

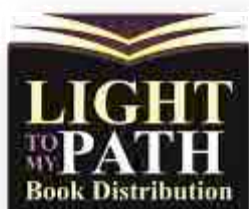
# SOMEONE ELSE'S FAITH

IS THE FAITH YOU PROFESS REALLY YOURS?

F. WAYNE MAC LEOD

# Someone Else's Faith

Is the Faith You Profess  
Really Yours?



**F. Wayne MacLeod**

Light To My Path Book Distribution  
Sydney Mines, Nova Scotia CANADA

Someone Else's Faith

Revised August 2015

Copyright © 2008 by F. Wayne MacLeod

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without written permission of the author.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise specified, are taken from the New International Version of the Bible (Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society. Used with permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers, All rights reserved.)

## Table of Contents

1	Going to Heaven on Someone Else's Shoulders .....	5
2	Living By Someone Else's Standard .....	11
3	Believing Someone Else's Beliefs .....	17
4	Using Someone Else's Gifts.....	23
5	Maintaining Someone Else's Traditions.....	29
6	Depending on Someone Else's Strength.....	35
7	Making Faith Yours .....	41



# 1

## GOING TO HEAVEN ON SOMEONE ELSE'S SHOULDERS

---

The 2006 edition of Operation World estimates that 81.5% of North Americans consider themselves to be Christian. This represents approximately 259 million people. Forty-eight million of these, however, have no church affiliation. Let's be realistic about these figures. Not everyone affiliated with a Christian church is truly Christian. There will always be those who attend church on Sunday whose faith is not real.

This brings us to an important question. Why do these individuals claim to be Christian if they do not practice their faith? While I cannot answer for them, I would expect that most of them would consider themselves to be Christian because they were born

into a Christian family. They feel that because they were born of Christian parents they are Christians (as opposed to Hindu or Muslim). For many people, you are born into your faith in the same way you are born into your nationality. I am Canadian because I was born of Canadian parents and I have never renounced my citizenship. Many people see their faith in this way. Unless you decide to change your faith, you remain what you were when you were born whether you practice this faith or not.

It is true that this is how things work with regard to our nationality. To be a Canadian, all I have to do is to be born of Canadian parents. As long as I do not renounce my citizenship, I will always be a Canadian. As a Canadian, I enjoy the privileges of citizenship. I am protected by Canada's laws and enjoy her freedom. Is this how it works, however, with regard to my faith? Can I call myself a Christian and expect to enjoy the privileges of Christianity simply because I was born in a Christian home?

To answer this question, I would like to look at two Old Testament passages found in the book of Ezekiel.

The first passage is found in Ezekiel 14.12-18:

The word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, if a country sins against me by being unfaithful and I stretch out my hand against it to cut off its food supply and send famine upon it and kill its men and their animals, even if these three men—Noah, Daniel and Job—were in it, they could save only themselves by their righteousness, declares the

Sovereign LORD. "Or if I send wild beasts through that country and they leave it childless and it becomes desolate so that no one can pass through it because of the beasts, as surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, even if these three men were in it, they could not save their own sons or daughters. They alone would be saved, but the land would be desolate. "Or if I bring a sword against that country and say, 'Let the sword pass throughout the land,' and I kill its men and their animals, as surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, even if these three men were in it, they could not save their own sons or daughters. They alone would be saved.

What does this passage tell us? God told the prophet Ezekiel that when His people turned their backs on Him and He responded in judgement, no one would be able to save them. Not even Noah, Daniel and Job would be able to save their own children on the day of God's wrath. What was it about these three men that merited mention in this passage? Genesis 6:9 tells us that Noah was "just and perfect in his generation and Noah walked with God." When his enemies sought to find fault with Daniel, they could find none (Daniel 6.4-5). God said of Job that there was "none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man." (Job 1:8) These three men were exemplary in their spiritual lives. They loved God and lived entirely for him. Their faith would save them in the day of God's wrath; their children however, would die because of their sin. When God's judgement was poured out on the inhabitants of Israel, it would not matter who



their parents were. If these children were guilty before God, they would suffer the consequences. The faith of their parents would not save them in the day of God's wrath. Will a criminal be pardoned simply because his father or mother has never broken the law? Each person is judged according to his or her own deeds.

Faith and nationality are very different. While I may be guaranteed citizenship in Canada because my parents were Canadians, I will never be guaranteed citizenship in heaven on this basis. Faith relates to a personal standing before God. It has nothing to do with my parents.

