

# UPON THE ROCK

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Upon the Rock is published bimonthly for the purpose of setting forth sound biblical material concerning first-principles and evangelism. We strive to print articles that are informative for Christians and non-Christians

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## **Tragedies Occur, but God is Faithful**

Brandon Britton

Recently I was watching the local news when a story was reported of a female police officer responding to a domestic abuse call. When she arrived she tried to remove the female from the scene, in order to protect her from an abusive husband, she was shot by the man and is currently in critical condition. She was trying to do the right thing and help someone, and it may cost her, her life.

About a year ago, a man walked into a classroom full of children in an Amish community and opened fire, killing a number of children who had simply come to school to learn. Tomorrow it will be something different, next week there will be another tragedy. We are constantly reminded of the reality of tragedies and we have all experienced them to varying degrees. Some, it seems, suffer much worse and more often than others. A friend of mine has lost a home to fire, tornado and flood. As awful as that must have been, he also suffered the tragedy of an infant daughter dying and a foster daughter being murdered. Words can't describe the pain they felt and no amount of sympathy can help someone "know how they feel."

It may even seem that no sooner do you begin to pick up the pieces from one tragedy, that another strikes. Perhaps you have felt that the only thing you accomplish by getting back on your feet is making it possible to be knocked back down again. You might argue that you don't even get up before more suffering is being piled upon you, burying you in heartache. Do you ever feel like the harder you try to do what is right, the more effort you put forth to grow, serve and obey, the more fierce the blow. I personally don't think this is always coincidental.

eighth Annual upon the rock lectureship

Theme: how god treats sinners

February 23-24, 2008

1. How God Treated Adam and Eve
2. How God Treated Noah
3. How God Treated Peter
4. How God Treated Judas
5. How God Treated the Woman at the Well
6. How God Treated the Woman Caught in Adultery
7. Would A Loving God Send Lost Humanity to A Place of Eternal Punishment?

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A former co-worker of mine would often reply to the question, “How are things going?,” with the answer, “Too good, and I know the Devil isn’t going to leave it alone for long.” If things are going great in the lives of Christians, Satan is unhappy. If we are diligently and successfully serving God in His kingdom, we are actively thwarting the efforts of Satan. When we are strong we busy ourselves in good works, we reach out with the Gospel to those who are hurting, and give hope to the hopeless. When we are walking in the light we try to lead others out of the kingdom of darkness. As the kingdom of God grows, the kingdom of Satan diminishes. Therefore, I don’t think it is coincidental that when we are working the hardest, we get hit the hardest. And when we get knocked down, there is a strong temptation not to get out of bed, come to worship, pray fervently, study the Scriptures and reach out to others. The tragedy is so real and so painful that we have a hard time doing anything.

If that is how you feel right now, you need to hear this message loud and clear: YOU ARE NOT ALONE! In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul compares the body of Christ to a physical body. In the physical body when one member is injured or missing, the rest of the body is affected and so it is in the body of Christ. God gave us the church to provide us with a family, a support group of fellow believers to fellowship with and be strengthened by. But sadly, there are some congregations where this attitude does not exist. When one hurts, they do not all hurt, but even if this is the case, YOU ARE NOT ALONE! Jesus understands our suffering and pain. He knows what it is like to experience tragedy. We have a High Priest Who has walked in our shoes and Who makes it possible to come boldly before the throne of God and obtained grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:15-16).

Jesus suffered the tragedy of the loss of a loved one. All of us have lost someone we love and our Lord did too. His first cousin, John the Baptist, six months His senior, was imprisoned and beheaded by a

cruel and immoral king. Imagine that a family member of yours is wrongfully imprisoned and then essentially, legally murdered. How would you feel? Angered, frustrated, heartbroken? Jesus no doubt did too. But this was not the only time death intruded into His life. One of His closest friends, Lazarus, became very sick and after a few days died. Remember, Lazarus came from a family of believers. They were some of the most loyal followers of Jesus, and they too suffered the tragedy of death. How did Jesus react to the news? "Jesus wept" (John 11:35). The next time you shed tears of grief over the death of a loved one, remember those same tears once flowed down the face of our Lord.

