

# Do We Strive or Believe?

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**Question:** Let's do one more. This is a heavy duty one, but maybe we can answer it fairly shortly. His name is Nadir. "Hi, Pastor Tim, I'm lost, and I need to be saved. But I'm a bit confused about how to go about it. On the one hand, I read some Scriptures that say we must be saved by faith apart from any work or effort on our behalf. And yet in other places, I read Jesus saying, 'strive to enter into the narrow gate,' and that we are to press into the kingdom. One seems passive - simply trusting Christ, while the other seems like an active striving that is difficult. For many who try to enter are not able to. How do we reconcile this?" Then he says, "also, is there any advice you can give me as to how to know for sure when I've really gotten saved? There have been a few times in the past when I thought I had just gotten saved, only to fall back after a few days or weeks, similar to the seed sown on the rocky ground, 'which received the word with joy, but had no root and soon fell away.' What test can I take to make certain my conversion when it happens, besides endurance since I can't be expected to wait months to know if I'm really saved or not, right? For example, Paul says that the Spirit bears witness with our spirit. What does that really look like? I've been deceived by emotions before, so I'm cautious of them, and would really appreciate some advice on this matter. Thanks."

**Discussion:** I mean, this is basic. When I say basic, I'm not necessarily saying that it's easy or that anybody and everybody can give a simple answer to this. But it's basic to the very fundamentals of Christianity. "I'm lost. I need to be saved, but I'm a bit confused about how to go about it." So what do you think? What do you say to somebody? What comes to your mind? Somebody asks you that, where are you going to go? Where are you going to take them? What are you going to say?

You know what the first thing that came to my mind? I would ask them this: What do you need to be saved from? You know the text that rings in my ear all the time is Jesus saying that those who are well don't need a physician. And you know the problem with a lot of people asking about the way of salvation is they're way too healthy to be saved. Because, here's the thing. People don't want to go to hell. When they say they want to be saved, they're looking for the escape. It's probably much like the rich, young ruler. What good deed must I do to be saved? You've got people like that all the time. They just want the fire escape. They want the fire insurance. But they're not really aware of what they need to be saved from. Oh, we're saved from hell, but there's a lot more that we need to be saved from. I think one of the things that we want to do - it's often said, we need to get people lost before we can get them saved. There is something to that. Do you remember the parable of the prodigal son? You see, the older brother never got lost. The younger brother did. And the younger brother got saved. But I think that's the starting point. Because you know I think there's a lot of people that ask that question, and they're just kind of nonchalant about it. It's not really that big of a deal.

And I've often brought up the example - I've told people before, I grew up swimming a lot. So this is an example that comes to my mind. I swam in swimming pools spring break and I had a buddy up in Michigan that had one and we'd swim over there all the time. We'd swim in the lakes and different places up there. We did a lot of swimming. And you know, people got swept away by the undertow in Lake Michigan. We'd swim across big lakes. My friends and I, we were good swimmers. But you know you can get really tired. And you know you can cramp up. And I've often pictured, I'd swim with my friends. A lot of times, there'd be girls around. Sometimes we'd be in boats. We'd be skiing. But I know this, if I was in the water, I remember one time - I remember one time I was pretty young, but I was about out of gas, and I remember the feeling. And I know this. If I'm out swimming and there's friends watching, and there's girls watching, and I began to cramp up, I wouldn't say anything. I'd play the man. I wouldn't start screaming like blind Bartimaeus. "Jesus, Son of David!" Like a crazy man in the pool. I wouldn't do it. I wouldn't say, "help!" Not as long as I felt like I was still in control. I knew there was a problem, but I was still in control.

That's how a lot of sinners are. They smell the fire and brimstone a little bit. (incomplete thought) It's how I was when I was lost. Ok, I see what religious people do. I'm going to take care of that one day. I've got control of this situation. That's how it is swimming. But I'll tell you this, if all of a sudden, you are in such a condition that you can't swim any longer, and you know - I'm going under for the last time and I know it. I know it in the depths of my soul. I don't have the ability to come up again. I don't care how foolish I sound, I'm going to scream. Because I need somebody to help me. Because I'm in trouble and I'm going down. And you know, I've actually heard a preacher say, when you get a sinner to that point, you show them Christ - it's all over. He's desperate. You show him Christ? You don't need all sorts of explanations and all sorts of long theological discussions. It's kind of like if you're going under in the middle of that pool, and somebody stretches out a hand. If you've got anything left, you're just trying to get hold of that. It's the same way. Do we really see that we need to be saved? (incomplete thought) The simplicity of it is, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. When you're in desperate situation - and I remember that.