Consider another example of this in Ezekiel 18:10-14. Ezekiel speaks here about the son of a righteous man:

“Suppose he has a violent son, who sheds blood or does any of these other things (though the father has done none of them):

“He eats at the mountain shrines.  
He defiles his neighbor's wife.  
He oppresses the poor and needy.  
He commits robbery.  
He does not return what he took in pledge.  
He looks to the idols.  
He does detestable things.  
He lends at usury and takes excessive interest.

Will such a man live? He will not! Because he has done all these detestable things,

he will surely be put to death and his blood  
will be on his own head.

This passage tells us that if a godly man had a son who did not live according to God's standards, that son would perish. The father's faith and godly life would not be credited to his son's account. "The soul who sins is the one who will die" (Ezekiel 18.4).

What does this tell us? It tells us that we cannot go to heaven on someone else's shoulders. We are not physically born into faith. We will not go to heaven because our parents were true Christians. Faith is not passed on through the genes. It is a personal matter between us and God.

The Bible tells us that the one thing we did inherit from our parents is sin.

Psalm 51:5 Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

Because they have inherited our sinful nature, our children will be separated from God and under His judgement. This nature has been passed on to us from our parents. Our children, in turn, will pass it on to their children. Until we personally renounce our sin and turn our hearts over to the Lord Jesus we will be citizens of the kingdom of this world and foreigners to the kingdom of God.

All too many people are trying to go to heaven on someone else's shoulders. The Bible clearly tells us that this is not possible. I ask you to look deeply into your heart right now. Are you depending on

someone else to get you to heaven? Do you trust in your parent's faith or some great saint to save you in the day of God's wrath? Remember Noah, Daniel and Job could not even save their own children. Salvation from the judgement of sin is a matter between you and God alone. Will you call out to God right now? Recognize your need of Him. Renounce your citizenship in the kingdom of this sinful world. Confess your sin and ask Him to accept you into His kingdom.

For Consideration:

- Does being born in a Christian home mean that we will be a Christian as well?
- What does Ezekiel teach us about each soul having to personally answer to God?
- Can we get to heaven on someone else's faith? How important is a personal faith?

For Prayer:

- Have you been born in a Christian home? Thank the Lord for the teaching and example you had in your parents.
- Take a moment to confess your sins to the Lord Jesus. Ask Him to forgive you and accept you as His child.
- Do you know someone who thinks they are going to heaven because of their association with a Christian community or church? Take a moment to pray that this person would come to personal faith in Christ.

## 2

# LIVING BY SOMEONE ELSE'S STANDARD

---

We have all felt the pressure to conform to the opinions of those around us. Government representatives are chosen to represent the opinion of the majority. If you want to advance in the company where you work, you must do what is expected of you. The pressure to conform is evident in our youth? What they wear, the style of their hair, the words they use, or the music they listen to is determined, for the most part, by what the majority of their peers think. Everyone wants to be accepted. Advertisers know that a product does not have to be good to sell. As long as they can convince people that everyone is using it, people will buy their product. We are a people who are governed by what others think. Our need of acceptance drives us to conform blindly to the majority opinion. There is security in knowing that we are just like everyone else.

Listening to others can be a good thing. The writer of the book of Proverbs tells us how important it is to seek the counsel of others in the decisions we make:

Proverbs 11:14 For lack of guidance a nation falls, but many advisers make victory sure.

Proverbs 12:15 The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice.

Proverbs 15:22 Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.

We are not created to be alone. There is great wisdom in seeking the advice and support of the larger body of Christ. Having said this, however, we need to be aware of the danger of blind conformity. In our effort to be accepted, the temptation is to cast aside personal convictions. We have all too often never questioned the opinion of the majority. We have blindly accepted the opinions of our respected leaders. We have allowed what others think determine how we live and what we believe.

Paul told the Romans that "everything that does not come from faith is sin" (Romans 14:23). What is faith? Faith is a heartfelt conviction and assurance. Paul is telling us that when we do something without a heartfelt conviction and assurance that what we are doing is right before God, we are guilty of sin. Is it possible that, in our blind conformity to the standards laid out for us by our fellow believers

and spiritual leaders, we are not acting from heartfelt conviction?

In Paul's day there was a debate over which days should be set aside as holy. Believers were divided over this issue. Listen to Paul's advice to the Roman believers:

Romans 14:5 One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.

We will not always agree on secondary issues. What is important is that we do all things being fully persuaded in our own mind. Paul is telling us that we should never do anything without a personal conviction that it is the right thing to do. To accept blindly someone else's reasoning is not enough. Each person must be persuaded in his or her own mind.

