

The Blessing of the Unchangeable

“Praise be to the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not abandoned his kindness and faithfulness to my master” (Genesis 24:26-27).

Scripture: Genesis 24:24-33

Song: “In Loving Kindness Jesus Came”

One of the notorious sayings of moms is, “You’d lose your head if it weren’t attached.” It is good that certain things are so well tethered to us!

God’s kindness and faithfulness were so attached to Abraham, they weren’t in danger of being lost. Abraham’s servant saw both at work. We have no previous knowledge of this man’s background or religious upbringing, but we assume that he came to see God through the evidence of His presence and activity in Abraham’s life. Kindness and faithfulness aren’t fleeting attributes like the weather; instead, they are two of the unchanging blessings we enjoy as a result of God’s favor.

I don’t recall my mom ever using the “lose your head” cliché with me, but she definitely had grounds to. I’ve been known to “misplace” keys while holding them, and I’ve searched the house for my phone when it’s in my pocket. And even though there are times that I look for God’s kindness and faithfulness to me, the reality is that I don’t need to search far, since they are His unchangeable attributes attached to me as His child.

Heavenly Father, help me see Your kindness and faithfulness, and let them be so evident in my life that others see them too. In Jesus’ name, amen.

October 26–November 1. **Stacy Voss** lives in Colorado with her two children and works as a grant writer for multiple faith-based organizations.

Unexpected Love

The steward took the men into Joseph's house, gave them water to wash their feet and provided fodder for their donkeys (Genesis 43:24).

Scripture: Genesis 43:20-25

Song: "East to West"

I have had long hair since I was a child. And it clogs drains. As a teen, I hid Drano that I used to prevent clogs. I feared that my parents would be upset with me for wanting long hair, so I wanted to prevent an unfortunate result. Now I laugh at this since my parents would have praised me for solving the problem and would never have been upset about it.

Today's Scripture gives us a glimpse of others who expected something awful to happen because of something that they didn't do or intend—the silver placed in their sacks of grain from their first visit to buy food (42:25). They brought the silver back and declared that openly, hoping that they would not be treated as thieves or refused more food (v. 21). They returned this second time to Egypt with fear and caution, expecting the worst. But unexpectedly, they received the exact opposite. They were treated as honored house guests.

We can "clog the pipeline" of relationship with God. Sometimes it is unintentional; other times it is more deliberate as we choose our own path. We can fall into the rut of fear by thinking our actions can keep us from the very thing we're told nothing can separate us from (Romans 8:38-39). But God meets us with unexpected and overwhelming love.

Father, forgive me when I drift from You because I forget that You're forgiving and loving. In Jesus' name, amen.

Boots of Grace

To each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it (Ephesians 4:7).

Scripture: Ephesians 4:6-9

Song: “Grace Abounds”

When I was a tyke of no more than two or three, I tried wearing my dad’s cowboy boots. I did exactly as I’d watched him do: I placed one foot in one boot and then put on the other boot. Only the boots swallowed my entire legs! I stood proud and tall, as if I filled my dad’s shoes. But I could only stand there. I had no ability to move because his boots were just too big. But now, since I have long legs just like my dad, his boots would fit and I could walk in them.

The grace Christ apportions to each of us fits us precisely. He gives us the exact gift that He chooses for us “to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up” (4:12). These gifts do not come as a result of anything we have done, but we are to use them for the kingdom. They are gifts of grace for serving and encouraging one another to build unity and maturity among our brothers and sisters in Christ. As we use our gifts and grow into them, we should recognize how we are becoming more and more like Christ, walking in His steps.

Father, I am grateful for the grace Christ has poured out on me. Please help me recognize His gift and to be faithful to use it for the good of the church. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Taking Shame by Surprise

“Very truly I tell you, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!” (John 13:38).

Scripture: John 13:36-38; 18:15-18, 25-27

Song: “Oh, the Bitter Shame and Sorrow”

On the night of her 40th birthday, a friend walked into a restaurant expecting a quiet dinner with her husband. Instead, dozens of people jumped out and screamed, “Surprise!” The look on her face and her shouts of shock revealed to all that their plan had worked.

We might like being surprised by fun and unexpected events with friends. But we might surprise ourselves in less fun ways when we do things that we didn’t really want to do—or even things that we said we would never do. Take Peter’s statement to Jesus as an example: “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you” (Matthew 26:35). But Peter then did exactly what he’d said he would not do—a surprising three times in a row!

Jesus predicted Peter’s denials. He wasn’t surprised by them. Surprising ourselves by doing what we’ve insisted we won’t do can be a recipe for shaming ourselves. Shame is a destructive emotion that can take away our joy, threaten to paralyze us spiritually, and hinder our initiative toward God. But just as Jesus reached out to Peter, He reaches out to us to forgive and to restore our relationship. Jesus’ response removes shame, which just might be the biggest surprise of all!

Heavenly Father, please forgive me when I try to hide from You. Please restore me through the power of the cross. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Bread for an Enemy

Jesus answered, “[The one who is going to betray me] is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish” (John 13:26).

Scripture: Psalm 41:8-10; John 13:21-30

Song: “The Bread, the Light, the Life”

Most everyone adored Pastor Peter Miller, except for a man who lived near him. This man ended up being a traitor, which led to his death sentence. When Pastor Miller learned of the man’s conviction, he walked 60 miles to plead for a pardon. General Washington was about to deny the request for Miller’s “friend,” when Miller said, “Friend!? Why, that man is the worst enemy I have in the world!” Washington, so moved by this unlikely kindness toward (and extreme effort on behalf of) an enemy, released the criminal.

The cross is a much greater story of someone going to exorbitant lengths for many others who are completely undeserving. Jesus gave up the adoration of Heaven for mockery and ridicule. We observe trials and challenges of Jesus’ ministry. And then, in the most unthinkable demonstration of love and gentleness, Jesus dipped the bread and then handed it to the very one who would set the dominoes tumbling for His crucifixion. If that’s the standard Jesus used in dealing with His enemies, then it makes me think through the ways I treat those I love and care about—as well as those who do harmful things to me.

Father, teach me to love all others like You do. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Offering What We Can

Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair (John 12:3).

Scripture: John 12:1-7

Song: "When Mary Poured a Rich Perfume"

I had surgery a few years ago. My young son didn't have access to many resources, but his tender spirit prompted him to do what he could to help. When I returned home from the hospital, he had a miniature sign ready for me saying "I love you," with each word written on an empty gum wrapper that was connected to the others with a paper clip. It still hangs on my wall, words now faded. Many visitors have a quizzical expression when they see it, not understanding the significance of this seemingly small gift that surpassed all others.

In today's Scripture, we witness the giving of another gift that some didn't understand. However, unlike my son's present, the reason for criticizing or not understanding the gift was due to its exorbitant cost. But what both have in common is this: two people who cared dearly for someone they loved and gave in direct proportion to their abilities.

There are times when the trials I face leave me exhausted and depleted, and my praise feels like little more than offering faded gum wrappers. Other days I bubble over so abundantly that friends and strangers alike hear me thanking God for His goodness. Regardless of which extreme I fall in, I know that God receives each.

Dear Father, thank You for letting me pour out my love to You in both small and lavish amounts. In Jesus' name, amen.

The Character of Love

Having loved his own who were in the world, [Jesus] loved them to the end (John 13:1).

Scripture: John 13:1-15, 34-35

Song: “Reckless Love”

A dad talked about what to do if there were ever a shooting at his son’s school. “You don’t have to be the hero,” John Castillo told his only child. But Kendrick rejected the advice, telling his dad he wouldn’t give it a second thought to save others. And that is exactly what Kendrick did. As soon as a gunman opened fire at the STEM School in Colorado, Kendrick jumped to action, lunging at the shooter in order to give others the time they needed to take cover. Because of Kendrick’s character to help others, he took the gunfire that ended his life but saved countless others.

Kendrick did what he did as a result of a deep-seated sense of identity: “You raised me this way. You raised me to be a good person,” his dad quoted him as having said.

Jesus’ final actions prior to His crucifixion point to one core component of His character that can’t be overlooked: love. It wasn’t a love that rolled out with storm clouds or shifted with the waves. It was—and continues to be—one of the steadfast attributes of Christ.

Those who knew Kendrick weren’t surprised that his core characteristic held up under pressure. And we don’t need to wonder whether the love of Jesus will remain steadfast. He loves each of us with a recklessness that surpasses all understanding.

Dear Father, help me more fully understand and accept the lavish gift of Your love. In Jesus’ name, amen.