Jesus suffered the tragedy of being betrayed by and losing a friend. What have you lost? Keys, a wallet, a cell phone, a job? While these losses are unpleasant, they cannot compare to the pain of losing a friend. And adding insult to injury would be losing a friend to betrayal. Has anyone ever betrayed your trust? Did they tell your secrets, betray your trust, spread rumors about you? Jesus was betrayed to die by one of His twelve hand-picked apostles. These were the men who were almost never out of His sight for three years. They traveled together, ate together, preached together and loved one another. Jesus was not just an apostle, he was the treasurer of the apostles. Jesus didn't have much earthly possessions, but what little He did have was put in Judas' trust. What did Judas do with it? He was dipping into the money bag and stealing from the Lord. One of His closest friends was stealing from Him and would then betray Him to be killed for more money. He was betrayed for thirty pieces of silver, the price of a common slave. Do you think Jesus ever thought, "Is that all I am too you, is this what our friendship was worth to you?" Perhaps we will not ever suffer anything this drastic, but even if we do, the Lord says, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

Jesus suffered the tragedy of sin. The common line of thinking is, if

some things about heaven I can imagine, and I can think upon these things, and it will serve as motivation to press on to the goal.

I often think of what Noah must have felt when God shut the door to the ark, and Noah looked around and saw his wife, his three sons and his three daughters-in-law. As sad as it must have been to know that everyone else outside the ark was lost, what a solemn joy it must have been to be there in the ark of safety with those he loved the most. As a Christian, I want to help as many people get to heaven as possible, but when all is said and done, when I get to heaven if I can look around and see my wife and my three girls I will have realized my biggest goal in life: 1) To get to heaven myself, and 2) To help the ones I love the most to get there too. If I miss heaven, I miss everything.

This life ends, but God is faithful and will reward all those who have prepared for eternity. The question I would like to leave you with dear reader is this: After your death, what then?

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HAPPY HOLIDAYS

*May your holidays be spent with those you love, and may God bless you as you seek to serve Him!*

toward Sodom!

Not only should both men and women remind their spouses about their main goal in life, but mothers and fathers must constantly remind their children of what is truly important. Parents, initially everything your children know about God comes from you! Think of the importance of starting early and instill in them a love for the spiritual. “And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. An thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up” (Deuteronomy 6: 5,7). If you think that sounds like work, it is because it is work. We are to diligently teach our children and remind them of where they came from and where they are going.

### THE REWARD

“And the building of the wall of it was of jasper, and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, and emerald; The fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, and amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass” (Revelation 21:18-21). This description of the church in heaven is a metaphoric description. The Holy Spirit uses physical beauty to try to help us get a glimpse of heaven. There is no true way to make us understand just how perfect heaven will be. We cannot even begin to imagine it. It will be a new place, a beautiful place, a pure place and a permanent place (2 Corinthians 5:1). There are

we are suffering, we must be doing something wrong. When Job endured all of his tragedies, his “friends” came to tell him what a horrible, wicked sinner he is. They even said to him, “who being innocent has ever suffered?” Jesus has. Look at the suffering of the Lord on the cross and be reminded that it was all for nothing that He did. He suffered, not because He was a sinner, but in spite of the fact that He was. He suffered for the sins of others. Sometimes we suffer because of the sins of others. A family at my home congregation was returning home from a night out bowling, when a drunk driver crossed into their lane and almost killed them. Thankfully, they all survived, but they spent many weeks in the hospital suffering physically from the effects of the crash. I could literally fill this page with example after example of people suffering because of sin, either theirs or someone else’s. But the point is, Jesus also suffered the same tragedies and can relate to us in ours.

Tragedies occur, and there is very little we can do about it, except to prepare ourselves and strengthen our faith so that we can stand strong when they come. Satan wants us to lose our faith or become so hurt by tragedy that we become ineffective and simply do nothing. Tragedies occur, but God is faithful. While we are struggling, stumbling and hurting, we must look to Jesus, who is the author and finisher of our faith. Who, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despised the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. We must consider Him who endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest we grow weary and faint (Hebrews 12:2-3).

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## Loved Ones Let Us Down...

A.J. Cox

### Introduction

As much as we might like to think that those who are closest and dearest to us will never let us down, we must acknowledge that human beings are sinful and, therefore, will often disappoint. The apostle Paul affirmed the universal sinfulness of man when he wrote, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 6:23). Similarly, the apostle John declared, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8). Placing too much trust in men is like leaning upon a broken staff. Eventually it will break and pierce the hand (2 Kings 18:20-21). In contrast, God is faithful, which is to say He is trustworthy, sure, and true (1 Corinthians 10:13). God, Who cannot lie, is reliable and always keeps His end of the bargain (Hebrews 6:18). Whereas we must be wary of placing too much trust in men, we have nothing to fear by coming to trust under the wings of God (Ruth 2:12). To illustrate, consider some of the ways in which men may let us down, but God has shown Himself to be faithful.

