

God Is Faithful

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[0 : 0 0] 1 Corinthians chapter 9, we'll start reading at verse 24, and we'll read through chapter 10, verse 13. There's some stern warnings in this passage. Let's pay close attention. 1 Corinthians 9, starting at verse 24.

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it.

Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly. I do not box as one beating the air, but I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others, I myself should be disqualified.

For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. Nevertheless, with most of them, God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. Do not be idolaters as some of them were. As it is written, the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.

[1 : 5 0] We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and 23,000 of them fell in a single day. We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by serpents, nor grumble as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer.

Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for us, for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.

Therefore, let anyone who thinks he stands take heed, lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man.

God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability. But with the temptation, he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

Kids, I want you to think with me. One of the best gifts that you've received in recent memory, maybe it was your birthday, maybe it was Christmas, though that was six months ago, it's been a little while, but think about a gift that you really were glad that you got, great value to you.

[3 : 1 2] Maybe it was a gift that mom and dad gave to you. Maybe it was a gift that your grandparents gave to you. Maybe a friend. Can you think of a gift right now that you're just like, yes, that gift I cherished.

Hopefully you've thought of something. Now think of that gift. What did you do with it? Did you immediately put it in the closet and forget about it? Or did you throw it in the trash because you didn't need to have it anymore?

No, you cherished it. You probably played with it. You did something with it. You didn't put it away. Well, I received a gift of great value from my grandpa when I was a child, maybe a teenager.

But you know what I did with that gift of great value? I put it in a closet, and I left it there for many, many years. Then I brought it out, and I enjoyed it, and I cherished it, because that gift wasn't something you could buy on Amazon.

It wasn't something you could go to the store and get. It wasn't something that I could just have now if I wanted to have it. My grandpa gifted to me a memoir of his life.

[4 : 2 4] He wrote down much of his life and in great detail. My grandpa was in World War II. He was stationed in the Pacific. He had diary entries from when he was in the war, and he shared that with all of us grandkids.

Kids, I cherish that now. I've grown up, and I appreciate it a little bit more than I did maybe when I was your age. But that is a great gift to me because it contains family stories. And family stories, as we all know, are of inestimable value. You couldn't put a price tag on a family story. Many of us have stories from those who have gone before us. Perhaps they are no longer with us, and we could not get those stories, could we, if we didn't have them written or shared with us before. Family stories have that kind of value. You can't put a price tag on them. Well, tonight, Paul shares with us a family story. He shares it for the benefit of the Corinthians.

[5 : 27] He shares it for the benefit of us as well. And this is a treasure that we should greatly value. Now, it's not a story that's especially perhaps cheerful.

As we just heard much of it read to us, it's a story that should leave us grieved for what happened to them. It should sober us. It serves as a great warning to us, but it is a story that we need nonetheless.

So in our passage this evening, we see first here simply the telling of the family story. Let me read again the first five verses. For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink.

For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. Nevertheless, with most of them, God was not pleased. For they were overthrown in the wilderness.

Now, the Corinthians, in hearing Paul, as he had written this down, and it was being read out to them, might have been a bit caught off guard. They might have thought, Paul, did you forget who you were writing to?

[6 : 48] Don't you remember who we are? We're a bunch of Gentiles. Paul, you must remember. You came and preached to us. You're the one who planted the church here.

Many of us were saved as a result of your ministry. We came out of pagan idolatry. We were worshiping the gods and the goddesses of Greece and Rome.

That's our background. We can see the temple of Aphrodite on that hill overlooking our city. All of that to say, Paul, we're not Jewish.

So, Paul, you must have us mixed up with someone else. Maybe you meant to include this story in a letter to the church in Jerusalem. Now, why would the Corinthians have perhaps thought this way?

Because Paul called the Israelites, our fathers. He's writing to the Corinthians. They're predominantly Gentile. And he says, our fathers.

[7 : 48] Not my fathers, considering Paul himself was a Jew, but our fathers. Presumably, he's including the Corinthians here as descendants of Israel.

How could he say that? Was he actually mixed up a bit? If you remember all the way back to the beginning of Paul's letter, as he often did, he would have his letters dictated.

