

Equipped to understand faith

Close to where we live there is a body of water that freezes over in winter. I've often wondered how safe it would be to skate on and perhaps one day I'll muster up enough faith to give it a try. But is faith all I need? I can have a huge amount of faith in the capacity of the ice-covered pond to support my weight, but if the ice is not strong enough to do this, my faith won't stop me falling through the ice if I try skating on it. On the other hand, if I put even a small amount of faith in ice that is strong and deep, I can probably walk out onto it and find that I don't come to any harm. It's not so much the *size* of my faith that is important, but the *object* of my faith, in this case, the strength of the ice.

There's a lot in the bible about faith. Take Hebrews 11, for example, where faith is described as "*being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see*".¹ Does this mean if we hope something will happen we can be sure that it will? No, merely hoping in the sense of "I hope this happens because it's what I want" isn't the kind of hope talked about here.

The first people to read the book of Hebrews, Jews who had converted to Christianity, had discovered hopes they never had before. For example, through their new-found faith in Christ, they learnt of a future resurrection, where they would receive glorified bodies and live with God forever. God had promised this and, by believing what God had promised, they received the assurance of what they hoped for. This illustrates the importance of building our faith on a firm foundation. (Remember the icy pond?) And that foundation is the character of God and the word of God. If God promises something in his word, we don't need to doubt that he will see it through because he is a God who cannot lie.

But some of us make the mistake of placing our faith in outcomes that God has never promised and we find ourselves experiencing bitter disappointment because we think God has let us down. A child is not healed. A marriage is not saved. A relative turns his back on God. What's gone wrong? Did we not have faith that God would heal the child, save the marriage, bring salvation to our relative? *But God is not obliged to honour promises that he has not made.* Let's not have faith in faith or blame ourselves for not having enough faith if circumstances don't work out the way we would like.

As well as taking God at His word and believing what he says, true faith turns belief into action - even when you can't see the outcome and you don't know how things are going to turn out. A good example of this can be seen in the account of Charles Blondin, the man who crossed the Niagara Falls on a tightrope in the 19th century. When he asked his audience if they believed he could safely carry someone across the Falls on his back, the crowd was very quick to respond that he most definitely could. But when he asked for a volunteer to demonstrate this, he got no response - no-one was prepared to act on what they said they believed. But then Blondin's manager took up the challenge and climbed on the tightrope walker's back before being carried across the Falls. This man didn't exercise 'blind' faith, which is a faith without foundation, but because he knew how competent Blondin was, he fully trusted him.

There's someone else who is even more trustworthy - Jesus Christ, God's Son. Blondin could carry people from one side of the Niagara Falls to the other, but Jesus Christ can carry you through this life and then from this life to the next. If you already belong to him but are holding back on following him wholeheartedly, remind yourself that he is fully trustworthy. If you do not yet know this Jesus that we talk about, why not make today the day you step out in faith by believing in him and committing your entire life to him? Then you, too, can be sure of what you hope for and be certain of what you do not see.

¹ Hebrews 11:1 (NIV)