

EIGHT IMAGES

To Help You Help God
Make Your Faith Grow

By and based on the books of **ROBERT J. CORMIER** www.thefaithkit.org

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THE POWER OF LIGHT

IT WAS A MOST tranquil desert night. Around me my companions were sleeping after a long day's trek.

We were on our way to climb Mount Sinai. We had arrived at the end of the first of a three day trip to reach the mountain. I was keeping watch.

We had been advised to keep a watch. The nomads of Sinai were known to take what they need. Sometimes they were known to take what you need.

To defend our camp, I was armed—with a flashlight.

At the moment, I didn't need it. All was quiet. It was a night to enjoy, a chance to think, to reflect upon the importance of this place in history.

After a time, however, I began to become conscious of a sound coming from the darkness of the desert night. It was a rustling. It came all at once; it stopped; and then it came again.

I was only beginning to pin down the precise direction from which it was coming when suddenly I began to hear more rustling coming from another direction. I was only beginning to zero in on this second source of sound when suddenly more sounds started coming from a third direction. Apparently we were being invaded.

I had to do something. And there was only one thing to do. I waited for the next telling sound, took aim with my flashlight, and fired. There was a man crawling toward our camp. But, the moment the light hit him, he fled. Not following his flight, I now fired in the direction of the second source of sound. Once again I had caught a nomad. Once again the invader fled. Two down, one to go. I fired once more, caught a nomad, and this one I watched run.



How powerful I felt. And how powerful, I thought, is light.

I should not have been surprised. After all, the power of light, of truth, is what our faith is all about. Faith is knowledge that changes the lives of those who possess it.

To believe in heaven frees us from the dread of death, or the need to keep ourselves distracted—never really living—because we cannot face the facts of life.

To believe in heaven frees us from anguish at the death of those we love. Though we may miss them, we know that they have gone to God and are more alive than we are. We also know that one day we will be reunited with them. Knowing that we are not going to lose them, we feel freer to love them while they are here.

To believe in heaven lets us dream. Though all of us have our dreams, the day comes when most people have to admit, if only to themselves, that their dreams are not going to come true. This never happens to people of faith. We know that our dreams are going to come true, the only place they ever could.

Knowing that we were made for divine life, we understand that we were made to want divine life. Presumably, we also understand that no worldly thing could ever fill us. This is the reason that to get one thing is to want another. Therefore, though we can and we should work to make our lives and our world better, we need not suffer over any one thing we do not yet have. We need not anguish over any one problem we have not yet solved. We need not suffer envy.

Not seeking more from things than they can give, we can enjoy the things we do have. Our house does not have to be a heavenly mansion. Our house is not in heaven. But, if we find love there, it can still be a home. The people in our lives do not need to be perfect. No one is perfect. Nonetheless, if the people in our lives are trying, they can still be our companions.

To believe in heaven gives us joy. At the very least, it gives us hope.



To believe in love gives us purpose. We know why we are here. We know what we should do. We know that what we do will make an eternal difference.

If we believe that we are here to grow in love, we love. We are free—free from the fear that we are giving more than others—to live the only kind of life that could ever satisfy us. God would not have made us so that we could ever be happy doing what is wrong. Rather He made us so that we can be happy only when we are doing what is right. This is the reason that if we live selfishly we are never satisfied, no matter how much we have, whereas if we live a life of love we are always satisfied, no matter how little we have.

If to grow in faith and love is our goal, we gain control over our lives. We are always in a position to do what we want most of all. This is not true if fame or fortune is our goal. If something worldly is our goal, we have to hope that the world will cooperate. (Probably it will not.) If, instead, to grow in faith and love is our goal, we can always do what we want, no matter what the world may do. If something goes wrong, we can accept it, and thus our faith will grow. If people offend or disappoint us, we can forgive them, and thus our love will grow.

If we believe in God's plan, we have the best possible reason to accept ourselves for who we are. After all, God's plan for everything is also His plan for each of us. Yes, our life is a struggle, but it is a special struggle that God has given us to form each of us into a special person who will have a place in heaven no one else can fill. Understanding this, we can forgive ourselves for what we cannot yet do or have done and cannot change. No longer do we compare ourselves to others. Indeed, once we recognize that God has put all His love into our making, we can love ourselves for who He made us. This makes possible the sincere love of others.

