

God's Great Faithfulness • Psalm 100:5

Last week I met a college president from Oklahoma who used to be a pastor. He told of conducting a wedding ceremony in which he asked the bride, "Will you take this man to be your lawful wedded husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do you part, according to God's holy ordinance?"

She was supposed to say, "I will," but she said nothing. The pastor waited. The groom waited. Everyone waited. After a very long silence, tears flowed down her face. She looked up at the pastor and said, "I'll try."

I don't know what that pastor did. I certainly don't know what the groom thought. But I want you to know that God does better than that bride. God promises that he will be good to us and that his love will endure forever. God will not break his vows to us! Psalm 100:5 says, "The Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations."

Relationships are very important to God. That is the story of the Bible from beginning to end. God desires a good relationship with every person and hates anything that damages or breaks his relationship with us. Open the Bible to almost any page and you will find something on that page about relationships—our relationship to God or our relationships with each other.

Take, for example, one of the most familiar examples of all: The Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments, in large part, are about relationships. The first four have to do with our relationship to God; the last six deal with our relationships to each other.

The first commandment is, "You shall have no other gods" because God wants an exclusive relationship with us. The second command says that "you shall not make or worship idols" because God doesn't want anyone or anything to come between him and us. Idols are like wedges between God and us, cutting our relationship apart. The third command is, "You shall not take the name of God in vain." God's name is not to be misused because that would damage our rela-

tionship with him. If someone uses your name in the wrong way, that will hurt your relationship with that person. The fourth commandment is to "remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." Every relationship requires time together. You cannot grow or maintain a relationship if you don't spend time with the other person. God wants special set-aside time with us to keep our relationship strong.

Commandment number five is "Honor your father and your mother." God desires that we have good relationships in our homes and in our families. The next commandment is, "You shall not murder." Murder is the ultimate breakdown of any relationship. The seventh commandment is, "You shall not commit adultery." Adultery betrays the intimacy and trust of a marriage like nothing else does. God wants us to have good marriages with exclusive intimacy. The eighth commandment says, "You shall not steal." Taking what belongs to someone else always damages relationships for everyone. Commandment number nine tells us, "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor." Telling the truth strengthens relationships; lying destroys relationships. And the tenth commandment says, "You shall not covet." To yearn for what belongs to another person is not only self-destructive but undermines relationships all around us.

But God gives us more than instruction, more than law. God also gives to us an example. He models for us how a good relationship can work. He

decided that he would love us and give us good. He decided that he would always tell us the truth. He decided that he would always do what is right. God decided to keep his promises to us regardless of what we do. "His love con-

tinues through all generations."

Do you remember O'Henry's Christmas story *The Gift of the Magi*? It's the love story of a young married couple in New York City who didn't have enough money to buy Christmas presents for each other. They were so poor they were barely making it.

God decided to keep his promises to us regardless of what we do.

She was a beautiful woman with magnificent long hair down to her waist. He was a loving husband whose prized possession was a gold pocket watch.

When Christmas came they expected no gifts from each other, but each had a special secret. He bought her expensive ornamental combs to wear in her magnificent hair. She gave him a gold chain for his prized pocket watch.

The irony was in the way they had paid for their presents. She sold her hair to a wig maker—it was cut too short for the ornamental combs. And her husband had sold his pocket watch in order to buy the combs.

The point of the story is that they loved each other. They counted their relationship to be of far more value than any possession or appearance. They gave their very best to each other without expecting anything in return.

God did even better than that! For Christmas God gave us his own Son. That is proof of how much he loves us. It is proof that he will do whatever he needs to do in order to have a good and lasting relationship with us. It is proof that God knew no limit in his love or his faithfulness.

We need to understand faithfulness. Anyone can make promises. Anyone can be good once in a while. Anyone can show love sometimes. But faithfulness is doing it on a consistent basis. Faithfulness is making promises and always keeping them. Faithfulness is doing whatever love needs to have done. Faithfulness is consistency. Faithfulness is never giving up. Faithfulness is staying the course. Faithfulness is the way God is with us.

That is very good news because it means we can always depend on God. No matter what we have ever said to him or done to him. No matter how many times we have been unfaithful. No matter how far we have wandered. There's nothing we can do to make God unfaithful. His faithfulness is guaranteed.

