sharing ideas

Helping our young people to find and nurture a first-hand faith in God

As Christian leaders, we recognize that most of our young people are attending secular colleges and universities. What are we doing to nurture them and help them to discover and nurture a first-hand faith in God?

Some years ago, Christian apologist Ravi Zacharias made the following troubling statement about the intellectual climate on many secular campuses: “I have been in universities where courses are branded as 'God-bashing' courses. I have talked to doctoral level students from very sophisticated universities where professors have openly said to them that the goal of that course was to knock God out of their thinking. I could name one of the Ivy League schools which has a promotional video right now...
where the closing statement is given by a student saying that one of the most fulfilling results of attending that university was to become an intellectually fulfilled atheist.”

We cannot afford to ignore the spiritual care of our brightest young leaders attending public colleges and universities.... [Click HERE for the rest.]


- Derek Morris, editor

**featured articles**

**Faith:**

- [Faith in God: The secret of a fulfilled life](#)
  “Faith does not operate in the realm of the possible. There is no glory for God in that which is humanly possible. Faith begins where man’s power ends.”

- [Reconciling faith and reason](#)
  Can a thinking person be religious? Can a believer be intellectually honest? Is there evidence for religious beliefs? Does it matter? Can we go ahead and believe, whether or not it makes sense?

- [Faith and the Golden Calf](#)
  Belief and faith are not the same thing. Many fail to understand that there is a vital distinction.
• **Faith and science: a personal story**
  The point of these accounts is simple—just as the Gadarene demoniac, I may not have all the answers, but I do have something to say about my experience with Jesus.

• **Grief and faith**
  Some Christians assume that something has gone wrong with their faith if they experience or express grief. But the point remains that in the course of any normal human experience, grief and sadness do have their share. God has made us with the capacity to express our sad as well as happy emotions.

**video**

**Remaining Faithful to the Call of Ministry**

Wintley Phipps explains how to stay focused on one’s calling to ministry when life’s distractions vie for attention.

15 Remaining Faithful to the Call of Ministry
Lessons from Two Lepers - by Fred Hardinge

I find 2 Kings 5 to have both a joyful section and a troubling one as well. Each of these sections powerfully illustrates two important principles of effective health ministry today.

featured website

faithfortoday.org

Click to see what resources this site has available.
Add us to your address book

unsubscribe from this list  update subscription preferences

NOTiCE: Unsubscribing will also cancel digital delivery of your Ministry subscription. If you would simply like to cancel your newsletter subscription, you can do that here.
Editor’s Blog

Helping our young people to find and nurture a first-hand faith in God

I am currently attending a Summit on Public Campus Ministries. As Christian leaders, we recognize that most of our young people are attending secular colleges and universities. What are we doing to nurture them and help them to discover and nurture a first-hand faith in God?

Some years ago, Christian apologist Ravi Zacharias made the following troubling statement about the intellectual climate on many secular campuses: “I have been in universities where courses are branded as “God-bashing” courses. I have talked to doctoral level students from very sophisticated universities where professors have openly said to them that the goal of that course was to knock God out of their thinking. I could name one of the Ivy League schools which has a promotional video right now where the closing statement is given by a student saying that one of the most fulfilling results of attending that university was to become an intellectually fulfilled atheist.”

We cannot afford to ignore the spiritual care of our brightest young leaders attending public colleges and universities. Intentionally establishing Christian support ministries on these campuses should be a top priority for us. As local pastors, many of us have academic institutions close to our churches. Provide a warm and welcoming environment for students who are studying away from home. College and university students also need Christian mentors. Find mature leaders in your church who are willing to serve as mentors. Simple strategies like meals with church families, retreats, and small group Bible studies can help these students to connect and stay connected during times of intense intellectual challenge. Let’s help our young people to find and nurture a first-hand faith in God.

Faith in God: The secret of a fulfilled life

The story has many versions, but the same point. One night a house caught fire and a young boy was forced to escape to the roof. The father stood on the ground below with outstretched arms, calling to his son, “Jump! I’ll catch you.” He knew the boy had to jump to save his life. All the boy could see, however, was flame, smoke, and blackness, and, as can be imagined, he was afraid to leave the roof. His father kept yelling, “Jump! I will catch you.” But the boy complained, “Daddy, I can’t see you.” The father replied, “But I can see you, and that’s all that matters.” The boy’s faith in his father asserted itself even though he could not see his father, but his father could see him. He jumped, safe in his father’s arms. He had faith in his father.

George Mueller, known as a man of prayer, faith, and a builder of orphanages, is reported to have said, “Faith does not operate in the realm of the possible. There is no glory for God in that which is humanly possible. Faith begins where man’s power ends.”

I have experienced the power of such faith in my life. I was not born in a Christian home; faith was not my heritage. I grasped faith when it was given to me as a gift.

I was born in a Buddhist family. I did not know anything about Christ until I entered high school in 1996. An evangelist had come to my town in Malaysia, and out of curiosity, I attended the meetings, heard the Word preached, and it gripped my heart. After the evangelistic meetings, I decided to learn more about the Bible and God. Soon I accepted Christianity and wanted to study theology and become an Adventist preacher. Therefore, I prayed to God to open a door to study theology according to His will. God made this possible when I arrived at Hong Kong Adventist College in December of 1998.

I was a new believer as I had only been baptized for a year. I faced many trials and difficulties when I was studying in Hong Kong. Despite my faith in God, my situation did not change. One of the struggles I was facing was finances; I was a self-supporting student. Besides studying full time, I had six part-time jobs in order to pay off my tuition fees and living expenses. As a result, I suffered physically. My health condition worsened; I had migraine headaches at least three or four times a week because of stress and lack of sleep. I still remember several times when I cried out to God to let me die because the pain was so unbearable. Every time a migraine came, it lasted for days. One evening, when I was admitted into the emergency room, I was hoping the doctor could treat my migraine. However, he simply said, “You need to relax and rest more.”

Faith to the rescue

It was in this period of time that my faith came to my rescue. From the time I became a Christian, the Bible was always my refuge, and I found great comfort in its promises. I treasured God’s Word in my heart. My one consistent prayer was that God would continue to strengthen my faith in Him. I knew that Jesus loved me, and He would always be with me no matter what happens.

Besides financial and physical struggles, another trial I faced was the unfairness of life. Since I was an international student coming from Malaysia, the only scholarship I received was a one-fourth tuition discount from the school. I was jealous of my fellow students who were local and received much more generous scholarships. Neither my desperate needs nor higher grades made any difference. However, my faith did not waver. I reasoned to myself that God was testing me so that my faith could be strengthened in the midst of trials. Just like Job says, “ ‘But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold’ ” (Job 23:10).*

Job! What kind of experience was he going through that led him to make such an affirmation? Job was a
God-fearing follower; he obeyed God and trusted Him.

