

Answering the Faith Call

Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved
(Joel 2:32).

Scripture: Joel 2:28-32

Song: “Blessed Assurance”

Almost nightly, my wife and I sat on our antique glider bench on the front porch of the old home we rented. And each night, we heard the pay phone ring in the parking lot of the store across the road. Interestingly, no one ever answered it. We often wondered why anyone would call a pay phone. Sometimes we were tempted to walk over and pick up the receiver to see who it was.

God must have felt the same when He called His people. They were a rebellious lot who had become complacent and wealthy. But they had also turned to idols and were quite self-centered. Joel was one among many prophets God sent to them, encouraging them to answer His call to repent. Judgment would follow if they didn't—in this case, with a plague of locusts.

Like the old pay phone, God repeatedly issues a faith call. He knows we can only enjoy life as He intends when we answer His call and to turn to Him in faith. Once we experience His forgiveness, we discover the true meaning of life, along with the joy, peace, and love that only He can give. Have you answered God's faith call?

Father, I want to walk by faith today, following You. In Jesus' name, amen.

May 20–26. **Martin Wiles** is a Christ-follower who is also a teacher, pastor, freelance editor, author, husband, father, and grandfather. He has authored seven books and has contributed to numerous publications.

The Source of Salvation

The people of Israel, who pursued the law as the way of righteousness, have not attained their goal (Romans 9:31).

Scripture: Romans 9:14-16, 25-33

Song: “How Great Is Our God”

Jack’s Knob lies high in the southern Blue Ridge Mountains, a subrange of the Appalachian Mountains. My brother and I once visited there as we hiked a section of the Appalachian Trail. Our water source for the night was a small bubbling spring that appeared to come from nowhere. It was so small that we had to corral it with a few rocks to collect and filter our water for drinking and cooking. But there, the Chattahoochee River begins and eventually supplies enough water for Atlanta, Georgia, and its suburbs.

Sources are essential, and the apostle Paul spent lots of time explaining the origins of salvation. That’s because if we look to the wrong source, there are serious spiritual consequences. Many Jews in Paul’s day relied on the law God gave to Moses for their salvation. Everyone else—the Gentiles—had no law from God. But ironically, Paul says many of his own people missed the *source* of salvation while many of the Gentiles found it.

Nothing has changed. Rigidly obeying a set of laws or doing numerous good works doesn’t result in forgiveness and salvation. We must simply believe in what Christ has done and receive the forgiveness He offers. He is the source of our salvation. Our righteousness comes from Him because we have none of our own to offer. On what source are you depending?

Father, I will look to and point to Your Son, the only source of salvation. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Hope in Christ

If they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again (Romans 11:23).

Scripture: Romans 11:1-4, 17-27

Song: “My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less”

Grafting branches gives hope for new and better plant growth. Using this technique, a gardener selects a particular plant because it has a sound root system, called the “stock” or “rootstock.” Next, the gardener chooses another plant for its stems, leaves, flowers, or fruit. This part is called the “scion” or “cion.” In this part of the plant, there are the genes the gardener wants to have reproduced, but the rootstock is needed to accomplish this. Grafting happens when the “vascular cambium tissues” of both pieces make contact. The process usually takes a few weeks to complete.

Paul uses this grafting metaphor to illustrate what God has done with the Gentiles. Israel, God’s chosen people, represented the rootstock. God had always planned to graft the Gentiles into the life of His people, thereby providing for the salvation of all believers.

Those who had received God’s law and those who hadn’t both failed to live up to God’s holy standard. Both lived without being reconciled to God, but hope arrived through Christ’s sacrifice on Calvary. We find our hope in the same place. When we come to faith in Christ, God grafts us into the vine of His Son. We can hope in many things, but Christ is the only one who will never disappoint us. In what or whom do you place your hope?

Father, thank You for grafting me into the life of Your Son. In Jesus’ name, amen.

The Faith Journey

Choose life, . . . that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. (Deuteronomy 30:19-20).

Scripture: Deuteronomy 30:11-20

Song: “Amazing Grace”

Some journeys have taken me where I wanted . . . but some have not. Along my way, a few relationships didn't last. A few exercise and diet routines didn't result in the desired weight loss. And I've been disappointed by several hiking trails that didn't deliver the vistas promised by those who promoted them. One trail simply ended without any option to continue.