### Family May Let Us Down...But God is Faithful

There are many ways in which family members might fail each other. In the very first family a husband and a wife failed each other when Eve ceased to be submissive and Adam neglected his responsibility as the head of his home (Genesis 3:6; 1 Timothy 2:11-15). Likewise, at a time when Job desperately needed support and comfort, his wife let him down when she told him to “Curse God and die!” (Job 2:9-10). Parents and children may also let each other down, as is evident by the case of Eli and his sons. By their wicked conduct Hophni and Phinehas shamed themselves and their father (1 Samuel 2:12-17, 22-25; Proverbs 1:8; 10:1; 17:25; Ephesians 6:1-3). At the same

He spent about one hundred years preparing a boat, the likes of which had never been seen, in a place where up to that time the land was watered by a mist from the ground (Genesis 2:6). He was ridiculed, belittled, mocked. But nonetheless, he stayed with it reminding himself daily of his main purpose in life. Then Abraham is mentioned: “By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in a land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob the heirs with him of the same promise” (11:8,9). Abraham left with his wife Sarah, and others with them, on a journey that would take them places they have never heard of; through people that would seek their destruction, and through circumstances they certainly could not foresee. The way would be hard. Why? What was their motivation in all of this? Why was Abel willing to die to please God? Why was Noah and his family willing to endure all they did? Why was Enoch so intent on pleasing God? Notice the next verse: “For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Hebrews 11:10). They wanted to go to the home of God. They kept their focus on the one question that matters the most: After death, what then?

Not only must one continually remind himself of what this life is all about, but he must also remind his spouse. Perhaps the greatest reminder of the importance of this point is seen in the life of Lot and his family. Remember the choice Lot made to “pitch his tent toward Sodom” (Genesis 13:12)? Then remember that when the angels went to rescue Lot and his family from the imminent destruction of that city, they found Lot right in the middle of the city? What did Lot lose that day? Well he lost at least two daughters, sons-in-law, and he lost his wife. What was the cause of Lot’s wife losing her life that day? She looked back. She couldn’t leave this world behind. Imagine how much Lot rued the day when he chose to pitch his tent

far ahead said, "Well, I guess I'll die." Then the old man asked one more time, "What then?" The young man realized the point of the old man's question. The one thing that mattered most is the thing the young man completely left off his list of things to do. He had not prepared for what comes after death. He missed the whole point of this life, and that is, to prepare for the life to come. God has promised a great and grand reward to those who prepare to meet Him. Many preachers have said, and rightly so, that heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people. What do they mean by that? Simply put, that when Jesus died on the cross, He left the decision on whether or not I will go to heaven completely up to me. He did everything He could to make sure I go to my reward, but I must prepare myself for it.

#### **A REMINDER**

In this life we must continually remind ourselves of our main goal, namely heaven. Hebrews chapter eleven gives a list of several men and women who succeeded in remembering their true home. "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh" (Hebrews 11:4). Abel's journey through this life was short, but he died remembering that his main goal in life was to please God. "By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God has translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God" (11:5). Enoch's journey was strange, in that he did not make the journey to meet God in the same manner as almost everyone else. He did not have to die, but rather was translated. Why? He pleased God. "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith" (11:7). Noah's was a terrific journey.

time Eli let his sons down by failing to restrain and discipline them (1 Samuel 2:29; 3:10-13; Proverbs 3:11-12; 13:24; 22:6; Ephesians 6:4).

Whereas family may let us down, God is faithful! As a Father, He loves us unconditionally and He is eager to give good things to those who ask Him (Romans 5:6-8; Matthew 7:7-11; James 1:17). Unlike so many negligent fathers who love their children in word only, God's genuine love for us is manifested by the fact that He chastens us in order to produce the fruit of righteousness (Deuteronomy 8:5; Proverbs 23:13-14; Hebrews 12:3-11). Additionally, God will never fail to provide the guidance and leadership that we need throughout life (Psalm 23:2-3; 2 Timothy 3:16-17). Few things are as painful as when family lets you down. But we can take comfort in the knowledge that God will never fail nor disappoint.