I remember that night that God saved me. I was done. All the fight. I didn't have any answer. I didn't have any solution. And if He didn't help me, I was not going to be helped. And that's what came out: "Lord, help me." And all the fight was gone. I had no plan B. It was You save me or I die. And He saved me. Now, you ask, well, that sounds pretty passive. What about the "strive to enter in?" At the straight gate or the narrow gate. What about that? Or, what was the other one he mentioned? "Press into the kingdom." Pressing in. Or you know, the violent take it by force. What about that? Well, you know what? Both are true. It's not a contradiction. Scripture doesn't contradict itself. Jesus isn't going to say on one hand that whosoever believes will not perish, and then over on the other hand say, you've got to take this kingdom by force and be speaking two Gospels. He wouldn't do that. It's the same, brethren. What we have to recognize is this: Obviously, that simple faith expresses itself in striving to enter. How can that be? How can that be? How's it consistent? Well, I would say this, that faith - if it's real - it acts. Does it not? I mean, what does it mean to strive to enter in?

Listen, I know this. I wasn't saved when God's Spirit first convicted me. You know why? I loved my motorcycle. I loved my lifestyle. I loved my friends. And I saw the claims of the Gospel, and it was like there was this voice in my ear: "you can't give up who you are. This is your life. You live to hang around these guys and to hunt and to party and to play sports. That's your life. You can't give that up." And I fought. I fought against that.

Do you know what the striving to enter in is? It was coming to the point where I recognized I need Christ only. It was coming to the point where the idols have to fall off. It was coming to the point where - it's almost like that striving to enter in, that's what the faith is. I mean, it's like my faith was in my happiness being found in my friends and my old lifestyle. And coming to the place where that stuff is being stripped away and coming to the place where it's Christ. It's only Christ. Only Christ can help me. Only Christ is going to be my hope. That's belief. It's like Scripture talks about. Faith without works - it's dead.

And this striving, this exertion - what is it? Charles Leiter was saying it in that message that James just posted. It's not this proud striving. It's a striving of desperation. And I remember that. Just a desperation. It's like the guy in the middle of the pool. It's desperation. Is he striving? What the striving is is it's almost like it's a backwards striving. It's like it's an upside down striving. It's almost like what it is is it's that coming to a place of total surrender and total hopelessness unless Christ is the one who rescues you.

And you know, getting to that place, it takes stripping away of all the things that we hope in. And we hope in so many things. Hoping, hoping. I mean, by the time the Lord actually saved me, the things that had been stripped away... And then after that. I mean, Jesus isn't just talking about the first time one time act of faith right at the beginning.

Have you ever read there in Romans? It's from faith to faith. Have you ever read that? The just shall live by faith. Every day it's a living by faith. You know what? Even after we're saved, it's day by day, my trust being entirely in Christ. And we need to be thankful for the Spirit that convicts us, that shows us, "you're becoming too dependent on that." "You should remove this from your life." "That right there. You're trusting that too much." Isn't it amazing? God is so aware of the life of His people to say, "no, too much of a hold on your life." And we feel it, because up till then we were probably saying, oh, I could get rid of that if I needed to. Now God says you need to, and it's like, ugh! It's like this root that's down inside and it's like part of you gets pulled out with it. And oh, it hurts. It's painful. But then there's a freedom when it's gone. It's a striving. It's a striving to live in the faith of the promises that are given to us in Scripture. It's a striving against all the deceptions of the worldly thought and the devil and all of his trying to deceive us and delude us. And what was it?

What was it Paul feared that the devil was going to do to those Corinthians? That he was going to deceive them just like Eve, right? And the issue was the simplicity that is in Christ. Just from a simple faith. There is a good fight of faith. There's a fight to stay securely in Christ. And it's Him

doing it. It's God who works in us to will and to do. But we work out our salvation in fear and trembling in a way that it's our own sweat and tears and our strivings and cryings and weepings and pleadings that work together with it.

And I, too, love that picture from Pilgrim's Progress. You remember, Pilgrim is in Interpreter's house. And he brings him and he shows him this picture. And there's a man at a desk. And there's another man there. And he says put my name down. And he writes his name down. And he goes off across this field. And there's these figures, these knights out there with armor and swords. And he has to go to hacking and chopping, and after giving and receiving many wounds, he arrives victorious. That's the picture of the Christian life. This is no flowery bed of ease.