To believe in God's plan allows us to accept whatever has happened and cannot be changed. We may not yet know why something hard has happened, but we can know that it needed to happen, for the best possible reason. Likewise, to believe in God's plan allows us to accept whatever is happening now and cannot yet be changed.

Since we know that everything that is going to happen—once it has happened and cannot be

changed—will also follow God’s plan, we can live our lives without fear. If we know that a year from now we are going to be where God wants us to be, what’s to fear? If we think the same about our family and friends, we can live without the impossible burden of thinking that everything depends on us. Everything does not depend on us. Everything depends on God. Our job is to do our best, the best we can right now. The rest is up to God and His plan.

To believe in God’s plan gives us peace.

LA BOCCA DELLA VERITÀ



IN ROME, IN the vestibule of the church of *Santa Maria in Cosmedin*, one will find a large marble disk upon which is carved a fearsome face. The mouth is carved all the way through. In fact, the object is known as *La Bocca della Verità*, “the mouth of truth.”

Since many people come to see it, archeologists have studied it, to find what it is. They have discovered that the *bocca* is really an ancient Roman

sewer-cover.

In the Middle Ages, however, the *bocca* was believed to have magic power. It was believed to have the power to make people tell the truth. If a person was suspected of lying, he was brought to the *bocca*, his hand was placed into the mouth, and he was told that if he lied, the mouth

would close... .

As far as we can tell, the *bocca* worked. It made people tell the truth. It made people tell the truth because they didn't make it prove its power. It worked because people didn't try it. In this, the *bocca* is the opposite of our faith which tells the truth when people do try it. It works when we ask ourselves the questions that faith answers, and see how we feel about the answers.

We begin with the most basic question of all:

Where do we come from? Is it possible that everything—the universe out there and also the universe within us—is just here, from nothing, for nothing, and is on its way *to* nothing? Or does it make more sense to us that the world and we were made, made by God?

So why did God make us? Is it possible that we were made for death? Is it possible that we who were made to want life so desperately were given life so that life could be taken away? Or is it not evident that we were made for life, life with God who made us?

Why then are we here, in *this* world? Is it possible that we are here merely to kill time before we go to heaven? Or is it not obvious that we are here for something important? And what is more important than love? And by loving don't we grow in love, and in our likeness to God? And by becoming more like God, aren't we growing in our ability to share His life when finally we see Him face to face? And by this process, isn't God giving us some responsibility for who we are, the chance to become our own person?

So if what we do is so important, why do our lives depend on so much we cannot control? After all, we do not choose our parents, or where we are born, or when, or countless other events that form us as the people we are. Is it possible that God just lets these things happen—that He has left us here at the mercy of luck, or other people's badness, or even our own created weakness? Is it possible that God left us here at the mercy of events that even He does not control? Or, when God made the world, isn't it obvious that He knew what was going to happen? Isn't it clear He had a plan? And if He did plan the events of our lives knowing how we would respond to them, wouldn't this make us the people He wants us to be while at the same time giving us a

role in our own creation?

What do you think?

LA PIETÁ



ALMOST EVERYONE HAS seen at least a picture of it. And almost no one ever notices that Jesus is depicted as a full-grown man while, in order to hold him in her arms, Mary, if she stood up, would be is nineteen feet tall.

You might not have noticed it on your own, but now that it has been pointed out, you see it for yourself.

We can say something similar about the truth of faith. It is not always

noticed right away by everyone on their own. But once it is pointed out, they can see it for themselves.

This is possible because God knew that we would hear about faith from many people, that most would seem sure, and that often they would contradict one another. Therefore, He knew that unless there were some way for us to see the truth for ourselves, faith would not be possible. For this reason, the truth of faith was written into human nature and will be recognized by anyone who looks for it in the right place.

MOMENT OF TRUTH

Rock climbing—the climbing of cliffs—is a little difficult for people to understand. To begin with, they find it difficult to understand why anyone would want to climb cliffs. If they bother to picture the process, they also find it difficult to understand how the equipment helps. In particular, they find it difficult to understand how the rope helps the person in the lead. It's easy to see how the rope might help a person if someone is above him holding it. But how does the rope help the person who has to bring it up?