#### **Friends May Let Us Down...But God is Faithful**

Friendship is truly a wonderful blessing. A true friend loves at all times and may even stick closer than a brother (Proverbs 17:17; 18:24). We must acknowledge, however, that even a friend may let us down. King David experienced the betrayal of a friend when his trusted advisor and counselor Ahithophel allied himself with his treacherous son Absalom (2 Samuel 15:12, 31). David decried the bitterness of betrayal when he wrote, "Yea, mine own familiar friend, in who I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me" (Psalm 41:9). The Lord himself experienced the bitterness of betrayal when His disciple Judas Iscariot agreed to deliver Him to the chief priest for thirty pieces of silver (Matthew 26:14-16). Jesus not only foresaw this betrayal, but He warned his disciples that it would take place (Matthew 26:20-25; Luke 22:21-23). And when Judas finally did betray his Lord he did so in a most offensive and calloused way, with a kiss (Matthew 26:47-50; Luke 22:47-48). Friends may also let us down when they tempt us to do

wrong. Jesus, likewise, was tempted by a friend when, after He foretold His death and resurrection, Peter rebuked him and sought to prevent Him from fulfilling God's will. In response Jesus turned to Peter and said, "Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men" (Matthew 16:21-23).

Whereas friends may let us down, God is faithful! A man need never worry about being betrayed by the Lord, for such would be inconsistent with His nature (Hebrews 6:18). A person who places his trust in God can do so with confidence, knowing that whoever believes on Him will not be ashamed (Romans 9:33; 10:11). Additionally, God will never tempt us to do wrong or lead us astray. James wrote, "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed" (James 1:13-14). Far from tempting us to do wrong, God helps us to overcome our temptations. Paul said, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13). Even if every friend that the Christian has on earth were to let him down and fail him, he would still have the greatest friend of all in the Lord.

### **Brethren May Let Us Down...But God is Faithful**

When a person becomes a member of the church of Jesus Christ they become a member of a great spiritual family (Matthew 12:46-50; Mark 10:28-30). The relationship that Christians share with one another can be the source of great joy, strength, and comfort (Acts 28:15; Romans 15:14; 2 Corinthians 7:13; Philippians 2:1-2; 4:1; Philemon 7). We must acknowledge, however, that even brethren may let us down. Brethren, for example, let us down when they turn

When the Lord returns all things will be dissolved and melt with a fervent heat. We will leave this world just as we came into it, with nothing. "*Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; Blessed be the name of the Lord*" (Job 1:21). We must guard our hearts and be ready for the Lord's return.

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## **This Life Ends**

Mark Reynolds

There is an old story that conveys a meaningful and useful lesson for us to bear in mind; the story goes something like this: A young man was graduating high school and for several years he and his friends were planning to take a trip throughout several states in the United States. An older, wiser man asked the young man, "So what are your plans after high school?" To which the young man replied, "My friends and I are going to take the trip we have been planning for several years." The old man asked him, "What then?" The young man said, "Well, I plan to attend college." The old man asked, "What then?" The young man said, "Well, I hope to get my degree, graduate, then start a job in my selected field." The old man simply asked, "What then?" The young man said, "I will probably get married, and have a couple children." The old man asked, "What then?" The young man said, "Well, I will try to raise my family, send the kids to college, and let them start a family of their own." The old man asked, "What then?" The young man growing weary of the question said, "Well, I'll probably retire and enjoy life after work." The old man asked again, "What then?" The young man never having thought this

money, but God has given it for us to enjoy while we live on this earth. We need to learn to be content with what we have. The third lesson we learn from these passages is that riches are given to be shared with others. God has blessed some with great wealth and they will be judged by what they do with their wealth. God gives us riches to do good works. The question we need to ask ourselves, what are we doing with our riches? Are we sharing what God has given us? When we answer these questions it will tell us a lot about how we view our riches.

In the great faith chapter of Hebrews 11, an interesting statement is made concerning the faith of Moses. *“By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ, greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward”* (Hebrews 11:24,25). The phrase, “He rejected the treasures in Egypt for the reward” is what is interesting to me. How did his faith in God get to the point that he was willing to forsake all for the reward. The answer is that he kept his heart pure and good. The heart is the master key to man’s being, the source of every attitude, word, and deed. This is why Jesus taught, *“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”* (Matthew 7:19-21). Moses’ life was filled with compassion for his people and a willingness to follow God. Because his heart was set on the spiritual and not on the physical he could see through the eye of faith the eternal reward. We must keep our hearts pure and good so that we do not lose sight of the eternal reward. Far too many have set their hearts on the treasures of this world and have lost sight of the eternal.

their back on the Lord and leave the faith. Paul spoke of such a personal disappointment when he wrote, “Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world” (2 Timothy 4:10). Brethren may also let us down when they fail to provide the strength and support that we need in times of distress. Again, Paul wrote, “At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge” (2 Timothy 4:16). Similarly, during His agony in Gethsemane, Jesus requested that Peter, James, and John wait with Him and watch because His soul was exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Though Jesus desperately needed them in the hour of trial He returned to find them sleeping, prompting Him to observe, “the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:36-46).

