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*Saint Mark's Church  
Sunday School*

## **Faith in the Spiritual Path**

### **Code: 10/SP / 2**

#### **1. Aim**

How to draw near to God, through our way of life. To realize that the Spiritual Path requires a constant and continual struggle to grow and perfect ourselves in Him.

**2. Verses:** Ephesians 2:8,9; Matt 25:21,23

#### **3. Resources**

Play the following you tube link:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ag6WE\\_82Q8&feature=fvw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ag6WE_82Q8&feature=fvw)

This You tube is on Fr Anthony Lazarus who has been living in solitude on the Mountain of St Anthony's Cave, Egypt for several years. He is Australian, and worked as a uni lecturer teaching literature and philosophy. He was an atheist for many years.

After his mother was diagnosed with terminal cancer and died, he abandoned his life in Australia, and set out in quest of God and freedom. His pilgrimage eventually led him to live as a Coptic monk under the guidance of HH Pope Shenouda III.

#### **4. Lesson**

In order to examine the characteristic of Faith in the Spiritual Path, it is important to first understand what is meant by the Spiritual Path.

##### The Spiritual Path

The spiritual path is not just a path of abstaining from, or abandoning sin. To not engage in sin, is only a passive path. However the Spiritual Path is a path requiring continual growth, and seeking perfection (in imitating Jesus Christ). This is a positive path, a path of unceasing walking, developing and advancing at all times towards our goal which is to be in Christ. For this reason, there is no such thing as a particular point in the Spiritual Path, at which we can just stop. The Spiritual Path requires constant growth. Repentance by itself is not enough. It has to be a life of holiness which is befitting for the believers of that path.

How can we begin this journey on the Spiritual Path? It is a long journey - for who can attain perfection?

You must begin the journey by taking the first step. The first step is the longest, and the most difficult step in the journey. You must taste God's word, and the feel the joys of

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having the Kingdom of Heaven in your heart and mind (as though living Heaven on Earth). You must have the fear of God in your heart. This then leads to the love of God, and a refusal to allow any obstacle of this world to separate you from Him.

To what extent do we love God? We are commanded to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might” (Deut 6:5). We must therefore aim for our whole heart to love God. This means not allowing ourselves to be distracted by other causes or worldly desires.

### Faith

In this day and age of freedom, and importance of civil and religious liberties, there are many varying spiritual paths, and pursuits in the spiritual path. An atheist can be in search of spiritual happiness and spiritual enlightenment; or an Islamic terrorist can seek to kill others in pursuit of his or her spiritual path. For this reason, the role of ‘Faith’ in the Spiritual Path is crucial. Faith forms the anchor by which we can be propelled towards our goal in our Spiritual Path.

Today, many faiths teach that the meaning to life, or the path to spiritual enlightenment is to love yourself, to live for the moment, or to go with whatever works or makes you happy – this might include following your peers who are engaging in evil deeds.

The elements of Faith for us as Christians begins with a belief or acceptance in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. However there is more to it than this. True faith in the spiritual path would necessitate that in our search for the Truth we seek to gain more knowledge and experience of God. There can therefore be varying degrees in our faith.

### Degrees of Faith in the Spiritual Path

The relationship which forms the basis of faith can be a direct, or an indirect relationship. For example, if I believe in someone, I trust him. When I have met him, I know him, and have an immediate relationship with him. But I believe in someone indirectly when I do not know him personally, but on the evidence of other people whom I trust they guarantee his trustworthiness.

So there are varying degrees of Faith. You can progress from a lesser to a greater faith, this progress being an endless journey. There is always room for growth and maturity. We could say that one begins with trust based on the reputation. You then proceed to an acquaintance based on your work or career. This then forms into an immediate certainty about the other person when there is a personal meeting or a direct relationship. Such a relationship transforms a simple trust into an absolute surrender of yourself, and offer yourself unconditionally to the other person.

Similarly faith in God can begin with evidence in the people who know Him, and have been permitted to see Him; trust in the testimony of the patriarchs, saints, and the Apostles. It can then proceed to the study of the love which is revealed in the Word of God, and this trust is then transformed into an unconditional surrender of your heart to

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Him when you have a direct and personal relationship with Him. From this point love develops and continues to grow.

A further important element of Faith in the Spiritual Life is faithfulness.

### Faithfulness

It is important to realize that faithfulness in our Spiritual Life will be the criterion of Judgment and the basis of entry into the Kingdom of Heaven. Make no mistake, we will be judged on the merits of our good deeds and our faithfulness:

*“Well done good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord” (Matt 25:21)*

Being faithful in the Spiritual Life, requires being honest in our relationship with God, others, and ourselves. Joseph was a perfect example of this in his temptation with Potiphar’s wife. Being steadfast in our faith and love towards God means that we will not allow any obstacle or sin to separate us in our relationship with God.

## **5. Conclusion**

It is not enough to simply say I am a Christian, or I believe in God. Neither is it enough for us to say that we have abstained from sin, and therefore deserve to enter the Kingdom of God. We are required to live a life of holiness and purity, seeking to learn about God and in turn fall in love with Him. This is not an easy task, but a lifelong journey. Each of us has been given capabilities. It does not matter how big or small these capabilities are, we are required to use them to draw us closer to God.

## **6. References**

1. Characteristics of the Spiritual Path, HH Pope Shenouda III
2. Elements of faith: an introduction to Orthodox theology, Chrēstos Giannaras, Chapter 3