Some time ago I heard a news report about an organisation that sold research papers to university students. Students were buying these professionally written papers and handing them in under their own names. We would all admit that this was morally wrong. Is it possible, however, that we may be equally as guilty before God when we choose to take the shortcut and let someone else tell us how to live out our faith? Is God pleased when we do not take the time to examine the Scriptures for ourselves? Is He honoured when we stand before Him with no personal convictions of our own, all we have is what we have been told to believe by others? Is He glorified when our actions, however

good they may be, are based purely on the traditions of our ancestors but do not come from our own heartfelt convictions? Are we not like those students who wrote their names on a work that was not their own and handed it in to their teacher? Are we living a faith that is not really ours?

In 2 Samuel 24, David approached a man by the name of Araunah to buy a threshing floor. He wanted to offer a sacrifice to the Lord God. Out of respect for David, Araunah told him that he could have the threshing floor and the sacrifice free of charge. Listen to the response of David to Araunah's offer:

2 Samuel 24:24 But the king replied to Araunah, "No, I insist on paying you for it. I will not sacrifice to the LORD my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing." So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen and paid fifty shekels of silver for them.

David would have nothing to do with offering a sacrifice to the Lord his God that he did not pay for himself. What he offered to God had to be his. He would not offer someone else's oxen.

Are you offering someone else's oxen to the Lord? Do the standards on which you base your Christian life and practice come from your own personal, heartfelt convictions before God or are you living by someone else's standard?

## For Consideration:

- What has been your primary influence in the lifestyle you live today?
- Have you ever felt yourself blindly conforming to the standards set by people around you? Are the standards you live by honouring to God? Are they in tune with the teaching of God's Word?
- To what extent is the church of our day influenced by the standards of the world?
- Take a moment to consider your present lifestyle. Are your standards at work and personal life compatible with the Word of God and His purpose for your life?

## For Prayer:

- Ask God to give you a deep conviction of His purpose for your life?
- Ask God to give you grace to live in such a way that all you do is a sincere act of worship and praise to Him.





# 3

## BELIEVING SOMEONE ELSE'S BELIEFS

---

We all have our heroes. As young children it may have been some fictitious superhuman being with great physical strength. As time went by we began to idolize some great sports star. In later years our attention turned to someone who had really advanced in their career. Even as believers, we have our heroes. We admire the faith of certain men and women who have gone before us. We are inspired by their faithfulness or giftedness.

Have you ever listened to a young child speak about his hero? It seems that he or she can do nothing wrong. He believes every word his hero says. He wants to be like him in every way. We can treat our spiritual heroes in the same way. Maybe your heroes are individuals in history who have been responsible for the formulation of the doctrine of your church. Maybe they are the present leaders of your assembly. Maybe it is your pastor. Maybe it

is a great Bible teacher or a simple member in your church. Like a child, we soak in every word they say and claim it as our own.

I was speaking to an individual some time ago about a doctrinal issue. He told me that though he had never studied the issue himself, he had no reason to believe that his spiritual leaders would mislead him. He chose simply to believe what they told him to believe. This problem is not uncommon. All too many people believe what they are told to believe without searching the Bible for themselves. We are more than willing to let someone else do the thinking for us.

A few years ago, I was speaking with a member of a popular cult. We were discussing an area of doctrinal difference. When I brought up an issue for which she had no answer, she told me that she would speak to her spiritual leaders and get back to me later. I realised that she was depending on someone else to do the thinking for her. Her beliefs were not her own. She believed what she was told to believe. This caused me to think about my own beliefs. Are my beliefs really mine or were they based on what others had told me to believe?

How about you? Do you blindly accept what you hear from your respected leaders? What do you believe? I am not asking you what your church believes. I am not asking you what others have told you to believe. I am asking you about your own personal heartfelt convictions before God and His Word. When Paul and Silas went to Berea they taught the Word of God in the synagogue. The Bible tells us that, while these Bereans received the

word with great eagerness, they examined the Scriptures themselves to be sure that what they were hearing was true.

Acts 17:11 Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

The final authority in all matters of faith is the Word of God. The Bereans understood this and submitted even the teaching of the great apostle Paul to the examination of Scripture.

The Lord commended the church in Ephesus for having examined those who came to them claiming to be apostles but we're not.

Revelation 2:2 I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false.

The Ephesians did not accept blindly what was preached to them. Like the Bereans, they too compared the doctrine they were hearing with the Word of God.

When Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well, she believed in him. She immediately went into town to tell her friends about the Lord Jesus. A great crowd followed her to the place where Jesus was. For two days Jesus taught them. Listen to

what the Samaritans said to the woman after hearing Jesus for themselves:

John 4:42 They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world."

"We no longer believe because of what you have told us," they said, "we believe because we have heard Him ourselves and know Him to be the Saviour of the world." These Samaritans have much to teach us in our day. Do you believe because someone has told you what to believe or do you believe because you have seen it for yourself?

We have all sung the great hymn "Faith of our Fathers." Is the faith of our fathers really ours, however? Have we, like them, wrestled long and hard over the pages of the Word of God? Are your beliefs based on personal convictions or on tradition alone? We all must come to the point in our lives where we can say like the Samaritans: "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves and we know" (John 4.42).

The Pharisees of the New Testament clung very tightly to their doctrinal traditions. On one occasion, they were present when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. They saw the power of Jesus over death. Their doctrinal traditions were so deeply rooted, however, that even this great miracle could not change their minds. Sometimes we are like the Pharisees. Our beliefs are based more on tradition

than personal conviction. Though we see the truth itself, we refuse to accept it. There are those who live and die fighting for a faith they do not even believe themselves.

I am calling you to examine your beliefs today. Do you really believe what you say you believe? It makes all the difference in the world when our beliefs are really ours. It is the difference between hearing about something and experiencing it for yourself. It is one thing to hear about a Saviour who came to die for you, it is quite another thing to know Him for yourself. It is one thing to hear about a God who cares for us in our every need; it is quite another thing to know this to be true in our own experience. May our beliefs and convictions be truly ours.

For Consideration:

- Are you a student of the Word of God? Does the truth you believe rest solidly on the teaching of the Word of God?
- How easy is it close our mind to the truth of God's Word because it does not fit our particular view point? Have you ever met people who refuse to listen to Scriptural advice because they have their mind made up?
- How important is it that our beliefs be personal to us?

## For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He has given us His Word to be our guide.
- Ask the Lord to give you a faith that is personal to you. Ask Him to make your beliefs very real to you.

## 4

# USING SOMEONE ELSE'S GIFTS

---

As human beings, we all have a tendency to compare ourselves with others. Have you ever sat under the ministry of a great preacher of the gospel and secretly wished you had his gifts? Have you ever watched a friend share his faith with an unbeliever and longed to have half his or her ability? Maybe you read a biography of a great saint of God and you were inspired by his or her devotional life. We allow ourselves to feel inferior to these gifted men and women of God. We dream of having their gifts.

In Acts 8 we meet a man by the name of Simon. Simon was a sorcerer. When he heard the message of the gospel, he believed and was baptized by Philip. He followed Philip and the apostles everywhere they went. He was amazed at the great miracles he saw Philip perform. When Simon saw how the Holy Spirit fell on the believers when Peter prayed over them, he approached Peter with a special request. He wanted to be able to do what Peter



did. He wanted to be able to lay his hands on someone so that they would receive the Holy Spirit. He even offered to pay for this special ability. Peter was angry with him and told him that he needed to repent of his wicked thoughts.

Why was the request of Simon so wicked? In the immediate context it is because Simon felt he could buy the power of the Holy Spirit. It is quite possible that Simon was looking for personal glory in this matter. He did not understand that the gifts of the Holy Spirit could not to be bought, sold or traded off for other gifts. Simon saw what Peter did and wanted to be just like him. He wanted Peter's gift. God does not work that way.

Paul told Corinthians that the Holy Spirit gives gifts to each believer as He determines right.

1 Corinthians 12:7-11 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.

Verse eleven is of particular importance here. The Spirit of God gives these gifts "just as he determines." In other words, it is God the Holy Spirit who determines how He wants to use us.

As a believer, you too have received a particular gift for the work of the Lord. How often have we looked at others and their gifts, however, and envied them? Somehow their gifts seem so much better than ours. Like a child imitating his or her favourite super hero, we try to imitate those whose gifts we admire. We push ourselves to be just like them. Maybe you read a biography of a great saint of God who spent hours a day in his prayer closet, so you force yourself to do the same. Maybe you have been inspired by a gifted evangelist, so push yourself to talk to everyone you meet about the Lord. Maybe you have seen how God has provided for someone who lived by faith so you considered leaving your job to trust the Lord for everything just like them.

In Acts 19 we read about the seven sons of Sceva who, on seeing Paul cast out demons, decided to do the same. They invoked the demons in the name of Jesus whom Paul preached. The result was disastrous. The demons attacked the sons of Sceva and overpowered them. They failed not only because they were not believers but also because they were trying to use Paul's gift when they had not been called or gifted to do so.

