

God's Faithfulness Quiets Fear

“Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God” (Isaiah 41:10).

Scripture: Isaiah 41:1-14

Song: “In Christ Alone”

The ruby slippers from *The Wizard of Oz* caught my eye at the traveling Smithsonian exhibit. I turned to get my husband Randy's attention. I thought he was right behind me, but as I scanned the room, I couldn't see him anywhere. My heart raced, and my breathing became shallow and rapid as panic set in. When he finally sauntered through the door from the previous exhibit room, I grasped his hand and wouldn't let go. Tears flooded my eyes as a feeling of safety returned.

My fear that day was unfounded. (I had the car keys and knew Randy would never abandon me.) Truth be told, much of our fear is unfounded. God promises to never abandon us. He repeatedly tells us in His Word, “Do not fear.” Fear says the enemy is greater than our God. Nothing could be further from the truth.

It has been three decades since I experienced that panic attack. As my faith and understanding of God's character have grown, such fear has become a distant memory. God's faithfulness has seen me through much scarier experiences. Today you can be confident of this: He is always with those who belong to Him. He is trustworthy.

Father, grant me courage to trust in Your faithfulness always. In Jesus' name, amen.

August 14–20. **Linda L. Kruschke** lives in Oregon with her husband of 35 years. She enjoys flower gardening, hiking, writing poetry, and having their adult son over for dinner.

Better than Law

What the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son (Romans 8:3).

Scripture: Romans 8:1-15

Song: “Nothing but the Blood of Jesus”

The first paperback edition of *Criminal Law* published by the Oregon State Bar was a mere 250 pages. The sixth edition has expanded tenfold to 2,500 pages and three volumes. As humans attempt to create a more peaceful society, the law keeps growing. Yet with each successive newscast, we see a society that seems only to grow more violent.

The one rule God gave to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden was replaced by the Ten Commandments, along with many more laws and rules God provided to guide His people. Then Jesus summed up all the Old Testament law and prophets in two rules: love God supremely and love our neighbors as ourselves. It seems simple, but we can't quite do it on our own.

Looking to ourselves or to society for what we need, it seems all hope is lost. But when we look to Jesus to change our hearts, hope abounds. With Him in our lives, we can see our own sinfulness, and God's Spirit nudges us to repent and gives us what we need to obey God's law of love. No matter how many laws are written, they cannot change our hearts. But Jesus can and does. He is our daily strength and hope.

Father, help me look inward to examine my own motives and behavior, allowing You to make me more like Your Son. In Jesus' name, amen.

The Blessing of Patience

If we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently (Romans 8:25).

Scripture: Romans 8:16-25

Song: “I Shall Not Be Moved”

When I first started blogging many years ago, the instant gratification of writing something and having it immediately published gave me a sense of accomplishment. When people started reading and commenting on what I'd written, I was thrilled. I quickly became obsessed with my blog stats. I expected the same instant success when I decided to write a book. I entered it in the unpublished category of a writing contest, and I won! I was sure I'd quickly find a publisher, but that was four years ago.

On this journey, God has taught me two things. First, bringing glory to Jesus is our greatest hope and privilege, and we know He is able to glorify himself through us. Second, patience is more than a virtue; it's a blessing. Submitting my writing to editors and waiting for a reply used to be agonizing. Rejections discouraged me. Yet the more I grow in my trust that Jesus will fulfill my hope of glorifying Him, the more I see the waiting, the acceptances, and the rejections as His plan for me.

When we hope for earthly things, we are often disappointed. But when we hope for the spiritual blessings God has promised, we can wait patiently for those blessings, trusting that He is faithful and true. Simply trusting our Lord secures all the hope we need in life.

Father, thank You for teaching me patience as I hope in only You. In Jesus' name, amen.

Prayer and Grief

The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans (Romans 8:26).

Scripture: Romans 8:26-39

Song: “O Come and Mourn with Me Awhile”

Cambridge professor and author C. S. Lewis published dozens of works—fiction, poetry, essays, and nonfiction—amounting to more than a million words. He was also a prolific letter writer, corresponding with friends and fans alike. Lewis believed that faith and reason are knit together and that trust in the Christian God is the only logical conclusion for a thinking person. But after Joy, his beloved wife, died of cancer within a few years of their marrying, he wrote a book titled *A Grief Observed*. In it he described his overwhelming sorrow and his struggle to pray. The experience tested every word he had believed and written about faith and suffering.

