

Faith

All I have seen teaches me to trust the Creator for what I have not seen.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Faith is the ability to offer our heart to the truth of what is happening, to see our experience as the embodiment of life's mystery, the present expression of possibility, the conduit connecting us to a bigger reality.

Sharon Salzberg, *Faith: Trusting Your Own Deepest Experience*

Faith is not the belief that God will do what you want. It is the belief that He will do what is right.

Max Lucado, *He Still Moves Stones*

Faith in Humanity

You must not lose faith in humanity. Humanity is like an ocean; if a few drops of the ocean are dirty, the ocean does not become dirty.

Mahatma Gandhi

Faith Will Be Tested. . .

Dear Friends, stand by this faith. Work for it and sacrifice for it. There is nothing in all the world so important to you as to be loyal to this faith which has placed before you the loftiest ideals; which has comforted you in sorrow, strengthened you for noble duty and made the world beautiful for you. Rejoice that you are worthy to be entrusted with this great message and that you are strong enough to work for a great, true, principle without counting the cost.

Rev. Olympia Brown

Every time you venture out in your life of faith, you will find something in your circumstances that, from a commonsense standpoint, will flatly contradict your faith. But common sense is not faith, and faith is not common sense. In fact, they are as different as the natural life and the spiritual. Can you trust Jesus Christ where your common sense cannot trust Him? Can you venture out with courage on the words of Jesus Christ, while the realities of your commonsense life continue to shout, "It's all a lie"? When you are on the mountaintop, it's easy to say, "Oh yes, I believe God can do it," but you have to come down from the mountain to the demon-possessed valley and face the realities that scoff at your Mount-of-Transfiguration belief (see Luke 9:28-42).

Faith must be tested, because it can only become your intimate possession through conflict. What is challenging your faith right now? The test will either prove your faith right, or it will kill it. Jesus said, "Blessed is he who is not offended because of Me" Matthew 11:6). The ultimate thing is confidence in Jesus. "We have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end . . ." (Hebrews 3:14). Believe steadfastly on Him and everything that challenges you will strengthen your faith. There is continual testing in the life of faith up to the point of our physical death, which is the last great test. Faith is absolute trust in God— trust that could never imagine that He would forsake us (see Hebrews 13:5-6).

Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest, Daily Devotionals*

To develop a verified faith we need to open to the messiness, the discordance, the ambivalence, and, above all, the vital life-force of questioning. If we don't, our faith can wither. If we don't, our faith will always remain in the hands of someone else, as something we borrow or abjure, but not as something we claim fully as our own.

Beyond verified faith, there is for Salzberg, a final stage of faith that follows "bright faith" and "verified faith." The final stage is "abiding faith" which Salzberg describes as "the magnetic force of bone-deep, lived understanding, one that draws us to realize or ideals, walk our talk, and act in accord with what we know to be true."

(MBH Note) Sharon Salzberg, *Faith: Trusting Your Own Deepest Experience*

The truths of religion are exalted, but its duties are close at hand. We know God less by contemplation than by emulation. The choice is not between 'faith' and 'deeds,' for it is by our deeds that we express our faith and make it real in the life of others and the world. Jewish ethics is refreshingly down-to-earth. If someone is in need, give. If someone is lonely, invite them home. If someone you know has recently been bereaved, visit them and give them comfort. If you know of someone who has lost their job, do all you can to help them find another. The sages call this 'imitating God.' They went further: giving hospitality to a stranger, they said, is 'even greater than receiving the divine presence.' That is religion at its most humanizing and humane.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *To Heal a Fractured World*

Working with Affirmations of Faith

Bruce Epperly has written extensively on the transformative power of affirmations. Text below is from his website.

Gently listen to your life, simply accepting the fullness of your experience. Where do you need personal transformation? What deeper realities call to you? Where do you need to grow? From this experience, what affirmations call you to personal and spiritual growth? Fashion these affirmations in terms of positive words that describe your life as God intends it to be.

Here are some affirmations that have transformed my life. Perhaps they will be helpful to you.

- I am the light of the world. (from Matthew 5:14-16)
- God is with me wherever I am.
- Nothing can separate me from the love of God.
- God speaks to me in sighs too deep for words. (from Romans 8)
- I give and receive love in every situation.
- When I am still, I experience Divine Wisdom.
- The Infinite Energy of the Universe flows in and through my life.
- I can do all things with Christ who strengthens me.
- God will supply my deepest needs.

For reflection and discussion

1. What does faith mean to you? How do you come to have faith?
2. Has your faith been characterised by stages--similar to Salzberg's bright faith, verified faith, and abiding faith?
3. Does the idea of working with affirmations appeal to you? What affirmations do you use or would you use?
4. How does All Souls support your faith journey?

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