

Faith Drives Experience

A meditation on faith and belief

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"Because you believe in My goodness, you experience My goodness." God spoke those words to me during a song at church. For the rest of the service, I was caught up in the implications of that statement. I wondered if the inverse were true. If I didn't believe in God's goodness, would I not experience it?

Is my experience of God's goodness based on my belief in it? I recalled the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30) in which one servant hid his master's talent in the ground because he believed his master to be a hard man, reaping where he did not sow and gathering where he scattered no seed. The one talent entrusted to him was taken away and given to the servant who had gained five more talents. Because he believed his master to be hard and unfair, he experienced an unkind master. The other servants experienced their master's joy. The servants' belief regarding their master determined their actions and their experience. In the same way, our belief regarding God determines our actions and our experience of God.

I have often wondered why my experience of God differs so widely from others who follow the same God. I believe that God is personal, interactive and accessible. My experience of God reflects that belief. Because I read in the Bible about numerous occasions when God spoke to people, it was no stretch for me to believe that God would speak to people today or that God would speak to me.

What We Believe Limits Us

"God never speaks to me," I have heard people say. That declaration leaves no room for God to do anything different in the future. The word "never" shuts down all expectation. Without realizing it, those people have closed themselves to God's communication. Fortunately, God can exceed our expectations of Him and often does. When He does, our belief about Him expands because of our experience.

However, we shouldn't let our experience determine what we believe about God. Our experience of God is limited and small. If that is our primary frame of reference, then our God will be limited and small, and we won't experience the fullness of God that is described in the Bible. The God of the Bible is a God of great compassion, a God who is active in the lives of people, a God who works

wonders. If we choose to believe in a God like that, we will begin to experience those attributes of God.

As we start to experience more of God, our lives do not necessarily become easier. We experience God in the midst of life's challenges and it's our experience of God's love and empowerment that enables us to endure and overcome those challenges. God doesn't spare us from hardships because He uses them to transform our character to be more like His.

If you desire to experience more of God, then first evaluate what you believe about Him. Do you limit God by believing He can do little in your life? Do you believe God to be stingy or generous, distant or close, active or uninvolved? Do you constrain God by what you believe He can't or won't do? Let us expand our belief so that God will have more opportunity to make Himself more real and active in our lives. God does desire a closer relationship with us.

We limit God by what we tell ourselves about Him. "I haven't been loving, so I can't expect God to be kind to me," we might say. Conditional statements like that prevent God from acting in our behalf. We refuse any possible gifts in advance. We make the mistake of seeing God as a human parent who punishes and withholds, when God is said to be faithful even when we are faithless. (2 Timothy 2:13)

God is Greater Than What We Believe

God is greater than the human parents who modeled imperfect love for us. "Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he? Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?" (Luke 11:11-13)

Let us guard against limiting God by our thoughts and attitudes. Actively choose to believe in God's goodness toward you. May you then begin to experience more of His goodness in your life.

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Rick Hocker

Author of *Four in the Garden*

An Allegory about One's Relationship with God

Readers' Favorite International Book Award Winner

Available in print and e-book at all online stores

Email: rick@rickhocker.com

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