



Peace On Earth Ministries  
"Proclaiming Peace To The Nations" – Zechariah 9:10

## Forever Faithful: The Search for *Semper Fi* Saints

PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY BIBLE LECTURES  
MALIBU, CA  
MAY 1-2, 2008

PRESENTED BY VICTOR KNOWLES  
FOUNDER/PRESIDENT, *PEACE ON EARTH MINISTRIES*  
P.O. BOX 275, JOPLIN, MO 64802 [WWW.POEMINISTRIES.ORG](http://WWW.POEMINISTRIES.ORG)

### INTRODUCTION

We have some good friends, Don and Joyce Hall, who live in Montezuma, Iowa. The Halls have some good friends, the Shores, who live in Tripoli, Iowa. Every December 25 the folks in Tripoli get a Christmas card from their friends in Montezuma that reads: "*From the Halls of Montezuma to the Shores of Tripoli.*"

Who does not thrill at those opening words from "The Marine's Hymn" when the United States Marine Corps, the official choir of every United States President, stand at attention and sing them? Our hearts beat a little faster. Our minds picture those brave Marines planting the flag at Iwo Jima.

The Marines have a famous motto: *Semper Fidelis* ("Always faithful"). Modern Marines have shortened it to *Semper Fi* but it still means the same thing: "always faithful." Faithful even unto death. On Feb. 19, 1945, 7,000 Marines fell at Iwo Jima. Admiral Nimitz said, "Uncommon valor was a common virtue." Percentage-wise, more Marines died in combat than any other branch of service during World War II. *Semper Fidelis*. "Always faithful." Even unto death. No wonder they call themselves: "The Few. The Proud. The Marines."

### PROPOSITION

From the Halls of Montezuma, North America, to the shores of Tripoli, North Africa, God is looking for a people who will be faithful, always faithful, forever faithful to Him. "*My eyes will be on the faithful in the land, that they may dwell with me; he whose walk is blameless will minister to me*" (Psalm 101:6 NIV). God is looking for a few good men and women. Heaven is looking for and counting on *Semper Fi* saints. They have always been here. Even when the world was at its worst, Noah found grace (favor) in the eyes of the Lord (Genesis 6:8). How good it is to know that there are still "the faithful in the land" who yet find favor in the eyes of God.

### THE SEARCH FOR *SEMPER FI* SAINTS

The kind of people God is looking today are *Semper Fi* saints. Godly people who are "always faithful" to Him and to His cause. Men and women of "uncommon valor." *Even unto death*. Two thousand years ago the challenge was issued to the faithful in Smyrna: "*Be faithful even unto death, and I will give you the crown of life*" (Revelation 2:10 NKJV). The kingdom of Christ has been built on the martyrdom of *Semper Fi* saints.

The Bible tells us that when Jesus comes again, He will be looking for faith on the earth (Luke 18:8). He will be searching for *Semper Fi* saints. I saw a bumper sticker the other day that read: "Jesus is coming again

– and He’s not going to be very happy!” He won’t be happy if He doesn’t find tens of thousands of *Semper Fi* saints – *bona fide* Christ followers – that’s for sure! The blind poet Fanny J. Crosby wrote, “When Jesus comes to reward His servants, whether it be noon or night, *faithful to Him will He find us watching*, with our lamps all trimmed and bright?”

## THE NEED FOR *SEMPER FI* SAINTS

The need for *Semper Fi* saints is great. The kingdom of God needs Christians who are *always* faithful: to their Christian mates, to their Savior, Jesus Christ, and to His church, the blood-bought body of Christ. Life Innovations recently released the following information on the status of marriage in the United States. “Married households are barely above 50%. There is less than a 50% chance that couples currently married will reach their 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Couples separate on the average 7 years after marriage and divorce after 8. Divorce rates continue about 50%.” Writing in *The Lookout* (Nov. 25, 2007) Bob Russell noted, “Some youth leaders estimate that 90% of Christian teenagers who go off to a secular college are lost to the church within three months. The students may still claim to be Christian and visit church when they return home, but realistically they are no longer identified with Christ – by belief or behavior.” In his book *Falling Away: Why Christians Lose Their Faith and What Can Be Done About It*, Brian Simmons writes that approximately half of all adherents in churches of Christ fall away between their 18<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> birthdays. Unfaithfulness is a serious problem in any generation. Are you aware that the Bible says the following of King Saul? “*Saul died because he was unfaithful to the LORD; he did not keep the word of the LORD and even consulted a medium for guidance, and did not inquire of the LORD. So the LORD put him to death and turned the kingdom over to David son of Jesse*” (1 Chronicles 10:13 NIV). What a warning for us to heed!