If we look at Job chapters 1 and 2, we learn that God allowed Satan to test Job. He lost almost everything he had—livestock, children, servants, property, and even his own health. Job 2:7 tells us that Job was afflicted with painful sores from the top of his head to the bottom of his feet. Even his wife told him to curse God and die. Yet, Job replied to her in verse 10, " 'You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?' " In all this, Job did not sin in what he said. This story is recorded in the Bible for us to learn about faith and trust in God. Can you imagine? If you were Job, what would you do? Job would never be able to stand firm on this trial if he did not have a relationship with God. Look at what he said, " 'Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised' " (1:21). Job realized that God is the Lord of our lives. He gives and He takes away.

Despite all these terrible and heartbreaking trials, Job still believed in the Lord, for God was the object of Job’s faith. Our belief affects our attitude and our reaction. What do I mean? Look at the attitude and reaction Job had while facing all these problems. Job’s faith, trust, and belief were all rooted firmly in God. What if his faith and belief were in his children, property, livestock, and servants? Then he might have committed suicide as his wife suggested, “Curse God and die.” Job would have been so hopeless if his faith was based on everything he possessed. That was not the case. His faith was in God, and God never disappears. So, when everything was lost, Job had one assurance that can never be lost and he exclaimed, "My Redeemer lives." In that Living God, Job trusted, so he survived every crisis. He did not lose hope because he based his faith in the Lord—God was the object of his faith.

God opens the way

Going back to my own story, despite my trials and struggles in Hong Kong, I kept praying to God and believing in Him. I was praying for God to open a way for me to study in the United States if it was His will. I also prayed that He would help me pay off all my expenses, tuition fees, and provide me a place to stay. I was very sure that there was no way for me to be able to study in the States if it was not God’s will.

God opened a way for me to study at Southwestern Adventist University in Keene, Texas, United States. I arrived there in August 2000. When I arrived, I did not know anybody. I was by myself, yet I knew that God was with me. Before arriving there I also prayed for God to care for my life and studies.

God is so amazing and great. The day after I landed on the university campus, I went to see different departmental heads and school administrators to check on what kinds of scholarships I could receive. Meanwhile, I also looked at some ads, trying to find a room off campus since it was cheaper.

On the second day of my search, God amazingly put me in touch with a lovely couple. I told them that I wanted to study theology and all I had was the deposit and enough tuition for the first semester. After listening to my testimony, the couple looked at each other. Then the husband told me that they used to rent their rooms out to students, but they did not rent them out anymore. However, just a few days before my arrival, the Holy Spirit impressed the heart of the husband that if there was a student who was studying and working hard and did not have a place to stay, then they would allow the student to stay.

“Now a few days later you’re here,” he said. “I'm sure God has sent you to our house.” The wife showed me one of the rooms and said to me, “Don’t worry about anything. You may stay with us.” They treated me as their own daughter, and let me stay with them for almost one whole year without charging me anything.

It was all God’s doing. I always reminded myself that “we live not by sight, but by faith.” Though I did not have enough money to study, know anyone, or know the culture, I believed God and His promises in the Bible. My faith was in God. I believed His Word, “ ‘You have made the heavens and the earth by your great power . . . nothing is too hard for you’ ” (Jer. 32:17). I know that everything on earth belongs to the Lord, and if it’s His will, then He will hear my prayer just like 1 John 5:14 says, “This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything
according to His will, He hears us” (NASB). I received my Bachelor of Theology at Southwestern Adventist University and Master of Divinity at Andrews University Theological Seminary. I finished these degrees debt free.

The important lessons I learned from my walk with God include: to trust and have faith in Him, believe His Word, and claim His promises because our God loves us so much that He will always carry us through. There might be times when we pray and pray and nothing happens. We believe in God and His promises yet certain things happen that let us down. We might have lost faith in God because of various situations. However, we must never lose heart, never give up hope. Always trust in God.

Augustine is reported to have said, “Faith is to believe what we do not see, and the reward of faith is to see what we believe.” That was the story of Job. That is also my story. And that can be yours too. Just believe in God.

* Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quoted is from the New International Version.
Reconciling faith and reason

Can a thinking person be religious? Can a believer be intellectually honest? Is there evidence for religious beliefs? Does it matter? Can we go ahead and believe, whether or not it makes sense?

Questions like these raise one of the most persistent issues in religion—the relation of faith and reason. Over the years no topic has attracted more theological attention or generated more diverse scholarly opinions. But the issue is more than merely academic. It is a matter of great personal concern. And it is unavoidable. Sooner or later every Christian questions whether his or her beliefs make sense.

According to the Bible, faith is the most important element in religion. It is impossible to please God without faith (Heb. 11:6). And faith is the indispensable condition of human salvation; it is the sole means by which we receive the saving grace of God (Rom. 3:28; Gal. 3:1-9). But the Bible also suggests that faith doesn't come easily. While Jesus said that even an infinitesimal amount of faith could move mountains (Matt. 17:20), He openly wondered whether He would find any faith at all when He returned to earth (Luke 18:8).

These biblical descriptions illuminate the problem that concerns us here. On the one hand, faith is extremely important; on the other, it is anything but easy. And if it has never been easy to believe, the challenges of our time make it more difficult than ever. In the well-known lines of "Dover Beach," British poet Matthew Arnold surveys the "sea of faith" and poignantly records its "melancholy, long, withdrawing roar." The nineteenth century brought sweeping changes in the way people viewed the world, and Arnold feared their impact on religion.

What Arnold saw taking place on a broad scale in Victorian society repeats itself on an individual level in the experience of many Christians today. Bit by bit, like the ebbing of the tide, personal faith seeps away. Finally, what was once a surging religious commitment gives way to the barren sands of doubt and disbelief.

Education taxes faith

Because educated people frequently experience this, some believe that advanced education inevitably erodes faith. They conclude that a person has to choose between serious intellectual inquiry and a genuine commitment to God.

This view is extreme, of course. But it is true that higher education can exert considerable pressure on religious commitment. Several factors account for this. One is the conflict between conventional scientific views and certain religious beliefs. What most scholars in natural sciences such as biology, zoology, and geology believe about the age of the earth and the origins of life contradicts what Christians have traditionally understood biblical passages like Genesis 1-3 to teach. And many scholars of the human sciences accept naturalistic accounts of religion. They hold that religious beliefs arise from various psychological and sociological influences and not from an actual supernatural or divine reality.

Indeed, it is probably accurate to say that God does not function as an explanatory factor in any scientific enterprise today. If the typical scientist were asked about the place of God in his investigations, he would no doubt offer a version of Laplace's famous statement: "I have no need of that hypothesis." 2

Another factor that puts pressure on faith is the "ethic of belief" that prevails in the modern world. We see this ethic in statements like these from the writings of David Hume and W. K. Clifford: "A wise man... proportions his belief to the evidence" 3; "It is wrong always, every where, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence." 4 According to this rational ideal, an intellectually responsible person always insists on adequate evidence for his beliefs, and he suspends judgment unless or until he gets it.
This ethic's effects on faith are not hard to see. Evidence for religious beliefs is notoriously scarce. Unlike scientific proposals, which are intended to rest on carefully developed empirical evidence open to public examination, religious convictions are highly personal and often resistant to public inquiry. For this reason, many people question their validity.

