



FAITH IN GOD – Psalm 1:1-3; Ephesians 2:1-10

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Believing in God

In my younger years, I enjoyed working in the garage with my father, using different tools and dismantling and building things, sometimes gardening, they were good times of sharing life and bonding with my father. Later when Jeanette and I met and got engaged and then married we enjoyed walking together hand in hand sharing together. Later we became parents and then enjoyed special times walking with our boys in National Parks on weekends, holding their hands when they were very young in encouragement and security. Doing things with family together is gratifying and fulfilling, but what about when it comes to a relationship with God? Is it possible to have such a close relationship with God?

On the 4th April 2021 the ABC reported on a survey carried out by McCrindle Research for the Centre for Public Christianity and they concluded that approximately 57.9% of Australians say that they believe in God. As a young man, before I became a Christian, I also would have said the same - I believe in God. Even though many of the general population would say they believe there is a God, they haven't moved forward in their belief. In effect this belief is just something casual in people's minds and does not bring a person closer to God.

In my teenage years I can remember a couple of men who faithfully taught basic Bible themes to young people on Sunday afternoons. One was the Anglican Minister at Padstow, and the other was an elderly man from Padstow Baptist church. Even though my attendance was sporadic at these meetings, these men planted the beginnings of the knowledge of God. Through attending these meetings my belief in God was encouraged by these faithful men, who had to leave it to the Holy Spirit to turn me around.

Later in 1968 I accepted Jesus as my Saviour and belief commenced the pathway to faith with the help of a new mentor who shared the Gospel of John with me (I can't remember this person, but he lived in Yagoona).

What is faith?

The author of Hebrews puts it this way:

*Now faith is **confidence** in what we **hope** for and **assurance** about what we **do not see**. This is what the ancients were commended for. **By faith** we **understand** that the universe was **formed at God's command**, so that what is seen was **not made out of what was visible**.
(Hebrews 11:1-3 NLT)*

As I grew as a Christian with the help of my mentor, I found after accepting Jesus as my Saviour that faith is not just a strong belief, it is confidence in the hope I received through Jesus' salvation as I came to realise how much I don't deserve God's salvation. Our powerful God, who formed the universe at His own command out of nothing visible, has made it possible for anyone to belong to His eternal plan that is provided through His grace, and through Jesus' death and resurrection. God awaits our acceptance it's not forced upon us; it is only received through our free choice.

For you and me faith and confidence are instilled in us by the action of the Holy Spirit as we learn from God's word. Jesus said:

Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. (John 16:7 ESV)

It took me quite a few years to come to grips with understanding the actions of the Holy Spirit in our lives. From Jesus own words, one of the ways I now think of the Holy Spirit is as our ever-present helper, in this way, the Spirit is ready to prompt us towards the goodness of God. It's when we turn away from God that we fail. If you know you are under temptation of any type, stop, call out to Jesus, it is the Spirit that steps in and helps us to be who God created us to be.

When you are feeling worn out or tired or like you're failing at life, or maybe you feel like you have been so bad you can't be a Christian or you've been struggling through doubt, it's time to remember that Jesus has left the Spirit, the helper, to boost your confidence that God is there and knows your needs.

Because the Spirit came upon the believers after Jesus' resurrection, each of us can start each day knowing the Holy Spirit is there to help us. He is the power that sustains, energizes, and keeps you on a holy path. God understands that you can't save yourself in these times. Do not hesitate to invite Him in as the Spirit is a gift sent by Jesus himself.

How do you have a relationship with God?

We can look at three aspects that help build your relationship with God:

1. Delve into His word.
2. Improve your prayer walk with God.
3. Call upon the Spirit for help.

Delve means to investigate, research, explore, probe and dig through God's word. There are so many resources available to us these days where you can move from just reading the Bible towards delving through God's word. Many of us have used Every Day with Jesus booklets or other similar guides. Our Daily Bread has an email service that takes you through the Word in 12 months. It's a great way to start the day. I have also used Our Daily Bread University – they offer free deeper studies (videos and notes) online.