## GOD’S FAITHFULNESS

King Saul is a microcosm of man, and man is a polar opposite of God. “*If we are faithless, He remains*

*faithful; for He cannot deny Himself*” (2 Timothy 2:13 NASV).

However, our unfaithfulness does not negate God’s faithfulness. Referencing the children of Israel, Paul said, “*What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? By no means!*” (Romans 3:3 ESV).

Again and again Scripture refers to God as being faithful. Notice how Moses chose to describe God after he gave the 10 Commandments to Israel: “*Know therefore that the LORD your God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands*” (Deuteronomy 7:9 NIV). The “Song of Moses” includes this stanza: “*For all His ways are just; A God of Faithfulness and without injustice, Righteous and upright is He*” (Deuteronomy 32:4 NASB). David’s “Song of Praise” states: “*To the faithful you show yourself faithful*”

(2 Samuel 22:26 NIV). God is under no obligation to show Himself faithful to those who are faithless. Perhaps the greatest exultation of God’s faithfulness is found in Jeremiah’s Book of Lamentations. “*Because of the LORD’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness*” (Lamentations 3:22, 23 NIV). Our faith is based on God’s faithfulness (Hebrews 11:11). Because God is faithful, we learn to be faithful!

## WHAT IS “FAITHFULNESS”?

Since God’s eyes are on the faithful in the land, *Semper Fi* saints as it were, then what does “faithful” mean? The Hebrew word for faithful in Psalm 101:6 is *aman* and means “to build up or support, to be firm or faithful, steadfast, sure, trusty.” We sit in a chair because we believe it will bear our weight. We set out to cross a bridge because we believe the spans will hold up the bridge. Some prisoners are called “trustees” because they have proven themselves to be trustworthy. In Revelation 2:10, our other main verse for this study, the Greek word for faithful is *pistos* and means “trustworthy, believing, true.” M. R. Vincent says, “Be thou” is literally translated “become thou.”

With reference to trials, “faithfulness is not only to be *existent* but *becoming*, developing with new strength and into new applications.” Vincent adds, “Not faithful *until the time* of death, but faithful up to a measure which will endure death for Christ’s sake. It is an *intensive*, not an *extensive* term.”

Someone who is “faithful” is reliable, dependable, trustworthy, steadfast, stable, unflinching, loyal, “marble-constant” (Shakespeare), and responsible. Go to Yellowstone and what do you see? “Old Faithful.” It’s like clockwork. Speaking of clocks, go to London and what do you see? “Big Ben.” Go to the train station and the train comes in when? “Right on time.” There may even be a faithful dog waiting for his master at the station! Some dogs are more faithful to their master than some professed believers are to their Master! The sun comes up every morning and sets every night. The moon is called “*the faithful witness in the sky*” (Psalm 89:37 NIV).

Someone who is “unfaithful,” however, is unreliable, undependable, untrustworthy, shaky, unstable, disloyal, and irresponsible. For example, is a person considered “faithful” if he doesn’t pay his bills? If he doesn’t show up at work on time? If he doesn’t pay his pledge to his club? If he doesn’t give his tithe and offerings to his church? If he doesn’t attend his club or civic organization? If he doesn’t attend the assemblies of his church? If he doesn’t turn out to vote in an election? If he doesn’t return tools that he borrowed from a neighbor? If he only does half a job?

The Almighty is observing the faithful in the land. He takes note of our faithfulness, fidelity, allegiance, and devotion. Crysostom said, “Faithfulness in little things is a big thing.” I really like Evelyn Underhill’s definition: “Faithfulness is consecration in overalls.” The Open Bible says faithfulness is “making faith a living reality in one’s life.” That will be our bottom line in this study.

The Bible says, “*Most men will proclaim each his own goodness, but who can find a faithful man?*” (Proverbs 20:6 NKJV). Who can? God can because His eyes are on the faithful in the land. He readily recognizes the righteous remnant. “*For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to*

*show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him*” (2 Chronicles 16:9 NKJV).

