

Walking by Faith & Not by Feelings

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A measure of a disciplined person is that he/she has substantially incorporated the teaching of 2 Corinthians 5:7 in his/her life; that teaching is expressed in the New King James version as:

“For we walk by faith and not by sight.”

As a way of adding context to the Scripture, verses 4 to 7 from the Complete Jewish Bible reads:

“Yes, while we are in this body, we groan with the sense of being oppressed: it is not so much that we want to take something off, but rather to put something on over it; so that what must die may be swallowed up by the Life. Moreover, it is God who has prepared us for this very thing, and as a pledge he has given us his Spirit. So we are always confident- we know that so long as we are at home in the body, we are away from our home with the Lord; for we live by trust, not by what we see.”

Although the 2 Corinthians Scripture speaks of “sight” or “what we see,” it does not mean eyesight alone, but rather all of our senses that bring us information and that influence our actions. That means our physical senses of touch, smell, hearing, eyesight and taste, as well as the sensations of our innards. The responses of our brains (our thoughts if you will), when added to the sensations within our bodies, produce what we call “feelings” or “emotions.” And so, we might paraphrase 2 Corinthians 5:7 by saying that:

“.. we respond to the things that life throws at us by trusting in what we know is God’s will for us, and not by our emotions or our feelings about either things or people” (my words).

“Easier said than done,” you say! Yes, that is true, and that is why walking by faith and not by sight is the mark of a disciplined man. The noted teacher of faith, Smith Wigglesworth, once said:

“I can’t understand God by feelings. I can’t understand the Lord Jesus by feelings. I can only understand God the Father and Jesus by what the Word says about them. God is everything the Word says He is. We need to get acquainted with Him through the Word.” Too many people try to get acquainted with God through their personal feelings. When they feel good, they think God has heard their prayers. If they don’t feel particularly good they think He has not heard them. Their faith is based on their feelings whereas it should be based on God’s word.”

God never puts upon us that which we cannot handle, and never asks of us that which we cannot do. 1 Corinthians 10:13 assures us of this; it reads:

“No temptation has seized you beyond what people normally experience, and God can be trusted not to allow you to be tempted beyond what you can bear. On the contrary, along with the temptation he will also provide the way out, so that you will be able to endure.”

And, to remind us and encourage us that we *can* walk by faith when our feelings and emotions pull us the other way, He provided examples for us of those who were severely tempted, and yet prevailed. A prime example of such a person was Abraham, in the incident that we call “the binding of Isaac;” in Genesis 22:1-13, we read:

“After these things, God tested Avraham. He said to him, "Avraham!" and he answered, "Here I am." He said, "Take your son, your only son, whom you love, Yitz'chak; and go to the land of Moriyah. There you are to offer him as a burnt offering on a mountain that I will point out to you."

What must Abraham have felt at that moment? It is awful enough to suffer the death of one's child from accident or sickness, but to cause it by one's own hand ..! Do you not think that Abraham's emotions were screaming at him at that moment to not do it? Of course they were, and that was the point of the test that God gave him. We continue reading at verse 3:

“Avraham got up early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, together with Yitz'chak his son. He cut the wood for the burnt offering, departed and went toward the place God had told him about. On the third day, Avraham raised his eyes and saw the place in the distance. Avraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey. I and the boy will go there, worship and return to you." Avraham took the wood for the burnt offering and laid it on Yitz'chak his son. Then he took in his hand the fire and the knife, and they both went on together. Yitz'chak spoke to Avraham his father: "My father?" He answered, "Here I am, my son." He said, "I see the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Avraham replied, "God will provide himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son"; and they both went on together.”

At that point, Isaac did not know that he was the lamb that was going to die, but he surely knew that something was up because there was a fire but no lamb. And why did Abraham tell his young assistants to stay behind with the donkey? It is because he knew that if they saw what he was about to do to Isaac they would have stopped him. Abraham knew that the young men did not have sufficient faith to overcome their natural feelings and to trust God. We continue reading at verse 9:

“They came to the place God had told him about; and Avraham built the altar there, set the wood in order, bound Yitz'chak his son and laid him on the altar, on the wood.”

