

Chapter 10

FAITH



God the Father with His Right Hand Raised in Blessing ((1474–1555) (drawing by Girolamo dai Libri)

INTRODUCTION

At this point in reading or listening to “MY JEWISH MESSIAH”, you have probably been experiencing many unique waves of emotions never before incurred due to the magnificence of our Lord and Savior’s countenance unfolding right before your eyes. If you selected one of his chosen disciples as your companion, there were probably many times when you comfortably walked together in much needed silence and contemplation. After all, the honor of being in the presence of “GOD WHO CAME TO DWELL AMONG US” had to be, by itself, truly overwhelming, astounding, and indescribable. Then, as you observed the gentleness he used as he tenderly cared for the forgotten and downtrodden in society, his sincere compassion for them must have pierced your soul, leaving its imprint permanently affixed. The endless actions of compassion you witnessed as he tirelessly ministered to those crying out in agony along the byways must have been amazing and shocking, indeed. However, never did our Lord ignore or refuse to touch even one helpless creature!

Certainly, one thing that hopefully stood out in your mind was how frequently Jesus offered prayers and petitions up to the Father with loud cries and tears. Our Lord prayed after he healed the leper, before he fed the 5000, and during his transfiguration. Then, when you could not locate him, he probably had arisen very early to spend time alone with the Father. Also, it was when you were resting your weary eyes at the end of a long day that he spent the entire night off by himself to be in the company of God in communion.

Then, when you thought every space in your brain was full to overflowing with euphoric thoughts and jubilation due to the grace that had been extended to everyone who came in contact with the Savior, you quickly surmised that walking with the “Jewish Messiah” meant tearing down the barriers of preconceived notions you had carefully built in order to receive concepts never before heard. This became perfectly clear as you sat at his feet with the masses that listened to him deliver the Sermon on the Mount. The forcefulness with which Jesus had delivered the behavioral requirements of citizens living in the kingdom of God let everyone know that a change in attitude was expected. Nothing was sugar coated regarding the effort it would take to comply. When the invitation was extended to “TAKE UP YOUR CROSS AND FOLLOW ME” the picture he painted to mankind regarding expectations let everyone know it would not be a fun walk in the park. All his followers were told, without doubt, that trouble and hardship would be a part of their earthly walk. However, those who had faith and believed in God would receive the reward of living eternally with him in heaven.

Thus, when you heard him say the words, “I and the Father are one,” the depth of their meaning became crystal clear in your mind that he not only believed his mission on earth was to represent God, but to present him to mankind, as well. One thing that is obvious in this oneness with God is that Jesus never indicated he IS the Father. Although Jesus (the Son) is his agent, he very succinctly stated that it is the Father working through him; thus keeping his distinctness from him.

In short, it is because of recognizing and acknowledging the holiness of God that our Savior found it necessary to humble himself before him with every breath he breathed. Certainly, as stated earlier,

Jesus was born into this world as a blood sacrifice for our sins so that we might be drawn back to a HOLY GOD who is reaching out to his children out of love. Although our Creator desires all his children to believe and receive the offer of grace he so lovingly extends, accepting or rejecting it is left totally up to each individual. However, this gift is not possible to receive unless God is recognized as our Creator; the all knowing Holy Father!

HOLINESS OF GOD

Thus, prior to the discussion of faith, it is important to understand, as believers in Christ, the holiness of the One we are following. In the study manual of "Christian Believer—Knowing God With Heart And Mind," by J. Ellsworth Kalas, he defines holiness as follows: "Holiness is a word found all through both the Old and the New Testaments. In the Old Testament, it is associated almost entirely with God. But because we are God's people, it becomes an issue for us too." Certainly, when Jesus delivered the "Sermon on the Mount," his message went right to the heart of this issue for all of us. Thus, throughout New Testament Scripture, purity of heart regarding each individual is referred to as critically important in developing a relationship with a Holy God.