This is how it works. The person in the lead has the rope attached to his waist. He begins to climb. As he climbs, he looks for cracks into which he will put an “anchor.” An anchor is piece of metal in one of various shapes and sizes. Attached to the anchor is a strap which is itself made of metal or some other strong material. At the other end of the strap is a metal ring (called a “carabiner”) which has a gate that can be opened or closed. Finding a good crack, the leader places an anchor into it so that the anchor will jam as it is pulled downward. Now he snaps the rope at his waist into the ring. Since the other end of the rope is in the hands of another climber, he is now safe.

Of course, once the leader climbs above his anchor, he becomes less safe. And because the farther above it he goes, the farther past it he must fall before it can hold him, climbers wisely place new anchors every few feet.

I learned this lesson the hard way.

It had been an easy climb. I had already gone about fifty feet before putting in my first anchor. Even then I was sloppy about it.

Now I had gone another seventy-five feet and had run into a problem. I had reached something of a fork-in-the-cliff. To my right the going seemed rather difficult—with no hope in sight.



Though the route to my left also appeared quite difficult, it did seem to lead to a wonderfully spacious ledge. To reach it, I would need to stretch my right leg up to a tiny but adequate edge in the rock, haul myself upward, and jump up from there. I could grab the spacious ledge and soon I would have a seat. All would be well.

To be smart, before undertaking this operation, I did put in a second anchor. Thereupon I reached, I stretched, I hauled, I jumped and, to my surprise, there was no ledge to be grabbed. The ledge had been an optical illusion. My hand had come crashing into rock and now I was holding myself up with no more than the pressure of my palm on a bump on a fairly smooth rock wall.

What was worse, the motion of getting myself into this predicament put a tangle in the rope which, pulling the wrong way from the wrong side, let loose the safety anchor I had just put in.

Somehow this unhappy motion also loosed the first safety anchor I had put in. Because both were still connected to the rings, I watched as they rode the rope all the way down to my partner.

I sized up the situation quickly. There was nothing to do but to attempt to return the way I had come—to undo the jump-up which had put me in this predicament. And, as we all know, it is much harder to come down than to go up.

I called down to my partner. “I am in big trouble,” I said, “you’d better get out of the way; there’s no reason to take you with me.” (And, since there wasn’t, he did.)

There I was. But not for long. A person of limited strength, I knew that I would not be able to hold on indefinitely. I had no more than thirty seconds before I would have to do something. I had that much time to make my peace.

“Please God, get me off of this,” I started to say. I considered making a deal. “If You get me off of this, I’ll...” But I couldn’t bring myself to do it. Somehow, at this moment, it came into my mind to ask myself “don’t you believe in heaven?” “If there is no heaven, does it matter if you live?” “I thought you didn’t believe that prayers can change God’s mind.” Ten seconds left,



I thought about it. I decided. I said to God “I accept this” and I jumped.

I beat the odds. And my partner and I now took the other fork and we finished that climb.

But my life was changed. I found out I did believe. And I have never forgotten.

All this happened because I had to decide. This, as it turns out, is how we get faith.

Unfortunately, we resist this decision. We also know that if we decide we do believe, we will have to live differently. We know that we will have to let people see that we believe. This is scary. It seems safer to hang on to a vague faith that asks for little. The problem is, a faith that asks little offers little. It does not give the gifts we get if we really believe.

Therefore, we need to decide. And how do we do that? We look at what faith says. We consider the alternative. We see what makes more sense.

Does it make sense that we are just here—yes or no?

Can it be that we were made for death—yes or no?

Is it imaginable that we are here to just kill time? Isn't it growing in love that makes us greater—yes or no?

When God made the world, did He know what was going to happen—yes or no?

Since, in fact, the truth is clear, what stands in faith's way is our reluctance to decide, to take a stand, and to be faced with the need to live it out.

Of course, properly understood, faith offers so much more than it asks.

Look, see, decide.

