

A Spiritual GPS

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I'll believe it when I see it. Common phrase, isn't it?

But we know that we are called by God to walk by faith and not by sight.¹ We are called to set our minds on things above, not on earthly things.² We are called to embrace the invisible.

My "I'll believe it when I see it" moment occurred nearing the end of 2023, when my relationship of nearing two years ended in a few brief moments. As Christmas rolled around, I felt hurt and lonely, but the time to slow down gave me the opportunity to reflect on the relationship and, most especially, my relationships with my family, my friends, my Heavenly Father, and my saviour Jesus Christ.

I had spent almost two years with someone who had never known God and who had quite a different perspective to my own when it came to life and our connection with the world around us. When she broke up with me, she cited that it was due to my religion that the relationship simply could not work. She could not see the value in believing in a God who we cannot see. She could not see the value of Jesus' death for a world so full of turmoil since he was not standing on a street corner protesting. She could not see the value of faith in the invisible – in what was not tangible.

Once the dust had settled, I realised I too had drifted off course. I had distanced myself from my family, from my friends, and from my Heavenly Father in pursuit of a relationship that proved to be but a breath of wind. I needed to find that narrow path once more and to put my faith firmly back in God's ever-loving hands. I had to place my faith back in the *invisible*, back in the very real sensation of God's guidance and love.

¹ 2Corinthians 5:7

² Colossians 3:2

These next words are a message to myself. I hope they serve as a reminder to you, dear reader, to embrace the invisible. To walk by faith and not by sight.

Faith and Trials

We are told throughout the Bible that walking by faith is not an easy task and we will face many trials. But walking by faith will lead us to the richest blessings from God. Blessings beyond measure as Peter says,

Your faith will be like gold that has been tested in a fire. And these trials will prove that your faith is worth much more than gold that can be destroyed. (1Pe 1:7)

Within the Bible, there is this connection which exists between faith and suffering. In the moment, it can be hard to remove ourselves from the fear of suffering and to embrace that faith which will bring us closer to God, to his incredible comfort, and to his loving embrace. As we read in the Psalms,

The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. He fulfills the desires of those who fear him; he hears their cry and saves them. (Ps 145:18-19)

Fear, in the context of our lives, often brings into sharp focus the circumstances that we are in – our pain, our challenges, our illnesses – but we are urged to replace our fear with faith. Our fear of suffering is brought on by unconsciously thinking that if we are followers of Christ and live out our faith, then we must be *free* of trials. In other words, if we are good then why do we suffer? Asaph grappled with this very thing,

This is what the wicked are like – always free of care, they go on amassing wealth. Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure and have washed my hands in innocence. All day long I have been afflicted, and every morning brings new punishments. (Ps 73:12-14)

Our fear of suffering blindfolds us to the discipline of our loving Heavenly Father, to the very lessons He is trying to teach us.³ Our fear of suffering blindfolds us to the love that God shows to us, to his outstretched hand that wishes to lead us through the darkest valleys. And on top off all of this? Our fear of suffering does not let us bring into focus God's plan and Kingdom, which is far greater than any present affliction.

³ This discipline is described in Job 5:17-25.

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. (2Cor 4:16-18)

We walk by faith and not by sight: *For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.*

Doubt

We have all experienced doubt, haven't we? The busyness of our lives, the constant bombardment of all that is going on around the world, the hardships we face, maybe the hardships other people around us face – it can cause us to doubt.

What do *you* doubt? Maybe you doubt God's power, maybe his love and care for us, maybe his plan for our world? A doubt which I still grapple with to this day is whether God listens to us. Does he hear my prayers? Does he answer them? Or am I just having a one-way conversation? How do we know he does answer prayers? Well, through the many accounts written within the Bible and the experiences in our own lives. God does not always answer prayers in the time that we wish, let alone in the way that we imagine. For me, this is still a challenging source of doubt.

But then comes the question, Is doubt the opposite of faith? Well, it isn't! Isn't *unbelief* the opposition to faith?

