

YOBL

Year of Biblical Literacy

Week 44: The value of Faith

Daily Reading for Week

- Romans 15-16, Psalm 140
- 1 Corinthians 1-2, Psalm 141
- 1 Corinthians 3-4, Psalm 142
- 1 Corinthians 5-6, Psalm 143
- 1 Corinthians 7-8, Psalm 144
- 1 Corinthians 9-10, Psalm 145
- 1 Corinthians 11-12, Psalm 146
- Read Scripture Video: 1 Corinthians

Focus of time together

Looking at 1 Corinthians and Acts, we will examine how the value of faith informed and shaped the early Christian community, and we will also explore what faith as a value means for our community today.

Opening Prayer

Have someone read the following prayer, called the Newman Prayer, aloud to open your time together.

Newman Prayer

God has created me to do Him some definite service. He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission. I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for naught. I shall do good; I shall do His work. I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth in my own place, while not intending it if I do but keep His commandments. Therefore, I will trust Him, whatever I am, I can never be thrown away. If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him, in perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him. If I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him. He does nothing in vain. He knows what He is about. He may take away my friends. He may throw me among strangers. He may make me feel desolate, make my spirits sink, hide my future from me. Still, He knows what He is about.

Amen.

Intro to Discussion

Last week, we looked at Romans and explored the idea that the Epistles as a whole are not primarily a set of doctrines about what to believe but instructions for the early Christian community about how to live in light of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. While they do indeed contain rich and wonderful theology, the bulk of the Epistles are concerned with the day-to-day tensions and practical questions about how communities of Jesus are to live with one another within the world.

This week we are looking at the value of faith. Simply put, faith is trust in Jesus. It is not simply believing true doctrine about Jesus (indeed, as James 2:19 says "even demons believe true things about God — and shudder"). Faith is first and foremost putting our trust in the person of Jesus. It is saying "I trust that in Jesus, I will find true fullness of life." This does not mean we don't have questions or doubts or that we intellectually believe all the right things. It simply means we wake up daily and trust that, in Jesus, we will experience true life.

Faith reaches beyond just individual heart postures. It is a way of being community. We trust that Jesus is at work in the individual lives in our community group and in the life of the community group itself. 1 Corinthians opens with Paul thanking God for the Christian community in Corinth. "I always thank my God for you and for the gracious gifts he has given you, now that you belong to Christ Jesus," he declares adding, "[God] is faithful to do what he says, and he has invited you into partnership with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." As you read 1 Corinthians, the realities of the church Paul is thanking God for begin to emerge. They believe all sorts of weird things; they are actively championing a man committing adultery with his step-mother; they are disunified, arrogant, and disobedient. And yet, before Paul writes some very strong words of rebuke and correction, he thanks God for them and declares that Jesus is at work in their midst and calls them partners with Christ.

The value of faith does not mean we don't give and receive correction or that, because no one is a final authority on truth but God, that there is no truth to be found in community. The value of faith means that our starting point in relating to one another is that the Spirit of God is actively at work in each individual life and the community as a whole. Like Paul in 1 Corinthians 1, we are able to have faith and trust that, despite everything, God knows what He is doing and what He is about.

Whole Group Discussion

One of the keys to this value of faith is trust. Trusting Jesus does not simply mean believing the right things about Him. Trusting Jesus means living our day-to-day life believing and acting as if Jesus is in control. Trust allows us to be fully present to God and others. This exercise is meant to help us discern the places in our lives where we are trusting Jesus and the places where we are finding trust in Jesus difficult. The hope is that by discerning these places and bringing them before Christ, we would experience a rich interaction with God's love and find invitation to practice a deep, trusting faith.

Reflection (30 mins)

Begin by sitting in silence together. Put anything that would be a distraction in the centre of the room. For a couple of minutes, allow the silence to wash over you. Notice what it brings up in your mind and how it makes you feel.

Have someone read the following prompts out loud then silently journal your response.:

- Think about the major events happening in your life right now. Think about the people, places, work, conversations, responsibilities, conflicts, fears, joys, and senses (sights, smells, sounds, and touches) that have made up your last week or so. Write out a list of all the things that come to mind in the next 5 minutes.
- After you have performed this internal inventory, ask the Holy Spirit to highlight 3 of the things you wrote down that you feel particularly thankful for. Why do you feel grateful for these 3 things? Journal your response in the next 5 minutes.
- Finally, ask the Holy Spirit to highlight 3 things you wrote down that you feel the most anxiety and fear around. What is it in particular you are fearful or anxious about? Journal your responses in the next 5 minutes

Invite each person to share one thing they wrote down that they are thankful for and one thing they are anxious or fearful about.

Stillness (5-10 mins)

We live in a world that seems to tell us that we are little autonomous gods in control of our own lives and destiny. But the story the Bible tells is different: we are not God. The world does not depend on us. One of the simplest, yet often most difficult, ways to practice faith is to sit still. The physical act of stillness can be an act of faith. We are going to practice this together.

Find a comfortable position you can sit still in for the next 5-10 minutes. Take the paper/journal you have written your responses on and place it in front of you where it is visible. As you sit, slowly read through all that you wrote down. For each item, visualise it in your mind. Imagine yourself bringing it before Jesus and laying it at his feet saying "I trust you, Jesus". Pay special attention to anything you find particularly hard to bring before Jesus.

Discovery Bible Method

If you still have time choose a short passage from the one of those you've read this week (around 5-10 verses).

- Have someone read it aloud, then ask someone else to re-read the passage.
- Have the participants retell the story from memory.
- Spend some minutes silently reading the passage again.
- Silently pray for God to speak directly from the passage.

Ask open-ended questions, such as:

- "What do you see?"
- "What does this say about God?"
- "What does this say about us?"
- "What is God saying to you?"

Let the participants do most of the talking and don't be afraid of silences. If the session veers off course, you can ask, "Where do you see that in the Bible?"

Let them suggest their own commitment to whatever God is saying to them.

Ask them:

- "What are you going to do?"
- "Who are you going to tell?"

Closing Prayer

Pray for any anxieties and fears that were shared in the reflection exercise. Also pray for those commitments you have made in response to what God has said in the passage you studied.