Whereas brethren may let us down, God is faithful! We need never worry about God forsaking us, for He has said, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Hebrews 13:6). This enables us to boldly say, “The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me” (Hebrews 13:6). After Paul declared that all men had forsaken him he went on to say, “Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me” (2 Timothy 4:17). What a wonderful reassurance we have, that even if all others forsake us, the Lord never will.

### Conclusion

It has not been the purpose of this article to undermine or depreciate the value of our relationships with family, friends, or brethren. Rather, it has been the hope that by highlighting human frailty and weakness we might come to recognize that our trust should be chiefly in the living God (1 Timothy 4:10). While loved ones and all other men may let us down we rejoice in the knowledge that God is faithful.

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## Health Fails, But God is Faithful

Phil Grear

Sometimes the hardest place to be a Christian is in a hospital room. We witness so much misery that seems so unfair. Even those who try the hardest to live righteous, godly lives are subject to the frailties of the human body. Heart disease, cancer, etc. can cause the strongest and healthiest among us to decline in health. None is exempted from the agonizing experience of illness, either their own or that of a loved one. It may be the illness of a good friend or even a loved one such as a lifelong mate or one of our precious children.

Many in Jesus' day experience this heart-breaking tragedy. The apostle Peter witnessed the suffering of his mother-in-law (Matthew 8:14-15). Jairus experienced the sickness and death of his beloved twelve-year old daughter (Luke 8:41-56). Jesus confronted sickness wherever he went. We are frequently told, "He healed their sick." On a personal level He knew the tragic illness of a dear friend. "Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick." (John 11:3). Not even the Son of God could avoid the suffering that plagues the human race.

Often it is our own illness that devastates our lives. Jesus once encountered a woman who had an "issue of blood twelve years, which had spent all of her living upon physicians, neither could be healed of any." (Luke 8:43). How do you cope with a body that has betrayed you?

Someone who has abandoned all faith in God has often done so for personal reasons. An honest and fair examination of the evidence points to the existence of God. Something else has motivated their unbelief, and often that is the suffering they have encountered in this life. "If there is a God, why did he let this happen?" Whether their own or that of a loved one, suffering has led them to doubt God. But

*eaten and are full—then beware, lest you forget the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage."* (Deuteronomy 6:10-12). The danger of becoming preoccupied with the things of this world to the neglect of spiritual things has and is a real problem of mankind.

Many among us have large savings accounts and/or assets totaling huge amounts. We work hard to earn this money and want to invest it so that it will earn the highest interest. There is nothing wrong with making money and investing it wisely. However we need to understand the danger that wealth can bring. We must be careful that the love of more does not cause us to neglect God, church, or family. This is why Paul told Timothy to warn the rich about putting too much trust in riches. *"Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life"* (1 Timothy 6:17-19). There are three important lessons that we can learn from these passages of scripture. First, we learn that riches are uncertain (v.17). Because of this uncertainty we should not put our trust in them. Solomon learned the hard way that riches do not bring happiness. In his old age he would write about the fleeting of riches. *"Will you set your eyes on that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings; They flow away like an eagle toward heaven"* (Proverbs 23:5). None of the material things in this life will last. In the day of death, all of the money in the world cannot help us to live any longer. It will cease just like our physical bodies. We must put our trust in God who gives us the riches. The second lesson we learn about riches is that they are unnecessary for the present enjoyment (17). Notice carefully what Paul says, "Who gives us richly all things to enjoy." God gives us all things to enjoy. We may have a little house, a little car, and not much

trust and our confidence must be whole-heartedly in Him, for He indeed is faithful to keep all His promises (2 Peter 3:9). “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths” (Proverbs 3:5-6). “Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord keep us motivated to press on toward heaven, no matter what may befall others. Let us heed the words of the Hebrews writer, “Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for **he is faithful** that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works” (Hebrews 10:23-24).

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## The Fleeting of Riches

Larry Reynolds

There are particular dangers in poverty and affluence. The wise man said, *“Remove falsehood and lies far from me; Give me neither poverty nor riches—Feed me with food allotted to me; Lest I be full and deny You, and say, “Who is the Lord?” Or lest I be poor and steal, And profane the name of my God”* (Proverbs 30:8, 9). We are warned over and over again throughout the Bible about trusting in riches and allowing them to take us away from God. Shortly before Moses’ death, he warned the children of Israel as follows: *“So it shall be, when the Lord your God brings you into the land of which He swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give you large and beautiful cities which you did not build, houses full of all good things, which you did not fill, hewn-out wells which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant—when you have*

has God proven himself unfaithful because people suffer?

