

Faith Is Like That

On a trip to the mountains of the American west we decided to cross a pass that was above 10,000 feet. We could see the summit in the distance and started on the designated route, following markings the map told us would take us there. There were times the summit was obscured by trees and turns in the road. There were a series of difficult switchbacks and dangerous curves that called for caution. Sometimes it seemed the grade was down hill away from the summit, or even carrying us back where we came from. An occasional car was disabled along the way and we wondered if that might happen to us. Someone would ask how much further it was and we wondered if it was worth the effort.

We reached the top and felt the joy of achievement. We paused and beheld the beauties we could not see from below. From this vantage point we could see for miles, whereas below we were limited by distance and obstructions. We saw the road we had traveled and from the top it didn't look near that difficult and long; it now had a beauty we could not appreciate as we traveled it. The journey up was well worth the effort for the joy we now had.

Walking by faith is like that. God in His word gives us just a glimpse of the summit, enough that we long to be there, a place of rest and beauty beyond imagination. We may not fully understand until we reach the end but it will be worth it. The fact that others "break down" will not stop us. The difficulties of "switch-backs" and "dangerous curves" do not frighten us. God has set up "guard rails" and "sign posts" for our protection and guidance. Though we be weary and wonder if it be worthwhile, and how much longer we must climb, "we faint not ... our... inward man is renewed ... our light affliction worketh for us ... an eternal weight of glory." To attain "a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens ... we walk by faith and not by sight: we are of good courage ... we make it our aim to be well pleasing in his sight" (2 Cor. 4:16-5:9).

By faith, Abraham sojourned, looking "for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." He died in faith, having seen the promises afar, "desiring a better country, that is an heavenly," for God prepared for him a city (Heb. 11:8-16). Abraham's faith was tried but it never wavered in unbelief, rather waxed strong, giving God the glory, being fully assured that what God had promised He could perform (Rom. 4:20,21). "They that are of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham" and are "heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:9,29).

"For the which cause I suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day" (2 Tim. 1:12). That's what walking by faith is all about.

- by Morris D. Norman

Seeing Ourselves as Victims

From time to time we encounter someone who seems to believe that everyone is against them. Every word that is spoken and every action that is taken is filtered through that lens. A casual comment becomes an insult. A simple disagreement is taken as a personal attack. In their mind, they are constantly being wronged.

Once a person adopts that sort of "victim mentality," it affects everything. If you believe people are always attacking you, then you feel compelled to defend yourself at every turn. Conversations become confrontations. Small matters become big ones. Even the memories of events are re-written to uphold this mindset. Relationships suffer. Sadly, this can happen among Christians. Families are strained, friendships are damaged, and harmony among brethren is disrupted because someone assumes the worst possible motive in others.

But the Bible urges us to have a very different outlook. Paul said that love "*is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil*" (1 Corinthians 13:5). In other words, love does not immediately assume the worst. It does not constantly search for insults or injuries. Solomon offered similar wisdom: "*Take no heed unto all words that are spoken*" (Ecclesiastes 7:21). If we listen hard enough and analyze closely enough, we can probably find something to be offended about. But wisdom says not to live that way.

The victim mentality leaves no room for mercy or grace. Forgiveness becomes nearly impossible, because every situation is viewed as a deliberate offense. Yet the Scriptures plainly command: "*Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for*

Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:32). Peter said that "*charity shall cover the multitude of sins*" (1 Peter 4:8). Love looks for ways to overlook non-sinful faults rather than magnify them.

None of this means that real wrongdoing should be ignored. The Bible clearly teaches that sin must be addressed when necessary (Galatians 6:1). But there is a big difference between dealing with genuine sin and imagining offenses where none were intended.

If we constantly assume we are victims, bitterness will soon fill our hearts. The Hebrew writer warned us to guard against "*any root of bitterness springing up*" that can trouble many (Hebrews 12:15).

Christians should strive for a more generous spirit — one that gives others the benefit of the doubt, that shows patience, and that is quick to forgive. After all, we depend on God's mercy every day (Matthew 6:12). A gracious heart will preserve peace in families, friendships, and congregations. And that is exactly the kind of spirit the Lord expects from His people.

- by Greg Gwin