

## Disobedience in the Book of Hebrews

The book of Hebrews in the New Testament combines two contrasting themes. There are exultant passages about the supremacy of Christ and the comforting assurance of His once-for-all-time work on the cross to secure our salvation. Yet Hebrews is also known for passionate and somber warnings: the dangers of disobedience in falling away or being hardened by sin. What does this book have for us? How should the assurances and the warnings inform our understanding of the Christian walk? Is there a particular aspect of disobedience that can undermine the effect of the gospel in our lives? What is our role in avoiding the disobedience described in Hebrews?

The writer uses multiple references to passages in the Jewish Scriptures to reinforce his<sup>1</sup> arguments. Psalms seem to be his favorite source, and he returns repeatedly to one psalm in particular. Direct quotations from Psalm 95 appear five times in Hebrews 3-4, along with numerous allusions to that psalm. How might the illustration from Psalm 95 help us understand and appreciate the message to the Hebrews?

In fact, those two chapters seem to interrupt the flow of the otherwise unbroken argument:

- **Hebrews 1-2:** Christ as superior over angels and Moses
  - **Hebrews 3-4:** Psalm 95 as a warning example
- **Hebrews 5-7:** Christ as superior over even Melchizedek
- **Hebrews 8-9:** Christ as the ultimate High Priest
- **Hebrews 10-13:** Christ as the example and object of our saving faith

The writer's exultation over the superiority of Christ (chapters 1 and 2) is leading to the culminating superiority over even Melchizedek (chapters 5 through 7). Christ is the ultimate High Priest (chapters 8 and 9) and the example and object of our saving faith (chapters 10 through 13).

The writer interrupts the flow of his thinking (chapters 3 and 4) because of concern for the hearers' dullness (5:11) and dependence on milk (5:12). The significance

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<sup>1</sup> The identity of the human author is not known for certain, but I will use the generic masculine pronoun.

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of Melchizedek and the superiority of Christ will be lost on dulled, milk-dependent persons. We need to understand the reason for his concern in order to accurately apply his instruction to our circumstances. How can we avoid the dullness he warns of?

The extensive quotation of Psalm 95:7-11 introduces the second of what are commonly called the “warning passages”<sup>2</sup> of the book (3:7-4:13). Quotations and allusions from the psalm permeate that warning section. Clearly Psalm 95 is a predominant part of the writer’s cautionary concern. What specifically can we learn about the writer’s concern? How does Psalm 95 reinforce the point of his warnings?

### *Psalm 95 – A Review*

The book of Hebrews begins by exalting Christ. Psalm 95 begins by exalting God with a call to worship:

O come, let us sing for joy to the Lord,  
Let us shout joyfully to the rock of our salvation.  
<sup>2</sup>Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving,  
Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms.,  
Psalm 95:1-2<sup>3</sup>

The psalm continues to exalt God as King (v. 3), Creator (v. 4-6), and Provider (v. 7a).

The book of Hebrews changes to a cautionary tone at the beginning of chapter 2. Psalm 95 undergoes a similar, if sharper, transition. “With verse 7b, the tenor of the psalm changes from worship to warning.”<sup>4</sup> The writer to the Hebrews uses this second section of the psalm to increase the intensity of his message.

Today, if you would hear His voice,  
<sup>8</sup>Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah,  
As in the day of Massah in the wilderness,  
<sup>9</sup>“When your fathers tested Me,

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<sup>2</sup> cf. Herbert W. Bateman IV, editor, *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 2007) for an extensive discussion from various theological perspectives. For a brief overview, see <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/warning-passages-ahead/>

<sup>3</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all biblical quotations are from the New American Standard Bible (NASB), 1995.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Alden, *Psalms, Volume 2, Songs of Dedication* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), 115.

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They tried Me, though they had seen My work.  
<sup>10</sup> “For forty years I loathed that generation,  
And said they are a people who err in their heart,  
And they do not know My ways.  
<sup>11</sup> “Therefore I swore in My anger,  
Truly they shall not enter into My rest.”