Some take religious claims seriously but insist that there is not enough evidence to support them. Bertrand Russell, the great agnostic, held this view. Once someone asked him to suppose that when he died he found out that God existed after all. If God asked him why he never believed in Him, what would he say? Russell answered, "Not enough evidence! Not enough evidence!" 5

Others take the position that religious beliefs do not deserve serious consideration at all. At best, they are matters of private preference or personal opinion. But they do not belong among the settled beliefs of thinking people.

**Faulty responses to pressure**

People who grow up in the shelter of a religious environment and then meet this sort of pressure in the course of their graduate or professional education or in pursuing their careers often react in one of three ways. Some capitulate to it, some defy it, and others just try to ignore it. The first response is rationalism. Rationalists accept the ethic of belief we just described. They insist on the highest standards of evidence for all truth claims. Because in their estimation religious beliefs do not meet these standards, they dismiss them as untenable, and religion loses its personal significance for them.

Diametrically opposed to the rationalist's response to intellectual pressure on faith is fideism. 6 Fideists react to the challenge of modern thinking by withdrawing their religious beliefs from intellectual scrutiny. They often minimize the significance of the challenge, sometimes ridiculing it. But they never try to formulate an answer to it. The fideist position is roughly God said it, I believe it, and that settles it.

A third response to rational pressures on faith is more social than intellectual. Many Christians have serious reservations about the religious beliefs they grew up with, but they maintain strong ties to the church anyway. For many reasons they are unwilling to sever their connections to the religious community of their early years. We might call such people "communal Christians."

Communal Christians participate in church activities and support the church financially. Often they even serve as leaders of the church. Most typically, they educate their children in denominational schools. But their religious experience contains a strong element of nostalgia. A vibrant personal faith is something they recall from the past, but it is not a present possession. Having nagging doubts about the church's teachings, they respond by trying to ignore them.

Each of these positions attracts certain people, and each has its peculiar difficulties. But all three views rest on the assumption that religious beliefs cannot be reconciled with serious intellectual activity. This is why those who hold to them believe that they have to give up either faith or reason, or else that the most they can hope for is to keep the conflict between them from disrupting their lives.

Serious Christians cannot accept the options we have described. If faith is to survive in the modern world as a vital force in human lives, there must be a way of relating it to reason that does not compel us to choose between the two. The purpose of this discussion is to describe such an alternative. We can't do this adequately within the limits of a brief article, of course. But we may be able to learn enough to help us avoid some of the more catastrophic mistakes that are often made in this area.

We can approach the topic of faith and reason in either of two ways. We can start with reason and ask about faith, or we can start with faith and ask about reason. The first tack is typical of philosophy. Philosophers assume the validity of reason; for them the status of faith is the problem. For Christians, however, the second approach is more
urgent. Assuming the validity of faith, how should we think of its relation to reason?

In a discussion of this nature, the meaning of the terms is crucial. An exploration of the various meanings of faith and reason could easily fill a book. In the following remarks I use these expressions rather broadly. Faith refers generally to religious experience, or Christian experience, and includes both the elements of belief and trust in God. Reason refers to intellectual activity in general and, more specifically, to the process of methodical, self-conscious investigation.

**Holding faith and reason together**

To achieve an adequate understanding of faith and reason, we must reject at the outset any attempt to keep the two apart. On the practical level, it is impossible to avoid thinking seriously about religious beliefs if we care about them at all. On a more substantive level, the attempt to divorce faith and reason does violence to both.

Intellectual integrity involves a willingness to submit all our beliefs to rational investigation. A person who will examine some of his beliefs but not others is like someone who breaks only a few laws. He is basically irresponsible. So we cannot be intellectually responsible if we isolate our religious beliefs from serious consideration.

Even more important, if we try to exempt faith from careful reflection, we misrepresent its nature. Several factors indicate that reason has an important role to play in religious experience. For one thing, genuine religious commitment involves the whole person, including the cognitive or intellectual faculties. For Jesus, the central precept of the law is the command "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matt. 22:37, RSV). According to Ellen G. White, this lays upon Christians "the obligation of developing the intellect to its fullest capacity, that with all the mind we may know and love our Creator." So what is sometimes called the intellectual love of God is an integral part of genuine religious commitment.

In the second place, while people often say that real Christianity is a practical matter and that what you do is more important than what you believe, Christian practice presupposes certain beliefs. We cannot ignore those beliefs without collapsing the basic structure of religious experience.

It is also significant that from its beginnings Christianity's supporters have argued for it and not merely asserted that it is true. They not only called on people to believe its teachings, but they maintained that these teachings deserved to be believed. They insisted that Christianity was demonstrably superior to alternative views. With the Jews throughout the Roman world Paul argued that Jesus was the Messiah (Acts 18:5), and with the Gentiles, that He was the true revelation of God to man (Acts 17:30, 31). And Peter urged Christians to be ready at any time to give reasons for what they believed (1 Peter 3:15).

These considerations make it clear that we must not separate reason from faith. Understanding, or intelligent belief, has a central role to play in religion.

**Reason aids religious experience**

In what ways, then, can reason contribute to religious experience? First, it can help to prepare the way for faith. And second, once faith is present, reason can help it to grow.

Often people do not make a religious commitment because it is unpopular within their circle of friends, or because it involves personal inconvenience. Others are put off by unfortunate encounters they have had with religious institutions and supposedly religious people. But besides such factors, intellectual obstacles keep many people from religious commitment. For instance, it has always been difficult to reconcile the reality of God with the massive presence of evil in the world. And as we have noted, certain biblical statements appear problematic in light of contemporary science. Even more recently, people have come to view religious beliefs as simply the product of
social conditioning, or the expression of psychological needs. All of these difficulties call into question the beliefs, or cognitive claims, involved in Christian commitment. If someone has serious questions along these lines, they must be dealt with before faith can become a real possibility.

By helping a person respond to challenges like these, reason can prepare the way for faith. It renders faith reasonable, and therefore responsible, by establishing the credibility of its intellectual contents.

Reason also plays a role within an established religious experience. Just as loving someone makes us want to learn more about that person, love for God elicits a desire to increase our knowledge of Him, to keep discovering new facets of truth. The Bible often stresses the importance of intellectual growth in the Christian life. The book of Hebrews, for example, bemoans its readers' failure to advance beyond a rudimentary grasp of God's word and urges them to go on to maturity (Heb. 5:11-6:1). And in his letter to the Colossians Paul expresses the desire that they "come to the full wealth of conviction which under standing brings" (Col. 2:2, NEB).