## SOME OLD TESTAMENT *SEMPER FI* SAINTS

Take a look at some of “the faithful in the land” that we find in Scripture. We have already mentioned Noah. Abraham is called faithful in Galatians 3:9 (KJV). God found Moses to be “*faithful in all My house*” (Numbers 12:7; Hebrews 3:2). It was said of David, “*Who among all your servants is a faithful as David?*” (1 Samuel 22:14 NASB). The prophet Elijah was faithful to God even though he felt like he was the only one who was (1 Kings 19:10-14). Most of the prophets were also faithful to God in spite of fierce opposition (think Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, and others). The ancient sufferer Job was faithful to God even in terrible suffering (Job 1:21,22, 2:9,10). His faithfulness reached its heights when he cried, “*Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him*” (Job 13:15 KJV). The “Faith Chapter” of the Bible, Hebrews 11, lists many men and women who lived “by faith” and accomplished much for God “through faith” though it cost some of them their very lives.

## OUR FAITHFUL LORD

When we come to the New Testament, Jesus Christ stands out like Mt. Everest. He is called “*the faithful witness*,” “*the Amen, the faithful and true witness*,” and the rider who is called “*Faithful and True*” (Revelation 1:5, 3:14, 19:11 NIV). Jesus said the purpose of His coming to earth was to “*bear witness to the truth*” (John 18:37). Trench cites Richard of St. Victor on Christ being called “the faithful witness.” “A faithful witness, because He gave faithful testimony concerning all things which were to be testified to by Him in the world. A faithful witness, because whatever He heard from the Father, He faithfully made known to His disciples. A faithful witness, because He taught the way of God in truth, neither did He care for any one nor regard the person of men. A faithful witness, because he announced condemnation to the reprobate and salvation to the elect. A faithful witness, because He confirmed by miracles the truth which He taught in words. A faithful witness, because He

denied not, even in death, the Father's testimony to Himself. A faithful witness, because he will give testimony in the Day of Judgment concerning the works of the good and of the evil." Christ is also called faithful in 1 Thessalonians 5:24, 2 Thessalonians 3:3, and 2 Timothy 2:13. He is described as our "*merciful and faithful High Priest*" in Hebrews 2:17.

Two churches of Christ are called "faithful" in the writings of Paul. "To the saints in Ephesus, *the faithful in Christ Jesus*" (Ephesians 1:1 NIV). "To the holy and *faithful brothers in Christ* at Colosse" (Colossians 1:2 NIV). Notice that being "in Christ" is mentioned in both passages. Jesus taught that abiding in Him (faithfulness) was necessary to productivity (fruitfulness, John 15:1-8). He is the vine and we are the branches. The church must stay connected to Christ for He is the head of the body.

#### NEW TESTAMENT *SEMPER FI* SAINTS

At least eight Christians are described as "faithful" in the New Testament. The newly baptized Lydia begged Paul to come to her house if he judged her to be a faithful *believer* (Acts 16:15). Paul called Timothy a faithful *son* (1 Corinthians 4:17), Tychicus a faithful *minister* (Ephesians 6:21), Epaphras a faithful *servant* (Colossians 1:7), Onesimus a faithful *brother* (Colossians 4:7). Peter also called Silas a faithful *brother* (1 Peter 2:13). Christ Himself called two of His followers "faithful": Paul

(1 Timothy 1:12) and Antipas (Revelation 2:13). In fact, Jesus called Antipas "My faithful *martyr*." Notice the full text. To the church in Pergamos, Christ declared: "*I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells*" (Revelation 2:13 NKJV).

#### THE FAITHFUL MARTYRS

Antipas, whose name means "likeness of his father," evidently "held fast" to Christ's name and did not "deny" his Christian faith even though it cost him his life. The Greek word for "witness" is *martus* from

which we get "martyr." A witness is one who testifies to the truth no matter what. Jesus was a faithful and true witness and He was nailed to a cross as a result. Stephen is often called "the first Christian martyr" because of his faithful testimony that resulted in his being stoned to death (Acts 7:54-60). Incidentally, Stephen's name means "crown." The Greek word for crown is *stephanos*. Sometimes being a faithful witness for Jesus comes at a high cost. It is noteworthy that the death of Antipas comes only three verses after Jesus said, "*Be loyally faithful unto death – [that is], even if you must die for it – and I will give you the crown of life*" (Revelation 2:10 Amplified). Tertullian said, "The more you mow us down, the more quickly we grow; the blood of Christians is fresh seed." I have read several books on "church growth" and attended several seminars on "church growth." I wonder if we want the kind of "church growth" Tertullian described?