SPIKES

As mountains go, Mt. Washington in New Hampshire is not very high. In the winter, however, it is a very tough climb. This is due to the very high winds that always pound Mt. Washington. In the winter, this results in wind-chill factors that can reach as low as eighty below. Therefore, to climb Mt. Washington in the winter, one has to go prepared.

We went prepared:

We had our special climbing shoes.

We had our special climbing socks—three pairs. These were made of wool, the only material that keeps you warm even when wet.

We had our special climbing long underwear made of the latest space-age materials.

We had our special climbing pants—made to cover the kidneys—also made of wool.

We had our wind pants—to prevent the heat from being drawn out of our special climbing pants.

We had our special climbing undershirts—also made of space-age material.

We had several wool sweaters.

Over it all, we had jackets filled with the down from geese.

On our heads, we had helmets made of more space-age material.

Over the helmets, we had hoods filled with down.

We had special climbing mittens.

We had “shells” to protect the mittens from the wind.

We even brought our snow-shoes.

Unfortunately, Mt. Washington is not climbed with snow-shoes. It is climbed with the spikes that climbers call “crampons.” Those we had left home.

We did try anyway. But it didn’t take long for us to realize that we weren’t going anywhere and so we went home.

The next year we brought the crampons and we climbed Mt. Washington.

We had not been very smart.

God would not have been so foolish. He would not have brought us into this world without all the equipment that we would need to do the work for which we are here. We are here to participate in our own creation. This we do by growing in the faith that inspires the love that makes us more and more like God, preparing us to share His life forever. For this to happen, therefore, we need to be able to have faith. To have faith, we need to be able to know the truth. Undoubtedly, we were given this power.

Unfortunately, people don’t feel that they have it. They know what they feel but they don’t feel that they know. They don’t feel sure about matters of faith. Still:

They feel, for sure, that the world has come from somewhere.

They cannot feel that they were made for death.

They definitely feel that love is the way.

And they do feel that things happen for a reason. They can hardly feel otherwise.

What they fail to realize is that these feelings are our knowledge of the truth. They are the response of our whole self looking at questions involving the whole of reality. This is how the truth of faith is supposed to be seen.

We can know this because this is all that we have. It is all that anyone has. And God would not have put us here without the power to do the work for which we are here.

Trust—yourself.

FIRST DAY AT THE BEACH

Every year, our first day at the beach involves essentially the same ritual:

We walk out to water's edge. We see where the sand is wet. We venture out. We take our position. We wait.

A wave comes... closer and closer. It crashes before us. The water comes rushing toward our feet. It's cold! We get out.

Okay. We knew it would be cold. We will try again. We walk back out. This time we dig in; this time we will stand our ground. A wave comes... closer and closer. It crashes before us. The water comes rushing toward our feet. It's still cold! But this time we stand our ground. And so another wave comes... and then another.

Slowly but surely we get used to it. Now we venture out a little farther. A wave comes....



Eventually, we get far enough out that there is water covering our feet. We continue to walk out a little farther... and farther... and farther.

Now we are almost waist deep. And now we have a problem. If we continue to wade out slowly, we know that we will be in too deep to be able to get out if a big wave comes. The time has come. Either we jump in or go home.

Now, to jump in makes perfectly good sense. Others have done it; they say the water's fine. We did it last year. We know that we will get used to the water in just a few seconds. Nonetheless, it's still hard to just jump in. We have to make ourselves do it.

A real life of faith starts much the same way.

Faith may begin as we ask ourselves the questions that faith answers, but the proof of faith is in the living. Living faith, we experience the superiority of a life that only faith makes sense of. Living faith provides the ultimate evidence that what we believe is true.

Herein lies a problem. In order to feel sure about our faith, we need to begin to live it before we feel sure. In this sense, we must just jump in.

What do we need to do? Actually, it's quite simple.

To vindicate our faith in heaven, we need to let go. We need to look at anything we thought we absolutely *had* to have and, in the name of our faith in heaven, acknowledge that we don't absolutely have to have it. This is not to say we don't want it, but now we acknowledge that we don't have to have it.

To vindicate our faith in love, we need to love. We need to do something for someone's else sake. We need to give and not worry about getting something in return. To do what is good and not worry whether anyone will notice. To do what is good because it is good.