God will always love you. He will always tell you the truth. He will always keep his promises. He will always give you his best. "For the Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations."

Psalms 100 ends with an intriguing truth. It is that the faithfulness of God is not limited to a lifetime. God is faithful through all generations.

Jonathan Edwards was one of America's great-

est religious leaders. His 18th century writings and sermons were a catalyst in the American Great Awakening. Some scholars consider him to be the most brilliant philosopher this nation has ever produced. He was a pastor, scholar, writer, missionary, theologian, philosopher and eventually the president of Princeton University.

A significant study has been done of Jonathan and Sarah Edwards' life and marriage. It is said that this devout man of God prayed that his children would become Christians and would effectively use their lives for God. But he also extended his prayer to his grandchildren and his great-grandchildren and great-great grandchildren as well. He prayed for future generations that were not yet born asking that they would experience the faithfulness of God, that they would become believers and that they would have highly productive and significant lives.

Sociologists have studied one hundred years of descendants of the marriage of Jonathan and Sarah Edwards. They discovered that not only did generation after generation come to faith in Jesus Christ but that they also made an enormous contribution to this country's culture and history. They produced an exceptional number of pastors, journalists, judges, governors, members of the United States Congress and one vice-president of the United States.

The study went on to compare Jonathan Edwards' descendants to those of a contemporary of Jonathan Edwards who was an unbeliever and a criminal to see what it was like in his family for that same hundred-year period. It was found that none of his descendants for one hundred years was ever gainfully employed. Every descendant for one century either depended on the income and care of others or spent a significant percentage of their lives in prison.

Our God is more than a God of individuals. He is a God of families. And he is the God of all generations. Many of you are living examples of that. Your parents were Christians and they sought to impact your life with Christian truth and values. You are the beneficiaries of that.

Some of you, by contrast, rebelled against your spiritual heritage. You rejected the teachings of the Bible, defied the holy lifestyle of your families and repudiated Christian faith.

Some of you have come back; or maybe you are at least thinking about it. Perhaps it's as if you

have tried to run away from God and could not escape. You are living proof of the truth of Psalm 100:5, “...his faithfulness continues through all generations.”

But there is not only a past and present aspect of this truth about God, there is a future aspect as well. There are those of you who are frightened or heartbroken over the ungodliness of your children. You did your very best to raise them in Christian faith. You have loved them and prayed for them. You took them to church. You taught them the Bible and righteous living.

But they have abandoned God. They are living sinful lives. They are prodigals who have rejected everything you hold sacred. They have no time for God, the Bible, prayer, the church or godly living.

You wonder what went wrong. You don't know what else to say or do. You fear that one day you will die and there will be no one left to pray for the son or daughter whom you love but who does not love God.

These last words of Psalm 100 are for you: “...his faithfulness continues through all generations.” It is the truth that God loves your children more than you love your children. It is the truth that Jesus, the Son of God, prays for your children more than you pray for your children. You may think that you will never give up on them. I hope that you won't. But be assured that even if you do give up, God will not. “His faithfulness continues through all generations.”

This isn't a guarantee that your son or daughter will repent and come to God. Even God, the perfect parent, had rebellious children named Adam and Eve. Jesus, the best of leaders, had a dozen followers and one of those betrayed him. It is possible to do everything right and still have those you love turn out wrong.

No, it is not a guarantee that God will overrule anyone's personal choices. But it is a guarantee that God will never give up on them. He will pursue them. He will love them. He will be good to them. He will convince them that what they are doing is wrong. He will keep drawing them back to himself and to faith. “His faithfulness continues to all generations.”

The final results may not be known until long after you have died. The blessings may not be fully played out until your grandchildren or great-grandchildren. But you can count on God to be faithful to you and to yours for generation after generation after generation.

There is no one else like God. He is truly one of a kind. He is marvelous. He is amazing. He is wonderful. He loves you and is good to you. And he is absolutely faithful.

As we begin to see his goodness and his enduring love and his absolute faithfulness our inevitable response is to shout for joy. We will then worship the Lord with gladness.

And we will enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise.

It is precisely the words of Psalm 100:

Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth.

Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Know that the Lord is God.

It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.

For the Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.

***God will always love you.
He will always tell you the truth. He will always keep his promises.***

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