

### **3: In Agony I Sought**

A short while ago it was my privilege to conduct a series of meetings in the state of Oregon. While there, a young lady made an appointment to see me, and shared with me a problem that is, it seems, an affliction of so many Americans. She was nervous. This must surely be our most common problem. There are many pills that have been prepared to deal with just this one problem. She knew she wasn't going to be receiving any pills from me, but I gave her something much better. I gave her a ten-point program from the Bible for nerves. After discussing it with her, she promised to put it into effect daily, just as I had outlined it to her. It had proven to be the most effective program for nerves I had ever heard of. Later she wrote me a letter and told me it wasn't working for her and that she was ready to discard it. I wrote back to her and suggested that she incorporate 'emotion and will' in her ten-point program. After a week or so she wrote back and confessed that no adjustment of the program would be able to help her since the root of her problem was that she wasn't sure that God existed at all.

Not long ago, Mrs. Coon and I were invited to have lunch with another minister by a mutual friend. Our friend thought that perhaps I might be able to say something to encourage the other minister. During the course of the meal our host very diplomatically asked the question, "Is there a God, and if there is, does He intervene in the affairs of men?"

I had been invited to conduct a week of spiritual emphasis in one of our Academies a few years ago. While there I presented to them a number of studies on the wonderful promises of God's Word. Early in the week the service was opened for questions from the students and the students responded enthusiastically. There were so many questions that I could see it would be impossible for me to answer them even if we classified them. Because they could not all be answered in the chapel period, one of the teachers came to me and asked if I would take one of his class periods and use it to answer the questions of his pupils who might not otherwise receive answers to their questions. I was happy to respond to the invitation. So eager were the students to get answers to their questions that other requests came for similar attention and students who were not members of these particular classes came in for these special sessions. These youth wanted to know Bible answers to their questions. That thrilled me.

Perhaps the most repeated question was, "How can I have faith?" Or, "How can I know there is a God?" We explored these questions thoroughly and with God's help I believe some answers were found that satisfied these hungering hearts.

So often, during a series of meetings, people come to me and with a note of frustration in their voices say, "My problem is that I have so little faith. What can I do to increase my faith?" This question has been raised so often that I have chosen to share with you my own experience in finding faith. I am convinced that no program; no series of meetings or question and answer periods are of any value except there first be a firm belief in God and His power to save and to intervene in the affairs of men.

The Bible is still true. God is still alive! This is a fact and is demonstrated every day. But the devil is working hard to fill the hearts and minds of men with doubts about His existence. Men and women are asking, "How can I be sure?" Many are filled with fear and unable to step out by faith on the promises of God. Many are desirous of increasing their faith - and I'm so happy about that, for there is an answer; there is a solution to this problem. I know - for I experienced it when in agony I sought.

About four years before I met Bob Law, who later became our son-in-law, I had gone through a personal Gethsemane. This experience that I passed through was the result of my taking a Bible promise and the determination to step out by faith in accordance with the provisions of that promise. I was simply ready

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to take God at His word and claim the promise for a specific need. My wife joined me in this experience. Now you might wonder how anyone would be asked to go through a Gethsemane experience for a reason such as that. I'll have to admit there were times when I too, wondered about that. But let me tell you, there is nothing Satan dislikes as much as a man really in earnest about taking God at His word - and the trouble started very soon after our decision was made. There is one thing that steadied me through the entire experience. I knew then as I know now - God is bigger than the devil; His power is greater than that of the devil. Let's never forget that!

Now I would like to share seven facts from the Bible with you:

1. Jesus is coming again. Revelation 22:12, "Behold I come quickly...."
2. He is coming for those who have faith. Revelation 14:12, "....here are they that (have) the faith of Jesus." This is one of many things that they have acquired through experience.
3. God is very well pleased with people who have faith, and He is very displeased with those who don't. Hebrews 11:6. "But without faith it is impossible to please God: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."