Besides adding to our knowledge, reason contributes to the life of faith by helping Christians to resolve the doubts and problems that sometimes arise. Ellen G. White mentions this function of reason in Steps to Christ, her careful discussion of Christian experience. She observes that many are troubled with the suggestions of skepticism that unsettle their faith in the Scriptures. She asserts that "God never asks us to believe, without giving sufficient evidence upon which to base our faith. His existence, His character, the truthfulness of His word, are all established by testimony that appeals to our reason; and this testimony is abundant." 8 Reason, then, can give a growing religious experience greater durability.

So reason makes important contributions to religion. It can prepare the way for faith, and it can enhance our religious experience once we believe. But even though reason is closely related to faith, we need to beware of exaggerating its accomplishments. There are important limitations to what it can do.

Beyond the limits of reason

So far we have focused on the cognitive dimension of faith. We have emphasized that religious commitment involves believing or knowing certain things. This is why intellectual activity is important to religion and why any attempt to separate reason from faith ends in spiritual disaster. But we must not conclude that faith is purely rational, or that religion is nothing more than belief. Faith has other qualities, too, and they complicate the picture. In particular, they require us to recognize the limitations of reason.

For one thing, faith must continually subjugate doubt. The evidence for faith is never overwhelming. Not believing will always be an option; it will always have a degree of support. To quote Ellen G. White again, "God has never removed the possibility of doubt. . . . Those who wish to doubt will have opportunity; while those who really desire to know the truth will find plenty of evidence on which to rest their faith." 9 For this reason, faith always has a certain "in spite of" quality; it holds on to its beliefs in spite of factors that make belief difficult.

A related characteristic of faith is the totality of trust it displays. From the available evidence, several philosophers have concluded that God's existence is "probable." 10 But faith does much more than affirm that God probably exists. Faith is the complete confidence, the absolute certainty, that God is real. Those who have faith do not limit their trust in God to the level for which there is evidence; they go beyond that limit to trust God completely, without reservation.

In some of the classic cases of faith, this contrast between evidence and trust is striking. We think of Job as an outstanding example of faith because he kept on trusting God in spite of all his sufferings. Similarly, Abraham maintained his confidence in God even when commanded to sacrifice Isaac. People with faith trust God even when the evidence seems to show that God is indifferent to their problems.

We must not exaggerate this aspect of faith. It would be a mistake to conclude that faith automatically gets stronger
when the evidence for it grows weaker. This would lead to the absurd conclusion that the highest form of faith is to believe something ridiculous. Nevertheless, there is a tension within faith. It always has a basis in evidence, but it always goes beyond the evidence, too.

The explanation for this tension lies in the fact that faith is a personal decision. It is an expression of freedom that involves the will as well as the mind. No matter how much evidence we have, in the last analysis whether or not we will trust in God is always up to us.

And since in part it depends on the will, faith cannot be forced or produced. In their eagerness to show that religion is reasonable, people sometimes speak of faith as if it were the product of rational inquiry, the matter-of-fact result of an investigation, an automatic response to certain stimuli, or the only logical conclusion to an argument. But this is a mistake. While it can contribute to faith in significant ways, reason alone can never lead someone directly into faith.

Several factors limit the contribution that reason can make to faith. One is the fact just mentioned: faith involves freedom. If faith were the only possibility, if reason left us with no other choice, then our faith could not represent a personal response to God's love. It would simply be admitting the obvious.

Second, if faith were the product of human reason, it could not be a response to divine grace. Instead, it would be a human achievement, a form of intellectual work-righteousness. And if faith were the product of reason, the caliber of a person's intellectual abilities would determine the quality of his or her faith. Then those who are young or uneducated would necessarily have a low quality of faith. Yet often these are the people whose faith is strongest. 11

Finally, we must recognize that few people find faith through a deliberate process of investigation. The famous proofs that God exists, for example, are notoriously ineffective in producing religious conversions. Rather, people find faith through nonrational means— the subtle influence of other people, the emotions that accompany certain experiences, or even vague impressions they are not fully aware of. As Jesus said, "The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8, RSV).

These considerations prevent us from claiming too much for reason. While reason can contribute to faith in several important ways, the origins of faith are inscrutable. Faith is never the last step in a logical exercise.

To summarize our observations, by nature religious experience is rich and complicated. Consequently, we must expect of reason neither too little nor too much. There is rational evidence for our religious beliefs, but the scope of such evidence is limited. Faith always believes more than reason can fully establish.

Similarly, reason can remove obstacles to personal trust in God, and when faith is already present, reason can help it to grow. But it cannot lead someone all the way from unbelief to religious commitment. In short, our discussion supports the conclusion that faith is reasonable, but it is not necessarily reasoned. Faith includes reason, but it is not limited to reason.

**Dealing with doubt**

This view of faith and reason has some important practical implications. Let us conclude by looking at how it can help us deal with the perplexing problem of doubt.

When serious thinking seems to leave us with more questions than answers about religion, we would do well to keep several things in mind. As we have noticed, because it always goes beyond the available evidence, religion always poses a degree of uncertainty or risk. But every significant venture holds an element of risk. Moreover, there is an element of mystery in every important relationship, not just our relationship with God. So it should not surprise us to discover a measure of doubt in even the strongest religious experience.

This suggests a second point. If people like Job and Abraham—outstanding examples of faith—wrestled with doubt
within their relationship to God, then it must be possible for us to work through our religious questions within the framework of a religious life. We don't have to put our faith on hold or isolate ourselves from other Christians until we have all our questions answered. Examining what we believe can be part of our religious experience; it doesn't mean our religious life is coming to an end.

Perhaps most important of all, we need to remember that satisfying answers to religious questions often come from action rather than reflection. The ultimate test of Christian faith is not intellectual but practical. More important than whether or not we can explain our beliefs is whether or not we can live them.

Some would-be Christians once asked Blaise Pascal how to obtain faith. He told them to associate with believers, to worship and pray with them—in short, to act as if they already had faith. Pascal believed that the experience of faith would follow the words and actions of commitment.

William James makes a similar point in his essay "Is Life Worth Living?" He concludes with this admonition: "Believe that life is worth living, and your belief will help create the fact." 

As we have argued in this discussion, there is a place for serious thinking in the Christian life. But reflection can accomplish only so much. The time comes when we must act. Careful investigation can demonstrate that faith is a reasonable choice, but it cannot prove that it is the right choice. Only the exercise of faith, the act of commitment itself, shows us that.


6 From the Latin word fides, for "faith."


8 ————, Steps to Christ (Mountain View,

9 Ibid.


11 Jesus cited children as examples of those who will enter the kingdom of God *(Mark 10:14)*, and He marveled at the faith of a Canaanite woman *(Matt. 15:21-28)*.

Faith and the Golden Calf

Faith is one of the most important and vital experiences into which the Christian may enter, but it is also one of the most misunderstood and misapplied tenets of Christian doctrine.

