

FIND US FAITHFUL

Acts 20: 17-24; Proverbs 20:6



We live in the ever-speedy world. We value speed, innovation, and instant results like never before. It seems like today everything changes in a blink of an eye. A very fun song from Frozen 2 tries to capture what it is like to live in this ever-changing world. It might sound a little cheesy, yet this is the very classic way of the world when it comes to dealing with change.

*Yes, the wind blows a little bit colder // And we're all getting older
And the clouds are moving on with every Autumn breeze
Peter Pumpkin just became fertilizer // And my leaf's a little sadder and wiser
That's why I rely on certain certainties
Yes, some things never change
Like the feel of your hand in mine
Some things stay the same
Like how we get along just fine
Like an old stone wall that will never fall
Some things are always true
Some things never change
Like how I'm holding on tight to you*

In a goofy way, the song actually is carrying something deeper to think about existentially. **In this ever-changing world, is there something that will never ever change we can cling to?** The Bible says, “Many claim to have unfailing love, but a **faithful person** who can find?” (Proverbs 20:6).

Hachiko story

Meet Hachiko, an Akita dog from Japan that captured the heart of many Japanese for his faithfulness to his master.

Eizaburo Ueno, professor in agriculture science at Tokyo University in Japan, had long wanted a purebred Japanese Akita dog. He had looked for the perfect Akita puppy for a long time, until one of his students encouraged him to adopt Hachiko, from the Odate city in the Akita prefecture of Japan.

Hachiko, or Hachi which became his nickname, and his new owner soon became best friends. The professor loved his dear dog above all and treated him as his son. The two of them were inseparable. As Hachiko grew older, he started to see his owner off to work in

the morning at the Shibuya Train Station, in central Tokyo and went to pick him up at the station in the afternoon when he returned from work.

On May 21, 1925, only two years after Hachiko was born, Hachiko was as usually sitting by the exit at Shibuya train station waiting for his dear Eizaburo. But his owner never showed up... It turned out that Eizaburo had suffered from a cerebral hemorrhage and died suddenly and unexpectedly while at work.

Hachiko moved in with a former gardener of the professor's family. But throughout the rest of his ten-year-long life, he kept going to the Shibuya Train Station every morning and afternoon precisely when the train was due to enter the station. He sat there for hours, patiently waiting in vain for the return of his beloved owner who sadly never came back. (https://nerdnomads.com/hachiko_the_dog)

The story moved me, as it did the people in Japan. In 1934 a statue of Hachiko was unveiled at a grand ceremony in front of Shibuya train station with Hachiko himself present as the main guest.

Hachiko points out to us a deep desire that we want to have in this ever-changing world: we want something that will never ever change. People come, people go, relationships are fleeting and broken, memory fades, bodies wear out. Our hearts will remain restless until we find the immovable anchor.

God's immovable faithfulness

"Listen to me, you descendants of Jacob, all the remnant of the people of Israel, you whom I have upheld since your birth, and have carried since you were born. Even to your old age and gray hair I am He, I am He who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you." (Isaiah 46:4-5)

Our desire for something that will never ever change meets its satisfaction in God alone. He's the faithful God who knit us in our mother's wombs, who made us fearfully and wonderfully, who saw us when we were woven in the secret place, and who takes delight in thinking of us (Psalm 139:13-17). In this ever- changing and anxious world, He's the immovable Rock who will never ever change, to whom we can cling.

Nevertheless, those He loves so dearly often don't understand His unfailing love and faithfulness. Like a broken-hearted lover, God found His own people unfaithful. "Many claim to have unfailing love, but a **faithful person** who can find?" (Proverbs 20:6).

A Faithful God's Servant with A Strong Sense of Calling

When Paul had to say goodbye to the Ephesian elders, he said:

*“And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that **prison and hardships** are facing me. However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to **finish the race and complete the task** that the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace.” (Acts 20:22-24)*

Reading Paul’s letters that he wrote to the early churches, nobody can deny that he is a faithful person. Paul endured hardships, sufferings, and pain for God. His life was all about Christ. In Christ he found the purpose of his life; in Christ he devoted his life to the higher calling; in Christ he persevered and endured many things; in Christ he found joy and comfort in the midst of trials and tribulations; in Christ he found the immovable faithful God who would carry him on to the completion of the task he was called for. Just like the God he loves is faithful, he strived faithfully.

What made Paul that way? I believe it’s the strong sense of calling he had in his heart. *“My only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying the good news of God’s grace,”* he said. With this sense of calling he endured sufferings, hardships, and pain. He strove faithfully to the end.

Paul started off his ministry when God struck him on his way to Damascus. Prior to the encounter, he thought he had been serving the Lord when he persecuted the Lord’s disciples. In God’s love and mercy, God revealed Himself to Paul. *“As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” (Acts 9:3)* That encounter lasted forever in his heart.

