



# An Anchored Faith

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How do you stay anchored when experiencing growth or shifts in faith?

A bit little about me and my background: I grew up in a Christadelphian community. I attended Sunday School. The Bible I knew was full of concrete thinking with clear rights and wrongs. It had the answers. A steadfast immovable faith was the goal. It felt anchoring to have certainty and absolutes, but there wasn't a lot of room for questions or interpretations.

The Faith that I have now sometimes feels like there are more questions than answers. That used to feel like a bad thing. But it's a faith of curiosity and exploration. Of turning the Bible over and seeing what stands. This new Faith I have is different than my earlier faith. It isn't stiff or rigid or legal. It doesn't break. It's a faith that needs engagement and intention and purpose. Without being anchored in engagement, it can go adrift.

## Drifting

Every summer, my family and I spend a week in the Finger Lakes region of upstate New York in the United States. We spend our week swimming and kayaking and eating marshmallows and jumping off the dock. On our last trip, on the last day of our stay, the weather was perfect. The sun was out with a gentle breeze. The lake was still and quiet. It was ideal. I pulled a floaty out past the dock and climbed on top. One of my sisters came out with her tube and linked up to mine. We spent the time laying on our backs, looking at the blue skies and puffy clouds. Gently rising with the waters. It was incredibly peaceful, like we were the only ones out on the entire lake. After a lot of daydreaming and some time resting with our eyes closed, we opened them only to find we had drifted several docks away down the lake. Without an anchor – without putting in any efforts to stay where we needed to be – we had drifted. During the many kayak outings we had that week, the only reason we were successful in our journeys is because we were constantly paddling. We were constantly engaged.

So how do we stay engaged with our faith?

How do we avoid drifting?

## Practicing

One way to stay engaged with faith is to *practice*. My husband is a professional pianist and composer. A lot of people would consider him an expert. As an expert, with several degrees and years of experience, he will still generally spend a minimum of 2 to 3 hours a day, 6 days a week, practicing his craft. He starts with scales and exercises, the same ones that he played when he first took up the instrument as a child. He will then move on to etudes to focus on particular areas to stretch. After that he'll play familiar music and then finally settle on new repertoire that he has set as goals to learn and to later perform. People often wonder why he practices and he would tell you that without practice, not only would he not progress but even more so, he would regress and stagnate and lose the level of mastery that he has worked for so tirelessly.

Being engaged in faith requires practice. We complete faith in an *action*. In its very roots, action is intended. More accurately, faith might be called *faith-ing* – a verb. Faith stirs you to movement and change and growth. It is something you are meant to *do*. If I want to know God and to know Jesus, I need to do what they do. God's word is meant to be absorbed and turned into the narrative of my day-to-day life. This takes effort and practice. Practicing is the opposite of stagnation. When I practice, I might make some mistakes. These mistakes then lead to lessons learned. As a result, engaged faith grows.

## Stirring Up

The second way to stay engaged with faith is to be engaged with *community* and to stir each other up. Hebrews says,

*Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. (Heb 10:23-25)*

We are meant to be in community. Community is where we demonstrate the fruit of the spirit. Community is where we encourage each other through our trials and where we

demonstrate the love of God, where our faith is stirred into action. Some of the most meaningful friendships I have, I found in community. These friendships have been encouraging and inspiring. They have changed my faith and, as a result, the way I live my life. And yet it isn't always easy to be in our community. I find it quite challenging in certain pockets. Conflict can bring questions and difficult scenarios to navigate through.

I have found that faith can be stirred into action as a result of the inspiring friendships *as well as* the challenging personalities in our community.

## Wrestling

The third way to stay engaged with faith is to *wrestle*. The letter to Timothy tells us to *fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called. (1Tim 6:12)*. A famous example of someone who wrestled with their faith and took hold of it is Jacob. In Genesis 32 we find Jacob at a crossroads.

*And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him.*

*Then he said, "Let me go, for the day has broken."*

*But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."*

*And he said to him, "What is your name?"*

*And he said, "Jacob."*

*Then he said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed."*

*Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name."*

*But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him.*

*So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered." The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, limping because of his hip. (Gen 32:24-31)*

At this point in Jacob's life we find him at odds with his brother, in conflict with his father-in-law. He was wandering throughout the land with his possessions in tow. And after years of

wrestling with God throughout his life, he holds on. He decides to cling to God. He leans in. He takes hold of his faith.

