

## Found Faithful

Air Dates: July 17-21, 2023

### Day One

Do you ever go to God for help in a faithless panic? I certainly can remember doing that at times when I've been at the end of my own rope, and in panic rather than in faith, I've run to God for help.

Recently I was comparing two stories in Matthew 8. The first is the story of the Centurion who asked Jesus to heal his servant. You remember that the Centurion insisted that Jesus could heal his servant simply by speaking a word, he didn't need to come to his house. The Centurion had faith to believe that Jesus had the power to simply speak healing to his servant who was miles away. When Jesus heard this, he said, *"I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith"* (Matthew 8:10).

You see, this Centurion was not an Israelite, yet he believed in Jesus. And Jesus commends him for his faith, and heals his servant as requested.

A short time later, the disciples come to Jesus in a panic. Jesus was asleep in the boat, and a squall comes up quickly which threatens to overturn the boat and drown them all. They come in great fear, begging Jesus to do something if he can. And Jesus says to them *"You of little faith. Why are you so afraid?"* (Matthew 8:26).

Interesting that the Centurion was commended for his faith and the disciples are confronted for their lack of faith. Both needed help. Both sought help from Jesus. Jesus responded to both requests. But one was a request of faith, and one was a faithless cry of panic.

The Centurion expected Jesus to heal his servant, even long distance. The disciples were amazed that Jesus could calm the storm. The Centurion only knew Jesus from afar by reputation. The disciples had spent much time with him. Yet, the Centurion showed great faith. He came with his need, but he brought expectation along with the need. The disciples came with their need but they thought this storm was too much for Jesus. They really didn't expect him to do what he did.

How about you and me? Jesus invites us to come with our needs, but he loves to see faith along with it. The next time you're in a panic situation and you need Jesus' deliverance, come with faith believing that he will hear and answer. He loves to see us come to him by faith. It pleases him to see that we have faith in him. In fact, without faith, it's impossible to please him.

### Day Two

I have a tendency to talk to myself. Do you do that, too? Well, I was just noticing that the Psalmist did it a lot. As a matter of fact, I think all of us need to learn to talk to ourselves more.

As I read Psalm 42 and 43, I noticed how this phrase was often repeated: "Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God." Evidently the writer was struggling with depression, with discouragement, with the blahs, just like you and I struggle from time to time. And he talked to himself as a way to speak the right words into his mind and turn around his wrong thinking.

In verse 6 of Psalm 42, we read, *"My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you..."* Now this is a very good technique and habit for all of us to learn. When we feel down, we should force ourselves to remember and recite out loud God's goodness to us in times past.

Are you having a tough time? Then, stop right now and talk to yourself; find some place where you can say something like, "Look, what is your problem? God loves you and cares for you; he's met your need time and again. Remember what he did for you in times past and put your hope in him again."

I noticed in Psalm 42 and 43 that the writer also verbalized his doubts. "Why have you forgotten me. Why have you rejected me?" He voiced those doubts and questions to God, but immediately he came back to the truth of praising God and hoping in God.

When I find myself doubting and questioning God, I try to voice those to him out loud. "Lord, I feel as though you're not there. I just can't understand why this has happened. I can't help but wonder if you've forgotten about me here. BUT I know better Lord. I remember what you've done in the past, and I know your ways are not my ways. THEREFORE, I trust you, I place my hope in you. You are my Savior and my God."

So, talk to yourself. I believe it's a Scriptural principle we need to incorporate into our lives to help us find victory in those everyday ups and downs of life.

### Day Three

Does it seem like your spiritual walk could be better described as a limp? If you're like me, there are times when it seems you're struggling with the same things all the time.

Are you limping along—spiritually speaking? Does it seem like God is far away, and prayer is unrewarding and dead? When you read the Bible, do you find your mind wandering, as the words run together on the page? Does it seem like a dry history book rather than a live letter to you from the Lord? Has your desire to be involved in ministry grown cold, and instead those avenues of service are more like a duty now than a joy?

Well, you've got a spiritual limp. We all get them, and we need to be prepared to deal with them. Most of us want to leave the race when we start limping, don't we? We figure we just can't keep going, so we give up and sit on the sidelines or start down another path which looks a little easier. But that's not how we should deal with a spiritual limp.

I noticed a passage in Hebrews 12 which encouraged me as I thought about my occasional spiritual limps. Verses 12 and 13 tell us "So tighten your loosening grip and steady your wavering stand. Don't wander away from the path but forge steadily onward. On the right path the limping foot recovers strength and does not collapse..." (Phillips Translation).

Tightening your grip and steadying your stand and staying on the right path require discipline. Discipline without feelings or emotions. Discipline without visible results. The first verse of that 12th chapter of Hebrews tells us we must run with endurance the race marked out for us. Even run the race with a limp, but whatever you do, you are not to sit down, get sidelined or sidetracked.

Let me encourage you to keep running in the right race, even though you're limping along. Just like professional athletes, sometimes we have to "play hurt," keep on keepin' on even though we're not feeling one hundred percent. Remember that the limping foot is healed by tightening your grip and steadying your stand, not by getting out of the race.

## Day Four

I wonder if you give up too easily? Do you keep wishing for the easy way out of whatever you're facing? It's likely you, like me, could use a lesson or two in how to persevere. Lots of people make good starts; not too many complete the course.

We read in Hebrews 12:1 that we should run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Note that each of us has a unique race marked out. Your race may be different from mine, but the important thing for both of us is to hang in there and cross the finish line.

The night is darkest just before the dawn, and all too often we quit the race when it gets dark and bleak, when the finish line is just around the corner. In the first chapter of James we read that "*perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything*" (James 1:4). Without perseverance we won't reach spiritual maturity. That's why we need to learn perseverance.

How often do you feel like quitting? Hebrews 12:13 says "*Don't wander away from the path but forge steadily onward. On the right path the limping foot recovers strength and does not collapse*" (Phillips Translation). Therefore, we need to make certain we're on the right path, and then stay on it regardless. Even if you're just limping along, don't stop. As we hang in there, our limps are healed and we're able to cross the finish line.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "*Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful*" (1 Corinthians 4:2). Proving faithful is perseverance, and we can learn to be faithful and to persevere. I'll take a faithful person any day over one with bigger talents or gifts who isn't willing to hang in and get the job done—to stick with it through thick and thin times.

## Day Five

Undoubtedly many of you, like me, enjoy sports. That's a common practice for us Americans. Well, if you watch sports competition very often, you're familiar with the term "playing hurt." Many times in these games a key player will be injured in some way, and you'll see them slowly pull themselves up off the ground or the floor. You know they're hurting, but so often they stay in the game. I think we can learn something from these athletes.

When a player continues to play even though he or she is hurt, you know you're watching a real pro, someone truly committed to their game. That person is willing to sacrifice herself or himself for the good of the team.

Well, there are times in our lives that we must play hurt. What do you want to do when you've been hurt? Suppose someone has trampled on your feelings or been very cruel to you. It makes you want to go to the sidelines and lick your wounds, doesn't it? It throws you into a pity-party, and your first reaction is to walk out of the game and say, "Forget it. Who needs this!"

But a true servant of Jesus Christ many times has to play hurt. Jesus is looking for people with perseverance; people who play in spite of the pain; people who stay in the game even though they might want to go sit on the bench for awhile.

Paul wrote to Timothy that he must *Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus* (2 Timothy 2:3). In Hebrews 12 we see that hardship produces discipline in our lives, and Paul wrote to the Corinthians that he delighted in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions and difficulties for "*when I am weak, then I am strong*" (2 Corinthians 12:10b).

Are you hurt? Well, are you going to go sit on the sidelines and lick your wounds, or will you choose to endure hardship as a good soldier would? Ask God to give you the grace and strength to play hurt.