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1 | *God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.* 1 CORINTHIANS 1:9

True to His Word

GOD IS FAITHFUL

When you were a kid, and you reneged on some commitment you made to one of your friends, I'll bet you heard this angry protest: "You promised!" Why? Because you hadn't been true to your word.

True to your word. That is a clear, concise, accurate definition of what it means to be a faithful person. If you're faithful, there is consistency between your *words* and your *works*, between what you *believe* and how you *behave*, between what you *promise* and what you *perform*. If someone believes they can trust you and you prove faithful, you will increase their faith in you and strengthen the bond between you. If you prove unfaithful, you will deservedly be on the receiving end of an angry protest from someone who believed they could trust you. And you will damage, perhaps even destroy, a precious relationship.

The Bible defines faithfulness the same way. When Scripture describes a person as "faithful," it's almost never referring to how much faith that person possesses, but to how much faith others can place in that person—how much others can trust him or her to perform what has been promised. A faithful person honors, cherishes, maintains, and guards the faith of those who put their trust in them.

That's exactly what we mean when we say, "God is faithful." As Christians, we're saying that God the Father is "able to do what he [has] promised" (Rom. 4:21), that God the Son, the "Word of God" incarnate, is "Faithful and True" (Rev. 19:11, 13), and that God the Holy Spirit, the "Spirit of truth" (1 John 4:6), will not—because he cannot—lie (Heb. 6:18). We're declaring our belief that God honors, cherishes, maintains, and guards the faith of those who put their trust in him by keeping his promises to them—that he is true to his word.

True to his word. That is a clear, concise, accurate definition of God's

faithfulness. And it's all quite simple to say, isn't it? But as the Bible illustrates, God's faithfulness is often not anywhere near so simple to see in our experience of this fallen age.

We live in this dystopic swirl of disappointment, disease, disasters, and disarray, where we're subject to futility, war, deceit, financial crises, suffering, grief, depression, dark nights of the soul, and death, all the while constantly battling the sinful desires of the flesh and the eyes and pride of life dwelling in our members (1 John 2:16). It's not surprising that at any given time, as our perceptions are distorted by our disorienting experiences, it can appear to us as though God is not being true to his word, tempting us to level an angry protest against him.

So, having defined what God's faithfulness means, we're going to briefly meditate on ninety-nine sightings of his faithfulness in Scripture, different and sometimes unexpected ways it manifests, to help correct some of our distortions and increase our faith that God's promises are more trustworthy than our perceptions; that we have good reason to believe that "he who calls [us] is faithful; he will surely do it" (1 Thess. 5:24); that he really is true to his word.

PRAYER

Father, I believe you are faithful; help my unbelief (Mark 9:24)! As I meditate on your word, which reflects all the chaos, calamity, sorrow, and sin in the world, help me see your faithfulness more clearly so I will more deeply trust in you with all my heart and not lean on my own understanding (Prov. 3:5). In Jesus' name, amen.

MEDITATE MORE

Read Romans 4 and ponder: What was it about Abraham's faith in God's faithfulness that God counted as righteousness (vv. 20–23)?

Begin with What You've Been Given

GOD IS FAITHFUL . . . TO TEACH YOU FAITHFULNESS

A faithful person honors, cherishes, maintains, and guards the faith of those who put their trust in him by keeping his promises to them. God's always like this. You and I, on the other hand . . . well, let's just say this proverb was written about people like us:

Many a man proclaims his own steadfast love,
but a faithful man who can find? (Prov. 20:6)

If we're honest, we'll admit this proverbial shoe has fit at times. If we're rigorously honest, we'll admit this shoe fits more often than we care to admit. The truth hurts.

But God knows us, and when he wounds his children with a truth, his purpose is to heal us (Hos. 6:1) and set us free (John 8:32). Our Father is faithful to keep his promise to conform us to the image of Jesus (Rom. 8:29), the "faithful witness" (Rev. 1:5). And he does this, not by downloading faithfulness into us like a software upgrade, but by "training us . . . to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age" (Titus 2:12). Like all training, growing in faithfulness is an arduous process. God teaches us to build our capacity for faithfulness much like we build our capacities for anything: by *exercising* what we want to grow.

We all like the idea of a stronger, slimmer body, or becoming proficient in a skill, or building more effective habits for more sustained productivity. But no transformation happens without starting the painful work of exercising what's weak and staying with it until it grows stronger.