John the Revelator saw "*the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God*" (Revelation 20:4 NKJV). Today we are seeing this particular type of execution happen to those who confess Christ in Islamic countries where Shari'ah law (religious law) is being strictly enforced. We must pray for our brothers and sisters (whoever they are and wherever they are) who are faithful witnesses, that they will be empowered from on high to be faithful even to the point of death. We must also pray that their faithful witness in death will have a powerful impact upon their persecutors and executioners even as the dying prayer of Stephen must have rang in the ears of a young fanatic called Saul. "*Lord, do not hold this sin against them*" (Acts 7:60). Augustine said, "The Church owes Paul to the prayer of Stephen." Paul and others turned the world upside down for Christ because one man was faithful unto death.

Your faithfulness to Christ can positively affect others. Joe DiMaggio, the great "Yankee Clipper," was once asked why he went "all out" when he played the game of baseball. He replied, "There is always some kid who may be seeing me for the first or last time. I owe him my best." That's what we owe others. That's what we owe Christ. That's why I want to be a *Semper Fi* saint.

Frederick W. Faber wrote the words to “Faith of Our Fathers.”

*Faith of our fathers! Living still  
In spite of dungeon, fire, and sword:  
O how our hearts beat high with joy  
When-è'er we hear that glorious word!  
Faith of our fathers! Holy faith!  
We will be true to thee till death!*

### IS FAITHFULNESS ESSENTIAL?

Why is faithfulness to Christ – being a *Semper Fi* saint – so important? Or as my Bible College professor, Donald G. Hunt, put it in the title of one of his booklets, “Must Christians Remain Faithful to Christ to Go to Heaven?” His premise was: “it is just as important to be faithful to Christ as our Lord as it was to accept Him as our Savior in the beginning.” This goes against the grain of what some are saying and teaching today.

### WHAT JESUS SAID ABOUT FAITHFULNESS

Consider what the Master Teacher, Jesus Christ, had to say about the need for faithfulness. When Jesus sent out the twelve apostles, He told them, “*And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved*” (Matthew 10:22 NKJV). This teaching is repeated in The Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24:13). The Christian race is not over until we cross the finish line.

Jesus concluded the Olivet Discourse by asking, “*Who then is a faithful and wise servant?*” It is the one who, when his master returns, “*finds him doing*” (Matthew 24:45, 46 NIV). Dallas Willard, in *The Divine Conspiracy*, said, “More than any other single thing . . . the practical irrelevance of actual obedience to Christ accounts for the weakened effect of Christianity in the world today.” The late James Montgomery Boice said the idea that one can be a Christian without being a faithful follower of Christ was “the greatest weakness of contemporary evangelical Christianity in America.” We must be *doers* of the Word (Matthew 7:24-27) or our spiritual house will be destroyed.

In the parable of the Talents, our Lord told the five-talent servant: “*Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord*” (Matthew 25: 21 NKJV). A few verses later He said almost the same thing to the two-talent “good and faithful” servant. But there were no welcome words of commendation for the man who buried his talent. Rather, he was rebuked, relieved of his talent, and relegated to outer darkness. Notice that he is called “the unprofitable servant” in verse 30. A faithful servant will be profitable for his master, but the unfaithful will prove to be unprofitable.

Jesus’ teaching on the vine and the branches in John 15 illustrates how important it is to be a close, connected, faithful follower of Christ. Those who abide (remain) in Christ receive nourishment from the vine and bear much fruit. Those who do not abide (remain) in Christ are cast out as a fruitless branch, gathered, and thrown into the fire (John 15:1-8). The late Fred Blakely said, “This passage speaks unanswerably on two important points at issue with the ‘eternal security’ advocates. First, it tells us, and that from the lips of the Son of God Himself, that a person who has been a Christian can cease to be such, and become a ‘cast-away’ by the Lord. If this is not what is intended in these words, then language is not capable of conveying definite meaning. I want it particularly noted that the branch was in the Vine. ‘Every branch in Me...’ It did not merely appear to be so; according to Jesus, the branch actually was connected with the Vine. It partook of the Vine’s ‘root and fatness’ (Romans 11:17). But it was ‘taken away,’ or ‘cast forth,’ from the Vine.”

### TEACHINGS ON FAITHFULNESS IN HEBREWS

There are many timely admonitions in the book of Hebrews that urge Christians to remain faithful to Christ. Some were reverting to their former religion (Judaism) and so the writer (“only God knows”), after proving the superiority of Christ and Christianity urges his readers to steadfastly continue in the Christian race.

Chapter 2 starts with a solemn warning. *“Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. . . .How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?”* (2:1,3a ESV).

