

Faithfully Promising

Most police departments have a motto that says something like, “Here to protect and serve.” But how far does that promise go? Antonia Bundy is a police dispatcher who answers 911 calls. One afternoon she received a call and heard a child’s voice say, “I need help.”

Antonia said, “What’s the nature of your problem?”

The young boy said, “My school.”

Since he didn’t sound panicked, she asked, “You had a bad day at school?” The boy said, “Yeah, I just called to tell you that.”

Now, Antonia could’ve concluded that this was a prank call (which is illegal) or she could’ve decided to scold the young man for wasting police resources. But something about his voice told her to take another approach. So, she asked the boy what made his day so bad? He said, “My homework.”

Later, Antonia said, “I’ve always been good at math ... So, it was something I was happy I could help him with.” She walked him through his arithmetic problems and, after that, the boy seemed to figure out that his situation didn’t really qualify as an emergency. So he told Antonia, “I’m sorry for calling you, but I really needed help.”

Antonia said, “You’re fine. We’re always here to help.”¹

In a world full of frequent bad days, whom do you turn to for help? Who turns to you? In our Scripture today, we need to see God’s faithfulness to us, our faithfulness to God and finally, a unique way to have the results of our faithfulness magnified. First, we need to see ...

I. God’s Faithfulness to Us

When’s the last time someone broke a promise to you? Probably not that long ago. How did that make you feel? Some people are really good at it. They’ve raised promise-breaking to an art form. They break their promise to be there on time or to pay you back or to do whatever you asked them to do. But then their excuse is so good for why they broke their promise, it’s so believable, you end up asking them to forgive you for expecting them to keep their promise. Do you know anybody like that?

Well, let me tell you about Someone who is NEVER like that: God. We find the word or the idea of faithfulness in the Bible attached to God over a hundred times. It’s one of His moral attributes, which means that faithfulness is a permanent part of God’s nature. In **Mal. 3:6** God says, **“For I the LORD do not change.”** And because God never changes, we can know that He will be faithful forever. In fact, it’s impossible for God to be unfaithful.

So, what does the word ‘faithful’ mean in the Bible? Dr. Millard Erickson writes:

... his faithfulness means that he proves true. God keeps all his promises. This is a function of his unlimited power and capability. Thus, he could never commit himself to do something of which he would eventually prove incapable. He never has to revise his word or renege on a promise. As Balaam said to Balak, “God is not a man, that he should lie, or a son of man that he should repent. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?” (Num. 23:19)²

Ps. 145 is just one of those many passages that describe God’s faithfulness:

... [The LORD is faithful in all his words and kind in all his works.]

The LORD upholds all who are falling and raises up all who are bowed down.

The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season.

You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing. (Ps. 145:13b-16)

Most of our World Outreach Team members can tell stories of God's great faithfulness to them. Some have had their lives spared when terrorists' bullets riddled their vehicle. A number of years ago, the Payne's had a CAT 5 hurricane bearing down on their island in the South Pacific when, at the last minute, God turned it away. When the environment is volatile, God's faithfulness is more obvious. But what about in our normal routines? Can you, for example, view God's faithfulness working in your insurance company?

Do you know anything about the man who wrote the hymn, *Great is Thy Faithfulness*? He must've been a missionary to write such words of faith, right? Well, his name is Thomas Chisholm. Do you know what he did to make a living? Well, he studied to enter the ministry, but, after just one year, he had to resign due to poor health. And for the rest of his life he lived in New Jersey and sold life insurance. Toward the end of his "boring New Jersey life," he said this:

My income has not been large at any time due to my impaired health ... which has followed me on until now. Although I must not fail to record here the unfailing faithfulness of a covenant-keeping God and that He has given me many wonderful displays of His providing care, for which I am filled with astonishing gratefulness."³

So, it was a New Jersey insurance salesman who wrote these inspiring words...

*Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon, and stars in their courses above,
Join with all nature in manifold witness
To thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love.*

*Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide,
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow
Blessings all mine with ten thousand beside!*

An insurance salesman from Vineland, New Jersey, who wrote:

*Great is Thy faithfulness,
Great is Thy faithfulness,
Morning by morning new mercies I see,
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord unto me.*

You don't need to be staring down a CAT 5 hurricane to sing it. You can sing it and mean it from your desk pod at the Aetna. You can sing it as you wash the dishes, change the diaper, change the oil, mow the lawn. You can sing it from your board room, bedroom, family room, or hospital bed. You can sing it anywhere and, anywhere you sing it, it always has the same meaning;

**The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases;
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.** (Lam. 3:22-23)

God's faithfulness to us has no end. But secondly, we also need to examine ...

II. Our Faithfulness to God

God's not the only one who can be faithful. We can be faithful, too. But as we've already noticed, our level of faithfulness is not always up to God's standard.

The Bible speaks of four types of faithfulness: faithfulness as an attribute of God (Ps. 89:8); as a positive characteristic of some people (Matt. 25:23); as a characteristic that many people lack; and as a gift of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22). To be faithful is to be reliable,

unwavering, steadfast. To be unfaithful is to be fickle, disloyal, deceitful, compromising to a fault. The first two of the Ten Commandments are basically about being faithful:

“You shall have no other gods before me.

“You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God ...” (Exodus 20:3-5)

You see, it’s all about being loyal to the only true God. And if you are, there are great benefits. Here are some of them:

Ps. 37:4 Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Prov. 16:6 By steadfast love and faithfulness iniquity is atoned for, and by the fear of the LORD one turns away from evil.

This isn’t saying that by OUR faithfulness iniquity is atoned for, but by Jesus’ faithfulness. It’s our loyalty, respect, and obedience to Christ that deliver us from evil.

