

STEPS OF FAITH

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Jan 19, 2014

Congregational reading: Hebrews 11:1-2, 13, 32-40.

Sermon in a sentence: Let us allow our faith in God to grow until our trust in Him is complete.

Scriptures: Mark 11:22; Heb. 11 *1, 6, 13, 32-40; Heb. 12:1-2; Job 19:25-27a; Job 14:7; Psalm 39 *7; Psalm 42, 43; Prov. 3:5-6

Key words: Faith (pistis); knowledge (oida); hope (elpis); trust (pisteuo – cognate of pistis)

Recent events have again brought us face to face with the question of what it really means to have faith in God and how we should conduct ourselves in light of this understanding. We have recently heard a couple of great messages on prayer and have taken time last week to practice it in a more deliberate and focused way.

Bro. Tom Foster recently preached to us on the topic of the stepping-stones beyond Passion: (Obsession and Possession). Today I would like us to follow that train of thought to consider what lies beyond simple faith and belief in God – i.e. the stepping-stones of faith.

(In 1 Cor. 7, the apostle Paul spoke about issues that were critically important for the church to understand that did not seem to have clear biblical answers. He thus spoke out of his own Spirit-led understanding and also spoke the Word he had received from the Lord. That is my intention today.)

Jesus spoke to His disciples in Mark 11:22 and made a very simple statement to them: "Have faith in God". This concept was reiterated to the man who brought his son to Him to have a devil cast out (Mk. 11:19-23).

The writer to the Hebrews explained and gave examples of great faith in chapter 11 of his book, encouraging us to follow in the steps of our faith-full predecessors.

However, we need to progress beyond simple Faith in God to the place of Knowledge. Knowledge is the stage where we have absolutely no doubt of the fact that God IS! Job exemplified this as he was going through his trials and stated:

Job 19:25-27a KJV For **I know** *that* my redeemer liveth, and *that* he shall stand at the latter *day* upon the earth:
²⁶ And *though* after my skin *worms* destroy this *body*, yet in my flesh shall I see God: ²⁷ Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another....

Knowledge is the place where there are no further questions on certain topics. Through our learning and our experiences, we *know*. We *know* the sky is blue and the sun is hot. We *know* we are alive and O₂ and H₂O keep us going. These are things we don't need to prove to ourselves through science or philosophy, because 'we know that we know that we know'. I *know* that God is real. I *know* He hears me when I pray. I *know* all power is in His hands. I *know* He will never leave me nor forsake me. I *know* He does all things well. I *know* my times are in His hands. I have learned these things. I have experienced these things. I *know* these things.

Then beyond Knowledge is Hope. Because of what I know, I can have hope that the Lord will act on my behalf in my situation.

The writers of Psalms 42 & 43 – (the sons of Korah), put special emphasis on Hope. They spoke of people that ridiculed their belief in God, and of their own feeling that He had abandoned and rejected them. Although it was clear that everything was going wrong, they still returned to their refrain, their chorus, three times:

Ps. 42:11 KJV Why art thou cast down O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? **Hope thou in God:** for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God. (see also 42:5; 43:5)

We *believe* there is a God. We *know* there is a God. And we have placed all our *hope* in Him that He will take care of that which concerns us.

But what happens if He doesn't answer our prayers in the way we have asked Him to? What happens when all the scriptures we have memorized and quoted about God answering prayer don't seem to be working, and our situation is getting worse?

That's when we move from Hope in God to Trust in God. I would propose that Trust is the highest level of faith.

Trust says: "I may never see the answer to *my* fervent prayer, but I absolutely trust that God is doing what is best for His kingdom and His purposes through me. At the end of the day, it is His will that must be done, even at the expense of my will.

Trust says: "Have Your way Lord. I submit to your Lordship." "Have Your way Lord. Not my will but Thy will be done."

Many Christians say words like these as a matter of course without thinking through the implications of what they're really saying to God! Do we really believe He owns us and can do whatever He wants to do with us? Do we really understand that our lives can give glory to God in sickness as well as in health? Do we really accept the fact that our poverty may serve God's purposes better than our wealth? Do we readily accept the fact that our utter reliance on Him vs. our power for independent action is key to His willingness to work with us?

Let us progress in our understanding and our prayer to the point where we trust God completely to do what He deems best in our situations. The place where He can reveal His will to us, vs. us telling Him what to do with us. Where, with humble, thankful hearts, we pray the "nevertheless" prayer (Mt. 26:29).

Our trust in God, (as opposed to the first level of faith), is like the crowd at Niagara Falls watching tightrope walker Charles Blondin (mid 1800's) go over the Falls, pushing a wheelbarrow. Did people have faith he could do it? Yes. Did anyone accept the offer to take a ride in the wheelbarrow? No! They had faith, but they didn't have trust.

Are you willing to go for a ride in God's wheelbarrow? Let us trust Him with our very lives.

Prov. 3:5-6 NASB **Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. ⁶ In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.**