

Daily Devotional, April 1, 2020 Keeping The Faith

When we are enjoying the good times in life, it's easy for us to talk about faith. It's easy for us to say we believe and to encourage others to "keep the faith" when they're feeling blue. But what about in times like what we're experiencing now--days and now weeks of prolonged uncertainty and fear? How do we keep our faith resilient when experiencing challenging periods?

As I ponder this question, I begin reading. I read the Bible, prayer books and blogs by Christian authors, and yet, even with all the reading, all the praying and all the exercises of trying to stay peaceful, some days are overwhelming, and I found myself begging God to drop me a line. Nothing happened. Silence.

How often do we pray over and over for God to bring relief and to change the outlook and yet see and hear nothing? We feel discouraged, depressed... and anxious. Why isn't God answering my prayers? Why isn't God making Himself known? We feel weak and insecure and alone. It is in these moments that we need to remember: We grow in our faith—and it takes time. The Fact is, the struggle is what strengthens us.

The faith that we carry is not often tested much in the good times. This faith that we nurture, is tested during our times of trial and of questioning the many U turns we take on our road through life. When we raise the question, "Where are you, God?" and then hear crickets chirping, that's when we must face the decision: Okay, am I going to believe anyway—nurturing an even stronger faith—trusting that God is with me even in this still moment? Or will I conclude that God is nowhere to be found, and instead take a few steps back in my growth?

Sometimes we can see the evil one's temptation at work in these moments; sometimes we're oblivious. We move forward, backward and sideways, but along the excursion we're growing when our number of forward steps become greater. Taking forward steps is your faith in action.

So how do we keep faith right now, as we keep receiving such depressing news of illnesses and the latest death count, and the feelings of being trapped, isolated in a way that makes our own homes feel like prisons? Well, first, *Settle into the Faith You Already Have*. Make a deliberate decision to remain faithful even when there seems to be no goal in sight and no sense of release from the anxiety. Settle into and endure the discomfort that comes from trusting in what you cannot perceive. This is not a question of taking a risk—it's a matter of strengthening your faith.

Do you struggle with trusting God? Try to think of this as learning a new stretching exercise (which it actually is for the brain) or a new skill. Getting to the next stage demands a time of discomfort while you push forward. In time, you begin to see and feel the difference. "This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints." (Revelation 13:10)

In addition, we must *Pray for Strength and Support*. As we experience a certain level of anxiety, pray for God's guidance and support as we take our steps forward, and also pray that God will give us the strength to endure. Along the way there will be constant temptations that will divert and mislead us and will falsely satisfy us, but we must believe that we can pray right through it. "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans." (Romans 8:26) If we should fall into temptation, which all of us do at times, merely start over. Keep making a decision for God over and over again.

And finally, *Keep Your Roots Buried in Rich Soil*. Whenever the weight of the load you're carrying seems too great to handle, bury yourself deeper in the abundance of the rich soil that is all around you. We unfortunately are being told not to surround ourselves with loving friends, we cannot drop into church to feel the warmth of the rich soil that strengthens our community of faith But we can call one another, we can text and email and use other social media such as Facebook to yet draw from the richness of that soil. We can read the Bible, and through its richness, we may find some encouraging messages that we can send to one another. We can *watch an online sermon*, and afterward, talk about what we drew from it though the comments or through all these other media platforms.

At any time, ask someone you love to pray with you or meditate on positive thoughts. Keep your roots planted in the Word. The tough times will hit us, they already have, but we are living for something much, much bigger. Remember: "Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown." (Mark 4:20)

Prayer: Thank you Lord for your Word that says you give us the power to come out of this trial stronger than before. Thank you that this ordeal will not last forever, for we're only passing through—cautiously, yet faithfully. Thank you that nothing has taken you by surprise. You know our journey better than we know it ourselves, and you will use this time of testing for good. Thank you for the rich soil of your Word and the many friends and family members that are part of the rich soil that we have taken root in. May our roots ever be entwined in you, To Christ be the glory, Amen.