God has gifted us as He has seen fit. There are times, however, when we are not happy with the gifts the Lord has given. Like the clay complaining to the potter about how it was being shaped, we

secretly long to be something other than what God has intended us to be. We live our lives ignoring the spiritual gifts God has given us. Like the sons of Sceva, we try to use gifts that are not ours to use. We have our own ideas of what we want to do in life and how we think God should use us. We go through life feeling guilty because we are not like someone else.

How important it is that we understand and accept the gifts and abilities God has given us personally. All too often we become imitators of people and not followers of God. God's purpose for you is very different from His purpose for everyone else. He does not expect all of us to be gifted preachers of the Word. He does not expect all of us to be able to spend hours every day in prayer. Praise His name that He has called certain individuals to these ministries. He does not expect you to use gifts that are not yours to use. He expects you to become everything He has personally made you to be. How much it must grieve Him when we depreciate the gifts He has given us and long for someone else's gift.

Have you accepted God's purpose for your life? Have you understood that He calls you to use the particular gifts He has given you and not someone else's gift? Have you recognized that God has been shaping you and gifting you for a particular purpose? No one else can fill that role like you. We are all different. We all have a function. The work of God is advanced when we recognize our differences and use them for His glory. I challenge you today to cease from being an imitator of people and become a follower of God. Accept the gifts and the

role God has for you. Don't be guilty of trying to use someone else's gift.

For Consideration:

- What spiritual gifts has the Lord God given you?
- Have you learned to be content with the gifts the Lord has given you? How have you been using them?
- Have you ever envied someone else's gifts? What does this tell you about your feelings about your own gifts and the purpose God has for you?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to see the spiritual gifts He has given you. Ask Him to help you to use those gifts for His glory.
- Ask the Lord to help you to accept with a grateful heart the calling He has placed on your life.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for any time you have not fully appreciated the gifts and calling He has for your life.



## 5

# MAINTAINING SOMEONE ELSE'S TRADITIONS

---

The story is told of a woman who would always cut the end off her roast beef before putting it in the pot to cook. One day her husband asked her why she did this. She told him that her mother had always cooked her roast beef this way. His question, however, caused her to think. Why had her mother always cut the end off her roast before putting it in the pot to cook? She decided that the next time she saw her mother she would ask her. The opportunity came and she questioned her mother about her custom. Her mother told her that she cut the end off her roast because that was how her mother had always done it though she had never understood why. Perplexed about the significance of this strange custom, both ladies paid a visit to the grandmother. When asked why she cut the end off her roast before putting it into the pot to cook, the grandmother responded: "Why, I always cut the end off the roast because my pot was too small to

fit it in another way." For years these ladies had carried on a tradition without having the slightest understanding of its meaning.

I wonder if we as believers have been guilty of the same thing. Have we been blindly maintaining someone else's traditions? Don't get me wrong, traditions can be very good. The problem comes, however, when we continue to practice these traditions without a proper understanding of their meaning. There are men and women today who would live and die for the traditions of their church though they have no understanding of their significance. When asked why they do the things the way they do, their response is simply: "It's always been done this way."

Traditions and customs are an essential part of our faith. It is important, however, that we understand their significance. The Pharisees placed a great emphasis on the traditions of their fathers. Their lives were dedicated to the maintenance of the Law of God and the traditions that had been passed down from their ancestors. Listen to what Jesus had to say about these people however:

Matthew 15:8 "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.

Could this be said of you today? Do you approach God with words and traditions but with a heart that is far from Him? Does your faith consist of the blind maintenance of customs handed down to you by your parents and grandparents?

We have all seen churches where traditions have become the central focus. In these churches we dare not change the order of service or go past the allotted time. The introduction of a new hymn or chorus is met with immediate resistance. When the new pastor arrives, he is quickly told what he is to do and how he is to do it. Should he introduce something new, he is told: "we don't do it that way in this church." To make the smallest change is a monumental task. For these people, their faith consists of maintaining the traditions of their ancestors. It sometimes has very little to do with a personal relationship with the Lord. For the most part, they have no reason for doing things the way they do other than the fact that it was always done this way. Like the Pharisees, they maintain the traditions but their heart is far from God.

How about you personally? How much of your faith consists of mindlessly accepting the customs passed on to you? It is one thing to maintain traditions that have personal significance, it is quite another to blindly maintain someone else's traditions. Is God pleased when we determine right and wrong on the basis of whether the action fits into the tradition of our ancestors? Are we not guilty, in this case, of placing tradition before the Word of God? While our confidence in the traditions of our fathers is admirable, they will not answer for us in the day of judgement.

