

N U R T U R E
F A I T H
with
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When We Need Help

READ: Hebrews 4:16 (Common English Bible)

“Finally, let’s draw near to the throne of favor with confidence so that we can receive mercy and find grace when we need help.”

MEDITATE:

This is truly one of the great passages of the New Testament. In these few words we are reminded that Jesus is a source of tremendous power, the place we turn to when we need help. Jesus is not someone who is incapable of understanding and sympathizing with our struggles. Jesus struggled as we struggle, was tempted as we are tempted, and endured disappointment as we endure disappointment, without ever committing any sin. Jesus is full of sympathy for us because he fought, as we fight, on the battlefields of human life. There is remarkable authenticity in the sympathy Jesus has for us because he tasted the same bitterness of conflict and hateful evil forces that seek our defeat. Yet, unfailingly, Jesus emerged a victor. His strength is now our strength.

It must not be forgotten that Jesus won battle after battle by using the same spiritual resource that is open to us – the spiritual power that comes from God in regular prayer. Jesus engaged no unnatural means to gain victory that is denied to us, no private miracle reserved only for God’s Son. He fought as we fight, standing where we stand, with the same resource that is placed in our hands – regular communion with God through prayer. Victory by any other means would have been of little value for ordinary people like us. The guidance Jesus offers us, and the encouragement we receive, is from someone who battled with no more than what is available to us.

It is well to remember that temptation is not sin. Jesus was tempted – perhaps the best known moment is when he is on a mountain, with God, for forty days following his baptism. But Jesus did not sin. It is not sin to discover that in some unguarded moment an unkind word for another may come into our mind or an impulse wells-up inside us that isn’t our best self. A downward pull to our lower nature is not sin. It is sin to yield, when a loose rein is given to evil desires. And while we learn from Jesus’ example that temptation is not sin, we also learn from Jesus that temptation must drive us to our knees in prayer. Human strength and resolve to avoid sin is simply insufficient.

The Gospels speaks often of the deep sympathy of Jesus. Whenever he was in the presence of human suffering or those who had been marginalized by others, the compassion of Jesus was powerfully exhibited. His sympathy stretched out and welcomed Zacchaeus, a dishonest tax collector, a woman caught in adultery, and numerous people afflicted with mental, emotional and physical disabilities. People were lifted and redeemed by his love and friendship. Jesus’ resurrection is a bold declaration that that same Jesus is present with us today, his sympathy continuing to stretch toward every one of us when we need help. And these few words from Hebrews remind us that Jesus sympathy – and strength – is sufficient.

