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A close-up photograph of a man with dark, curly hair, a beard, and glasses, wearing a blue textured shirt. He is looking down at a baby who is laughing joyfully. The baby is wearing a white shirt with a blue pattern of small rockets. The background is a blurred outdoor setting, possibly a beach or park, with a body of water visible in the distance.

Faithful Father



Inside

2021: Faithful



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Thy Faithfulness!

F *faithfulness* is one of the Bible's great words. It reminds me of marriage, a union of love sustained by mutual commitment and loyalty. *Faithful* is a relational word; relationships do not last without faithfulness. The biblical word for this relationship is *covenant*. There are human covenants like marriage, but in the Bible the crucial marital relationship is the covenant between God and His people. It's in this context that the Bible speaks so movingly of God's faithfulness.

When God announced a new covenant with Israel through Jeremiah, He poignantly recalled the earlier covenant when "I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them" (31:32). Where Scripture celebrates God's faithfulness most clearly, a sharp contrast with His unfaithful covenant partner is often nearby.

Just before God proclaimed His nature to Moses on Mount Sinai as "abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Exodus 34:6, ESV), Israel made a golden calf. After forty years of wandering for unbelief, she was told that the Lord is "the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments" (Deuteronomy 7:9). We can recite the loved confession "The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases . . . great is your faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22, 23, ESV), but it was made in exile. Nehemiah sums up God and Israel's story well: "You have dealt faithfully, but we have done wickedly" (Nehemiah 9:33).

The new covenant is the good news that God remains faithful despite us, that in Jesus the faithful Father is revealed and our covenant faithfulness is fulfilled (John 1:17, 18; Romans 3:3). In Christ, the marriage relationship is made new. So we can praise, "I will sing of the mercies of the LORD forever; with my mouth will I make known Your faithfulness to all generations." So we can confess, "If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself" (Psalm 89:1; 2 Timothy 2:13).

This great word resonates deeply in us, all the more in hard times. *Great is Thy faithfulness!* is our song and our cry.

— Jason Overman





Crossing the Jordan

How to face the river of impossibility with our God.

by David Kidd

The apostle Paul wrote in Romans 8:31, “If God be for us, who can be against us?” (KJV).

Let’s see how the truth of this statement is illustrated in a Bible story we all know in the book of Joshua. By looking at the *what, who, where, when, why, and how* of Israel’s Jordan crossing, we learn how God is for us. The lessons that follow encourage us to overcome great obstacles in our own lives.

What?

First, what is the Jordan, and what does it represent?

The Jordan is a river in Israel, more than two hundred miles long. *Jordan* means “descender.” It descends from the foot of Mount Hermon, more than nine thousand feet above sea level, to the Dead Sea, thirteen hundred feet below sea level.

After wandering in the wilderness for forty years, the Israelites crossed the Jordan on the flat plains of Jericho north of the Dead Sea. The river would not have been flowing particularly fast at this point of crossing. Yet it was a great obstacle between the Israelites and the Promised Land.

For the Christian, the Jordan is more than a river. Our personal Jordan is whatever stands in the way of our laying hold of God’s promises, whatever obstructs us

from enjoying the blessings of the Christian life. Consider what blocks your path right now. It doesn’t matter what it is. *If God be for us, who can be against us?*

Who?

Second, who was crossing the Jordan? A people with a rebellious history. They would have entered the Promised Land many years before had it not been for the disobedience that doomed them to forty years of wilderness wanderings. Their faithlessness has become an object lesson for the people of God (cf. 1 Corinthians 10; Hebrews 3-4).

Some commentators have speculated that the Israelites totaled over one million at that time. If their army of about forty thousand armed men is any indication, it was a significant number (Joshua 4:12, 13). Their

crossing was a daunting task, but the people committed to forge ahead despite their troubled history.

Like the Israelites, maybe we have a negative past that is holding us back from succeeding in great undertakings, or even attempting them. We can allow many other things to hinder us. But it doesn't matter who we are, what our past is, or what our weaknesses are. *If God be for us, who can be against us?*

Where?

Third, where were the Israelites crossing the Jordan? Near the city of Jericho (3:16), a mighty, walled city only six miles away. Jericho was in a fertile valley where many people lived. Do you think they were ignorant of Israel's approach or happy for them to march in? Of course they weren't! So why did God have Israel cross so close to her enemy? Maybe to show that God was in control and not Israel. She had to depend on Him every step of the way.

Remember, God is with us wherever we are, no matter how dangerous or desperate the situation. His grace and strength are sufficient to overcome all we may face. *If God be for us, who can be against us?*

When?

Fourth, when were the Israelites crossing? In the rainy spring when the Jordan overflowed its banks, at the time of Passover (3:14, 15; 5:10). This place of crossing was usually not more than five feet deep, except in the wet season. At this time of year, the melting snow from Mount

Hermon floods the river valley, up to two miles wide. It is possible the Israelites crossed the Jordan when it was a good mile wide and much deeper than five feet.

What a mighty obstacle! But it did not matter, because God was with them, just as He is with us. However deep and wide the obstacle, when we encounter it, *if God be for us, who can be against us?*

Why?

Fifth, why were the Israelites crossing? To receive a blessing or enjoy a rest? No! They were crossing to fulfill the great promises that God made to their fa-

lenges lie ahead. *If God be for us, who can be against us?*

How?

Finally, how were the Israelites crossing? In this last question we realize that the *what, who, where, when, and why* mattered not in light of the *how*. Here is the description in Joshua:

So it was, when the people set out from their camp to cross over the Jordan, with the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people, and as those who bore the ark came to the Jordan, and the feet of the priests who bore the ark dipped in the edge of the water . . . that

“ Our personal Jordan is whatever stands in the way of us laying hold of God's promises. ”

thers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Genesis 15). The Israelites were crossing to receive the Promised Land for an inheritance. It was a giant-sized task, and giants lived there. They were crossing for battle, and God was going before them (Joshua 1:2-6; 4:13).

We, too, face our impossibilities for a reason, or for many reasons, and those can create spiritual battles for us. So we fight the good fight of faith with the armor of God, meeting whatever chal-

the waters which came down from upstream stood still, and rose in a heap . . . Then the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood firm on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan; and all Israel crossed over on dry ground (3:14-17).

The Israelites crossed the Jordan because of a miracle — our faithful Father's mighty power! Every obstacle bowed to the

how of God Almighty. If we trust in His strength, the river of impossibility can part in our lives as well through things only He can do. *If God be for us, who can be against us?*

A sign

The miraculous parting of the Jordan would surely have been enough to encourage the Israelites that God was with them. But it is amazing what He did next.

None of the Israelite boys born in the wilderness had been circumcised (5:4-7). Just after they crossed into the Promised Land, God required them to be circumcised, stipulated by the

in vulnerability they learned dependence on God. They had to trust in Him who was with them from everlasting to everlasting. Their victory over Canaan would be by faith in His strength, not theirs. Because they were obedient to God's command, He protected them while they healed: "This day I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you" (Joshua 5:8-10).

God with us

After being circumcised, the Israelites were given another powerful reminder of God's presence with them: They celebrated the Passover in the Promised

Returning to Romans 8, Paul reminds us that the Commander of the Lord is with us today:

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? . . . Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us (vv. 31, 32, 35, 37).

Is God for you? If you are not sure, you can be! David said that the "sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart" (Psalm 51:17). God respects humility and repentance before Him.

We can be sure today that God is with us through His Son Jesus, our Passover. He has rolled away our sins. If we have a spirit yielded to God that says, "Not my will, but Yours be done," that says, "Have mercy on me, a sinner," then the faithful Father who is for us is also working in us.

In Christ we are overcomers, conquering all that hinders us from enjoying the fullest spiritual blessings of this life. Since God is for us, like Israel, we will cross our Jordans too! **BA**

“God is with us wherever we are,
no matter how dangerous or desperate
the situation.”

sign of the covenant God made with Abraham (Genesis 17). But remember what happened to the men of Shechem in Genesis 34? After being circumcised, these weakened men could not defend themselves when Jacob's sons attacked.

So why did God command circumcision on the Jericho side of the Jordan, with the enemy of Jericho so close by? Here, within the Promised Land, God reminded Israel of the importance of His covenant promise and the sign of Abraham's faith. But also,

Land. The event recalled how God, through Moses, had provided manna for the people for forty years in the wilderness. But just as God had promised, the manna ceased once they ate of the harvest in the Promised Land (vv. 10-12).

