

Bible studies Fresh Start with Jesus –2015

Based on “How to Live a Holy Live”

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1 Following Jesus: Growth through trial and error

Being upfront, I want to begin today with a number of questions and you may respond by hand:

- Have you ever fallen down?
- Where you ever tripped by somebody else?
- Did you ever hurt yourself during those moments?
- Did you ever had the feeling you wanted to stay down?

Again some question, but now a little more personal. You can answer by raising your hand if you'd like:

1. Who has accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior?
2. Who wants to follow Jesus with all of his/her heart?
3. And how has that been going till now? Easy breeze, troubled times are over?

1.1 Holiness and setbacks

When you've chosen for Jesus then you're called holy. Holy means being set aside, having a special position in life and thereafter. Choosing for Jesus means you've become a child of God. Holy means having a special place in this world, with the identity of being a child, a child of God. That's not always easy. The world is often a place far away from God. Not caring about relationships and getting to know each other. Instead anger, grief, frustration. It looks often easier to return to that world and accept to live with those emotions instead of choosing to follow Jesus and address those emotions. So we can have setbacks. Turning back to the things we used to dealing with, by our self, looking for answers and solutions.

Today I want to address this with you and see what the Bible has to say and offer regarding this. Discussing setbacks and getting back on your feet with hope and strength to carry on.

First part that I want to read is about Elijah. But first a short introduction to get a picture about what was going on at that moment in Elijah's life.

Elijah is the ONLY prophet in the whole of Israel that wants to serve God with all he's got. He's facing an army of prophets and the king and queen that want to follow Baal, a fake God from the nations around them. Set aside in a world that does not want to know about God and do whatever feels fit to them.

Talking about being holy, being set aside for God.... All alone in the whole world...

At that moment God intervenes. A beautiful story about the sacrifice on Mount Carmel. 2 bulls, 2 groups of prophets (Elijah versus 450 prophets of Baal), 2 altars, 1 dry 1 soaking wet (3 times soaked in water). God shows his power and all 450 prophets of Baal are killed and all Israelites present pronounce God as their only God and king. And Elijah gets the power from God to run the whole way to Jizreel, 40 miles away, outrunning the king on his horse and carriage.

Complete victory!

And that's where our story starts today. Let's read 1 Kings 19:1-18...

1.2 Setbacks due to lack of trust (faith)

Such a big victory and again resistance... Elijah had done exactly what God asked him to do, God had shown his strength and power and everybody confessed that God was the only God for them. And then the queen gives the order to kill him. Elijah lost it all, what else should he and God have done more?!?? Discouraged by this setback Elijah travels into the desert and lays himself down to die. In

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vers 4 we read: But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree; and he requested for himself that he might die, and said, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers." ...

God strengthen him and still he runs off to the mountain of God, to hide and wait for it all to end.

Reading in vers 9: Then he came there to a cave and lodged there; and behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and He said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

On which Elijah replies wiht: He said, "I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away."

What going on? Why is Elijah so depressed up till the point he wants to die. Any thoughts?

Apparently he lost his trust in God. Like his fathers for him. He's down and desperate.

Do you know that feeling? Giving it your all, put all your trust in God and still.... It looks like it's never enough, whatever you do in the end it always fails. Like you're on your own and whatever you do it turns out in another way that you thought or hoped. Why even put you trust in God? Why not turn back, say goodbye and return to what you've always known? Losing your trust because all the setbacks overwhelm you.

There's another side to losing your trust. Losing your trust because of setbacks caused by our selfs. By being disobedient to God doing the things that are bad for us (lie, steal, cheat) in the meanwhile doing harm to others by our actions. Losing your trust because you get disappointed in yourself. Even though we do all we can, knowing what Gods asks from us, we make those mistakes over and over again....

Setbacks that causes us to loose trust in ourselves and if we lost it, if we know how bad we did, what will God not think of us...???

So both these forms of setbacks can cause us to neglect our relationship with God. Taking a distance because we think we're not good enough for God.

During this study I want to address both of these forms, look at these types of setbacks that can cause us to lose faith in God. Who do you deal with this and can we prevent this?

Ther's a Dutch saying that goes: Vertrouwen komt te voet en gaat te paard. (trust comes on foot and goes by horse) Which means gaining somebodies trust goes very slow, but you can lose it very fast.

1.3 Impact on your spiritual life due to lack if faith

First I want to address the lack of faith. What happens if we have not enough of something, when you lack something?