His name was Job. He was “perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil.” (Job 1:1). He was a very religious man who was deeply concerned about the spiritual welfare of his children (Job 1:5). Due to circumstances completely beyond his control, he was inflicted with “sore boils from the soul of his foot unto his crown. And he took a potsherd to scrape himself with; and he sat down among the ashes.” (Job 2:7-8). The boils so disfigured him that his friends did not even recognize him. They were so distressed at his appearance that “they lifted up their voice and wept.” They were so disturbed at what they saw that they tore their clothing and sprinkled dust on their heads (Job 2:12). People actually turned away when they saw Job coming. “The young men saw me and hid themselves; and the aged arose, and stood up. The princes refrained talking, and laid their hands on their mouths.” (Job 29:8-9).

Job desperately tried to make sense of his suffering, but received no help from his friends. They kept telling him God was punishing him for some unconfessed sin. Job vigorously insisted on his innocence, but still could not help but wonder why God was allowing this to happen. He begged God for an explanation. “I will say unto God, Do not condemn me; show me wherefore thou contendest with me.” (Job 10:2). He even expressed a desire to call God into account for the whole situation. “Oh that I knew where I might find him! That I might come even to his seat! I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments. I would know the words which he would answer me, and understand what he would say to me.” (Job 23:3-5). Job was crying out for an explanation that only God could give. But he never got it.

Finally God answered him, but not as Job expected. Job would just have to trust God’s judgment. “Then the Lord answered Job out of

the whirlwind, and said, Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee and, and answer thou me.” (Job 38:1-3). God presented Job with a long list of serious questions designed to help him realize that he was not to understand everything. Who was Job to call God into account? God was under no obligation to explain himself to anyone.

Job had no idea that he was the subject of a discussion between God and Satan. Satan had accused God of so sheltering Job that nothing bad could happen to him. Satan argued that Job would quickly abandon God if life got difficult. “And Satan answered the Lord and said, Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life. But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face. And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life.” (Job 2:4-6). Job never learned of this conversation, but he did learn that God was faithful and would do what is right. “Then Job answered the Lord, and said, I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee. Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? Therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not.” (Job 42:1-3). Job finally understood. “Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once I have spoken; but I will not answer; yea, twice; but I will proceed no further.” (Job 40:4-5). Job had learned that illness and suffering are not signs that God is unfaithful.

In the midst of great suffering and misery it is hard to see the hand of God. It is easy to blame him for the situation. “Why did God allow this to happen to me?” “If there is a God...” It is not sinful to ask these questions. Job asked them, but it is still said of him, “In All this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.” (Job 1:22). “In all this did not Job sin with his lips.” (Job 2:10) His health problems, as bad as

in grave danger. “For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn away from the holy commandment delivered unto them” (2 Peter 2:20-21). It is our responsibility to lovingly admonish and warn them of the error of their way: “Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins” (James 5:19-20).

We would do well to remember that even when brethren fall away, God is faithful. Though our brethren may disappoint us, discourage us, or even desert us, we have the assurance of our Lord that we will not be alone: “Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Hebrews 13:5). Time and again we are reminded in Scripture of the faithfulness of God. He is called “the faithful God” (Deuteronomy 7:9). Leaning upon His faithfulness is the answer to so many problems not only in our own individual lives, but also in the collective life of the congregation where we labor and worship. “**God is faithful**, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Corinthians 1:9). In times when we may be tempted to give in to the allurements of sin, we must remember, “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but **God is faithful**, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (1 Corinthians 10:13). In times when we do give in to temptation and our hearts and lives are not what they need to be, we would do well to remember that, “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). Our

light: “For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world” (2 Timothy 4:10). No doubt this was a blow to Paul and to all other faithful brethren who had been built up and encouraged by the work of Demas. However, Paul did not allow this to discourage him from living for the Lord. As a matter of fact, Paul had been betrayed by other brethren, but he took confidence in knowing that the Lord was still with him: “At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of a lion. And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen” (2 Timothy 4:16-18).

