee? Will it declare Thy faithfulness?" (Psalm 30:9). Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, and the conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1), and it is only by faith that we can please God. Hebrews 11:6 reads, "and without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him." It is by faith that we experience the victory that overcomes the world (1 John 5:4).

As a Christian discouragement and opposition will inevitably come to you. It often occurs immediately after some major victory or success (1 Kings 19:1-3). In one breath, Jesus commended the disciples and promised them reward, "I grant you that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22:28-30). In the next breath He warned, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you (disciples) like wheat" (Luke 22:31). If we could have been given a glimpse into heaven at that time we would have seen Satan making accusations against Peter and the disciples. As Satan did in the first chapter of Job he is now seeking permission from God to test (sift) the disciples and it is granted to him. But Jesus lets Peter know that He has prayed a prayer of intercession for him. The content of that prayer is that their faith would not fail (Luke 22:32). The word that is translated fail is to be taken in the sense of ceasing to exist, not as in coming up short.

How critical is your exercise of faith? It is essential in times of testing and temptation. The Apostle Paul certainly understood this concept when he prayed for the Ephesians. He prayed, "that He [God] would grant you according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man; so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith..." (Ephesians 3:16-17). When you face times of discouragement do you pray a prayer like this? Do you pray this prayer for other believers that are undergoing times of difficulty?

Let's draw some biblical principles from these passages. One of the first things to realize is that **false hope will bring defeat**. Faith demands dependence upon something and if that something cannot deliver it is a false hope. Faith is not a power within itself as some teach today. We do not frame our worlds or speak what we want into existence. Notice that Peter had faith but it was in himself. Faith must always be placed in something and Peter trusted in his own strength when he declared, "Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!" (Luke 22:33). Few have spoken with any more resolve than Peter. If our words alone have power then he would have succeeded. We must recognize our weakness if we are to experience God's power in our lives. Peter could not deliver. When it comes to living the Christian life in times of testing you will not be able to succeed if you are taking confidence in your own wisdom or strength. The Apostle Paul exhorts us "that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God" (1 Corinthians 2:5). The prophet Zechariah also reminds us that it is "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the LORD of hosts" (Zechariah 4:6). Are we leaning on His everlasting arms? As Jesus prophesied, Peter denied Christ three times (Luke 22:61).

In the Psalms military might is spoken of as a false hope and it is contrasted with

trusting in the Lord. "Some boast in chariots, and some in horses; But we will boast in the name of the Lord, our God" (Psalm 20:7). Is it not Jeremiah who says, "Thus says the LORD, 'Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me...' " (Jeremiah 9:23-24)? What are you trusting in today? Some have placed their security in money or material wealth. Some are searching for peace in a new economic or political system. Some will look for fulfillment in life through a personal relationship. If you trust something or someone other than Christ you will eventually be destined for failure.

God's power delivers when we fall. Even before we fall short Jesus intercedes for us. No doubt Peter and the disciples remembered and took comfort in the Lord's words, "I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail." (Luke 22:32) Jesus Christ is "able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25). The Lord was able to deliver Peter and He is able to deliver us. Perhaps you have awakened from a slumber to find yourself face to face with a living nightmare as Peter did. Jesus can save you. He can wash away your sin. He can take away the guilt. "We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1).

God's power can keep us from falling. We trust in God's power and God's faithfulness for deliverance from temptation. "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it" (1 Corinthians 10:13). In his epistle Peter taught that we are kept by the power of God through faith even though we may be distressed by various trials in the proving of our faith (1 Peter 1:5-7). It is through God's precious and magnificent promises that we escape the corruption that is in the world (2 Peter 1:4). The proving of our faith demands that we make our stand on the promises of God's word. It is His word that we hide in our hearts that we may not sin against God (Psalm 119:11). I would also like to point out the importance of prayer during times of temptation. We have a negative and a positive example of the significance of prayer during these times in Luke 22. Before His arrest Jesus was found praying very fervently and instructing the disciples to pray that they might not enter into temptation. Jesus prayed and overcame in His trial; the disciples slept and entered into their temptation. If you are presently undergoing difficult trials, depend on God's power and God's faithfulness to take you through. He will not fail you. Take the precious promises from God's word and believe them. Pray and know the strength of God's indwelling Holy Spirit. Be vigilant to approach your trial depending upon His power that mightily works within you. His power will keep you from falling.

One final observation is that **the proof of your faith is of great value.** Jesus instructed Peter, "when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:32). Some thirty years later Peter writes to strengthen the brothers in Asia Minor who were undergoing trials. He was speaking from experience when he encouraged them to "rejoice even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials" (1 Peter 1:6-7). Peter taught them that the proof of their faith was more precious than gold. Have you considered that your faith will be found to result in praise and honor and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ? God highly values your faith. Your present trial may be more significant and have more purpose than what you may be able to conceive at this time. Stand firm for the glory of Christ.