The general opinion exists in the minds of many that faith and the power to work miracles are the same thing. Many believe that only those who have such power are true possessors of faith. Miracles surely have played an important part in the establishment of faith, but they are not faith.

The results of a great miracle are the same today as they were in the days of Christ. Almost everyone is forced to believe when the strong evidence of the supernatural as seen in a miracle is presented. Only one who will not see can reject such a manifestation of the power of God.

Belief and faith are not the same thing. Many fail to understand that there is a vital distinction. There are those who believe in God who do not have faith in Him. There are even those who, in spite of their own desire not to believe in God, believe anyway. An example of this kind of belief is recorded in the scripture, "the devils also believe" (James 2:19). But this belief is not coupled with faith.

**What Is Your Faith?**

Another common error is often put in the form of a question. One may ask you, "What is your faith?" This is like asking, "What is your hand?" or any other part of you. Your faith is a living, integral part of your total being. It is one factor contributing to the stature of the whole man. Without faith, man is lacking a part of himself every bit as much as if he were lacking a hand or a leg. Your faith is not your denomination any more than your hand is a part of your house. Your hand is used in the service of your house and your faith is used in the service of your God.

**Faith Healing**

Another error in the understanding of the work of faith has come through the work of so-called faith healers. Though some may claim, and have impressive evidence of, actual healings, the Scripture makes it clear that this is not the proper use of faith. It was never designed to be used as a tool or as a weapon with which man may force God. It was not made to be a lever that man could place in the heavenly courts to move heavenly powers to his own ends. Such usage of faith is not Biblical and it violates the very nature of God and His omniscience.

Many may be heard to say, "I just didn't have enough faith." This may be true, for all can see the need of more faith, but the reason behind this statement is often wrong. Those who make it usually have passed through an experience in which they were praying for some specific thing that they felt was of utmost importance and their request was not granted in the manner they wished. This experience brings many to the place where they doubt God because they cannot understand why He deals with them in this way. When that which was believed and expected is thwarted they have nothing left. True faith in God, however, when put to the test will still cling to God and in Him seek the answer.

There are many examples of faith given in the Scriptures, both of true faith and that which springs from belief in God's power only. The classic example of belief without faith is the story of the deliverance of Israel from Egypt.

The ten plagues, which finally convinced even Pharaoh of the power of God, were truly miraculous. God was working for Israel and they all believed in Him. They left Egypt under the direction of the cloud and the fire and all were confident that God would work for them.
Just out of Egypt trouble began to arise. Pharaoh had second thoughts as to what the release of the Israelites would mean to the economic conditions in his land. He realized that none of his people knew how to do the work that Israel had been doing for them for more than 400 years, and most surely the nation would experience financial as well as industrial ruin. The only course of action that could save his nation was to recapture his escaping slaves. This he set out to do, and when Israel saw they were trapped between the sea and Pharaoh's approaching armies they forgot all the belief they had in God and the miracles He had done for them. They even forgot the cloud and the fire that were with them. They doubted God.

Even in this condition God saw fit to deliver them out of the hand of Egypt, and He opened the sea before them so that they crossed between its walls on dry ground.

Three short days from the Red Sea experience we find the camp of Israel lacking water. Seeing a desert oasis they rush forward only to find that the water is bitter and undrinkable. The memory of the deliverance less than a week before vanishes. Their belief disappears under the seeming affliction. The bitter disappointment of the unquenched thirst of the multitude gave name to the place, and it was called Marah. Again everyone doubted God and they cried to Moses to give them water. Under the direction of God, Moses cut down a tree and cast it into the bitter water and it became sweet and drinkable. Then everyone believed God.

From Marah we follow Israel to the base of Mount Sinai. Here the supply of food is beginning to run low and again God is doubted. But He performs another miracle and sends bread down from heaven. Under the power of this marvelous gift everyone again believes.

One of the marvels of the Old Testament is its record of the long-suffering of God to these people who doubted Him under every trial or test.

After a time God came down on the mountain to talk with His people and to make a covenant with them. Great manifestations of power were seen on the mountaintop. Thunder and lightning and smoke that put fear into the hearts of the people.

After the covenant was made God called Moses up into the mountain and he was gone for some time, as Deuteronomy 9:9 indicates. After five weeks had elapsed the people became worried. They knew not where Moses was nor what had happened to him. This fear brought up the same reaction as before—doubt of God. This led them to do a most foolish and rash thing. "And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him" (Ex. 32:1).

They wanted a new god. The God who had brought them out of Egypt was such a strange and mighty One. His ways were not understandable to the people of Israel. He did what He wanted to do instead of what the people wanted Him to do. They believed in His power, they recognized His superiority over any other power or god, but they could not understand Him. They did not have faith, and a lack of faith is idolatry, for it is an indication that the faith has been put in something else.

Israel wanted to be the creators of God rather than the creatures of His creation. They wanted a god they could control, one they could take where they wanted it to go, one who would not go away on the mountain and do strange things, one who would serve them rather than one they should serve. Thus they decided to have a god of gold, not because of their faith in gold but because of a lack of faith in the true God.

The Scriptures give many examples of idolatry by lack of faith. Though all do not show their idolatry in the form of worshiping a golden calf, it is still the same problem that the calf worshipers had—a lack of faith.

The allegory of the rich man and Lazarus, though often misapplied, is an excellent story for illustrating lack of faith on the part of mankind. The rich man requested Lazarus to go to his five brothers and warn them of their impending
doom if they did not change their ways. But the answer was that even a supernatural event such as a resurrection from the dead would not convince them (Luke 16:30). No doubt they would have been impressed for a time and even have believed, but the benumbing influence of time and the intoxication of human reasoning would eventually convince them that there was really nothing to faith in God.

As Jesus hung upon the cross the faithless leaders of Israel stood before Him in mockery. One said to Him, "Let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him." But would they have believed and had faith in Him if He had come down? All the proof needed had already been given in superabundance and they did not believe.

Man today is guilty of the same evil in which the Israelites indulged. If some act of God such as Creation, the Flood, or any other supernatural event is beyond the comprehension of man he considers it a fable and some other theory is devised even more fantastic than the one being destroyed.

Natural man limits his acceptance to a narrow scope of things, including only what he can see, only what he can touch, what he can understand.

Spiritual man, on the other hand, accepts the two important tenets of faith—all things are possible in God, and God's will is correct in all things. If these two points could be understood properly one would possess true faith.

Look at faith under the test in the Scriptures. Don't look at the great miracles for this test—the woman touching the garment, the centurion and his healed servant, nor the healing of the man born blind. Too many have looked here only and have been led astray in their concept of faith by thinking this is the way faith always is to be used. Look past all these to Hebrews 11:36-39. Here lies the secret of true faith, the experience of faith under test. These are the ones who "had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; . . . they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise." These had faith that stood the test!

For a closer look at faith in the test consider the experience of the three young men on trial before Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel 3:16-18 tells of the understanding these young men had of the two tenets of faith. First, God can deliver us from Your hand, 0 king, and second, if He does not, it makes no difference; we still will not worship your idols. This is a statement of faith in the face of death itself, faith so strong the ruler of the world could not shake it.