Hebrews chapter eleven is filled with faithful individuals, but when we read it, we see there are quite a few who had doubts – times where they questioned God's purpose. Sarah and Abraham laughed when God promised them a child in old age. Moses was too afraid to go and speak with Pharaoh. Gideon asked for three signs from God before he would follow God's plan for him.

And we have many accounts of Jesus' disciples doubting. One such instance gave us a saying still used today: doubting Thomas. Thomas doubted the resurrection of Jesus because he had not yet put his fingers where the nails were and put his hand into Jesus' side. Jesus then appears to Thomas and invites him to do just that, and Thomas makes one of the most beautiful

declarations: *“My Lord, and my God!”* He went from doubting to an incredible declaration of his faith.⁴

All these individuals had periods of doubt and yet we still count them as these titans of faith. Why is this? It was how they *reacted* to their doubts. They didn’t let it grow into *unbelief*. They didn’t lose their faith. In fact, they took a “leap of faith”. Despite the questions and doubts they had, they leaned on God, and they made it through, as described in Proverbs,

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him and he will make your paths straight. (Prov 3:5-6)

Maybe it doesn’t have to be a leap, maybe just that one step forward. Hold out your hand to God. Ask him for help.

Be strong and courageous.... The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. (Deut 31:7-8)

At the end of Hebrews chapter eleven, there is an amazing message for us all,

All these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect. (Heb 11:39)

They were looking forward to the promise of a Messiah, the Prince of Peace, the Christ, but they never saw it fulfilled. *Yet, they still believed.* They walked by faith; they were certain of the things hoped for; they were sure of the unseen. They may have doubted, but they *pressed on*.

A Refiner’s Fire

If doubt is not the opposite of faith, is doubt useful in our journey? Absolutely it is.

Doubt or questioning is like the refiner’s fire, helping to remove the dross from our faith.⁵ God is the gardener who prunes us, so we grow to be more fruitful.⁶

Doubt is an opportunity for transformation. It is a healthy process to go through. Doubt should not be masked; it should be embraced fully as a moment to further develop and try our

⁴ see John 20:25-28

⁵ 1Peter 1:6-7

⁶ John 15:2

faith. It is a moment to put to death a life which is rooted in this current world – in mammon – and to grow more firmly rooted in a life which embraces the saving name of Jesus Christ.⁷

For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. (Rom 6:5-7)

A Mustard Seed

So now, how much faith do I really *need* to walk by faith?

Jesus spoke to his disciples about this when they were asking why they could not drive out a demon. He said,

Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mount, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you. (Mt 17:20)

Isn't this an incredible illustration? Jesus says it is not the *amount* of faith we show that is important, but rather the *kind* of faith we show.

Do we have faith in ourselves, in our skills, in our money? Or do we place our faith in God? If we have faith in God, even if it is as small as a mustard seed, nothing is impossible. How incredible is that? Jesus also said, *Everything is possible for one who believes. (Mk 9:23)*

Consider once more Gideon. He had faith to place a fleece of wool out on the threshing floor as a test, so that he could *see* what God's plan was for him. God gives him a clear answer. Perhaps he doubted he would even receive an answer. And so, what does he do? He performs the same test again, but asks for the inverse, just to make doubly sure that he was clear on what God wanted. How many of us want to do this? We might not use a fleece as Gideon who was a farmer did, but do we have courage for our own version of this test? At least Gideon was courageous.

So how do we walk by faith? By letting go, by receiving forgiveness, by travelling together, and by keeping God at the centre of our lives.

⁷ *Whoever loses their life for my sake will find it. (Matthew 10:38-39)*

Letting Go

How do we let go of our fear, our doubts, our focus on all that is going on around us and happening to us? How do we instead focus on walking by faith? How do we take that next step as all those in Hebrews chapter eleven did? Well, in the following chapter we are told exactly how.

So then, let us rid ourselves of everything that gets in the way, and of the sin which holds on to us so tightly, and let us run with determination the race that lies before us. Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from beginning to end. He did not give up because of the cross! On the contrary, because of the joy that was waiting for him, he thought nothing of the disgrace of dying on the cross, and he is now seated at the right side of God's throne. (Heb 12:1-2, GNT)

Let us draw on Gideon again. Gideon was a farmer, and he was called upon by God to deliver Israel with just 300 men against the Midianite army of 135,000. He had no previous experience in leading a military campaign, but God had a plan. Gideon threw off his doubts in his own abilities. He took a leap of faith and placed his full trust in God.

