

How Firm a Foundation: A Tribute to the Seniors of Cofer's Chapel

For the past three years, it has been our privilege – and a real joy – to work with the senior adults at Cofer's Chapel. From the days when there was the "50+" group, until more recent times when all the seniors became one fellowship, we have observed this special group of people. When we first joined Cofer's in 1999, Bro. Eugene Waddell, a former senior pastor of the church, as well as Foreign Missions Director, worked with them. For as long as we have known this congregation, many senior adults have labored in the church, into their 70s, 80s, and even 90s. One of our seniors, now inactive, will celebrate her 100th birthday this month. Many have gone home to Heaven over the years.

As I thought about this group who love their Lord, their church, and each other, I'm reminded of the old hymn "How Firm a Foundation." How its truths comfort and assure us, taken as they are from Scripture. While one senior might walk every day, and seemingly have an inexhaustible supply of energy, another may be bent by age, chronic back pain, and have to walk with a cane or a walker. One may have a mind and memory as sharp as when he or she was 50, while another is retreating inexorably into the darkness of dementia. It's hard to understand. Yet, the Lord cares for each one and is at work in the life of every one of His children.

*How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in His excellent word!
What more can He say than to you He hath said—
To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?*

The foundation of the believer is the Word of God. He has

spoken, and His word is true, His promises are sure. We who have fled to Him for refuge (trusted Him for salvation) are resting on a sure foundation.

*Fear not, I am with thee, oh, be not dismayed,
For I am thy God, and will still give thee aid;
I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand,
Upheld by My gracious, omnipotent hand.*

Based on Isaiah 41:10, we are admonished not to fear nor be dismayed. He is our God, and He will do all for us. We are held securely in His mighty hand.

*When through the deep waters I call thee to go,
The rivers of sorrow shall not overflow;
For I will be with thee thy trouble to bless,
And sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.*

Isaiah 43 says when we pass through deep waters, they will not overflow us, and when we go through the fire we will not be burned. Sustaining grace through all of life. Cofer's seniors exemplify that every day.

*When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
My grace, all-sufficient, shall be thy supply;
The flame shall not harm thee; I only design
Thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine.*

This stanza pairs well with the previous one, with its reference to fiery trials. I love the line "my grace, all-sufficient, shall be thy supply;"

*E'en down to old age all my people shall prove
My sovereign, eternal, unchangeable love.
And when hoary hairs shall their temples adorn
Like lambs shall the still in my bosom be borne.*

This is the stanza that my heart bequeaths to our Cofer's seniors: Even in old age we prove His "sovereign, eternal,

unchangeable love.” Even though the hairs of our head turn white, He will still carry us like lambs in his bosom! Wow! (Isaiah 46:1-4) Psalms 71 and 92 both reference the strength and presence of a God who will not forsake us in old age, and can still make us fruitful. Seniors can serve! Do not make the mistake of writing them off. I have noticed, as one who’s recently entered that group, that retirees tend to not be included or invited to minister as before, and that’s a mistake, in my opinion. Knowledge, wisdom, sound judgment, and discernment generally characterize my age group better than younger groups. Obviously, we have to make adjustments, and can’t do as much as we used to, but we can still contribute!

*The soul that on Jesus doth lean for repose,
I will not, I will not, desert to his foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I’ll never, no never, no never forsake.*

The hope and mighty assurance for all of us, regardless of age.

Heaven is Home

I’ve lived a fairly long life – 68 years now. To most people I’m “old,” and I’m fond of saying when asked how I’m doing “pretty good for an old man.” However, that falls flat when I’m with our seniors at church, or at a luncheon with other pastors and retired pastors, and there are many who are 5, 10, 15, or 20 years older than me.

But the longer I live, the more I remember: “I’m not home yet.” Especially in these days of so much turmoil, socially, politically, morally, and even religiously, life is hard to bear some days. The shooting last year at the Texas church

brought that home once again. I have cried looking at pictures of the children shot down deliberately in cold blood by a man filled with evil.

The political division, the “me first” mentality, self-identifying, sexual exploitation of children, world hunger, rampant racism, abortion – not only accepted but glorified by so many – cause a heaviness and a sorrow that will never be gone here on earth. We’re reminded that:

1. Perfect healing will not take place in this life, but in the world to come.

2. Perfect justice will not take place in this life, but in the world to come.

This means, of course, that we will suffer angst, pain, anxiety, and grief all throughout our lives. Though Jesus is King, though His peace is real, His grace is sufficient, and His power available, things will never be perfect down here.

Some people are recognized for their greatness in this life, while God honors others in the life to come. Henry C. Morrison was a faithful missionary who served the Lord in Africa for over 40 years. He recalls that emotional day when he and his wife boarded a ship on their way back to the United States. His mind flooded with memories of the wonderful experiences they had enjoyed on the mission field. He began wondering what it would be like to return to his Midwestern hometown – will anyone there still remember us? Aboard that same ship, that day with Henry and his wife was the former President of the United States, Teddy Roosevelt. He was returning from a big game hunting trip in Africa. When the ship pulled into the New York harbor, there were thousands of people there to greet him. The crowds cheered and the bands played. There were signs, banners, and billboards everywhere saying, “Welcome Home!”

As the dear missionary and his wife left the ship, they saw

that no one had come to welcome them back home. With a heavy heart, Henry Morrison went to his hotel room and told his wife, "Honey, for 40 years we poured our lives into ministry and service. And yet we come back to America and not a single soul comes to welcome us home!"

His wife came and sat down next to her husband. She put her hand on his shoulder, and said to him, "Henry, you have forgotten something. You're not home yet!"

Do you ever feel like the things you do for Christ are overlooked? Maybe you spend long hours working with children each day, or you work a mundane office job. Never forget that this world is not your home. Serve your Savior faithfully each day, and He will reward you for your labors – just keep in mind, you're not home yet.

Earthly crowns are dross to him who looks for a Heavenly one.

– Jane Porter[1. Excerpt from a devotional by Dr. James A. Scudder.]

Here's just a little of what awaits us!

The Absence of all that's bad (Revelation 21)

"And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." There isn't a more comforting verse in all of Scripture!

The Presence of all that's good

There's a joke about two guys who speculate whether there will be baseball played in Heaven. One says "I'll pray and ask God tonight since you want to know so badly." The next day, he tells his friend. "Well, I prayed about whether there would be baseball in Heaven, and God answered me. I've got good news

and bad news.” “Tell me,” says his friend. “The good news is that, yes, there will be baseball in Heaven. The bad news is that you’re the starting pitcher tomorrow!”

The Glory of God in Jesus (Revelation 22:3b-5)

His servants will serve Him. We will see His face, shine in His glory, and sit with Him as Kings.

Eternal

“And they will reign forever and ever” with Him.

