



April 16, 2022

## The Social Context of Faith

*He said, "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come to His seat! I would present my case before Him, and fill my mouth with arguments." - (Job 23:3-4)*

One of the things we must beware of is pretense if we are to develop a faith of sufficiency. It is crucial that we do what we can to avoid acting as if everything is fine, when in fact we are suffering. Faith and complaining are not mutually exclusive. Even if you have strong faith, you may still complain to God. While Job never cursed God or accused him falsely, he did complain. He complained and he moaned and he groaned. When bad things happen, you can do that too. If you doubt this, just read the psalms! Tell it to God! Let him hear from you. He is not nervous, he is not insecure, he is not worried. It will not upset him to hear you complain. It is one of the ways that we seek God and this is one of the lessons Job teaches us.

In addition, there is also a social dynamic to faith. When we're with a group of people, the flow of faith occurs separately through each individual as well as through our fellowship. Even Jesus, in his finitude, was limited in some measure by the attitude of others. On one occasion when he was visiting his hometown of Nazareth, he was met with a great deal of skepticism on the part of the folks living there. In fact, the resistance was so great that he was not able to perform many miracles, "and He marveled because of their unbelief" (Mark 6:6). Faith is not just an individual matter.

On another occasion, when Jesus was getting ready to raise the daughter of Jairus, who everyone knew was dead, he sent everyone but Peter, James, and John outside (Mark 5:21-24, 35-43). He did not want to fight the unbelief that was present among the people.

Unbelief and belief are real forces in the world, and they are polarized so that one takes away from the other. When faith begins to move, it moves on groups. When you are with other people, your faith is affected by the totality of the faith present. Sometimes when you go to pray with people you will find yourself totally drained in your efforts because they do not have faith. So an important part of our growth in faith involves the people with whom we associate. This is why the writer of the book of Hebrews, as he was encouraging his readers to draw close to God in faith, instructed them with these words:

*And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:24-25)*

**Reflect:** *God uses others to transform our own faith. Faith based on what we hear or read is central and necessary; the beginning of faith does come by hearing. But God wants to lead you on to the point where you can say, "Now I've seen it with my own eyes and it's all clear." It's clear because you are convinced that all will be well, and you shall not want. This kind of faith comes from spending time in the presence of God, and we most clearly see the presence of God in the face of Jesus Christ. As Jesus told his disciple Philip, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). Do you know what Philip had just said to him? "Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us" (v. 8).*

*(Q) How has the faith of others helped in making Jesus visible in your life, and, as a result, has stirred you up with love and good works? How is God inviting you to be a help to others in a similar way in their journey of faith?*