Later in the Bible when Jacob is mentioned in Hebrews 11, his staff is specifically mentioned. This is the staff that he likely leaned on in the years following the encounter in Genesis 32. *By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff. (Heb 11:21)* We can see when looking at his life that his faith was changed by this encounter. He was transformed by his engagement with God and his staff certainly must have been a constant reminder, anchoring him to that pivotal encounter. And like Jacob, I hope that I will continue to be engaged in my faith and wrestle with who I am and who I am not and how I can be the best version of myself, the most Jesus-like.

## Engagement

These ways of living – practicing faith, stirring one another up in our faith communities, and wrestling with questions – all require engagement. Faith requires engagement. And being anchored in engagement leads to a growing, expansive faith. When I am not anchored in engagement, that’s when drift and loss happen. Like being engaged to a future spouse, being engaged in faith requires commitment. And being engaged is just the beginning of a relationship that will deepen and grow.

A quote from a favorite author of mine, Bob Goff, reads,

*Being engaged is a way of doing life, a way of living and loving. It’s about going to extremes and expressing the bright hope that life offers us, a hope that makes us brave and expels darkness with light. That’s what I want my life to be all about – full of abandon, whimsy, and in love. But the kind of love that God created and demonstrated is a costly one because it involves sacrifice and presence. It’s a love that operates more like a sign language than being spoken outright.<sup>1</sup>*

Being engaged in my faith means expressing the bright hope that I hold on to. It is demonstrated through sacrifice and presence. It is a faith that operates like a sign language.

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<sup>1</sup> from *Love Does: Discover a Secretly Incredible Life in an Ordinary World* by Bob Goff

## Steadfastness

It's important to remind ourselves – in the midst of our wrestling and stirrings and often drifting – that God is the one who demonstrates absolute steadfastness. The beginning of Psalm 118 reads,

*Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever! Let Israel say, "His steadfast love endures forever." Let the house of Aaron say, "His steadfast love endures forever." Let all who fear the LORD say, "His steadfast love endures forever."*

Lamentations states,

*The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him." (Lam 3:22-24)*

The way that God demonstrates his steadfast love is in how he restores, establishes, strengthens, and supports us. We read in 1 Peter,

*The God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, establish, strengthen, and support you. (1Pe 5:10b)*

To fully understand the meaning of this verse, I want to define the words that have been translated to restore, establish, strengthen, and support. The word translated *to restore* means to mend something that has been broken. God will reset your bones that have been broken. The word translated *to establish* means to make stable and prop up. God will prevent you from toppling over and he will reinforce your *external* weaknesses. The word translated *to strengthen* means to properly make strong so that you can move. The focus is on strengthening and supporting your soul – your *internal* weaknesses – so that you can be effective. The word translated *to support* means to lay a foundation. God will settle and stabilize your foundation. If we insert those definitions into the verse, the passage reads,

*The God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself put you back together by resetting your broken bones, prevent you from toppling over, prevent you from collapsing, and he will settle and stabilize your foundation. (1Pe 5:10b)*

We see this demonstration of God's steadfast love in his interactions with Jacob. Perhaps using his staff daily reminded Jacob that God had reset his broken bones, that he had prevented

him from toppling over or collapsing into himself, that the result was a life settled on the stable foundation of his God. This was a foundation he later shared with his offspring as, when he was dying, he blessed each of the sons of Joseph, as he bowed in worship over the head of his staff.

How has God demonstrated his steadfast love in your own life?

## Unrelenting Love

It is tempting to crave certainty and steadfastness in our faith – in immovable absolutes and concreteness – but that is not faith. Faith moves. It involves questions and curiosity and exploration. It shifts and grows.

Where, then, do we find stability? We find it in God. *God* is steadfast. *That* is what we can be certain of. He demonstrates his certainty and steadfastness in his unrelenting, and pursuing, love. The steadfast thing that we can cling to is being known and loved *by God*. That is what we can rest on. There is nothing you can do to gain or lose His love. He has already fully expressed his love for us in the death of his son and our brother Jesus Christ.

May we find restoration.

May we be anchored in an established faith, in strength, and in a foundation of steadfast love from our God.