Home

“In my Father’s house are many dwelling places (mansions)...I am going away to prepare a place for you.” John 14:2 CBS

Building 429 sang “This Is Not Where I Belong”

*...all I know is I’m not home yet
This is not where I belong
Take this world and give me Jesus
This is not where I belong*

*So when the walls come falling down on me
And when I’m lost in the current
Of a raging sea
I have this blessed assurance, holding me*

*All I know is I’m not home yet
This is not where I belong
Take this world and give me Jesus
This is not where I belong*

B.J. Thomas wrote the song “Home Where I Belong”

*They say that heaven’s pretty,
And living here is too.*

But if they said that I would have to choose between the two.

*I'd go home,
Going home,
Where I belong.
While I'm here I'll serve him gladly,
And sing him all my songs.*

*I'm here,
But not for long.
And when I'm feeling lonely,
And when I'm feeling blue.
It's such a joy to know that I am only passing through.*

*I'm headed home,
Going home,
Where I belong.
And one day I'll be sleeping,
When death knocks on my door.
And I'll awake and find that I'm not homesick anymore.*

*I'll be home,
Going home,
Where I belong.*

To conclude, I've asked my son Phillip to write a little something about C.S. Lewis' description of Narnia's version of Heaven in "The Last Battle."



I am hard pressed to find a better depiction of Heaven in any work of fiction than what C.S. Lewis wrote in the final book of "The Chronicles of Narnia." The last few chapters of "The Last Battle" are full-to-bursting with the beauty, grandeur, and awesomeness that awaits those who believe. Food tastes better. The world is familiar yet deeper, richer, and better in every way imaginable. There are sweet moments of reunion with those who have gone before, as seen when King Tirian is reunited with his father. Yet nothing captures that pull we feel when we think of our heavenly home, that sense of longing – better than these words by one of the characters in those final pages: "I have come home at last! This is my real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now." Heaven is the place we "have been looking for" all our lives. Heaven is home, our "real country." Heaven is where we belong. What an amazing hope we have as believers!

**This life is just the preface. The real story starts
when we're home!**

“My Times are in Thy Hands”

When did this phrase from Psalm 31:15 from the King James Version first cross my mind and eventually stick there? Was it as a child in Sunday School or Vacation Bible School? Or as a teen in Sunday School or youth group, or hearing a message from my pastor? Or later when I started making it a practice to read through the Bible yearly? I honestly can't recall when this phrase stuck, but somewhere along the way, it did.

The Psalm itself is powerful, from its opening stanza “In thee, O LORD, do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed: deliver me in thy righteousness,” as the writer launches his appeal to the Lord for salvation, deliverance, and rescue. I learned early on that verse 5 was taken on the lips and echoed from the heart of our Lord Jesus as He yielded His spirit to His Father while dying on the cross (Luke 23:46) – the last of the seven final words of our Lord on the cross.

The Psalm is most instructive; trusting in the Lord in the midst of trials, of opposition, of sorrow, and affirming over and over that He will help and deliver. The Beacon Bible Commentary says Psalm 31 is “a striking alternation of lament and praise.”[1. Beacon Bible Commentary] We would all benefit by learning this Psalm, making it our very own, internalizing its principles and, indeed, its very words, climaxing with the powerful exhortation of verse 24 “Be of good courage, and he

shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord.”

Right in the middle is verse 15 “my times are in your hands.” Some versions render this “my future.” Other versions translate “fate,” “life-stages,” “destiny.” I sense that the idea is that all of our life is in his hands, his care, concern, and keeping. Wow! He was with me in the past. He is with me today (and moment by moment). He will be with me always. The CSB translates “The course of my life is in your power; rescue me from the power of my enemies and from my persecutors.”[2. Holman Christian Standard Bible] The “course of my life,” my whole life, from beginning to end, is under His control. What assurance that gives! His power is greater than any other power!

Robert Browning’s beautiful poem “Rabbi Ben Ezra” includes the key line from verse 15:

Grow old along with me!

The best is yet to be,

The last of life for which the first was made.

Our times are in his hand

Who saith, “A whole I planned.

Youth shows but half; trust God: see all, nor be afraid!”[3.

Robert Browning – “Rabbi Ben Ezra”]

Because of our trust in a Sovereign God, we can have hope even when we fail (and we so often do!). He forgives, He renews, He gives fresh grace, and new beginnings – things we all need.

I will go on, my past I leave behind me

I gladly take his mercy and his love.

He is joy and he is peace, He is strength and sweet release;

I know He is, and I am His, I will go on. [4. William J. and

Gloria Gaither “I Will Go On”]

Memories (Part 3)

This section of my personal memories deals in large part (not exclusively) with ministry-related memories rather than personal ones, and covers a period of some 20 years from 1995 until the present. I include it because, number one, these are special memories in my life, and secondly, they testify to the faithfulness and leading of God as Judy and I endeavored to be obedient to our calling as believers, spouses, parents, and missionaries.

Russia

We were in the process of completing our fourth term of service in Panama when a phone call came from Brother Eugene Waddell, director of the Foreign (now International) Missions Department. Would Judy and I consider transferring from Panama to Russia? After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, God had opened doors to Russia and all the former Soviet Union countries, and there was the possibility of Free Will Baptists partnering with the Russian Baptist Union, most of whom were very close to us doctrinally. This was the spring of 1995.''

As we finished up that term and came to the states, with plans to visit Russia with someone from the mission that year, our feeling was that we would be transferring. I picked up some Russian grammar books, a traveler's course, and other resources, thinking that would help prepare me. By the time we went in October 1995, I had learned several phrases and lots of individual words.

The trip was unforgettable. We traveled with Jimmy Aldridge (Overseas Secretary with FWB International Mission) and Galen

Dunbar (board member). We met Brother Nicolai Sobolev, pastor and leader in the Russian Baptist Union, and what a wonderful host he was! We traveled from Moscow to Chelyabinsk, and then to Yekaterinburg. We attended a conference in Moscow with many Russian pastors and leaders, and a number of expatriates. What a humbling experience to listen to Russian pastors relate their experiences of time spent in prison, torture and isolation. Their faithfulness to our God came through in their testimonies. Through impossible situations, they labored to keep the church alive in Russia.

As a result of that amazing conference, and through an extended season of prayer and reflection, we reluctantly told Brother Waddell that we didn't feel the Lord's leading to go to Russia. At that time, we did not know why God said no. A year or so later, Mike and Cathy Corley were appointed to do what we were asked to do and they did it so much better than we could have!. He knew Russian and could begin ministry without the years of language study. Don't second guess God. His ways are always perfect.