Here are two fundamental facts: God will not be pleased unless I believe that He IS - that He exists; and I must also believe that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him. You see, I must not only believe that He exists, but I must believe that when I come to Him in prayer He will answer the prayers of my heart. I must believe that I can receive answers! Whether the answer comes in the way I expect or in the way God sees is best is not really important. But I must believe that God is interested in me - that He loves me and will answer me when I come to Him in prayer.

4. Faith comes by my observing God through nature. Romans 1:20, 21, "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:"

God says that men are without excuse because He is to be seen in the visible things He has made - creation! If after viewing the handiwork of God and I still I choose to believe that God does not exist, I am without excuse. Notice that the Bible says that there is no excuse because it has been made very clear. God wants us to know that He exists and has allowed creation to cooperate with Him in making it very clear for each of us.

5. Faith increases by my bringing it into contact with God's word. Romans 10:17, "So then faith cometh by hearing the word of God."

This is how faith comes. It comes by my bringing faith into contact with God's word.

6. God has given every soul a measure of faith. Romans 12:3, "God hath dealt to every man a measure of faith."

Every person who has ever lived has been given a measure of faith. We each have a measure of faith, and it is our privilege to increase that measure of faith. This, we are told pleases God.

7. To get answers from God, we must mix our faith with His words. Hebrews 4:1, 2. "Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: (the children of Israel, two million strong) but the word preached did not profit, not being mixed with faith."

In other words, here is a book. This book represents faith. It contains the promises of God. God has given to every one of us a measure of faith. Now, for me to get answers to my problems - answers to my

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prayers, I must take one of the 3,573 promises the Book contains and MIX the faith I have been given with the Word of God. It's just as simple as that: mix faith with the promise!

Now you might ask, 'How can I mix faith and promises?' Well, if it were possible I would like to have us go into the kitchen right now and we would do a bit of mixing. There is no mystery to mixing flour and water, is there? Now the cook just pours one into the other and stirs it briskly and in minutes it's mixed. Using that illustration, we can understand the instruction of God's word. We're to take the faith we have been given and pour it over the promise of God and mix the two.

But again, you say, 'How do I pour my faith over the promises of God's Word?'

I pour my faith over His word, saying, 'Lord, I believe Your word.' When I say Lord, I believe this promise - what am I pouring over it? I can even feel my breath as I'm speaking. Even as I'm speaking, I'm pouring spoken faith over the word of God.

My favorite author in the book, Christ's Object Lessons page 147 suggests that we can take our Bibles and turn to any of the promises and claim it by faith. We're teaching classes now in which we urge people to do this very thing. We tell them to take any of the promises, put their finger right on the promise and say, "Lord, I believe this promise." Then, you see, I am mixing my faith with God's word. It's just that simple - and that thrilling! You will thrill with me as you experiment with this new concept. It isn't really new - it's just not been understood and practised as yet.

The importance of mixing faith and the promises of God is revealed in the experience of the children of Israel. Of the two million who came out of Egypt, only two entered the land of Canaan because they failed to follow God's simple plan. They failed to mix faith and the promises He had made to them. Think of it - 'One in a million'! Had the people in that day simply taken the promises of God and poured over it the faith that had been given them-what might have happened! God is love; but God is also in earnest when He gives a command. It is necessary for mankind to know and believe that God is, and that He will reward His people if they will follow His simple plan. He was in earnest back then, even as He is in earnest today! We must believe that God exists - and - that God will reward me. These are basic.

