

Expecting the Miraculous

By Randy Hurst

The Spirit's gift of a living faith

It was the heart of the Great Depression in Cokato, Minn., and my grandfather stood in an empty potato bin praising God.

My Grandfather Hurst had experienced the Holy Spirit baptism, and his faith had been dramatically transformed. He expected answers to prayer.

Grandfather often expressed his faith in times of need by praising God in spite of the circumstances. Once, all the family had to eat for many days were potatoes. One day Grandmother sent Grandfather down to the cellar for some potatoes to cook for supper. She knew even before he came back up again that they had no more potatoes, because she heard him praising God.

Suddenly there was a knock at the door. Grandmother called down for Grandfather to come up from the cellar and go to the door. Standing there was a man he had never met.

"Are you that new preacher I heard about?" the man asked.

"I suppose I am," Grandfather replied.

"I have a farm a few miles out of town," the man said. "I got to thinking this morning about the new preacher I heard about. I figured you might need some potatoes or something. I brought you a couple of 100-pound bags if you can use them."

Grandfather's confident and fervent faith was characteristic of many early Pentecostals. They believed not only that God could act but also that He would respond to the needs of His people.

FAITH AFTER PENTECOST

On the Day of Pentecost, the disciples' faith was radically changed. Their belief that Jesus would fulfill His promises was more clearly demonstrated after the coming of the Spirit than when He was physically present with them.

Acts 3 tells of a lame man who sat begging every day at the temple gate. Peter and John had certainly seen him there many times. But after being filled with the Spirit, they looked at him differently. When the lame man asked for money, Peter said, "I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene — walk!"¹

Then Peter took him by the hand and raised him up. The man entered the temple with Peter and John, walking and leaping and praising God. The people who saw him were filled with wonder and amazement.

continued on page 18



Expecting the Miraculous

After the coming of the Spirit, Jesus' disciples expected signs, wonders and miracles to happen in His name.

What Jesus promised to His first followers still applies to the church today. We can receive guidance, provision, protection, healing and spiritual transformation because of the Spirit's presence and power. The apostle Peter wrote, "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness."²

THE SOURCE AND CHARACTER OF FAITH

Salvation is a gift; it is received by faith. Even the faith to receive God's grace is itself a gift.³

The apostle Peter presents essentially this same perspective. He addresses his second epistle "to those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours." Faith is received. But just as the faith to begin our Christian life is a gift, the power to sustain us in our Christian life is a gift. At the end of this life, entrance into His eternal kingdom will also be a gift.⁴

A familiar text in Hebrews is, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."⁵ But to truly comprehend the nature of faith, we must go to the previous chapter and discover the reason we can come to God with confidence. The writer lays a foundation for his teaching concerning faith by saying, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful."⁶

As important as it is for our faith to be hopeful and passionate, the strength of our faith is not in its intensity or our capacity to believe, but in God's ability and willingness to do what He has promised. We have faith, not in our faith itself, but in His power and faithfulness.

A LIVING FAITH IN A LIVING SAVIOR

The apostle Paul succinctly expressed the nature of faith in his

second letter to Timothy: "I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day."⁷

Paul did not say, "I know what," but "I know whom I have believed."

Similarly, in his first epistle Peter wrote the testing or proving of a believer's faith is more precious than gold. He was writing to those who, unlike himself, did not see Jesus when He walked on earth. He said, "Though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory."⁸

A believer's faith is not an abstract knowledge. It is not merely a positive mental attitude or hope that something will happen. It is a relationship — a complete trust in a Person.

The motto of the Assemblies of God is "All the Gospel." If we believe God's Word, we should believe all of it.

Of the 16 foundational truths of the Assemblies of God, these four especially characterize Pentecostals and define our reason for being as a Fellowship: salvation, the Holy Spirit baptism, divine healing and the Second Coming.

These four truths represent the present reality of who Jesus is to us.

Jesus is our Savior. We have been rescued from everlasting punishment for the wonderful purpose God has for us — now and for eternity.