Director of Field Operations

In not choosing to go to Russia, we opted to return to Panama for a fifth term. That concluded in the middle of 1999, and we moved to Nashville to be near our oldest two sons (Michael was married and Phillip was a senior at Welch), and to enroll David in Bible College. Stateside assignment usually lasted a year or so, and involved visiting churches, speaking in mission conferences, attending associational meetings, and other mission-related opportunities. I was in western Missouri in an area-wide mission conference when one unusually warm November afternoon I received a call from James Forlines, who had become General Director of the Mission in 1998.

Bro. James told me he was considering me as a possibility for

the Foreign Missions (now International Missions) administrative staff. Was I interested and willing to be considered? I could take some time and think and pray, talk it over with Judy, etc. We prayed earnestly, considered the possibilities and implications as to what it would mean for us, and in early January 2000, I called and told Bro. James that if he selected me for the position, I would accept. In mid-January, I became the Director of Field Operations.

It was my role to supervise and coordinate the efforts of our field personnel. I had an office in Nashville, and from there traveled to approximately 20 countries over the next eight years. It was truly a great adventure, a challenge beyond anything I could have imagined. Thanks to the Lord's enablement, I was a part of several initiatives that enabled us as a people to have a greater impact around the world: partnership with Bible Mission International in Central Asia, the creation of the position of Regional Director which served us well for a number of years, although it has now been eliminated, the creation of the Hanna Project, and ongoing efforts with our international Free Will Baptist family. One of my most special memories was going to Bulgaria with Clint Morgan and Tim Awtrey to survey that country as a potential field of service for our mission, and later making that recommendation to our Board. The Board approved opening Bulgaria, and today, nearly 15 years later, God is working there in a mighty way through four missionary couples and a growing number of Bulgarian believers.

The International Fellowship of Free Will Baptist Churches, Inc

In 1992 a historic event happened for Free Will Baptists around the world. Panama was host to a consultation that would bring representatives from a number of countries where our missionaries served. Spearheaded by Dr. Melvin Worthington,

Executive Secretary of the National Association of Free Will Baptists, USA, the consultation became the catalyst for an international movement.

The International Fellowship of Free Will Baptist Churches, Inc. was officially organized in 1995 in Brazil. They decided to meet every three years. I missed the 1995 and 1998 meetings in Brazil and Uruguay, respectively, but starting in 2002 (we skipped 2001 because it was so close to the terrorist attacks of 9-11), I attended every meeting through 2010, plus a number of executive committee meetings on off years as a translator-advisor, or as a member of the committee. Bro. Worthington decided to postpone the next session until 2002, and we met near Nashville, Tennessee at Camp Garner Creek. We met in Panama in 2004, France in 2007, and Oklahoma City, Oklahoma in 2010.

We'd basically meet every three years or so for a general assembly. The other years I would help coordinate an executive committee meeting, sometimes as a liaison and sometimes as a member of that committee. Working with men like Gerardo Acevedo (Uruguay), José Manuel Parrón (Spain), Luis Felipe Tijerina (México), and others remains a joy I can't adequately describe and has led to some treasured friendships as well.

Panamá, Part II

God is truly a God of surprises. I had served as Director of Field Operations at International Missions, truly loved it, and was able to visit around 20 countries during those years. However, I was having some health issues (turned out to be sleep apnea at the time, and later some more problems), and I also began to sense some unrest in my spirit that perhaps it was time to leave and find a different ministry. The Lord graciously opened doors. I would leave the position of DFO, but stay on with the Mission. The original plan was to stay

involved with the International Fellowship of Free Will Baptist Churches and help countries that had received the gospel from Free Will Baptist in the United States develop plans and strategies to begin sending out their own cross-cultural missionaries. At the same time, it was felt that Judy and I should have a field ministry somewhere, so we decided to divide that role between Panama (helping the Bowermans at the seminary) and Uruguay (teaching Bible institute classes). However, by the end of 2008, Eddie's health had deteriorated, and he was going to have to return stateside immediately and go on a liver transplant waiting list. We made a trip to Panama in early January 2009 to meet with Eddie and LaRhonda Bowerman getting a crash course in the operations of the Seminary in Chame. Someone would need to assume leadership of the seminary, and it seemed that the Lord had brought us back to Panama for that hour. We served the next five-plus years in Chame, which turned out to be some of the most rewarding years of ministry. But it was not easy. The daily schedule was exhausting, on call 24/7, readjusting to the heat and humidity of Panama, and responsibilities without number. My undiagnosed health problems also left me extremely tired most of the time. Only God can be credited with giving us strength for each new day.

Judy had some flowers planted around the porch of the dorm where we were living. The beautiful small purple flowers bloomed every morning and then faded away in the heat of the day. Judy said they reminded her of Lamentations 3:23, "They (God's mercies) are new every morning. Great is thy faithfulness." It was a reminder every morning when we walked out the door, that God is faithful and His mercy to us is new and refreshing each day.

Another blessing to us was how God sent us Ariadna and Lazaro Riesgo from Cuba to help us in the seminary! "God sent" is putting it lightly! They came and stepped in immediately relieving us of many of the duties we had.

Also, the churches in Panama were seeing the importance of the seminary and taking ownership. Pastors were willing to dedicate two days a week to teach classes and this was essential. We had students in three different years so it was necessary to have three classes simultaneously. Not only was it a great help to us but the students learned from seasoned pastors. Another benefit was the pastors caught the vision and shared it with their congregations.

It is hard to believe that we're talking about nearly 20 years here. From a middle-aged couple with children still at home to watching those same children grow up, go off to college (all went to Free Will Baptist Bible College, now Welch College), meet their future spouse, get married, and start their own family. Now we're grandparents, several times over, but "greatly blessed, highly favored." As the old saying goes, "how time has flown!"

Bethany

A highlight of 2014 for us was our trip to Peru to see David, Bethany, and their three children; Isaac, Jude, and Naomi. Peru is a beautiful country, Lima is a fascinating city, and being with the kids was special. We actually had them to ourselves for a few days while David and Bethany went away to have a short vacation and celebrate their 10th anniversary. The next time we saw them was just before Christmas 2014 when they flew in to spend their Christmas break with the Lytles Bethany's family in the Huntsville Alabama area. How could I ever forget the night Bethany told us she might have cancer? She didn't feel well from the time they arrived, and kept getting worse. Judy and I were to have gone to Panama on January 7 for a special "Passing the Baton" meeting that weekend in which International Missions was turning the work there over entirely to the National church. Because Bethany was feeling so bad, Judy decided not to go and went down to

Huntsville, AL with Sheila Sass. I was to go on to Panama, but that very morning David called to say that cancer had spread throughout Bethany's body. I got the message en route to the airport, so I canceled my trip, went down to Alabama that morning straight to the hospital. Bethany went home to be with Jesus the next morning around 2:30.

