

This book challenges readers to develop what God/Jesus, highly values; faith in Him. It looks at the various relationships in which faith is to be developed, relationship with God, in marriage, within the family, in the workplace and others areas. Throughout the book the author soundly expounds pertinent biblical passages, inspiring applications.

In Search of Faith: Developing a God-Honoring Faith While Living In Our Fallen World

By Ruben L. Martinez

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“When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?”

– JESUS

IN SEARCH *of* FAITH

Developing a God-Honoring Faith
While Living In Our Fallen World



RUBEN L. MARTINEZ

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ABBREVIATIONS

Old Testament

Genesis	Gen	Ecclesiastes	Eccl
Exodus	Ex	Song of Solomon	Song
		Isaiah	Isa
Leviticus	Lev	Jeremiah	Jer
Deuteronomy	Dt	Lamentations	Lam
Joshua	Josh	Ezekiel	Ezek
Judges	Judg	Daniel	Dan
Ruth	Ruth	Hosea	Hos
1 Samuel	1 Sam	Joel	Joel
2 Samuel	2 Sam	Amos	Amos
1 Kings	1 Kgs	Obadiah	Obad
2 Kings	2 Kgs	Jonah	Jon
1Chronicles	1 Chr	Micah	Mic
2Chronicles	2 Chr	Nahum	Nah
Ezra	Ezra	Habakkuk	Hab
Nehemiah	Neh	Zephaniah	Zeph
Esther	Esth	Haggai	Hag
Job	Job	Zechariah	Zech
Psalms	Ps	Malachi	Mal
Proverbs	Prov		

New Testament

Matthew	Matt	1 Timothy	1 Tim
Mark	Mark	2 Timothy	2 Tim
Luke	Luke	Titus	Titus
John	John	Philemon	Philem
Acts	Acts	Hebrews	Heb
Romans	Rom	James	Jas
1 Corinthians	1 Cor	1 Peter	1 Pet
2 Corinthians	2 Cor	2 Peter	2 Pet
Galatians	Gal	1 John	1 John
Ephesians	Eph	2 John	2 John
Philippians	Phil	3 John	3 John
Colossians	Col	Jude	Jude
1 Thessalonians	1 Thess	Revelation	Rev
2 Thessalonians	2 Thess		

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Chapter 2

Searching for Faith in God

Attributes of God

Throughout the Bible and history in general, humanity has repeatedly been plagued by a lack of knowledge of God or by frank misconceptions. He has revealed quite a bit about Himself through creation and then progressively through His Word, culminating in the words and works of the Lord Jesus Christ (see Heb 1:1-2). Now if God had not graciously revealed His attributes, nature, and character, humanity would hopelessly keep groping around seeking explanations for life. Extensive illustrations of this groping can be noted from Greek and Roman mythologies, relying on mere human observations, experiences, and reasoning. There are of course enough divine characteristics revealed in creation to hold man morally accountable to God (see Rom 1:18-20).

However, in order for man to have a loving relationship with God, much more of God's nature must be revealed. That essential revelation is beyond unredeemed human perception. God must open man's spiritual eyes, so they can see what is essential about Himself—what the New Testament calls, "light." In the Old Testament, God used the patriarchs, prophets, and priests to accomplish this, then authenticated what they said with miracles (for example, the Book of Exodus). In the New Testament, while God used His apostles, the crown of all revelation is the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what the Apostle John was getting at in John. 1:1-18, (see also Eph 1:15-20).

In John 1:18, we read this curious statement, "...He [Jesus] has explained Him [God the Father]." The term for,

“explained,” means, “To bring out the meaning, exegete, expound, interpret, reveal.” The verse begins by stating, “No one has seen God at any time....” Jesus came into the world to reveal His Father, God. Those characteristics of His nature are necessary for fallen, unredeemed humans to know and thus have a loving relationship with Him. However, to truly understand, this revelation requires the exercise of faith! As I mentioned in chapter one, there is no way around faith, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.” (John 1:12). To “receive” points to a beginning, child-like faith that instinctively embraces its dependence and need of help, the faith slowly begins to trust and believe. This child-like faith can then grow strong and mature, *cf.* Matt 18:2 ff.

Furthermore, while the Old Testament mentions and reveals God’s mercy, love, and grace, it only highlights God’s holiness and justice (*cf.* Ex. 34:6-7; Ps 85). While the New Testament also reveals God’s holiness and justice, it only highlights His mercy, love, and grace (*cf.* John 1:14-17). In many ways, exercising faith in God has already been mentioned in the previous chapters. In this chapter, I want to elaborate on a few of God’s attributes, that in my thinking and our times, sorely need to be reconsidered. Jesus reveals so much, there is no way to cover even a tenth of it! As a result, what I am going to do is simply mention a few of the attributes covered in both the Old and New Testaments. That coverage will necessarily have to be a short and abbreviated treatment! I also need to mention that God’s attributes are so interrelated, that some overlapping is difficult to avoid. Along with the interrelatedness, I will also have to sub-categorize in some cases. For instance, under the attribute of love, there is compassion, mercy, grace, etc. Under the attribute of sovereignty, there is authority, power, wisdom, control, etc.

I am going to be looking at five attributes of God and what exerting faith in each one looks like. By doing this, I hope that it will trigger useful and fruitful meditations about exerting faith in God and His attributes. The five attributes of God that I will discuss are sovereignty, faithfulness, love, holiness, and glory. Again, there are tons of things to say about each one of these attributes, that perhaps, a whole book should be written about each one. If all I accomplish is raise awareness or curiosity, it will be well worth it.

The Sovereignty of God

Absolute sovereignty is an attribute of God that many have disagreed with and even fought over. In some circles, the battle still rages today, between what is called Arminianism (highlighting man's free will) and Calvinism (highlighting God's sovereignty). Both have strong cogent argumentation and supporting biblical passages, but I am not going to defend either one of them. I believe this area of revelation, like other biblical revelations, involves mystery. For example, I believe that Jesus is both fully man and fully God, that God is three persons but is one God, that God is utterly sovereign, and that man has free will, etc., (see. Dt 29:29; Col 1:27 and 2:2).

It seems to me that it is the height of arrogance to think one can, by mere logic, explain such mystery as the reality of both man's free will and God's sovereignty. Then again, it may not be arrogance, but fear; fear of the unknown. It seems to me that we westerners have a difficult time with mystery. Having an "explanation," albeit a false or incomplete one, can temporarily and falsely relieve fears. Others ride doctrinal hobby horses to make themselves feel good about "being in the right" while others are "clearly being in the wrong". Then again, this may be a ploy to keep themselves from facing ugly and frightening internal, personal issues.

Be that as it may, there are biblical passages that highlight God's absolute sovereignty that believers need to keep in mind when exercising faith. The Old Testament book of Daniel is chock full of revelations on the sovereignty of God. A whole book could be written about God's sovereignty just from the book of Daniel! My personal favorite from Daniel is chapter seven. What one finds there is God's sovereignty over human history. The "super-powers," of the world rise and fall according to God's sovereign plan.

Dan 7:9-14 is a beautiful, awe-inspiring revelation. Not only does it bring out God's absolute holiness described as "...a river of fire..." (v. 10), but also God's sovereignty by giving to the "...Son of Man..." (v. 13, *cf.* John 5:24-29) the world's dominion forever (v. 14). All this, of course, means God has the absolute authority and power to carry this out, i.e. He is The Boss, Top Dog, The Chief, Kingpin, Master, Head Honcho, Numero Uno, and the Big Kahuna... of the whole world and throughout all time!

As the world faces all the turmoil of terrorism, abusive governments, massive immigration battles, fake news (we can hardly believe much anymore), and moral debauchery, believers can react in less than God-honoring ways. Fears, self-protection, anxiety, and constant anger are some of the ungodly responses to our fallen world. Yet, a good understanding of God's sovereignty can ameliorate and temper the believers' inner state and actions.

No matter who is living in the U.S. White House, God has not lost control, He is the world's sovereign! *Cf.* Acts 17:24-26. No matter the lies and liars that seem to win, God will eventually sweep them away like a flood, *cf.* Ps 73:18-20. No matter the economy, God can sovereignly make meat and sweet bread drop from heaven! *Cf.* Ex. 16, especially verses 13-15 and 31. Amidst the world's chaos and threats, believers can

have composure and steadiness as they exercise faith in God's sovereignty over all of life. That exercise of faith in God's sovereignty means they will continue to respond in godly ways that include gracious, nourishing speech, and keeping of one's responsibilities. The exercise of faith in God's sovereignty kept Daniel steady and God-honoring in the face of his homicidal political enemies.