As if this reminder weren't enough, the Lord himself appeared to Joshua in a special way, assuring him of His powerful presence. The Commander of the Lord's army had come, and Joshua worshipped Him (vv. 13, 14).

David Kidd and his wife, Angella, live in Tauranga, New Zealand.





Going the Wrong Way

by Sarah Andrews

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths (Proverbs 3:5, 6, ESV).

Barreling down the freeway toward Grandma and Grandpa's house, I heard the dreaded "low fuel" warning come on. I knew, but had forgotten, that the gas was low. Fortunately, a gas station was just ahead and not too far off the beaten path. It would delay our arrival by only a few minutes. I could make it to the station, but might not make it to my grandparents' if I didn't stop.

When I announced the detour, the back end of my family Truckster erupted in cries of despair: "We're going the wrong way!" My kids were familiar with the route to Grandma and Grandpa's; they recognized a wrong turn when they saw it.

I think of this brief exchange often these days. In many ways — in virtually every way — it feels as though our nation is going the wrong way. Up is down. Wrong is right. Good is evil. Evil is good. It doesn't seem possible that this is the way God has ordained for us. I hear a lot of despair as people lament that we are going the wrong way. I feel it too. But here's the thing: God is in control.

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope (Jeremiah 29:11).

I was in control of my vehicle during that drive to my grandparents' place; I was not asleep at the wheel. I did not have a lapse in lucidity. Yes,

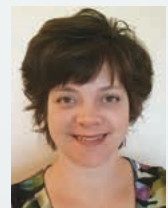
we were momentarily going the wrong way. But that detour was crucial. If we didn't gas up, we might be in a real jam down the road. I had to prepare us for the whole journey, not just for the moment.

So it is with today's wild departure from all things Christian. God is not asleep at the wheel. He hasn't lost track of us. I am coming to believe that He is preparing us. He knows far better than we do what lies ahead and what we need in the journey. God is faithful. His Word is true!

The question is, Do we trust Him? He has ordained each one of us to be a part of history (*His story*) at this exact time. We need not fear that we will be lost along the way or that we will never make it. We simply need to cling to God's promises, knowing that He is trustworthy. Come what may, He will see us through.

"Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand" (Isaiah 41:10). **BA**

Sarah Andrews writes from Spokane, WA, where she attends the Church of God (Seventh Day) with her husband and three daughters.





Just a few reasons we can
depend on God.
by Gordon Feil

The Bible instructs us to be like God, but many attributes of His we cannot attain to or even mimic: His eternity, His knowledge of all, His power over all, His transcending presence, and His perfection, to name a few. But some attributes we may properly aspire to, such as His loving-kindness, mercy, grace, and faithfulness.

Interestingly, although the Bible implies the faithfulness of various people in its pages, it refers directly to only a few. In the Old Testament, Abraham, Moses, and David are called faithful (Nehemiah 9:8; Numbers 12:7; 1 Kings 3:6). In the New Testa-

ment, Timothy and other ministers of the gospel are referred to the same way (1 Corinthians 4:17; Colossians 4:7-12).

But most often Scripture contrasts God's faithfulness with human faithlessness, as in Nehemiah 9:33: "You have dealt faithfully, but we have done wickedly." Or as Paul states in 2 Timothy 2:13: "If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself."

No wonder the Bible asks, "A faithful man who can find?" (Proverbs 20:6, KJV). I don't know about you, but I let people down, and a chain with even one broken link is still broken. I don't see myself as faithful, at least not in the way that I think the Bible means the term when it asks the question. I think I'm reliable; I surely strive to be. Reliability is part of faithfulness, but to be faithful is more than just being

reliable. It's elusive. That's why Proverbs 20:6 wonders if such a person can be found.

The truth is, we find only one *fully* faithful person in the Bible: God's own Son, our "merciful and faithful High Priest . . . Jesus Christ, the faithful witness" (Hebrews 2:17; Revelation 1:5). In fact, the Lord is called "the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness" in Revelation 3:14. Our English word *amen* comes from the Hebrew word that means faithful.

Divine dependability

It's not enough to just know this truth. How can we depend on the Lord's faithfulness?

- We can rely on the Lord to keep His word (Deuteronomy 7:9; Hebrews 10:23). If He says He will do something, He does it. We need never doubt whether God will deliver.

I try to keep my word, but from time to time, I forget what I was supposed to do or procrastinate. I'm not that dependable.

- We can rely on the Lord to extend His compassion. "His compassions fail not . . . Great is Your faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22, 23). His heart goes out to those in need. Does my compassion fail? Yes, sometimes. I see someone begging for money and think they are trying to con me. No doubt some of them are, but should I let those jade my compassion?

- We can rely on the Lord to complete what He began in us. "He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it" (1 Thessalonians 5:24; cf. 1 Corinthians 1:9). Paul was inspired to write, "He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6). What gave Paul that confidence? He tells us in verse 5: our "fellowship in the gospel." Paul looked at what the saints were doing in Christ and knew God was behind it, completing the work He was doing in His "called out" ones.

I ask myself if I am faithful when I try to help someone find their better self. Do I see it through? Or am I a better starter than finisher?

- We can rely on the Lord to get us through temptations. First Corinthians 10:13 tells us "God is faithful" at keeping us from being tempted above what we can bear. He will make a way of escape. James concludes his epistle by saying that we should help those who have strayed from the truth to find their way back (5:19, 20). Because the Lord does that for us, James says we

should do that for others as well.

I, too, should be faithful in helping others lighten the burden of their temptation. Getting beyond some of the moral hazards of life often takes time and patience. Am I faithful like God in this matter? I want to be.

- We can rely on the Lord to forgive our sins (1 John 1:9). He is faithful not only to forgive but also, as the verse says, to "cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

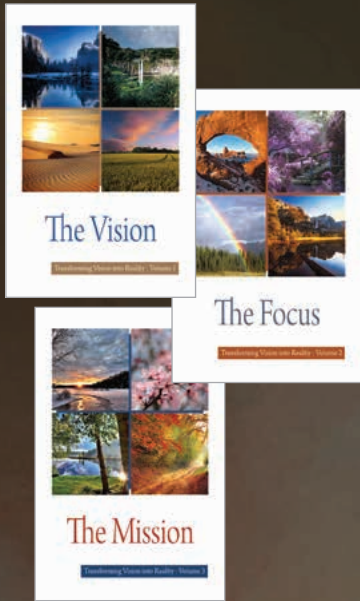
I cannot cleanse anyone of unrighteousness, but I can encourage others to accept His gift and change their lives. I can do the same and set a good example. I also have to examine whether I am faithful in forgiving others as He is. Do I hold a thought or desire of vengeance? Do I feel I deserve more than what someone has given me? Do I resent someone's behavior, or do I resist forgiving myself? I have done all of these things, but I want to be faithful in forgiving.

Fickle vs. faithful

I am thankful for God's faithfulness. I may be fickle, but He is predictable. He does not change (Malachi 3:6), and Jesus Christ is the same "yesterday, today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8).

That is our God. There are no surprises but safety in Jesus. He is a sure thing! I want to follow His example. Do you? **BA**

Gordon Feil writes from Victoria, British Columbia, Canada.



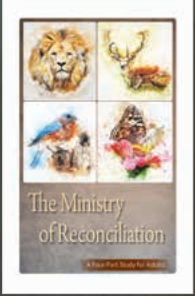
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Mourning 'Evangelical'

by Ken Lawson

As a minister, I have always loved meaningful, descriptive words. When I first learned the word *evangelical*, I was impressed by its definition and excited to say, "I am an evangelical!" Though I'm still attracted to it, in recent years I have been more reluctant to state publicly that simple, joyful response from the heart: "I am an evangelical!"

What does *evangelical* mean? It is one who believes in and spreads the message of Jesus Christ according to the four Gospels (Evangelists) and the rest of the New Testament. From this definition, the depth of *evangelical* branches out to several applications. Here are three.

Evangel: the good news of humanity's salvation through Christ. (Each of the four Gospels is an *Evangel*.)

Evangelist: one who brings, speaks, and writes the good news of salvation by faith in Christ.

Evangelism: the preaching and spreading of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

For fifty-seven years I have preached about Jesus' life, teachings, and example; His coming to earth to save us by shedding His blood on the cross; His resurrection and the promise of His return to receive us into His eternal kingdom.

Living and sharing the story of Jesus Christ is what makes believers evangelicals! The four Gospels reveal this truth. An evangelical believes, lives, and hopes in the complete Jesus story. But in recent times *evangelical* has become twisted and painful for many Christians. In its present use, the word is now associated more with partisan politics and power.