Epilogue

I told one of the editors of Rambling Ever On that the Epilogue would be relatively short. We left Panama as missionaries assigned to that field in 2014 and retired from the Mission in June 2015. Growing health concerns led to an MRI which revealed that I have Intracranial Hypotension, a spinal fluid loss, which causes the brain to sag and, in my case, led to severe headaches, especially when preaching, lack of balance which caused me to not be able to walk a straight line, and even speed up, trip, and fall. To that, we could add lethargy, slurred speech, and delayed reactions that at times made it dangerous to drive. God has been merciful, and though it took a while, we've learned that getting horizontal and resting every day has helped tremendously.

Judy and I have both had a number of health issues, mostly minor, and for that we praise the Lord. It's all part of the aging process. Speaking of aging, our pastor at Cofer's Chapel, Allen Pointer, asked us to serve on staff at the church part time and work with the senior adults and to begin a ministry to internationals. God has allowed us to start a Hispanic ministry, and we now have around 30 Spanish-speaking folks to whom we minister, and whom we're seeking to fully integrate into the life of our church. It's also exciting to get to know our seniors better, especially since we are a part of the group!

At this stage of life, watching our grandkids be born and grow

is truly one of life's greatest blessings. We have nine, with another on the way.

You Don't Know Who Ty Cobb Was?

A baseball great. Record holder. In the first class of Hall of Fame players inducted in 1936. Lifetime batting average of .366 – the highest of all time. Three times batted over .400 for a season. Possibly the greatest player of the early 1900s.

Violent temper with a reputation for viciousness and thought to be a racist.

Some recent studies seem to indicate that some of the things thought to be true about him may not have been factual. (This may have been due to an inept and extremely biased biographer.)

Earlier biographers depicted Cobb as extremely violent, sharpening his spikes and endeavoring to slide into other players and cut them. He is said to have attacked blacks and sought to inflict bodily harm on them. Even Ken Burns of the famous video series *Baseball*, presented that picture of Ty Cobb. In the movie "Field of Dreams," the ghost player Shoeless Joe Jackson talks about not inviting Cobb to come to the magical field because "we hated the ____."

More recent studies seem to show that he was not hatefully racist, was respected by teammates and opponents alike and tried to graciously reach out to fans. He was, according to Charles Leershen, in "Ty Cobb: A Terrible Beauty," an extremely complex man, far from perfect, but not guilty of

many of the things alleged in earlier biographies.

Ty Cobb was born in Georgia in 1886, just 21 years after the Civil War ended. He played for the Detroit Tigers, and because of his attitudes and actions, and being a Southerner, he may have created more problems for himself than he should have.

Interestingly enough, Jackie Robinson, who broke the color barrier in 1947, was also born in Georgia, 33 years after Ty Cobb. And recent information would seem to show that Cobb was not against African Americans playing in the major leagues. "The Negro should be accepted wholeheartedly, and not grudgingly," he said. "The Negro has the right to play professional baseball and whose [sic] to say he has not?" And he was proved correct in the years that followed as African Americans reshaped the all-time baseball statistics from that point forward.

Now while I am sure there are those who do, it is likely that most people in China, India, or the heart of Africa would not know who Ty Cobb really was; in fact, he or she would never have even heard of him. Fame is not only fleeting, it's also limited by time and place. In this case, the real and total truth about Tyrus Raymond Cobb is known only to God.

Historical facts, anecdotes, trivia and the like, are interesting, at least to some people, at certain times, and in at least a few places. They do serve as good attention grabbers, make for memorable illustrations, and help transition us to consider more important things. But only one bit of information and only one Individual makes any real difference.

It's not Ty Cobb who must be known – it's Jesus! Jesus, Name above all names. Jesus, who said of Himself "I am the way, the truth, and the life, no man cometh unto the father but by me." Jesus, supernatural birth, sinless life, sacrificial death, and glorious, bodily resurrection, all to save people

from their sins. Jesus, of whom it was said: "Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved."

If Ty Cobb remains unknown except for a small group of baseball aficionados and historians, it will make virtually no difference. But if Jesus is not known – and received – there are eternal consequences. He tells us to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. His name is to be proclaimed in all the earth.

Last, but certainly not least: we must clearly and accurately communicate the message. If indeed historians have missed the boat on what kind of person Ty Cobb was – intentionally or accidentally – that is sad, to be sure. However to miss the message of Jesus, or to transmit or receive a distorted message, is tragic.

There are still hundreds of millions of people who are not only unreached with the gospel – the only message that can save them, remember – but are still unengaged in the sense that no believer or group of believers is plotting a strategy to engage them with the gospel. There remain some 1,600 languages and dialects that do not have even a portion of the Bible. Thankfully, major efforts are underway to change that and get the Word to them in their tongue.

Ty Cobb was a great baseball player and a complicated person and while it is interesting to know who he really was and what he accomplished, that knowledge holds temporal importance. The same cannot be said about the most significant person to walk the face of the earth – Jesus Christ. We are to know Him and to make Him known to the uttermost ends of the earth. We should proclaim the Good News about Jesus with clarity, accuracy, and consistency. There is nothing more eternally significant than this.

La Himnodia Latinoamericana

Hace un mes, una amiga aquí en Nashville que fue bibliotecaria en Welch por más de 30 años, puso una sugerencia en su pared de Facebook. Hablando de la bendición que son para los hijos de Dios los himnos y otras canciones cristianas, pidió que todo aquel que quisiera pusiera el nombre de alguna canción favorita y que incluyera porqué le gustaba tanto esa canción. ¡Muchísima gente respondió! Viendo los nombres de aquellos himnos y leyendo los testimonios fue de mucha bendición y edificación espiritual para mí, y según los comentarios que leí, para muchos más.

Ahora, yo quisiera poner algo en español, pidiendo prestado el concepto de mi amiga.

En mi opinión, en ninguna parte del mundo hay mejor himnodia que en América Latina.

Comenzando con los himnos que llegaron a Centro y Sudamérica de América del Norte y de Europa, las iglesias evangélicas han cantado “En La Cruz,” “Cuando Allá Se Pase Lista,” “Oh Tu Fidelidad,” y “Cuán Grande Es Él,” y mil himnos más, llenando sus cultos con alabanzas al Todopoderoso. Traducidos del inglés, han enriquecido la vida espiritual y la adoración congregacional del pueblo hispano por más de cien años.”

Autores hispanos como el famoso Alfredo Colom de Guatemala escribieron canciones inolvidables para el pueblo latinoamericano. “Manos Cariñosas,” “Pero Queda Cristo,” conocido popularmente como “Por la Mañana Yo Dirijo mi Alabanza,” “Canten con Alegría,” y “A La Victoria Jesús Nos Llama.” Colom nació en 1904. En su juventud era mujeriego, alcohólico y pecador perdido. Cuando conoció a Cristo, su

vida fue transformada.