Or he would dictate his letters and have them written for him. Remember Sosthenes, the brother that Paul spoke of in the greeting of the letter. This was likely who Paul had actually writing it.

You could imagine Sosthenes. He's looking at the desk. He's writing away, and he looks up. Uh, Paul? I know you write to many churches.

Often. You probably have multiple letters in the works right now. I just want to make sure that you remember who you're writing to. You seem a bit confused. This letter is for that Gentile church in Corinth.

[8 : 45] But Paul is not at all confused about who he's writing to. Because look at how he begins in verse 1. I do not want you to be unaware.

Meaning that they have been, perhaps, unaware up to this point. Unaware of these stories related to Israel. They are, in fact, unaware, generally speaking, of probably much of the Old Testament. Because they're Gentiles. So Paul here, he's catching them up to speed. He knows exactly who he's writing to. He's sitting them down, and he's telling them the family story that perhaps they haven't heard.

Okay, fine. Paul is not confused about his audience. But we still haven't answered that question. How is this, then, their family story? Paul, how can you say, our fathers?

Because while the Corinthians may not have been physically descended from Israel, they have been spiritually descended in a very important way. Paul is clear about this in another letter that he

wrote.

[9 : 53] In Galatians 3, verse 7, Paul says, Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. Meaning those who have put their faith in Jesus Christ are sons of Abraham.

All those who put their faith in Jesus Christ. Jew or Gentile. Paul wraps up chapter 3 of Galatians saying, There is neither Jew nor Greek.

There is neither slave nor free. There is no male or female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring.

Heirs according to promise. Paul is clear. All those who belong to Christ are Abraham's offspring. And that includes the Corinthians.

And that includes us who are in Christ. All Abraham's offspring. So Israel's history is our history. We could say, this is our family tree.

[10 : 56] We're the leafy branches of that tree with its roots tracing back to Israel in the Old Testament. Now sadly, as we'll see this evening, not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel.

As Paul said in Romans 9. Meaning not all physically descended from Abraham and his grandson Israel actually proved to be in the family of God. Most in this passage proved themselves to not be in the family.

But generally speaking still, the stories of the Old Testament are about our lineage. That's why Paul can say to Gentile Christians, our fathers.

In a sense, any time that we read the Old Testament, we aren't reading the stories of these strange foreign people. We're reading the stories of our fathers.

We're hearing family stories. We could list countless ways that the word of God is an invaluable gift to us. Well, here's just one of those reasons to treasure it.

[12 : 00] We wouldn't know these family stories if God didn't write them down and pass them on to us that we might hear of them. And the family story that we're hearing tonight, it's really a couple of stories.

It's the stories of our father's deliverance from Egypt and then their subsequent wilderness wanderings. These stories are spread through several books of the Old Testament. They're very familiar to many of us.

But we're especially looking at Exodus and numbers with Paul. When Israel was in bondage in Egypt, what did God do? Oh, he sent Moses to deliver his people.

And he used those ten plagues to bring that deliverance amount. And after the tenth plague, the plague that had killed all of the firstborn in every household in Egypt, only then did Pharaoh relent and release the people.

And then very quickly, he regretted that he did that. And he pursued them. Oh, but the Lord was with our fathers. As Paul speaks of here, he went before them by day in a pillar of cloud and by night in a pillar of fire.

[13 : 08] And the Lord led our fathers through the Red Sea. This was their salvation from Egypt that the Lord brought about. And he did it through the leadership of Moses.

Moses was at the center of it. And so Paul can say that they were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. This is not a physical baptism, as we might think of it, but figuratively speaking, when we think of Christian baptism, in fact, at our last baptism service, this was emphasized.

We are baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. The very name of the triune God. We're now identified as his people.

We are bound up in his name. And so the people of Israel, to say that they were baptized into Moses is to say that they came to be identified with him and with his leadership.

One people under his human leadership, as he, of course, answered to the ultimate leadership of God himself. And now once in the wilderness, God continued to care for our fathers, to provide for them.

