

Come In!

By Mark Mullery

Here's where I was the other night: felt discouraged, weary, slightly overwhelmed. My joy-meter was reading in negative numbers. The cause? No great suffering or trials here, just the everyday experience of looking ahead to the next couple of weeks with a lot to do and not enough time to do it all. A couple of projects at home, no time to do them. A teaching assignment to prepare for, but the slots I'd set aside got used up by unexpected meetings. Teenagers who desire and require lots of conversation, but always after I'm in bed and wanting to be asleep. Can you relate to this? I think Pilgrim's Progress calls this 'The Slough of Despond.' God calls it unacceptable. But I wasn't there yet.

What do you do in moments like this? For some, the answer is to fold-up, cave-in, go home. If I can't get things done the way I want to, I just won't do anything. My solution's a little different, but no more virtuous. I fret and worry and then I grit my teeth and press on. So what if the blood pressure goes up or the stomach gets tied in knots, I've got work to do and I'm going to do it! Pretty sad, isn't it? But what's wrong here? How would you diagnose the patient? What's the MRI show when you examine my soul and pinpoint the problem. Pride? Self-sufficiency? Fear? Maybe, but I've got another word that unlocks a lot for me: unbelief.

Unbelief. Think about that word: take belief and undo it. Remove faith and what do you have? Not 'nothing' but something, something called 'unbelief.' Unbelief may not feel like much, but it's a powerful force. Our hearts aren't passive, they're active, busy like two year olds on caffeine. Unbelief is really a misnomer, for it's not that we have no faith, it's that we've removed our faith from God and placed it elsewhere. 'Unbelief' means I have 'un' faith towards God, but I can be sure I have faith in something. Unbelief says, 'God isn't here' or 'God isn't causing this to work for good', so it looks somewhere else for help. Unbelief doubts God's promises, slanders his character and pushes on looking for a more worthy object to trust. And if I'm not going to trust in God, what should I pick? For me last week the answer was me! Instead of 'unbelief' maybe I should call it 'idolatrous faith in self.' Unbelief isn't passive, it couldn't be more active. I've gone out shopping for a new god and picked myself. Isn't that the dumbest thing you've ever heard? But I'm probably not alone in this, am I?

So now what? What's the solution? How do I get out of this slough of despond, this pit of idolatrous, misplaced faith? Listen to the words of Hebrews 10:19-22

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, 20 by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, 21

and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

“Confidence to enter the holy place.” Remember the place behind the veil, the place of God's presence, only the high priest could go there and then only once a year? No longer. The curtain's been torn, the veil's been rent, and not just the one in Jerusalem. More importantly, the one which protected the true high place, the throne of God in heaven. So now I can walk right up to God, no questions asked. Jesus Christ has sacrificed himself, shed his blood giving me unrestricted access to God. Complete access, day or night, weekends included. Christ has made a way for me into God's presence.

There are a lot of places I don't have access to: luxury boxes at Redskins games, the Oval Office at the White House, the vault where my bank keeps money. I don't have access to those places, I don't belong there. But the throne room of God, the place where God lives, I have confidence to come there. And what do I need that I can't get there? Do I need wisdom to know what to do? Hey, God's wise enough to create and sustain the world, I bet he can help. Do I need strength to persevere when tired? Well I can come to the one who upholds the universe with a word, that's pretty strong. Do I need forgiveness for my unbelief? This throne

is a throne of grace, occupied by a God who forgives all my transgressions. He knows all things, he can do all things, he owns all things, and he loves me and welcomes me. With Christ as my priest, how can I not draw near with confidence, with full assurance? I can't see this holy place, but I can get there anytime, all I have to do is pray.

So let's do it! Jesus Christ has opened up a new and living way. He has given us permanent access to God, 24/7. We can come anytime, we can come with full confidence, with absolute assurance. Bring your cares and your worries and your burdens and your needs and your weaknesses and your sins. Bundle them up and bring them here. Trade your unbelief in for faith in Christ and see what happens to the joy meter in your life.