A biblical passage that has caused so many debates and conflicts is Eph 1:4-5. In this passage, it is noticeably clear that God was sovereignly choosing believers even before they were born. Paul goes on to mention God's good intentions, His will, and glory in relation to this sovereignty; an attribute of God. Contextually, Paul's purpose in bringing out the sovereignty of God is to encourage believers especially about the secure standing in relation to God. Believers are to exercise faith in God's sovereignty when they are discouraged, feeling like they are a failure, and perhaps not even feeling like one of God's chosen. That seems to be the proper application of God's sovereignty in this passage. Believers are to exercise faith in God's sovereignty in choosing them and not their circumstance, feelings, or performance in any way, *cf.* Eph 1:13-14.

Another biblical passage that is also hijacked in doctrinal arguments is Rom 9:6-23. Paul brings out God's sovereignty for at least three reasons. The first reason is to expose the misconception that merely being of Israel or one of Abraham's descendants meant automatic salvation (vs. 6-7). The second reason is to humble humans' demandingness of God explaining Himself (*cf.* v. 20). The third and most important reason, Paul brings out God's sovereignty to reveal how God sovereignly worked things out to, "...make known the riches of His glory...." (*cf.* v. 23). That display of God's sovereignty brings any man's arrogance down a few notches, to say the least!

Believers need to implement faith in God's sovereignty by humbly trusting God's way of salvation (trusting in the finished work of Jesus on the cross) and that such a sovereign plan reveals more of God's glory (more on this below). Although believers do not understand all of God's ways, they are to rely on God's sovereignty as they live their daily life. Believers can express awe and wonder with David in Ps 139:6, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is too high, I cannot attain to it." The sovereignty of God should primarily lead believers to worship not debate! However, to get to worship, believers must exercise faith in what God has revealed concerning His sovereignty.

The Faithfulness of God

A largely unspoken or rarely discussed experience nowadays is *unfaithfulness*. It has become so common that most people now expect *unfaithfulness* and see it as just an everyday reality. Now many businesses advertise that "no contract" is necessary. Business owners know that customer loyalty or faithfulness is not to be counted on, so tricky allurements or outright fantasy advertising must be implemented to stay profitable. As another example, for years now people have had "starter marriages" where the husband or wife, sometimes both, know that the marriage is not going to last, but simply be a trial run at marriage. As a result, "To death do us part..." is in many instances only a nice, sentimental part of the "vows".

Another area where *unfaithfulness* is becoming common is in friendships. I vividly remember my children repeatedly being disappointed by "friends" who said they would be coming over to play and spend the afternoon or evening with them. Then, shortly before the friends were due to arrive my kids would get a call that something else came along, something

“more fun” and so the “friends” would not be coming over. Sometimes my kids were not informed until after the fact! Faithfulness to one’s word is disappearing.

Another disturbing but quite common experience related to unfaithfulness is lying. Lying seems to have become a way of life. Whether it is news outlets, politicians, false advertisers, or even preachers making false promises, lying is a way of life! Eugene Peterson’s translation of 1 Tim 4:2 states, “These liars have lied so well and for so long that they have lost their capacity for truth.” Such is our present world!

In stark contrast, God is absolutely faithful. He is totally dependable and trustworthy in His character, Word, and thus His promises. As the old hymn has it, “...There is no shadow of turning with Thee: Thou changest not, Thy compassions they fail not: As Thou hast been Thou forever wilt be...” God’s attribute of faithfulness is demonstrated in both judgments and blessings.

One of the greatest stories in the Old Testament (and the whole Bible) is Abraham’s obedience to God in his willingness to sacrifice his only son of promise in Gen. 21:12 and 22:1-10. In the New Testament, we are told that Abraham was exercising faith in God’s faithfulness to keep His promises. Even though we do not find any record of resurrections before Abraham, Abraham’s faith in God’s faithfulness included believing (“He considered...”) that God could/would raise Isaac from the dead! See Heb 11:17-19. It is no wonder Abraham is called “The father of the faith.” Indeed, three major world religions consider Abraham a founding patriarch: Judaism, Islam, and Christianity.

When the Lord was instructing the Israelites to go into the promised land to possess it and to destroy the ungodly, wicked nations, He highlighted His faithfulness. His promises, given by the forefathers, (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) would *certainly*

be fulfilled and had nothing to do with their numbers or faith. He loved them and was keeping His word. However, the faithful keeping of His promises also meant the certainty of the judgment of the wicked, *cf.* Dt. 7:7-10.

Now, this faithfulness does not play favorites, otherwise, such faithfulness could not be counted on, i.e. would not be dependable. Centuries later when the Jews strayed from their relational commitments with God, God repeatedly warned them to repent and return to Him, otherwise, they would experience destruction. When they refused, the Lord leveled Jerusalem. The prophet Jeremiah, who loved God and the Jewish nation, was used by God to sound strong warnings. In His faithfulness, God carried out what He had warned because they refused to repent; because of this, Jeremiah was greatly distraught and in anguish. Thus, Jeremiah expressed his anguish and wrote the book of Lamentations.

What is instructive through all of Jeremiah's anguish and bitterness, is that part of Jeremiah's rock-solid hope was God's faithfulness. See Lam 3:19-23. God had been faithful in keeping His word, even in judging His own people. Therefore, God can be trusted in whatever He says! This passage is where that old hymn quoted above comes from. Believers have been encouraged by it for almost one hundred years now!

What about today? Believers seemed to be facing unprecedented challenges to their walk of faith. Now Jesus promised, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matt. 28:20) And, "In the world you have tribulations; but take courage; I have overcome the world." (John 16:33) Well, what about when ungodliness and immorality like homosexuality, begins to show up in the church and in believers' homes? This is definitely occurring now, much more frequently these days. This is one area where exercising faith in God's faithfulness is greatly called for. Will the church leaders, parents, and siblings

stay faithful to God or allow the immorality for the sake of “love and unity”? Yes, love (which can be complex in application) should never be absent, but God’s Word is quite clear about maintaining moral purity, *cf.* 1 Cor 5:11-13. Indeed, maintaining moral purity (for instance in marriage) is a major part of loving.

What is called for is the exercise of faith in the Lord’s faithfulness, to keep His promise to not leave His loved ones, but to stay with them through the tribulations of the world. Indeed, biblical faithfulness has the same core sense of certainty as faith. Faith is having a settled conviction of something actually existing or certainty that it will be, even though not seen, *cf.* Heb 11:1. It is possible that church leaders, parents, siblings, etc., lose relationships with loved ones, as they obey the Lord and not associate with the immoral “Christian.” These decisions, to not associate with certain loved ones, are very tough decisions and so require great faith in the Lord’s faithfulness.

Jesus also said that He came to cause divisions in close relationships and that one must love Him above all others. In other words, losing beloved individuals would be part of the collateral damage of following Him, i.e. doing what is God-honoring when it comes to moral issues and living for Him. Then again, this calls for a strong exertion of faith in God’s faithfulness (certainty of His support) because great loss and intense pain are certainly part of living life for Jesus! This is not to say things will always be clear and simple, but when it comes to the bottom line, a choice might have to be made and the exercise of faith in the Lord’s faithfulness is indispensable.

What about the future, in this life or the next? Many times, we make or must make, decisions about the future, now! Saying yes to living and obeying the Lord now, means saying no to other things. Of course, making sacrifices for a better tomorrow

is necessary and many are still doing it. For example, getting an education or training now for a better paying job later is what many realize needs to be done, and end up doing it. However, the focus here is in relation to God's revealed will.

Many, for example, will ask mostly to themselves or only subconsciously, "If I give the money I should be giving to the church, will I have enough for my family or myself?", "If I live for the Lord, is it really worth saying no to certain pleasures now or losing beloved relationships?" Although they may not be asked out loud or consciously, these questions are none-the-less, asked every day. In Matt. 10:42, Jesus promises future rewards for those who, as disciples, give to others. Yes, the glory of God (more on this below) and the love of God (more on this below) are to be the greatest motivation to live for Jesus. Though in this passage (and many others), Jesus tacitly reveals the reality and legitimacy of other motivations we all have, that is, we are multi motivational beings. Still, believers are to exercise faith in God's faithfulness in the future as they live for Him today.