We have no doubt read that passage many times over the years, but have we considered how Abraham could have accomplished it? By **that** time, Isaac **had** to have realized what was about to happen, and Abraham was up in age while Isaac was a strapping young man. The only way that Abraham could have bound Isaac and laid him on the wood of the altar was for Isaac to cooperate. And what must Isaac have been experiencing emotionally in all of this? A bit of anxiety perhaps? Scripture does not tell us about Isaac's faith, but it **must** have been equivalent to Abraham's. Continuing with verse 10:

“Then Avraham put out his hand and took the knife to kill his son. But the angel of *ADONAI* called to him out of heaven: "Avraham? Avraham!" He answered, "Here I am." He said, "Don't lay your hand on the boy! Don't do anything to him! For now I know that you are a man who fears God, because you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." Avraham raised his eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram caught in the bushes by its horns. Avraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering in place of his son.”

So, Abraham (and I suggest Isaac as well) passed God’s test of walking by faith and not by their emotions and feelings. There was another young man who was put to the same test as Isaac, and who actually had to die in order to pass it. It was, of course, Yeshua. He, like Isaac, accepted that he was about to die but, unlike Isaac, knew in advance that there would be no ram in the thicket to save him. But Yeshua had an advantage, you say, “For in Him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Colossians 2:9 NKJ paraphrased). Yes, that is true, but Yeshua was also a man, and experienced all of the natural emotions that men experience; this is made clear in Matthew 26:36-39, where we read:

“Then Yeshua went with his *talmidim* to a place called Gat-Sh'manim and said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took with him Kefa and Zavdai's two sons. Grief and anguish came over him, and he said to them, "My heart is so filled with sadness that I could die! Remain here and stay awake with me." Going on a little farther, he fell on his face, praying, "My Father, if possible, let this cup pass from me! Yet- not what I want, but what you want!"”

And Hebrews 4:15 adds to this by saying:

“For we do not have a *cohen gadol* [high priest] unable to empathize with our weaknesses; since in every respect he was tempted just as we are, the only difference being that he did not sin.”

Scripture also provides us with an opposite example – an example of a disciple who did not walk by faith and insisted on having sight in order to believe. We read in John 20:24-29:

“Now T'oma [Thomas] (the name means "twin"), one of the Twelve, was not with them when Yeshua came. When the other *talmidim* told him, "We have seen the Lord," he replied, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands, put my finger into the place where the nails were and put my hand into his side, I refuse to believe it." A week later his *talmidim* were once more in the room, and this time T'oma was with them. Although the doors were locked, Yeshua came, stood among them and said, "*Shalom aleikhem!*" Then he said to T'oma, "Put your finger here, look at my hands, take your hand and put it into my side. Don't be lacking in trust, but have trust!" T'oma answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Yeshua said to him, "Have you trusted because you have seen me? How blessed are those who do not see, but trust anyway!"”

The test that Thomas did **not** pass was the test of 2 Corinthians 5:7:

“For we walk by faith and not by sight.”

These would merely be interesting stories if they only applied to Abraham, Isaac, Thomas, and Yeshua, but they apply to us as well. The Scriptures I read to you have been given to us to help us “walk by faith and not by sight.” Let’s each of us think for a minute. How immune are we to allowing our emotions to get the best of us? I have been working on keeping my emotions in check ever since I came to faith, and I still lose it every now and then. Typical emotions that sometimes get in our way and cause us and others problems are fear, worry, anxiety, broken heartedness, depression, and anger. These are just examples, and while our feelings and emotions are given to us by God to be used appropriately, they can quickly turn into sins if we act wrongly in response to them. Let’s look at them individually.

First, fear, worry, and anxiety as a group. 2 Timothy 1:6 in the NKJ assures us that:

“.. God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.”

Also, in Proverbs 12:25 we read:

“Anxiety in a person's heart weighs him down, but a kind word cheers him up.”