To vindicate our faith in God's plan, we need to embrace, ourselves and our lives. We need to choose to be ourselves regardless of what others might think. We need to acknowledge what we regret, and accept it as our life. We need to say, "come what may," and mean it.

Just do it. Just jump in.

LIGHTS IN THE SKY

One Summer evening after supper, while it was still light, some friends and I were playing football out on the street in front of my family's home.

Suddenly, in the sky there appeared a bright red dot. About the size of star, it was much brighter and we stopped everything to look at it.

At that very moment, right before our eyes, the dot rapidly expanded into a bright red disk which now covered a sizable portion of the sky. One of my friends fell down at the sight of it.

We had just enough time to exchange looks of confusion and there now appeared a bright blue dot. Moments later, this too became a bright blue disk.

We had just enough time to absorb this latest development when now there appeared a bright green dot. The pattern was becoming predictable—this, too, rapidly expanded to become a bright green disk.

Now my friends' confusion was complete.

But not mine. I had figured it out. It was the end of the world. I had read about it in the Bible.

I had read about how, at the end, there would be lights in the sky, etc. These surely were the lights.

I now insisted that we form a circle and pray.

And so we formed a circle and started to pray—any prayer that anyone knew—when my mother came out to have a look. She had been listening to the radio and had just heard that the Navy had shot up missiles filled with colored dust. It was a test of the winds in the upper atmosphere.

It was not the end of the world. Except for me.

Actually, my friends soon forgot that I had told them that it was the end of the world. I, however, never did. I even remember what I thought. I remember thinking that our prayers were not going to do us much good. After all, we were praying only because we thought that the world was coming to an end. God knew that. God knows us. God knows who we really are. Therefore, if we really want to feel ready to stand before Him, we have to get ready now.

Unfortunately, involving the need to take that first, potentially risky step, the time for faith is never now. We can always find some reason not to do what is risky, especially if there is no one to force us and, because others would rather not be challenged, society tells us not to.

The time for faith is now. Therefore we must make it now. We must recognize that no other time is coming, and that only our decision can give us the greater life we seek.

If what we seek is a greater life, why not now? If not now, when?

TRAPPED

The glory of any childhood is to grow up near a construction site. There is so much to see.

First, the land is cleared by heavy machinery.

The foundations are dug.

The foundations are poured.

The frames go up.

The walls go up.

The houses are enclosed. Now there is something to enter.

We had waited for this moment—the chance to enter a house that was built but not yet occupied. Our chance would come on Saturday.

We tried the front door. Locked. We tried the back door. Locked. We even tried the door at the base of the stairs that went from the backyard down into the basement. That too was locked.

All the doors were locked. But not all the windows. A basement window had been left open. It was a window at ground level that let light down into the basement. We used it to let ourselves down into the basement, needing to hang from the window ledge and let ourselves drop.

Only then, when everyone had dropped down, did we notice that the stairs that would take one from the house into the basement had not yet been completed.



We could not get into the house. We could not get out the way we came in. The window was too high for us to reach. We were too small to lift each other up. Immediately everyone felt the need to go the bathroom. And, of course, there was nowhere to go.

It was ten o'clock. We started to walk around in circles. Time is passing so very slowly.

Eleven o'clock. Now we're getting hungry.

Twelve o'clock. Now we've missed lunch; now we're in trouble with our mothers.

One o'clock. We're going to miss dinner; then we'll really be in trouble.

Two o'clock. How are getting home tonight?

Three o'clock. It's only Saturday; perhaps no one will find us until Monday. This is certainly the worst day of our young lives.

Finally, at about four, after having walked around in circles for what had seemed an eternity, I stopped in front of the door that led to the backyard. It opened with a turn of the knob. It was locked only from the outside.

We could have walked out at any time. We had been trapped all day by nothing.

This, of course, is the tragic true story of many people's whole lives. They feel trapped but they are trapped by nothing. They could escape misery at any time.

All they need to do is think about what our faith says to whatever is wrong, and accept that what faith says is more important than what is wrong. No matter what might be wrong, peace, purpose, and joy are always available.