



FAITH

Extract from 'Awakening Cry' by Pete Greig

Much of our praying is nothing short of the laughing stock of devils; praying 'God, you're the God of revival! You're the God of the impossible!' when we don't believe a word of it. If we did the miracle would happen. Oh my people, let's be frank and honest: He's not doing it! We are faced with this question: "Can these bones live? Can we really expect revival? Can God match this situation?"

More and more people are praying for revival and prayer-groups are multiplying. National and international initiatives gather hundreds of thousands of Christians in prayer and this is utterly thrilling. But scripture clearly teaches that it is not so much the quantity of prayer but the quality; the depth, the perseverance, the humility and above all the faith behind it. We are probably all guilty at times of praying faithless prayers more akin to wishful thinking than actual spiritual authority. But no matter how impressive our prayers sound, without faith they are powerless and pointless like a gleaming sports car without an engine.

Faith in the faithfulness of God

Faith is the vital ingredient of the Christian life; Jesus would often distil complex situations down to the essence of faith, informing the sick, "Your faith has healed you" or rebuking people for their unbelief. The writer to the Hebrews says that without faith it is completely impossible to make God happy. The disciples approached the Lord one day and asked for more faith, but in reply Jesus gently admonished them: "You don't need more faith. There is no 'more' or 'less' in faith. If you have a bare kernel of faith, say the size of a poppy seed, you could say to this sycamore tree, "Go jump in the lake," and it would do it." (Eugene Peterson)

With our western quantitative mind sets we interpret this reference to "faith as small as a mustard seed" (NIV) as referring to an amount of faith necessary. We might think that our present quantity of faith is the size of a mere speck of dust and as a result we only see the occasional verruca healed, but that if we could somehow grow our faith to the size of a mustard seed then we would be able to rearrange the landscape.

But ironically this is the very mentality that Jesus is rebuking! He is saying that size doesn't matter. Miracles are not proportional to the quantity of faith because even the tiniest amount imaginable could shift a mountain. Lots more faith is not the answer to the mountains of cancer or evangelism. The key is not faith in a power formula, but faith in a powerful person. Jesus is saying that either you place your trust in him or you don't. When I board an airplane I place my entire trust in the pilot's ability to do what I cannot do and fly that 'plane. It is not possible to 'hedge my bets, just in case' and keep one foot on the runway as we take off! I must either place my trust in the pilot, in which case I fly, or I can distrust the pilot and remain firmly on the ground, but there is no in between. In the same way there is no sliding scale when it comes to faith.



Hudson Taylor, the great missionary to China, wrote "The issue is not greater faith, but faith in a great God." If we lack faith, therefore, it is futile trying to stir it up from within. Instead we need a revelation of the greatness of God. When we discover that his name is Faithful, that his promises are sure and that he is utterly trustworthy it becomes easy to trust him. The first approach focuses on self to try to arouse faith, the second approach derives faith from the realisation that God really can be trusted. Focusing on quantities of faith as the answer to a situation makes faith out to be some kind of formula for manipulating reality (no matter how many Bible verses are woven into the equation). Such faith-formulae may even work, since there may well be an inherent, limited power in 'mind over matter' that is neither demonic nor divine. For instance, there are authenticated reports of mothers lifting cars off their children after a road accident with apparently superhuman strength. Similarly, some Management Training Courses teach clients to run barefoot over red-hot coals simply by psyching themselves up. There is no burning to the feet because - like passing a finger through a flame - it is quite possible to do this apparently impossible act without harm. Yet one coal-runner commented 'I now believe I can do almost anything'. This has everything to do with faith but nothing whatsoever to do with Jesus. It is clearly not a faith that flows from the revelation of God's will. Even Christians may use faith equations based on Bible verses, to achieve real results that have little to do with Jesus. He actually warned us that many would succeed in performing miracles in his name without ever having known him (Mat. 7.23). Biblical faith has nothing to do with the power of positive thinking. It is faith in a person and not in a principle or technique and so we must be people whose faith is lodged firmly in the Word of God.

Jesus modelled God-focused faith perfectly, "I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me;" (John 8.28) Here then is the key to Jesus' power: he lived his life focused upon the Father, saying only what he heard the Father saying and doing only what he saw the Father doing. Confronted by incurable illnesses, demonic manifestations or stormy seas Jesus fixed his eyes upon the Father. There is no cure in the illness, no freedom in the demoniac and no peace in the storm. But we put our hope in the higher reality that God is the God of health, freedom and peace. The issue is not faith but focus therefore. No wonder we are told to "pray and seek God's face" for it is only as we look to him that we find faith for breakthrough.