Loss and grief are inevitable in this life. Jesus told His disciples, “In this world you will have trouble” (John 16:33). Losing a loved one can leave us without words to pray, but even our wordless prayers are heard by the One who comforts and strengthens. He understands our heart’s cry better than we do ourselves.

Our faith can weather the trials and losses we face, even when our prayers are halting or wordless. The Spirit knows the deepest need of our heart and is the perfect translator.

Father, speak to and for my soul as I face the inevitable losses in this life, and grant me a comfort that comes only from You when I mourn. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Blessed by Serving Others

Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and oppressed (Psalm 82:3).

Scripture: Psalm 82

Song: “They’ll Know We Are Christians by Our Love”

For many years now, a group from my church has regularly served at a local residential women’s facility that houses 40 to 50 women and children. My role is “kitchen boss.” We always cook my Texas skillet dinner, serving it with salad and following up with brownies and ice cream for dessert. I do the shopping, direct the work of the volunteers, and keep things on track so dinner is on time. It’s hard work . . . and I love it!

Some of the residents in this facility were “just one friend’s couch away” from being homeless before being accepted into the program. Others were on the verge of losing custody of their children. Almost all came from abusive relationships, poverty, and addiction. But when they come through the serving line for dinner, gratitude beams in their beautiful smiles. With this simple act of serving them a meal and sitting down to eat it together, we hope to show them God’s heart of love and care for them.

When we are blessed with abundance and safety, it’s easy to forget the fatherless and the oppressed. Yet God calls us to not only remember them but also to defend and uphold them. The amazing thing is that when we do, we receive a spiritual blessing far greater than we can imagine.

Father, thank You for allowing me to share the hope of Your Son with those who are oppressed, struggling, and hurting. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Seek God!

Judge nothing before the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes. He will . . . expose the motives of the heart (1 Corinthians 4:5).

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 4:1-6

Song: “The Old Account Was Settled Long Ago”

Music legend Johnny Cash (1932–2003) had an affinity for gospel music that was instilled by his deeply religious mother. In spite of his secular success, Cash never forgot his roots. Yet he struggled with a drug habit and at one point felt beyond the reach of God’s grace. In a 1970 account, he said, “By 1967, I was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. . . . I couldn’t stand my life, but I couldn’t find my way out of it.” It hadn’t occurred to him to cry out to God, but after waking up in a jail cell and not knowing how he’d gotten there, he acknowledged his need to seek God’s help and mercy.

God’s mercy can reach us no matter where we’ve wandered. He knows the intention of our hearts when we cry to Him for help. Cash went on to write and record songs that reflected his faith, and he even recorded his mother’s favorite hymns. He continued to struggle with drugs, but he also continued to seek God’s help.

We all face dark days. No matter how bleak things seem, there is hope in God’s saving grace. Until the appointed time when we pass or the Lord comes, we can seek Him for the help we need.

Father, in my darkest times, You’ve never left me. You know the motives of my heart and the desire of my soul. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Because of Christ, We Endure

When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly (1 Corinthians 4:12-13).

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 4:7–21

Song: “I Know You Can”

After his decision to stay in Romania during World War II, Richard Wurmbrand (1909–2001) was imprisoned multiple times between 1948 and 1964 for preaching the gospel. He was not permitted to have a Bible, and at times he was too weak even to recall the Scripture he knew. But God upheld and sustained him by Christ's indwelling presence and by the knowledge of His love. In the darkest circumstances, even as he was tortured for his faith, Wurmbrand was able to show Christ's love to his captors. His witness was so impactful that some even became Christians.

Although I have never been imprisoned or tortured, I *have* been ridiculed by a former boss for my faith. At that time, I remembered Jesus was with me, equipping me to bless others, even on the hard days. Because of Him, I could respond to ridicule with grace.

It is because of Christ in us that we can bless, endure, and answer kindly. We can't change what the world throws our way, but we can let Jesus control how we respond. To love others and bless even those who curse us is God's will. Jesus' love is sure and steady, helping us to love and bless even those who are hard to love.

Father, thank You for equipping me for every hard place You would have me go in this world. In Jesus' name, amen.