

**BIG IDEA**

When our faith is tested, and God seems silent, rather than chasing down another way to peace, trust that the one who has been faithful will, once again, be faithful to the end.

**SCRIPTURE**

Exodus 31:18-32:8; John 16:33; Psalm 23

**Confident Faith**—Everything seems to work like we'd hoped: Prayer makes a difference, our obedience to God results in blessings, and we are filled with joy and gratitude. This stage can last a long time and can include a sense of euphoria or 'rightness' about life and our relationship with God.

**Challenged Faith**—Things that worked in the Confident stage seem to have stopped working: Prayer seems unanswered, our obedience doesn't get us anywhere, and doubts grow. This stage can feel like nothing is happening like we are stagnant, or God is far from us. Though it is difficult to keep going, this is always a stage on our faith cycle - not the final destination.

**Living Faith**—Here we have a deep abiding faith that remains strong in most situations: Prayer is essential to my relationship with God, obedience is joyful, doubts come and go, but can't shake us. This stage roots us deeply into the practices that ground us to God, helping us to feel gratitude for the stages of both Confident and Challenged Faith that we've encountered.

- It might be worth pointing out that while Moses was gone that God was at work and preparing a mighty work even when the people did not see it.
- The Israelites weren't looking for a substitute for God; they just wanted something to add on to God. They may have been tired of the silence. They may have been tired of feeling alone in the valley. They may have been looking for something they could grab hold of that would help them get through what they were going through.
- We are all tempted to grab hold of something that isn't God to deaden our times of suffering. That might be alcohol or drugs to numb the pain, inappropriate sexual activity to feel good for the moment, overspending to get an adrenaline rush, overworking because we feel in control and powerful, social media to distract us from our pain, or overeating. Create a judgment-free zone, and don't be afraid to go first. Be open and honest; your vulnerability will set the tone of the group.
- God does not leave us empty-handed. He gives us his Holy Spirit, and he gives us his followers to cling to when we experience trials. We were not created to be alone, and we especially were not designed to travel through the deserts of life alone either. But when we cling to the wrong things, the things of this world, we miss the blessings and promises of God who gives us his peace, his wisdom, and his people. But to cling to God and his people, we need to surrender whatever we may be turning to instead of God.

- “One of the experiences of prayer is that it seems that nothing happens. But when you stay with it and look back over a long period of prayer, you suddenly realize that something has happened. What is most close, most intimate, most present, often cannot be experienced directly but only with a certain distance. When I think that I am only distracted, just wasting my time, something is happening too immediate for knowing, understanding, and experiencing. Only in retrospect do I realize that something very important has taken place. Isn't this true of all the really important events of life? When I am together with someone I love very much, we seldom talk about our relationship. The relationship, is in fact, is too central to be a subject of talk. But later, after we have separated and written letters, we realize how much it all meant to us, and we even write about it.” –From the *Genesee Diary* by Henri J. Nouwen

### REGULAR QUESTIONS FOR YOUR GROUP

How are you doing?

How can we help?

How can we take the next step to be 3C Christ-followers?

Who is someone you can BLESS?