Believers' faith in the Lord's faithfulness is challenged at many levels, sometimes in small ways, but at times even to death, *cf.* Rev. 2:11. The very name/character of God is Faithful, *cf.* Rev. 19:11, "And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war." And so, believers are to exercise faith in God's faithfulness. Jesus is looking for such faith in His faithfulness... will He find it in us?

The Love of God

This is an immense topic that will take an eternity to sound its depths! One can try to imagine light years up, light years down, light years east, west, north, and south, and just barely

scratch the surface of God's love. My words, indeed, language itself, fails miserably in expressing all that could and should be expressed about the love of God. Still, I will offer some thoughts that will hopefully trigger some meditations and acts of faith.

Well, we begin with a general, but biblically informed definition of love. Love is doing what is best for the person being loved. Well, what is best? What is best is helping the person being loved know God and live the will of God in their life. Because of how far we've fallen, that task takes blood, sweat, and tears! That of course is what Jesus did and is doing, only He did it in the unique and ultimate way that only God could accomplish, *cf.* Luke 22:41-42; John 15:13; 19:17-34; Acts 4:12. Now in a less than divine way, but at times still requiring great sacrifices, Jesus' disciples/followers are called to love others, *cf.* 2 Cor 4:12, (more on this below).

Now we understand that love has many shades of meaning and can be pretty complicated. Yet, in comparison to biblical love, today love is being defined in ways that are so lame and weak! Today "loving" means allowing others to do whatever, even if it is against God's revealed moral will; for example, sexual perversions, abortions, etc. Today love means giving those we "love" whatever they want without requiring much if any responsibility, just to help them fulfill their dreams. Today love means not stressing anyone out, and tolerating anything and everyone. With such definitions of love, people are emotionally crippled and spiritually flabby, to say the least!

When the love of God is received and deeply experienced, it is a powerful motivator. Jesus' eternal experiences of His Father's love motivated Him to go through the great sufferings He experienced to have others saved and to know His Father, God, *cf.* John 17:26. This is the love that is to powerfully

motivate and compel Christians to love others, *cf.* 2 Cor 5:14-15.

When this divine love is being lived out, it is also a powerful witness for the person and love of Jesus. In John 13:35, we read of Jesus telling His disciples, “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” Once again, to love, even fellow believers, may require some blood, sweat, and tears because the sinful nature is not eradicated even when one trusts Jesus as personal Savior. Even loving fellow believers, which is a great witness, requires the ongoing exercise of faith.

All that is great, but what about when intense suffering comes knocking at our door? Eventually, suffering *will come* knocking! There is something about suffering that brings us face to face with what really matters, and that is our relationship with God! We may deny, try to numb, or rail against God when intense suffering comes, but we will have to reckon with Him. When it comes to our relationship with God, the issue of sin is “ever before us!” See Ps 51:3.

In Ps 130, we see a man free-falling with nothing to hold on to, but the Love of God. It manifests itself in the forgiveness of sins, which then propels him to earnestly invite others to put all their hope in the Lord. In verse 1, we are not told what is causing trouble. Many times, the cause of our suffering is not the issue, but rather what we do with it during that time. What the psalmist does is cry out to the Lord when he is deeply suffering, which is one of God’s main purposes when people are in pain. In verse 2, the psalmist shows that he understands he really doesn’t have anything to offer God, but his soul crying for help. This is the psalmist’s and our desperate cry, “...oh God help/save me!” We all have, are having, or will have those panic moments when we cry to God. Though coming to God shines the light on the fundamental problem, and it’s usually

not the immediate cause of our suffering or suffering itself, but it is sin! God is holy and the psalmist is not; verse 3. With that, the psalmist realizes he is utterly hopeless and helpless unless God shows mercy and grace by forgiving him!

In verse 4, the greatest tension/problem the psalmist is facing, and really all of humanity faces, is relieved by God's amazing forgiveness. Note that the purpose of such great forgiveness is not personal ease and happiness, but rather the fear/worship of God. Oh, that we Christians would get that right! *Cf.* Apostle Paul in 1 Tim 1:15-17.

I must point out here, that for many to really believe that God actually forgives them of their sins is very difficult. To experience forgiveness for great sins they have committed is simply too far removed from what they have experienced in life. That is why the exertion of faith to receive and experience forgiveness will need repetition and many reminders of Jesus' great work, they will need to be reminded of the eternal price He paid to procure that forgiveness, see 1 John 1:9-2:2.

From such deliverance, the psalmist is now propelled to putting all his being, all his hope, in the person of God and His word, verse 5. No matter what difficulties or dangers he faces in life, he will put all life in the hands of God, verse 6. Note, the night watchmen were in danger throughout the night, as they had to keep watch for any enemy that could not be seen in the cover of darkness. Hence, the watchmen greatly anticipated the morning light when their safety would greatly increase! As he experienced God's forgiveness the psalmist became more aware of both the greatest danger; sin before God, and the greatest security, God's forgiveness/love.

From that experience and secure position before God, in verse 7, the psalmist is now motivated and free to reach out to others. He connects the amazing transformation of his hopeless suffering to rock-solid hopefulness in God's love, namely,

God's loyal love. This is a rich Hebrew term that means to consistently do what is best for the one being loved. Indeed, that loyal love, (variously translated, "mercy," King James; "lovingkindness," New American Standard; "unfailing love," New International Version; etc.), does much more than forgiveness. It abundantly redeems, but redeems, "from all his, (Israel) iniquities," verse 8.

There are many more biblical examples of suffering that bring those who are suffering to the point of realizing that the greatest problem is sin. From the conviction of sin, they are further carried along to realize that God's love is demonstrated through God's mercy, kindness, compassion, forgiveness, and redemption, *cf.* Ps 25:1-7; Rom 5:3-8, etc.

God's loyal love is demonstrated in unexpected ways that only the truly divine can demonstrate. For example, we are shown in the Bible that when we devalue and turn away from God, He is greatly grieved. One of the saddest descriptions of the suffering servant of God, Jesus, is found in Isa 53:3-4, "He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him." However, that most grievous shunting of God's love did not stop God's loyal love! The next two verses (5-6) read, "Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrow He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and flicked. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him and by His scourging we are healed." What love!

There is more. God's love knows that for a stubborn, self-relying man to come to the realization of sin, more times than not, strong, repetitive pain in his life is needed! God's loyal love is willing to cause that needed pain and suffering, *and* for Himself to hurt and suffer along with His beloved, for the

beloved's good! This seems to me the whole point of the curse on the woman and the man in Gen. 3:16-19. See also Isa 63:9, and context.

Then again, the suffering may not be the presence of sin, but the prevention of sin. In chapter 7 we mention Paul's "thorn in the flesh" 2 Cor 12:7-10. Notice, twice Paul writes, "...to keep me from exalting myself," and "...there was given to me." This will sound odd, only because we are not used to seeing such wise love like this, but who can suffer with their children like that? This indeed is an awe-inspiring love that God has revealed and demonstrated!

Here's the rub. When life is not working well for us, when there is great frustration and pain, we forget or do not feel God's love, mercy, kindness, compassion, etc.! Even when reminded by the Holy Spirit, reading in the Bible, hearing some good sermon, or loving friends that remind us, we may not be moved. We are again left with the need and the decision to exercise faith in the love of God. By having faith in God's love for us, we are to continue to keep up with our responsibilities at home, work, school, etc. We are to implement faith in God's love and believe that He is working on something good and wise. We are to keep faith in and through whatever pain and suffering we are experiencing, even if we do not see it. By exerting faith in God's love, we are to continue loving others and not just lick our wounds and seek to shield ourselves from more pain.

When we exercise faith in God's love under such circumstances, our faith is deepened and strengthened, that is what God is after. Then, when that finally happens, we will be able to honor God more effectively and extensively. We become more mature, more "Christ-like."

This "Christ-likeness," which demonstrates the love of God and is expressed as mercy, kindness, grace, compassion, etc., is then going to show to others. Yes, many times this will not

mean that, at the moment, we ourselves are experiencing the love of God, but by having faith in His love we give it to others who, like us, may not deserve it! It seems that this is part of what the Apostle Paul meant in 2 Cor 4:12-13. Although he is speaking about living by faith in the resurrection, the same applies to living by faith in God's love.