If Peter had pulled out a video camera and filmed the scene as Jesus arrived at Jairus' house, we would have found the evidence conclusive: Jairus' daughter was indeed dead. We would see for ourselves the mourners in black, the mother pale and weeping and the corpse lifeless on the bed. But Jesus was watching another reality as he entered the house and announced with absolute certainty "She is not dead but asleep." In a matter of minutes the mourners discovered that Jesus, far from being deluded, was more in touch with reality than every single one of them because he kept his eyes fixed on heaven, walking "by faith, not by sight." (2



Corinthians 57)

Faith in the promises of God

All the mighty interceding of the ages that has ever shaken the Kingdom of darkness has been based upon the promises of God. Why should we expect God to do what he has not agreed to do?

It is because faith comes from knowing God that his promises are so vital, providing a foundation on which to base our faith. They assure us of his provision when we are in need, his love when we are lonely and his victory even when the material evidence appears to point to defeat. Materialism (the belief that matter is all that matters) is the greatest enemy of faith. Its inverted creed of "walk by sight and not by faith" will often contradict the promises of God's Word. When Christians live in an environment of materialism they find it hard to see the world with eyes of faith. But in non-materialistic cultures the most remarkable miracles consistently take place in answer to prayer. Our worship leader visited Nigeria and found that he was able to perform miracles in that atmosphere that just don't happen here on the same scale. He even interviewed a man who had raised seven corpses from the dead. If matter is our ultimate focus then death is ultimate defeat. But if the resurrected Christ is our focus we can look beyond a corpse and see life, hope and victory.

Get real!

All this talk about 'walking by faith rather than sight' and ignoring the physical evidence to trust God for something else, could be a ticket for super-spiritual unreality. I have known people to pray unsuccessfully for healing only to inform the suffering person "You have been healed⁷⁰; it's just the symptoms that remain"! This is completely ridiculous. The greatest gift that God wants to give to some Christians is not tongues or prophecy but common sense. I am not for one moment suggesting that we kiss our brains good-bye and deny blatant reality. In fact God-focused faith is not unreal, but is based upon firm evidence. As Finney put it, "Faith must have evidence. Without reason we have no right - and no obligation - to believe a thing will be done. Belief without evidence is fanaticism."

Faith must be founded upon three vital pieces of evidence:

the evidence of God's promises, the evidence of circumstance and the evidence of God's specific command.

Because these evidences are individually open to misapplication and misinterpretation we need to make ourselves accountable before praying over corpses, selling all our possessions or marrying the complete stranger in the third row! If we are honest, not many of us have an intimacy with the Father sufficient to declare with absolute certainty "she is not dead but sleeping", which is why we need to measure our inclinations against the Word of God, heeding common sense and the wise counsel of others.



When faith is based on evidence

and applied accountably it does not need to be frightened of facts. If someone has been healed then the doctor will verify this, and until s/he has done so, vital medication should not normally be abandoned. When I offer to pray with a non-Christian for healing I will always be honest about the possibility that it might not work. They invariably appreciate this honesty and reality, as well as the fact that I care enough to risk praying even though there is no guaranteed result.

We have seen in this chapter that our prayers for revival must be faith-full and that such faith only comes by taking God at his word and trusting his promises. Isaiah said that if we want to "soar on wings as eagles", riding the thermals of the Spirit, we must wait on God. Timing is everything. In fact without such waiting and watching, all our praying and preparing will never get off the ground; we will resemble frantic turkeys flapping around clumsily, rather than the majestic eagle God intends. Nicky Gumbel recounts a vivid illustration of this point:

"Eagles do not fly - if you mean by that the flapping of wings to propel them from one place to another. Other birds do that, but not eagles. They have an inborn ability to discern wind currents. They do not go anywhere until the right breeze comes along. When it comes, they just let go, born aloft by the wind. They do not have to flap their wings (how uncouth!) - eagles have the ability to lock their wings in place. All they do is ride the wind. Other birds are afraid of storms. Eagles love a storm. It forces them higher and higher and higher.

Many Christians do their work for the Lord by the sweat of their brow. They join the cult of white knuckles. They really 'work for God', like turkeys. Have you ever seen a turkey fly?: They beat themselves into insensibility, propelling themselves across a farmyard. They cannot get more than three feet off the ground. Eagle Christians do not serve by the grit of their teeth or sweat of their brow. It is service by the power of God through the wind of the Holy Spirit - discerning his purpose and then going with it, not trying to get him to bless your mess."