El himnario "Celebremos Su Gloria" destaca dos famosos músicos, himnólogos de antaño: Alfredo Colom y Roberto Savage. Savage era norteamericano pero durante muchos años de su ministerio sirvió como misionero en Ecuador en la emisora HCJB, y dio a luz a proyectos musicales que incluían la serie "Adelante Juventud, himnos, coritos y cánticos espirituales que guió al pueblo latinoamericano en sus alabanzas al Señor. Hizo compilaciones de música de varios países y arreglos que eran fáciles de cantar. El impacto que se sentía por los esfuerzos de estos dos siervos es incalculable.

Otros nombres destacados de otra generación: Santiago Stevenson, el trovador panameño (A La Casa de Jairo Iba Jesús), Danny Berrios, Stanislao Marino, y Juan Romero ("Visión Pastoral," o "Eran Cien Ovejas") entre muchos de las décadas de los 70 y 80. Más recientemente, Marcos Witt, Juan Adrián Romero, Marcos Barrientos y Marcos Vidal nos han dado nuevas canciones, muchas, y el pueblo sigue alabando al Señor.

Pero los Latinoamericanos también crearon una multitud de coritos y canciones en español. No he visto ni conocido otro continente u otra cultura que haya producido más música original. Canciones espirituales, salmos abundan. (Piensen en "Si Fui Motivo de Dolor," "Más Allá del Sol," "Alabaré,," y salmos como el 145, 3:3-4, 25, 92 ("Bueno es alabarte oh Jehová") La lista es interminable.

Me impresionó mucho cómo la gente respondió al blog de mi amiga en inglés. Me gustaría invitarles a ustedes que respondan a este blog, indicando su canción, o canciones favoritas, y diciendo por qué le gusta esa canción en particular. Estoy seguro que será de mucha bendición.

Termino con una canción – una de mis favoritas. No es necesariamente mi favorita absoluta, pero es linda, y la letra expresa grandes verdades. Muchos de ustedes la conocen – "Día

en Día.”

*Día en día Cristo está conmigo,
Me consuela en el medio del dolor.
Pues confiando en su poder eterno,
No me afaño ni me da temor.
Sobrepuja todo entendimiento
La perfecta luz del Salvador.
En su amor tan grande e infinito
Me dará lo que es mejor.*

*Día en día Cristo me acompaña
Y me brinda dulce comunión
Todos mis cuidados él los lleva;
A él le entrego mi alma y corazón.
No hay medida del amor supremo
De mi bondadoso y fiel Pastor
Él me suple lo que necesito
Pues el pan de vida es mi Señor.*

*Oh Señor, ayúdame este día
A vivir de tal manera aquí.
Que tu nombre sea glorificado
Pues anhelo honrarte solo a ti.
Con la diestra de tu gran justicia
Me sustentas en la turbación.
Tus promesas son sostén y guía
Siempre en ellas hay consolación.*

Forgiveness

“Cutting someone a little slack.” “Showing grace.” “Giving a second chance.”

All of these phrases interest me a great deal in terms of relationships.

There is a difference between cutting someone some slack or covering a multitude of sins, and forgiving wrongs done to us or others. The latter involves a definite transgression, a sin, a crime, even, and most of the time only those who are resting in their forgiveness in spite of the enormity of their sins against a Holy God, can extend forgiveness to others who neither deserve it or in some cases even want it. The former is more of the nature of overlooking, not making a big deal of others faults and frequent mistakes. Both are marks of a Christian who walks in fellowship with God, as is also our subsequent treatment of people we've said we forgive. Hence, the following simple outline for this devotional thought:

- 1. Overlooking faults (I Peter 4:8 – “love covers a multitude of sins.”)**
- 2. Forgiving (Matthew 18, Luke 17, Colossians 3:12-13)**
- 3. Treating others as forgiven.**

Overlooking faults

I personally have come to the conclusion that I want to stop saying “I don't like... (fill in the blank with whatever: genre of music, style of preaching, sports team, etc...). If it's in the realm of preferences, not biblical and moral values, I want to say “I prefer,” or “I like,” and not run down others' opinions. Most things do not rise above the level of simple preference (Think: musical tastes). Some things do, obviously, and must be defended, refuted, fought over, but even there, in the right attitude. Other things are just what one person likes better, and another person likes less.

When Peter reminds us that love covers a multitude of sins, it's as the ESV Study Bible states: “Where love abounds, offenses are frequently overlooked and quickly forgiven.” (1

Peter 4:8)

Going beyond negativity in the area of preferences and offenses, I want to be Christlike in the matter of forgiveness. I want to overlook minor faults, and gently address major ones after having gotten the beam out of my own eye (Matthew 7). I am convinced that my dealing with myself first, a firm attitude with self, in which my own weaknesses, sins, and hangups get the most attention, will enable me to be more accepting of my brother. I must learn to move past minor differences, letting love triumph over them, and bring us together.

Forgiveness (Matthew 18:18-35, Luke 17:1-4)

I want to forgive from the heart, as I have been so graciously forgiven, undeserving though I am. If Matthew 18 doesn't stop us cold in our tracks as far as forgiveness is concerned, I don't know what will. We who have been forgiven the thousands of talents – an overwhelming debt – by our loving Lord, must forgive wrongs done to us, even as we've been forgiven. Peter thought he was really going the distance when he spoke of forgiving seven times until Jesus said it must be seventy times seven.

Pastor Daryl Grimes writes of his brother who was murdered more than 30 years ago, and of the man who killed him. "Forgiveness is important. I don't know when it happened but there was a time in my life that I had to let go of the bitterness and hatred I had for this man. Hating him will not bring my brother back nor will it do anything but destroy me...Jesus died for him, too."

Consider these examples from Scripture:

- Joseph and his brothers. – "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good..." (Genesis 50)

- Stephen and murderers. “Lord lay not this sin to their charge.” (Acts 7:55)
- Jesus and those who crucified Him. “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” (Luke 23:34)

A couple of examples from modern history, one from 50 years ago, and the other from recent weeks. First, the Vietnamese girl who was burned by napalm. Her remarkable story can be found in *Fire Road: The Napalm Girl's Journey Through the Horrors of War to Faith, Forgiveness & Peace*. For those of us old enough to remember the Vietnam War, we will remember Phan Thi Phuc, running down a street with her body on fire from a napalm bomb.

Against all odds, Kim lived—but her journey toward healing was only beginning. When the napalm bombs dropped, everything Kim knew and relied on exploded along with them: her home, her country's freedom, her childhood innocence and happiness.

The coming years would be marked by excruciating treatments for her burns and unrelenting physical pain throughout her body, which were constant reminders of that terrible day. Kim survived the pain of her body ablaze, but how could she possibly survive the pain of her devastated soul? Kim says she was following the religion she grew up with, but didn't know “the real God.” She says God still knew her, though.