Psalm 95:7b-11

quoted in full, Hebrews 3:7-11

The psalm refers back to the Exodus (specifically Exodus 17:7 and Numbers 14) when the Israelite refugees from Egypt questioned God’s care for them. The critical moment was when the people explicitly “tested” and “tried” God. This event at the location mentioned in Psalm 95 is recorded in Exodus 17:7.

Moses named the place Massah and Meribah because of the quarrel of the sons of Israel, and because they tested the LORD, saying, “Is the LORD among us, or not?”

“Is the LORD among us or not?” This is more than doubt. This is “a pattern of refusal to take God at His word.”<sup>5</sup> The people were challenging God’s goodness and impugning the integrity of His kind intentions for them. The writer repeatedly points to that incident as the Israelites’ “disobedience” (Hebrews 3:18; 4:6, 11).

Instead of trusting God in the midst of adverse circumstances, they demanded that He show His hand in order to demonstrate to them that He was in their midst to help them.<sup>6</sup>

Their challenge to God and testing Him were the observable disobedience, the “behavioral” aspects of their rebellion. But behavior usually results from cognitive convictions and volitional choices.<sup>7</sup> What does the writer to the Hebrews say about the mind and the will that led to the Israelites’ defiant behavior? How can we refine our

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<sup>5</sup> Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1975), 346.

<sup>6</sup> Kenneth S. Wuest, “Hebrews in the Greek New Testament,” *Wuest’s Word Studies From the Greek New Testament for the English Reader, Volume Two* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), 75.

<sup>7</sup> This clarity was provided in a paper by Dr. Matthew D. Jensen of the University of Sydney referenced below.

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understanding of his warnings in order to more attentively apply his warnings to our own faith?

### *Belief and Trust*

Immediately after the extensive quotation from Psalm 95 (Hebrews 3:7-11), the writer offers a commentary to clarify the point he is making from that ancient allusion (v. 12-19). Clearly some aspect of unbelief is the cause. He brackets his commentary with the danger of an “evil, unbelieving (*apistias*, ἀπιστίας) heart” (v. 12) and the conclusion that the Israelites were guilty of “unbelief” (*apistian*, ἀπιστίαν, v. 19). He unfolds the specific aspect of unbelief illustrated by the psalm. Unbelieving hearts (v. 12) are in danger of being hardened (v. 13), just as the hearts of the Israelites were hardened (v. 15, repeating Psalm 95:8 once again).

The Old Testament Israelites may have had some level of belief in God. That belief did not translate into trusting Him in difficult circumstances. The New Testament writer pointed to this incident as representative of the condition of at least some members of the Hebrew congregation he was addressing. Their belief in ideas about God did not translate into confident trust in God.

### *Disobedience and Distrust*

The sin condemned in Psalm 95:8-9, testing and trying God, is described repeatedly as “disobedience” in Hebrews (3:18; 4:6, 11). The particular form of the disobedience of the Israelites must relate to the warnings to the readers of the book. Understanding their disobedience can help us avoid the same sin.

Each of the three references to the “disobedience” of Psalm 95 use the word *apeitheia* (ἀπειθεία, or a related verb form). *Apeitheia* is the noun form of the verb *apeitheō* (ἀπειθέω), the negated form from *peithō*, (πείθω). *Peithō* is used fifty-two times in the New Testament, and almost three-quarters of those occurrences (37/52) are translated as variations of convinced, confident, persuaded, trust, rely, etc.<sup>8</sup> The writer to

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<sup>8</sup> John R. Kohlenberger III, Edward W. Goodrick, James A Swanson, *The Greek-English Concordance to the New Testament With The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 604.

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the Hebrews uses *peithō* in 2:13 (quoting Isaiah 8:17, “I will put my trust in Him”) to express “a declaration of complete confidence in God:”<sup>9</sup> The Messiah had absolute trust in God.

