

What is Faith?

Today while running errands I was listening to Elder Hales' most recent conference talk in which he discusses faith¹. He recounts a letter from a man who wrote of a friend's long struggle with cancer. He writes "[He] tried everything humanly possible and 6 years ago found faith ... but not an extra day, so I guess it's hard to believe." Shortly after that, Elder Hales comments "We cannot measure faith by 'an extra day.'"

As I listened to that talk today I thought that the writer of the letter didn't understand faith. A belief based on receiving our every wish isn't faith – it is the antithesis of faith. Faith requires a confidence and belief based on the nature of God. I thought again of how, so far, my faith has not failed me, perhaps because I have seen so much of the goodness of God.

Then this evening I received a call from a very dear friend. His son, who is serving a mission, yesterday had a very serious bicycle accident. My friend was with him in the hospital as the young man lingers between life and death. I can only try to imagine how that must feel, but I certainly cannot know. I commented to my sons about how there is nothing this young man's parents can do, notwithstanding their desires to help. My wife gently corrected me, saying "They can pray."

Of course I knew she was right, and I am sure my friend and his wife have been praying, as I have. But it caused me to reflect on my prayers. I know that God loves his children, and based on this young man's life to date I would imagine that God and Jesus Christ are very pleased with him, as he has been an exceptional young man in every way. However, when I pray, this is then reflected into a feeling that I already know God is aware of this young man and his needs. The bottom line is, I am not sure what my prayers add in his behalf.

I pray because my heart – and God's commandments – tell me that I should. I express my desire that this young man recover, and be able to go on. I trust implicitly that God will do that which, in his wisdom, is best. But I do not know what my prayers add to God's actions.

So what is faith? Is it sufficient that I know that Christ died for me, and that he loves me today? I certainly know those things. Is it sufficient to know that the church is true, and that it is lead by a living prophet, under the personal and constant direction of the Lord Jesus Christ? I

1 Robert D. Hales "Finding Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ" Oct 2004

certainly know those things. Is it sufficient to have the confidence that God can do all that he says he can do, and indeed that he is “powerful to the fulfilling of all his words”²? I have that confidence. I seem to have all that I thought I should need, but I don't seem to understand one fundamental thing – what it really means to exercise faith.

Certainly, I am troubled by the situation with my friend's son. I feel very strongly the need for divine intervention in their lives. I petition my Father for that intervention. Is this sufficient? Is it enough to know that God will intervene as he sees best? Or am I to have a stronger confidence in my ability to sway God's actions?

The nature of my questions leads me to believe that I truly am missing something fundamental. I shall continue to seek it, because I do not want in any way to turn my back on God's plans for me. I pray that my faith may be adequate to the tasks He has for me.

Several days have passed since I wrote the main body of this essay. During that time I have learned a lot more about this subject.

After writing I reflected on these thoughts a lot. The first conclusion that struck me was that asking for the blessings could be, in itself, an act of faith. I don't know why my asking may be efficacious, but I have been commanded to do so, and I comply out of faith.

Now, after five more days, my friend's son remains in a coma, with no signs of improvement. Of course, the last time I wrote his survival was in doubt; at least now there is less danger that he will die. This has become a very intense experience for me. I call my friend almost every night, and it is extremely sobering to hear the pain in his voice, and recognize the cost to him to bear this experience. However, this has helped focus my prayers. I have realized that this case is beyond what medical science can now handle. The doctors are preparing my friend for the worst case – massive brain damage, and physical helplessness. The doctors know that they cannot predict everything, but this situation is beyond their power to fix. And so I realize that the only answer is a miracle from God. As I have prayed specifically for a miracle, I have found that more and more what I am praying is that the son not experience loss of mental capability. As I so pray, I feel the confirming presence of the Holy Spirit, and I believe that my Father is satisfied with my prayers. So by following the commandment in faith I have learned and been strengthened.

2 Alma 37:16

Today marks four weeks after my friend's son had his accident. Yesterday I talked with my friend and he told me how his son was starting to respond to voice commands and he was starting to track people with his eyes. Today I called and found out that his son has died. This is an extremely difficult time for his family. I cannot imagine the pain they are suffering. I have spent time praying to my Father to comfort them and protect them with his love in this time.

However, I still feel very comfortable with all the prayers I have offered asking for a miracle. Last night I prayed and thanked my Father because it sounded like the miracle was being granted. Today I know that the answer was No. As much as I grieve for the young man, and as much as I wish I could do something to comfort his family, I know that our Heavenly Father is watching over us all. The young missionary will serve out the rest of his mission, but on the other side of the veil. Thanks to the power of Christ's atonement, and through the marvelous blessing of sealing ordinances, my friend's family is not broken – they will be together again. In some ways this knowledge is very different from faith, but both faith and knowledge are very comforting to me. I pray that my friend and his family may feel the same comfort.

Christ lives. He is our Savior. He has worked our salvation through his infinite atonement. God is alive and powerful, and operates daily in our lives to the point where sometimes we take his help for granted. I know these things, and rejoice in them.

In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.