It is hard to imagine that any true evangelical would allow the word to be used in a manner that would distract from or denigrate its true meaning of evangelizing about Jesus Christ. But this deeply Christ-centered word has been re-

defined and abused by worldly political parties and candidates.

I've always claimed to be an evangelical by believing in and sharing the message of Jesus taught in the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament. So, now what? What should I claim personally and publicly, considering *evangelical* is more about a political party than the person of Christ?

The wonderful term *evangelical Christian* now refers to those who vote for a particular party or candidate. Being true to my evangelical passions, I struggle to give the word away to any party or politician who cannot live up to the true spiritual value of the word: *one who believes in, lives like, and hopes in Jesus Christ, Savior of the world and coming King.*

I understand that the meanings of words change, but one truth and standard must never change. It's right there in Scripture. Hebrews 13:8 says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever." Those of us who claim allegiance to Him must uphold the words that reflect our devotion to Him: His teaching, His example, His shed blood for the forgiveness of our sins, His promise and our hope of resurrection, His guarantee that those committed to Him, who hold the line, will inherit the promises.

I am an evangelical! My vote is not for sale. I vote for my Lord, Savior, and soon coming King — Jesus! **BA**

Ken Lawson is superintendent of the Central District and lives with his wife, Sandra, in Cottage Grove, MN.



Questions & Answers



Does the Bible command anyone to have a wedding or tell us what to do at such an event?

The Bible contains no specific command requiring persons to participate in a public ceremony like a wedding in order to become husband and wife. But it does contain narratives and instructions that point up the need of crossing the boundary between not married and married in ways that champion the lasting value of that boundary.

Starting in Genesis 2:18-25, Scripture affirms basic parameters that are vital to a God-blessed marriage: It is monogamous, heterosexual, and permanent. A fully biblical marriage is marked by a beginning point when the man and the woman declare themselves to be husband and wife in the sight of God and others. Scripture does not prescribe elements for a public event by which marital unions may be recognized in heaven, but it does record such a wedding event in John 2. Our Messiah and Master blessed this event with His presence and power.

Much like the Jewish wedding that Jesus attended in Cana, most other cultures and religions have their own laws about how marriages should be solemnized for legal purposes. They also have their own traditions about how weddings are celebrated by families and in socio-religious groups. In both Testaments, the Bible refers to this as arranging, or making, a marriage (Genesis 34:9; Matthew 22:2).

Given the importance of marriage in Scripture and the roles of marriage and family as essential building blocks in stable societies, it follows that the boundary between married and not married is a primary social and religious distinc-

tion. We refer to that boundary as a wedding. To ignore the line drawn by a wedding is to invite legal and moral confusion, much of which now abounds in our culture and our world.

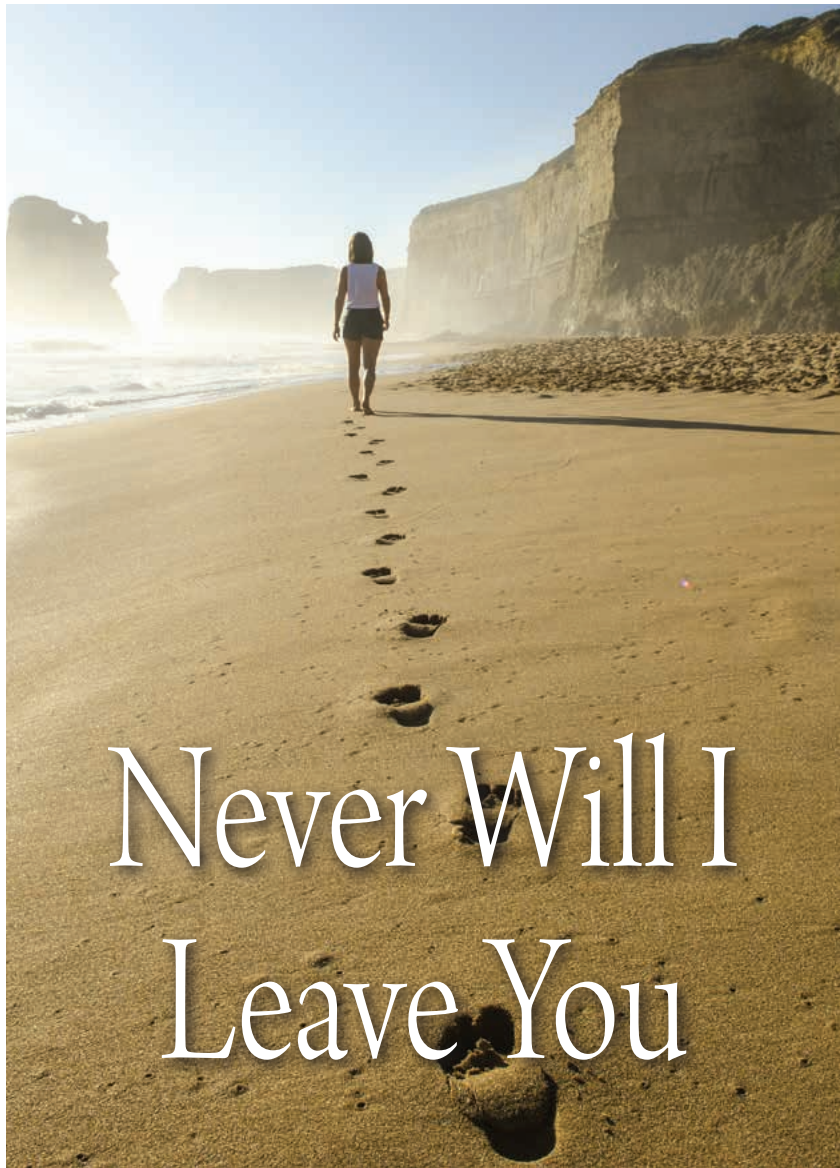
Having sex with someone is not a wedding. Cohabiting for a time does not a marriage make! Conceiving and birthing children together does not equate to holy matrimony. To be married by legal and biblical standards, two people must *get* married. They must agree together and express their choice and commitment in a way that satisfies the legal and spiritual requirements of marriage. When a man and woman do this, they have every right to consider themselves married and thus qualify for the blessing, dignity, and protection that a godly marriage affords.

As for wedding elements and traditions, these are numerous and flexible, permitting each couple a wide selection. They can have it their way, but they should “have it.” To forsake the Bible’s instruction and sacred tradition is to add to the moral and marital chaos in so much of the domestic landscape today.

Core elements of a wedding in the Christian tradition are vows, witnesses, prayer, and the declaration that a true marriage covenant now exists — that the man and woman are now husband and wife. They are fully authorized and blessed by heaven and earth to live together as such!

True weddings reflect a kinship with, and our hope for, that ultimate marriage supper of the Lamb: Jesus Christ to His bride, the church. Such is promised to those who love the Lord’s appearing and have donned their wedding garments that are “washed in the blood” (Matthew 22:8-14; Revelation 19:7-9).

— Elder Calvin Burrell



Celebrating a lifelong journey with Jesus.
by **Diana C. Derringer**

"I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5).

When I was eight years old, I read Bible verses that explained God's love, my sin, Jesus' sacrifice, and my need to repent and accept God's

grace in faith. God spoke to my heart. Although not audibly, He called to me: "Trust Me. Follow Me. Never will I leave you."

I did not fully understand God's grace then. I still don't. However, I knew I could trust God, so I took that first step.

Promise for life

From the beginning of our journey together, I relied on God's promise never to leave me. Whether facing childhood illnesses, the death of loved ones,

or thunderstorms that drove me to an inner stairway, I asked the one and only God who saved me to be with me. Often as a child, particularly during thunderstorms, I sang the comforting words of an old hymn, "No, Never Alone."

Through the struggles of adolescence, school, career, and marriage choices, God's voice remained: "Trust Me. Follow Me. Never will I leave you." Prayers for guidance, daily Bible reading, and the support of believing family members and friends helped me grow in faith and continue my walk in God's path.

Many times I wished for a clearer map. Instead, God taught me to trust Him one step at a time, often into unexpected territory. When I sensed God's call to ministry, I anticipated serving on the mission field. Instead, God led me to social work.

Employed by a secular agency, I asked God to shine His light through me. In the midst of 24/7 on-call stress, God continued to speak: "Trust Me. Follow Me. Never will I leave you." He walked with me through dysfunctional circumstances, court hearings that ripped families apart, and behavioral patterns that continued through multiple generations. I prayed for new insights that would lead to life changes in people. I praised God when those changes occurred.