The Lord looks at the heart. It is not the outward tradition that counts but the attitude of the heart. It is quite possible for us to maintain good traditions and still be far from God. Unless those traditions are based upon personal conviction and devotion



to God they are virtually meaningless. Listen to what the Lord says to his people who maintained the traditions of the fathers without personal conviction and devotion to him.

Amos 5:21-23 "I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps.

Yes, even the great traditions of our spiritual ancestors can become a stench in the nostrils of God if they are practised by those who do not understand their meaning. A blind and heartless adherence to someone else's tradition does not bring honour to God.

For Consideration:

- What are some of your spiritual traditions? Where did these traditions come from? What is the meaning of these traditions to you personally?
- Is it possible to uphold a spiritual tradition without understanding what we are doing? Is it possible to go through the motions but have no personal connection to that tradition?
- How important is it that our hearts be engaged in the traditions we practice?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for the many good spiritual traditions that have been passed down to us.
- Ask the Lord to give you grace to understand why you practice these traditions.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for times you have gone through the motions but your heart was not engaged in what you were doing.
- Pray that God would help you to practice your faith with true love and sincere devotion.



## 6

### DEPENDING ON SOMEONE ELSE'S STRENGTH

---

King Joash became king at the age of seven. He reigned for forty years in Jerusalem. The first part of his reign was characterized by service for God. During his reign, the temple, which had been in disrepair, was restored and regular sacrifices made for the sins of the people. In the later part of his reign, however, Joash turned his back on the Lord God. He set up foreign idols and worshipped them. Even though the Lord sent prophets to warn Joash, he refused to listen. What caused this once faithful king to turn his back on God?

The answer is found in the person of Joash himself. During the first part of his reign, Joash had a very close relationship with Jehoiada the priest. As long as Jehoiada was alive, Joash served the Lord:

2 Chronicles 24:2 Joash did what was right in the eyes of the LORD all the years of Jehoiada the priest.

2 Chronicles 24:14 When they had finished, they brought the rest of the money to the king and Jehoiada, and with it were made articles for the Lord's temple: articles for the service and for the burnt offerings, and also dishes and other objects of gold and silver. As long as Jehoiada lived, burnt offerings were presented continually in the temple of the Lord.

2 Chronicles 24.17 tells us that when Jehoiada died, Joash turned to other people for counsel:

2 Chronicles 24:17 After the death of Jehoiada, the officials of Judah came and paid homage to the king, and he listened to them.

Joash was the type of person who could be very easily swayed. As long as he was connected with someone who was strong in the Lord, he was faithful. When that person was taken from him, he wandered from the Lord.

The whole history of the children of Israel is one of following their leaders. As long as their leaders loved the Lord, God's people would obey Him. When their leaders turned their backs on the Lord, the people would follow.

Joash and the people of Israel depended on someone else's strength. To some extent we have all experienced what we are talking about here. Who among us has not been influenced by what is happening around us? When we are with godly individuals we find it relatively easy to live for the Lord. When these friends leave and our non-Christian friends show up, however, things radically change. We find ourselves returning to our old ways.

As individuals, we can often be guilty of depending on someone else's strength to get us through. While it is important for us to support each other in our times of difficulty, some of us have never learned to stand on our own. When the trials of life strike us, we run to someone else for the solution. As long as we are surrounded by godly people we can live for the Lord but when they leave we fall apart spiritually.

Listen to what the apostle Paul told the Ephesians:

Ephesians 6:10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

What is the source of our strength? Paul tells us in this passage that we are to be strong "in the Lord." Many of us find our strength in people. People will come and go. They will, sometime or another, let us down. Sometimes they will make bad choices or give us bad counsel. There are times when they will simply not be able to help us. There is only one person who will always be there for us. The Lord Jesus will never leave us or forsake us. You will

never encounter a problem too big for him to handle. He alone is able to strengthen you for every problem you face in life.

Paul understood something of the power at his disposal when he wrote:

Philippians 4:13 I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

The apostle Paul faced many trials in life. He knew what it was like to be betrayed and abandoned by his fellow humans. He knew the sting of their insults and the pain of their lashes. If he was depending on other human beings to get him through these trials, he would have given up. He found his strength in the Lord his God.