The fact that Jesus’ confidence was fully vindicated after he had experienced suffering and affliction assured them that they could also trust God in difficult circumstances.<sup>10</sup>

Similarly, *peithō* is the word Paul used to express his absolute confidence in God’s loving care regardless of the most extreme hardships:

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written,

“For Your sake we are being put to death all day long;  
We were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”

But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced [*peithō*] that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.  
(Romans 8:35-39)

That confident trust through difficult circumstances demonstrated by Jesus, Paul and others was exactly what the ancient Israelites and the Hebrew congregation lacked. In contrast to the Messiah’s trust and confidence in God’s plan, the Israelites were disobedient.

*Apeitheia*, the “disobedience” in those verses is the lack of confidence or trust, a failure to rely on or be persuaded. Past efforts to translate “disobedience” more

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<sup>9</sup> Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* in the New International Commentary on the New Testament Series (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 144.

<sup>10</sup> William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8* in The Word Biblical Commentary Series (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), 60.

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specifically led to creative new terms, such as “non-persuasive”<sup>11</sup> (Kenneth Wuest) or “unpersuadableness”<sup>12</sup> (John Owen).

More recently, at least one scholar has proposed that *apeitheō* and its cognates are better translated using the idea of “unpersuaded” in most of their twenty-six occurrences in the New Testament. “The idea of being ‘unpersuaded’... is the unique contribution of this word group....”<sup>13</sup> There is more to the *apeitheō* word group than a general idea of nonspecific ‘disobedience.’ A more detailed and particular understanding of the writer’s vocabulary will help us understand and follow his admonition. If we look no further than a general warning against “disobedience,” then “the word’s unique contribution is overlooked and we risk misunderstanding the text under consideration.”<sup>14</sup> Recognizing the error of the Israelites more explicitly as “unpersuadableness” will help us understand the underlying causes of their disobedience. “Someone is unpersuaded of something, so does not believe in it and is thus disobedient to it.”<sup>15</sup> Disobedience is often the end of that sequence that begins with “unpersuadableness.”

That “unpersuadableness” is precisely the concern of the writer to the Hebrews:

Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through the same example of disobedience [*apeitheias*, “unpersuadableness”] (Hebrews 4:11).

The “unpersuadableness” of the Israelites, their lack of trust in God, led to their disobedience in testing God, “Is the LORD among us, or not?” Their lack of trust in His wisdom and goodness and commitment to them led to their hesitation to enter the rest He promised in the land He had for them.

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<sup>11</sup> Kenneth S. Wuest, “Hebrews in the Greek New Testament,” *Wuest’s Word Studies From the Greek New Testament for the English Reader, Volume Two* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), 82.

<sup>12</sup> John Owen, *Hebrews: The Epistle of Warning* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1953), 60.

<sup>13</sup> Matthew D. Jensen, Some Unpersuasive Glosses: The Meaning of ἀπειθεια, ἀπειθέω, and ἀπειθής in the New Testament.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 138, no. 2 (2019), 400-401.

<sup>14</sup> Matthew D. Jensen, Some Unpersuasive Glosses: The Meaning of ἀπειθεια, ἀπειθέω, and ἀπειθής in the New Testament.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 138, no. 2 (2019), 401.

<sup>15</sup> Matthew D. Jensen, Some Unpersuasive Glosses: The Meaning of ἀπειθεια, ἀπειθέω, and ἀπειθής in the New Testament.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 138, no. 2 (2019), 400.

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The writer included the lengthy quotation from Psalm 95 to illustrate the “unpersuadableness” in more detail. That detail should help his audience (first-century and twenty-first) to avoid the sin of the Israelites. Two factors plunged them into the disobedience of “unpersuadableness.”

- They ignored the indications of God’s care for them.
- They imposed their wishes over God’s wisdom.

### Disregarding God’s Past Work

God’s response was based on the inexcusable reluctance of the people, “They tried Me, though they had seen My work.” God’s care for His people was not an abstract theory. He had clearly demonstrated what He was willing and able to do on their behalf. They had seen His work. They had seen His terrible wrath on Egypt to rescue them (Exodus 7-11). In the desert He had provided water (Exodus 15:22-27), miraculous bread (Exodus 16:1-7), and meat (Exodus 16:8-21). They had seen His “work” (singular), all of His actions taken together as an indicator of His trustworthy care for them. And yet, they showed themselves to be “a people who err in their heart” (Psalm 95:10b). Rather than see the cumulative work as unmistakable confirmation of God’s continuing care, they erred by contesting that care: “Is the LORD among us, or not?” Whatever they thought of the God who had repeatedly rescued them, they did not trust Him in their present trouble. They did not consider the work He had already done for them as sufficient to merit their trust.