In that passage, Paul quotes from Ps 116:10. In v.9, There is a fresh commitment; a rededication to walk ethically, uprightly, righteously, in the eyes of God in this lifetime, "in the land of the living." He did it by exercising faith in the Lord, v. 10. The psalmist is saying that even in his time of great trouble, he was still believing in the Lord. This would continue the way of living he committed to in verse 9, i.e., he will continue to trust in the Lord no matter what! In our present consideration, the believer will continue to show God's love by faith, even if he is going through some tough things.

This is not easy nor simple because life, itself, is not easy nor simple! Many questions surround every circumstance we find ourselves in but exercising faith in God's love is still a decision our Lord is asking believers to make. As He searches in our hearts, will he find faith in His love?

The Holiness of God

One of the most difficult biblical teachings for humans to swallow and live by is the absolute holiness of God. The fact that a mere eating of a fruit would cause an eternal explosion so to speak, eternal separation from God is staggering. It seems so unfair, way too excessive, even ridiculous. To accept and live by this revelation that God has graciously given Himself to us, certainly takes serious consideration and much faith to say the least!

One main reason for this sense of "unreasonableness," is that absolute holiness is something mere humans have no

experience of. Absolute holiness is something totally different from anything they have ever seen, heard, touched, smelled, thought, or felt in any way. Now, some sense of holiness may be felt for instance, when in the presence of a highly moral person, e.g. the Pope, Rev. Billy Graham, or at a “holy place,” like St Peter’s Basilica, the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican City, or the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. However, absolute holiness is something far beyond that.

In a sense, not ever experiencing absolute holiness gives it a mystery quality and this adds understanding to our human reactions. Absolute holiness is what some theologians call, “Wholly Other,” or “complete otherness,” something totally different in kind.

Added to this, “complete otherness,” is the reality of overwhelming power used by God Almighty to safeguard and maintain His absolute holiness. From the cherubim armed with the “flaming sword,” in Gen. 3:24, to Daniel’s vision of God’s throne as being, “... ablaze with flames, it’s wheels were a burning fire. A river of fire was flowing and coming out from before Him...,” Dan 7:9-10, and on to Rev. 4:5, which reads, “Out from the throne comes flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder...,” one must get the picture of this terrifying, consuming holiness which nothing or no one unholy stands a chance of surviving.

I have attempted to understand this in my mind. I imagine the whole world having only one source of unpoisoned water. All the governments and all the militaries would surely guard that one source of water with all their might! If any unauthorized attempt to penetrate that source was detected it would immediately be destroyed. Such is the only source of absolute holiness, the absolute holiness of God! Any threat of contamination is met with an overwhelming consuming fire from God.

From this, one can begin to understand the supersensitivity against and unfathomable dangers of even the smallest sin penetrating God's holiness. The smallest of sins causes an eternal separation from God. Such separation recalls other attributes of God, like God's justice/judgments and his settled righteous wrath against sin. This was demonstrated in the Old Testament over and over. One can also begin to understand God's impossible moral demands that need to be commensurate with that of His holiness, e.g. The Book of Leviticus and the Sermon on the Mount in Matt 5-7.

God's holiness is not just about judging every speck of sin but also setting things right. Otherwise, there would be no hope for creation, which includes all of us! There is something though, deep within human beings (call it the image of God) that responds to both the terrifying power and the divine determination to deal with evil decisively and make things right. When the divine determination to deal with evil is demonstrated by God, the only proper response is repentance and worship! See Isa 6:1-5; Rev. 5:1-14.

What one can see in all this, is the overlapping or integration of a number of God's attributes. God's moral perfection in absolute holiness would point to God's eternal love (see above). Thus, the absolute necessity of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, cf.. 3 chapters of Matthew 26-28, see esp. 26:26-28. Yes, the greatest demonstration of God's demand for absolute holiness/righteousness *and* divine love, is what happened at Jesus' death. Jesus paid the eternal crushing price sin demanded from God's holiness, (cf.. Isa 53:10), "But the Lord was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief, if He would render Himself as a guilt offering..." Then, in the very next verse we find the results that the divine love was after, (cf.. Isa 53:11), "... By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities."

Rom 3:21 in the New Testament reads, “But now apart from the Law (God’s absolute holy standard), the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the prophets.”

Now, all this is wonderful, uplifting, indeed life-giving truths! Even so, they get lost or at least put in the back burners of our brains because of the daily responsibilities, pressures, temptations, failures, and the general busyness of life. Our hearts are just not capable of living in such rich oxygen, so to speak, of the absolute holiness of God.

Then what happens when we do not live by faith in God’s holiness? Well, to begin with, there is no serious need for Jesus’ great sacrifice of leaving heaven, coming to this guilty earth, being misunderstood, rejected, tortured, and nailed to the cross. There is really no appreciation for the Gospel of our Lord Jesus, or for the cross. From that, we can see that any worship is at best superficial and self-serving, i.e. selfish. Further down this road of not living by faith in God’s holiness is a life of hedonism and debauchery. All of which biblically speaking calls for a just divine punishment, *cf.* 2 Tim 3:1-6; 2 Pet 2:1-3.

In what ways are believers to exercise faith in God’s absolute holiness? Well to begin with, and as mentioned above, we have no experience or sense of this *absolute* holiness. This “total otherness,” is something way beyond us; it is beyond intellectual explanations, it is transcendent, it is a mystery to us. We can reason that if God is God, He *should* be absolutely Holy, but there is no explanation, but a call to faith! And that is what we must do, believe that God is absolutely Holy as He has revealed in His Word. “Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name...,” (Matt. 6:9f). With such belief, our worship will be profound and a “sweet aroma to the Lord,” (*cf.* Ex. 29:15-18; 2 Cor 2:14).

From that foundation, we can now see a life of faith in the holiness of God, which is to be lived out and demonstrated in every area of our lives. We are to exercise faith in God's holiness and thus seek to live morally pure lives; because living immorally brings disaster while moral purity restores and maintains life. Most importantly, moral purity brings honor/glory to God, i.e. it reflects God's holy nature, *cf.* Lev. 20:26; 1 Pet 1:13-16. Yet faith in God's holiness *must* be exercised because so much from inside and outside of us screams, "unholy is the way to life!" This is not easy to see or to admit, but that is the reality which is very evident by our frequent if not constant moral failures if we dare admit to them. If we do admit to them, praise be to God for His patience with us, see 1 Tim 1:16.

Finally, believers must exercise faith, in that what awaits them in heaven is the same absolute holiness that is going to, forever, be the constant reality! Think of it, no more failing and disappointing our Lord, ever! I personally greatly anticipate *not* disappointing my Lord Jesus anymore. Though, as long as we are on this side of heaven, we must exercise faith in the absolute holiness of God until our faith becomes reality, *cf.* Rev 21:1-5.

The Glory of God

As with the absolute holiness of God, God's total glory is something very difficult to imagine and live by, this shows our need to exercise faith in it. Indeed, what the scriptures reveal is that coming near the unveiled glory of God is dangerous and overwhelmingly consuming, *cf.* Ex 3:1-6; 33:18-23; Isa 6:1-5; Rev 1:12-17. In Phil 2:6-7, we are told that Jesus is equal with God the Father, but that He "emptied Himself." This, of course, is deep theology being declared by many others, who are much more qualified. I simply want to point out that Jesus was, in a sense, a covering or hiding of the full glory of God. When

Jesus' disciples did get a glimpse of His glory, they were terrified, *cf.* Matt 17:1-6.

Now, it also will take eternity to explore the glory of God, so no definition can be exhaustive. Here are some thoughts for consideration and hopefully motivations for living by faith in the glory of God. The "glory of God," is in essence, the presence of God. In Lev 9:23-24, we read, "... the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people. Then fire came out from before the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the portions of fat on the altar; and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces." That was the first time the Lord came and dwelt in the tabernacle in the wilderness.

When the glory of God appeared for the first time in Solomon's magnificent temple, the priest could not minister because of the "cloud." 2 Chr 5:13-14. When Solomon finished praying the prayer of dedication, "...fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the house....," 2 Chr 7:1-3. Note that in this passage the declaration that "...He is good, truly His lovingkindness is everlasting", instructs us that the "glory of God" involves other attributes of God. Indeed, it is reasonable to say that the glory of God involves all His attributes since it is His presence. Some of His attributes may be veiled, but they are there. Perhaps the term *majesty* could be used here. That is, "His Majesty", all His glorious, splendid Being that overwhelms any and all creatures. Again, see Isa 6:2, where even the holy Seraphim had to cover their faces and feet in the presence of God.