People are anxious to learn and put into practice these wonderful principles. The most exciting days are just ahead of us when we come to know, and experimentally attest to the power of God in our lives. Recently a lady came to me during one of our series of meetings, which, by the way was directed entirely to the exploration of this very theme, and said, "I am going to test this thing. I am going to test God by a very special request." I smiled and said, "Don't you do anything of the sort." I told her about the nobleman who came to Christ and reasoned that if He answered his request, then he would know that Christ was God. Jesus turned to this man and said, in effect, "Nothing of the kind. You are not asking a sign of me. You have received plenty of signs that I am the Son of God. That question has been answered sufficiently. You must come to Me and say, 'I know You exist and I know You are going to hear and answer, therefore I present Your promise.'" Do you see the difference? One is using faith as a basis; the other uses doubt as the basis. We cannot come to God and say, "If You do this I know You exist..." No, emphatically NO.

When we, however come to God and say in our hearts - demonstrating it with our actions, "I know that God exists and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him", and we present to the Lord a promise that we would claim not to prove His existence, but rather because He exists and we know He will answer - then we please Him!

It is said of Enoch in Hebrews 11:5, before he was translated, that he pleased the Lord. He knew that without faith it would be impossible to please his Lord. The world looked on and as its people watched this man of God asked, "What do you think you're going to gain by believing in God's existence?" One

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day they found that Enoch was missing! He had so pleased God by his way of life that He took him to glory land to be with Him through the countless ages of eternity. Enoch believed God! Enoch believed that He was, and that He was a rewarder of men!

We, too, must believe as Enoch did. And we have as much reason to believe as did Enoch. Often we pass by the very instruments of God's love by which He would have us know of His existence. This is not confined to the lay-men. There are ministers of the Word that have harbored the question of God's existence, too. Just the other day a minister spent more than an hour with me in discussing this very thing. "How can I know He exists?" was the burden of his heart. I tried to show him how God has revealed Himself in a billion ways. There is proof on every side. Nature's book is replete with testimonies to God's existence.

When my wife and I claimed that Bible promise, and the devil went to work to bring discouragement, I went into the woods. On my knees I picked a little flower. With this tiny, beautiful flower clutched in my hands I lifted my face heavenward and prayed to God. I needed an answer. I must have an answer. I had to have an answer to some of my deep problems. I was willing to stay there until it came - I was just that desperate. This was four years before I met Bob, our son-in-law.

It's wonderful how the Lord works. He loves us and demonstrates it in so many ways. A few years before this I had received a sermon that was written by one of my brothers. It was entitled, 'How I Convinced an Infidel That There is a God'. At the time I read it I wasn't particularly impressed, but here in my agony, on bended knee, I realized the logic and power of that sermon. I took my Bible and in the fly-leaf I began to write. I began to recall what I had read and gave myself a Bible study right then and there. I wrote it down so I wouldn't forget it. It's been such a blessing to me ever since and I want to share it with you.

I wrote down five things. The first was, 'How I Know that God Exists'. Then I borrowed from my brother's sermon and listed five evidences of God's existence. The first of these was Order. I looked at the little flower I held in my hand and as I looked at it and saw the delicate arrangement of its petals, I could see it had Order. Then I was impressed with its Beauty. It was just simply beautiful - indescribably beautiful. The next was Plan. This flower demonstrated a definite Plan. Design was next on the list. It had symmetry - no question about that. Last I put down, Means to an End. These five things showed me that there was an Intelligence behind this little flower. It showed Wisdom - the existence of Mind. This is so in all of nature.

And there on my knees I said, "Lord, this little flower shows me that You exist. For in this flower I saw, (1) Order, (2) Beauty, (3) Plan, (4) Design, (5) Means to an End. This has proven to many great thinkers that a Mind must be in back of nature. This is what Romans 1:20 was talking about. That verse says that God is clearly seen by the things He has made, and those who won't accept Him on the basis of these proofs are without excuse. This is what I shared with my minister friend who came to find out how he could believe that God existed. There are billions of evidences of God's existence - by the simple fact that there are billions of little flowers around, to say nothing about the rest of nature. Think of the starry heavens! We cannot look up and see the handiwork of God - see those beautiful shining stars - and not be impressed with the existence of a Master Mind. The five distinctive features that were demonstrated in the little flower are to be seen in all of God's handiwork. Yes, these five things always postulate Mind.

This concept is so simple that a child can understand it. Take any little boy or girl and show him a traffic light. It's not hard for them to see that it has order. It goes on and off. It has design and a definite plan. It's not hard for them to realize that a mind was behind that. It may not necessarily have beauty, but there are enough evidences in its working to show even my four-year-old grandson, Randy the reasonableness of there being a mind behind the traffic light. I can show him a little flower and point out the five points I've mentioned and prove, beyond a shadow of a doubt that God exists. It's just that

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simple and that logical. I shared with my minister friend that it is not the mind of the child that is doubting God, but rather the so-called sophisticated mind that is doubting and questioning the existence of God. But His existence is written in every little flower that grows! Oh that men would only let themselves believe.

The next thing I wrote in the fly-leaf of my Bible was, 'How Do I Know that He is a Wise God?' I took the same tiny flower and said, "This tiny flower shows tremendous wisdom from the time it starts germinating through to maturity." I thought of the miracle of pollination; the budding and the miracle of blooming. It all showed to me that there was tremendous wisdom behind that little flower. "I have a wise God," I said.

Then I wrote and asked, 'How Do I Know You are a Big God?' I had some big problems and I needed a Big God to solve them. Through my tears, there on my knees, I sobbed out these questions. I needed an answer. I couldn't go on living with the doubts that my brothers had put into my mind when they came to see my property and told me that God didn't receive His mail the day I wrote Him that letter. The other brother told me that the devil had answered my prayer. I had to find out. I had to know for sure, and so there on my knees I wanted to know if God was a Big God.

I looked at the flower again. I saw the Order, Beauty, Plan, Design and Means to an End in that flower and realized that the vast expanse of the heavens showed these same features. I had studied astronomy in college and had been impressed by the immeasurable distances in the starry heavens. I knew as I reflected on the Greatness of God, shown by His ability to create and direct the myriads of heavenly bodies, that my God was a Big God. I found confidence there out in that lonely spot - confidence in my God to solve my biggest problem.

I had now seen that I had a God. I had seen that I had a Wise God and that I had a Big God. Now I said I want to know if I have a God that is interested in little, tiny me. And so I wrote that question down in the fly-leaf of my Bible. I wondered where I would turn to find the answer to that question. I picked up the little flower again and thought - this flower is only a fraction of my size, and yet, You're interested in that flower. I reasoned, if God can be interested in that little tiny flower, that today blooms but might be cut down tomorrow, surely He must be interested in me. As I thought on that, the truth of His interest in me came home to me with conviction.

My last question was this: 'How Do I Know that You Communicate to Me in the Bible?' To answer this to my satisfaction I listed three things. Before I wrote them down, I knew of course that God speaks to me through nature, but that doesn't detail my God. It doesn't tell me anything in detail about my God. The Bible is the only source of information to give detail about God, and if He doesn't communicate to me through the Bible, I didn't know where to turn. So I listed three things: (1) prophecy. I had been preaching that there are 1,335 Bible prophecies of which over 1,000 have accurately met their fulfillment. One of the fulfilled Bible prophecies came to my mind which proved God's communication to me through prophecy. I thought of the story of Josiah Litch, who in 1838 was preaching in Philadelphia. He was preaching Bible prophecy and the Lord blessed him. The Infidel Clubs of America challenged him. They said, "You talk about how Babylon fell according to the prophecy and how Medo-Persia, Grecia and Rome came on the scene of action and came and went in accordance with Bible Prophecy. You tell how Tyre would be a place for the spreading of nets, and so on. How do we know these things weren't written after the event took place?" They challenged him to show them an event that was yet future that would take place that they could see with their own eyes.

Josiah Litch said, "I accept your challenge. In 1840, August 11, according to Bible prophecy, the Ottoman Empire will lose its independence." They said, "We accept your prediction. We'll wait and see." When

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August 11, 1840 arrived, four powers took over the Ottoman Empire and 1,000 infidels were converted in a day!