Like the Israelites, our trust falters because we forget that we, too, have seen His work. They had the evidence of repeated supernatural intervention by God to meet their needs. In spite of that overwhelming evidence, the crisis of the moment was all they could see.

### Disregarding God’s Providential Wisdom

If their error was lack of trust, the reason for their error was presumption. “They do not know My ways.” The error common to ancient Israel and modern humanity (and everyone in between) is that we believe we know what is best, how God ought to run things. We assume that the immediate relief of our pain or discomfort or inconvenience

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is the only reasonable option. We don't like the idea that God's infinitely loving and infinitely wise plan might have other means of accomplishing His purposes. We question His commitment to care for us: "Is the LORD among us, or not?" When circumstances don't follow our desired pattern, we "err in our hearts" because we "do not know His ways." "His ways" are anchored in His infinite wisdom, power, and love for His people. We tend to forget His perfect goodness when all we can see is our immediate crisis. Trust requires that:

we come to grips with the disturbing truth that the larger story God is telling does not always follow the script we've come up with for our smaller story. <sup>16</sup>

Like the Israelites, our trust falters when we are overwhelmed by our circumstances. Nothing seems more important than eliminating the pain of a crisis in our health, or our family, or our finances. Anything that does not provide rapid relief is of no interest.

Is it not possible that an infinitely wise, graciously loving, and supremely powerful God could somehow be working a greater good than we can imagine through all the disappointments and difficulties that come our way?<sup>17</sup>

Our confidence wavers because we can't see what He is doing, and ultimately we forget that He is always at work. What was lacking in the faith of the Hebrews that we might also need to understand?

### *Unfinished Foundations*

The writer to the Hebrews acknowledges the foundation of their faith, but he also recognizes the inadequacy of a bare foundation. The Hebrews' idea of faith focused on repeatedly returning to familiar doctrines:

Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of **repentance** from dead works and of **faith** toward God, of instruction about **washings** and **laying on of**

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<sup>16</sup> Larry Crabb, *When God's Ways Make No Sense* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2018), 59.

<sup>17</sup> Larry Crabb, *When God's Ways Make No Sense* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2018), 64.



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**hands**, and the **resurrection** of the dead and eternal **judgment**. (Hebrews 6:1-2)

Foundations are critically important, but they are not an end in themselves. They are meant to be built upon. Picture a builder who takes great care in perfecting a foundation but never uses the foundation to support a useful structure. The Hebrews were content to define their “faith” as adherence to certain doctrines that indeed form the foundation, the starting point, for the Christian life. They were failing to “press on to maturity” in seeing how their trust in God during difficulties should build on their orthodoxy.

The particular “elementary teachings” he lists can be seen as basic doctrinal outline – the commencement of our Christian life, the context of our Christian life, and the completion of our Christian life:

- **Soteriology – the Doctrine of Salvation**
  - Repentance from dead works
  - Faith in God
- **Ecclesiology – The Doctrine of the Church**
  - Baptism (“washings” βαπτισμῶν, entry to the church)
  - Laying on of hands (ministry of the church - healing, commissioning)
- **Eschatology – The Doctrine of Last Things**
  - Resurrection
  - Judgment

The writer describes their diet as milk essential for infants (Hebrews 5:12-13) but not adequate for maturing in the faith. The spiritual infants were content dwelling on the bare foundations, the beginning understanding of the Christian life. They did not recognize the purpose of the foundation. Those doctrines were (and are) intended to enable believers to grow on to the “solid food” of continuing trust in God in spite of bewildering circumstances. They may have accepted and articulated the doctrines, but they were still in danger of the Israelites “unpersuadableness” if the doctrinal orthodoxy did not mature into increasing confidence and trust in God.