By reading God's word, we conscientiously gain a better understanding of His greatness, glory and goodness and through this we let the Spirit direct our lives. This was my experience as I passed through my 20's to 40's - through reading the Word, the Holy Spirit motivated me to want to walk with God, as I came to grasp more and more how deeply He cares for me.

2 Timothy 3:16 summarises the importance of God's word:

All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. (NLT)

Improve your Prayer walk:

I won't say that I am a great prayer warrior like some men and women who spend a great deal of time as intercessors. I would say that I'm more like a prayer talker. My prayer ability grew as I prayed or more like simply talked to God as I walked to work, sometimes I would sit somewhere quiet during the day and maybe dwell on a verse and talk to God about it. Sometimes ideas flowed from Devotional booklets as I worked through Bible texts with commentary alongside.

Working on your relationship with God like this brings great joy into your life. (*I know for a fact that Caleb and Grace treasure our prayers for them.*)

The Psalmist commences Psalm 1:

*Oh, the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked,
or stand around with sinners, or join in with mockers.
But they delight in the law of the LORD, meditating on it day and night.
They are like trees planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit each season.
Their leaves never wither, and they prosper in all they do. (Psalm 1:1-3)*

The faithful delight in God's word and meditate on it day and night and this brings great joy through our relationship with God. This is how God prepares us for His work. Our fellowship here at Panania is not age dependent, it simply depends on you and me and our willingness to serve to our ability.

As a summary building a relationship with God involves:

- Recognising my own failures and what is wrong in my life
- Through faith accepting Christ as Saviour
- Reading and reflecting on His word
- Talking with God through Jesus
- Quietly listening to the Spirit's prompting

The discovery of Christ

When I was challenged to accept Jesus there was a strong realisation in my mind of my failings before God. I was outside God's fellowship, and something didn't seem right. The call on my heart was to fix the situation, just belief that there was a God was not enough. This, now, is not surprising as Paul writes in Chapter 2 of Ephesians to the Christian gentiles living in Ephesus:

Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. (v. 1)

Disobedience to God's laws and sin separate us from God, as if we were dead, you lose the ability to grow in spiritual fellowship with God.

You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. (v. 2)

It's the devil's spirit that puts temptation before us and so it is the devil at work on our hearts when we live in disobedience to God's laws.

All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God's anger, just like everyone else. (v. 3)

Before we became Christians our nature was no different to the rest of the world, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature, spoken from our mouth as we covered in James, incorrect thoughts, physical actions, and other wrongs listed in the Bible. But even as Christians we fail God and must confront our own failings to discover all they do is separate us from God.

The comfort of the Saviour

But hope is not lost to us as we read in Ephesians:

But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!) (v. 4,5)

Fortunately for me and you, our eternal salvation, is not dependent on any of our own abilities. God the Father is so rich in mercy and loves us so much that it was through His grace that he raised Christ from the dead.

For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus. (v. 6)

Now, every person who accepts Jesus as Saviour is a saved sinner. We are all delivered from sin and God's wrath and brought into a state of salvation, gaining the right given to us by grace to eternal happiness. We will have a place in heaven with God.

So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of his grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus. God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. (v. 7,8)

What powerful verses - We are under the incredible wealth of God's grace and kindness – it is God who saves – and we can't take any credit. It's well worth meditating at home on these verses and letting the truth of them sink in.

Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. (v. 9,10)

Take comfort in the truth that we are God's masterpieces created new in Christ Jesus so that we can do the good things He planned for us.

In God's comfort we can know:

1. The grace that saves us is the free undeserved goodness and favour of God;
2. God's intention is that all people can access His saving grace
3. God's grace is not *by the works of the law*, but through faith in Christ Jesus, by means of which anyone can obtain the great blessings of the gospel.
4. Both our faith and our salvation are purely the gift of God.

I've found it's a bumpy road at times when you walk with God, especially knowing my own failings. I've found that it's through the Word that the Spirit gives strength to my walk and its through my prayer I can share my life with God. Moreover, it's through Jesus I can rest in the comfort of God's eternal grace.

Through our fellowship together we can support and build each other up regularly. This is why our Grace Groups are so important

Let us pray

What a Friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer!