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Legitimately Making God Real in Our Lives

By Freddy Davis

Today I want to get a little bit personal in a way that I virtually never do. I want to open myself up and express something that shows a weakness in my own personal worldview beliefs, but one that virtually EVERY believer also struggles with. It is my hope that understanding this struggle from a worldview perspective will help you as you deal with the same struggle in your life. You see, living out a biblical worldview involves more than what most people think.

What Is the Problem?

From the earliest days of my Christian walk, the apostle Paul's lament in Romans 7:14-25 has haunted me. For me, and I believe every Christian, trying to live up to the expectations God has for us is a struggle. And this is not just a simple struggle to DO what God wants us to do, but to BE the person He wants us to be. I desperately want to be "sold out" to God and have no inhibitions when it comes to expressing my faith out in the world. Paul expressed the struggle this way:

14 For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. 15 For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. 16 But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good. 17 So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. 18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. 19 For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not

want. 20 But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.

21 I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. 22 For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, 23 but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. 24 Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.

The issue at hand relates to the sin nature that is part and parcel of our existence as human beings. Adam and Eve left us this legacy when they disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden. That sin nature is the source of the anguish Paul expressed in the passage above, and is the source of our own struggles with sin.

So on a personal level, what do I struggle with that is similar to the anguish Paul expressed?

- Committing sins when I don't want to commit sins.
- Thinking sinful thoughts when I don't want to think sinful thoughts.
- Not speaking up for the truth of the gospel when others are speaking up for false beliefs.
- Not intentionally engaging and opposing the evil in society when I know it is hurting people and society.
- Not sharing the gospel message when there is an opportunity.
- Not consistently experiencing the presence of God in my life because of various distractions.

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- Not joyfully and continuously seeking to be obedient to the revealed will of God in my life.

So How Do We Solve the Problem?

As with much in life, it is one thing to identify a problem, but often quite another to actually do something about it. That is certainly the case when it comes to overcoming the struggles associated with our sin nature. In spite of the fact that we don't want to sin, and struggle not to, we do it anyway – just like Paul.

But, we are not without hope. In spite of the fact that we are tormented by our sin nature, as Christians we also have the Holy Spirit living in us. That provides for us both the power and the will to become increasingly consistent in our faith life if we decide that is the direction we want to take our lives. This is the very essence of the sanctification element of our salvation process.

As I think about what is necessary to deal with this problem in my life, there are several things that immediately come to mind:

- I have to come to a place where I "don't care" what other people think.
- I have to come to a place where I live in the presence of God.
- I have to come to a place where doing God's will is more important to me than my personal will.

But How Do We Get to That Place?

There are, of course, various ways people approach dealing with how to express their Christian faith out in the world.

- Willpower - Some people attempt to will themselves into a right relationship with God. For them, it is a matter of duty, and they form a habit of doing things that are as-

sociated with having a personal relationship with God. There is nothing wrong, of course, with exercising our will in the pursuit of our relationship with God. In fact, that is a very important part of it. But if our effort is purely based on a sense of duty, the personal element of relationship will be lacking.

- Legalism - Some people attempt to "do all the right things" just because those are the rules. Again, this creates a situation where it may appear to someone from the outside that a relationship with God exists, but where the actual personal element of a relationship does not.
- Boldness - Still other people just "buck up" and blurt out the truths of their Christian faith, and they do it purely as a reaction. Again, there is nothing wrong with training yourself to boldly express your Christian faith, but it is important that the personal aspect of the relationship with God does not get set aside in the process. It is certainly possible to be bold based purely on a thoughtless reaction.

But none of these things really solves the problem of our struggle to experience a truly personal relationship with God in daily life. In fact, just the opposite. A relationship with God is an intimate personal interaction, not a work that we do. You don't engage a relationship using willpower. You don't engage a relationship based on legalism. You don't engage a relationship by being bold. You engage a relationship by interacting with a person on an intimate, personal level. There is no pretense.

So how do we do that? How can we engage a personal relationship with God on an intimate personal level when we are material creatures and he is a purely spiritual person? A lot of people struggle even conceiving how to bridge that gap. Well, the reason we

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can do it is because we, too, are spiritual persons. We may be housed in a material body, but the essence of our personhood is spiritual. We can personally engage God because He is a person and we were created in His image as persons.

Many people never think about the actual nature of our human relationships, but even our interaction with other human beings is essentially a spiritual encounter. We do it from the platform of a physical body, but the essence of our relationships are all spiritual. All relationships involve self-conscious thoughts that don't even have a physical basis.

So, what is the process?

1. We begin by recognizing that our spiritual interaction with God is not simply a subjective experience. God is an objectively real person that we can know in an objectively real personal relationship. The relationship is genuinely real – with a real person. Nothing after this will make any sense if you don't get this one.

2. We must then make a decision. Are we willing to engage that relationship based on His requirements or not? Many people want God, but are not willing to allow their lives to be "transformed by the renewing of their minds." What is required is that we intentionally set aside our self will and begin to live life based on His will.

3. Once we have made the decision to allow Christ to be LORD of our lives, we must work to become increasingly aware of God's actual presence in us. When we invite Christ into our lives, He actually, literally, enters into us by the Holy Spirit. He lives in our bodies as an objectively real person.

4. Once we become truly aware of His presence in us, we must increasingly converse with Him about vari-

ous elements of our life. That is called prayer, and it involves much more than simply asking Him for things. He is a person that we interact with in a personal relationship, not a vending machine that spits out prizes for us when we say the magic words. We must communicate with God in the same way we communicate with fellow human beings.

5. When that kind of relationship with God is real to us, we become increasingly bold (not obnoxious) with our speech and actions as we live out our faith in daily life. It becomes a natural thing to do because God is real to us.

6. Unfortunately, in spite of our desire to unwaveringly live out our relationship with God in daily life, there still are times when we fail – in the things we think, say, and do. But when we fail, we can't just wallow in our misery. We need to acknowledge it, ask God's forgiveness, then immediately get back on the right path.

As Christians, what do we really want? We want God to be 100% real to us. And when that happens, we have no doubts about His presence with us, and we increasingly express God in every part of our life. It is not a matter of mere intellectual knowledge, or feelings of God's nearness. It is a matter of "knowing that we know."

You must, of course, have a level of intellectual knowledge, because you can't act on what you don't know. You will also have personal experiences of God's presence because that is the natural result of being in relationship with Him. But there is one more thing that must also be present – something that is too often missing in many Christian's lives. The other something is total, complete confidence that our knowledge and experience represent actual reality. When we have that, God is

100% real to us, and we are able to come to a place where we have no doubts, and a willingness to live out our faith appropriately in every circumstance of life. That is the ultimate result of having a genuine biblical worldview. And that is the bottom line of what MarketFaith Ministries is all about.

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