

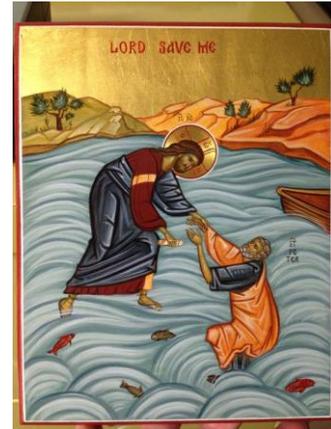
The Second Step of Faith

By Deacon Linda Bobbitt

Shared 5-12-20

The other day I read a daily devotional online that quoted part of a sentence from James 1:6: “But ask in faith, never doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind...”

The devotion was about our response to the COVID pandemic and it urged its readers to have faith in God who “has a purpose in each of our trials, and through stories such as this, we find the courage to trust His plan in all things.”



Statements like this from religious organizations have always frustrated me because they suggest a couple of things. First, by saying, “God has a purpose in each of our trials” suggests that God is behind or at least complicit in COVID. While this is misleading and frustrating, I will put it aside for the time being because what grabbed my attention and frustrated me the most was the expectation that we can and should be completely confident in our faith.

My frustration comes from the fact that faith and full confidence are not synonymous, they are mutually exclusive. Indeed, when we are completely confident of something, we don’t believe it, we know it. We know that 2+2=4. We know what we are wearing today. We claim to know many things and if we are proven wrong by evidence, then we will change our mind and know something else.

But faith is different because faith is only necessary when there is NOT knowledge. We have no way to verify things in which we have faith. My own life has taught me that faith is really the **decision to trust in the face of doubt**. It is not the absence of doubt. Doubt, therefore, can not be a failure of faith.

Since my annoyance would not leave me alone, I went back to my Bible and I looked up the context for the quote and found it in the following passage:

“If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you. But ask in faith, never doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind; for the doubter, being double-minded and unstable in every way, must not expect to receive anything from the Lord.”

I looked more closely at the actual words used by James focusing on the word “doubt”. The Greek word we translate as “doubt” (διακρίνω) is also used to describe discernment or judgement. Sometimes this word suggests investigating thoroughly by weighing pros and cons. Other times it suggests over thinking things and vacillating – unable to make a decision. The specific meaning of the word depends on its context. [\[1\]](#)

With this in mind, it appears that James is telling us to turn to God in our times of doubt and to trust what we receive from God. Don’t get stuck wondering if it is really true because we

cannot verify. Simply act as though it is true and take a step, make a decision and move forward in faith.

In my own life I spent much of my 20s and early 30s stuck in doubt. I went to church and knew the Bible stories, but some part of me kept getting hung up on my doubt. I kept asking God to remove the doubt and I sat stubbornly waiting for full confidence. My faith spun in circles. God would reveal himself in moments of inspiration, beauty or prayer and my faith would soar, but then I would look back on the experience and rationalize it away saying things like, “that was a really good sermon – the pastor is a wonderful preacher”, or “what a beautiful place I’ve found – nature is so peaceful”, or “what a great insight I had, I must be brilliant” 😊. Each time I rationalized away my encounters with God I basically brought myself back to the starting line. My faith and spiritual development simply couldn’t evolve because I refused to take the second step.

The first step was to trust God enough to respond to the call that was clearly in my heart. I had responded to God’s call each time I went to church even though I wasn’t in the mood or reached out to someone I didn’t want to talk with simply because of the nagging tug in my heart. But the second step was to accept that it was indeed God who had called me and that when I had responded to the call, God had actually met me.

This second step was key and it is that idea that got triggered by the reading. Trust is a decision we make in the face of doubt. It is our response to God’s invitation into relationship. We all fail at trust over and over, clinging to things that seem more certain. Yet over and over the Bible warns us not to cling to things of the world – things that we control. Instead, God calls us to trust him and God gives us many opportunities to do so. Many of us respond to God in times of crisis, but then go back to our old ways as soon as the crisis is over, forgetting that we actually encountered God – for real.

But what if we didn’t? What if we reflected on our experience of God and trusted that it was real? What would we do next?

We might open our minds and hearts to see how God is present in the world all around us. We might listen differently to the stories of others (written and spoken) to see how God met them and wonder if that is how God meets us. We might allow ourselves to be vulnerable enough to share our experiences of God’s presence with other people. We might look for God’s presence in their response.

Chances are that when we reflect on the things we do out of our willingness to trust God in the face of our doubt, we will be able to take that second step – to *trust* that God is real and active in our lives and to act as if it is true even if we aren’t sure. With this step, we grab God’s offered hand and begin a new journey.

^[1] I use Bible Hub to look up Greek and Hebrew and see all the different ways the words are used in the Bible. <https://biblehub.com/>