When one takes the time to contemplate and meditate on such wonderful truths, it is no wonder we are told that we are to do everything to the Glory of God, see 1 Cor 10:31; 1 Pet 4:11. His glory, His Majesty has always been, is, and will always be worthy to be worshipped. With such understanding,

it was only right and proper, and yes, righteous of God to create man (and all of creation) for His glory! Putting it another way, it would not be right for God to have such wonderful glory and not expand and multiply it!

When we are living out our lives of toil, frustrations, and failures, we forget all this. Now God set up the “sabbath” when time is to be taken to enjoy and meditate on the Lord. It can be readily seen that taking such a special time feeds the human soul in such a way that it strengthens them to face the harshness of life. Then as the days, weeks, months, and years go by and “sabbaths” are *not* taken, it is extremely easy for our fallen minds to wander off into darkness!

In such sad, spiritual conditions/blindness, when we hear that all is to be done to the glory of God, many of us quickly think of God being a narcissistic “glory hound.” We may not say out loud or even consciously, but questions arise like, “Really, God is that needy?”, “Is God just out for Himself?”, “What about us? Shouldn’t we get some glory for our hard work?”, and on and on the questions keep coming. Furthermore, spiritually unexamined, darkened lives begin to get fixated on themselves and on the here and now. Perhaps there can even be some resentment toward the Lord for being such a glory hound!

Then here comes the call for faith, faith in the revealed glory of God. That revelation is in His Word and deeds. Those deeds are revealed in the Bible, church history, and our personal lives. The exercise of faith in the glory of God is critical. Someone has said that we need something bigger than what we can do; someone much more important than ourselves. And that is our glorious God and His glorious kingdom. We are way too small of a package to live for, but God in all His Majesty/glory is most certainly worthy to live and die for!

God the Father is searching for faith in His glory and His Christ's glory, "...For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen," (Matt 6:13; see also Rev 19:1-16). There is nothing or no one greater to live for than God's glory and Kingdom, but most of the time it must be done by the application of faith. We can read about His glory in His word, or see it in the lives of others, and we may even remember some of His glorious works in our own lives. However, yesterday's visitations of the Lord are encouragements indeed but do not replace the need to exercise faith in the present. Will the Lord find that faith in His glory in you if He searches your heart today?

I will end this chapter with a personal story. Back almost 40 years ago, the Lord performed some spiritual surgery on me. I tell people, "I don't think He used any anesthesia!" By His grace, I held on to Him and He kept giving me encouragements in many forms. As I recovered and gained strength my faith grew. One evening, as I was rehearsing His goodness in my mind, an intense and profound sense of His presence flooded my whole being. I could not utter a sound or move. I just sat there in deep joy, and even as I write, tears are flowing. Since then, I have faced many trials, but that experience of His presence, His glory, has kept me going in my walk of faith, praise be to His glorious name, now and forever, AMEN!

Even this cursory understanding of these few wonderful divine attributes reveals God to be worthy of our faith. We are now more prepared to delve into those areas of life that consistently challenge us to *exercise faith* in Him through our Lord Jesus. We will begin with exercising faith in marriage, then proceed to faith in functional work environments or relationships; and then conclude with the call to grow our faith.

Chapter 3

Searching for Faith in the Marriage Relationship

Getting Married

The institution of marriage is in disarray these days. Most know that conservatively fifty percent of marriages end up in divorce. Young people see this and have experienced the ravages of divorce and want no part of it. Many are waiting longer and longer to get married, but that also has its challenges, disadvantages, heartaches, and undesirable consequences. God instituted marriage, but without an understanding of its design and proper workings, failure is certain. Failure does not necessarily mean divorce, but largely falling short of its purpose. It's sad to say, but the church doesn't seem to fare much better than the world in relation to divorce. Then what is going on and what is the ultimate purpose for marriage?

Well, taking steps towards and actually getting married takes great faith these days. Not only are there the obvious dark clouds of divorce looming all the time, but we also have massive cultural stumbling blocks. Some of these stumbling blocks to getting married cause untold soul-damage. Stumbling blocks I see include daunting economic demands, unrealistic high standards of living, high educational hurdles, ill-effects of feminism, ubiquitous sexual promiscuity, and the contemporary "wisdom," of not getting married young.

Now, one can do all kinds of research and agonize over all the pros and cons of all these issues, but here are a couple of facts. The Lord designed us to go through puberty in our early teens, which clearly signals the onslaught of sexual drives. Reasonably, the most intense sexual drives are generally from

the mid-teens to mid-twenties, but our culture and our “wisdom,” are all saying, “You are too young to get married!” Add these to the facts that most are not getting married that young, and that there are massive amounts of explicit and graphic sexualization coming from everywhere. What we have here is the perfect storm for moral and relationship disaster! What torture for our young people and everybody else who loves them! By the time marriage does occur there are usually already many deep wounds, hurts, guilt, suspicions, i.e., heavy, overwhelming “baggage”! Do we need the Lord or what? I personally feel terrible for our young people, especially those (and these are most, I would say) who do not know or really follow the Lord. This is why I wrote above, that to actually get married these days takes great faith, but faith *in the Lord* is what is needed.

The Lord by, “...*His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness...*” (2 Peter 1:3). Then there is no shortage of our Lord’s provisions. No, but the question is, “Are we going to put our faith *in Him*?” Putting our faith in the Lord is in stark contrast to what is being pushed everywhere, although not readily seen by so many. That is, faith in technology, education, government, and self is what is aggressively being shoved down our throats.

The Bible tells us that God has given us all things to enjoy (1 Tim 6:17), but without thinking about it, these very gifts of God, the ones He gave us to enjoy, replace the Lord in our hearts and minds. By the time we know it, and this includes too many Christians, we are giving our most and best to these idols. Yes, I believe technology, education, etc., have become the idols in our culture. They don’t have to be, but they are.

My dear reader, if you find this rings true of you, the only way to deal with this is to repent and look to Jesus Christ for forgiveness and restoration. Know this, the Bible reveals that

everyone has broken God's absolute righteous Law which makes us sinners. There is no way around God, so we must all face Him. However, the Bible also reveals the wonderful good news that in His infinite love, Jesus died for all of our sins. Will you not *accept Jesus Christ by faith*?

Now returning to our present subject, what is marriage for anyway? Marriage is one of the greatest means of reflecting our glorious, singular-three-person God, and thus "holy matrimony's" ultimate purpose. Certainly, this unusual and pregnant statement needs to be unpacked, but more challenging is that it needs to be accepted and applied to live out *by faith*. When it's done, it yields a wonderful marriage that greatly honors our great God. Furthermore, it blesses the couple and everyone associated with them who are willing to receive the truth.

Also, as stated above, it can be understood as just a matter of some quick and easy decisions and boom, we can have a wonderful, God-honoring marriage. Most of us know that things do not work that way, and neither does marriage. It is a matter of gaining biblical understanding and then living accordingly by faith. The process is really a life-long walk that certainly has its ups and downs. However, the process is one in which God is not only involved but surely takes delight in seeing His children enjoying discovery and gaining insights for living and growing in love.

We proceed with the unpacking and start with the Apostle Paul's curious statement in Eph 5:32, "*This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.*" In the context (5:22-31), Paul had been exhorting the wife to submit; respect the husband while the husband is to love his wife. Yes, clearly that is what Paul has written, but what does it mean? Doing a complete analysis of the passage is beyond our present scope, but we can draw out some significant gold

nuggets which are just below the surface, ready for grabbing. Paul starts with the wife, so that is where we will go first.

Wives Submitting

To submit to the husband is a hotly debated issue if not rejected outright. We will simply assume that the Bible is being accepted at face value and that the wife is willing to be under its authority. Now, I try to catch or summarize the phrase “to submit” with the phrase, “actively support”. That is, the wife is to actively support the husband in the direction he is moving or goals he wants to achieve for his God and family. The adverb “actively,” is to signify her total involvement and use of all her faculties; body, soul, spirit, mind, emotions, will, etc. The verb “support,” means she is to help him and be there to aid him in ways and things he cannot manage by himself, e.g., having and raising a family!

It does not take much imagination, especially for wives, to realize this is going to heavily tax faith! All sorts of questions come up. What if he is leading us down a wrong path? What if he is making terrible financial decisions? What if he starts walking away from God? What if he’s an idiot! Such questions are great fodder for counseling sessions in which I have been involved countless times. First, I want to point out that actively supporting the husband will take great faith.