How should we react when our brethren fail us and fall away from the Lord? We must remember that they have frailties and weaknesses just as we do. “There is none that doeth good, no, not one” (Romans 3:12). We should pray fervently for those who have gone astray: “Confess your faults one to another, and pray for one another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16). We must also do everything we can to help restore the erring to the way of right: “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted” (Galatians 6:1). Take note also of a great lesson concerning our attitude toward the erring from the verse just cited—we must never think that we cannot fall to the same temptations that caused these to become unfaithful. It must ever be remembered that we are striving to get to heaven, and to help all that we can along the way to get there as well.

Those of our brethren who have turned aside from faithful service are

they were, did not indicate God’s lack of concern or care. In spite of outward appearances God was faithful. He had not allowed Job to be exposed to more than he could handle. And when it was all over he rewarded Job with great blessings. “The Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before...So the lord blessed the latter end of Job more than the beginning.” (Job 42:10-12). Job died without ever receiving an explanation for his physical suffering, but he had learned the faithfulness of God.

Nearly all will experience failing health during the lifetime. It may be the elderly person whose body wears out with the passing of the years, or the terrible suffering of a young child with a tragic disease. But none of this indicates that God is unfaithful. God will not abandon us during our suffering. We must learn to be patient and trust him, even when we do not understand all that is involved.

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## Faith Falters

Jim Bullington

Have you met any good old fashioned heroes lately? As we say in the south, “They’re about as scarce as hen’s teeth!” Maybe, just maybe, you’ve met some and just didn’t know it. This message on *Faith Falters* will introduce you to some heroes that live in your world, and finally, confront you with the biblical task of being one of God’s heroes.

The eleventh chapter of Hebrews mentions many Old Testament heroes, fourteen of them by name. But for the first two, Abel and

Enoch, the biblical student can list sins that existed in the lives of all of them. Noah, though one of the righteous eight, later succumbed to temptation and sank into a drunken stupor (Genesis 9:18-29). Abraham lied to Abimelech when he said Sarah was his wife; a half-truth we might say, but a lie none the less (Genesis 22:1-7). Isaac was extraordinarily partial to Esau while neglecting to some degree his obligations to Jacob and to his wife, Rebekah (Genesis 25:26-28). Jacob took advantage of Esau's weakness, beguiled his father, and inherited the family blessings due the oldest son (Genesis 25:29-34; 27:1-40). Joseph was a favorite of his father, Jacob, and seemed totally oblivious to his brother's feelings when he told them of his dreams and then revealed the fact that he would one day rule over them; not that they were justified in their later actions, but it is no wonder they were angry with him (Genesis 37:1-11). Moses acted out of haste and anger in killing one of the Egyptian task masters and then concealing the fact (Exodus 2:11-15). This list could go on and on, but the point should be obvious; people who were identified as heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 were men and women who sometimes stumbled and fell; they were human in the sense that they were subject to temptation and sin. Nonetheless, they were heroes one and all!

Perhaps a New Testament real-life hero will help us to define the essence of a hero and how this relates to faltering faith. First, however, it will be good to define the difference between faltering, falling, and failing. The concept is somewhat progressive in nature. When we falter, our step becomes unsteady and unsure; when we fall, our faltering steps are of such a magnitude so as to bring us down. When we fail, we remain in a fallen condition; we falter, and if we do not correct our ways, we fall; we fall, and if we do not correct our ways, we fail. Now watch this process in the life of a well-known New Testament character.

home because of the efforts of their concerned brothers and sisters? How many brethren felt they were all alone in the battles they were facing, only to have an arm around their shoulder or a hug or a gentle word from those of their brethren who had faced similar circumstances? No child of God could put a value on being a part of the family of God! Brethren who serve as marvelous examples of godly living and who continually encourage those around them by word and deed are an asset to the church of our Lord. One of the great blessings of being a part of the body of Christ is the ability to lean upon and to count on the faithful.

Sadly, at times we fail our brethren, and they fail us. As frail humans, "all have sinned" [past tense] and "come short of the glory of God" [present tense] (Romans 3:23). We will fall from time to time. Some will fall into momentary lapses of sin. Others will fall away for a while, only to "come to themselves" (Luke 15:17). Still others will fall away and be unfaithful for long periods of time. Perhaps through persistent efforts of caring brethren and untold multitudes of prayers, some of these may be won back to the Lord. It can be rather disconcerting and spiritually disastrous when those that we esteem, admire, and seek to emulate in the faith fall into sin and out of service to the Lord. While we should have confidence in our brethren, especially those who are faithful and active in the work of the Lord, we must be careful that we not place so much trust in them that we fall when they fall. We will have to deal with brethren who fall away. Even the most trusted and faithful may slip and fall. Consider Demas. At one time, he was a faithful companion and co-laborer of the apostle Paul. Paul mentions him as a faithful worker along with Luke and Mark (Philemon 24). He also sends his greetings to the church at Colossae (Colossians 4:14). Though he was a great asset to the work of the church at one time, he fell away, and his life was no longer worthy of commendation or imitation. As Paul neared the end of his earthly sojourn, he makes mention of Demas, though now in a very negative