Chapter 3 includes a warning issued by the Holy Spirit. *“Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: ‘Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion’. . . .So I swore in My wrath, ‘They shall not enter My rest’”* (3:7, 8, 11 NKJV).

The Holy Spirit’s phrase *“Today, if you will hear His voice”* is repeated in 3:15 and 4:7.

Another warning is sounded in 3:12-14 NIV: *“See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first.”* The chapter ends with a stark reminder that Israel was not able to enter the Promised Land, *“because of their unbelief”* (3:16-19).

Chapter 4 opens with the first of 12 “let us” exhortations that are scattered throughout the book of Hebrews. All of them show how important faithfulness is for the Hebrew Christians and for us today. With little or no comment here they are in the order of their appearance.

1. *“Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it”* (4:1 NIV).
2. *“Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience”* (4:11 NIV).
3. *“Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need”* (4:16 NIV).
4. *“Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity...”* (6:1 NIV).
5. *“Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water”* (10:22 ESV).

6. *“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful”* (10:23 NKJV).
7. *“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds”* (10:24 NIV).
8. *“Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching”* (10:25 NIV). Notice two helpings of “let us” in this verse and in the next one.
9. *“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us”* (12:1 NIV).
10. *“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear”* (12:28 NKJV).
11. *“Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore”* (13:13 NIV).
12. *“Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise - the fruit of lips that confess his name”* (13:13 NIV).

The peril of apostasy is treated in Chapter 6. Is it possible for a believer to fall away? We’ll let Scripture speak for itself. *“For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they then fall away, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt”* (6:4-6 ESV). However, *Semper Fi* saints will be encouraged by the next words. *“Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things – things that belong to salvation. For God is not so unjust as to overlook your work and the love that you showed for his sake in serving the saints, as you still do. And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises”* (6:9-12 ESV). There are more exhortations to faithfulness in Hebrews than anywhere else in the New Testament.

The book closes with a benediction asking God to “equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen” (13:21 ESV).

#### TEACHINGS ON FAITHFULNESS IN REVELATION

Being a *Semper Fi* saint is especially stressed in the final book of the Bible. Perhaps the key word in Revelation is “overcome.” In the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter John hears a loud voice from heaven say, “They overcame him [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death” (12:11 NIV). This is how the early Christians became faithful – even to the point of death. John adds, “This [captivity and impending death] calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints” (13:10 NIV). *Semper Fi* saints have always understood this. John goes on. “This [refusing to worship the beast when others do] calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God’s commandments and remain faithful to Jesus” (14:12 NIV). Again John writes. “They [the 10 kings who pledge their allegiance to the beast] will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings – and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers” (17:14 NIV). I know whose side I want to be on in that war! The beast and his allies are defeated, Satan is cast into hell, and the saints go home to glory. The book ends with: “The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people, Amen.”

#### BECOMING A SEMPER FI SAINT

Now we come to the “nuts and bolts” of this paper. What all is involved in being a *Semper Fi* saint? What spiritual disciplines are needed to be a *bona fide Semper Fi* saint? I believe they are at least 10 in number.

First, we must have the pure mind of Christ. Jesus Christ was a faithful Son to His Father and if we are going to be faithful children of God we must have the pure mind of Christ. Everything is won or lost in the mind. “For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace” (Romans 8:6

NKJV). We must learn to say with Paul, “But we have the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16 NIV). That may sound like an audacious statement, but it is true. Christ lives in me (Galatians 2:20). “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5 NKJV). We must permit or allow the mind of Christ to have free reign in our lives. When we fully possess the mind of Christ we will think as He thinks, speak as He speaks, and act as He acts. Our thinking will be elevated to a higher plane. We will set our mind on things above, not on things of the earth (Colossians 3:1). We will verbalize things like, “Sin shall not have dominion over me.” We will find ourselves capturing every thought and making it obedient to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). We will live victoriously each day knowing that we have the mind of Christ. “With God we will gain the victory” (Psalm 60:12a NIV).

Second, we must live each day in the power of the Holy Spirit. One of the Christian symbols found in the catacombs of Rome was a ship under full sail. Isaiah said, “Your rigging hangs loose: the mast is not held secure, the sail is not spread” (Isaiah 33:23 NIV). Mates, hoist the sails and catch the wind of God’s Spirit. The Holy Spirit will be the wind in our sails and will keep us on a straight course. I know this is true because the Bible says faithfulness is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). The same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead dwells in us (Romans 8:11). He testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children (Romans 8:16). When our lives are controlled by the Holy Spirit we won’t carry out the desire of the flesh (Galatians 5:16). It’s as simple as that. “Walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh” (NASB). Didn’t Christ promise us that He would ask God to give us a divine “Helper”? Of course He did. “And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever” (John 14:16 NASB). Call on your Helper, the Holy Spirit, to help you be faithful and holy. It is God within who makes us *godly*. It is Christ within who makes us *Christ-like*. It is the Holy Spirit within who makes us *holy* and *spiritual*.