An invitation to join my first international mission team resulted in additional challenges and opportunities to trust God's guidance. Writing and performing dramatic skits, working with interpreters, and temporarily releasing my passport and visa in order to minister in a women's

prison stretched, but grew, my faith. I worked additional trips into my schedule as often as possible.

In spite of my job's inherent difficulties, I never planned to retire. I expected either to drop dead while making home visits or be kicked out the door when my abilities grew suspect. However, once again God spoke. I knew I needed to leave as surely as I had known all those years before that I was where God wanted me to serve. With no idea what the future held, I heard once again: "Trust Me. Follow Me. Never will I leave you."

The message that time included these words: "Everything will be OK."

Winding road

God's call to serve as a friendship family for international university students came out of the blue. A friend, originally from Hong Kong, asked if one or two girls from Taiwan could stay with our family during the local university's winter break.

Although a bit uncertain, we said yes. That answer led to some of the greatest relationships and experiences of our lives. We continue to hear from many of the students who have become a part of our ever-growing family.

Soon after we stepped into that role, my husband was diagnosed with a malignant brain tumor. His initial prognosis was three to five years. He went into remission after three years, and his recovery continues to stump medical professionals.

Nevertheless, my husband's health challenges from the tumor, plus a heart attack, stroke,

and fall with a severe brain injury five years later, halted further mission trips. At the same time, this ongoing experience has increased the impact of our testimony with the young people who have become a part of our family. We appreciate as never before God's leadership through every circumstance. "Trust Me. Follow Me. Never will I leave you."

Since I was home more, I began submitting a few of my church and mission trip dramas for publication. Eventually I added other work, including articles,

uncertain futures, God remains. He turns unexpected encounters with friends, family, acquaintances, and perfect strangers into lessons in faith and ministry opportunities.

Looking back or looking forward, in every life stage and every event, I never cease to be amazed at God's comfort and strength. On top of the world or in the pit of despair, I have learned the following:

- Turning to God in faith is a choice. Whether eight or eighty, I had to reach a point when I acknowledged my failures, turned

“ I may feel abandoned and alone,
yet God remains. ”

devotions, poetry, and Bible studies. At a writers' conference, I felt God's nudge to attend a workshop on ministry through writing. That led to radio dramas for translation into multiple languages broadcast around the world. I no longer take mission trips, but I now share God's love with more people than I could in a lifetime of short-term travel. "Trust Me. Follow Me. Never will I leave you."

Lessons from God's promise

Through the decline and death of my father, God never left. As several family members face

to Jesus, and gave Him complete control of my life. Without that decision, nothing else mattered. When I stepped out in faith, God filled my life with His presence, never to leave, never to forsake.

- Regardless of my circumstances or my reaction to them, I can count on God. I may feel abandoned and alone, yet God remains. His promises never depend on my emotions. Neither should I. I rely on God's never-changing nature, not my ever-changing feelings.

- God knows and understands my struggles. Jesus has

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Scars That Bleed

Shame, secrets, and the power of wounds.
by **Linda L. Kruschke**

Some experiences change you forever. When I was fourteen, my first boyfriend raped me. I was forever changed, and I didn't tell anyone — especially not my mom because she had forbidden me to see him. I had disobeyed her when I went to his house with no one else home.

In the short term, this trauma propelled me into a life of drinking and smoking marijuana in an attempt to erase the pain and shame. Gone was the girl who loved school, got straight A's, and had dreams to follow. A depressed, powerless girl replaced her, though this new me still got good grades — just with less joy.

My choices put me in situations where rape happened again. And again. And again. The darkness surrounding me grew deeper with each successive blow. The last assault left me pregnant and scared. The final thread of my once ambitious dreams was about to unravel.

So I did the only thing I could think of to tie up the frayed strands of the life I still hoped for deep in my heart. I chose death for my child and a promise of freedom for me. Yet this choice proved to be another trauma shrouded in pain and shame that I tried to bury.

Painful consequences

It took decades to heal from the repeated wounding I endured in my teens. There is no straight-line, easy cure for sexual trauma that runs deep in both mind and soul. Even healing

from a single rape is much too complex for simple remedies. It doesn't happen all at once.

Drugs and alcohol are certainly not the answer, and only delay the hard work of coming to terms with a life no one would wish for. Keeping the trauma a secret compounds feelings of guilt and shame.

Such secrets also worm their way into relationships and make them harder. I met my husband-to-be one summer during college. We married a year later, and I believed I'd found happiness at last. Thinking that burying my pain deep in my heart and mind was the same as putting it behind me, I kept the truth from my new love. Consequently, he couldn't understand my sudden flashes of anger or my panic attacks when he left me sitting alone in a bar or at a friend's party.

Moving forward

I saw my first counselor nine years after my boyfriend raped me and a year after I married my husband. I don't remember her name, but I remember she was a good listener. She didn't fix me, but she provided the first important step toward deep wounds mending into scars. But with that one step forward, I feared the path ahead and retreated.

I decided returning to my academic roots was the answer to the sadness I didn't fully understand. I enrolled in law school and determined to put my past behind me at last. It worked (sort of) for the three years I spent most waking hours in class, in the library studying, or writing papers about the foreseeability factor in contracts. I graduated *cum laude*, proud of my achievement and the fact that I had a job with a small firm lined up before I even graduated.

Finding freedom

Six or seven months into that less-than-my-dream job, I took a nosedive into major clinical depression. Academic success does not guarantee on-the-job success, especially when you work for a man with the same name as your teen rapist. Thoughts of my past plagued me again and again and again. There was no escape.

Eventually, with time and more counseling, with prayer and patience, my wounds began to heal. I learned that keeping my trauma secret allowed it a power over me to tell me lies about my shame. I learned the truth that no matter what poor choices I had made, someone assaulting me was not my fault. My worth is not determined by

what I've done or what others have done to me. My worth is safely ensconced in the fact that I am made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27) and that Jesus is my Savior (1 John 4:13-15).

I also learned that forgiving those who had hurt me was key to my healing. I resisted this lesson for a long time, believing the counselor who told me I had a right to be angry. Because I'm a bit stubborn, God finally made the lesson as clear as possible. He gave me a dream in which my first teen rapist was everywhere I went, down on his knees asking me to forgive him.



I awoke with the certain knowledge that if I wanted to heal, I had to forgive. And I had to ask for forgiveness for clinging to my bitterness for so long. As King David wrote:

When I kept silent, my bones grew old

Through my groaning all the day long.

For day and night
Your hand was heavy upon me;

My vitality was turned into the drought of summer. *Selah*

I acknowledged my sin to You,

And my iniquity I have not hidden.

I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,"

And You forgave the iniquity of my sin. *Selah* (Psalm 32:3-5).

Witness of wounds

Often I've prayed God would grant me complete healing. For years I prayed to forget every detail of being violated by boys

and men who seemed indifferent to the pain they caused. Those prayers seemed to have gone unanswered. Now I see that God answered with a resounding, but knowing, "No, My daughter."

Christ retained His scars in His resurrected body. Without their witness, Thomas would not have believed it was really the Lord. "He said to Thomas, 'Reach your finger here, and look at

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■ [Focus on the Faithful]



by Jason Overman

In the last two issues we've looked at the personal faithfulness of two giants of the Old and New Testaments, Abraham and Peter. We have examined the relationship of living faith between individuals and our heavenly Father, but faithfulness is also a communal reality. We are God's people, so what does a faithful church look like?

The answer is found on every page of the Acts of the Apostles. There we read that the first church is born and empowered by the Spirit in her mission to be witnesses of Jesus Christ to the "end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). We cannot cover all these stories here, but let's join Apostle Paul and get a glimpse of the two churches he planted in Philippi and Ephesus, and what characterized their faith.

Joy in Philippi

On his second missionary journey (Acts 16), Paul and his fellow evangelists have come to Macedonia. One Sabbath they join some women riverside outside Philippi for prayer, and there meet a woman named Lydia. As Paul shares God's Word, "the Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul" (v. 14). She goes into the river and is baptized with her household. Just as Lydia's heart opens, so does her home to these missionaries. She "begged us," Luke recalls, "if you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay" (v. 15). With her baptism and act of hospitality, the Philippian church is born.