Scriptures supporting the concept of the holiness of God are as follows:

Exodus 15: 11---"Who is like You, O Lord, among the 'gods? Who is like you glorious in holiness?" (Spirit Filled Life Bible, New King James Version)

1 Samuel 2: 2---"No one is holy like the Lord, for there is none besides you. Nor is there any rock like our God." (Spirit Filled Life Bible, New King James Version)

Psalms 99: 1-3---"The Lord reigns; Let the peoples tremble! He dwells between the cherubim. Let the earth be moved! The Lord is great in Zion. And he is high above all the peoples. Let them praise your great and awesome name. He is holy." (Spirit Filled Life Bible, New King James Version)

As we read through the first five books of Old Testament Scripture it does not take long before we realize to what extent mankind distanced itself from God through repeated acts of sin. However, another concept that almost shouts to us repeatedly from Holy Script is the enormous love God has for his creation. After all, since God is holy and without blemish, he most certainly does not NEED anyone or anything. Therefore, it is the patience, grace and mercy he extends throughout time to man that demonstrates the depth of his love he feels for his children. Given the countless times God forgave the sinful behavior of his people offers a vivid description of the nature of our Lord. **Psalm 86: 15** succinctly states this with the words, **"But you, Lord are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness."** (New International Version)

Thus, since the implication of being in a state of holiness, between what is sacred or showing total irreverence to it (acts of sin) separates the individual from his Creator, it is no wonder the pages of the Old Testament are so filled with mans attempts at restoration through offering animal sacrifices on the altar, or various cleansing rituals as specified by God through Moses. Unfortunately, the sinful nature of mankind continued and reconfigured itself into a form of justification without interrupting the desired behavior. Thus, the acts of becoming ritually pure focused entirely on ceremonies

performed to the exterior of the body; causing the messages of Jesus on purity of heart (internal cleansing) to be in total conflict with the laws added by the Jewish leaders of that time.

Before Christians view the ritual purification ceremonies practiced by the Jewish people with disdain, we must take a look at how we seek forgiveness for our own sinful behavior. Although we do not practice the same purification rituals, do we have the answer in dealing with the sins we commit? Simply by wearing religious expressions of piety, being counted as a regular church attendee, faithfully tithing, or giving to the poor still do not replace repenting of sin. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus let us know that he was asking all of his followers (meaning us) to focus on purity of heart. The words from **1 Samuel 16: 7** apply to all God's creation that state, **"But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him.**

For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart." (English Standard Version)



As the writer's wise 91 year old friend, Mary Josephine Pascall frequently stated while wagging her finger directly at you, "Now child, why do you want to work at hiding your sinful behavior? You might as well fess up because our Lord knows what you are thinking and doing anyway? Give it up! He already knows! You can't get away with anything just because you fool every person in your path! And....child...., why would you ever want to hide from a Father that loves you so much?"

Consequently, since the act of sinning distances us from our Holy God, unless we, as Jesus taught, bow in reverence at the Creator's feet, it will be virtually impossible to ever behold the true nature of our Father and grow closer to him. As stated in an earlier chapter, man is not capable of ever maneuver the trials of life on his own. Without God, every human being is lost; no matter the material riches or position obtained. Therefore, the question in this writer's mind is, "Given this basic truism, why would anyone ever want to set out on a useless, empty journey of this sort," especially in light of the Scripture from **Jeremiah 29: 11** that reads, **"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future"**. (NIV)



"Schnorr von Carolsfeld Bibel in Bildern 1860 001" by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld - Bibel in Bildern. Licensed under Public Domain via Commons -

For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," declares the LORD. 9"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts....Isaiah 55: 8-9 (NIV)

FAITH

The beginning point of having faith is believing that God exists and is the Great Promise Keeper. It is accepting the fact that God already has, and will always, fulfill his promises even though our human eyes have not seen them materialize, yet. Although many people have tried various times to offer evidence and logic that explain the existence of God, in the end, those believing in God must simply make a giant leap of trust defined as faith. **Hebrews 11: 1** states, **"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."**

Thus, once the great leap of faith in believing God exists has occurred in your life, it must be pointed out that this is only the beginning of your walk with the Creator. **James 2: 19** states, **"You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that----and shudder."** Since Almighty God desires to be an intricate part of every aspect of your earthly life, in order to establish this dynamic intimate

relationship that he desires, reading his Word, spending time in prayer, and listening for his still small voice (Holy Spirit) are all critical aspects of the process.

Then, as stated in the study manual of “Christian Believer—Knowing God With Heart And Mind,” by J. Ellsworth Kalas, “Faith is as faith does”; words that require much contemplation by all those committed to a lifelong spiritual journey with God. It means being willing to follow in the footsteps of saints like Abraham who never witnessed the promises of God delivered in his lifetime, but still finished the race the Almighty set before him. Certainly, those of us that were later inhabitants of the earth recognize that his descendents became as numerous as the stars in the sky; a promise of the Father delivered according to his plan and right on time. Since the Old Testament is filled with stories of situations like this, it should be a lesson to all of us regarding our own faith walk with God.