Because of disobedience, God did not let Moses enter the promised land. Moses, however, took time to speak to those who would—those who had survived the wilderness journey. He reminded them about their responsibilities on their faith journey. Fulfilling those responsibilities—or neglecting them—would have consequences.

My faith journey is one journey that has not disappointed me. It began in earnest when I was 9 years old when I received the gift of salvation and began following Christ. I've made many mistakes along the way and have failed Him in numerous ways. But through the good and bad times—the times of obedience and disobedience—I've grown spiritually. He has always forgiven me when I've confessed my sin to Him, offering me a new path forward. He will do the same for anyone. Our job is to love God with all our hearts, listen to Him, and follow Him. Where are you on your faith journey?

Father, on my faith journey I want to be following You today. In Jesus' name, amen.

Faith over Fear

Overhearing what [the people who had come from Jairus's house] said, Jesus told him, "Don't be afraid; just believe" (Mark 5:36).

Scripture: Mark 5:35-43

Song: "The Name of Jesus"

As a child, I feared the dark. My dad often said, "There's nothing there in the dark that isn't there in the light." I was old enough to know, though, that some things—like criminals and nocturnal predators—*do* operate at night. Dad's solution for my fear was to have me walk outside in the dark alone. I had faith in my dad—and in God—but that exercise didn't alleviate my anxiety.

A synagogue leader named Jairus had approached Jesus, wanting Him to come heal his sick daughter. But before Jesus could act, others came with the news that the girl had died. That's when Jesus gave Jairus the assurance, "Don't be afraid; just believe" (Mark 5:36).

It's true that God has not given us a spirit of fear (2 Timothy 1:7), but God has also created a fight-or-flight mechanism within us that gives us the good sense to respond appropriately in the presence of danger. Faith and a healthy aversion to danger are not mutually exclusive. (In fact, heedlessly putting ourselves in known danger does not demonstrate faith, but foolishness.) Faith believes God can do the impossible, protect us from unknown dangers, and help us conquer our fears, including life in an uncertain world. What faith steps can you take to deal with your fears today?

Father, when fear rises up in me, I will remember that I can trust You because You are in control. In Jesus' name, amen.

Share the Good News

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation (Isaiah 52:7).

Scripture: Isaiah 52

Song: “Go Tell It on the Mountains”

My insides felt as if they would burst if I didn't share my good news. After a rocky relationship that didn't end well, I'd found someone I wanted to spend my life with. I knelt before the most caring woman in the world and asked her to marry me. And she said yes! I couldn't contain my joy. Years later, I am still telling others about my wonderful wife.

God delivered Israel after 400 years of Egyptian slavery. The news of what God had done for them became known far and wide, and God reminded His people of His goodness to them as they persisted in their sin. Finally, their stubbornness led to 70 years of captivity in Babylon. Then God used Cyrus the Persian to proclaim their release. But neither of these deliverances would compare to the spiritual freedom Messiah would later bring.

In a world filled with bad news, Christians have the privilege of sharing the good news of the gospel. Because of God's great love, He provided a way for release from sin's slavery. We receive spiritual freedom when we acknowledge our sin and trust in Christ for salvation. Once we enter into that liberty, we can always be looking for opportunities to tell others about it.

Father, as I tell what You've done in my life, I pray that those who hear will come to faith in You. In Jesus' name, amen.

One in Christ

There is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him (Romans 10:12).

Scripture: Romans 10:1-17

Song: “Blest Be the Tie that Binds”

In 1963, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. observed, “It is appalling that the most segregated hour of Christian America is 11:00 on Sunday morning.” In the years following that statement, some positive change has taken place within the North American church. There has been movement toward God’s people from different races and cultures worshipping and serving together, not only breaking down barriers between race and culture but also socioeconomic status. While there is still potential for even more growth and change, my heart rejoices today when I visit various churches and see people of all races, cultures, and classes worshipping together.

The risen Christ called Paul as an apostle to the Gentiles—to those of different races and cultures who didn’t have God’s law, who worshipped multiple gods, and who indulged in sinful lifestyles. Paul, on more than one occasion, had to spend time proving to his fellow Jews that the message of salvation was for *all* people . . . period.

There is no place in Christianity for prejudice or racism. God’s Word precludes it. We are to take the gospel to the whole world, and our call as brothers and sisters in Christ is to love one another (1 John 4:7) . . . period.

Father, I want Your love to flow through me toward *all* my brothers and sisters, not just the ones I’m most familiar with. In Jesus’ name, amen.