There are many men and women I greatly admire. They are sincere and godly individuals, but they are all humans, subject to the same frailties as I am. I respect their counsel. I need their encouragement and support. I realize, however, that if I am ever going to live the life that God requires of me, I will need a source of strength far greater than what these godly individuals give me. I need far more than the wisdom and strength of other human beings to face the enemy. I need the strength and wisdom of God himself.

God has promised these things to us in His word.

Isaiah 41:10 So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

James 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.

All the strength and wisdom you will ever need is promised to you if you would only reach out and ask God for it. In His strength you can overcome anything that Satan throws your way. Why be content with the limited human resources when God offers you freely all you need?

Are you like Joash and the people of Israel depending on the frail strength of their human leaders and friends? May God cause you today to hear His invitation to draw from His limitless resources. May He teach you how to lean on the One who can never fail.

For Consideration:

- Have you ever found yourself trusting people and not the Lord?
- To what extent does your faith and walk with the Lord depend on the people around you?
- Why is it important that we find our strength in the Lord and not in people?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He is able to give us all the strength we need to face whatever life throws at us.
- Ask the Lord to help you to lean on Him and draw more from His strength.



- Thank the Lord that He does strengthen us through other believers. Ask Him to teach you, however, to put your trust in Him and not in people.

## 7

# MAKING FAITH YOURS

---

In the last few chapters we have been trying to show how it is possible to live someone else's faith. All too often Christianity is accepted as a packaged deal but never personalized. Until our faith is personalized it is not really ours. We cannot honour God by means of second hand faith.

Maybe the Holy Spirit has been speaking to you through this book. Your faith has been a second hand faith. You want to know how you can make faith really yours. Let me conclude with a few brief observations.

### *Knowing a Personal Saviour*

Few men have had to suffer what Job suffered. He lost everything he had. His friends, the support of his wife, his possessions, his family, his riches, and his reputation were all gone in just a short time. One of the greatest blessings that resulted from these trials was that Job's eyes were opened to really see God for the first time. Listen to what he says:

Job 42:5 My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you.

There are many people who have heard about God but not so many have really experienced Him in their lives. Maybe as you read this book you are saying: "I'd give everything to be able to experience God. I've got a lot of head knowledge but I really do not know Him. Is it possible to know Him in this way?"

You can know God even as Job knew Him. Listen to the promise He gave through Jeremiah the prophet:

Jeremiah 24:7 I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the LORD. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart.

Jeremiah 31:34 No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

If you want to know the Lord in this way you need to understand what it is that keeps you from knowing Him. Listen to what the prophet Isaiah tells us:

Isaiah 59:2 But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.

Sin is what separates us from God. Sin will keep you from knowing Him. The only way you and I can know God is by the forgiveness of our sins. The Lord Jesus came to earth to offer that forgiveness. If you want to know God, you must get rid of the one obstacle that stands in your way, that is sin. The Lord Jesus can forgive you today if you call out to Him with all your heart. There is no other way to know God but by crying out to the Lord Jesus to remove the sin barrier. The Lord Jesus is your only hope; no one else can forgive your sin. Only those who recognise and confess their sins can experience the cleansing power of God's forgiveness. Listen to what John tells us:

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

We cannot underestimate the importance of the word "if" in this verse. This little word is vital to the understanding of the whole verse. "If" you confess your sins He will be faithful to forgive you. All too many people take this for granted. They feel that the Lord already knows that they are sinners and that He will forgive them but they never come to Him for forgiveness. What about you? Have you confessed your sin? Do you recognise that you will never personally know God until your sin is forgiven? Don't let another moment go by before you beg Him for forgiveness.

### *Living By Personal Convictions*

Once you have understood what it means to know God personally, you will then have to turn to His

Word to understand His will and purpose for your life. While it is good to listen to the experience of others, it is important that your authority be the Word of God. Listen to the opinions of others about the Word of God but, like the Bereans of Acts 17.11, search the Scriptures yourself. If you are truly a child of God, the Holy Spirit dwells in your heart. He has promised to lead you into truth. You alone must answer to God for your convictions regarding His Word. Let me give you some advice as you seek to understand the will of God in His Word.

First, commit yourself to regular reading and meditation of the Scriptures. Read and study both the Old and New Testaments. Until you are personally familiar with the content of Scripture, you will never be able to have personal convictions about what it says. I have met too many people who have had opinions about what the Bible teaches who have never read it even once.

Second, search the Scriptures with an open mind. Don't go into your study of the Bible with your mind made up. Don't be afraid to let the verses you read challenge your present understanding. Don't elevate a particular theology over Scripture itself. Let the Bible challenge your present understanding. You are in search of truth not trying to defend a position given to you by someone else.

