

Forsaken by God?

Our experience of the life of faith is never constant. Trials and tribulations come into our lives which can cause our faith to waver under the pressure and strain. It would, almost certainly, be less than truthful for any of us to say that—no matter what comes—our faith is always strong. But having said that, it is important to note as well that if our faith is to be strong, we have to seek growth and strength in our faith in the ways in which God instructs us from his word. There's scriptural guidance for a strong faith that to willfully ignore is the height of arrogance and foolishness—not to mention the fact that to do so is to sin against Jesus Christ and His church. One of the first things that we must remember is that God has not forsaken us even though we may sense that he has at times.

There is an account in the life of Martin Luther of a time when he was going through a great measure of difficulty. His personal experience of melancholy (a degree of discouragement or even depression) left him lethargic and not really wanting to regularly look to God in the Word and prayer. One morning his wife Katy dressed herself in black clothes as a sign of mourning. She didn't try to explain herself to Luther she just went about her daily routine dressed all in black. After a while Luther, who had heard nothing of anyone dying, asked his wife: "Katherine, why are you dressed in mourning black?" "Someone has died," she replied. "Died," said Luther, "I have not heard of anyone dying. Whoever can it be that has died?" His wife replied, "It seems that God must have died!" Martin Luther got the message. He was a Christian but he was living like a practical atheist. Luther realized how foolish he had been and, by God's grace, he began to slowly move past the discouragement by looking to God through the Word and prayer.

If we are to continue to grow in our faith in God, we must continue to grow in our knowledge of God and love for God. Scottish Presbyterian pastor and author, Dr. Sinclair Ferguson has noted that in-depth study of scripture is a primary, instrumental way that God uses to strengthen our trust in him. "Knowledge and love of God create an environment in which discouragement and a sense of depression or spiritual desertion find difficulty in breathing....I do not believe that it is possible to overstress the importance of this principle. Of course it is unglamorous; but there is much in the Christian life that is unglamorous. The

important thing is not its glamor, but that it is God's way. And because it is his way, it works." Gathering with God's people weekly for Lord's Day corporate worship and fellowship; sitting under solid preaching and teaching of God's word, along with prayer and participation in the sacraments is ordinarily God's way to grow and strengthen us so that we're prepared in times when our faith is tested.

Even though there may be times when it seems as if God is not near and that he doesn't hear our prayers, God's word is clear: God will never leave or forsake his children. It is important to note that, on the Cross, Jesus Christ cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" These words were written by David in Psalm 22:1. Unlike David or any other sinner saved by grace, Jesus was truly forsaken by the Father; although there is certainly mystery here, God the Father, who cannot look on sin (Habakkuk 1:13), turned away from his own Son as Jesus bore our sins in his body on the tree (1 Peter 2:24). Jesus suffered God's wrath and was forsaken by God so we would never have to be.

If you have trusted in Jesus Christ: his perfect life, sacrificial death and subsequent resurrection, you can be sure that God will never leave you or forsake you. What a comfort this truth is always and certainly during times of trial and suffering.

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