The classic example of faith comes from the book of Job. His immortal words are, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (Job 13:15). This is true faith in action, true faith in the test, true faith triumphant, when one can rely upon his God even in the face of death and disaster and tragedy.

There is a modern-day experience which parallels the experience of Israel at the foot of Mount Sinai. The people said Moses had delayed upon that mount. Today mankind is fulfilling a prophecy spoken by Christ nearly 2,000 years ago. Speaking in a parable, He said many people in our day would say, "My lord delayeth his coming" (Matt. 24:48). It is no different in this day than it was in ages past. A lack of faith is still idolatry and this belief of a delayed coming of the Lord has caused man to make idols of such things as securities and pleasures of the world.

Israel was punished for her idolatry. Moses burned the golden calf and put it in the water supply of the camp "and made the children of Israel drink of it" (Ex. 32:20). It was not a pleasant experience. No one likes metallic tasting water, but it was a mild punishment in comparison to the punishment for idolators who must "drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation" (Rev. 14:10). No mixture of mercy will be there at that time, and it will be much more unpleasant than Israel's punishment.

The reward for those who have faith, however, is markedly different. It is very pleasant. Christ, speaking again in a parable, says, "Well done, good and faithful servant; . . . enter thou into the joy of thy lord."
Faith and science: a personal story

After being miraculously cured of leprosy, Naaman professed faith in the God of Israel. “‘Now I know,’” he said to Elisha, “‘that there is no God in all the world except in Israel’” (2 Kings 5:15). Naaman said, too, that he would never again give sacrifices or offerings to any God “‘but the LORD’” (v. 17).

There was, however, one problem. Naaman said to Elisha, “‘But may the LORD forgive your servant for this one thing: When my master enters the temple of Rimmon to bow down and he is leaning on my arm and I bow there also—when I bow down in the temple of Rimmon, may the LORD forgive your servant for this’” (2 Kings 5:18).

What did Elisha say to Naaman, who expressed concern about a part of his job that required him to go to a heathen temple and bow there with his master? To this concern, Elisha responded “‘Go in peace.’”

As a scientist, I do research in the area of radiometric dating and the directly associated earth science concepts of plate tectonics and magma cooling rates. I am also a person of faith and a strong believer in the importance of Genesis 1–11, but I work daily with data that I don’t know how to fit into a short time frame. I would like to find convincing evidence confirming the literalness of the Genesis record, but in my area of research I usually find that the data fits better with a long-age model. Nevertheless, though I may appear to some to bow to the god of evolution in my research, just as Naaman told Elisha, I also declare, “[Y]our servant will not offer burnt offering or sacrifice to any god but the Lord.”

The finitude of mankind

Yes, I am sympathetic to church members who would like definitive answers about the issues regarding the age of the earth. I don’t want the church to change its beliefs. In return, I would hope for sympathy and understanding from leaders and members of the difficult position that, as a scientist, I am in. Many have exhibited sympathy, understanding, and trust. And I really do appreciate the leaders who, sympathetic with my concerns, have said to me, “Go in peace.” Indeed, I appreciate the patience of the church as I try to understand these two apparently discordant sets of data—nature and revelation—both of which I hold in high regard.

No doubt the discordance comes from my finite understanding, but I am encouraged by seeing other areas where apparently discordant sets of data must be accepted. Church history suggests to me two areas that have been under discussion for a long time: (1) How can Christ be both Creator and created at the same time? (2) How can I have free will to choose, but God still has foreknowledge? And as a physicist, I ask, How is it possible that light behaves both as a wave and a particle? Each of these three examples has been discussed at length, with many helpful explanations, but ultimately, it seems that the problem comes from our own limitations. I believe the same limitation causes our trouble in explaining the apparently discordant sets of data from nature and inspiration.

What the Lord has done

With that lead in, let’s reflect on Mark 5:19, and specifically Jesus’ words to the Gadarene demoniac. After restoring him, Jesus said, “‘Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you’” (Mark 5:19). Although the demoniac did not understand all that happened, he could tell what Jesus had done in his life.

In many ways, the demoniac reflects my situation. As with him, I don’t understand many things. Nevertheless, I still
can witness to my professional colleagues about the wonderful things God has done for me. I do have something to say about Jesus, who has answered my most important questions.

I have had some wonderful opportunities to witness, sometimes with apparent success and other times with apparent failure. Either way, I have tried to tell people about how much the Lord has done for me.

• While a student at University of Colorado, I helped with a Bible study for a geologist who found that the scientific arguments I had learned for a worldwide flood were quite unconvincing.

• In my dissertation acknowledgements I included an appreciation for the natural world that God created for us to enjoy studying; someone who read that later asked me for more details about what I had meant.

• I lent one of the missionary books of the year to my major professor. The book had been especially meaningful to me, but it ended up on my desk a couple days later as though he had no interest in having anything to do with it. On the other hand, he went out of his way to make sure that I had no Sabbath problems. He even offered me his rental car so I could attend church when we were away from home working together.

• While working at an accelerator’s facility, the schedule was 24/7. I would ask that I not be scheduled to work on the Sabbath. That meant that fellow physicists might have to take a 24-hour shift. This special request often resulted in questions about my beliefs. The first few times I was caught off guard and would just give a list of doctrines, but later I learned to give a story or share the great controversy theme.

• On another occasion a colleague in Moscow asked about the problem of evil; she had heard the story of the fallen angel and found it unsatisfying. We continue to correspond.

• I had an opportunity to help another Russian colleague come to the United States to do research at a major university. After I left that institution, he started attending church.

One of the things I do at Geoscience Research Institute is respond to questions that come to our Web site. I have had interesting exchanges with various individuals. Probably the longest-lasting exchange has been with an atheist who sent a scathing letter to us outlining what he saw to be the stupidity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. After giving a pleasant response and an acknowledgement of fallibility, I have had an extremely pleasant interchange with him. He continues communicating with me several times each month.

When I first started taking geology classes at a nearby state university a few years ago, I asked about making up the four Sabbath field trips. I was told that if I didn’t go on the field trips, I wouldn’t pass the class. As time went along I did well in the class and tried to find ways of making up the field trips, and I did get a passing grade in the class. The second quarter the issue of field trips came up again. By then the students knew me, as did the teaching assistant. I had no interest in asking for any favors but, on their own accord, the students and teaching assistant said that having Sunday field trips was fine with them. By the end of the second quarter I had developed a good enough relationship with the professor that he gave me a large data set to analyze on his computer.

Finally, my wife—who manages the diabetes treatment center at Loma Linda—went out to eat with a representative of a pharmaceutical company and another co-worker. During lunch the representative surprised them by stating that he and his family were interested in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. They had enjoyed working with various Adventist medical personnel.