[14 : 17] He gave them bread from heaven. He gave them water from the rock. Very specifically, Paul speaks here of that rock that God had Moses strike in Exodus 17.

But here, Paul doesn't just speak about physical food and physical drink. He actually speaks of spiritual food and spiritual drink. It's not just a physical rock, but a spiritual rock.

And Paul identifies that spiritual rock as Christ himself. Thank you, Paul, for doing the hard work of just telling us straight out. And Christ followed them all of those years in the desert.

Now, in the Old Testament, we never read of any rock, physical or even spiritual, following the Israelites. But Jewish teaching through the centuries did say that a physical rock, that rock, had followed Israel.

So Paul is likely drawing on that teaching and saying, no, let me tell you, let me correct this. There was a rock that followed our fathers, but that rock was Christ. Even before he entered into this world as a man, God the Son, the second person of the Godhead, he was actively involved in saving and sustaining his people.

[15 : 31] It is good and right and true that we see Christ in the Old Testament. And not just pictures pointing to him.

That's often what comes to our minds is this idea of, yes, types, shadows. We find them then fulfilled in Christ. The whole book of Hebrews is helping us see that.

We look to the Old Testament. We see what went before and how it pointed forward to Christ. So we should see those pictures that point to him. But we should also see the person of Christ.

We should remember the person of Christ, the second person of the Godhead. He's in harmony with the Father, with the Spirit. He's nourishing his people.

He's delivering his people. He's actively at work in the Old Testament for the sake of our fathers. So yes, God provided for the physical lives of the people of Israel from Egypt to the wilderness to the promised land.

[16 : 32] Oh, but their spiritual lives were in his hands as well as that spiritual rock followed him.

But as we see in Numbers and as Paul then speaks to here, oh, despite the goodness of God, despite the loving faithfulness of God, his kindness to his people to lead them, what did they do?

Oh, they rebelled. As Paul says in verse 5, nevertheless, there's our contrast. But with most of them, God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

Now that's a bit of an understatement to say that most of them God was not pleased with. You hear the phrase most of them and you think, I don't know, maybe like 60%, 70%, maybe 80% is what we're talking about here, but by most of them, Paul means all but two.

Well, we've got millions likely here. All but two of those Israelites who came out of Egypt were overthrown in the wilderness.

Only Joshua and Caleb, who trusted the Lord and did not rebel, only they would remain and then enter the promised land from that generation that came out of Egypt.

[17 : 50] And so the generation as a whole was characterized not by their obedience to the Lord, but by their disobedience, by their faithlessness. Now why tell us this family story?

Why did Paul go into such detail? And we'll see more details to come in the text. And that's what we see next in our passage. We see not just the telling of the family story, but now we see the point of it.

What's the point of this family story? And look with me beginning in verse 6. Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did.

Do not be idolaters as some of them were. As it is written, the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play. But we must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did and 23,000 fell in a single day.

We must not put Christ to the test as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents. Nor grumble as some of them did and were destroyed by the destroyer.

[18 : 58] Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction on whom the end of the ages has come. So Paul says it twice here.

Just for good measure to make sure that we see it. The point in him telling this family story is that our fathers might be an example to us. We are living in the last days.

We were reminded of that even this morning. The end of the ages has come upon us. Meaning all that's left in God's great plan of redemption is for Christ to return.

That's what we're now waiting for. The next and final chapter. We don't know when that day will be, but we can say we are living at the end of the ages. So our fathers, those who lived before us, those who lived even before Christ came the very first time, their lives are to serve as an example to us. Paul says it in verse 6. He says it again in verse 11. They are an example. Now if you've been with us in 1 Corinthians, you see here perhaps that Paul is very smooth in his transition.

[20 : 06] Paul in chapter 9 put forward another example to us. Himself. He put himself forward as an example. And now he's giving Israel as the example to us here in chapter 10.

Just layering on one example after another. First a very positive example in himself, and then now a very negative example with the nation of Israel. And he tells more of this sad family story in these verses.

He tells more about those who proved to not be in the family, the true family of God. They desired evil. They gave in to their desires wholeheartedly.

He gives very specific examples like the example of the golden calf. They committed idolatry. And what happened after that? Moses burned the calf, that golden calf.