### *Trust and Trials for the Hebrews*

The core of the disobedience described by the writer to the Hebrews is the refusal to trust God in difficulties. Later in his book, the catalog of faith (Hebrews 11) cites

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multiple examples of those whose faith was manifested in their trust through trials – Noah facing the end of the world, Abraham leaving his home, then enduring decades of childlessness, then offering his long-awaited heir as a human sacrifice, Moses being ill-treated by the very people God sent him to rescue, Rahab abandoning her own people – and the list goes on with even more descriptive details of horrific tortures. The common factor of many of these examples is the adversity they faced and the trust they maintained in God. Their faith was displayed in that trust.

The extended list of examples comes immediately after the writer has recognized the reality his audience had faced in the past:

But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one.  
(Hebrews 10:32-34)

Apparently the Hebrew Christians had already suffered significant mistreatment and survived it with their faith intact. But with the possibility of additional (or continued) persecution, more encouragement was necessary to reinforce their continued trust:

Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. (Hebrews 10:35-36)

Their endurance and joyful acceptance and confidence may have been wearing thin. Surviving one series of calamities only to face even more can be disheartening. The writer sees the potential parallel with the ancient Israelites whose trust turned to testing the Lord. His warnings from Psalm 95 caution his Hebrew hearers not to fall into the “unpersuadableness” of their ancient ancestors. Like that original audience, we face a variety of difficulties, and we need the same reminders to reinforce our trust in the same God.

### *Trust and Trials Today*

The Israelites in the Exodus had a long string of miraculous interventions demonstrating God’s commitment to their ultimate well-being. We have much more

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powerful evidence of God’s care for us and His intentions for our good: the incarnation and ultimately the cross. The eternal, infinite Second Person of the Holy Trinity descended to partake of flesh and blood (Hebrews 2:14), to become as one of His weak creatures (v. 17), and ultimately to submit to the humiliation of death that we fear (v. 15). That demonstration of love should be a convincing reminder of His compassionate care for us regardless of our difficult circumstances. And we have the writers of the New Testament to repeatedly remind us that God is working His purposes for our good, and indeed for our infinite, eternal joy.

In his letter to the believers in Rome, Paul linked endurance in suffering to the evidence of God’s love for us demonstrated in the cross:

And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. (Romans 5:3-6)

In case his readers failed to see the connection and the impact the cross should have on our trust through tribulations, Paul summarizes:

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

In the book of Hebrews, the writer challenges the lack of trust when he compares their spiritual state with the Israelites described in Psalm 95. The first-century Hebrews were in danger of the same disobedience of distrust – *apeitheia*, “unpersuadableness.” They acknowledged the foundational truths of their faith without growing in their trust in the Truth Giver.

### *Faith-A and Faith-B*

C. S. Lewis described a similar separation of aspects of faith – believing Truth and trusting the Truth-giver. Lewis describes what he calls “two senses of the word Faith:”

- Faith-A: a settled intellectual assent;

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- Faith-B: a trust or confidence in the God whose existence is thus assented to....

Lewis continues, “The devils who ‘believe and tremble’ (James 2.19) have Faith-A.”<sup>18</sup>

Elsewhere, he illustrates that distinction:

For example, my reason is perfectly convinced by good evidence that anaesthetics do not smother me and that properly trained surgeons do not start operating until I am unconscious. But that does not alter the fact that when they have me down on the table and clap their horrible mask over my face, a mere childish panic begins inside me. I start thinking I am going to choke, and I am afraid they will start cutting me up before I am properly under. In other words, I lose my faith in anaesthetics. It is not reason that is taking away my faith: on the contrary, my faith is based on reason. It is my imagination and emotions. The battle is between faith and reason on one side and emotion and imagination on the other.<sup>19</sup>

His “Faith-A” in surgeons did not grow into convinced “Faith-B” real enough to trust the surgeon. The result of a growing faith, based on solid reasonable evidence (about competent surgeons or about a trustworthy God), “is to retain, so far as the will and intellect are concerned, what is irresistible and obvious during moments of special grace.”<sup>20</sup>

The English word “faith” encompasses both the concepts of belief and trust as shown in Lewis’ Faith-A/Faith-B distinction. The related ideas of belief and trust might be clarified by an old illustration.<sup>21</sup> A circus performer asked the audience if they believed he could carry a person across the high wire in a wheelbarrow. The enthusiastic crowd cheered their affirmation. When he asked who would be first in the wheelbarrow, their silence indicated that their “belief” did not translate into trust.