But just downstream from this tranquil beginning the rocks of persecution threaten. Back in the city, and heading to prayer again, Paul delivers a slave girl from an evil spirit of divination in the name of Jesus Christ. Her owners are furious, seeing that they have lost their money-maker. They drag Paul and Silas to the authorities, where they are accused, beaten, and tossed into jail (vv. 16-24).

At midnight, deep in the pris-

on with feet fastened in stocks, these two witnesses of the way of salvation pray and sing hymns to God, and the prisoners listen to them (v. 25). We expect prayer. It's been mentioned three times since we arrived in Philippi. *But singing?* This is the only place in Acts where we read of singing. Joy in a jail, of all places!

At this moment, an earthquake shakes the prison. Chains are loosed, but no one tries to escape. The suicidal jailor, fearing the worst, discerns the only relevant question, given the circumstances: "What must I do to be saved?" Paul replies simply, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ" (vv. 26-31). The jailor does and is baptized with his household. There's more rejoicing as wounds are washed and bread is broken. The story of the church in Philippi ends just as it began — back in Lydia's house (v. 40). But we'll find the themes of prayer and rejoicing later in Paul's epistle to the Philippians.

Tears in Ephesus

We glimpse the faithful church from a different perspective as we join Paul and his fellow evangelists in Ephesus on their third missionary trip. He spent three

The Early Church

years in Ephesus, and his affection for the church is evident in his emotional farewell speech (20:17-38).

Paul recalls his tireless teaching among them, through tears and trials, testifying of “repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ . . . and preaching the kingdom of God” (vv. 19, 21, 25; cf. 19:1-10). Paul never “shunned to declare . . . the whole counsel of God” and nears the end of his “race with joy” – the ministry Jesus Christ gave him “to testify to the gospel of the grace of God” (20:24-27). Now as Paul prepares to say goodbye to the church, he is concerned for the flock and its shepherds, “the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (v. 28).

That God redeemed His church through the precious blood of His Son is the heart of Paul’s gospel of grace and kingdom counsel, but there are also savage wolves that would not spare the flock. The “Holy Spirit has made you overseers,” he tells the elders. “Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears” (vv. 28, 31). Paul’s teaching is urgent.

Paul movingly commends his friends “to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (v. 32). To these elders he commends Christ’s example of leadership, and his own: to not be covetous or greedy but hardworking, caring for the weak. “Remember the words of the Lord Jesus . . . ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’” (v. 35). Finally, Paul kneels and prays with them, and afterward they weep together (a third reference to tears) and kiss him; they will not see him again (vv. 36-38).

It’s a sad parting, but the themes of his farewell – God’s grace, our inheritance, and watchful spiritual warfare – he will teach again in his epistle to the Ephesians.

Stick together

What does a faithful church look like? The churches of Philippi and Ephesus tell of the core truths and traits of faithful churches everywhere: kingdom and repentance, teaching and hearing the Word; prayer, hospitality, redemption, and baptism. We see passion and peace,

urgency and confidence as the Spirit moves the church.

By the grace of God, faithful churches of Jesus know the joy of Philippi and the tears of Ephesus. We share both in and through all circumstances together. **BA**



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Faith Fully

by Whaid Rose

The following lines from a less familiar John Newton hymn, “We Were Once As You Are,” succinctly capture the end goal of our walk of faith:

Our pleasure and our duty
Though opposite before;
Since we have seen his
beauty,
Are joined to part no
more.

This speaks to our dilemma, which Paul describes in Romans 7:18: “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.” The hymn also pictures an end to this struggle in the convergence of our “want to” (our pleasure) and our “ought to” (our duty).

Test of faith

That’s where we find Abraham in Genesis 22. His long journey of faith reaches its climax in his response to this command from God: “Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you

love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you” (v. 2).

By His emphasis (“your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love”), God presses upon Abraham the weight of this assignment. It may seem bearable to us because we know how the story ends. But at this point, Abraham doesn’t.

The details in verse 3 are therefore provided to give us a sense of the gravitas of this undertaking. Abraham gets up early in the morning, likely due to his restless sleep. He splits the wood and saddles the donkey, tasks usually reserved for servants. Only he must attend to this most sacred matter. Note also that the trip to Moriah is a three-day journey, not a short drive across town. There’s time to think and agonize in prayer for a way out of this deal.

But Abraham isn’t looking for a way out — only a way through. His pattern of building altars since his arrival in Canaan (Genesis 12:7) has unwittingly prepared him for this moment. Abraham’s altars not only mark the places where God appeared to him but also instruct concerning the nature of worship — what

Andy Stanley describes as “recognizing and responding appropriately to the greatness of God.”

This sheds light on Abraham’s instructions to his servants upon arrival at Mount Moriah: “Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you” (v. 5). His tendency to lie has led some to suggest that Abraham is fabricating the facts. If he tells them the truth, they might rise to Isaac’s defense.

But far from veiling the truth, Abraham speaks from a deep sense of confidence in the goodness and greatness of God. So based on past experience, he expects at least two things to happen: God will reveal Himself, and Abraham will respond in worship.

Regarding his assertion that Isaac will return with him, Hebrews 11:17-19 explains that Abraham believed that if nothing else, God would raise his son from the dead.

Even so, Abraham cannot know with certainty how this will play out, so the remainder of the journey with Isaac alone must have been the most difficult. Isaac’s question about the absence of a lamb for the burnt offering, though understandable

Surrendered

since he, now a teenager, had watched his father offer sacrifices on many occasions, must have been like a dagger in Abraham's heart.

The climactic moment finally comes. Arriving at the place of sacrifice, Abraham builds the altar, binds Isaac, and lays him down. He then raises the knife (vv. 9, 10). Try to picture the scene. Some things are best left to our imagination.

Divine intervention

Then, true to form, God intervenes: "Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me" (v. 12). Apparently, God never intended for Abraham to go all the way through with the sacrifice; He simply wanted to see what he would do.

But God is omniscient (knowing everything), so why the need to know? The Hebrew word used here is *yada* — to ascertain for certain. God knew beforehand what Abraham would do, but He wanted Abraham to prove it. Furthermore, God's goal for us is obedience. Just as Adam and Eve

exercised their will in disobedience, God wants us to exercise our will in obedience to Him (see Romans 6).

So in response to Abraham's obedience, God reveals Himself as Jehovah Jireh by providing a substitute for the burnt offering (v. 13). Once again, Abraham bows in worship: "And Abraham called the name of the place, The-Lord-Will-Provide; as it is said to this day, 'In the Mount of the LORD it shall be provided'" (v. 14).

Answering the call

There's much here to be gleaned, including how this story depicts the Father's redemptive love and how Isaac's Moriah mirrors Christ's Calvary.

Suffice it to say, Abraham is hailed in the New Testament as the father of the faithful — fore-runner of those who walk with God by faith (Romans 4:16). Thus, by extension, the call to Mount Moriah is issued to all of us. Answering that call leads us to the end of ourselves, where we learn to surrender the dearest things in life, to choose the Giver over the gift, to fully rest our faith in the greatness and goodness of our faithful Father.

Up until Genesis 22, Abraham's faith is often eclipsed by doubt, his moral courage and strength of character conflicted by cowardliness and a penchant for lying his way out of a bind. But through a long process of heart shaping, his contradictions gradually give way to an inner congruence in which his desire and God's will are harmoniously joined, his "want to" and his "ought to" becoming one and the same.

That was God's goal for Abraham. It's His goal for us, too, on this side of the cross: faith, fully surrendered, hearts continually bowed in worship, finding "daily cause to raise/New Ebenezers to His praise."^{*} **BA**

Whaid Rose, former president of the General Conference, is dean of the Artios Center for Vibrant Leadership, and pastors the Newton, NC CoG7. He and his wife, Marjolene, live in Denver, NC.



^{*}"Be Still, My Heart! These Anxious Cares," John Newton



The Faithful God

There once was a man who owned some land where he grew crops and raised goats. He was the only man in his village who believed in God. Well, one day, all his goats disappeared. They had run through a hole in his fence and were lost somewhere in the woods. Although he searched and searched for them, he could not find them.

All the villagers gathered around him, shaking their heads. "Ah, it is too bad," they said. "Perhaps your god does not care for you after all."

The farmer replied, "Whether it is good or bad, I don't know. One thing I do know: My God is faithful."

Not long after that, the farmer's only horse jumped the fence and was gone. Although the farmer searched for him, he could not find him. All the villagers gathered around him again, shaking their heads. "Ah, it is too bad," they said. "Perhaps your god does not care for you after all."

The farmer replied, "Whether it is good or bad, I don't know. One thing I do know: My God is faithful."

