

Defending the Faith

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March 2019

Increasing Faith

Christ often remarked on the faith of various individuals during His ministry. One example was when the disciples were confronted with a boy who they could not cure from epilepsy. Later, the disciples asked Jesus why they could not cure the boy. He said, *“Because of your little faith. For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. But this kind does not come out except by prayer and fasting”* (Matthew 17:2-21). On another occasion, Jesus and his disciples were in a boat. Jesus slept as a violent windstorm arose. They woke Him up crying, *“Lord, save us! We are perishing!”* And he said to them, *“Why are you afraid, you of little faith?”* Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a dead calm.” (Matthew 8:25-26).



We often suffer from “little faith.” We do not completely trust God. We worry and become fearful. We entertain doubts at times. We become depressed over our circumstances, wondering what we can do to change them. Christ declared, *“Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today”* (Matthew 6:26, 34). If only we could have faith the size of a mustard seed!

As Christians, we are to purposefully work toward increasing our faith. We do this by experiencing God. Praying or talking to God is the easiest way to experience Him. If we pay close attention, we will find that He answers us. He may respond through an answered request or His response may come through a loved one or a friend. Have you ever thought about phoning a friend, when suddenly your phone rang, and it was his/her voice? Have you ever had a loved one speak words of encouragement at just the right time that you knew came from God?

Sometimes God allows us to experience Him through events in our lives. Think back. What events have molded you into the person you are today? Do you believe that those events were coincidences? Do you believe that only you were responsible for the twists and turns you took throughout your life? Think! Is it possible that God brought you through those twists and turns,

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Increasing Faith (cont'd)

through the tribulations of your life to make you into the person you are at this moment? What does He have in store for your future? What blessings has God bestowed on your life, despite the hard times you faced? When I think back through the events of my own life, I see God's hand at every turn. No matter how difficult life may have been, no matter how much I suffered, each turn brought me closer to God and made me who I am today. I thank God for His faithfulness, even though there were times when I was not faithful. *"We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose"* (Romans 8:28). The word "together" is actually translated as "in synergy" with God. This means that God works all things for our "good" with our cooperation. When I turned toward God through my most trying times, God allowed me to experience His presence.

At times, God will put it on our hearts to act on His behalf, to do something. Have you ever done something, which was very difficult because God asked you to do it? It has been my experience that the most challenging tasks were the times when I received the greatest joy and blessings. These required a great sacrifice on my part and required that I trust God implicitly. At these times, I obeyed Him with self-abandonment, surrendering my will to God's will.

Adam and Eve ate of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. According to Thomas Hopko (1983), "Knowledge in the Bible is not an abstract, intellectual thing. It is not a product of thinking. It is the result of living experience...Eating of the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" means experiencing wickedness. It means committing sin." The hymns of Cheesefare Sunday vespers, describes Adam sitting outside the gates of Eden, weeping and mourning the loss of the presence of God. We, too, sit outside the gates of Paradise, grieving the loss of our intended home, longing for the presence of God. We realize that we are not at home in this evil world, that we belong with God. We realize that we are "exiles," as Hopko (1983) puts it. However, as Christians, we



possess the hope of our salvation, when we will be reunited with our Lord and will finally be home in Paradise, where *"he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away"* (Revelation 21:4).

For Eastern Orthodox, Great Lent begins Monday, March 11 in preparation for celebrating the resurrection on Easter. It is a 40-day time period of focusing on our spiritual growth and increasing our faith. It is a time of fasting to help discipline our bodies by bringing it under subjection to our will, which in turn, will help discipline our minds. Some give up certain types of food, others give up T.V. or Facebook, and yet others prepare by increasing their time of prayer and almsgiving. For the Orthodox, this is not a time of gloominess or sadness. It is a time of reflecting on all the blessings

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God has bestowed on us and thanking Him. It is a time of joy in anticipation of the glorious resurrection and thankfulness for God's mercy.