He ground it to powder. He scattered it on the water. He made the people drink it. And then some of the people were put to death by the sword, and others were killed by a plague.

[21 : 10] Do you see the severity of the people's sin there? In another example, another episode Paul shares, the people committed sexual immorality, and God struck them down with a plague again.

Numbers 23. They put Christ to the test. They grumbled in the wilderness about not having food and water. And they were destroyed by serpents that God sent.

They grumbled many times. And what was the result? Paul shares, they were destroyed by the angel of death. They started well, passing through the Red Sea.

But they did not finish well. Almost like a runner in a race. Which maybe should make us think of what Paul talked about at the end of chapter 9. Remember back to chapter 9, we had it read for us again, how Paul talked about that, that razor sharp resolve to run the race to the finish, to be faithful to the end where that eternal prize awaits.

Well, Israel here is just an example of the opposite. Almost all of Israel in the wilderness, save just two, failed to run that race to the finish.

[22 : 25] They had no discipline. They had no resolve. They were overthrown. They were disqualified. To use the same word as Paul in chapter 9, verse 27. They did not endure to the end.

Paul doesn't want to see that same result for the Corinthians, nor for us. And so that brings us to then the lesson from the family story. Verse 12.

Therefore, let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed, lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man.

God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability. But with the temptation, he will also provide the way of escape that you may be able to endure it.

So Paul has shared very generally, so far, about how Israel is to be an example to us. Broadly speaking, that we might not sin. But now he speaks very particularly for us.

[23 : 27] And he gives this really two-fold lesson to us. The first, to take sin seriously. And the second, to remember that God is faithful.

It's both then a warning and an encouragement. So first, we must see this warning. And it's a warning against falling. We see this in verse 12.

Now there's some debate about what Paul means here by fall in verse 12. Or even what he meant by disqualified back in chapter 9, verse 27. Some say that the reference here is a warning against the potential loss of reward, which would be this temporary fall into sin.

A fall that would eventually, of course, then lead to repentance. Others say, no, this is a warning about apostasy. And I think there's good reason to see it this way.

That all professing Christians must be careful that they don't make shipwreck of their faith, as Paul has spoken of in other places. And that would then mean that this wasn't a temporary fall that he has in mind, but a full, final fall that would result in condemnation before God's throne one day.

[24 : 39] Now, if that is what Paul is saying, we need to be very clear on this. Paul is not saying that a true Christian can lose his or her salvation.

He's not saying that about himself. He's not saying that about anyone else. If by fall he is speaking of apostasy, well, then he's talking about those who profess faith, but prove they never had true saving faith in Christ because they eventually fell.

He's not saying a true Christian can fall in this way. What did Jesus say in John 6, verse 40? For this is the will of my Father. This is his will that we're talking about.

For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. Or again in John 10, 28, I give them eternal life and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.

Well, how can we be so sure? How can we be sure that no one will snatch them out of the Son's hand? Because as Jesus goes on to say, my Father who has given them to me is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of my Father's hand.

[25 : 52] I and my Father are one. I and the Father are one. So if you can't take them out of the Father's hand, well, you can't take them out of the Son's hand either. Many places that we could reference to prove, no, a true Christian cannot fall in such a way that they somehow lose their salvation.

So Paul is definitely not saying that is somehow possible. But what he is saying is that every true Christian will heed the warning against falling and endure to the end.

Every true Christian will listen to the warnings given in God's Word. We will listen to every warning about sin and we'll take it seriously. We're not going to be dabbling in sin and thinking it's okay. We're not towing the line. We're not getting as close to the line as we possibly can and thinking no worries here. I've got it under control. That kind of lazy, dismissive posture, that's not how we should be at all as Christians.

No, we see the great danger in sin and then we act with sober minds accordingly. We know our weaknesses still. We know how sin does so easily entangle us.

[27 : 06] So what do we do? We have our defenses up and we keep them up. So we don't say I'll be fine. I'll be able to stand. I'm standing firm all by myself.

That's like a toddler. Can't say I know this from experience. That's like a toddler who says to mom and dad, don't hold my hand as they're walking on that narrow ledge off the ground.