Shortly after that, the farmer's horse returned, bringing with him several other wild horses. All the villagers gathered around the farmer and exclaimed, "Ah, what good fortune!"

The farmer replied, "Whether it is good or bad, I don't know. One thing I do know: My God is faithful."

The very next day, while the farmer's son was trying to ride one of the wild horses, he was thrown off and broke his leg. All the villagers gathered around the farmer, shaking their

heads. "Ah, it is too bad," they said. "Perhaps your god does not care for you after all."

But the farmer replied, "Whether it is good or bad, I don't know. One thing I do know: My God is faithful."

A week later, war broke out, and all the young men were taken to be a part of the army. However, when the army commander saw that the farmer's son had a broken leg, he told him to stay at home. All the villagers gathered around the farmer and exclaimed, "Ah, what good fortune!"

But the farmer replied, "Whether it is good or bad, I don't know. One thing I do know: My God is faithful."

Soon the invading enemy army reached the farmer's village. They took and killed all the cattle, sheep, and goats to eat. Then they left, leaving the village destitute. The very next day, the farmer's goats all returned from the woods and entered their pen through the same hole in the fence they had gone out of. All the villagers gathered around the farmer, shaking their heads in wonder. "It's a miracle!" they exclaimed.

The farmer simply smiled and said, "All I know is that my God is truly faithful."

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28, NIV).

This story is adapted from a famous Chinese folktale of the farmer and the horse. Original source: Huai Nan Tzu.



Joseph and Brothers (copyright MMBX PRODUCTION 2008)

Word Search

Read Lamentations 3:22-24 in the NIV. Then find words from this text in the puzzle below. The following words are hidden in this puzzle (horizontal, vertical, diagonal): *great, consumed, compassions, never, fail, every, morning, faithfulness, portion, wait.*

C	F	P	L	I	B	Z	A	Q	K	O	F
M	O	X	O	X	C	W	K	F	N	D	A
X	I	M	X	R	G	O	N	J	E	E	I
M	Y	K	P	J	T	K	W	M	N	S	T
B	F	V	Z	A	U	I	U	X	F	F	H
R	A	A	V	R	S	S	O	X	Q	R	F
V	I	Q	E	S	N	S	T	N	T	W	U
J	L	V	G	O	C	I	I	G	F	S	L
H	E	E	C	Q	A	H	O	O	U	X	N
N	U	V	W	W	X	K	V	F	N	Z	E
Y	M	O	R	N	I	N	G	N	W	S	S
G	R	E	A	T	E	V	E	R	Y	J	S

Science Fun

Sometimes it's hard to see God's hand in our lives. Did Joseph wonder where God was when he was sold as a slave or wrongfully thrown into prison?

Do this simple experiment in which you will reveal something that appears at first to be hidden. You will need plain white paper, baking soda, water, a cotton swab, and grape juice or some other dark-colored juice.

Directions

Mix 2 tablespoons baking soda with 2 tablespoons water. Dip the cotton swab in the mixture, and use it to write your message on the paper. Let the "ink" dry completely. It should become invisible. To reveal your message, dip another cotton swab into grape juice and paint all over the page. Your message will appear.

Kids Time activities are abridged from the BAP children's curriculum. Order at cog7.org/online-store.





The Faithfulness of God

Editor's note: The following two articles were written as class assignments given by Martha Rohrbaugh to her English students at Spring Vale Christian School for this issue. Find more student submissions on the faithfulness of God at baonline.org.

by Nathaniel Fedoriw

Author David Jeremiah said, “God is faithful, and that trumps all our problems, tragedies, and the very prospect of death itself.”

What is faithfulness? According to the dictionary, it is remaining loyal and steadfast. I remember times when I was unfaithful to God. I had sinned like the rest of the world, and my guilt was great. My logic was, if I’m not

faithful to God, then He won’t be faithful to me. I was wrong in my thinking, especially considering Paul’s words: “If we are faithless, He remains faithful” (2 Timothy 2:13).

Typically, if we do something wrong to a friend or let them down, our friend will do the same. When we hate someone, almost always that person will hate us back. However, it is different with God. Hundreds of millions of people don’t even believe in God, but God remains faithful to them.

“But I say to you, love your enemies . . . that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matthew 5:44, 45).

God is going to be faithful to us no matter what. This kind of love is unheard of. Imagine if we were like that. Imagine if we could love the people who hate us and bless those who curse us. Imagine if we could lay down our lives for our enemy. That is exactly what Christ did for us. He

loved the ones who hated Him. He prayed for those who cursed Him, and He laid down His life even for those who didn’t acknowledge Him. How incredible! Jesus is the perfect representation of faithfulness for us.

Evangelist David Wilkerson said, “Our faith is not meant to get us out of a hard place or change our painful condition. Rather, it is meant to reveal God’s faithfulness to us in the midst of our dire situation.”

Our faithfulness to God may not ever benefit us here on earth. It may actually hurt us. But we do not live for ourselves; we live to serve Him. This life is only a dot compared to the life we will enjoy in the kingdom. Life hurts sometimes, and friends disappoint. But through all of our trials and temptations, He remains true to us.

Nathaniel Fedoriw is sixteen and the son of Steve and Anita Fedoriw. He writes from Owosso, MI.





by **Kassidy Hinds**

In a world filled with evil and uncertainty, how can we know God remains faithful? It may seem as though, if anything, He has been unfaithful in His promises to keep us safe, love us, and provide for us. However, we can find evidence all around us that declares God's faithfulness even in the most troublesome times.

The hot topic of this entire past year: COVID-19. Where do I even begin? Church has been canceled. I can't hang out with my friends. I'm stuck at home. School looks different, and sports don't exist anymore. When I think about this situation, all I can see is the damage that it's brought to all of our lives. This leads us to the question we all ask: "Is God faithful?" Would you take a minute to see things from a different point of view with me?

Instead of church being canceled, maybe we can consider

that congregating in every home helps us remember that the church isn't just the building; it's the people inside it. Not being able to hang out with friends could turn into more time to spend with our family. Being stuck at home could allow us the chance to rebuild or strengthen our relationship with Christ by giving Him more of our free time.

The list continues with things we see as negative results from COVID-19, causing us to lose sight of God's faithfulness. But if we change our perspective, we may find that these negative things can impact us positively.

Romans 3:3, 4 says, "What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? By no means! Let God be true though every one were a liar" (ESV). Even if we choose to remain unfaithful and deny God's goodness in our lives, it doesn't mean God stops working. We may not believe it, but the truth is God is faithful to His people. We just have to accept that it may look different from what we think "faithful" should look like.

The song "Way Maker," performed by Leeland, says that even when we can't see what God is doing, He is working on our behalf. It has been a great encouragement for me during this time. How great a promise to declare! It doesn't matter if we can feel it or see it; God is working! He has been faithful, and He will remain faithful.

As difficult as it is at times, we have to cling to this promise. God has never been unfaithful toward His people. Often our mindset needs to change, to realize God is good and loves us. He is working everything for our good. He is in control and is faithful even in our trials and tribulations. **BA**

Kassidy Hinds is fifteen and the daughter of Tim and Lisa Hinds. She writes from Owosso, MI.



Never Will I Leave You

continued from page 13

“been there and done that” for every situation I face. Physical, spiritual, and emotional exhaustion; exasperation at the actions of others; sorrow and death — Jesus faced them all.

- If I fail to trust God, I fail. Far too many times, I head out on my own, only to fall flat on my face. While I’m still a work in progress, I know God never fails. His way may not always be easy, but it will always be right.

- In addition to His presence, God grants His power. That remains as true today as when Joshua prepared to enter the Promised Land. Not only did God promise that He would be with Joshua, but several times He said, “Be strong and of good courage” (Joshua 1:6, 7, 9, 18). In verse 9, God added, “Do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.” The best part: When God says, “Be strong and courageous,” He gives His strength and courage. When I think I cannot go on, God can. Whether He takes me by the hand and leads me where I need to go or picks me up and carries me there, God extends His presence and power for every challenge.

Therefore, I can say with confidence, “The LORD is my helper; I will not fear” (Hebrews 13:6). **BA**

Diana Derringer
writes from Camp-
bellsville, KY.



Scars That Bleed

continued from page 15

My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing” (John 20:27).

My own scars help others believe I understand what they are going through. Without their witness, my testimony that God can bring enough healing for today would not have the same power.

Questions on healing

As I walk closer to Jesus and trust Him with my story, He has encouraged me to share openly with others. Most times when I tell it, I experience a little more healing. But sometimes the telling is met by another one saying, “Me too.”