What happens to plants when they lack water? Or your care is has not enough motor oil? The plans will dry out and die. Same thing goes for your car, the motor will run dry, burn up and brake down (die).

What happens if we have a lack of faith in a person?

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You don't listen so closely anymore to their advice. His words do not hold so much value for you anymore, especially compared to the words of others. You spend less and less time with the person, don't talk so much with them anymore and eventually you'll stop meeting all together, maybe even actively avoiding the person...

Lack of faith causes us to dry up. Relationships will cease to grow and eventually they'll die.

Our relationship with God works just like that. If we lose faith in God you run the risk that you don't talk so much with Him anymore (prayer). You don't listen as carefully as you would use to do (prayer and bible reading) and eventually you skip your moments of interaction (prayer, bible reading, visiting the church services and church activities all together). In the end the contact will cease to exist, because we even actively avoid it.

Spiritually we dry up until you eventually die. Once you started with such a beautiful relationship with Jesus but all the setbacks caused you to lose faith and give up...

1.4 How to handle setbacks from the outside

How do you regain your faith when it's damaged and is in need of repair?

Let's take an even closer look to how this works between people.

Just like between people faith then be regained by the one who lost it and can be given back to the one that got hurt and damaged. But how?

When somebody loses faith then there are always two people involved. The one who was damaged, hurt and lost his faith and the one that got the faith in him lost.

Faith can be restored for both of them and require the following two things:

- 1. *Actively seek the relation. Talk to each other***
- 2. *Restore the faith by actions***

Take a look at the relation first. Without one of the parties wishing for recovery it won't work. You need to actively keep meeting, keep looking out for each other to find moments to talk with each other.

Enabling the one in whom the faith was lost what happened that caused the other to lose faith and giving the other the opportunity to tell what went wrong and caused the faith to get damaged.

Through the conversation by talking and listening the way can be opened up for the next step: recovery through deeds. Showing that it's not only words and good intentions but real longing to restore the faith.

Now let's take a look how this worked between God and Elijah.

Having his life committed in the service of God Elijah had seen many miracles and experienced many miracles himself through his own hands. He was closer to God than anyone in Israel at that moment. So you can say he had a fairly close relationship with God. But even though he had seen God's deeds from close by and he knew he could trust God, Elijah got discouraged by setbacks and lost his faith.

The first thing that Elijah does is running away to seek some rest and to talk to God. Elijah looks for God to talk to him. Maybe not with the words we would expect (O Lord take my life...) but he lets God know that he's had it, is discouraged and lost his faith.

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After listening to Elijah God reaches out in action. He gives what Elijah needs most at that moment: food. And God makes sure he eats enough so He even wakes Elijah for a second round. The food was so good it gave Elijah the strength to go on through the desert for 40 days and nights, by foot! And still, Elijah has not totally restored his faith and decides to hide again, hiding from the world around him.

This time it's God that seeks the relationship and comes to Elijah with the words: "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

And Elijah responds in words telling God what bothers him. In verse 9 we read: He said, "I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away."....

And God responds by telling Elijah to step out: So He said, "Go forth and stand on the mountain before the Lord." And God showed Himself to Elijah. Later on about the way how he did this but first: God showed Himself to Elijah to have the conversation and restore Elijah's faith in Him. Come out and talk to me.

And again God asks Elijah what's bothering him and Elijah responds with the same words: "I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away."....

Eventhough God already knows what's going on in Elijah's heart He start the conversation so Elijah can express Himself. Apparently God knows that it is necessary for us to speak out so He can then show by deeds that we can trust Him and put our faith in Him. And how for Elijah....

God sends the wind, so powerfull that it cracks and destroys the rocks of the mountain. Secondly he sends an earthquake and this one would probably not be any lesser in force. And lastly God sends fire. But in none of these things God showed Himself. He used these elements of nature to show his almighty power to Elijah to show that He controls the wind, earth and fire. Showing that He's maker and ruler over all the elements and that Elijah can build on that to regain his faith. And that's not all, to top it off, God shows Elijah His plans with Israel to restore His position. All these deeds, showing His power and plans to Elijah, gave Elijah the strength to restore his Faith in God and go forth doing as Gods asked Him to do.

To restore faith it's important to show it by deeds that you're reliable and worthy to be given the faith and that's exactly what God does here. And not only then, He still says we can find Him and that He wants to show us his mighty deeds so we can know we can trust Him, put our Faith in Him. And as we good see in this bible part God has multiple ways of showing how powerful and caring He is and wants to be for you and me!