Consequently, it is at this point that we must center on the process used for lifting up our requests to God in prayer. Jerry Sittser, in his book “When God Doesn’t Answer Your Prayer,” stated that we would probably be surprised as to how many people within one congregation on a Sunday morning are wondering why God answers the prayers of others but not their own. Folks, I would imagine, if we are truly honest with ourselves, most of us have asked this question in our own minds more than once. In fact, it is these exact feelings experienced by many people when God did not intervene in a tragic event, which prompted them to stop believing in their Creator all together. I have heard it said by some, “If there is a God, why did he allow this to happen in the first place?”

Betende Hände. Bleistift und Kohle auf Velin. By Otto Greiner (1869-1916)

Thus, rather than making others feel guilty during their time of doubt, we should patiently walk beside them until this conflict is resolved. At this point, if you read the Scripture below the picture of God above, you will realize that it is not possible to think like God. He is not bound by space or time; which means, he sees the past, present, and future simultaneously. He knows us better than we know ourselves and realizes precisely what we need, can handle and understand. Truly, if we were to realize what sorrows were waiting in our future, we would probably worry ourselves into a permanent state of insomnia.

Also as human beings, we are self centered beyond words when we make our prayer requests to God. Our needs and desires for solutions are generated from mere human minds that try to hem God in based on the perimeters we have established; walls that try to inhibit a supreme being that created literally everything and everyone. It is at this point that we must realize that God cannot be contained within walls that we build!

First, we have such limited vision that if God were to bestow on us our every desire, it would be calamitous for us; possibly resulting in corrupt behavior. As Jerry Sittser stated in his book, “When God Does Not Answer Prayer”: *“Spiritual power is greater than all other kinds of power because it*

comes directly from God. It is mightier than armies and education and office and wealth. It is the power that created the world, that sustains the world, that redeems the world. It is the power that can heal the blind and raise people from the dead. It is the power that can transform the human heart. There is no power as wonderful and good as spiritual power. It is for that very reason that is so terrible and dangerous, not because of what God does with it but because of what we might do. God is merciful to us when he does not grant us such power on a whim or wish."

Sittser went on to say, *"Unanswered prayers are God's gift to us because it protects us from ourselves. We try to change our circumstances when we pray. But God wants to change us."*

Second, we would probably treat God with very little importance, but instead more like making a purchase on line with a credit card when needing a prayer answered. Certainly, this makes the words of Jesus more understandable in **Matthew 19: 23-24**, when he said to his disciples, **"I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."** (*Life Application Study Bible, NIV*) This statement was especially shocking during that time because of the belief that being poor was the result of punishment from God due to sinful behavior. (Since society reveres the wealthy even today, the words of Jesus strike right at the heart of the matter, don't they?) Plus, people who do not know physical hunger have a tendency to feel self sufficient; thinking they are capable of managing without help from God.

In short, faith is bowing at the foot of the cross in total submission to God with both open hands and heart and believing that he truly does know us better than we know ourselves. It is realizing that we are here on this earth at this time and in this location for his purpose and pleasure; NOT OURS.

Then, when the unthinkable and unimaginable challenge rears its ugly head in our path, let the Scripture from **Isaiah 43: 1-2** sweep over us, **"Fear not, for I have redeemed you; When you pass through the waters, I will be with you, and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze."** (*NIV*)

Finally, does this mean we should stop praying? No! Our God asks us to raise our voices to him when feeling pain and happiness! O Christian Believer, you may never in your earthly life see some of your prayers answered, or be unable to recognize the response from your Almighty because it is not what you imagined within your human mind as being the solution.

Romans 5:1-5 reads that faith triumphs in a time of trouble. **"5 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have^[a] peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. ³And not only *that*, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; ⁴and perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us."** *New King James Version (NKJV)*

In conclusion, when challenges in life shake your faith to the core, fall to your knees and cry out like the father who had asked Jesus to heal his demon-possessed boy when he said, **"I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" (Mark 9: 24) (NIV)** Above all else, please know you are not ever alone. Jesus

promised you would never be without him; and you won't! Also, as disciples of Christ, let each of us be his reflection and wrap our arms in prayer around a child feeling doubt and pain. Go Ye!

TIME FOR CONTEMPLATION

In order to internalize the response we should have all our lives to our Creator and his Son, let us allow the actions of the disciple Peter to lead the way. It is important to frame the actions of Peter by remembering that he was not a learned man, but an ordinary fisherman possessing a bold and brash personality. His quick reactions to situations remind the writer of a very large puppy desirous of wanting to play with his master. Lacking coordination and training, all he knew to do was to jump, lick, and wag his tail. Given this description, it is understandable why Jesus chose him, isn't it? After all, enthusiasm like Peter's would keep those around him in a positive frame of mind.