I reply, “Tell me about it, if you feel up to it.” And then I listen to their story of rape and pain and shame. This is when my carefully tended scars begin to bleed again. The wound is torn open, but the pain I feel is no longer for myself but for the one whose story I’ve entered into.

I know now I will never forget. And I wonder if I should want to forget if I could. Would I walk away, pretend it never happened, that I was never assaulted, violated, and made to feel shame and doubt?

Could I ignore the very truth of what I know was wrong — pure evil? Could I simply walk away and cease to bear witness for those who came after me — or maybe for those violated before my own innocence was vanquished, but are yet to heal at all?

If I could be healed com-

pletely in an instant, but doing so meant leaving my sisters, my friends — even strangers — without the hope of knowing they aren’t alone, could I? Should I?

Because to heal 100 percent is to forget every ounce, every moment of the pain and struggle. And to forget is to lose compassion. So perhaps it is worth the ups and downs of scars that appear healed but sometimes — more often than we’d like — bleed tears of understanding, helping others feel not so alone.

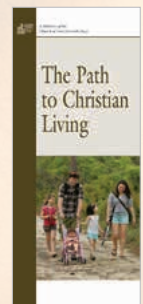
BA

Linda L. Kruschke
writes from Lake
Oswego, OR.

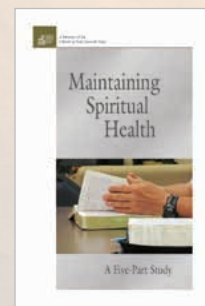


Updated Tracts

*The Path to
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What should motivate us and empower us to right living?

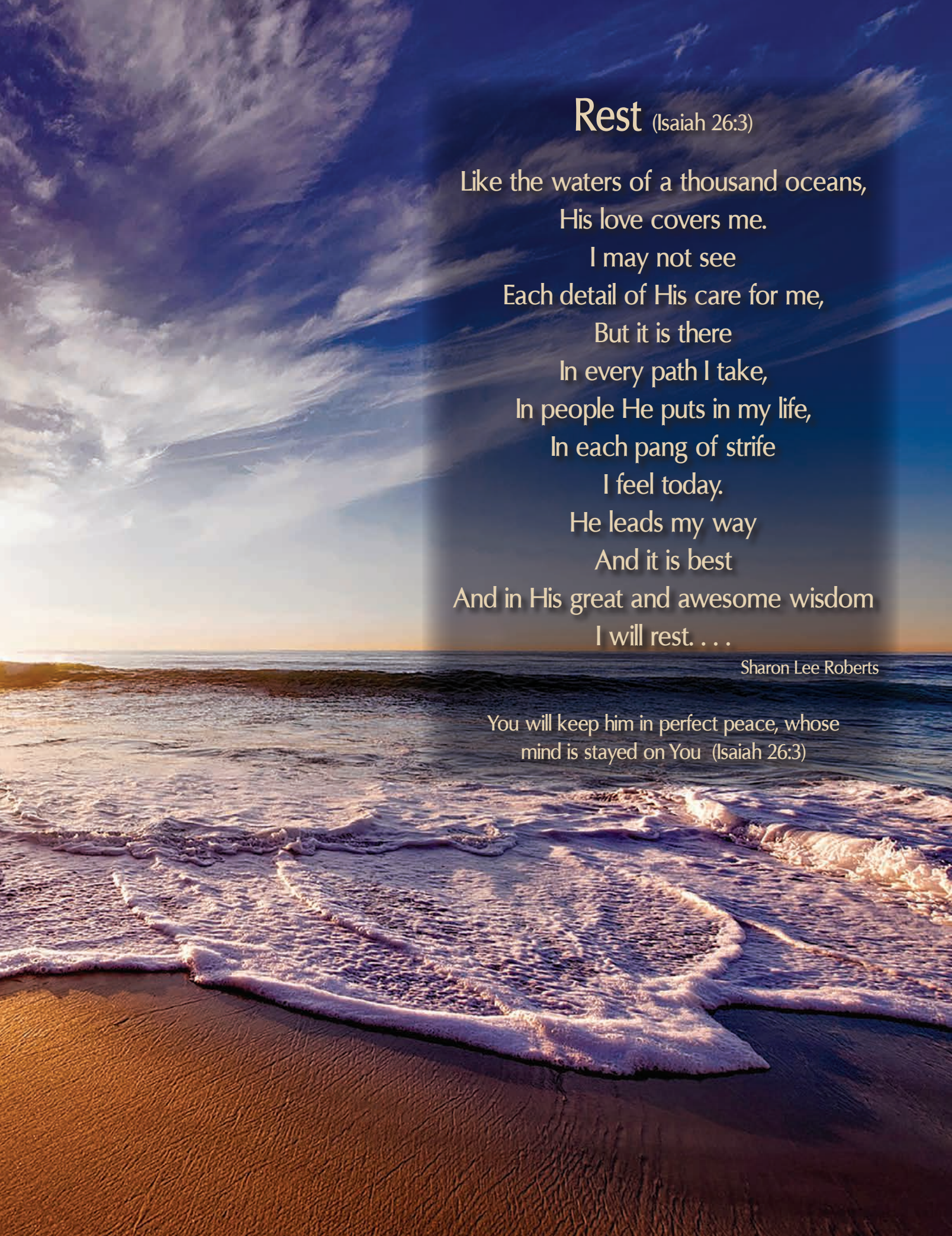


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Rest (Isaiah 26:3)

Like the waters of a thousand oceans,
His love covers me.
I may not see
Each detail of His care for me,
But it is there
In every path I take,
In people He puts in my life,
In each pang of strife
I feel today.
He leads my way
And it is best
And in His great and awesome wisdom
I will rest. . . .

Sharon Lee Roberts

You will keep him in perfect peace, whose
mind is stayed on You (Isaiah 26:3)

Support the Bible Advocate!

What a year the last twelve months have been! We've endured much, but despite all of the challenges, God has been faithful. We're still here "because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning" (Lamentations 3:22, 23). And we thank you, our readers, for being faithful as well through your support and prayers. We hope you have made it through the worst of the pandemic and that life is opening up for you again.

As with so many families and churches around the world, the pandemic hurt the Bible Advocate Press financially. That's why our annual spring support letter is coming to you via the BA rather than to your mailbox separately. We can't afford the postage to mail letters to all of our readers, so we are coming to you in this space, as well as online, where you can donate safely and conveniently with a click of a button.

The BA is trying to make up for the steep shortfall from last year. As churches closed and people were laid off work, our quarterly sales and offerings sagged. We kept at it, but as our fiscal year ended in March 2021, our operating expenses exceeded revenue by over \$60,000. We are being faithful stewards of the resources God has provided. We are pinching every penny and ask you to help us make up the deficit.

The *Bible Advocate* remains a free publication, and we want to keep it that way for as long as possible. This work is also supported by the sale of original BAP study material. Please give to the BA and purchase our products as you are able. Your continued generosity is appreciated.

In your service — grace and peace!



Jason Overman
Editor



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Becoming the Leader God Wants You to Be

- How do you spot fallacies in biblical interpretation?
- What principles or practices do you use when you teach Bible classes for church?
- Do your communication skills strengthen or weaken your leadership role?
- In what ways do your non-verbal skills help you influence the people around you?
- How can your church become a healing community?

Artios Christian College exists to help you become the Christian leader God wants you to be. You were created to lead. Artios partners with you to increase your influence for Christ in your home, church, community, and work. Find your calling and engage it! Discover more at <https://artioscollege.org/>.

Consider enrolling in one of our programs! Artios has a program for every Christ-follower: the full-time pastor, the bi-vocational pastor, the local pastor, the worship leader, the prayer ministry leader, the youth leader, and *everyone* who is part of the body of Christ.

Take a look at our upcoming term.

Late Spring 2021 Classes

Registration ends May 10

Class dates: May 16 – June 20

BIS 201 - Biblical Interpretation

CHE 301 - Christian Education

COM 121 - Written Communication for Leadership

Gjesdal Named Artios Co-Director



Pastor Loren Gjesdal has joined Makayla Ross as co-director of Artios Christian College. Having been appointed to this position by General Conference President Loren Stacy and then confirmed by the GC board of directors, Gjesdal fills the vacancy left by the resignation of longtime co-director Israel Steinmetz. Loren Gjesdal is an Artios graduate (BA in Christian Leadership, Pastoral Ministry), with education and experience in business and management. He resides in Albany, Oregon, with his wife of thirty years, Nickki, and their three adult/teen children. A licensed minister, Gjesdal co-pastors the Marion, Oregon congregation, a ministry he continues to fulfill as he serves Artios part-time.