I should have faith in who again? The husband? Not necessarily. First and foremost, faith in the Lord and His Word is what is being asked of the wife. The Lord is asking/commanding the wife to have faith that *He* is working in her husband and perhaps even through her husband. This is going to take the uncommon practice of looking beyond the physical, beyond the husband, beyond the immediate, and on to the Lord and His Word.

Indeed, the Lord commands wives to submit to her husband, even if he is disobedient to the Word, 1 Pet 3:1. The context of that commandment is that all believers are being commanded to submit in the most unfair of situations, see 1 Peter 2:11-25, especially 2:18-19. We must not miss the basis of this command. Peter first points out that Jesus is the example of suffering unjustly that believers are called to follow, 1 Peter 2:21. To suffer unfairly is just unnatural and most would even say unrealistic. Our hearts and minds recoil at even the suggestion. Then Peter points out Jesus' example of entrusting Himself, "...to Him who judges righteously," (1 Peter 2:2).

Then, there is the basis of such a daunting commandment given to wives; faith in our God "*who judges righteously.*" Well, will the wife exercise faith in God and thus submit to respect her husband? With this great foundation for her faith-based-obedience, anything besides what is clearly immoral, illegal, or dangerous, she is to submit to and respect her husband. To go into answering every question that comes about the husband and specific situations would make this book way too long, and should be addressed with some mature and biblically wise believers.

Still, as mentioned above, she is to use all her faculties in actively supporting her husband. This may mean she vigorously and passionately reasons with him in things she agrees *and* disagrees with. Especially when she disagrees on things, she is to be very clear about her own personal decision to trust the Lord and continue to actively support her husband. This will take great patience, perseverance, and reminders from various sources. Nonetheless, our Lord is especially interested in developing her faith in Him.

Husbands Loving

Concerning the husband, Paul writes in Eph 5:25, “*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.*” At first glance, this doesn’t seem to call for much faith. That is because most do not see what is at stake here. To start bringing out the meaning here I ask a question, “What got Jesus crucified?” Was it that He was not doing enough around the house? Perhaps not providing enough? Well, obviously that was not the case since He performed a great number of healings, fed thousands, and raised the dead!

No, what got Jesus in trouble was that He spoke and lived the truth. Although in absolute love, He led in what was experienced as very unpleasant truth and righteousness. He could not be contained or controlled. That unnerved everyone, especially those in power. They resisted, rejected, and even attacked Him. He experienced frustration, being misunderstood, being accused of evil motives, disrespect, and rejection. Failure of His efforts was ever before His eyes. He, “*...gave Himself up [crucified] for her.*” Husbands are commanded to love their wives with the same willingness to be crucified!

Obviously, wives are not the focus, and thus not to be equated with the evils of those who crucified the Lord. Rather, the focus is on the way husbands are to love their wives. To be sure, husbands will sometimes have their hands full in leading their wives in truth and righteousness. Yet, they must be willing to sacrifice their pleasures and immediate goals/projects, to speak and live the truth. This “sacrificing,” will most likely include giving up times and pleasures, to study and gain the truth and thus be able to speak and live it. Oh, the faith required to give up some of those all-important goals/projects!

How many times have we heard of wives complaining about husbands spending too much time at work? Well, many husbands find it easier to be at work than in a home with tensions and issues too chaotic to try to address. To go home and address confusing issues after a long day at work, only to be more frustrated, is not a delight, to say the least. Nevertheless, he is commanded to love his wife and seek out truth and lead in that truth. Eph 5:26 reads, “*so that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water, with the Word.*” (Emphasis mine.) How do we suppose that is going to be received, especially if the wife has herself experienced a day full of labor and frustration?

The probability is that if the husband decides to go forward with faith and speak what he thinks is best, wisest, and biblical, he is going to get reminders of his past failures (even 20-30 years past!). Add to that the copious tears, anger, hurt children, and we are left with chaos, confusion, and a deep sense of failure in his soul. Now the husband, like the wife, is asked to keep trusting the Lord under very difficult situations with the wife. Peter commands the husbands, “*You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.*” 1 Peter 3: 7.

Now we can quibble over the meaning of “weaker vessel”, but the context clearly shows that the husband is being commanded to keep entrusting himself to the Lord under very difficult circumstances, (see note on context above). The Lord is saying, “If you don’t love her (live with her in understanding), I won’t even hear your prayers!” Well! You mean I have to keep loving her even if she is unreasonable and downright disrespectful? Yes, “*...just as Christ loved the*

church, and gave Himself up for her.” Oh, the husband’s faith is severely tested under such circumstances!

Just like with the wives, we need to ask, “Faith in what or who?” The wife? No, not necessarily. First and foremost, faith in the Lord and His Word is what is being asked of the husband. Faith that the Lord knows, has, and will do what is best, and keeps those who trust Him. The Lord is asking/commanding the husband to have faith that *He* is working in his wife, and perhaps even through his wife. Then, as with the wife, this is going to take the uncommon practice of looking beyond the physical, beyond the wife, beyond the immediate, and on to the Lord and His Word.

Husbands tend to either withdraw or blast away, “with a big voice.” No, husbands are called to sacrificially love, but that takes great courage and/or restraint. Besides, what is really at stake here is faith. As with the wife, this will take great patience, humility, perseverance, and reminders from various sources. This is what our Lord is especially interested in, developing the husband’s faith in Him.

Serving the spouse

Well because the marriage relationship is a chief means of reflecting and honoring the Lord, I would like to explore its depths a little bit more. Furthermore, because of our fallenness, it is also one of the chief areas in which our Lord develops our faith. For this I go to a most unlikely place; the curse of God upon the woman and the man. This will yield a greater understanding for both husbands and wives, and thus how to better and more effectively serve their spouse. Truly and effectively serving one another reflects the loving relationship of our eternally blessed and holy Three-Person God.

Here we go. Genesis 3:14-19 records the curses upon the serpent, Eve, and Adam. After cursing the serpent, God

addresses Eve next. Literally, the Lord pronounces that in both conception (note: The King James Version translated the Hebrew accurately here) and childbearing she will have great pain, (3:16a-b). To begin with, conception is usually *not* painful! Then the great pain continues through giving birth. From this, one can reasonably see that the curse involves turning what should be pleasurable and fulfilling, into a source of great pain and that it would be the ongoing reality throughout life.

Conception would represent the whole of the child's life, but instead of pure joy and pleasure, the child would be a continual source of pain. A basic observation and reality is that mothers usually experience the troubles and hurts of her children with much more pain and agony than fathers. I know there are many exceptions (especially in our times), but it is hard to deny. This of course does not mean there aren't any joys and pleasure for the mom in having children. However, even the simpler "separation anxiety" that is experienced as children are growing up and leaving is clearly much more evident in moms than dads.

Well, just having God's pronouncement of definite, great pain would make the woman quite insecure, to say the least. That insecurity would propel her to seek control of her environment and her closest relationships. Who else was there at first, but her husband, Adam? She was going to try and control him. With that, another part of the curse on the woman is pronounced. In the final analysis, he will have rule over her, (3:16c-d). Note the phrase, "Your desire shall be..." is the same as in Gen 4:7, with the clear meaning of dominate or control.

Wow, what a prospect for life! Pain, pain, and more pain, in the closest of her relationships, with her children and husband, throughout her life! Was the Lord just having an outburst of anger and being mean? No, the Lord knew the

woman would put her trust in herself, her resources, and abilities. With the serpent's help/temptation, self-sufficiency had been conceived and given birth in her heart and mind. See Genesis 3:6. The Lord set out to break her of the trust she would put in seeking to gain her own security; that is, her life, by managing/controlling her children and husband. That trust was doomed to fail, so the Lord was lovingly putting her in a position to see and experience the painful consequences of trusting in herself.

The Lord was after something much more than just giving her pain. He was aiming at getting her to run back to Him, to depend on Him because if you're apart from God there is no life. It's certainly not that God needed her, so He was going to overpower her and make her grovel. No, He knew she was futilely but tenaciously trying to gain life through the very gifts and abilities He had given her. Yet, she would end up only producing more pain, corruption, and death.