Elijha steps out when he hears the soft breeze, a gentle blow. He directly knew that it was God and that God wanted to show Himself in that way to him. Not all powerful and with great might but with a soft, cooling and reinsuring breeze...

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So when we encounter setbacks and start to lose our faith there's one important thing to do: Keep actively working on your relationship with God. Seek Him, tell Him what's bothering you and... keep listening. God won't let go! He will always keep talking to you asking what's wrong. God always wants to restore His relationship with you. From big and powerful actions to a soft breeze. The solution to restoring your faith in God is talking to God seek the conversation with Him. God will always answer you and He will always show you how big He is and that He wants to take care of you. He'll show you his plans including His plans with you!

1.5 Setbacks from the inside out

Together we've read about Elijah and how God showed him his loving care (food) power and plans so Elijah was enabled to restore his faith in Him. But what if it's the other way around? What if something is not done unto us but cause by us? Something that caused damage to our relation with God and others around us?

I want to take a look at this using another event from the Bible. Let's read Matthew 26:69-75

So... Jesus was just beaten up condemned to a horrifying death and Peter goes out doing what he was just been warned for: Denying that he knows and loves Jesus. Not once but THREE times! What if this was you? You know something is not good to do and still you do it. You failed every step of the way. Jesus warned Peter that this would happen and still he let it happen. Jesus even asked at the very first moment to leave everything behind and follow Jesus which he did but apparently Peter couldn't follow through...

Exactly at the moment that Jesus would have needed it the most showing that he was loved by his followers no matter what consequences. NO, No, no I don't know Him I don't know who he is...

This can happen to us as well. We know Gods law we know what God really wants (our heart) and still we fail day in and day out. Quite a "good" example of real believers of Jesus what will He not be thinking of us? We're probably not good enough because I'll make the same mistakes over and over again so I will never get it right. And before long you stop talking to God move away back to your live as you knew it before.

Do you recognize this feeling, ever experienced this?

Let us continue reading in John 21:1-19

We just read a part of the gospels where Jesus was resurrected and already shown himself to Peter. After Peter's denial a cap was created between him and Jesus in the relationship. Being called to be a fisherman of man he lost his faith and went back to being a fisherman of fish. His old familiar live. But God did not let go! Jesus comes up to Peter! And asks him three times whether Peter loves Jesus or not. Moved till tears Peter responds with "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." So you know how much regret I have for what I did and how much I want to follow you and that I want to give my all for this! And apparently that was what Jesus was looking for and the relationship is restored. Jesus gives Peter the assignment to tend his sheep and also tells his plans with his live (versus 18 and 19).

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So whatever you do how bad it was God does not let go! In 1John 1:9 en 1John 2:1-2 we also read this:

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

“My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.”

Whatever we do we can always go back to Jesus confess our sins and He will forgive us and restore us. Jesus knows our heart and what we feel and how we think. God longs for a relationship with us and He will never let go. SO DON'T LET GO YOURSELF!

We do not need to earn His trust. His grace enables us to keep building and restoring our relationship with Him thanks to Jesus.

Of course God asks us to change our deeds and do what He would like us to do: Love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and your neighbor as yourself.

Like God will show us that we can put our faith in Him He also shows and lets us know that He will never let go!

1.6 How to prevent losing your faith

Like the Dutch saying says: Vertrouwen komt te voet en gaat te paard. (trust comes on foot and goes by horse) (Which means gaining somebody's trust goes very slow, but you can lose it very fast.) It's easy to lose your faith and it takes a lot of time to regain it.

There's another saying that goes like this: Voorkomen is beter dan genezen. (It's better to prevent than to heal) Would it then not be better not to lose faith at all? Would it not be great if that's possible? Whatever happens, whatever setback, whatever we do we do not lose our faith in God? Is this even possible that we can prevent setbacks turning into lack of faith?

Not every setback is the same. A difference of opinion with a colleague of whom you thought you were in agreement, being lied to by somebody who thought you could trust, losing of a loved one up till the things you brake yourself (little white lie, not keeping your promises, etc). One setback is heavier and more difficult to cope with than the other. One thing is for sure: everybody will encounter setbacks and challenges in their lives. God Himself tells us so for instance in 1 Peter 1:6: “...even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials,...” So how can it be that there are people who can keep their faith in God through all they endure? Stretching from serious illness to death around them? Are they better than us do we not have enough faith?