This doesn’t mean we’ll never be touched by evil, but that evil will never take control of us.

And Jesus Himself promises a very specific reward for extreme faithfulness, faithfulness that includes suffering ...

Rev. 2:10 “Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.”

While I was growing up in Minnesota, my family was part of the Evangelical Covenant Church, a denomination with its roots in the Swedish migration to the U.S. back in the late 1800’s. When I was a teenager, an event among missionaries that my church supported rocked the world. It revolved around a surgeon named Dr. Paul Carlson who had left a lucrative practice to serve as a full-time medical doctor at a bush hospital in the jungle town of Wasolo in Congo, central Africa. He’d gone there on a short-term mission trip in 1961 but returned to set up a private practice in California. But he couldn’t get the enormous medical needs in Africa out of his mind. When asked by a colleague why he would leave the comfort of the U.S. for the challenges of Africa, Dr. Paul said, “I’m going back because I can’t stand doing hernias and hemorrhoids anymore. Here there are so many to do the work – over there so few.”

Dr. Paul, his wife Lois, and their two children made their home in a community that included a leper colony and an 80-bed hospital serving 100,000 people. He often served as many as 200 patients a day. He loved the people and the people loved him, giving him the moniker Monganga Paulo, “My Doctor Paul.” [put up photo from Life magazine]

Unfortunately, after a couple of years, the political situation deteriorated significantly. Dr. Paul became so concerned that he moved his wife and kids to a neighboring country. He, however, returned to his post. He worried that, if he left, the rebel soldiers would come in and kill all his patients.

Unfortunately, in September of 1964, rebels entered his hospital taking Dr. Paul and other staff captive. After three months of captivity and torture, during a chaotic gathering of all 230 prisoners in a courtyard, one of the rebel soldiers started shooting. Dr. Paul and several others began to run. Dr. Paul told a missionary running with him to go over first. That missionary was **Chuck Davis**, the father of Ace Davis who was on our staff here at Valley a number of years ago. Chuck remembers it this way ...

We came to a short cement wall around a porch, and Dr. Carlson motioned me to jump over. I dove over the wall, then turned to help him. Just as I reached up to help him over, he was shot ... It was just a matter of seconds, and he would have been over the wall ...

Though Dr. Paul Carlson had lived in Congo just over two years, he was buried there among the people he loved. In a diary that he kept during his imprisonment, he wrote:

“For me to live and die is gain – this becomes more real each day ... If by God’s grace I live, which I doubt, it will be to His glory ... I can only realize when I see such difficulties as we have seen that we need to work all the harder for our Lord. I’m praying that through this we might see revival in our churches in the Ubangi, in the hearts of all of us, and our Congolese brothers too.”⁴

I distinctly remember these events from when I was 14 years old. This is the kind of extreme faithfulness that Jesus said would earn some of His disciples the crown of life.

I am not suggesting that this extreme faithfulness is required of all believers. But I do want us to see one more teaching about any form of faithfulness. What I want us to see is that ...

III. Faithfulness Can Be Squared.

In math, when you square a number you multiply it by itself. This magnifies the sum, as opposed to merely adding the number to itself. In II Cor. 9 we find a formula for ‘squaring’ faithfulness. Look at it:

The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency (contentment) in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.

He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. (2 Cor. 9:6-11)

The Greek word translated ‘*bountifully*’ is literally ‘*with blessings*,’ plural. *Whoever sows ‘with blessings’ will reap ‘with blessings.*’ And verse 10 says it won’t be by addition. NO! God, who supplies seed for sowing will ‘MULTIPLY’ your seed, increase your harvest in MULTIPLES. God will “square” your faithfulness. However much faithfulness you produce, God will square it, multiply it times itself.

Dr. Paul Carlson’s faithfulness was “squared” by God in the years that followed his giving of his life. Perry Mulenga, a member of this church, grew up in the Democratic Republic of Congo. I asked him if he was aware of any movement of God in the late 60’s or early 70’s. He said, “Yes, yes! There was a great movement. In fact the church I grew up in was part of that mighty work of God in my country.”

You don’t have to give your life to be part of a mighty work of God. You just have to give with your whole heart, *not reluctantly or under compulsion*. This is the essence of Faith Promise Giving. You take God at His word. He says that He will supply you with the seed to be sown AND THEN He will cause there to be an increase in the harvest of your righteousness. He supplies the money, you give it, He increases the harvest. He multiplies it. He squares it.

So, are you tired of dealing with the hemorrhoids and hernias of your job? Are you ready to be part of creating a revival? By the way, did you notice that this promise from God to square your faithfulness is a 911 call? Yes, it’s 2 Cor. 9:11. Our world is at the point of emergency. It’s time to dial up God’s 911. I’m going to give you time to do that right now. Take a Faith Promise card. Write down your ID. Then, put down a number of how much “seed money” you want God to provide to you so that you can sow it for the spiritual harvest He will bring. This is just between you and God, but remember, ‘*Whoever sows sparingly will reap sparingly. But whoever sows bountifully, will reap bountifully.*’ Let’s put in our order for seed to do some serious sowing for the harvest this year.

¹ Caitlin O’Kane, “911 dispatcher helps child who called for math homework help,” CBS News (1-29-19)

² Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983,1984,1985), p. 291

³ www.gaither.com “Great is Thy Faithfulness – The Story Behind the Hymn”

⁴ From memory and various articles including: www.paulcarlson.org; blogs.covchurch.org/serveglobally; <https://ms/2H1dUeE>, TheNewYorkTimes, “Carlson’s Death: ‘Matter of seconds’