Don't hold my hand. I'll be fine. But he doesn't realize the very reason that he is fine and standing firm right now is because mom or dad is holding his hand. He thinks I'm standing firm all by myself. So dad, you can let go. We can think the same way. We can think we're standing firm in our own strength. We can think that we know what we're doing. We're fine.

We've got life all figured out. You see, that was the temptation that the Corinthians faced. Thinking that they've got life figured out. Remember back to chapter 8 and chapter 9.

[28 : 05] They were being dismissive about the very real possibility of stumbling into sin themselves. They were thinking, oh, we've got this liberty. We can eat meat that was previously offered to idols.

It's our weaker brothers. They need to get their act together. We're standing firm. They're the ones teetering on the edge. But Paul is teaching us, no, if you think that you're standing firm, you are the one who is teetering on the edge.

Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall. Your pride will be your downfall is what we're being told. So then in humility, we ought to look to the Lord for the strength that we need.

And that's exactly what Paul would have us to do. Look to the Lord. Remember Him and remember what He's like. So we've seen the warning. We've seen the first part of this two-fold lesson.

We need to take sin so very seriously. Now the second part. Oh, how we need to remember the faithfulness of God. What wonderful words of comfort and assurance we find in verse 13.

[29 : 25] God is faithful. There's the assurance found right alongside the warning that has just preceded it. And we find this throughout God's Word.

Warnings and yet assurances going hand in hand. Now we see something very similar in a narrative actually. In Acts 27, there we find that Paul was at sea.

He was sailing to Rome to be imprisoned there. And the ship hits this storm on the sea. It was so bad that Luke, who wrote Acts, would say, all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned.

But then he writes that Paul stood up. And Paul said these words. He said, I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship.

For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship. And he said, Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand before Caesar.

[30 : 27] And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you. So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told.

But we must run aground on some island. So, in its own way, there's some wonderful words of comfort there. Yes, the ship will be lost. Yes, we have to run aground. But your lives will not be lost.

He gave assurance to those sailors who were thinking, all hope of our being saved, abandoned. We're going to die at sea. And he says, No. Here's the comforting words to give you.

Of course, as they approached that ground that they were going to hit, as they came towards the island, some sailors were afraid. And instead of staying on the ship as they had been instructed, they tried to escape.

They were ready to get in the lifeboat and scurry out of there. And it's then that Paul issues, not reassuring words, he doesn't say, Listen, guys, remember, your lives are going to be saved this very night.

[31 : 29] No, he gives them a stern, grave warning. Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved. Now, wait a second, Paul.

You just said that an angel told you God has granted you all those who sail with you. But now you're saying those sailors will perish if they don't stay in the ship.

Which is it? Should we believe the assuring words or should we believe the warning words? The answer is yes. God uses that warning to bring about the very thing that he assured.

And we see that same strategy employed by Paul here in 1 Corinthians. A strong warning. A real warning to all professing Christians.

Not to make us doubt our salvation, but to ensure that we take our salvation seriously. Are you serious, then, about your pursuit of righteousness?

[32 : 36] May this warning, even, fuel that pursuit. Charles Spurgeon explained it like this. God preserves his children from falling away, but he keeps them by the use of means.

And one of these is the terrors of the law, showing them what would happen if they were to fall away. There is a deep precipice. What is the best way to keep anyone from going down there? Why? To tell him that if he did, he would inevitably be dashed to pieces. Christians need real warnings about real dangers.

The writer of Hebrews gives us real warnings about real dangers in Hebrews 3. And interestingly, he draws on the same story that Paul drew on in 1 Corinthians 10.

10, the unbelief of Israel in the wilderness. And he uses that story as a real warning to Christians. He says in chapter 3, beginning in verse 12, take care, brothers.

[33 : 38] Right off the bat. You hear it. He calls them brothers. Not perhaps brothers. Not like, maybe my brothers, but I'm still not sure yet. Not, you might be my brothers, but we just can't really know.

No, he speaks to them as Christians. Very confidently. Very clearly. And he says, take care, brothers. Lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart leading you to fall away from the living God.