Sometimes our faith falters; note however, it is **our** faith. The one thing that never falters is **the faith!** Our faith sometimes is weak, but **the faith** holds out promises that will never fail, hope that will never be disappointed, and love that cannot be exhausted. If I would be one of God's heroes, I need not look for personal faith that can never falter, but for purpose of heart that refuses to quit doing what is right regardless of the earthly cost. Jesus timeless question still applies: "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16:26).

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## Brethren Fall Away, But God is Faithful

Patrick Morrison

God, in His infinite wisdom and foresight, surrounded us with a spiritual family to help us on our journey toward heaven (1 Timothy 3:15). It would be near impossible for us to remain faithful to the Lord without the encouragement and support of a loving church family. God put us in the midst of those who can sympathize with our struggles, who can admonish us to leave behind our sins, who can lend us strength to fight the temptations around us, and who can rejoice in our victories. Truly, the wisdom of God is seen in the church: "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God" (Ephesians 3:10). How many brethren have been on the verge of giving up on the Lord, only to be encouraged by the good examples and kind words of loving brethren? How many brethren have wandered away from the Father's house, only to find their way

And the Lord said, 'Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.' But he [Simon Peter] said to Him, 'Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death.' Then He said, 'I tell you, Peter, the rooster shall not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me.'" (Luke 22:31-34). We know the rest of the story; Jesus' prediction about Peter's subsequent actions that night is a matter of inspired history. Indeed, before the full dawning of day, Peter had denied on three occasions his knowledge of His master! As the rooster crowed on that mournful morning, Peter's mind was swept back to the painful and true words of Jesus. Against all thoughts and claims to the contrary, Peter had denied Jesus Christ! He stumbled and fell. However, one thing that did not occur; he did not fail!

Notice the words of Jesus, "...[W]hen you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren." Jesus knew full well that Peter would falter and fall; He also knew he would not fail. Jesus recognized the character of Peter and knew that he would not remain in a fallen condition; He knew that he would return and be of great benefit even after such a tragic error on Peter's part. Faltering is bad; falling is worse; but failure is the final nail in our spiritual coffin.

A true to life hero in God' sight is not the sinless ones with whom He deals (none of which are human by the way). Rather, the heroes with whom God deals are those who have the courage of conviction to refuse to stay down after a fall; they get up in spite of the odds, knowing that their Father's opinion is the only one that really counts! They walk in faith, not flawlessly, but faithfully! God's heroes are saints who falter, sometimes fall, but who absolutely refuse to quit!

So, have you met any true-life heroes lately? Maybe, just maybe,

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there are some with whom you rub shoulders. Maybe there is one that the world looks down upon because of past sin in his/her life, but who refuses to quit. Maybe there's one who is out of favour with the powers that be, but who incessantly demands to know what is right and refuses to be deterred by the cries of the masses. Maybe there's one who has few friends because of an unpopular stand for truth that was consciously chosen years ago. These can present themselves as elders, deacons, Sunday School teachers, mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, daughters, sons, neighbors, friends, and in any and every circumstance of life. Once again, heroes are not people whose faith never falters; they are people whose faith never fails!

Now to the application of this study. Are you and I one of God's heroes? False humility needs to be set aside and we need to answer candidly and honestly this question. Do you remember the old saying, "Quitters never win and winners never quit?" Well, it is not true in every realm, but it is true when it comes to biblical faith. Winners never quit doing what is right; even if their faith falters, even if they fall, they refuse to fail! That's a winner; that's a real-life biblical hero.

Somewhere in this big, huge and sometimes cruel world, a man is reading this article and struggling to find the courage to rise from the ashes of a terrible personal fall; he knows what is right; he knew it when he made the stupid choices that led to his fall. This article is written to that man. God says, "Take heart and be a man! Rise up, come to Me and I will receive you as my very own!" Likewise, there is a woman, or perhaps a girl, who is at war with herself; she is in a fallen condition, but knows what God expects. Perhaps shame, or disgrace, or fear, or a thousand other hindrances stand in her way. The loving Father says the same: "Take heart. Be the woman I made you to be. Rise and come to me and I will receive you again just as I have done with every other hero I ever received into my arms!"