Over the next few months this family started attending the local Seventh-day Adventist church, studied with one of the pastors, and decided that they wanted to be baptized. This man’s wife, who grew up in a country that was controlled by communists, was a chemist and in a doctoral program in psychology. For a while she had studied Buddhism. Because of her early education in communism, she once asked me about Creation, and I made a few comments. One Sabbath the whole family came to an open house at Geoscience Research Institute, and later she told me she had listened to a radio broadcast about intelligent design. It really took no convincing on origins issues
because the mind-set was fertile and ready for a change.

Several years ago this couple moved to a new location. When we visited them the week they moved in, we noticed that the house next door was for sale. We are now next-door neighbors.

**Lessons learned**

During the years these experiences have taught me many things about how to witness to people. One of the best examples comes from Ellen White’s *The Desire of Ages* when she wrote about how Jesus dealt with doubting Thomas.

“In His treatment of Thomas, Jesus gave a lesson for His followers. His example shows how we should treat those whose faith is weak, and who make their doubts prominent. Jesus did not overwhelm Thomas with reproach, nor did He enter into controversy with him. He revealed Himself. . . . Unbelief is seldom overcome by controversy. It is rather put upon self-defense, and finds new support and excuse. But let Jesus, in His love and mercy, be revealed.”

I have learned the truth of Ellen White’s words, “Our influence upon others depends not so much upon what we say as upon what we are. Men may combat and defy our logic, they may resist our appeals; but a life of disinterested love is an argument they cannot gainsay.” Or as Madeleine L’Engle says, “We draw people to Christ not by loudly discrediting what they believe, by telling them how wrong they are and how right we are, but by showing them a light that is so lovely that they want with all their hearts to know the source of it.”

The point of these accounts is simple—just as the Gadarene demoniac, I may not have all the answers, but I do have something to say about my experience with Jesus.

---

1 All Scripture quotations in this article are from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION, copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers.

2 Plate tectonics is the comprehensive geology theory of how the earth’s present mountain ranges, ocean basins, earthquakes, and volcanoes are due to the long distance movement of the continents through time.

3 Magma is hot liquid rock that can cool underground to form granitic-type mountains such as the Sierra Nevadas in California. It takes some time for this large a volume of liquid to cool to a solid.


5 Ibid. 142.

Grief and faith

How should Christians react to grief? What is the relation between faith and grief? Some Christians assume that something has gone wrong with their faith if they experience or express grief, and particularly so at a time when the spotlight shines on the young, the virile, the positive, and the successful. But the point remains that in the course of any normal human experience, grief and sadness do have their share. Normally, people of faith do feel sadness and grief at times of loss. God has made us with the capacity to express our sad as well as happy emotions.¹

When Abraham lost his wife, he mourned and wept for her: “She died in Kirjath Arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan, and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep over her” (Gen. 23:2).² When Jacob died, Joseph “fell upon his father and wept over him and kissed him” (Gen. 50:1), and his family and friends “lamented loudly and bitterly” (Gen. 50:10). Hannah grieved over her inability to bear a child (1 Sam.1:5), and David composed two great psalms on grieving over his failures and sins (Pss. 32 and 51).

Many psalms speak frankly about the reality of grief: “My eyes grow weak with sorrow; / they fail because of all my foes” (Ps. 6:7); “How long must I wrestle with my thoughts / and every day have sorrow in my heart? / How long will my enemy triumph over me?” (Ps. 13:2); “Be merciful to me, O LORD, for I am in distress; / my eyes grow weak with sorrow, / my soul and my body with grief” (Ps. 31:9); “The length of our days is seventy years— / or eighty, if we have the strength; / yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, / for they quickly pass, and we fly away” (Ps. 90:10); “Then their numbers decreased, and they were humbled / by oppression, calamity and sorrow” (Ps. 107:39); “The cords of death entangled me, / the anguish of the grave came upon me; / I was overcome by trouble and sorrow” (Ps. 116:3).

From these and other similar passages, we note that God does not condemn our grief and sadness but understands them as a normal part of human experience. Paul acknowledged God’s goodness in healing his friend Epaphroditus and mourned that his death would have brought “sorrow upon sorrow” (Phil. 2:27). In other words, Paul freely admits that he would have had a hard time in coping with the loss of a friend and gives some counsel on a Christian’s attitude to grief. The apostle acknowledges the normalcy of grief and does not suggest that Christians should be strong and avoid the pain associated with loss. Rather, Christians are reminded that while they grieve, they must not lose faith. “We do not want you . . . to grieve,” says the apostle, “like the rest of men, who have no hope” (1 Thess. 4:13). In other words, the Christian response to bereavement includes both grief and hope.³

Twofold affirmation

That response includes a twofold affirmation: first, we live in a world of pain, separation, and death (1 Cor. 15:56); second, we know a better day is coming, a resurrection day of triumph over suffering and death (1 Cor. 15:16, 17; John 5:28, 29; 11:23, 24). In between, we are asked to endure the pain of separation, “the sting of death” (1 Cor. 15:56), and comfort one another with the hope of the Second Coming (1 Thess. 4:17).

Jesus chose that ultimate hope to comfort Martha in her hour of grief (John 11:23). While Jesus’ words were meant to bring encouragement, His intent was not to repress Mary and Martha’s need to grieve. In fact, as Jesus saw their pain, He provided appropriate and meaningful ministry and support by mirroring their grief: “Jesus wept” (John 11:35). Whatever the case, Jesus did not rebuke Mary and Martha for their grief.

When we lose a loved one who has died in the blessed hope, we can take consolation in the hope that we will see them again and know that they are not suffering but simply waiting in an unconscious sleep (John 11:11; Dan. 12:2; 1 Cor. 15:51), which for them lasts but a moment. Their very next thought will be to wake up to Jesus’ calling them to come forth (1 Thess. 4:16; John 5:28, 29). At the same time we can acknowledge the fact that we hurt because...
we miss them and will endure the sting that will one day come to an end.

Where do some Christians get the mistaken idea that it is inappropriate to grieve? How does the expression of sorrow and hurt become a demonstration of weakness? Nowhere does the Bible teach that concept.4 Solomon reminds us of the reality of death and grief by pointing out that there is “a time to be born and a time to die, . . . a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance” (Eccles. 3:2–4). Christians are not to live in a fantasy world.5

Often times when significant loss occurs, the bereaved persons feel that their faith has been shaken or even shattered. Religious people may find themselves questioning their entire belief structure and doubting all that has been the foundation of their past life. This would be a normal consequence of grief.6

Derek Nuttall says, “Having a religious belief will not necessarily reduce the pain of loss nor remove the need to work through the stages of grief. Such belief, however is an aid to grieving.”7 In bereavement we need to know we are not alone, that God understands our pain and in some ways shares our sorrow. “At the heart of Christianity is faith in a God who through His son has shown he loves us and shares in what we experience and through the cross suffers with us.”8

To say that a deeply religious person will not face grief situations is unrealistic and emotionally unhealthy.9 Jesus felt free to express His grief on different occasions including weeping openly (John 11:35; Matt. 26:37). He even confided in His disciples toward the end of His life that His soul was “‘overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death’” (Matt. 26:38). He even asked for an impromptu support group when He appealed to His closest disciples to “‘stay here and keep watch with me’” (Matt. 26:38).

