

Praying Into the Abyss of Despair

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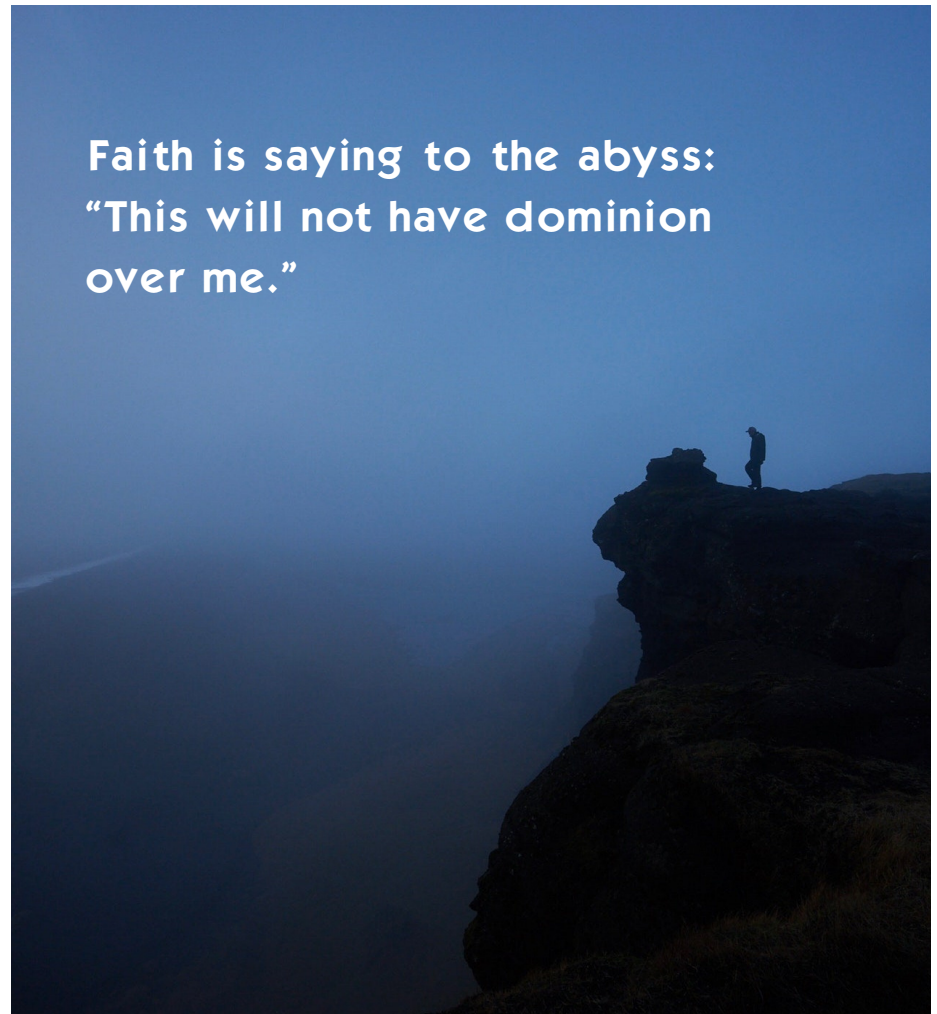
Sometimes circumstances make us feel like we are standing on the edge of a dark and bottomless abyss of hopelessness. We pray, do all the things we know to do, have been told to do, trained to do (and then some) and nothing changes or things get worse.

Cliché Christian answers and the insensitivities of cheap, canned theology of fellow Christians don't help. Rather than identify with us in the darkness of the mystery of our circumstances, people who sound like "Job's comforters" heap guilt, shame, introspection, fear, and anxiety upon us with: "There must be sin in your life" or "You just don't have enough faith," or this would not be happening to you. *Both are lies.*

PRAYER TAKES COURAGE

Prayer is an activity that takes a lot of courage.

Sometimes the essence of prayer is trusting God so that it may seem we are in voluntary freefall, descending into the abyss of our hopelessness. We have no sensory assurance of anything other than darkness. We can't stay on the edge any longer, and what is in front of



Faith is saying to the abyss:
"This will not have dominion
over me."

us is nothing but darkness and despair.

Those who choose to trust someone other than God turn from the precipice, give up on prayer and accommodate their present reality. Those who believe will (in trust and faith) throw themselves, heart and soul, into the abyss.

Once those who trust in God

do so, they discover that fearful freefall turns into flight when God puts his wind beneath their wings. Those who refuse to face the abyss of their hopelessness can never know the experience of having freefall turn to flight by God the Holy Spirit.

Ezekiel spoke of waters where we can no longer touch solid

ground—waters so deep that we cannot control anything, even our own survival. Those who insist on the security of the shoreline, where everything is safely neat, predictable, understandable, and manageable, will never know the dynamic of the real prayer of faith.

Father God appreciates the “faith” of those who, in the face of their impossibility and no answers, throw themselves into it anyway. It’s corny and clichéd, but he appreciates it in ways that we cannot truly fathom.

There is an intimacy with the Father, and a fraternity with the Son and a unity of the Spirit that can only be subjectively

experienced when we have stared at the darkness and thrown ourselves in. It is what Jesus did at Calvary and in the grave, facing it, going there willingly. Until resurrection morning, all is darkness, and we can’t change reality by pretending there’s no darkness. For the children of Israel, the last minute of the last hour, of the last day of the 39th year of wilderness wanderings looked exactly like every day that had preceded it—but then . . . resurrection dawn.

I get discouraged as much as

anyone, but somehow, if I must fall, I have learned to fall forward, or more recently, “fall in.”

If you are struggling, or seem to have no strength—or if the thought of engaging in prayer excites you as much as a toothache—don’t give up. Don’t let a lack of results deter you.

Faith is more than getting results/answers. Faith is saying to the abyss: “This will not have dominion over me, and if I



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must perish, I will, but I will throw myself and my hopelessness right into believing and trusting in God.”

In doing so, my only hope will be God taking my freefall and turning it into flight where it is his supernatural resurrection life . . . or it is nothing.

The great mystery of freefall into the abyss is discovering

that the buoyancy of faith doesn’t have to be mine! When I am weak, the faith of others, who love me and with whom I am in relationship, taken and animated by the Spirit of God, becomes: the air beneath my wings! My only job is to jump into the abyss, trusting God. *My contribution of faith is to admit that I don't have any!*

Then, “in faith” I throw myself in! This is overcoming prayer. This is overcoming faith.

This is faith that stares death in the eyes and prevails.

If God has given me strength, or favor and prosperity rather than adversity, it is my moral duty to my brothers, sisters, and the world to enter into their suffering and

impossibility, and share my faith when they have none. I sincerely pray that I will be able to live the rest of my days in this way. I pray

every day:

“Lord, you have given me life and strength and health, please, let my life amount to something today for your purposes in your saints. May my existence be more than the delusions of American cultural priorities of self-interest.” □

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