What are *your* hindrances?

Receiving Forgiveness

We need to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus and we need to keep running to him. Even when we falter, God will help us. But we must make the leap of faith – that next step – to continue running. Jesus has taken care of the sin; we have been washed clean. There is no longer guilt, but rather the free gift of eternal life from God.

But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:4-7)

Without the guilt, we are able to come to God with an open heart. We are not bound by shame but given the opportunity for transformation. As John says,

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1John 1:9)

Instead of saying, *I am a bad person; I am not good enough, God; I am worthless*, we put away our sin – and the guilt and shame that come with it. Instead, we can say,

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting. (Ps 139: 23-24)

This is a challenging idea for me: putting off the hindrance of guilt and shame, and embracing the grace which opens me up to transformation.

Travelling Together

And that brings me to a very important point: *we need to support each other*. We need to run the race together, encouraging each other to keep moving, and taking the time to support someone who has fallen behind, who is hurt, or who is feeling fatigued.

As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another (Pr 27:17) Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing (1Thess 5:11).

In light of this, let us take a moment to consider our own faith community, our own ecclesias.

Within our own community there is often a feeling of not wishing to share oneself too much with another. I don't know whether this is just my perspective as a young person, or whether this is shared across all generations. We show up on a Sunday, engage in a bit of small talk, partake in the Memorial Meeting, and then part ways once more. If we do this, we are missing these words from Proverbs,

A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity. (Pr 17:17)

We are brothers and sisters in Christ, are we not? For me, I have had the opportunity of being on the committee for the Youth Circle in Brisbane and one initiative that we have put in place is a discussion evening called 'Real Talk'. It is an opportunity to anonymously share questions and discuss what has been on our minds as young people in this world today. Although it is still in its infancy, I hope that it will begin to build a culture of deep spiritual connection and conversation amongst young people – because we are a family in Christ after all. We need to embrace these words from Romans,

So we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another (Rom 12:5)

An African proverb that echoes all this beautifully states, “If you want to go *fast*, go alone. If you want to go *far*, go together.”

Let us travel together.

Keeping God at the Centre

Another thing that we need is to continually feed on God’s word. We need to grow our faith by watering it with the wisdom and teachings found within the Bible. As we see when Jesus is tempted out in the wilderness, knowing God’s word can put us in good stead to keep our eyes firmly fixed on God’s plan for us.

We often place our faith in the temporal things around us – in our finances, our material possessions, our career success. (This is true for me, and I’m sure all of you have experienced this as well.) Now, there are absolutely no issues with these things on their own, but the problem is when our faith becomes greater in *those areas* than our faith in God and the plan and gift which has been granted to us from Him.

We must try to always keep God and Jesus at the centre of our lives. They are the thread which should be drawn through all we think, say, and do.

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear.

Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?

Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?

Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.

If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you – you of little faith?

So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. (Matt 6:25-34)

Seek first the Kingdom of God. It is not, seek *third* the Kingdom of God, after our finances, careers, and studies. It is seek *first* the Kingdom of God, and all these things will be added unto you. Be grateful to all that God has given you. Let God permeate all that you are and all that you do. God must be the centre of our universe.

A Refuge

So, let us keep our eyes firmly fixed on Jesus our saviour, constantly consuming the spiritual food found within the Bible and continually talking with God through prayer. All of this allows us to walk by faith – not walking alone but with each other – towards that promise of something far greater. God works in our lives here and now. God has a wonderful plan for us.

We are told throughout the Bible that faith doesn't stop trials, temptations, and suffering in our lives – they will come – but we can trust.

Trust in the Lord with all our heart and lean not on our own understanding; he will make our paths straight. (Prov 3:5-6)

When we walk by faith – even in all the storms of life – we can find refuge, we can find peace, we can find rest.

For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from him. He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken. On God rests my salvation and my glory; my mighty rock, my refuge is God. Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us. (Ps 62:5-8)