He gave her pain in the closest of her relationships which would be the resources she would most use to try to gain her life, her womanhood, her meaning, etc. As most of us can testify, intense pain can be the most effective tool to knock us into reality! The most important reality we all need to know is that we are totally and inextricably dependent on God. Accordingly, that is what our Lord is after in mothers. They are not to look to their children and husband for their security. But wives, have faith in the Lord, trust Him with all your heart, look to Him for all your security and meaning, for your womanhood, and for all of your life!

In the meantime, life happens and the journey of faith continues throughout life. Wives continue to experience pain, sorrow, and insecurities quite consistently. Well husbands, here is your wife's interior. Many times, husbands just don't get it. They don't understand why the wife is so uptight and well, let's

say “edgy” over every little thing. Insecurities are powerful and constantly threatening her. Therefore, security is a profound and constant need that your wife has. What was that commandment given to husbands, the one we looked at from way over near the other end of the Bible, Eph 5? “Husbands love....as Christ loved...and gave Himself up...” Wow, maybe the Lord understands women after all! Na, you think??

Here is some great help for the husband on how to serve the wife more effectively! Her need is relational, emotional, physical, and spiritual security. God is commanding husbands to be the instruments to provide for that profound need in His wife. It’s not *necessarily* doing more dishes, taking out the trash, or picking up your own underwear. Instead, talk to her, tell her where you’re at, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. With genuine curiosity, ask about her fears, joys, and hurts. Share with her what you envision for your future together. Relate to her! It will greatly and profoundly minister to her as she experiences a greater connection with you and thus will experience greater security.

Then it gets tricky right? We have to remember that the wife is constantly tempted to find her security through her children *and husband*. This is where it becomes critically important to read God’s word in its details. Back in the last phrase of Eph 5:26, we read, “...*with the word*.” Oh, the truth, how we all need it for our lives and especially in the closest relationships!

I wonder what would have happened if Adam had loved Eve, and spoken God’s word to her as the serpent was tempting her? Would she have responded with anger and eaten anyway? Perhaps, but I would venture to say, “probably not.” The fall had actually not happened yet, remember? However, now we are on this side of the fall, and there is nothing to be done about it. (Please wait, ladies, the husband’s turn is coming!)

Many times, speaking the truth in love will not be well received. In fact, it may be met with a flurry of accusations, retaliation, or even rage! Then, to complicate matters, husbands have their own sinfulness, so even the truth may not be communicated with love at all. I don't know how many times out of exasperation, I have exclaimed to my wife, "I am just a puny little sinner; I'm not God!" To which she may have thought, "Is that supposed to be a news flash?" Obviously, husbands need to exercise faith in the Lord as they seek to communicate truth in love.

Be that as it may, husbands are called to be instruments in meeting the deep need for security in their wives. Yes, this means sharing with her as much of his heart as possible, demonstrating a genuine interest in her, and providing for her. Most importantly, he is to lead her in God's word, the truth. That truth, as the husband faithfully communicates it, can lead his wife to the Lord Jesus. That is the ultimate way a husband is to effectively minister to his wife.

All of these call for faith in the Lord. Faith that the Lord is working in and through his wife. Faith that the Lord is his manhood, his importance. He will need to exercise faith that the Lord has good intentions for him, even as he loves his wife when his wife may not be respecting him at all. She may even be putting him down! He is still to love her. Therefore, he must exercise faith that his manhood is intact no matter what she throws at him.

Why faith in the Lord? Well, the wife is fallen, sinful, and unable to save herself *from* herself! The same goes for the husband. He is fallen, sinful, and in the same predicament. It is the Lord, and only the Lord, who can deliver and give him his manhood and significance.

Well, what about the curse on the man? Just like how the husband can gain much insight on how to minister his wife from

the curse given to her, the wife can also gain much insight on how to minister her husband from the curse given to him. Just to note, the curse on the woman took one verse while the curse on the man took three verses, Gen 3:17-19!

The Lord starts His curse on Adam by highlighting why Adam was being cursed. Fundamentally it was idolatry. Adam preferred, and thus, replaced God's word with Eve's word, "...you listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat from it.'" (3:17). Then God tells him what's going to happen. The earth was going to turn bad, to make it painfully difficult to grow food to eat. In verse 17, the term translated "toil," in the NASB ("sorrow", KJV), is the same Hebrew term for pain in verse 16. This difficulty, God informed Adam, would be throughout life. What a prospect for life!

It got worse. Not only would it be difficult, but all his painful labor would produce were "thorns and thistles," i.e., more problems. All of this spelled frustration, failure, and certain impotence throughout life! One can only imagine where Adam's manhood was at this point. God was not done yet. Besides frustration and failure throughout life, in the last verse of the curse, the Lord basically tells the man, "Oh don't forget you are dust/dirt."

If the woman experienced nerve-wracking insecurity at God's pronouncement of her curse, then the man experienced devastating insignificance when God finished His curse on him. Every effort, no matter how great or ingenious, would only result in more problems and failures throughout his entire life. As a man and husband, this hits my soul with extreme force. Tears roll down my cheeks because deep down I feel like a failure and know, in fact, I have failed so many times in so many ways. Thank God for His love, mercy, and wisdom to deal with all this!

If this was the end of the story, we men would be and stay miserable for eternity! Once again, it wasn't that the Lord just "went off" on the man. No, God also knew the man would now have a dogged determination to find life through the very gifts and abilities the Lord had given him. The most wonderful gift given to Adam besides the Lord Himself was the woman. Temptations to either idolize, overpower, use, and abuse her would be very strong. God had also gifted the man with strength and abilities to produce from the earth. The Lord knew Adam would try to use his God-given abilities and trust in those abilities to gain significance; his importance, *apart from God*.

Lovingly the Lord made conditions so that the man would painfully and constantly have his goals blocked and experience humiliating defeats. Nevertheless, just as with the woman, the Lord was after something much more than just giving him humiliating defeats. God was aiming at getting the man to run back to Him and to depend on Him since if apart from God there is no life. It's certainly not that God needed him, so as to crush the man and leave him there. No, the Lord knew the man was arrogantly and stubbornly going to try to gain life back through the very gifts and abilities He had given to him. In the end, he would end up only producing more pain, corruption, and death.

If and when men allow themselves to feel the failures and disappointments of all their labors, yes, even their powerlessness to stop decay and death, they are brought back to the painful reality of who they are. They are utterly dependent creatures who need mercy and grace. They come to understand that their manhood, significance, and importance, does not come from any achievements or any woman or women. He comes to know that the most important reality is that we are totally and inextricably dependent on God. That is what our Lord is after in husbands. They are not to look to the wife or achievements for their significance, their manhood.

Husbands are to have faith in the Lord, trust Him with all their heart, look to Him for all their significance and meaning, for their manhood, and for their very life!

All that is good biblical truth, but life goes on and we are called to live by faith in all of life. Husbands experience frustration, failure, and a constant, nagging fear of being exposed as inadequate, incompetent, and impotent, just like the Lord pronounced back in Genesis 3. Well wife, here is your husband's interior. His failures and insignificance are powerful, and constantly threatening his sense of manhood. As a result, your husband has an intense and constant need for significance. We need to go back to Eph 5, and look again at the commandment given to the wives. Here we find a great help for the wife on how to serve her husband more effectively! His need is importance, respect, and physical or spiritual significance. God is commanding wives to be the instruments in helping to provide for the very profound need in her husband. It's not *necessarily* pampering him, offering solutions to solve his problems, or even keeping him from failure. Wives do not have the power to reverse what God had pronounced! They need to respect the husband, observe and highlight the times when he works hard at what is honorable. She is called to be his greatest cheerleader, in every sense of the word. It will greatly and profoundly minister to him. She must remember that in his soul, he is already bruised and battered by the fall. No matter how much he bolsters, camouflages, or denies it, in the depths of his heart he already knows he has made mistakes; and if truth be told, he is simply not enough for the job. When the wife submits to him and respects him, it can help him keep going despite his failures.

It gets tricky, right? We have to remember that the husband is constantly tempted to find his significance through his achievements *and his wife*. Again, it is critically important to

read God's word in its details, just as it was in looking at the commandment given to the husband in Eph 5. Here, I want to go to Gen 2:15-18. In verse 18, we read the well-known statement from God, "It is not good for man to be alone; I will make him a helper...."

If we ask the question, "Helper for what?" we can go back to the previous two verses and find the answer. The Lord had basically just given Adam two commandments. First is what some have called the "cultural mandate". That is, to develop the earth. The other was "don't eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil." Eve was to help Adam keep these commandments which of course meant procreation, otherwise, it was the whole earth for just the two of them to develop!