“The real God, He knows my heart. Ten years later I was just seeking the truth and looking for the answer, ‘Why me?’” she says.

“I found a Bible in the library in Saigon. At that time I wanted to die, I was so full of bitterness and anger and hatred,” she says.

But that's when she found Christ. After a lifelong battle with physical and emotional pain, she says, “God gave me peace and joy.”

Fire Road is the true story of how she found the answer in a God who suffered Himself; a Savior who truly understood and cared about the depths of her pain. Fire Road is a story of horror and hope, a harrowing tale of a life changed in an instant—and the power and resilience that can only be found in the power of God’s mercy and love.

More recently, the story of gymnast Rachel Denhollander, sexually abused by Dr. Larry Nassar, who both challenged him to repent and also forgave the man who abused her. Her words to her abuser:

“In our early hearings, you brought your Bible into the courtroom and you have spoken of praying for forgiveness. And so it is on that basis that I appeal to you. If you have read the Bible you carry, you know the definition of sacrificial love portrayed is of God Himself loving so sacrificially that He gave up everything to pay a penalty for the sin He did not commit. By His grace, I, too, choose to love this way.

You spoke of praying for forgiveness. But, Larry, if you have read the Bible you carry, you know forgiveness does not come from doing good things as if good deeds can erase what you have done. It comes from repentance which requires facing and acknowledging the truth about what you have done in all of its utter depravity and horror without mitigation, without excuse, without acting as if good deeds can erase what you have seen in this courtroom today.

The Bible [speaks of] a final judgment where all of God’s wrath and eternal terror is poured out on men like you. Should you ever reach the point of truly facing what you have done, the guilt will be crushing. And that is what makes the Gospel of Christ so sweet. Because it extends grace and hope and mercy where none should be found. And it will be there for you.

I pray you experience the soul-crushing weight of guilt so you may someday experience true repentance and true forgiveness from God, which you need far more than forgiveness from me – though I extend that to you as well.”

Treating others as forgiven

I want to treat others as forgiven, not just say the words. How we act toward others speaks volumes. The fruit of the Spirit that includes gentleness, goodness, and meekness are so indicative of our relationship with Christ and whether or not we are led by His Spirit. Truly forgiving will involve a change in our attitude toward others. Paul reminds us in Colossians 3 that we are to “put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another if anyone has a grievance against another. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also are to forgive.” I think that treating others as forgiven flows from resting and rejoicing in our own forgiveness. The three points are interrelated and joined firmly; if I am able to cut others some slack, to forgive a multitude of sins because I’m loved by God and know that I am, and can, therefore, accept and tolerate differences and even disagreements, I have taken a huge step toward a joyful, balanced life. Going beyond that, if I can truly forgive even major sins against me because He has forgiven me all my sins, I truly live in freedom. Treating others as forgiven then means that I treat others on the basis of forgiveness and acceptance. That’s freedom and release!

So how do we want to live? It really is up to us, to a great extent. We have the Guidebook, the Scriptures. We have the Inner Guide, the Holy Spirit. And we have a Savior who models this for us, and encourages us on to victory.

Memories (Part 2)

As I continue to recall memories, I should point out that these are selective and representative. There are many more, but these stand out to illustrate the faithfulness of God in both good and bad times. (Read Part One [here](#).)

The Sweet Fellowship of College

“Yesterday, Today, Forever” was a medley of songs popular during my college years at the Free Will Baptist Bible College, [1. Welch College now.] that we dorm students would sing during informal gatherings. One evening, around 1970 or 1971, as the students frequently did, we’d gathered in front of the sliding curtain opening into the dining hall (where the student lounge and later “Common Grounds” were) about five minutes to six, and as was often the case, we started to sing:

Yesterday, Today, Forever Jesus is the same.

All may change, but Jesus never, glory to His name!

Glory to His name, glory to His name.

All may change but Jesus never, glory to His name!

Precious name, oh how sweet, hope of earth and joy of Heaven.

Precious name, oh how sweet, hope of earth and joy of Heaven.

Heaven is better than this, praise God what joy and bliss

Walking down streets of purest gold, living in a land where

we'll never grow old.

*Heaven is better than this, praise God what joy and bliss
I like Bible College down here, but Heaven is better than,
Heaven is better than*

Heaven is better than this.

This world is not my home, I'm just a passing through

My treasures are laid up, somewhere beyond the blue.

The angels beckon me to Heaven's golden shore,

And I can't feel at home in this world any more.

More, more about Jesus, more, more about Jesus

*More of His saving fullness see, more of His love who died for
me.*

It's me, it's me, oh Lord, standing in the need of prayer

It's me, it's me oh Lord, standing in the need of prayer.

*Sweet hour of prayer, sweet hour of prayer, that calls me from
a world of care*

*And bids me at my Father's throne make all my wants and wishes
known.*

*In seasons of distress and grief, my soul has often found
relief*

*And oft escaped the tempter's snare, by thy return, sweet hour
of prayer.*

With a key word, one song would flow into the next:
name...name, Heaven...Heaven,

This...this, more...more, and prayer...prayer. That particular night, though, as we approached the final song, there seemed to be a holy hush, a sense of God's Spirit. The curtain came open well before the end. The dining hall hostess stood there smiling. She didn't hush our singing and call for someone to ask the blessing right away. Instead, she joined us as we finished out the medley with the the beautiful and poignant "Sweet Hour of Prayer," and then we prayed and went into the dining hall to eat. A beautiful moment, a precious memory, which to me highlights the camaraderie, the sweet fellowship, the closeness of our student body during our unforgettable college years.

First Visit to Cuba

It was the summer of 1986. We had just come home from our second term in Panama to begin stateside assignment. Brother Eugene Waddell, who had recently been named as General Director of Free Will Baptist Foreign Missions, called me, and asked me if I would go with him to Cuba to be his interpreter/translator. I felt greatly honored to be asked to go. Over the years, we had met a number of our FWB people from Cuba who migrated to Panama en route to the United States. I'd heard so much about the country and the church there. In addition, visits from the US to Cuba were very infrequent, and no one from the Mission office had gone in nearly thirty years.

It was one of the most unforgettable weeks of my life. We were in Pinar del Río, at the site where the seminary had operated for almost 20 years up until the time of the Cuban revolution. Since that time it had been closed, and the government would not allow the seminary to reopen. Eugene Waddell spoke several times during the youth camp we were attending; the FWB Church in Cuba was still permitted to use the facility for camps and conventions. Never have I seen such

anointing or heard such pertinent messages as those he brought that week. His messages from the book of Daniel, and how God used this young man and his three friends as witnesses in a foreign, hostile culture, tremendously blessed and encouraged our Cuban brothers and sisters, especially the youth.

