

# Continuing Faithful Over the Long Haul

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Date: 15 August 2021

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, it's great to be here. I appreciate the invitation to come and spend some time with you. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. from that sermon series that I could share here this morning that would be an encouragement to all of us. So if I normally don't entitle my sermons, but if I were to give this sermon a title, it would probably be something like continuing faithful over the long haul. One of the COVID-19 terms that we become familiar with now is long haulers, because there are some people who have ongoing results after they've had COVID-19, and over a long period of time, they have to deal with different results or consequences of their having COVID-19. And so we refer to that as long haulers. Well, in the Christian life, we need long haulers. We need people that are going to hang in there and continue faithful right to the very end. In June of 2001, I received a phone call from one of my cousins. He said, my dad, who is, well, this cousin said, my dad, who was my Uncle Peter Bueller, had just passed away, and they were preparing for the funeral service. And it just happened that Uncle Peter was a retired minister. The church that he was attending, and he was a retired minister. The church that he was attending was pastored by a person who had very recently become a widower. And so the family, in consultation with the pastor, said, you know, conducting a funeral service after you've just lost your wife for a dear friend would be a tremendous load. And so they said, we could bring in somebody else to help with the service. And so the family contacted me and asked me if I'd be willing to speak at my Uncle Peter Bueller's funeral. So I was thinking about, you know, what do you share a lifetime of faithful walk with God, pastoring a small country church for many of those years?

[ 3 : 39 ] A person who grew up in a very conservative, traditional church setting where they taught you that you couldn't have assurance of salvation. It was a sign of pride to say, to make the claim that you had eternal salvation. And so my Uncle Peter grew up in that context as a young man, but then he became a believer in Jesus Christ. He received the assurance of salvation, and the rest of his life he proclaimed that. And he taught about salvation in Jesus Christ and hope and joy that we could have by knowing that we belong to Christ. And so I thought, you know, in some ways it's not a hard service to conduct. When a person has served the Lord faithfully and they've gone on to their eternal reward, it's not a sad occasion. It's a celebration. But what exactly was I going to say? And as I was thinking about this, I was driving one day and listening to the radio, and that was exactly the time that

Charles Templeton had died. I don't know if that name rings a bell with any of you. Charles Templeton started out as a Christian evangelist back in the era of Billy Graham. As a matter of fact, Billy Graham and Charles Templeton were very involved in starting the whole Youth for Christ movement in the U.S. And so he started out as this evangelist and a dynamic man of God. And over a period of time, he drifted away from his faith and he became what he referred to himself as an agnostic. He says, I don't really know if there is a God. I don't really know if there's anything solid you can believe.

And he devoted himself to journalism. And over a period of time, he went even farther and he proclaimed that he was an atheist. He absolutely declared that there is no God. I don't believe that there is any God. And so he made his mark in journalism. And on this radio program that I was listening to after Charles Templeton had just died, they were lauding him and just talking about all the wonderful things he had done and all the contributions he had made through his journalistic work.

And I thought to myself, here were two men that lived kind of in the same era. My uncle Peter, who the people that were listening to the radio would not have recognized for the most part, Charles Templeton, whose name was quite well known, but who had remained faithful to God? One started out very devoted to God, serving God, and left that. The other one started out in a very humble way and walked faithfully with God and served God's people, served God and served God's people.

[ 6 : 32 ] staying faithful over the long haul. So Peter writes to encourage a group of Christians who are struggling, who are suffering in their faith.

And we know that that is not a new story in Scripture. A lot of people have suffered for their faith. In Hebrews chapter 10, we can read A Call to Perseverance. If we read Hebrews chapter 10, verse 19 and following on. And this short passage of Hebrews is very parallel to what we read in 1 Peter. So Hebrews 10, 19. Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the most holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened up for us through the curtain, that is his body, and since we have a great high priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience, and having our bodies washed with pure water.

So there, first of all, the author is pointing us to Jesus. He does that all through the book of Hebrews. He always talks about how Jesus is the new way, how Jesus is the living way, how Jesus is the better way, how Jesus is the perfect high priest, how Jesus is the perfect sacrifice. And he goes over and over this theme, comparing the Old Testament and contrasting that with Jesus, how Jesus is the fulfillment and the better way. So he reminds these Christians, this is who Jesus is.

[ 8 : 09 ] This is what he has done. He has opened up a way for us to come into the very presence of God. So then he comes out with a word of encouragement. Because of this, in verse 23, he says, Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another and all the more as you see the day approaching.