No, they're not better, they searched and got the reinsurance from God that whatever would happen they can trust Him that He will make it turn out for the best. They've learned and experienced that. Just like Elijah God showed His power and love to them so they knew and know they can trust Him.

This does not mean that they're immune for setbacks. Setbacks even though very small can have a huge negative impact in our lives and our faith.

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And everybody including us have endured setbacks we'd rather never seen. So you cannot prevent setbacks but you can prevent a setback turning into loss of faith in God. God shows us very clear in His word how we can do this. He tells us how can grow in faith. Lets read 1 Peter 1:13-20

1.6.1 Growing in Faith: Dedication and focus

Jesus teaches us that we can grow in faith and that through that growth we can learn how to cope with setbacks so it does not have a (big) negative impact on our faith.

Growing in faith means that we grow in the knowledge and experience that God will take care of us protect us and will do whatever is necessary to make us whole, how intended it to be.

So we can grow in faith, learn and experience that we can trust God and in such a way that setbacks won't have such a big impact on you anymore. This is a process which you need to actively take part in. In the church of the Nazarene we call this holiness. Growing to become more like Jesus and gain more and more a steady faith in God.

Like Elijah close and direct relations had with God and experience Him from close by, so can we. Through Jesus we are now able to build our relationship with God again and we received new grace so we can become God child when we accept Jesus as our Lord, Savior and Shepherd.

Peter gives us clear handles how to grow, how we can get closer to Jesus even though we make mistakes. Peter shows us that we can grow closer to Jesus via a clear focus and dedication (active handling).

1.6.1.1 Growing in Faith: Focus on Jesus

Peter states in 1 Peter 1:13 "Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." So he says: keep you focus on Jesus. Like Paul says in Hebrews 12:1-4:

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, **fixing our eyes on Jesus**, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin;

We need to keep our eyes on Jesus because He's our salvation through his dead and resurrection (his grace).

1.6.1.2 Growing in Faith: Build your relation with Jesus

Peter compares the life of a believer with that of a human: we start out as a baby and grow when eating the right nutritious food: the Bible. Like a baby having a more then healthy hunger and thirst which we satisfy by reading the Bible. If we read the Bible in that manner we will be fed and grow and become spiritual grownups. Understanding who God wants to be for you; how He loves you and what He wants us to grow into: a follower of Jesus with an active relationship so He can use you to reach out to the people around you.

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1.6.1.3 Growing in Faith: Building your relationship with fellow believers

Peter states clearly that we need to act lively and have an active role in building Gods Kingdom as building blocks of that Kingdom. Together we will form the church where Jesus name is lifted high and His name is praised around the world! In 1 Peter 2:4-5 he says:

And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, 5 you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

And we also read about this in Ephesians 3:14-21:

14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, 16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, **17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.**

20 Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, 21 to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

Only with our fellow believers in Jesus Christ we will be able to comprehend how great God is and how deep and wide Jesus love is for us. We need to help each other to grow and encourage each other. Like Hebrews states we need to use the lives of witnesses of faith that lived in the Bible as an example for our own lives: Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

In that way we can now also encourage each other, pray together, worship together and study the Bible together. Growing along the way in Faith and an active live with Jesus.

1.7 Growth through trial and error - Conclusion

Live is often difficult full of challenges and questions. If we chose Jesus as our savior and shepherd it may even look to become even more difficult at the beginning because we start a whole new growth process. This growth process isn't easy whether we get challenges and setbacks from the outside or we make mistakes ourselves. If we're not careful then we run the risk to lose our faith in Jesus due to all these setbacks. Getting the feeling that our life with Jesus started so beautiful but got quickly complicated.

During this Bible study we read about how Elijah and God handled with setback caused by others and how Peter and Jesus handled setbacks from the inside out. We read how we can grow to prevent that we get discouraged through these setbacks and prevent that we lose our faith because of these setbacks: It's important to keep our eyes on Jesus and actively build our relationship with Jesus and fellow believers.

A short summary of the most important lessons :



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- Keep looking for God! Even if you have doubt in your heart about God or yourself. You will find God and He will show you through his deeds how big He is and that He wants to take care of you!
- God **NEVER** doubts you! Whatever you do and whatever happened if you repend of your since He will always take you back. He will always keep talking to you!
- Build your spiritual live actively by reading the Bible, prayer and meeting with fellow believers in Jesus to prevent discouragement through all the setbacks in life.