We thank Israel Steinmetz for his many years of service within Artios Christian College and its predecessor, LifeSpring School of Ministry, and wish him well in the next season of his life and ministry. We welcome Loren Gjesdal with gratitude for his willingness to serve in this new role and with great anticipation of all he will bring to Artios.

LEA 111 - Essentials of Vibrant Leadership

PSY 311 - The Church and Mental Health

Register today!

In English: <https://my.artioscollege.org/en/courses>

In Spanish: <https://my.artioscollege.org/es/courses>

— Lisa Harp Hinds
Dean of Administration



On Mission ... in Burundi

by **Alexandre Masumbuko**

Burundi is a country located in East Africa, bordering Lake Tanganyika, Rwanda, Tanzania, and DR Congo. In the past, it was ruled by Belgium.

Over 90 percent of the people in Burundi believe in God, and many different denominations are there, including the Catholic, Protestant, and Adventist churches. Many Pentecostal churches are in this country, and they have many different names. Islam is there as well.

Therefore, in the Church of God we teach more about salvation and the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, emphasizing

the three works of the Holy Spirit in John 16:8: to convince of sin (the commandments), righteousness (Matthew 25:1-46), and judgment (Hebrews 9:27). We continue to interpret the prophetic message of the three angels in Revelation 14:6-13.

The message of the Church of God (Seventh Day) is unique, as we have doctrinal differences with other Protestant churches.

Hardship

As you may know, war has greatly weakened Burundi. It has gone through many periods of war in its history, including ethnic war. As recently as 2015, a crisis from the presidential elec-

tion created great turmoil in the country, closing it off from aid. Though we are currently thanking God that we have peace, the previous conflicts have caused people to lose jobs. Life is even more difficult with the coronavirus pandemic that is spreading around the world and impacting Burundi. But we thank God that He continues to protect us and His church here, even though people do not get enough food and are hungry.

Despite the fact that life is difficult in Burundi and many people are trying to figure out how to get food for the day, they have the heart to love God and hear the gospel. We preach the good news and make it most

effective through educating our evangelists on how to approach people and comfort them in their troubles. These evangelists show love and compassion by helping people with their needs and loving one another by helping with their problems.

Growth

The growth of CoG7 Burundi continues in a positive way. We thank God for His grace. The Church continues to teach our leaders through various seminars so that they can be good leaders and love their work. We preach the gospel so that many people receive Jesus Christ and accept baptism from the different churches. We currently have at least one church in seven of the eighteen regions of Burundi: Bujumbura, Makamba, Rutana, Bubanza, Cibitoke, Ngozi and Karuzi. We hope to open churches in the remaining regions.

Despite all these efforts, there is no shortage of challenges, such as finding places of worship. For example, the church of Bujumbura has not yet found an official place to worship. We are only borrowing the current location. Another challenge I face as the leader in Burundi is visiting the churches to comfort and encourage them.

To strengthen the church, one of our goals is to help those who have received the gospel to create small economic cooperative projects and train these people to take good care of them. These cooperatives can help them simplify their daily lives and follow the Word of God with one heart.

Another goal is to secure a projector so we may share the gospel through cinema, helping



people understand it better. Because transportation in Burundi is difficult, we want to purchase a car in the near future to facilitate travel to churches far and wide, and purchase bicycles for evangelists to support worship in our congregations. We also want to print books in Kirundi, Swahili, and French to teach the faith of our church.

Testimony

I was born into the Catholic Church. Later, when I could make my own decision, I joined the Pentecostal church. However, when I realized that the Sabbath was not Sunday, I left that church and joined the Seventh-day Adventists (1995- 2003). In 2003, I started the Church of God (Seventh Day) in Burundi.

However, because of difficulty with the government at that time, we started as Messengers de Dieu du 7ème jour au Burundi, or Messengers of God of the Seventh Day in Burundi.

In 2005, we received permission from the government and officially became the Church of God (Seventh Day) in Burundi. My second motive for starting a new ministry was dissatisfaction with the SDA's faith and teachings based on the prophecy of Ellen G. White. The SDA Church made her teachings of greater importance than the Bible, so I started looking for a church that had only good biblical teachings. At that time I thought of starting a church called the Church of God (Seventh Day), not knowing if it existed anywhere.

Looking back on my life, this



Burundi

Population: 11,530,000

Capital: Gitega and
Bujumbura

Official languages: Ki-
rundi, French

Land area: 27,834 sq
km / 10,747 sq mi

Official CoG7 congre-
gations: 12

CoG7 membership: 1,300+

President: Alexandre Masumbuko



period of time had a profound effect on my ministry. Due to the call I had received, I wanted to be dedicated in giving everything I had as a leader. As long as I could help the Church ministry grow in our country, I had to bring the message I had been given to Burundi and spend all the money I had, even though I did not have enough.

As a result, I met loved ones who were thirsty to join the Church. When they were poor, I had to help them live and find a place of worship so that they might join our church. At that time I also met enemies who

fought against me and wanted to discourage me from continuing my ministry in this country. Despite all the challenges I faced, God continued to help me. My goal is to finish my ministry safely and rest in peace and wait for my crown.

After doing research on the Internet, I discovered that the CoG7 was already established in America and in other countries in Africa. I wrote a letter and sent it to CoG7 in America, and I received a reply in 2004 from Pastor Bill Hicks. Afterward, Pastor John Njogu and Pastor Robert Crawford visited me. In 2015,

God's servants came to the Burundian church again when Pastor Crawford, Pastor Njogu, and Brother Bryan Cleeton visited the Bujumbura and Ngozi regions. This journey was a tremendous success and caused rapid Church growth. Their visits encouraged us that the Church has other brethren around the world. Thank you, and God bless His work all over the world.

In 2017, we received an official letter from the International Ministerial Congress (IMC) for the Church in Burundi to become an IMC member. We were happy and honored by this decision.

On behalf of the Church of Burundi, we give many thanks to the IMC of the Church of God (Seventh Day). May God protect and bless you so much.

Pastor Alexandre Masumbuko

lives in Bujumbura, Burundi, with his wife of 39 years, Beatrice Bukuru. They have seven children.





Faithful Father

In many family films, dramatic tension is built between an untrustworthy father and his children, whom he regularly disappoints. He promises to come to his daughter's soccer match, but he forgets and works late. He promises to come to his son's baseball game, but he forgets and takes a nap instead. The screen is filled with the sad faces of his disappointed daughter and son scanning the sidelines and the stands for a glimpse of Dad. But Dad's not there. His promises mean nothing. He's simply untrustworthy.

I suppose that this theme repeats itself in so many dramas because so many people experience it in real life. I doubt there is a human father who has never disappointed his children multiple times. Human fathers are, well, human. Sometimes we become distracted, and sometimes we become selfish. Sometimes we simply forget what we've promised or what time it is or where we're supposed to be. It happens. Not often, we hope. But it happens.

In stark contrast to even the very best of human fathers, we who are in Christ have a heavenly Father. His faithfulness never fails. He keeps all of His promises. He is never distracted and He never forgets. Dedicating the temple he had built for God, King Solomon said of our heavenly Father, "Blessed be the LORD who has given rest to his people Israel, according to all that he promised. Not one word has failed of all his good promise, which he spoke by Moses his servant" (1 Kings 8:56, ESV throughout). Not one word! That's a faithful Father!

The Father's faithfulness to all His children and to all His promises may be traced far beyond the span of time that Solomon mentioned. Long before the promises God made to the children of Israel through Moses, God promised the evil

serpent, who enticed Adam and Eve to sin, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:15).

Later, God chose the man we know as Abraham and promised him, "In your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (22:18). Much later, God chose David to be king of Israel and promised him, "Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever" (2 Samuel 7:16). Long after the time of Solomon, our faithful Father kept all these promises, fulfilling them through Christ's atoning death and victorious resurrection.

Through Jesus Christ, our faithful Father has also made promises to us, His new covenant children. We are promised "Whoever believes in [Jesus] shall not perish but shall have eternal life" (John 3:16). We are promised "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). And we are promised "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also" (John 14:3).

The good news about our faithful Father's promises to us in our day is that He is always faithful. He keeps all of His promises. He is never distracted and He never forgets. We can say with Solomon, "Not one word has failed of all his good promise."

— Loren Stacy



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