Isn't it amazing? It's by faith. And yet, we need to fight and strive with every ounce of energy that He supplies us with to fight sin and the lies that it brings and to trust Christ and to seek to love Christ more than anything. We've got the Spirit of God working in us to do that. (incomplete thought) He's wondering how you know. Basically, the question is assurance. And I would say this.

Assurance - I know this is probably something that the theologians would probably say, but assurance basically, and I think you can see this in Scripture, I think we draw assurance of our salvation from three primary sources. And understand, assurance is not the same thing as faith. Faith is believing on the Lord Jesus Christ. Assurance is knowing that you do. It's believing that you believe. You follow? Assurance is that certainty that I'm actually a Christian. And the difference is that I can doubt whether I'm a Christian and truly be one. So I can lack assurance, but still have saving faith. But how do you know? And we're just going to end on these three things.

Somebody look up 1 John 5:13.

"I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life."

**Tim:** Ok, there's the first one right there. You may know - that's the assurance - if you believe. Now brethren, I can tell you this. I trust that Jesus Christ died, and I trust that if I go to Him, He won't cast me out, and I trust that if I call upon the name of the Lord, I'll be saved. And you know what? I've done that. I have done that. I have believed those promises. Believing the promises is faith. But I can also stand back and look and say I know I believe them. That's my hope. I know Christ is my only hope. And I can say based on that, John says you can know you have eternal life. That brings assurance.

A second way is maybe 1 John 2. If you look at 1 John 2:3. Somebody have that? (You can read it if you've got it).

"And by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments."

**Tim:** Ok, there's another way. By this I can know if I see a transformation in my life where I went from being - remember Romans 8? What does it say about the natural man? He doesn't understand the things of God. Tim: What else? He can't submit to it. He cannot submit to God's law. This is a man in the flesh. His might is set on the things of the flesh. He cannot keep the law of God. But you know what's true of somebody who gets saved? The commandments of Christ suddenly grab that man. He can't live his life as though those commandments don't exist. His life, his conscience is governed by what Christ says. Jesus said this. "If My Word abides in you," He said you're going to prove to be My disciples for real, there in John 8. If His Word abides in us. That's the same thing. His word abiding in us means it has place there. And where you see that is a conformity to those commandments. Jesus said, "Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things I say?" See, if we really believe; if there's saving faith that He's Lord, our life falls in line. And what John says too is they're not grievous. Didn't Jesus say His yoke is easy? His burden is light? See, I can look at my life there. Have I obeyed Christ perfectly? No, I haven't. But I can tell you this. In my lost days, I didn't care what Christ said. When I got saved, it holds sway with me. It governs my life. And I can look at that and say even though I might do something and the devil comes along and says, "look what you just did. You think you're a child of God?" Well, as a matter of fact, I know I did that, but devil, my life used to be like this. It's totally been turned upside down. So even though yes, I did that. There's no explanation for my life except God saved me.

The third thing is what we find in Romans 8:16. This doesn't have to do so much with whether I'm a believer and know I am or that I have Christ's commandments and I keep them. This is actually a witness that is borne to our spirits by way of the Spirit of God. It's supernatural. But I think it's very common. I think that God is in the habit of communicating His love and His sonship by way of the Spirit directly to the spirit of His children. And that's what that text says. Romans 8:16 Somebody have it and want to read it? "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God." See, there's a witness bearing from the Spirit. Or, we might see similar meaning over there in Romans 5:5. Somebody want to read Romans 5:5?

"And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."

**Tim:** And if you read the next verse...

"For while we were still weak, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly."

**Tim:** See, I think that's what's communicated. I think that's the love of God that's shed abroad in our hearts.

This isn't our love to God. This isn't God's love channeled through us for other people. This is God's love for us that is poured into our own hearts where we feel it; where we sense it; where

it's manifest. And it's a love that was demonstrated by Christ dying for us in our ungodly state. And it's communicated to us.

Brethren, I can tell you this, that over the how ever many years I've been saved, there's seasons still when I'm reading Scripture, you know, precious things happen. There's times in singing hymns and something happens in my soul. There's times in prayer. There are times and it's just supernatural. It's the Spirit of God taking a truth and bringing it home with such power. And when you couple all three of those things together, you basically get somewhat of a Scriptural theology on assurance. Anybody have anything they want to add to that?