The same is true of faithfulness. We all like the idea of being true to the love we've proclaimed, the commitments we've made, and the responsibilities God has entrusted to us. But if unfaithfulness has become a sinful habit

in a certain area, because selfishness has taken root and we lack the fortitude to swear to our own hurt and not change (Ps. 15:4), no transformation will occur without the hard, painful work of *exercising* faithfulness.

The good news is that God has provided us everything we need to start exercising today. We begin with what we've been given. Our training regimen is structured around Psalm 37:3: "Trust in the LORD, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness." Today's exercises in *befriending faithfulness* are to do whatever it takes for us to *trust in the Lord* for the grace to diligently *do good* to the people and through the responsibilities he's entrusted to us, in the place (*land*) we find ourselves, with the resources he provides. And to do our "work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men" (Col. 3:23).

God is faithful to teach us faithfulness so that we increasingly—like him—honor, cherish, maintain, and guard the faith of those who put their trust in us by being truer to our word. And he will teach us here, in the "land" where he's placed us. And if we befriend faithfulness here, someday our Master will say to us, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master" (Matt. 25:23).

PRAYER

Father, thank you for being faithful to teach me faithfulness. Today, whatever it takes, help me trust you fully and "do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10), where you have placed me and with the resources you provide. In Jesus' name, amen.

MEDITATE MORE

Read Psalm 37, written when David was old (v. 25), and note the various ways he describes the dynamic between our faithfulness and God's.

Will I Believe God?

GOD IS FAITHFUL . . . TO PUSH YOU INTO DEFINING MOMENTS

If you had been a traveling guest among Abram's nomadic group four thousand years ago, and just happened to observe him the night he stepped outside his tent and gazed into the starry heavens, you wouldn't have guessed it was a defining moment in Abram's life, much less a defining moment in world history. Because what made those minutes of quiet stargazing so astronomically important was that an old man, in the deep recesses of his heart, *believed God*.

God had pushed Abram's faith to the brink. It began when God promised this childless, seventy-five-year-old man, "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you . . . and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 12:2–3). Abram believed God.

Years went by and God did bless Abram with material prosperity, but not with progeny. However, he reaffirmed his promise (Gen. 13:14–16) and Abram believed.

More years went by. God continued to prosper everything Abram did, except procreate. When God again reaffirmed his promise, but again said nothing about how or when it would be fulfilled, Abram, now in his eighties (and Sarai in her seventies), poured out his anguished perplexity in a desperate prayer: "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" (Gen. 15:2).

This brings us to that monumental, undramatic night. God told Abram, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them. . . . So shall your offspring be" (v. 5). He still didn't tell Abram how or when descendants would come. Once again, he reaffirmed his promise.

But this reaffirmation contained an implied question: "Abram, do you believe me, or your own perceptions?" It was a defining moment.

Aged Abram, with a barren, aged wife and a childless tent, looked into

the starry, starry sky and in his heart resolved to trust that though he couldn't see how, "God was able to do what he had promised" (Rom. 4:21). Abram believed God. And God "counted it to him as righteousness" (Gen. 15:6).

God leads many of his children to defining moments when our faith seems pushed to the brink. To observers, it might not show. But inside, everything is on the line for us, all hanging on our answer to a simple, life-defining question: Will I believe God's promise over my perception?

Defining moments are expressions of God's faithfulness to us. God uses them to reveal whether we have justifying faith (the kind he counts as righteousness), to bring needed clarity to our commitment, and to help our unbelief (see Mark 9:24) by forcing us to lay aside the excess weight of nagging doubts (Heb. 12:1).

But our defining moments can also be expressions of God's faithfulness to an untold number of others. For in walking "by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7) in this world, we also become channels through which God's saving grace flows to others. These channels of grace connect with others for years, even centuries beyond us, adding more stars to Abram's sky.

PRAYER

Father, thank you for being faithful to me. Whatever it takes, help me walk in a manner worthy of you and fully pleasing to you (Col. 1:10). And since without faith it is impossible to please you (Heb. 11:6), help me lay aside any weight of unbelief and, if necessary, push me into a faith-defining moment. In Jesus' name, amen.

MEDITATE MORE

Paul wrote, "No unbelief made [Abram] waver concerning the promise of God" (Rom. 4:20). Why isn't Abram's perplexed prayer in Genesis 15:2–3 an example of wavering faith?

But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. LAMENTATIONS 3:21–23

This I Call to Mind

GOD IS FAITHFUL . . . EVEN WHEN YOUR HOPE HAS DIED

This is, arguably, one of the Bible’s most beloved declarations of God’s love, mercy, and faithfulness. What’s surprising is that it comes from what is, arguably, the Bible’s saddest book: Lamentations.

The book’s author wrote of the nightmarish horrors he’d witnessed as the Babylonian army first laid siege and then laid waste to Jerusalem. He saw priests massacred (Lam. 2:20), women raped, men enslaved (Lam. 5:11–13), young and old slaughtered in the streets (Lam. 2:21; 4:7–8), and starvation-crazed citizens resort to cannibalism (Lam. 4:10). Then, like a spear thrust into Israel’s spiritual heart, he saw the Babylonians raze Solomon’s great temple to the ground (Lam. 2:6–7).

But the author knew he and his people hadn’t been mere victims of ruthless Babylonian imperialism: “The LORD has done what he purposed; he has carried out his word, which he commanded long ago” (Lam. 2:17). After centuries of prophetic warnings, God had finally brought upon his rebellious people (Isa. 1:7–9; Amos 2:4–5) the dreadful covenant curses Moses had pronounced (Deut. 28:47–57).

So the author lamented that God had “driven [him] into darkness without any light,” “enveloped [him] with bitterness and tribulation,” and “shut out [his] prayer” (Lam. 3:2, 5, 8). No wonder he wrote, “My soul is bereft of peace; I have forgotten what happiness is” and “my endurance has perished; so has my hope from the LORD” (Lam. 3:17–18).

By all appearances, everything was lost. God, in his righteous wrath, administered through a foreign superpower, had slain his “firstborn son” (Ex. 4:22). The tomb had effectively been sealed. All one could do was weep beside the grave—or hide from those with power to kill. Sound familiar?

Suddenly, light shone in the grieving author’s darkness: “But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope” (Lam. 3:21). What did he recall that

revived his dead hope? The word of the Lord whose judgment had buried his hope. He recalled that God is “merciful and gracious . . . abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” (Ex. 34:6), and that God promised to extend his steadfast love and mercy “from everlasting to everlasting” to those who fear him (Ps. 103:17). All was not lost. God would not let his firstborn son remain in the tomb. God’s word became a light in his darkness (Ps. 119:105).

This lamenting poet likely didn’t realize his words would so powerfully foreshadow Jesus, the Word made flesh (John 1:14), the “light [that] shines in the darkness” (John 1:5), who endured the judgment of destruction we deserved. But reading his poems through New Testament lenses, he reminds us that in our darkest places, when we’ve “forgotten what happiness is,” when it feels like our “endurance has perished” and “so has [our] hope from the LORD” (Lam. 3:17–18), Jesus is the greatest expression of God’s unceasing, merciful steadfast love for us. And Jesus, through his Spirit, loves to resurrect our hope by helping us call to mind his “precious and very great promises” (2 Peter 1:4). And when his light shines in our darkness, “the darkness [will] not overcome it” (John 1:5). For great is his faithfulness.

PRAYER

Father, thank you for your unceasing steadfast love, your never-ending mercies, and your great faithfulness. Help me experience them anew today, and should I find my hope perishing, help me call to mind the promises that will revive my hope in you. In Jesus’ name, amen.

MEDITATE MORE

Read Psalm 103, then read Lamentations 3:19–33. How many echoes of the psalm do you hear in the lament?

Fly by the Instruments

GOD IS FAITHFUL . . . TO GUIDE YOU IN SPIRITUAL STORMS

On July 16, 1999, John Kennedy Jr.'s single-engine Piper Saratoga crashed into the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of Martha's Vineyard, killing John, his wife, Carolyn, and Carolyn's sister Lauren. All investigations into the cause pointed to a phenomenon called "spatial disorientation."¹ This occurs when a pilot flies into conditions that prevent him from seeing the horizon or the ground. Reference points that normally guide his senses disappear. His sensory perceptions become unreliable, and he can no longer discern up from down. It can be deadly.

This has a spiritual parallel, one that many saints in Scripture and across the ages (myself included) have experienced when we've "flown" into spiritual storms, with names like "dark nights of the soul" and "faith crises."² We lose sight of familiar reference points and become spiritually disoriented. In confused fear, we lurch back and forth trying to regain our bearings, and often begin to spiral down.

Most planes are equipped with navigational instruments. If a pilot enters conditions where his sensory perceptions become unreliable, he can "fly by the instruments." But this is much harder than it sounds.

Under normal conditions, we're usually wise to trust our brain's instinctive instructions to escape danger. But when a pilot is spatially disoriented, his desperately urgent instincts are based on unreliable sensory data. So, if everything in him is shouting "Bank right!" but the instruments indicate he should hold steady, he will instinctively doubt the instruments. As one expert stated, reflecting on the Kennedy crash, "You have to be well trained to disregard what your brain is saying . . . and fly by the instruments."³ John had not received this training.

This also has a spiritual parallel. In disorienting spiritual storms, we must learn, like pilots, that our subjective perceptions are unreliable. We

must train ourselves to place our faith in the objective instruments of God's promises and warnings in Scripture. To paraphrase our text, we must fly by faith, not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). But this is harder than it sounds.

When our "skies" are clear and our spiritual reference points are in sight, it's easy to imagine confidently relying on the Bible's navigational instruments in some spiritual storm. But, as experienced pilots testify, a real storm is nothing like we imagine. We don't realize how much we rely on our perceptions until we experience the fear of real disorientation and feel the compelling power of our perceptions commanding us to doubt the instruments. We need training.

But faith training isn't like flight training. There aren't faith simulators to prepare us for spiritual storms or human faith instructors to grab the controls if we panic. We must learn by flying in a real storm.

The Holy Spirit is the best instructor. If we listen, he'll faithfully equip us to use the biblical instruments and instruct us through the experience and example of saints whose storms made them skilled at flying by faith, not by sight. And what all these saints (and I with them) testify is that in a spiritual storm, though our disoriented perceptions demand otherwise, we're always wise to fly by the instruments.

PRAYER

Father, thank you for faithfully providing all I need to endure any spiritual storm I may face. Whatever it takes, teach me to "fly by the instruments" so that should I become spiritually disoriented, I will not "lean on [my] own understanding" (Prov. 3:5). In Jesus' name, amen.

MEDITATE MORE

Read through Hebrews 11, identify the spiritual storms each saint endured, and what it meant for them to "fly by the instruments."

6

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest.

PSALM 22:1-2

“I Will Never Forsake You”

GOD IS FAITHFUL . . . EVEN WHEN YOU FEEL FORSAKEN BY HIM

Those anguished opening words of Psalm 22 were penned by King David, who also composed Psalm 23, which opens like this:

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. (vv. 1–3)

These two psalms are about as different as they could be. It’s almost hard to believe they were written by the same person. In Psalm 22, David feels forsaken by an unresponsive God; in Psalm 23, he feels shepherded by an ever-attentive God. In Psalm 22, David’s soul is in restless agony; in Psalm 23, his soul is resting in the care of his Good Shepherd.

I love that these two psalms are back-to-back, because they illustrate how different a saint’s experience of God can be. But there’s a deeper beauty in this poetic juxtaposition. Both psalms foreshadow and prophesy of Jesus. And in that light, we see that the order in which they appear is no accident.

We know Psalm 22:1, because Jesus screamed it in unfathomable agony on the cross: “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” (Matt. 27:46). *Selah*. At the crux of history, there was a moment when God was God-forsaken.

And he was forsaken for you. And me. The eternal radiance of the Father’s glory and “the exact imprint of his nature” (Heb. 1:3) became in that darkest moment *our* unholy sin (2 Cor. 5:21). And for that moment, the holy Father could not abide the holy Son made unholy. God became the object of God’s wrath to eternally remove our curse, that we might become the objects of God’s eternal mercy, clothed forever with his holiness and righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21).

In Psalm 22, God not only provides us words to pray during our desolate

seasons, but he also helps us grasp the desolation Jesus experienced to purchase our peace and restoration.

That is the promise of Psalm 23, purchased by the price of Psalm 22: your Good Shepherd will restore your soul forever. Which makes the order of the psalms fitting. Jesus was forsaken by God, scorned by men, and pierced in his hands and feet (Ps. 22:1, 6–7, 16). For *your* sake. So that he could guide you through every evil valley, honor you before every evil enemy, pursue you with goodness and mercy *every day* of your earthly life—even days you feel forsaken—and bring you to live with him in his house forever (Ps. 23:4–6).

Do you feel forsaken by God? Jesus understands and sympathizes with you—more than you know (Heb. 4:15). Psalm 22 may be your song for brief nights, but Psalm 23 will be your song for an eternal morning (Ps. 30:5). And for all your lonely nights or refreshing mornings he makes this promise of faithfulness: “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Heb. 13:5).

PRAYER

Father, thank you for the “inexpressible gift” of your holy Son (2 Cor. 9:15), who endured being forsaken by you during the moment he became sin for me, that I might become your righteousness and never, in reality, be forsaken by you. In Jesus’ name, amen.