Third, we must permit the word of Christ (Holy Scripture) to dwell in us. George Mueller said, “The vigor of our spiritual life will be in exact proportion to

the place held by the Bible in our life and thoughts.” Paul said, “*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly...*” (Colossians 3:16a ESV). The word of God cannot have free course in our lives until we give it the go-ahead, the green light, the permission, the invitation to come in and do its work in us – informing, reforming, and transforming. In His teaching on the vine and the branches, Jesus informed the disciples, “*Already you are clean because of the word I have spoken to you*” (John 15:3 ESV). Nonetheless, He went on to remind them: “*If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you*” (John 15:7 ESV). (There is a direct correlation between the word of God and answered prayer.) Jesus declared, “*The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life*” (John 6:63 NIV). Martin Luther testified, “The Bible is alive, it speaks to me; it has feet, it runs after me; it has hands, it lays hold on me.” E. Stanley Jones said, “The Bible redirects my will, cleanses my emotions, enlightens my mind, and quickens my total being.” The faithful student of Christ’s word will no doubt be a faithful servant of Christ.

Fourth, we must make prayer and praise a daily practice. Paul encouraged the Christians in Rome to be “*faithful in prayer*” (Romans 12:12 NIV). I am so humbled when a brother or sister in Christ tells me that they pray for me every day. That is faithfulness in prayer. One of my favorite prayer passages in the Bible is in the little book of Philemon where Paul, who is in prison, writes Philemon, “*But, meanwhile, also prepare a guest room for me, for I trust that through your prayers I shall be granted to you*” (Philemon 22 NKJV). If you did nothing more than pray all day for saints at home and abroad it would be a wonderful ministry. Time spent with God is never wasted time. Charles Spurgeon said, “All the Christian virtues are locked up in the word *prayer*.” Are you too busy to pray? President Abraham Lincoln wasn’t. He confessed, “I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go.” John Bunyan said, “Prayer is a shield to the soul, a sacrifice to God, and a scourge to Satan.” Make prayer the key of the morning and the bolt of the night.

My favorite praise passage is in Second Chronicles 20. Jehoshaphat, Judah, and Jerusalem are surrounded by the enemy. They don’t know what to do. They tell God they don’t know what to do. Then some Levites stand up and start praising the Lord with a very loud voice. The next morning Jehoshaphat draws up the strangest battle plan ever. He appointed some men to sing and praise the Lord for the splendor of His holiness! Now watch what happens. “*As they began to sing and praise, the LORD set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated*” (2 Chronicles 20:22 NIV). It took three days just to gather the plunder and on the fourth day they had a “Singspiration” in the Valley of Beracah (“praise”). Fear fell on all their enemies and God gave Judah rest. Erwin Lutzer said, “You don’t learn to praise in a day, especially since you may have been complaining for years! New habits can take time to develop. But you can begin today, and practice tomorrow, until it becomes a part of you.” Quit your whining and start your praising!

Fifth, we must place a higher premium on fellowship. The early Christians “*devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer*” (Acts 2:42 NIV). William Barclay called these “a lightning summary of the characteristics of the early church.” Don DeWalt called them “the fruit of faithfulness.” A recent report from The Barna Group, however, shows a majority of adults now believe there are alternatives to going to church as a legitimate way of practicing Christianity. They include engaging in faith activities at home with one’s family (89%), watching a religious TV program (69%), listening to a religious radio broadcast (68%), and attending a special event, such as a concert or community service activity (68%). Lost in translation is what it means to be a part of the body of Christ. The numerous “one another” passages remind us that fellowship (a common relationship and partnership) is vital. Several years ago singer Bono of U2 said that even though he is a “believer,” he finds it difficult to be around other believers. “They make me nervous. They make me twitch.” “*Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage each other – and all the more as you see the Day approaching*” (Hebrews 10:25 NIV). A person who enlists in the

U. S. Marines must make a commitment. Too many Christians are AWOL in the army of the Lord. At the end of his career, Pete Rose said, "I'd walk through hell in a gasoline suit to keep playing baseball." We need that same sense of desire and dedication to meet with the saints of God.