Jesus is our Baptizer. He has made His power available to us to obey His commands, purify and transform us, and enable us to accomplish what He has designed for our lives.

Jesus is our Healer. We can expect Him to intervene in our lives at any time and anywhere to heal our bodies, minds and emotions.

Jesus is our coming King. We have hope for an end to suffering, sin, pain and fear. He is coming back to the earth at any moment to rule His eternal kingdom.

We believe God's Word that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever."⁹ With the Spirit's help, we can know Jesus more fully and intimately — and trust Him for all He has promised.

THE PERIL OF "NONDEPENDENCE"

In the early years of the Pentecostal movement, believers had few resources. Most lacked formal education. Many churches met in storefronts and basements. Today, for most Pentecostals in America, those circumstances have radically changed. But our essential need for the Holy Spirit's help has not.

Human knowledge, ability and effort are not sufficient to meet life's challenges. We need divine intervention. God created us with certain innate abilities, but He also designed us to need Him. We were designed to be dependent.

For most of us, our personal walk of faith is always changing — either for better or worse. A dying faith diminishes. A living faith grows. Faith energized by the Spirit is a living faith.

The writer of Hebrews says, "We must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it."¹⁰ Drifting does not require initiative or conscious effort. Both human nature and the world's culture will keep supplying currents that move us from the course of dependence on God — both in our own personal lives and in the life of the church.

Though what we believe as Pentecostals should incline us to a life of spiritual dependence on God, we can drift from that dependence in practice. It's not that we choose to be spiritually independent. Independence implies intent. Those who drift from an active dependence on God's power and

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*Some Assembly required.



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activity do not likely do so by intention, but by default and neglect. This process can be termed “nondependence,” though the word doesn’t appear in dictionaries.

A deist believes that God exists and created all things but set the universe in motion to regulate itself and is no longer involved in its operation. The analogy often used to explain deism is that God is like a clock maker who constructs a watch and then leaves it, allowing it to operate on its own.

Cessationists, on the other hand, are Christians, but believe miraculous gifts such as prophecy, healing and speaking in tongues ceased after the apostolic period of the Church.

A dysfunctional Pentecostal can essentially become a functional deist or a functional cessationist. In other words, we can function as though God is no longer actively involved in our lives or works miracles.

The enemy of our souls probably doesn’t care much about whether Christians give mental assent to or even verbal profession of belief in a particular biblical truth as long as they don’t actively depend on that truth in a way that affects their lives.

FULL ASSURANCE OF “ALL THE GOSPEL”

Faith is not just what we believe, but how we believe it. The strength of our confidence in life and witness depends on the character of our faith. A particular kind of faith is described in Scripture by the Greek word *plerophoreo*, usually translated, “full assurance.”

Paul describes Abraham’s faith as being “fully assured” that what God had promised, He was able also to perform.¹¹ And he wrote to the Colossians about the spiritual wealth that “comes from the full assurance of understanding,” and results in a true knowledge of Christ himself.¹²

Hebrews instructs us to draw near to God with “a sincere heart in full

assurance of faith.”¹³

An instructive account concerning faith proved in adversity is demonstrated by how differently Mary and Martha responded when Jesus did not arrive in Bethany before their brother Lazarus died.¹⁴

When she heard that Jesus was coming, Martha went out to meet Him, but Mary stayed at the house. Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died. Even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give it to you.”

Crisis reveals the character of our faith. Seemingly impossible circumstances require an “even now” kind of faith — a Spirit-given assurance of God’s power and willingness to act.

Many Christians can personally identify with the struggle of the father referred to in Mark 9. After Jesus’ disciples unsuccessfully attempted to cast out the demons from the man’s son, Jesus rebuked them for being “unbelieving.”¹⁵ Then Jesus said to the father, “All things are possible to him who believes.”

The boy’s father cried out, “I do believe; help my unbelief!”

We all struggle with unbelief. Our cry for help in our unbelief was significantly answered when Jesus sent the Spirit to be our Helper.

The Spirit can give us faith that results in hopeful anticipation God will act in our lives as He promised. Through an intentional dependence on the Holy Spirit, we can receive what Jesus promised His first followers — fervent, living faith that enables us to expect the miraculous.