Commenting on Christian attitudes toward grief, one writer says, “Grief appears to have a transcendent function and can in the end enhance spiritual growth of bereaved people as it awakens them to existential and spiritual essence of life.”10 We, as Christians, sometimes go wrong when we use the hope of life to come to mask our present feelings of pain, which must have expression. Not continuous expression as if we had no hope, but sufficient expression in order to get past them through to healing.11

**Jesus: Model in grieving**

Christians should consider Jesus as the Model. He shared our emotions and feelings. There were moments when He was troubled and full of sorrow: “Surely he took up our infirmities / and carried our sorrows” (Isa. 53:4). He told His disciples, “‘My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death’” (Matt. 26:38). “He [Jesus] began to be deeply distressed and troubled” (Mark 14:33). He knew how to cry: “As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it” (Luke 19:41). He experienced anguish: “And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground” (Luke 22:44). He experienced and displayed the full range of emotions including joy, love, and compassion (see Luke 10:21; 7:13; John 15:10,11; 17:13; Mark 10:21; 1:40, 41; Matt. 14:13, 14). He was “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (Isa. 53:3, KJV). He displayed the deep emotion of anguish and despair in a time of impending loss when he said, “‘My God, why have you forsaken me?’” (Matt. 27:46). Jesus’ questioning and despair demonstrated a part of the grieving process. In addition, Jesus also showed grief over His beloved city Jerusalem (Matt. 23:37).

Jesus grieved at the time of Lazarus’ death (John 11). He cried, and others observed “‘how He loved him!’” (John 11:36). The passage also states that Jesus was “deeply moved in spirit and troubled” (11:33). Ellen White comments on how Jesus felt “every pang of anguish, as He said to His disciples, ‘Lazarus is dead.’”12 Although Jesus was aware that He would raise Lazarus in a short while, He grieved for the pain and anguish that Mary and Martha had to experience.13 In human sympathy He wept for those in sorrow. He also wept for those who would plan His own death because of their unbelief in and hatred of Him.14

If Jesus, our Model and Example, can grieve and be “human,” then other humans in this world of sin can also hurt
and grieve. Ministers who are commissioned to pastor the flock need to stop shutting down the expression of pain from their hurting sheep because it makes them (the ministers) uncomfortable. Much of the time, whether we realize it or not, we are motivated by our own needs. Shutting grieving people down becomes one way of keeping a lid on our own repressed grief. It would be better if we sought help and assistance in working through our own losses so we could feel more comfortable and therefore able to be present in the midst of our congregant’s pain and suffering.

The griever needs our presence. When the timing is right, we can certainly share the reality of heaven that serves as a foundation for our hope in the midst of grief and loss. But our encouragement should never be used to shut down the need of hurting people to express their pain over the sorrow they are experiencing regarding separation from their loved ones.


2 Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture passages are from the New International Version.


5 J. Donald Bane et al., eds., Death and Ministry: Pastoral Care of the Dying and the Bereaved (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), 125, 126.


7 Nuttal, 27.

8 Ibid.


11 Winter, 369.


13 Ibid., 528, 533.

14 Ibid., 533, 534.
Lessons from Two Lepers

From the time I was a young boy, one of my favorite stories in the Bible tells how God miraculously healed Naaman (2 King 5)—a classic story of God’s provision for unbelievers. I find this chapter to have both a joyful section and a troubling one as well. Each of these sections powerfully illustrates two important principles of effective health ministry today.

First, the joyful section. Naaman visited all the best physicians and healers in Syria but found no help. Through the witness of the Hebrew maid in his home, he learned of God’s prophet in Israel. The king of Syria readily agreed and wrote a letter of introduction. With a heart filled with new hope, he set off for Samaria with considerable wealth to be used to pay for his healing.

Finally, after a detour to visit the king of Israel, he arrived at the residence of the prophet Elisha. Rather than come out and meet Naaman, the prophet sent his servant to him with a very simple message. “ ‘Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored to you, and you shall be clean’ ” (v. 10).1

Poor Naaman. He was expecting something entirely different. Angry and frustrated, he turned around and left Elisha’s house in a rage. After all, were not the rivers of Syria far nicer than the muddy Jordan? As he headed back home, some of his wiser servants reasoned with him. “ ‘If the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done it?’ ” (v. 13). As his anger cooled, he turned toward the Jordan, jumped in, and dipped himself seven times “and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean” (v. 14).

A very grateful Naaman and his retinue of aides rushed back to the prophet’s home to offer him costly gifts in exchange for his healing. However, Elisha refused to accept any payment at all and wished him peace.

Many of us today are like the Naaman of old. We refuse the simple things God asks us to do, especially in the area of the prevention of many common diseases. We would rather spend small fortunes on pills, potions, syrups, and claimed cures rather than give up our health-destroying habits by adopting and using God’s simple, wholesome lifestyle of balanced living and eating—a way of life that is readily available around the world and is most economical and effective.

What healed Naaman? Did the special minerals that made the Jordan River muddy or the ritual of dipping seven times heal Naaman? No! It was “only through following the specific directions of the prophet that he could find healing. Willing obedience alone would bring the desired result.”2

Now the troubling section of the chapter. The prophet refused all payment for what God had done. Gehazi, Elisha’s servant, could not tolerate seeing Naaman return to Syria with all the wealth he had brought with him and was determined to profit from God’s miracle of healing. So, he ran after Naaman to get something for himself (vv. 20, 21). When Naaman saw him, he gladly stopped, thinking something must be wrong. But the greedy servant now lied to Naaman. Out of a grateful heart, Naaman offered Gehazi more than he asked for, plus two servants to transport it back to his home. After lying to Elisha about where he had been and what he had done, the prophet declared that Gehazi would become a leper, and indeed it was so.

Why, when people are desperate for help, does there always seems to be some who willingly take advantage of them? While we might expect this from the unsaved, we find it very troubling when this same behavior lives inside the church.

Today, the world is filled with greedy opportunists, and sadly there are Gehazis in the church as well. They seek to sell unproven health products through multilevel marketing schemes: nutraceuticals, botanicals, cancer cures,
equipment, and others. Rarely are these things inexpensive, but almost always the claims are fanciful.

“Solemn are the lessons taught by this experience of one to whom had been given high and holy privileges. The course of Gehazi was such as to place a stumbling block in the pathway of Naaman, upon whose mind had broken a wonderful light, and who was favorably disposed toward the service of the living God.”

Our goal must be “not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved” (1 Cor. 10:33, KJV).

References:

1 All Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.


3 Ibid., 252.