

Date: July 5, 2026 (Pentecost 6)

1. Texts: Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67; Ps. 45:11-18; Romans 7:15-25a; Matthew 11:1-19, 25-30.
2. Subject: discipleship.
3. Topic: the practice of our faith.
4. Aim: encourage.
5. Proposition: "Even the faithful may struggle with the faith."

## OUR HUMAN PREDICAMENT

Even a saint can struggle with living his faith.

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate...I can will what is right, but I cannot do it.<sup>1</sup>

Those are the words of *Saint* Paul. The saint who crafted much of the theology of the New Testament Church struggled with his own faith. That would be like saying St. Peter struggled with his faith—oh. Peter did that too, as his prejudice against the Gentiles proved. Well, it could be like saying St. Augustine struggled with his faith—oh, he did that too.

But I was held back, not by fetters put on me by someone else, but by the iron bondage of my own will. The enemy held my will and made a chain of it and bound me with it. From a perverse will came lust, and slavery to lust became a habit, and the habit, being constantly yielded to, became a necessity. These were the links hanging each to each ... and they held me fast in a hard slavery.<sup>2</sup>

Ok, so it's probably time to come clean about this: everyone struggles with the Christian faith and its practice. Even *saints* struggle with it. Even your own grandparents, parents and children struggled with it. Even your own bishop, clergy and lay readers. There is not one of us who has not struggled with the Christian faith.

We can maybe grasp some of the theology—except for Trinitarianism, possibly. But taking all that Jesus and St. Paul taught and use it to mold our daily

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 7:15, 18b.

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine, *The Confessions*, as quoted by Carolyn Helsel in "workingpreacher.org" "Commentary on Romans 7:15-25a", July 5, 2026

lives just doesn't quite work every time. We end up sounding a lot like St. Paul: "I know what I'm supposed to do. I just can't seem to make it all work."

Each one of us will have our own areas of struggle. It could be prejudice, greed or a hunger for recognition. For some it might be a poor self-image that always looks for approval or an unhealthy relationship with food and drink. Or maybe it'll be relationships inside your own family. Whatever area, we all know enough from the gospel of Jesus Christ to say, "I know what I'm supposed to do. I just can't seem to actually do it."

St. Paul starts with a healthy dose of honesty. He gives up pretending he is strong enough to handle everything. He admits to himself that he can't do it, and certainly can't do it alone.

Then, in an almost desperate state, St. Paul throws himself onto Jesus, begging for help. He hungers to hear God's still, small voice.

It may seem like this a kind of cop-out, an escape as St. Paul waits to hear a voice that will never come. But it is actually a really smart move.

Waiting to hear God's advice means that there will be a delay in his decisions. Paul gives himself time to reflect, to think about the consequences of his decision. Rather than acting on impulse, St. Paul gave himself time to collect himself and to place his decision up against what he knows of the gospel. Rushing ahead into action actually works against reflection. Sure, you may get things done, but a rushed decision is frequently a poorly made decision. Paul gave himself time to breathe, time to put his decision up against his list of divine priorities.

Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!<sup>3</sup>

However—and this is important—Jesus won't necessarily rescue you by the use of miracles. In fact, it is rare that Jesus himself will intervene directly. Instead, Jesus is more likely to use another disciple.

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<sup>3</sup> Romans 7:24-25.

You see, the Christian faith is always a communal faith. The Holy Spirit in whom I was baptized is the same Holy Spirit in which you were baptized. The experience and practice of the Christian faith is always a joint affair.

“Oh,” someone will want to object, “my faith is a personal one.” So is everyone’s. But holding on to faith personally doesn’t mean you hold on to it privately and individually. Privatizing your faith means isolating yourself from the Body of Christ.

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body— Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many.<sup>4</sup>

When you cry out to God for help, resist the temptation to turn inwardly, clinging to a false sense of independence. Independence is a lie and a trick of our egos. Rather than separating yourself from the Body of Christ, reach out in faith for the comfort and support an other disciple can offer.

So, when Paul cried out in spiritual agony, Christ’s first line of relief would likely have been other disciples, perhaps Timothy, Luke or Onesimus. When we find ourselves in need of support, it is from within the faithful that we seek it.

This isn’t easy. It takes courage. Finding the support you crave will mean letting go of your spiritual independence and pride. But there will be a mature believer to whom you can turn in honesty and trust.

It seems that the first step in this process must be an honest appraisal such as St. Paul showed. He recognized that he couldn’t do it all. He was honest with himself and admitted that he needed help. Human nature complicates the understanding and practice of the Christian faith. We really do know what we should be doing for the sake of the faith, but we frequently find ourselves not

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<sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:12-14.

fully capable of doing it. We often find ourselves standing in St. Paul's shoes: "Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

We do give thanks to God, for he has created the means of dealing with our human contradictions from within the Body of Christ.

AMEN.