I said, "If a thousand infidels would accept your Word as a communication of God's command through that one prophecy, can I question Your communication when I know that over one thousand prophecies have already been fulfilled?"

The second reason that I listed by which I knew that God communicated to me thru His Word was (2) It changes My Life. When I thoughtfully and prayerfully read His Word it makes me pure when otherwise I'm impure. It makes me honest when otherwise I would be deceitful. It makes me kind when otherwise I would be unkind. I knew it had changed my life. I recalled my college days when I would get up at 3:30 in the morning and spend an hour with God in prayer and then go and work on the farm. I was convinced of His power in my life during that time. Some of the boys that were my friends - at least I thought they were, had engaged in stealing bicycles. They had been successful, too! But they had not spent time with God and so had entered upon some very deceitful practises. I knew that had it not been for the power of God in my life through the study of His Word, I too, would have been with these boys in their escapades.

And so I knew by the experience of prophecy that had been fulfilled that God communicates through His Word; I knew by the change in my life that I had received communication through His Word, and (3) I knew of God's communication through His Word because of the Transformed Lives I had witnessed.

In agony I sought and found that God communicates to me through nature, and through His Word. It is by the study of His Word that faith comes. So I opened my Bible and I took a Bible promise. I began to pour my faith over a Bible promise, remembering that this was very important and indicated in the experience of the children of Israel when they left Egypt and how that only two of the more than two million people, twenty years of age and over, had entered the promised land. The reason for this tragedy was that they did not mix the faith God had given them with the promises of His Word.

I decided I must do some mixing of faith with the promises. So I opened my Bible to a promise and put my finger right on the promise and I said, "Lord, because You have promised, I know You will fulfill this promise." You see, this is mixing the two, as the Lord desires us to do. I remembered what Numbers 23:19 says, "God is not a man that He should lie. ." This is what gave me the assurance. The verse also says, "...hath he said, and shall he not do it?" And so, you see, I knew that God had made a promise, and since He cannot lie - I knew He would keep His promise. "Now," I said, "I believe You will fulfill Your promise for me." I turned to Matthew 24:35 and read, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." I claimed that promise, too. What was I doing? I was strengthening faith.

Then I said, "You've said in Hebrews 6:18 that it is impossible for God to Lie, so I take this promise on which I have put my finger. It's impossible for it not to be true. It came from a God of love - a God that cannot lie." And so I began to see some of these wonderful things that God had wanted me to see which I needed to see - that unless I saw, I might lose my soul as my mother predicted might happen.

My faith was beginning to be strengthened. By the way, what is faith? When people say, 'My faith is weak', that's a direct insult to God. Faith is simply, Trusting God! Faith is, believing God! If I say, "My faith is weak," I'm saying, "I don't much believe in God." When I doubt the miracle of answered prayer and keep taking the disappointments of life as fate and keep talking about my doubts - I'm simply tell the world, "I don't believe in God!" Don't ever say your faith is weak. No. Talk about the power of God. Talk about His might and ability to answer prayer!

The Lord has shown us in nature that He exists. He has given proof that He communicates to us through nature. Now we can take any of the 3,573 promises He has made and on the basis of His love, we can

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know that He will fulfill each one. It may not be fulfilled in the exact way we might want it to be fulfilled, but because we know that He loves us, we can relax in the fact that He will answer it the very best way, and in the way that we would want it to be fulfilled if we could see the end from the beginning.

I have no business to prescribe how God should answer my prayer. This would be presumption. I found through my study at that same time, that God reserves the right to answer my prayer according to His choosing - not mine. I had read the text in the book of Jeremiah 33:3, "Call upon me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not." You see, God says that He will surely answer our requests, but He will answer them in the way that He sees best. Isaiah 42:16, "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known."

