



## Food for Thought: A Little Stale

*“Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.”*

*~Hebrews 11:1*

The other day, while putting groceries away from our latest Walmart run, I found a pizza in the freezer with an expiration date that was 6 years past its use-by date. It didn't look too bad, I thought, just a little freezer burnt. Part of me, the guy part, said “this looks like dinner tonight.” The other part, the part that my wife controls, said “You better throw that out-- **NOW.**” It reminded me that just about everything in life now carries a use-by date. They're very helpful, actually. If you can't remember how long it's been since you purchased something, you can check the date. Or, if you think the milk is past its prime but you would rather not inhale too deeply or taste it to confirm the fact, the telltale date is there on the carton, right at the top. How very convenient.

This got me wondering, does faith get stale? Do we need expiration dates stamped on us to show that our devotion has begun to sour or fade?

One of the most beautiful—and equally frustrating—aspects of our Christian lives is the ebb and flow of the seasons we go through. While we love to (and should) soak in the goodness of God while everything is going well, and we are healthy, we also cry out in frustration and anger when God seems far away. If you take the time to notice, our congregations are full of people in every stage of their Christian walk and in different seasons.

The most difficult season, and the one which so many of us Christians seem to battle through the most, is what I call the dry season. That is when our faith not only feels distant but shows signs of drying up no matter what we do. And when it does, we find it almost impossible to connect with God in any meaningful way. Typically, most dry seasons usually occurs in the winter months. Which is a bit ironic because Christians and non-Christians alike already battle demons during the winter months with Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)—a form of depression that affects even normal people.

Depression in the dry season can get so bad that it feels like we are all alone in the world and going through things no one has ever gone through before. In the bottom of the pit it is easy to feel unworthy when God feels that distant. We can feel judged and ashamed about our lack of relationship with God, which makes us not want to share how we feel. Devotion time sours, our passion for God wanes or shrivels past the point of recognition, and we begin to draw away from God. But the sad part is that we usually don't notice the changes.

Some Christians will tell you that it is normal. That we go through these highs and lows in our spirit. They will also tell you that to cure it, you just need to pray more, to press into God more, to spend more time in His presence, or to have more faith. While their advice is well-intentioned, and it does work occasionally, it also sometimes does more harm than good.

I believe that if we do not live by our faith, it will become more than stale, we will lose it. As much as we would like to, faith cannot be stored to be used when we need it most. The only way to "keep the faith" is to use it. The word of God says, "that faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" and that it "comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God."

Maybe we have heard it, but it doesn't stay with us unless we do something with it. It doesn't hang out, it doesn't hang around hoping to get used. It is a use or lose deal. You are either live "by faith" or you don't. There is no in-between.

So, if it's been a while since you've had one of those "spiritual highs," but you aren't running away from God either and you seem to be stuck in a rut, it can be difficult to know where to begin. If you attend church every week, go to your small group and already read your Bible regularly, but it's starting to feel more like more of a routine than like worship, then you are at the point where you need to make changes.

When God feels that far away, and things feel difficult, it can be easy to let the passion of our worship slip. Then you usually start hearing things like: "you've got to have faith," or "it'll work out, you just have some faith". What they are really trying to say is that with God, there is hope. This isn't

about how many times we raise our hands during Sunday service. It is more about where our worship comes from. When we stop worshipping from the heart, we cease to give God the glory and honor He deserves and our darkest nights only get darker.

God doesn't always work in the ways we want Him to, but He does always work. When we find ourselves feeling desperate for Him in a dry season, we can miss His hand working in our lives. We become so focused on expecting Him to move in a specific way that we miss the small, daily ways He comes through for us.

As with all things in the Christian journey, there is no one formula to solve all our problems. But by staying faithful and focusing on God, by seeking His presence and by continuing to seek Him, we can make it through the dry seasons.

No human can live without faith in someone or something. The difference between a Christian and non-Christian is not that one has faith and the other does not. They both have faith. The difference between the two is the object of their faith. One believes in himself and trusts in his or her own efforts. The other, in Jesus Christ and in God, who care for him and are there to guide him. That makes the life of a Christian, from start to finish, a journey of faith.

It doesn't matter if your faith has gone stale, or you have fading faith, broken faith, or you've lost your faith. We serve a God who forgives. Somehow, He makes it possible for us to find Him even in the driest of seasons. And, He helps us rebuild our faith in deeper and more powerful ways. For myself, I find that it usually happens around Easter.

Every year, the church puts on an Easter celebration to the Risen Lord. We sing to Him and the congregation with such gusto that it stirs the fibers of our being. I have always felt that there is a link between the Spring Easter celebration and the end of the dry season, just like in nature. Spring announces the end of winter with an explosion of life that is both refreshing and invigorating.

It is only when we restore our belief in the words of God that faith returns, and the staleness begins to fade. This year, there was a line in our

Easter Cantata that said, “There was a rumbling in the earth ... a groaning... and a battle being won as creation moaned for the resurrection power to take the battle. Death defeated. Life wins!” As that choir was singing their song “Earth, Earth”, you could feel the Holy Spirit descending. You could feel that resurrection power pushing aside all the indecision, the doubt, and the staleness of winter just like the emergence of new life from the earth after a long cold winter.

I felt the stirring, the rumbling and the start of the rejuvenation process in my soul. It was like a burst of faith. I watched the people leave the service and you could see the smiles on their faces and sparkles of life in their eyes. They believed, and He had found a way to renew their faith. Life is glorious.

Yes, God had ended the dry season. Yes, spiritual death was defeated. Life has indeed won!

Just some Food for Thought.