And in John 14:26-27, Yeshua tells his disciples that he is leaving them, and he urges them not to fear by saying:

“But the Counselor, the *Ruach HaKodesh*, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything; that is, he will remind you of everything I have said to you. What I am leaving with you is *shalom*- I am giving you my *shalom*. I don't give the way the world gives. Don't let yourselves be upset or frightened.”

Well, if God has not given us a spirit of fear, where does unjustified fear come from? It comes from our lack of faith that God is in control. What is the remedy for fear, worry, and anxiety? It is to repent of our lack of faith, put ourselves, our loved ones and our circumstances in God’s hands, and determine to trust God.

The next emotion on the list of examples is broken-heartedness. Psalms 34:19(18)* assures us that:

“*ADONAI* is near those with broken hearts; he saves those whose spirit is crushed.”

* Verse 19 in the CJB and *Tanakh* corresponds to verse 18 in most English versions.

Also, in Psalms 147:2-3 we read:

“*ADONAI* is rebuilding Yerushalayim, gathering the dispersed of Isra'el. He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.”

What is the remedy for broken-heartedness? It is to put ourselves and our circumstances in God's hands and determine to trust God. In Job 13:15 (NKJ), we read:

“Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him.”

Next on the list of emotions is depression. Depression is a bad feeling that is commonly accompanied by negative thoughts. It can come upon us at various times and for various reasons that can be spiritual, situational, and/or medical. In cases where the etiology of depression is medical, it ought to be treated medically; but, if it is the result of hurtful situations or satanic spirits, it needs to be treated biblically. Psalms 42:6-12 describes a depressive state and its spiritual cure; it reads:

“My soul, why are you so downcast? Why are you groaning inside me? Hope in God, since I will praise him again for the salvation that comes from his presence. My God, when I feel so downcast, I remind myself of you from the land of Yarden, from the peaks of Hermon, from the hill Mizar. Deep is calling to deep at the thunder of your waterfalls; all your surging rapids and waves are sweeping over me. By day *ADONAI* commands his grace, and at night his song is with me as a prayer to the God of my life. I say to God my Rock, "Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, under pressure by the enemy? My adversaries' taunts make me feel as if my bones were crushed, as they ask me all day long, 'Where is your God?'" My soul, why are you so downcast? Why are you groaning inside me? Hope in God, since I will praise him again for being my Savior and God.”

The spiritual cure for depression is expressed clearly in James 4:7, which reads:

“.. submit to God. Moreover, take a stand against the Adversary, and he will flee from you.”

We have the authority to stand against Satan, and to command unclean spirits that he has put on us to leave.

Now the last emotion on the list – anger. Ephesians 4:26-27 says that we can:

“Be angry, but don't sin- don't let the sun go down before you have dealt with the cause of your anger; otherwise you leave room for the Adversary.”

And Psalms 37:8 instructs us:

“Stop being angry, put aside rage, and don't be upset- it leads to evil.”

Notice that none of the emotions I have spoken about are sins in and of themselves but, if we allow ourselves to be governed by them instead of by faith, sin and destruction lurk at the door. What kinds of sin and destruction? All kinds! Offending and driving away those whom we love, making bad decisions that result in loss and, most important, displeasing God; for Hebrews 11:6 states:

“And without trusting [i.e. having faith], it is impossible to be well pleasing to God, because whoever approaches him must trust that he does exist and that he becomes a Rewarder to those who seek him out”

In the natural, none of us have the ability to go against our feelings and conform our actions to God’s will. We need God to empower us to do it, but we have a two-part role to play. The first part is that we must be open to receive God’s power. If we are willing, Philippians 4:13 promises us:

“I can do all things through him who gives me power.”

The second part of our role is to trust God to manage how we use the power that he gives us. Proverbs 3:5-6 implores us to:

“Trust in *ADONAI* with all your heart; do not rely on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him; then he will level your paths.”

I’m taking him up on his offer. I hope you will as well.