

"Have Faith in God"

For years and years I taught children and teenagers to have faith. When a problem presented itself in their path my answer would be "just pray and let God take care of it." I gave them analogies of daily practices of faith. We have faith in the chair we sit in demonstrated by the fact that we do not check the sturdiness of the chair before sitting in it. We have faith in whomever is driving the automobile we travel in to get us to our destination safely. We have faith in the medical society to heal our diseases and mend our wounds. Why then is faith in God such a big problem for us?

I recently learned a very difficult lesson. I learned just how difficult - yet utterly satisfying it is to place faith, blind faith, total faith, in God. In October of 1993 I was asked to resign my position as youth minister in a church that I had come to love very much. I practiced a little faith then. I prepared resume's and started passing my name around and "trusted" God to call me to another church. No calls came.

In December I was arrested for being involved in an inappropriate carnal relationship two years earlier. I then spent my first, and by the hand of God, my last night in jail. It was not until then - and the weeks following - that I learned what faith and trust in God was all about, for the first time. In that small blue iron and concrete room I heard the voice of God calling me back home. Just like the prodigal son - which in fact I was in terms of my relationship with the Father - He was waiting on the porch with his arms outstretched saying, "Please let me take care of you. I can handle it. Really."

For a short amount of time I did not want to return into those loving arms. I was too ashamed. Afraid that I could not be forgiven or would be faced with judgement. But what I found was that there was no comfort in anything but those arms. Forgiveness had already be given and judgment was not an issue. God simply said, "Hey. I'm your Father. I am protective. I am strong. I am wise. Trust me, I'll take care of everything." What else could I say but okay. From that moment I crumbled in the arms of God. He washed

away my pain through the tears that flowed from my eyes. The friends that I lost were replaced with joy from the spirit that has come to mean much more than the friendships ever did - or could.

Once I let go of the situation and allowed God to begin the healing process I was restored with something that I thought I had lost. The one thing that Christians have that the rest of the world has not. The one thing that beyond every possible human effort, success and failure, was once again in my sight. Hope. A simple word, but a great gift of God's grace and mercy.

Grace and mercy have taken on clearer meaning too. I have always defined grace and getting what we do not deserve. For the Christian that grace is demonstrated in Christ's death on the cross so that we do not have to be judged for our sins. It is a life-long sentence of happiness and eternal life with God in heaven. I certainly do not deserve that. I have defined mercy as not getting what we deserve. In my particular case I deserve many years in prison with no hope in the future. I deserve exile, social shunning, and eternal damnation for my sins. But God says, "No. You are still an infant learning to walk. You fell down. Here, let me help you up and assist you with your next step. Don't worry - I'll catch you if you fall and I will remove the things that will get in your way. Just trust me." What a Dad!

Well, my life has taken many new and exciting turns since that frightful day - and night. Certainly the first step was to get out of the ministry. But after doing that several interesting things began to happen. Before the arrest no calls were made to me in regard to my resume. Over 40 had been sent to churches all over the globe - literally. The first day home I received an inquiry. And over the next several weeks I continued to receive calls from churches interested in me as a minister for their congregations. I declined every one of them but began to see a new hope on the horizon. Perhaps God was not finished with me after all. Certainly He still loved me, but could I still be an instrument for Him?

I began to think of Peter. He promised Christ that he would never leave him. That he would stand with Christ through thick and thin. Remember what happened? That night Peter, hiding in fear, denied Christ three times. And I do not mean a simple, "No I don't know him." or "Oh, I am sorry. You must have the wrong number. There is no Messiah here." Peter vehemently denied Christ - the third time cursing in the process.

And I thought of Paul, formerly Saul. His entire mission in life was to persecute any and all Christians he could find - killing many of them. And it was he that Christ met on the road to Damascus. Through that dark blindness, through the despair, through the lowest moment in Saul's life he came to realized just how powerful Christ is.

Both men went on to become the two most powerful witnesses for the love of God the early church ever saw. In fact it is directly a result of their efforts that we are gathered here today. If God can use two such men - perhaps I am not too damaged to be used still. Hmmm.

Through this entire affair I am learning that faith in God is not something that you talk about. It is not something that can be pulled out of a hat in times of trouble as an emergency exit. *Faith is a lifestyle.* It is something that must be practiced day by day, night by night each minute of every day. And it comes from one source - Prayer.

We do not simply give our trust to friends. It is only after we have known them for some amount of time that we really begin to trust them. And how do we get to know them - talking. Prayer is just that. It is spending time with God.