

Walk by Faith

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2nd Corinthians 4:16-5:10

I'm the type of person who likes to have a sense of being in control of things. In order to keep from failing, I usually spend way too much time calculating how to do something new, before I try it. The problem is that even though I'm so careful, it doesn't necessarily keep me from making all kinds of mistakes. There is so much in life that we can't control, and I think most of us have realised that, pretty clearly, as we struggle with having to stay at home, and either work from home somehow, or figure out what to do. Or, if you are still able to work, the work may have become extremely busy due to extra customers buying food, if you're deemed an essential service. There may be a lot of extra work needed to sterilize everything. I've heard it's been pretty crazy for Radek at London Drugs these days! On the positive side, related to the pandemic, I've heard that more people are realising their need for Jesus Christ. We are reminded how much we are actually not in control. Science and medicine have not solved all our problems and to put all our trust in human wisdom and accomplishments is risky and unreliable.

The main point I'd like to think about today is how we focus on walking by faith. One of our key verses in our Scripture reading is verse seven of 2nd Corinthians 5, "for we walk by faith, not by sight." When we forget to walk by faith, and just focus on the many problems we face, we start to worry about things that we can't control. I like how Jesus puts it, starting in Luke 12:25. In the context, he explains how God takes care of us. He then says, "...can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest?" It's like, with God, it takes nothing to add an hour of life to someone's lifespan - such a simple thing for God! Yet, we may worry about our lives, as if we can control our future! Sure, we can make choices that affect our health and quality of life, but there's so much that we can't predict or control. Who would have known a few months ago that we'd be stuck at home, experiencing a pandemic today? Well, God knew exactly what would be happening! And, God knows what will be happening tomorrow, and in the weeks and months to come. As we keep our eyes on God's Son, Jesus Christ, we walk by faith in the one who is not surprised by anything that happens.

The temptation is to forget that God walks with us as the challenges before our eyes threaten to overwhelm us. Our prayers become "Help me with this," and "Please take care of that problem." Our minds become occupied with all the difficulties we face, and then we ask God to take the problems away, or help us fix things. This is not wrong, but it's much better to start with our eyes on God. Concentration camp survivor, Corrie ten Boom once said this. (I'll say it first in English),

"If you look at the world, you'll be distressed.

If you look within, you'll be depressed.

If you look at God you'll be at rest."

As we praise God for what God has done, and as we declare God's goodness and strength, by the time we get to sharing our feelings with God concerning our problems, even big problems often start to shrink. We'll gain a healthier perspective on reality, and we'll find hope for the future, and energy to go through difficult situations. Our focus will move from worrying about ourselves to caring for those around us, as God cares for them.

In his 2nd letter to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul gives hope to the new believers who were experiencing persecution. In chapter 4, verse 16, he says, "So we do not lose heart..." and then he contrasts walking by sight with walking by faith. He compares the present state of things (that are seen) with a faithful look into a future vision (that is invisible at present). Things may

look bad now from our perspective. But, there are some things that are more important than even life and death. We often fear what we cannot see, and fear can paralyse us. I've heard that [t]he African impala can jump to a height of over [3 metres] and cover a distance of greater than [10 metres]. Yet these magnificent creatures can be kept in an enclosure in any zoo with a [1 metre] wall. The animals will not jump if they cannot see where their feet will fall. Faith is the ability to trust what we cannot see, and with faith we are freed from the flimsy enclosures of life that only fear allows to entrap us.

We may worry about our health. Of course, our health is important, but life doesn't go on forever. Paul says our outer nature is wasting away while our inner nature is being renewed. Our bodies are getting older and weaker, but our inner spirit continues to grow, through faith. We may be experiencing afflictions, but we can look forward to "glory" that is beyond measure in a future in heaven. The things we see in this life are only temporary, but many of the things that we cannot see are eternal. God, God's Word, Jesus Christ, faith, hope, love, and heaven are all eternal things.

Paul says our "earthly tent" (our body) may be destroyed, but we have a "building from God" a new body that will be indestructible. He says we now "groan under our burden." It reminds me of another one of Paul's letters, to the Romans, where he says "...the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now..." (chapter 8, verse 22). In our lives we often face challenges, and we may groan. But, even in terrible difficulties our faith gives us hope. Our troubled lives and decaying bodies will one day be further clothed with eternal, "resurrection bodies." We've been given the Spirit as a guarantee. In other words, Jesus Christ has been the first one to be resurrected. We celebrated that a couple of weeks ago, at Easter. Now, his Spirit strengthens us and gives us hope, until the day when we, too, will be resurrected. With God's Spirit working in us, we are never alone, even though we may sometimes feel alone.

Whether we are "at home" in our bodies, (living our lives), or "away" from our bodies" and "at home" with the Lord (after this life is over), we can live with confidence. It's good to be alive, but we need not fear death because we will then be with our loving God. Paul emphasises that our aim should be to "please him" while we live our lives. This doesn't necessarily mean doing all kinds of things for God. It has more to do with living with faith in God, trusting in God to help us in our relationships, reading God's Word in the Bible, and growing in prayer. In Hebrews 11 it says, "Without faith it is impossible to please God." Faith is essential to our relationship with God because God is way beyond our understanding. Just like we don't understand everything that happens around us. We have to accept much by faith. We have faith that gravity will pull us down into the water if we jump off a rock over a lake. We trust that summer will come after spring, and winter will come after fall. Faith is a part of life. We put faith in airplanes to fly us to various destinations. We put faith in doctors to give us good medical advice. It seems that often when difficulties come, it's a time when we come back to God, looking for help. But, if we work at our faith relationship when things are going well, we'll be better equipped to face the challenges when they come. With what do we fill our minds? Do we spend hours getting the latest info on COVID-19 and all the hardships in the world? It's good to be informed but we need to balance the bad news with hopeful. God is still at work. Even within many sad stories around us, through faith we can open our hearts to see where God is at work. The point is not to ignore any bad news. It's to recognize the reality that God is ultimately in control. This give us strength and courage to work to improve things around us. As our faith grows, we'll be inspired to be God's hands and feet of blessing to others.

Paul says that we all must appear before the judgement seat of Christ. He is speaking now to Christian believers and so the judgement he is talking about is likely not so much to decide if people will go to heaven or to hell. It's more of a judgement of how Christians have lived their lives. Some may receive rewards for good that they've done, while others who lacked much faith may not receive many rewards, yet they will still be a part of God's Kingdom, because of Jesus Christ's sacrifice for our sins on the cross. Living with faith in the resurrected Christ frees us from the fear of eternal punishment for any wrongs that we've done. Christ has us covered! Are we walking with this kind of faith? It can be the source of great peace and courage in stepping out to follow God, as the Spirit leads. Let's pray.

Loving God, we confess that we have not always lived with faith in you. It's so easy to get bogged down with daily challenges that we forget that you are walking with us. Help us to walk by faith and not just by sight. Help us to grow in a sense of your presence, so that we may live in the reality of your care, rather than just by our own strength. O Lord, during this time of COVID-19, help us to focus on the most important things, fixing our eyes on our faith and hope that come from the Lord, rather than living in fear. Thank-you for the strength that comes from your Spirit and your word in the Bible. Thank-you that we can live with confidence because of the work of Jesus Christ. Amen.