Third, commit your study of the Word of God to the Holy Spirit in prayer. Let Him guide you in your research. Expect that He will lead you. He has been given to us to guide us into all truth. He will be faithful.

Finally, seek the counsel of other men and women of God. Listen to what they have to say but realise that you must come to your own personal conviction. When you have listened to others, return to the Scriptures to make sure that what they say is true.

*Accepting Yourself For Who God Has Made You To Be*

If you want your faith to be really yours, you need to realize that God has a particular purpose and plan for you. To accomplish this purpose, He has taken you through the trials and difficulties you have experienced in life. Like the potter He has been shaping you on the potter's wheel for a particular reason. Nothing has ever happened to you in your life that God will not use to make you everything He wants you to be.

Accepting that God has allowed all our struggles for a purpose makes it easier to understand that we have a particular role to play in the outworking of God's great overall plan for this world. No one else can fill that role like you can. To diminish your significance in the work of ministry is to diminish the importance of what God has been doing in your life by moulding, shaping and calling you to that ministry. To look with envy at how God is working in the life of another believer, is to refuse to accept fully the significance of your own God-given role. It is to want to be something that God does not want you to be. Confess this as sin, and ask God to help you to be thankful for the role He has given you.

*Living in God's Strength*

Learn to live in the strength that the Lord provides. How can faith be real in our lives when we refuse to give God the opportunity to prove Himself? If we are constantly running to others in our times of need, how will we see God's strength at work in us? I am not diminishing the importance of Christian fellowship and support. God may very well work through other believers to strengthen and encourage you. What I am saying, however, is that the Lord has promised to be our strength, let's let Him fulfil his promise in us. Don't be afraid to step out into what He has called you to do. Listen to what David did when it seemed that everyone was against him:

1 Samuel 30:6 David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters. But David found strength in the Lord his God.

This same encouragement is yours in God if you will let Him work in you. There is no counselor like the Lord Jesus. He knows you better than you know yourself. Listen to His promise in Matthew 11:28:

Matthew 11:28 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

Do you need rest? Have things been piling up on you? Won't you come to the Lord and quieten your

heart? He is willing to prove the truth of His promises to you. There is no one who can quiet your soul like Him. There is strength in Him for your every trial.

It has not been my intention to be critical in this reflection. It has been my concern, however, that as believers we experience faith that is ours. Our society needs more than anything else to see evidence of true faith. Before we can ever hope to reach our friends and loved ones with the truth of the gospel, we need to examine seriously our own faith. Is it real or are we just pretending? I pray that the Spirit of God would use this study in many lives. Won't you join with me and pray that as believers we would not be guilty of living someone else's faith. May our faith be truly ours.

For Consideration:

- Are you sure of your personal salvation and forgiveness through the Lord Jesus? What is the basis of your assurance?
- How important is the Word of God and prayer in the formation of personal convictions and practices?
- What role does the Holy Spirit play in helping us to have a faith that is personal?
- Are you willing to step out into what the Lord has for you even if you feel you do not personally have the strength and skill necessary?



## For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for the tools He has given us to help us to have a faith that is personal to us. Thank Him for His Word and His Spirit.
- Ask the Lord to become more real to you. Ask Him to make Himself known to you as a person and not merely a doctrine.
- Ask God to give you the strength to step out in obedience to His leading, trusting Him for the strength necessary to be obedient.
- Ask God to give you grace to be willing to stand firm on the truth He has revealed to you no matter what others say or what circumstances come your way.
- Ask God to give you a tender heart to hear from Him. Ask Him for forgiveness for times when you have not been willing to listen.

## Light To My Path Book Distribution

Light To My Path Book Distribution (LTMP) is a book writing and distribution ministry reaching out to needy Christian workers in Asia, Latin America, and Africa. Many Christian workers in developing countries do not have the resources necessary to obtain Bible training or purchase Bible study materials for their ministries and personal encouragement. F. Wayne MacLeod is a member of Action International Ministries and has been writing these books with a goal to distribute them freely or at cost price to needy pastors and Christian workers around the world.

To date tens of thousands of books are being used in preaching, teaching, evangelism and encouragement of local believers in over sixty countries. Books in these series have now been translated into a number of languages. The goal is to make them available to as many believers as possible.

The ministry of LTMP is a faith based ministry and we trust the Lord for the resources necessary to distribute the books for the encouragement and strengthening of believers around the world. Would you pray that the Lord would open doors for the translation and further distribution of these books?

For more information about Light To My Path visit our website at <http://ltmp-homepage.blogspot.ca>