I used to say to the Lord, "Lord, as I go down the highway of life and I come to a fork in the road, and I turn to the right, let such and such a thing happen. If it does happen then I'll know I should do so and so. If it doesn't happen then I know I must take the other fork in the road." Have you ever done that? This was the way I used to bargain with the Lord. I thought I really had it made. But I didn't have it made at all. Because when I got to the fork, it wasn't a fork, but rather it was five-points! Now what? That's when I had to go to Jeremiah 33:3 and trust that the Lord would show me what to do, plain and simple. The Lord assured me He would answer my prayer but not necessarily my way. I must not lay down the ground rules for answered prayer. When I finally saw this, I was so happy and satisfied. My vision and wisdom are so limited that I can't see all the possibilities - and God can see them all.

One day I walked into a room and found my little daughter putting a razor blade in her mouth. She hadn't closed her mouth. I wondered what to do. Knowing that she mimicked me so often (that's why I was often ashamed of her), I smiled broadly and opened my mouth wide. She did the same. I walked toward her and gently I lifted the blade out of her mouth and when it was out I said, "It will cut you all to pieces!" Immediately she closed her mouth tight. She thought it was something good to eat - perhaps candy or something. Daddy knew better!

When you and I say, "I must have it this way," remember our Father knows best! He doesn't want to give us something that will hurt us and cut us all up. A lady, whose husband was in the army said, "O God, I demand that You bring my husband home to me safe and sound." God did bring him home, but how often she wished she might have asked for God's will to be done. This once kind, loving, sweet husband, came home a wretch. With bitter tears she realized that to demand of God is often to receive something we don't want. How important that we understand this basic rule of life.

Like a little child - with the faith of a little child we are to come to God and say, "I know that You will fulfill this promise because You have promised. I believe You are fulfilling this promise, because You cannot lie. Thank You for having fulfilled this promise, because You love me."

Romans 8:32 says, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things." Don't you see, God gave His best - would He withhold from us that which is of lesser value? God loves us and He is anxious to answer our prayers in His best way, and at the best time.

While I was talking to the college students and answering their questions I presented to them the things you have just read. Then I said that there was one more thing I was anxious to share with them. I asked them, "How many of you believe in the Bible?" They all raised their hands. Then I encouraged them to say it out loud. I asked them to take the Bible in their hands and say, "I believe Your Word." This, you see, is pouring faith over His Word.

Then, the next thing to do is to open the Word to a promise. It may be Philippians 4:19. You may be in need of financial help. God can and WILL respond. He has promised. And since we believe the Bible, we

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can believe His promise. Doesn't that make sense? And since I believe the promise, we can say, "I believe, Lord, that You are fulfilling it."

We simply use the A, B, C's of prayer. A is "Ask..." Matthew 7:7; B, is believe. Say, "I believe." Mark 11:24; C, is to claim and then we are to return thanks to God that we have received. This is receptive prayer. Most Christians are praying prayers of commitment, instead of prayers of reception. They are saying, "Lord, forgive my sins if it be Thy will . . ." That's a shame! We don't have to pray a prayer of commitment for the Lord to forgive our sins. He has already promised to do this through His Son, Jesus Christ. I can pray a prayer of reception and say, "You promised to forgive me of my sins and cleanse me. I thank You for having done it!"

I can claim from God, wisdom. I don't have to ask for it if it is His will. He has promised to give it to me if I ask. So when I ask for it, then I must believe He has given it to me and then thank Him for having given it to me. This is the prayer of reception.

"We thank Thee, Lord for being our Savior. We thank Thee that when we come to Thee Thou wilt give us power to become the Sons of God if we believe on Your name. We ask Thee for any heart who is not now Thy son or daughter, but wishes to be, and quietly in his heart says, 'forgive me for my sins'. Make that one Thy son or daughter just now. We believe Thou art doing it as he or she believes it, and we thank Thee and receive it through Jesus Christ, our Lord, amen.