Sixth, we must learn to become service-oriented. In *The Externally Focused Church* (Group Publishing, 2004), authors Rick Rusaw and Eric Swanson share four characteristics of externally focused churches: (1) they are convinced that good deeds and good news can't and shouldn't be separated; (2) they see themselves as vital to the health and well-being of their communities; (3) they believe that ministering and serving are the normal expressions of Christian living; (4) they are evangelistically effective. The emphasis is on "service" and not "serve us." Bob Russell, who preached at Southeast Christian Church, Louisville, Ky., for 40 years, says, "Nothing helps you grow as a Christian like service. If you want to be stretched, visit a nursing home, teach a class of six-year olds, go on a short-term mission trip, or volunteer to do a humbling job like cleaning stains in the sanctuary. If your church is not providing opportunities for your members to serve, you are stifling their spiritual growth" (*When God Builds a Church*, 2000). For years Southeast has had a "Great Day of Service" where thousands of members spread out and serve their community. We are best served when we are engaged in service outside the church walls. Faithfulness means we will be faithful in little things (Luke 16:10). Faithfulness is consecration in overalls.

Seventh, we must stand guard against "cheap grace." When I taught Church History at Ozark Christian College I required my students to read Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *The Cost of Discipleship*. Bonhoeffer was a fearless leader in the Confessional Church during the dark days of Nazi Germany. He coined the phrase "cheap grace," calling it "the deadly enemy of the church." In searing words that nearly set afire the paper upon which they were printed, he wrote, "Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace

is grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate." Or, as *The Message* reads in Romans 6:1-4, "*So what do we do? Keep on sinning so God can keep on forgiving? I should hope not! If we've left the country where sin is sovereign, how can we still live in our old house there? Or didn't you realize we packed up and left there for good? That is what happened in baptism. When we went under the water, we left the old country of sin behind; when we came up out of the water, we entered into the new country of grace – a new life in a new land!*" Faithfulness means we will declare the whole counsel of God.

Eighth, we must learn to be better stewards of everything God has given us. The last sermon Archie Word ever preached was "We Must Give an Account of Our Stewardship" based on the parable of the talents. His last point (this was when sermon had points!) was on money and the ex-boxer pulled no punches. Neither did Jesus, who talked about money and possessions more than any other topic. He said, "*Watch out and be on guard against all kinds of greed because one's life is not in the abundance of his possessions*" (Luke 12:15 CSB). He also said, "*Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth...But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven...For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*" (Matthew 6:19, 20 NIV). C. S. Lewis said, "All that is not eternal is eternally useless." I have that quote on my office door where I see it every day. Missionary Lee Turner shared a quote with me I've never forgotten: "Live simply so others can simply live." I am reminded that the Rich Man in Luke 16 wound up in hell because he accepted Lazarus as part of the landscape and did nothing to alleviate his hunger, not even the crumbs that fell from his table. We are going to give an account for everything that God has entrusted into our keeping some day. "*Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful*" (1 Corinthians 4:2 NKJV). Jesus said, "*If you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?*" (Luke 16:11 NIV). If we aren't faithful with our money, how can God trust us with spiritual things? Faithfulness means we will provide for our family, support God's work, and pay our bills.

Ninth, we must be willing to accept suffering as a part of our Christian experience. This goes against the popular feel-good gospel that is being shamelessly preached today by popular televangelists who will not mention sin, repentance, the cross, or suffering in their tepid teaching. But Isaiah described the Messiah as “*a man of sorrows, familiar with suffering*” (Isaiah 53:3). Jesus told the two men on the road to Emmaus, “*Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?*” (Luke 24:26 NIV). Jesus Christ did not get off this planet without suffering and neither will the faithful Christian. Paul said “*the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives*” (2 Corinthians 1:5 NIV) and that “*all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution*” (2 Timothy 3:12 NKJV). I will not soon forget my visit to a house church in central India. A former soldier in the Indian army, retired, was now a Christian and the leader of the church. Two weeks prior to my visit he was set upon by Hindu extremists and beaten within an inch of his life. But on this night, as a kerosene lamp flickered and cast shadows on the walls, he sang a song that he had written. It was praise to God that he had been counted worthy to suffer for the name of Christ. I was not surprised to learn that 13 people had confessed Christ and been baptized into Christ since the beating.