A very similar message to what we read in 1 Peter. Let us continue on. Let us be faithful. We might ask ourselves the question, If God is so great and God is so good and he has opened up a living way for us to come into his very presence, and he has promised to never leave us and never forsake us, why would we have to go through such hard struggles sometimes?

It's kind of a natural question, isn't it? If God is good, if God is all-powerful, why do we suffer? Why do we struggle? Why are his people persecuted?

And God has purposes in allowing this. And throughout Scripture, we find different reasons for which God allows suffering in our life. It says he allows suffering as a test to allow us to prove what our faith really is all about.

[ 9 : 47 ] 1 Peter 1, verse 7, it talks about the fact that our faith is being tested and we are being refined. It's kind of the picture of refining precious metals and taking away the impurities so that what is precious will remain.

Removing things that hold us back. Suffering kind of gets us to the very core of what is really important. Sometimes if life is just easy and we're going along, we have all these things that we think are very significant, very important, and then in a time of hardship we realize actually some of those things are not really important in light of eternity.

Some of those things could be released and given up, and we would still have the riches of Christ. Our response to suffering gives us a platform for witness.

In 1 Peter, again, in 1 Peter chapter 3, we read that we should be ready to give a reason for the hope that is within us. So when the world around us is running out of hope and they don't have a place to turn and they see a Christian who is at peace and a Christian who is content and a Christian who is joyful, it should give us a platform for witness.

And we can say, look at the treasure we find in Jesus Christ. And so God allows these hard things in our life to refine us and to purify us and to make us more like Jesus Christ and to give us an opportunity to be a witness to the world.

[ 11 : 20 ] As a matter of fact, in the book of Acts chapter 8, where it talks about persecution, it says that people were scattered and they went everywhere preaching the gospel, carrying the message of Jesus.

In 1 Peter chapter 1, where Peter is writing to the church and he addresses them as those who are scattered. And the picture, word picture that is there is a sower went out to scatter the seed. And as he went out, he threw the seed here and he threw the seed there onto the ground that was prepared. And that's the picture of God sending his people out into the world, scattering them into the world as carrying the seed of the good word of God and spreading it around so other people could hear that wonderful message.

So God knows that we're going to suffer. His word gives us the tools to prepare ourselves. But in chapter 5 of 1 Peter, I want to look a little more specifically at some of the resources that God has provided for us so that we can stay faithful for the long haul.

So let's go to 1 Peter chapter 5. And in the first three verses, we're going to see that God provides us with leadership, with role models and with examples.

[12:42] So Peter is writing as an elder in the church, and he's writing to, he appeals to the elders there. To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's suffering and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed.

Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care. Serving as overseers, not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be.

Not greedy for money, but eager to serve, not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. So Peter is specifically writing to the elders and saying, this is the attitude in which you should serve.

This is how you should go about your work. But on the flip side, it also implies that God has provided people to mentor us, to lead us, to encourage us.

And so we have pastors who have been gifted. And when I was pastoring, I like to think of myself as not doing a job or having a career as much as the church has recognized a certain call and gifting.

[13:55] And so the church has said to me, we will provide your livelihood for you so that you are free to minister. And you are free to walk in your calling. And so that was the way I looked at pastoral ministry.

Not as a job, but as a call that the church recognized and said, we will release you to do that work. And so don't worry about a house to live in. Don't worry about the food on the table.

We'll provide that so that you are free to devote yourself to that calling. And I trust that in some ways I was one of those examples, one of those role models, one of those people that could walk alongside other people and mentor them in things of the faith.

It is so important for us in our walk with God to have those people in our life that we can look to, that we can say, wow, here's a person who stayed faithful.

Here's an Uncle Peter that stayed faithful to the Word of God. I can learn from his example. He was a role model to me. So God has provided these leadership examples for us to help us to stay faithful in the long haul.

[15:06] But then in going on into verse 5, he also knows that we need an interconnectedness. Not only do we receive from other people, but we also give to other people.

And in that ministry, in that giving, we are also built up and encouraged. Young men, in the same way, be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another.

Because God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. And in those verses there, it's talking about that relationship. That healthy relationship.

I'm sure we've all heard that old African proverb, if you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go with others.

And that's very true in our Christian life. As we walk with others. As we have this fellowship. Back to Hebrews chapter 10, 25, where it says, don't give up meeting together. But all the more, as you see the day approaching, encourage one another.

[16:08] Be there for each other. Humbly depend on God. Humbly walk with others. And we will be there for each other. Going on to verse 6.

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. Now, what could be more relevant from the word of God for us today?

Cast all your care on him, because he cares for you. We could go to Matthew chapter 6 and verse 25 to the end of that chapter. We could read all about how, if we seek first the kingdom of God and

his righteousness, God will provide everything that we need.

He says, look at the lilies of the field. Even Solomon in his splendor wasn't dressed like those beautiful flowers that God has created. They're not concerned. God watches over them. Look at the birds.

Do they fret? Do they worry? God looks after them. He says, if God can look after the plants and the animals, will he not much more look after you?

[ 17 : 15 ] He cares about our cares. He knows our needs, so we don't have to live with anxiety. It says, cast all your anxiety, cast all your cares on him. I like that word, cast.

I don't know if you've had the experience of carrying something that's heavy, and you plan to set it down on something that you're not quite sure is strong enough to hold it. So you have this, maybe a rickety table or a bench or something, and you're going to set this heavy thing on it.

You don't just sort of plop it down. You set it down very carefully, and you kind of watch to make sure it's going to stay in position, right? Whereas if you're just dropping a piece of steel onto the ground, you don't set it down very carefully.

You just drop it, because you know that it's not going to disappear. The ground is going to hold it. And that's kind of a little illustration or a little picture of how God is sufficient and God is able.

We can cast our care on him. We don't have to go to him very gently and say, well, God, do you think maybe you could handle this? Obviously he can. Then we can just sort of hand it to him and know that he's there.

[ 18 : 28 ] We can cast all our cares on him. He goes on to say in 1 Peter 5, verse 8, Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

Resist him standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of suffering. So part of God's equipment for us in this long haul, this long walk of faithfulness with him, is letting us know that there is an enemy, but we don't have to fear the enemy.

He gives us the equipment to overcome. He warns us that there is an enemy. He warns us to be aware. He warns us to resist the enemy. He's looking for someone to devour.

But when we stand firm in the faith, we can resist him. Just this past summer in the Keniston Church, we have been so blessed when Ryan and Bryce and Sean came and shared his series of messages.

And they talked about spiritual warfare. And they would touch at various times on Ephesians chapter 6, where Paul gives us a list of the equipment that we have to resist the enemy.

[ 19 : 44 ] The helmet of salvation, the shield of faith, the sword of the spirit, the belt of righteousness, our feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. And so God has given us this equipment so that we can resist the devil, so that we can walk faithfully, so that we don't become defeated when he attacks us.

Verse 10. And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm, and steadfast.

To him be the power forever and ever. All of us believe something about God. All of us have an image of God in our minds.

All of us live out our life with a certain sense of who God is, how he relates to us, and how we relate to him. And it's formed in different ways.

It's probably started out being formed in our family life. And maybe our concept of God was very inadequately formed in our family life.

[ 20 : 50 ] My uncle Peter, in his early childhood, was formed in a context in his family and in his church setting that said, you do the best you can and you hope it'll turn out okay.

When he realized that that is not the message of Scripture, the message of Scripture is an all-sufficient sacrifice of Jesus Christ for our sins, so that we could have eternal hope, then he spent the rest of his life declaring that message, declaring the wonderful salvation that we have in Jesus Christ.

And so his concept of God was developed and changed and formed through Scripture. So we all believe things about God.

And these verses 10 and 11 tell us a few things about this wonderful God. First of all, it says, he is a God of all grace. Grace is when we receive something that we don't deserve.

Somebody comes and gives us something that we haven't earned, we don't deserve it, and they just freely give it to us. That is grace. In Ephesians 2, verses 8 to 10, it talks about, by grace we have been saved through faith, that not of ourselves.

[ 22 : 08 ] It is a gift of God, not by works, lest anyone should boast. This God of all grace offers us salvation, and then he expects us to just live out that Christian life by gritting our teeth and doing our best, doesn't he?

Of course not. Our walk with, continual walk with Christ as disciples of Jesus Christ, is still by grace. Every day he gives us the grace to walk with him.

Every day he gives us the grace to be faithful. Every day he gives us the grace to trust. It all comes as a gift from him. And day by day we trust him, we live by faith, and we receive his grace.

The God of all grace. Even the will and the power to live the Christian life is a gift of grace from him. And the God of all grace who called you to his eternal glory.

Eternal glory. Let's just flip back to 2 Corinthians chapter 4. 2 Corinthians chapter 4 verse 16.

[ 23 : 14 ] Therefore we do not lose heart, though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

For our light and momentary troubles are achieving. Now Paul, when he says light and momentary, he isn't making light of the fact that there are struggles in life. He isn't making light of the fact that there are tests and trials and hardships and hurts and losses.

He's not making light of that. But he's saying there is a comparison. On one side of the scale is what we face in life. On the other side of the scale is who God is and what he offers and what eternity is all about.

And which one outweighs the other. So that's the point he's making. So when he's saying our light and momentary troubles, he's not saying, oh, life is a breeze.

You won't face any challenges. See, that's not what he's saying. He's saying, in comparison to what God offers us, it's small. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

[ 24 : 26 ] So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. So we keep our eye on that ultimate goal.

Fix your eyes on Jesus Christ, looking unto Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of God the Father.

The God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ. I like to think about the glory that's going to come.

When the scripture tells us in Romans that right now we are living in a place where creation is groaning. And one day it will be restored.

It will be made better than ever. It will be a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness dwells. And the glory of Christ will be revealed. We're going to see it.

[ 25 : 32 ] The God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm, and steadfast.

He restores us. He establishes us. I was thinking about the Israelites in the wilderness. Now, we read that story and we say, yeah, they went out and they gathered a homer of manna.

Okay. So how many Israelites went out and gathered a homer of manna? Well, 600,000 fighting men. So if they were married, a million two hundred.

If they had children, you're easily reaching numbers of two million people. Now, two million homers of manna every day, twice as much on Friday so that they wouldn't have to go out and gather it on Saturday.

Just doing a little bit of math, and these are just round, rough figures, but just to give us a bit of a concept of this God who restores and establishes and maintains, this God who is sufficient, these Israelites were consuming somewhere in the range of 150 super beast semi-loads of manna every day.

[ 26 : 57 ] Now, that's a fair amount of manna. Then they had water to go with it, and they had food for their livestock that they had with them, and this happened day after day after day after day for 40 years.

I'd say that's a pretty good, pretty good amount of food that had to show up in the wilderness day after day after day. And then when they complained, he said, well, okay, here's some quail.

So many quail, you can't even eat them all. This God will restore and make you strong, firm, and steadfast. Their shoes didn't wear out.

Their clothes didn't wear out. Every day's needs were met. This God is sufficient. To him be the power forever and ever.

Amen. So we are exhorted to be faithful, but at the end of the day, it is God that is doing the work. At the end of the day, we look to him.

[ 28 : 00 ] We enjoy listening to the Gaithers, and every once in a while, the Gaither vocal band will sing a song, The Church Triumphant. Before they sing that song, Gloria Gaither has this little reading that she does, and I'd like to close by sharing that reading, because it's encouragement that God is at work.

God is building his people. God has a plan. God has a purpose. We don't want to get sidetracked or derailed or overcome by the challenges of life.

We want to stay faithful. God has always had a people. Many a foolish conqueror has made the mistake of thinking that because he has forced the Church of Jesus Christ out of sight, he has stilled its voice and snuffed out its life.

But God has always had a people. The powerful current of a rushing river is not diminished because it is forced to flow underground.

The purest water is the stream that bursts crystal clear into the sunlight after it has forced its way through solid rock. There have been some who, like Simon the magician, men who could not be bought or sold.

[ 29 : 18 ] God has always had a people. Men who could not be bought and women who were beyond purchase. God has always had a people. There have been times of affluence and prosperity when the Church's message has been nearly diluted into oblivion by those who sought to make it socially attractive, neatly organized, financially profitable.

But God has always had a people. Yes, it's been gold-plated, draped in purple, encrusted with jewels. It has been misrepresented, ridiculed, lauded, and scorned.

But God has always had a people. And these followers of Jesus Christ have been, according to the whim of the times, elevated sacred leaders or modern heretics.

Yet through it all, the march is on. That powerful army of meek, God-chosen people who cannot be bought, blabbered, murdered, or stilled.

On through the ages they march. The Church. God's Church Triumphant. Listen, child of God. It's alive. Discourage pastor.

[ 30 : 32 ] It's his church and it's still alive. Lonely missionary. Sow that seed with confidence. The Church is still alive. Old saint. You're not forgotten or alone.

The Church is still alive. It's alive, my broken-hearted friend. It's still alive. Busy mother. Keep on trusting in Jesus.

The Church is alive. You're not alone out there. Keep looking to Jesus. The Church is alive. Faithful fathers. There is rest in the Lord. God's Church is still alive.

So, family of God, lift up your hands. Lift up your hands and praise the Lord. The Church, God's Church Triumphant, is still alive. It's alive, my friends.

Alive and well. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[ 31 : 30 ] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.