In addition, it is important to point out Peter's behavior in the miraculous draught of fishes; a miracle preformed by Jesus. If you recall Scripture, you will remember Jesus approaching the tired group of fishermen that had been unsuccessful and had returned with long faces and empty boats. When Jesus directed them to cast their nets out in a specific location, even though they knew in their heart of hearts that it was a useless recommendation, they followed his directions anyway. Then, when the boats were sagging with the abundance of fish, it was Peter that recognized and acknowledged the divinity of Jesus by falling at his feet in humble adoration and submission. Scripture from *Luke 5: 6-11* reads, *"When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink."*

"Brooklyn Museum - The Miraculous Draught of Fishes (La pêche miraculeuse) - James Tissot - overall" by James Tissot - Online Collection of Brooklyn Museum; Photo: Brooklyn Museum, 2006, 00.159.87_PS1.jpg. Licensed under Public Domain



“When Simon Peter saw this, HE FELL AT JESUS’ KNEES AND SAID, “GO AWAY FROM ME, LORD; I AM A SINFUL MAN!” For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon’s partners.” (Life Application Study Bible, NIV)

Ladies and gentlemen, let us all follow the behavior of Peter through recognizing the greatness of the Father by falling to our knees in total **reverence to a HOLY GOD**. (Before moving to the next section, focus on the painting above by Tissot that brings Peter’s reaction to life. Are you surprised that only one out of the group had this reaction? May we all model his behavior.)

Sources:

“Christian Believer—Knowing God With Heart And Mind,” by J. Ellsworth Kalas

“When God Does Not Answer Prayer” by Jerry Sittser

“New Application Study Bible, NIV”

“The Spirit Filled Life Bible—New King James Version”

“Morning by Morning” by Charles Spurgeon



GROWING IN THE WORD



1) Before beginning your Bible Study together, I invite you to go to the www.devotionalembbers.com and open the music tab showing the selections in alphabetical order. Play the hymn, “Holy, Holy Holy, by organist Brad Jent and allow your mind to focus on the holiness of the Father.

2) Read together the Scripture from ***Isaiah 57: 15: “For thus says the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.”***

Share your feelings on why our Holy God chooses to bow down and revive the heart of the contrite ones. When you come into the presence of God in prayer, what is your visual image of him? Describe your feelings of being in his presence. Discuss the word, “reverence.”

3) In the book “When God Does Not Answer Prayer, by Jerry Sittser, the following quote was used: ***“Spiritual power is greater than all other kinds of power because it comes directly from God. It is mightier than armies and education and office and wealth. It is the power that created the world, that sustains the world, that redeems the world. It is the power that can heal the blind and raise people from the dead. It is the power that can transform the human heart. There is no power as wonderful and good as spiritual power. It is for that very reason that is so terrible and dangerous, not because of what God does with it but because of what we might do. God is merciful to us when he does not grant us such power on a whim or wish.”***

Sittser went on to say, *“Unanswered prayers are God’s gift to us because it protects us from ourselves. We try to change our circumstances when we pray. But God wants to change us.”*

Ask someone to read this out loud slowly. Discuss what these powerful words mean to you. Have you ever wondered why God doesn’t seem to answer prayer? Do you know anyone that has fallen by the wayside; no longer believing in God due to tragedy? Talk about how a disciple of Christ can walk alongside an individual in this troubled time? What can you say or do? Tie your discussion to the statement *“Faith is as faith does”* by *“Christian Believer—Knowing God With Heart And Mind,”* by J. Ellsworth Kalas.

CLOSING PRAYER

Dear Kind and Forgiving Father,

First, we praise you for allowing us to ask questions and share our times of doubt freely with you. Since you have told us our mind will never come remotely close to being like yours, it is a relief that you know us better than we know ourselves.

We openly admit that many times, confusion is such a part of our thinking process; we don’t even possess the ability to figure out the questions to ask. Thus, we ask that you help us sort through the troublesome times of doubt and hold our hand when we lose our grip. Steady our feet when we stumble and fall carrying us safely toward the star that leads us home.

Holy! Holy! Holy! You are the Holy Father! We bow to you in total submission; dying to self and becoming one with you.

Amen!



The hand as an isolated motif. [Fresco](#) from [Sant Climent de Taüll, Catalonia](#)