We laughed, we cried, we worshipped, and we forged friendships that would last for a lifetime and into eternity. There were also strategic discussions and the working out of a viable strategy for the Mission to again become involved in the life of the Cuban church, but in a healthy way that would honor our brothers and not create unhealthy dependency. What has resulted in Cuba these past 30 years owes much to the wisdom God gave to Bro. Waddell and Bro. Gilberto Díaz, who was president of the Cuban Association.

The 1989 US Invasion of Panama

Things had been hot and chaotic in Panama since 1987, when frequent demonstrations started taking place against the dictatorship that had ruled the country since October 1968. Then, in early 1988, the U.S. froze Panamanian assets in an effort to force dictator Manuel Antonio Noriega to step down, and charged him with drug trafficking and other illegal activities. Banks closed, and we had difficulty getting money to even buy groceries. Things calmed down a bit, but then in May, 1989, after Noriega had the presidential election annulled when it was evident that the opposing candidate had one, violence erupted, and images of Guillermo Endara and Guillermo "Billy" Ford beaten and bloodied by Noriega's thugs flashed across the television screen. The tension grew almost daily.

Judy shares the following memory:

Since public transportation was so difficult during this time,

one afternoon, I decided to take our friend Lola to a bus stop closer to her house so she wouldn't have to wait for hours. We were chatting in the car as we arrived to the area called San Miguelito. Suddenly, we were in the middle of a political demonstration. The traffic was totally stopped. I looked around. There was a river of cars in front of us, behind us and on both sides. The angry mob was shouting, "Kill the Gringos, kill the Gringos." There was no escape. The car had tinted windows, thank the Lord, because one protester approached my car and laid his AK-47 right on the hood and continued to shout! Lola was praying like there was no tomorrow and I was saying a few prayers myself. Just as suddenly as we found ourselves in this horribly frightening situation, it seemed like God parted the Red Sea. That river of cars opened up and I didn't wait to see if the traffic light was red or green. I gunned it and we were out of there safe and sound. Only God could do that!

There were a couple of coup attempts to have Noriega step down, which failed and resulted in Noriega's men being killed. October and November slowly went, the tension growing, and no one knowing what might happen. Noriega shook a machete in the face of the United States, and declared Panama to be in a state of war. It was now late December, Christmas season, stores crowded with customers and their Christmas merchandise.

December 20, 12:00 a.m.: My family and I – our three boys were there with us, ages 14, 12, and 8 – will never forget "Operation Just Cause." The bombing, the strong military presence for weeks that followed, the terrible Friday, December 22 following the Wednesday a.m. invasion; a day of looting as people ransacked the stores, including those nearby us, and carried things up the street in front of our house. Everyone was concerned that once the stores were wiped out, looters would start breaking into homes. That night, by common consent, believers set a time to pray and call upon the Lord for His protection. I'll never forget when the prayer

time ended, at that very moment, we heard the first U.S. helicopters passing over the neighborhoods, and heard that a curfew had been instituted! We were able to sleep in peace, in spite of the uncertainty. The next day, we saw the first troops, patrolling the city. Things began to quickly calm down.

Parents' Home-going

These memories, though separated by over 25 years, have special significance: the passing of our parents, their departing this earth on their Heavenly journey. My dad died in 1981, after a year and a half struggle with pancreatic and liver cancer. He was not quite 70, and I was only 31 when he left us. We are thankful he lived longer than the doctors' had predicted, and enjoyed several months relatively pain-free. Judy's mom, Lillian Hovis, left us in 1993, at age 68. She had taken care of Judy's dad, who had lived in declining health for some time, when she was stricken with pancreatic and liver cancer in 1992. In less than a year, she was gone. That left Judy's dad, who lived for almost three years after his wife of 46 years was taken. He passed in 1996, at home. My mom suffered from Alzheimer's for more than 8 years, before the Lord took her home in 2007.

These very selective memories, spread over a period of 30 plus years, show God's love, faithfulness, protection, and comfort. From a precious, unforgettable moment of fellowship and camaraderie, to the Holy Spirit's mighty working among believers in Cuba, to God's hand of protection during a time of uncertainty and danger, to His comfort as we said our earthly goodbyes to those we love, He was there!

Memories (Part 1)

Memories are indicators, reminding us where we've been, what we've experienced, and the faithfulness of God throughout our lives.

Memories are signposts, pointing us backward for remembrance and reflection so that we can then look forward to God in faith and anticipation.

Memories are not in and of themselves infallible or "stand alone." Truth, fact, and reality are all much more important. At the same time, memories are our recollection and impression of those events and realities.

Some memories seem to always be around, just under the surface, easily recalled. Others pop up out the blue, after not having been remembered or thought of for years.

It would be negligent to fail to point out that there are bad memories, awful memories, that constitute nightmares in our lives. These don't bring joy as do good, positive memories, but sometimes we can still learn from them. We can trust the Lord to heal them and to help us learn from them.

Memories can be faulty or false. My memory of Judy's nurse's cap, for example. The first time I went to see her in Missouri in 1970 after we started dating, I arrived at her house, and her dad took me with him to go pick her up. I used to tell people of seeing her come out of the doctor's office where she worked, so pretty with her nurse's cap on. She reminded me that she was not wearing a cap; I was remembering a picture of

her in her nurse's garb on a shelf at home. I had conflated the two things and thus had a faulty memory.

Memories can have great value, even if we don't remember everything. While it's great to remember one's salvation experience – and many do in great detail – it is even more important to know that today we are relying on Jesus' finished work on the cross, and are believing in and following him. It's not necessary to remember the date and all the circumstances.

God constantly reminded His people of His mighty workings on their behalf in the past and urged them to go back and recall His faithfulness. (Psalm 78 is a lengthy recall of what God had done in the life of Israel, and how the people still didn't obey and follow Him.) Psalm 77:11: "I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your wonders of old." (Psalm 103:2)

So, with those foundational observations, some memories "from my personal storehouse." I've selected them as representative, and for their value as teaching experiences. Over time, I hope to do a couple more of these, that cover the years of my life. I'm convinced that memories can have great value as teachers.

1966 (I think that's the year.) "Who Am I?" Sunday morning service at my home church. I was 16. A group of young women, slightly older than me, was singing one Sunday morning, a beautiful song that was very popular during those years. As they sang "who am I that a King would bleed and die for, who am I that He would pray not my will thine for?," [1. Who Am I: Charles "Rusty Goodman" 1965] tears began to flow, and several of the girls totally lost it. In fact, they couldn't continue. The emotion spread throughout the church, as the Holy Spirit ministered to hearts. I think that some people came to the altar. Our pastor, as this went on for several minutes, realized he couldn't preach the sermon he'd prepared, but deftly and with wisdom, began to exhort and encourage the

people. A tremendous memory indeed, one of many times when “God showed up” and blessed His people.