In Paul, we see that encounter with the Lord transformed him into a whole new person. Such encounter set a sense of ownership of the task that God has for him. *“God has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet this is no cause for shame, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day.” (2 Tim 1:9-12)*

From Paul we learn that until it forms a strong sense of calling deep in our hearts, faithfulness will never be attained. A sense of calling gives a sense of purpose in life. Unless we find it, we’ll remain purposeless and meaningless. We’ll be tossed back and forth in the ocean of life, useless, and hollowed. *“Everything has a purpose, even machines. Clocks tell the time, trains take you places. They do what they’re meant to do. Maybe that’s why broken machines make me so sad, they can’t do what they’re meant to do. Maybe it’s the same with people. If you lose your purpose, it’s like you’re broken,”* pondered Hugo in the movie *Hugo*.

Owning A Calling

Nevertheless, having a calling doesn't necessarily mean owning a calling. In the parable of the talents that Jesus told, though each servant was given a different amount of talents according to their abilities, yet they all shared one calling. They were called to be faithful to what their Lord has trusted them with. *"The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. (Mat 25:16-18)* When it was the time to settle accounts before their master, not every servant found to be faithful. It was only the first two servants who were acknowledged to be faithful, *"Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!" (Mat 25:23)*

God calls us to be faithful to our calling by completing the task He gave for us. The one talent guy hid his master's money and did nothing about it. As a result, it didn't bear fruit. He's a portrait of a purposeless life. He didn't have a sense of calling like the other two guys.

A strong sense of calling starts with a genuine encounter with the Lord, nevertheless it doesn't always guarantee a faithfulness. Through Paul we see that faithfulness is birthed when God's servants **press on** towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called them heavenward in Christ Jesus (Phil 3:14). While they press on, they experience a meaningful life on earth where hope, joy, peace, and comfort are always available in the midst of hardships, sufferings, and pain.

Press On!

In his letter to the church in Corinth, Paul shared with them how he pressed on in the midst of the hardships he experienced, *"We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us as you help us by your prayers." (2 Cor 1:8-9).*

Life is mostly filled with things that we cannot control. A shroud of uncertainties will always follow in this ever anxious-changing world. Some of us may think that maybe on earth life will never be complete. Nevertheless, Bible tells us that in Christ every Christian is fulfilled; in Christ, we have been brought to fullness (Col 2:10). Knowing that we are fulfilled in Christ, we can control our response to any circumstance we're facing. We can choose to be content in Him and trust in His sovereignty, and be productive, creative, and joyful. It's true that life is a hodgepodge of complexities yet there's hope, joy, and divine companionship in the present for those who press on and trust in the Lord.

Faithful to the end

Second Timothy was the last letter Paul wrote shortly before his death during his second imprisonment in Rome. He remembered Timothy, his beloved son in the faith. In such a time, Paul's memories of Timothy's sincerity and devotion are especially touching (1:3-5). Paul encouraged Timothy to continue in his faithfulness by joining him in suffering for the gospel (1:7).

As he concluded the letter, he asked Timothy to come soon. Paul was assured that he had “fought the good fight” and that “a crown of righteousness was laid up for him” (4:7-8).

I have a certain feeling when I read Paul’s second letter to Timothy. It reminds me of a delicate feeling I have when I see the beauty of a dawn—when the day is in between the light and the dark. It is far in sight, but close in heart. It seeps through my soul. Its beauty speaks gently and powerfully to my heart. It’s out of reach yet it feels so close and so real. It’s like something is fleeting yet the beauty of hope is set off. The world is a flower quickly fading- here today and gone tomorrow. And I am in the world. A meaningful life only happens when we know what the Creator called us to do and live out the calling faithfully to the end.

The world may change any time and may fill with things I can’t control, yet one thing I am assured of - that to have God is the sweetest thing in life. What matters the most is to be confident in His immovable faithfulness that He who began a good work in me will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus (Phil 1:6).

Evan Lature, New Hope Bible Fellowship, Wheaton, Jan 26th 2020

Jesus, I My Cross Have Taken
By Henry Francis Lyte

1. Jesus, I my cross have taken,
All to leave and follow Thee;
Destitute, despised, forsaken,
Thou, from hence, my all shalt be.
Perish every fond ambition,
All I’ve sought, and hoped, and
known;
Yet how rich is my condition,
God and Christ are still my own!
2. Go then earthly fame and treasure,
Come disaster, scorn, and pain,
In thy service pain is pleasure,
With thy favor loss is gain.
I have called the Abba Father,
I have stayed my heart on Thee,
Storms may howl and cloud may
gather
All must work for good to me
3. Man may trouble and distress me,
’Twill but drive me to Thy breast;
Life with trials hard may press me,
Christ will bring me sweeter rest.
O ’tis not in grief to harm me,
While Thy love is left to me;
O ’twere not in joy to charm me,
Were that joy unmixed with Thee.
4. Haste then on from grace to glory,
Armed by faith and winged by
prayer;
God’s eternal day’s before thee,
God’s own hand shall guide thee
there.
Soon shall close thy earthly
mission,
Swift shall pass thy pilgrim days,
Hope shall change to glad fruition,
Faith to sight, and prayer to praise.