Tenth, we must be more faithful and bold in witnessing for Christ. As we have learned, “witness” comes from the Greek word *martus* or “martyr.” When Jesus told the twelve, “*You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth*” (Acts 1:8 NIV), He was really saying, “You will be My martyrs.” A witness is one who testifies to the truth even at the cost of his or her life. How could the apostles and others do this? Let us not forget the first part of Acts 1: 8, “*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you....*” When you are filled with the Holy Spirit you will speak the word of God with boldness (Acts 4:31). *Christian Standard* (May 4, 2008) tells of a minister in India who was forced to sign his own death warrant at gunpoint. Ajai Lall, a good friend of mine whom I have worked with in India, was planning to preach at a conference in Punjab. When Hindu extremists threatened to protest the event, local authorities forced Lall to make a choice: sign a document giving police the

right to shoot him if the protestors began to riot, or don’t speak at all. After calling his family, Lall signed the papers and preached for 40 minutes – with five AK-47s pointed at him and a police chief ready to give the order to open fire. In February 2008 Lall preached 18 times during a 7-day conference attended by more than 100,000 people. More than 10,500 decisions were made for Christ. An observer from America called the event “a modern Pentecost.”

#### THE SEMPER FI SAINTS’ REWARD

The Bible says, “*A faithful man will abound with blessings*” (Proverbs 28:20 NASB). What are the rewards of being a *Semper Fi* saint? In a word – heaven! What a blessing it will be to hear the voice of Christ: “*Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter in to the joy of your lord*” (Matthew 25:21 NKJV). I think of that old song that says, “When all my trials and labors are o’er, and I am safe on that beautiful shore, just to be the dear Lord I adore, will through the ages be glory for me” (Charles H. Gabriel). Heaven will surely be worth it all. “Be faithful weary pilgrim. The morning I can see. Just lift your cross and follow close to Me” (Ira F. Stanphill).

The grand old hymn “Conquering Now and Still to Conquer” (Fanny J. Crosby) is based on Revelation 6:2, “*And He went forth conquering, and to conquer.*” I have attached the refrain from this song at the end of every email I send.

*Conquering now and still to conquer, rideth a King in His might;*

*Leading the host of all the faithful into the midst of the fight;*

*See them with courage advancing, clad in their brilliant array,*

*Shouting the Name of their Leader, hear them exultingly say:*

*“Not to the strong is the battle,  
Nor to the swift is the race,  
But to the true and the faithful  
Vic’try is promised through grace.”*

Homer Hailey said the message of Revelation is “Victory through faith!” Faith and faithfulness come from the same Greek root. Faithful followers of the Lamb are assured this victory (Revelation 17:14). Jesus told the suffering saints in Smyrna, “*Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life*” (Revelation 2:10 NIV). The crown of life is also called “the crown of righteousness” (2 Timothy 4:8), “the crown of glory” (1 Peter 5:4), and the “incorruptible crown” (1 Corinthians 9:5). *Stephanos* is the most common Greek word for crown. Stephen must have been given the crown of life when he laid down his life for Christ. In the catacombs beneath Rome one of the most frequent symbols found is the crown. I believe that every faithful saint who enters heaven will be given the crown of life, the crown of victory.

## CONCLUSION

Those of you who know me well know that I love the hymns of the faith. Here’s one I can’t resist including in closing, “A Volunteer for Jesus” (W. S. Brown).

*And when the war is over, and the vict’ry won,  
When the true and faithful gather one by one,  
He will crown with glory all who there appear;  
Will you be enlisted as a volunteer?*

I volunteered for Jesus when I was 12 years old at Pine Lake Bible Camp near Eldora, Iowa. On June 22, 1958 I made the Good Confession and was baptized into Christ. Next month, on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my conversion, I am going back to Iowa to stand on the shores of Pine Lake and say, “I *still* believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God!”

I volunteered to teach this class this year at Pepperdine because I have a growing concern that the message of faithfulness is not being sounded out in our churches all over this land as it once was. Faithfulness to Christ is necessary to receive the crown of life. The eyes of God are on the faithful on the land. When Jesus comes again He will be looking for the faithful. I want to be found faithful, don’t you?

I’m glad a modern songwriter has captured this concept of the necessity of faithfulness (Steve Green, “Find Us Faithful”). We’ll close with his words.

*Oh may all who come behind us find us faithful  
May the fire of our devotion light their way  
May the footprints that we leave  
Lead them to believe  
And the lives we live inspire them to obey  
Oh may all who come behind us find us faithful.*