Missionary Lillian Trasher went to Egypt in 1919 and founded the orphanage in Assiout that now bears her name. Feeding hundreds of children every day required a continual dependence on God. Those who worked with “Mama Lillian” over the years shared many testimonies of her incredible faith and God’s miraculous provision.

During World War II, while the battle in North Africa between the Allies and the Nazis raged, “Mama Lillian” cared for hundreds of children. One day she rang the chapel bell, signaling the children to gather for prayer. She knew the food pantry was nearly empty and the children scarcely had enough food for one more meal. Looking down at the boys and girls at her feet, she said, “Children, we’re going to pray the Lord’s Prayer. When we come to the words, ‘Give us this day our daily bread,’ I want you to pray those words very loudly.” The children did as Lillian instructed. When they came to that part of the prayer, the hundreds of children cried out, “Give us this day our daily bread!”

Two nights earlier, down the Nile River, an Allied regiment was preparing to ship out of Egypt. The commander instructed the sailors to dump all the remaining food overboard into the waters of the Nile delta to lighten the load.

One Scottish sailor approached the commander and said, “Sir, I don’t feel it’s right to destroy this food when so many in this country are hungry.”

“But we cannot leave the food for the Nazi soldiers,” the officer replied.

“I’ve heard that an American woman up the river has an orphanage,” the young sailor told him. “Can we take the food to her?”

“Impossible!” the commander protested. “We don’t have time!”

The soldier pressed further, “Can I ask for volunteers among the men who will help me load the food onto railway cars?”

“Very well,” the commander agreed. “Hurry.”

Just three hours after Mama Lillian’s children prayed, crate after crate filled with food arrived at the Lillian Trasher Orphanage.

God hears the cries of His children uttered in faith — even before they pray. His Spirit spoke to a young sailor and used him as the instrument through which He responded to the expectant faith of Lillian Trasher and the children in her charge.

The fullness of the Spirit overflows in a faith that expects God to fulfill His promises — to personally provide for our needs and intervene in our lives. We do not merely hope for God to act in today’s world, we have the assurance that He will. **tpe**

1. Acts 3:1-10
2. 2 Peter 1:3, NIV
3. Ephesians 2:8,9
4. 2 Peter 1:1-3,11, NASB
5. Hebrews 11:1, KJV
6. Hebrews 10:23, NASB
7. 2 Timothy 1:12, KJV
8. 1 Peter 1:7,8, NASB
9. Hebrews 13:8, NKJV
10. Hebrews 2:1, NASB
11. Romans 4:21
12. Colossians 2:2
13. Hebrews 10:22
14. John 11:1-32
15. Mark 9:19

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E-mail your comments to tpe@ag.org.

ABCs OF SALVATION

To know God and be ready for heaven, follow these steps:

A. Admit you are a sinner.

“There is no one righteous, not even one ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Romans 3:10,23 (See Romans 5:8; 6:23.)

Ask God’s forgiveness and repent of your sins.

“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Romans 10:13 (See Acts 3:19.)

B. Believe in Jesus (put your trust in Him) as your only hope of salvation. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16 (See John 14:6.)

Become a child of God by receiving Christ.

“To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” John 1:12 (See Revelation 3:20.)

C. Confess that Jesus is your Lord.

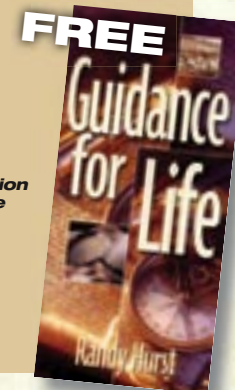
“If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Romans 10:9 (See verse 10.)

For further help, contact the Assemblies of God church near you.

If you would like someone to pray with you concerning your decision to follow Jesus Christ, please contact the church indicated on the back cover or call:

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I OPENING

Nisar:

- Memorized the Quran by age 13
- Prays five times a day
- Believes Jesus was a mere prophet
- No one has told him otherwise

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