MEDITATE MORE

Read in order: Matthew 27:27–50, Psalm 22, and Psalm 23 and ponder the faithfulness of God in the forsakeness of God for your sake.

A Priceless Gift in a Painful Package

GOD IS FAITHFUL . . . TO INCREASE YOUR ENDURANCE

Not long ago, I met a friend for breakfast. When I asked him how he was doing, he answered, “I’m enduring.” This response gave me joy. For many months he’d been wrestling “spiritual forces of evil” (Eph. 6:12) in a fierce, disorienting fight for faith (1 Tim. 6:12). His “enduring,” as in working out his faith, indicated that God was at work in him, doing something wonderful (Phil. 2:12).

The New Testament makes it clear that, for the Christian, developing endurance is essential, because “the way is hard that leads to life” (Matt. 7:14), and we’re certain to face fiery trials (1 Peter 4:12). Therefore, it says, “you have need of endurance” (Heb. 10:36) because “by your endurance you will gain your lives” (Luke 21:19). God promises to us the “eternal weight of glory” of knowing and being known by Christ (2 Cor. 4:17; Phil. 3:8). But the promise has a crucial condition: *our endurance*.

Our heavenly Father loves to bless his children with good gifts (Luke 11:13). So, when he wants to bless us with the priceless gift of endurance, in what package should we expect it to arrive? One that “seems painful rather than pleasant” (Heb. 12:11): a season of discipline. Because endurance only comes by pushing ourselves (or being pushed) beyond our current limits and persevering through significant, sometimes agonizing, discomfort.

God’s discipline can be a confusing gift to receive at first. It was for the original recipients of the epistle to the Hebrews. They too battled spiritual forces of evil, suffering persecution for their faith in Christ and wrestling with their own questions and doubts. They were growing weary and discouraged.

But the author of Hebrews was discerning. He perceived they lacked endurance. Their “drooping hands” and “weak knees” (Heb. 12:12) were

putting them at great risk of losing their best and abiding possession (Heb. 10:34). They were losing confidence in Christ and shrinking back in unbelief (Heb. 10:35, 39). These Christians needed encouragement, but not the gentle, consoling kind. They needed exhortation.

So, in love, the writer delivered a clear, strong word: “You have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised” (Heb. 10:36). He reminded them of the examples set by saints who’d gone before them (Heb. 11), especially the example set by Jesus (Heb. 12:2). And then he reminded them that their affliction was an expression of their Father’s faithfulness, a painful package containing his loving gift of endurance—if they’d receive it (Heb. 12:3–11).

We all need this reminder because we all “have need of endurance.” And if, in a “severe test of affliction” (2 Cor. 8:2), we’re tempted to give up, it’s likely we need a firm reminder to “endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2 Tim. 2:3 KJV). Because, as Jesus reminded us, “by your endurance you will gain your lives” (Luke 21:19).

It gave me joy that morning at breakfast that my friend needed no such reminder. He was faithfully receiving his faithful Father’s very good gift.

PRAYER

Father, thank you for faithfully providing me the endurance I need to receive what you have promised: “fullness of joy” and “pleasures forevermore” in your presence (Ps. 16:11). Give me discernment to recognize this gift in its painful package, and humility to receive a firm exhortation should I begin to lose heart. In Jesus’ name, amen.

MEDITATE MORE

Read Hebrews 10:19–12:17. Receive this grace of exhortation if you “have need of endurance,” and learn from the writer’s firm expression of faithful love if someone you know needs to receive this grace.

Learn to Trust the Speed of God

GOD IS FAITHFUL . . . EVEN WHEN HE SEEMS SLOW

Your head ages faster than your feet.⁴ It's true. Einstein was right. He theorized that the speed of time isn't a constant, as is the speed of light; it's relative to a particular frame of reference. For us, that frame of reference is earth's gravitational force. The higher we are from the earth, the weaker its gravitational pull, and the faster time moves.

This reality impacts us all daily. The GPS⁵ satellites we rely on to guide our surface and space vehicles and keep our phones and computers synced orbit in a time different from ours. So, they're programmed to compensate for the time speed differences based on Einstein's calculations. Change the calculations and the result would be catastrophic.

Here's what to keep in mind as we go on: the speed of time we experience in our frame of reference isn't always the speed we should trust. Sometimes it's critically important that we trust a timing based on a different frame of reference.

As Christians, this concept isn't new. Two millennia ago, Peter wrote, "Do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (2 Peter 3:8). In other words, in the life of faith it's critically important that we learn to trust God's timing more than our own—to trust the speed of God.

