

Faithfulness

ADVENT DEVOTION – WEEK 4 | DECEMBER 23–29, 2018

BY JILL DUFFIELD, PRESBYTERIAN OUTLOOK EDITOR

LAMENTATIONS 3:22–23

“Great is thy *faithfulness*. ... Morning by morning new mercies I see.” I cannot help but hum the hymn as I read these verses from Lamentation. Great is thy *faithfulness*, Lord unto me. I came to know this hymn while in seminary. I don’t think the red hymnal of my childhood church contained this powerful song of promise and praise. Nonetheless, once exposed to the booming chorus – “All I have needed thy hand hath provided” – it became a staple of my worship and devotional life. I even like the antiquated “thy” and “hath.” Those words gave the hymn an even greater gravitas and majesty. God’s ways are not my ways. God’s words are not my words. God’s ability and will to provide, uphold and sustain go far beyond my limited understanding and ever evident finitude.

Whatever *faithfulness* we muster, God’s *faithfulness* surpasses. Whatever *faithfulness* we exhibit, God’s encourages. Whatever *faithfulness* we practice, God fills in the gaps. The great, amazing, inexplicable promise of this text from Lamentations is the enduring, never ending, unconditional loving relationship God desires with us regardless of our shortcomings, idolatry and sin. God’s faithfulness never fails.

As we draw closer to the birth of Jesus Christ, knowing that the baby born in Bethlehem will grow up and go to the cross in Jerusalem, the words from Lamentations echo, resound and ring through the cosmos. God’s *faithfulness* and mercy know no bounds. Nothing will separate us from the love of God. New every morning are the blessings of the Triune God who refuses to give up on us. Jesus Christ becomes incarnate for the sake of the world. All we have needed our God hath provided. Absolutely everything.

PRAYER:

Creator, Son and Holy Spirit, as we get closer to the birth of Jesus, help us to recognize your new mercies each morning so that on that morning of mornings, we will rejoice, give thanks and sing at the coming of our Savior. All we have needed you give, withholding nothing, not even the Son of Man, in order to reconcile us to you and one another. Thank you, Jesus. Amen.

DAILY PRAYERS AND PRACTICES

Monday, Christmas Eve — HEBREWS 11:1

While only 15 words, this verse from Hebrews contains a plethora of theology. If you had to define “faith” in one short sentence, what would you include? Write a one-sentence definition of faith.

PRAYER FOR THE DAY:

Often, Lord God, we people of faith struggle to keep following, keep praying and keep serving in the face of ongoing suffering, chaos and cruelty. On this eve of our Savior’s birth, we remember that the pain is that of birth, not death. We tend to Mary as she labors, assured that soon we will greet Jesus Christ. Amen.

Tuesday, Christmas Day—

PSALM 36:5

Today we rejoice in the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Give thanks for all the blessings of this life, mostly for the coming of Jesus into the world to save sinners. God's love and faithfulness reaches from heaven and comes to earth this day.

PRAYER FOR THE DAY:

Heaven and earth are full of your glory, God of all, we rejoice at the birth of our Savior, the Savior of the world, Jesus Christ. Let this day not end without our raising our voices in praise for the amazing gift of your love and faithfulness not bound by heaven, extending over all the earth. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.

Wednesday— 3 JOHN 1:3

Now we begin our journey of following Jesus Christ faithfully every day. As the excitement of Christmas Day wanes, we are invited to tend daily to our relationship with the babe born in Bethlehem. How will you tend to your relationship with Jesus in the days and months ahead?

PRAYER FOR THE DAY:

Gracious God, it is easy to sing and pray on high holy days. We get blessedly lost in the angels' chorus and the poetic language of the birth stories, but like the shepherds we cannot remain at the stable forever. As we return to our routines, may we take with us the beautiful imagery and sounds of Bethlehem and share them with a weary world. Amen.

Thursday— MATTHEW 6:30

Be not anxious. Fear not. These admonitions come from Jesus often. Thankfully, he reminds us frequently that God does not abandon us. God provides for us. We are not alone. Remember today that God is with you. Christ is right now praying for you. The Spirit goes ahead of you.

PRAYER FOR THE DAY:

When days are shorter and darkness outweighs the light, we ask, compassionate God, for an extra measure of your encouragement. Help us to be not afraid, to not be anxious and to act out of trust and love rather than fear and worry. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.

Friday— JOSHUA 24:14

The temptation of idolatry calls persistently. Even unconsciously we put other priorities ahead of our God. What form does idolatry take in your life? What things, people or ideas do you put ahead of faithfulness to Jesus?

PRAYER FOR THE DAY:

We are prone to wander from your ways, Lord God. We capitulate to the prevailing values of culture, often unknowingly. Wake us up to your will this day. Silence in us any voice but your own. Grant us the stamina to be faithful fully and always. Amen.

Saturday— LUKE 16:10

As we come to the close of a calendar year and embark more fully into a new liturgical one, take stock of your life. What areas require attention? What little things are you called to be faithful in so that you will be faithful in much, too?

PRAYER FOR THE DAY:

Help us, Almighty God, to be the people you call us to be, bearing witness to our Savior in each and every thing we do and say. As we go about our work and play, rest and chores, remind us that our actions and attitudes reveal our loyalties. May we be faithful in all things until we are faithful at all times. Amen.

 *Faithfulness* 