1968 Testimonies of enrolling college freshmen. Again, at my church. Again, a Sunday morning. This time, our pastor had asked those of us going off to college in a few weeks (it was early August) to briefly share. I – the shy, inhibited one – was first. All I can say is that I poured out my heart, after spending hours going over what I wanted to say, and a Power greater than mine took over, and my testimony (exhortation) touched hearts in a way I couldn’t have imagined. It may have been the first time in my life I had ever thought that God might somehow use me in the ministry as a preacher.

1977 First service in Panama that Judy and I led. John 4 the Samaritan woman and the living water Jesus gives. We had five people present – the Cáceres family, father, mother, and three teenaged daughters. I was nervous. My Spanish was not all that good, since we had just finished one year of language school, and had arrived in Panama only two months earlier. We put the chairs in a circle. Judy played the piano and led the singing. That was the small beginning of a church plant in Bethania, Panama City – quite a memory, indeed!

1982 Phillip’s epiglottitis. I was on a trip to Panama’s interior, about two hours from home. Up in Buenos Aires, there was no electricity and no running water. There was no way to keep in touch with Judy and the three boys. When I got home four days later, there was a sign on the door: “Phillip is in the hospital. Don’t worry – he’s much better. Come as soon as you can.”

I rushed over to Paitilla Hospital to find Phillip in a hospital room under an oxygen tent. Judy explained that after I left on my trip, Phill had started running a high fever, and didn’t seem to be breathing well; in fact, he was wheezing. After an entire morning of this, she grew very concerned and had a neighbor take him to the clinic for a 2:00 p.m.

appointment. (I had the car.) The clinic was full that afternoon, but the receptionist realized Phillip was very sick and moved him to the front. Dr. Vásquez looked at him and said “I don’t want to alarm you, but we need to get him in the hospital. I think he has epiglottitis.”

In a matter of minutes, the doctor had diagnosed our son with something rather rare in Panama – an infection of the epiglottis – which led to its swelling and producing thick saliva. Phillip was slowly smothering to death. The doctor immediately started two antibiotics and ordered an oxygen tent to help Phillip’s breathing. Unknown to Judy at the time, he spent that first night at the hospital, because of his concern, and to be able to monitor Phillip closely.

God was so merciful, and though I came into the picture “after the fact,” my heart is no less grateful to the Lord for sparing our son. Jehovah-Rapha, the Lord our healer.

Memories...we all have them. Let’s benefit from them.

Precious Memories how they linger

How they ever flood my soul.

In the stillness of the midnight

Precious sacred scenes unfold. [2. Precious Memories: J.B.F. Wright, 1925]

Sometimes He Calms the Sea

African-American pastor and songwriter of the past century, Charles Tindley, used a common metaphor of the time to reference the trials, tribulations, dangers, and snares of the

Christian life: "When the storms of life are raging, stand by me...when the world is tossing me like a ship upon the sea, thou who rulest wind and water, stand by me." [1. "Stand By Me" Charles A. Tindley]

Another song writer-poet expressed similar sentiments: "Jesus Savior, pilot me, over life's tempestuous sea, unknown waves before me roll, hiding rocks and treacherous shoal, wondrous sovereign of the sea, Jesus Savior, pilot me." [2. "Jesus, Savior Pilot Me" Edward Hopper]

Songwriter Scott Krippayne, echoed these thoughts in a song he wrote in 1995:

*All who sail the sea of faith
Find out before too long
How quickly blue skies can grow dark
And gentle winds grow strong
Suddenly fear is like white water
Pounding on the soul
Still we sail on knowing
That our Lord is in control
Sometimes He calms the storm
With a whispered peace be still
He can settle any sea
But it doesn't mean He will
Sometimes He holds us close
And lets the wind and waves go wild
Sometimes He calms the storm
And other times He calms His child"* [3. "Sometimes He Calms the Storm" Scott Krippayne]

Traveling by boat or ship, or being out on the ocean, rivers, or lakes was a dangerous thing for many centuries, since ancient times. Storms could arise without notice, and the wind, strong waves, thunder, and lightning menaced travelers, and could capsize a ship and cause many deaths. This has been symbolic of trouble in the Christian life. Storms symbolize

illness and disease, financial disasters, broken relationships, and anything else in life that threatens us, either physically or emotionally. Can God not step in and save the day? Can he not send a miracle our way?

In Mark 4, the disciples on the Sea of Galilee found themselves caught in a sudden storm, helpless and in grave danger, while Jesus was asleep in the boat. They woke him, frightened out of their wits, and He stood, extended His hand, rebuked the wind, and said "peace, be still." Immediately the storm ended. Instantly. There was a "great calm." Jesus then rebuked his followers for their lack of faith. Sure, He can calm storms. He's God.

A few years later, Paul was traveling as a prisoner to Rome, on board a ship in the Mediterranean Sea. Suddenly, a Euroclydon, a powerful, cyclone-type wind arose, and for the next two weeks the ship was tossed and battered until all hope of survival was gone. But suddenly Paul appeared and said to all on board with him: "The God whose I am, and whom I serve, has appeared to me." He gave Paul the peace he needed, and the assurance that all would be well (Acts 27:23). But they had to ride out the storm and suffer shipwreck. Life's like that sometimes.

Yet another song repeats for us the same truth:

*Sometimes He calms the storm sometimes He calms me
Sometimes the storm still rages on but I feel the sweetest
peace
It's such a joy to know that my Lord knows just what I need
Sometimes He calms the storm sometimes He calms me*[4. "He Calms me" sung by the McKameys]

Here are some lessons we can learn.

God is sovereign over every storm life brings our way. He is capable of doing the miraculous; healing, provision, removing obstacles, and certainly doesn't mind His child asking for

those things. He may not do what we wish He would, but He always, always, always, will be with us, and will speak peace to our heart if we call upon Him. “Therefore, we will not fear...” (Psalm 46:2) At the end of the day, He will “get us to the other side.”

Here’s the point. We all face storms. God can miraculously still them, and sometimes will, but often we will have to go through them. However, even in the storm He is with us, can speak peace to our heart. The loss of our beautiful daughter-in-law two years ago – my health challenges the past few years – standing with friends and family during severe trials. I’m so glad He is there. The song by *Casting Crowns*, “Praise You in This Storm,” states it beautifully:

*And I’ll praise you in this storm
And I will lift my hands
That you are who you are
No matter where I am
And every tear I’ve cried
You hold in your hand
You never left my side
And though my heart is torn
I will praise you in this storm*[5. Praise You in This Storm”
Mark Hall and Bernie Herms (Casting Crowns)]

Prayer: Father, even now be with your dear children who are caught in one of life’s raging storms, whatever it might be. Please calm the storm, according to your will, or please calm them, and assure them of your love and presence. In the powerful name of Christ, Amen.