This isn't easy—not only due to sinful unbelief, but because to trust a timing based on a different frame of reference is counterintuitive. Since we can't calculate God's time, his timing often doesn't make sense to us. So, at times we cry, "How long, O LORD?" (Ps. 13:1).

That's why after Peter described a God-day as being like a thousand years for us, he went on to say, "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness" (2 Peter 3:9). Indeed. The Creator of light speed, who constantly monitors a universe some 94 billion light-years across, is clearly not

slow. But his time scale is clearly very different from ours.

The Creator of time is not constrained by it (Col. 1:16). God is not in time; time is in God (Acts 17:28; Col. 1:17). So, when the speed of God seems slow to us, or when his timing doesn't make sense, we must "not overlook this one fact": God-time is different from human-time. God-time is relative to his purposes, which is his frame of reference. And God, according to his wise purposes, makes "everything beautiful in its time" (Eccl. 3:11)—the time he purposefully chooses for it.

And his purposes, as they relate to us, are beautifully redemptive: "The Lord is not slow . . . but is patient toward [us], not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

When God seems slow to us, we must remember that he moves at the speed of his faithfulness to work "all things . . . together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). We can trust his timing over the relative and unreliable frame of reference that shapes our expectations.

PRAYER

Father, thank you for being faithful to move at the speed that accomplishes all your purposes (Isa. 46:10) and allows you to make "everything beautiful in its time" (Eccl. 3:11). Forgive me for the times I've questioned your timing in unbelief and teach me to trust your frame of reference over my own. In Jesus' name, amen.

MEDITATE MORE

Read 2 Peter 3. How can you apply what we've just pondered together to the promise of Christ's return?

Pray for Your Children and Don't Lose Heart

GOD IS FAITHFUL . . . TO HEAR YOUR PRAYERS FOR YOUR CHILDREN

Years ago, I wrote an article suggesting seven things we parents can pray for our children. However, I included this qualifier:

Of course, prayers are not magic spells. It's not a matter of just saying the right things and our children will be blessed with success.

Some parents earnestly pray and their children become gifted leaders or scholars or musicians or athletes. Others earnestly pray and their children develop a serious disability or disease or wander through a prodigal wilderness or just struggle more than others socially or academically or athletically. And the truth is, God is answering all these parents' prayers, but for very different purposes.⁶

This qualifier has become more important to me over time. I've seen children of faithful, prayerful parents reject their parents' faith, and the children of unfaithful parents embrace Christ. I've seen spiritually vibrant young adults become spiritually disillusioned mature adults, and spiritually disillusioned young adults become spiritually vibrant mature adults. The older I get, the less confidence I place in how things appear at any given point. And this has encouraged me to persevere when it comes to praying for my own children.

Like most young parents, my wife and I started out with an almost unconscious assumption that if we parented "right," our kids would embrace the faith we embrace. But years of parenting have humbled me. Our five precious children, all adults now, grew up in the same home, with the same

parents who earnestly sought to live out their faith in essentially the same ways, and were part of the same churches. Yet each are walking unique spiritual paths at their own unique speeds. And as of now, not all embrace the faith we tried our insufficient best to nurture. Here is where a parent's faith is tested.

But here is also where a parent can learn to really pray. There's nothing like losing confidence in the power of our abilities to make us more dependent on and desperate for God's power to do for our children what we cannot: give them saving faith. And desperate dependence is what fuels persevering prayer.

That's the lesson of Jesus' parable of the persistent widow in Luke 18. The helpless widow was desperate for justice and dependent on the unrighteous judge to give it to her. Her desperate dependence fueled her relentless petitions till finally the judge granted her request. And if an unrighteous judge can be badgered into granting justice, "will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night?" (Luke 18:7).

When it comes to our children, Jesus wants us "always to pray and not lose heart" (Luke 18:1). This is a lifelong calling. For if our children are living and doing well spiritually, they are not out of the woods. And if they are living and not doing well spiritually, their story is not over.

God is faithful to hear our prayers for our children. And no matter how, according to his infinitely wise purposes, he determines to answer, he will not allow such a labor to be in vain (1 Cor. 15:58).

PRAYER

Father, thank you for my marvelous children and for faithfully hearing my prayers for them. Increase my awareness of how desperately dependent I am on you to give my children what I cannot, so it will fuel my persistent prayers for them. In Jesus' name, amen.

MEDITATE MORE

Read the parable of the persistent widow in Luke 18:1–8. Why does God value persistence in prayer?