They are of course both moral commandments since they come from the Lord, but for simplicity's sake I will distinguish them as one being more physical and the other being moral/spiritual. This will give wives some ideas on what to focus on as they seek to encourage and lift their husbands. Here, one may wonder what would have happened if she had actually been a helper in keeping the moral commandment.

Though the fact is, the fall happened, but Eve did not lose her design and purpose to be a helper to Adam in keeping those commandments. When we get back to the effects of the curse on the man, we see that now he faces the relentless prospect of failure and certainty of experiencing his inadequacy and insignificance. The wife is to continue to submit and respect him, but if she senses that her husband is overly dependent on her, with as much respect as possible, she is to help him see the moral issue in his lack of trust in the Lord.

This helps the wife be a better helper! The wife now has a much better understanding of her husband's deep need for significance. She now has a greater understanding of why in Eph 5, (and other passages) the Lord commands her to submit

and respect her husband. In doing so she will be a greater and more effective helper to him, especially as she uses all her being, i.e. body, soul, spirit, etc.

All of these call for faith in the Lord. Faith that the Lord is working in and through her husband. Faith that the Lord will be her security and thus keep her. She must exercise faith that the Lord has good intentions for her, even as she respects her husband when her husband may not be acting loving! Faith that indeed she is not alone.

Why faith in the Lord in all this? Well, the husband is fallen, sinful, and unable to even save himself *from* himself! The same goes for her. She is fallen, sinful, and in the same predicament. It is the Lord and only the Lord who can deliver and give her her womanhood and security.

This exercise of faith in the Lord is especially called for when the marriage is going through intense difficulties. The wife may feel totally discounted and neglected, if not abused, but is still called to exercise faith in her Lord Jesus and respect her husband. Abuse is not to be tolerated, but faith is still called for. This is not the work to enter all the resources our Lord has provided for her, but besides the spiritual (especially the Holy Spirit and His Word) and mental abilities He has granted her, she also has the people of God and the church that she can avail herself of. This of course will also require the exercise of faith in the Lord, since brothers and sisters in the Lord may fail her as well.

All this applies to the husband as well. He may feel belittled, disrespected, if not “neutered”, every time they talk. He is still called to exercise faith in His Lord and love her as Christ loved the church. He is to use all the resources the Lord has provided for him including the church body which, as mentioned above, will require faith as well.

Serving the Lord in Marriage

What is a strong enough motivation that will not only propel one into what is certainly going to be a painful, frustrating, and perhaps maddening relationship called marriage, but also maintain that commitment for life? Many of us immediately answer, love! Ah, love! Though what most mean by love, is that wonderful feeling of being totally happy and fulfilled by the other. Others may go a little deeper and point out that the longings for family and companionship will do it.

Yes, the feelings of love and longings for family are powerful. Many can testify of intense feelings and being in touch with deep longings that have moved them to get married. Too many marriages have become a cordial, but dead coexistence which may or may not end in divorce. When this happens, and evidently it has happened at least 50% of the time, then faith in others and at some level faith in yourself, suffers. What is to motivate us to get married, to stay faithful to that commitment, *and to flourish*?

In Matt 22:30, Jesus made a comment that seems to be a minor point in His answer to the Sadducees' ridicule of the resurrection teaching/belief. Still, it is informative for our purposes here. Marriage is not "permanent" according to Jesus. After death, there is no marriage. Now other scriptures indicate we will know our loved one, rejoice, and be comforted, but marriage is to serve a purpose for this life only. What is that purpose? Well, simply, the glory of God as all and everything we do is to do, *cf.* 1Cor 10:31.

Yes, as I alluded to this at the beginning of this chapter, marriage is to first and foremost glorify/serve God. With this understanding, then we can safely say that marriage is *not primarily* about our fulfillment and happiness, but about serving the Lord and His purposes/glory. In chapter 7, we will explore the glory of God as a motivation for our life of faith.

Here I want to camp a little on the fact that marriage is not primarily about us.

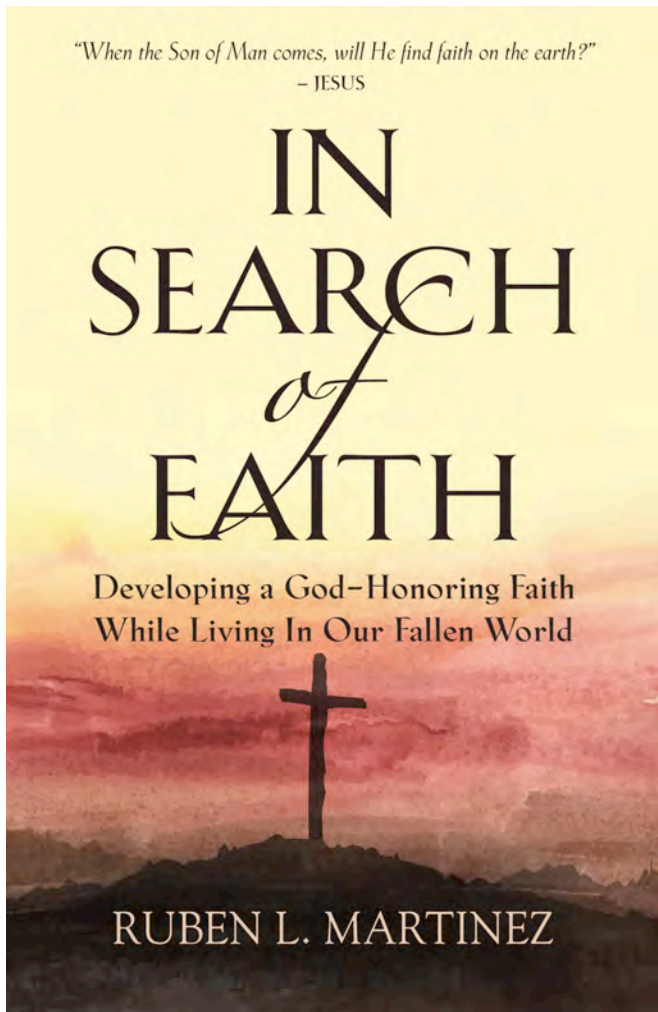
This understanding can greatly help couples stay focused and faithful to their marriage commitment which in turn would cause their marriage to flourish. There is something much bigger than us and our marriage. Someone has said, “we are too small of a package.” We can get all we ever want and then what? Too many “successful” athletes and movie stars have testified to this sense of emptiness after great success. The Word of God is a thousand times more authoritative, and the first 6 chapters of Ecclesiastes would be a great portion to look at for this fact. The author was successful and experienced all the pleasures one could ask for, but when living for yourself and only for this life, the result is futility. See Eccl 1-6.⁴

When the husband is acting unmanly and has been for some time now, the wife needs to remember, it is not about her happiness. It’s not about his happiness for that matter either. It’s about her doing her part in being a helper and respecting her husband *to serve God’s purposes*. As mentioned above, this may include times of intense interactions and conflict, but all for the purpose of helping her husband live out the Lord’s will for his life. Her happiness, her security, and womanhood are in the Lord and not her husband’s favorable or unfavorable responses.

When the wife is not being sensible and is disrespecting him, repeatedly, he needs to remember it’s not about his manhood and it’s not about making her do what he wants. It’s not about her happiness either, but about him lovingly leading her in truth. As he does this, there is no guarantee that she will change or respect him. Yet, as he faithfully leads her in truth, he will be serving God’s purposes.

⁴ See James Reitman’s excellent exposition of these chapters in his book “Unlocking Wisdom, Forming Agents of God in the House of Mourning.”

All this of course gets us back to the need to exercise faith. Why? This is because we live in a fallen world and we are fallen. Wives continue to feel insecure and keep trying to find their security by their own means, that includes trying to control her husband. Husbands continue to feel insignificant and keep trying to find their significance by their own means, which include either try to dominate or withdraw from their wife. Now, God's love, care, and purposes are not experienced consistently. Therefore, exercising faith in the Lord in the marriage relationship is an ongoing need, but something that our Lord is constantly "searching for."



This book challenges readers to develop what God/Jesus, highly values; faith in Him. It looks at the various relationships in which faith is to be developed, relationship with God, in marriage, within the family, in the workplace and others areas. Throughout the book the author soundly expounds pertinent biblical passages, inspiring applications.

In Search of Faith: Developing a God-Honoring Faith While Living In Our Fallen World

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