The most significant purpose of Great Lent is to spiritually strengthen us and to develop a more intimate relationship with God. We prepare ourselves for spiritual battle. We put on our spiritual armor, which Paul describes in Ephesians 6:10-18 because we fight against the devil himself and his demons. We put on the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the spirit, and the shield of faith, “with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one.” We become spiritually strengthened as we focus on Christ and talk to Him often, no matter where we are or what we are doing. We direct our thoughts on Him. When we are at a loss for what to pray, we can recite the Jesus prayer, which is the simplest and most powerful: “Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”

As we pray, fast, read our Bibles, and participate in almsgiving during Great Lent, we *will* experience God and our faith *will* increase. And as we experience God more deeply, we will discover an incomprehensible joy and peace. Faith is not simply believing that God exists. It is experiencing God. “All of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18). Experience will allow us to see the glory of the Lord. The Holy Spirit transforms us into the likeness of Christ little by little, and as we behold the Lord, He reflects back to us the image of what we are intended to become: more humble, merciful, kind, compassionate, forgiving, loving, faithful, full of integrity and truth. The more we cooperate with the Holy Spirit to become like Christ, the more our faith will increase.

Therefore, this year during Lent, ask God to purify you and to increase the love in your heart, to make you more like Christ. If you dare, ask God to show you what you need to change in yourself. Ask God to help you become the person He intended you to be. Ask God how you can bless others and how you can glorify Him in your life. Ask the Holy Spirit to allow you to increase your faith and experience God.

Hopko, Thomas. 1983. *The Lenten Spring*. Crestwood, New York. St. Vladimir's Seminary Press. pp. 23, 28.

I pray that this will be the most blessed Lenten preparation for Easter that you have ever experienced! God bless you!

Helen Kamenos
Readers' Favorite Author

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The Temptation of Christ



We fast as Christ fasted for 40 days to overcome the temptations of the Devil. The following is the account according to Matthew 4:

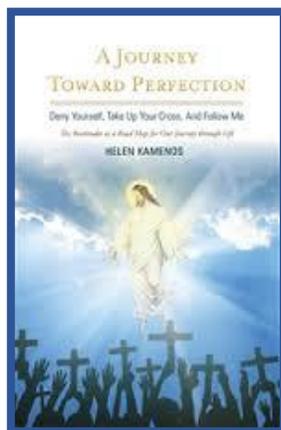
Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But he answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away with you,

Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'"

Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.



"A Journey Toward Perfection"

By Helen Kamenos

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A Journey Toward Perfection

“Perfect Lenten read and anytime.”

Reviewed by Tim M. for Amazon

A *Journey Toward Perfection* reveals a path toward developing an intimate experiential relationship with God. It is an in-depth study of the attributes of the Beatitudes in Matthew 5. These are the attributes God bestowed upon us when He created us in His image. God created us to love. These are the traits necessary to love others as God loves us. These characteristics are central to our Christian spiritual growth. Discover how these attributes can sustain you through the many trials and tribulations of your life. Comprehend how love truly conquers all. Experience God’s true presence in your life.

The Beatitudes from Matthew 5:

³ *Blessed are the poor in spirit,*

For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ *Blessed are those who mourn,*

For they shall be comforted.

⁵ *Blessed are the meek,*

For they shall inherit the earth.

⁶ *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,*

For they shall be filled.

⁷ *Blessed are the merciful,*

For they shall obtain mercy.

⁸ *Blessed are the pure in heart,*

For they shall see God.

⁹ *Blessed are the peacemakers,*

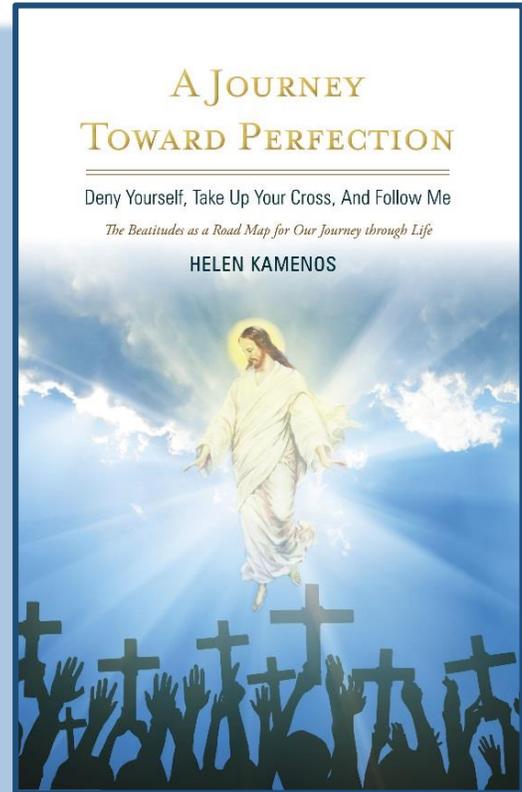
For they shall be called sons of God.

¹⁰ *Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake,*

For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ *“Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.*

¹² *Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*



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