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<sup>18</sup> C. S. Lewis, “Is Theism Important?” in *God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970), 172-173.

<sup>19</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), 138.

<sup>20</sup> C. S. Lewis, “Is Theism Important?” in *God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970), 176.

<sup>21</sup> I first heard this illustration decades ago as a new believer, and I have no recollection of its origin.

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A friend suggested a more appropriate biblical example. A desperate father approached Jesus about the healing of his son (Mark 9:14-29). After a brief discussion about Jesus' abilities, the father responded with an affirmation and a plea. Using Lewis' Faith-A/Faith-B distinction, the father might be paraphrased, "I believe. Help my lack of trust." He understood and assented to the power possessed by Jesus, but he faltered in his confidence that Jesus would work in the immediate crisis.

That frantic father may never have experienced "moments of special grace." But most of us have, and those experiences can continually reinforce our trust.

### *Moments of Special Grace*

Those "moments of special grace" can happen when we are in fellowship with other believers or discovering new depths in Scripture or exulting in worship. In those moments our faith seems strongest, and we experience some sense of being drawn near to God – a repeated purpose of the writer (Hebrews 4:16; 7:19, 25; 10:22). During those moments of special grace we can specifically look for more than immediate good feelings or increased theological insight. We can look for reminders of God's providential, loving care for us. Those moments are opportunities to reinforce our persuasion that God is trustworthy, regardless of our circumstances. The reminders help us continue trusting during trying times when our emotions and our imaginations push to the forefront of our thinking, when life seems to "clap a horrible mask over my face." If our desire is to grow in trusting God and knowing Him better, we will constantly be alert to see His work and His ways.

The writer's repeated example from Psalm 95 suggests his antidote for "unpersuadableness" that struggles to trust God. The Israelites were not persuaded to trust even when "they had seen My work" (Psalm 95:9; cf. Hebrews 3:9). Our trust during trials can be strengthened by focusing on God's greatest work, the cross. The Israelites tested and tried God rather than trusting Him (Psalm 95:9; cf. Hebrews 3:9) because their hard hearts (Psalm 95:8; cf. Hebrews 3:8) did not "know My ways" (Psalm 95:10; cf. Hebrews 3:10). They failed to see even the possibilities that His infinite wisdom, goodness, and power might have a plan beyond their immediate conditions. Our trust during trials can be reinforced by remembering His perfect providence. He is

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always working in a larger story that includes us, but is not limited to our present circumstances. Our focus on God's past work, primarily in the cross, and on God's providential wisdom will move us toward the maturity, the solid food of trusting Him through the most difficult circumstances.

Larry Crabb suggested trust in trials is a key characteristic of a growing relationship with God.

You know you're finding God when you believe that God is good no matter what happens. Or, in other words: Finding God is developing, through Christ, an unshakable confidence in God's absolute goodness and perfect love no matter what we may experience in this life. Finding God means to rest in his goodness through poverty, blindness, and plane crashes. Finding God means to face all of life, both good and bad, with a spirit of trust.<sup>22</sup>

Trust is an essential ingredient in any relationship. We can see more of God's character in Scripture, through fellowship with other struggling believers, in deepening our theological understanding, in our longing for Him stirred in our worship. We can grow in our relational knowledge of Him and what He has done for us as we contemplate the cross. As we become more and more confident in God's good intentions for us, we continue to grow in trusting Him no matter what circumstances we face. In the absence of answers to many of life's hard questions, "You can always trust the God who died for you."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Larry Crabb, *Finding God* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1993), 106.

<sup>23</sup> Ken Crabb quoting his father, "Remembering Larry Crabb", Moody Radio broadcast, March 5, 2021; at 38:16

<https://www.moodyradio.org/radioplayer.aspx?episode=367535>