But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called, today, that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed, we hold our original confidence firm to the end.

The Christian perseveres. The Christian endures. The Christian holds our original confidence firm to the end.

Or as Paul says in Colossians 1, we continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel. The Bible gives many warnings to Christians.

[34 : 50] They aren't fake. They are very real. They are very sobering. And yet, they are not given so that we might despair. They aren't given so that we would endlessly doubt!

We doubt our salvation. Look back at Paul's words at the end of chapter 9 here in 1 Corinthians. Paul speaks of this potential of being disqualified from the race.

You might have noticed we didn't really address that last week. Well, it ties in here. Disqualified from this race. The race that results in a prize of eternal worth.

An imperishable wreath. That's a race that I don't want to be disqualified from. To be disqualified from a race, that's as bad as it gets. Some of us were in a race just yesterday.

Some of us were actually racing. Others of us were meandering along, enjoying our time together. But if you're actually in a race, you don't want to come in second place.

[35 : 52] You want to come in first. You want to run the race for the prize. To be disqualified from a race, that's not even coming in second place. That's not even coming in last place. You simply didn't make it to the end.

And you literally didn't finish the race. And you didn't finish because you were kicked out. Maybe you got injured. But maybe, the other reason is you broke the rules. They told you, you can't continue in this race because it's not fair.

And so you're disqualified. Paul chose a term that describes the worst outcome in a race. And so I think he's talking about apostasy, falling away in a final way.

And yet, Paul is not wondering if he might be disqualified. Paul is not wringing his hands with uncertainty.

He's not saying, I sure hope I'm not disqualified. He's not self-absorbed. He's not navel-gazing. That would be one wrong extreme to take, this hyper-fixation and hyper-fear of falling away.

[37 : 01] That's crippling. That is paralyzing. But Paul's also not swinging in the other opposite, wrong extreme. Like I was yesterday in the little race that we ran, taking a leisurely stroll in this race of the Christian life.

He's not doing that either. He's disciplining his body. He's keeping himself under control. He's running with that razor-sharp resolve. And that's the posture that we ought to have as well.

Not living in this constant fear that, well, have I made a false profession? Not doing that, but at the same time, we are running with all of our might.

We're taking heed of real warnings that are for our good because we don't even want to get close to the edge of that cliff where others have fallen.

So there's absolutely a strong, real warning issued to us here. in its issues so that we would run that race with self-control and discipline.

[38 : 05] Heed the warning. And at the very same time, remember the wonderful words of comfort and assurance. God is faithful.

There are real temptations to sin. There are real consequences for sin. And yet, God really is faithful. God is faithful to us.

God is faithful to us as His people. And He will not let those who really, truly belong to Him be tempted beyond our ability. He will bear us up.

Just as He promises in Isaiah 46, for I have made and I will bear, I will carry, and I will save. What precious words that God gives to us.

He will sustain us. He will keep us. He will not let those who are really, truly His fall. Rather, what does Paul say? He will provide the way of escape.

[39 : 04] He will ensure that we will endure and that we will endure to the end. God in His faithfulness will see that we persevere.

Which is another way of saying that God will preserve us. So we cling to those words. We remember this is our God. He is ever so faithful to us.

And do those words perhaps draw to mind for some of us something else that Paul said at the beginning of 1 Corinthians? This isn't the first time that Paul has said God is faithful.

Flip back to chapter 1. In his greeting to the Corinthians. We hear him say those very words again. right in the middle, beginning in the middle of verse 7. As you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ who will sustain you to the end guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[40 : 08] God is faithful by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord. It is God who will get us to the finish line.

He'll finish what He began in you. It is God who called us into the fellowship of His Son. There it is. God called us into fellowship.

God saved us by grace. And it is God who will keep us in that fellowship until His Son returns. So yes, heed the warnings.

We run the race with all of the energy that we have. And we take to heart even the words of Hebrews 3. We exhort one another. We encourage each other.

Kids, if you've been in a race recently, you've been running your heart out. Isn't it helpful when somebody says, great job, Nora. Great job, Landon. Keep running that race.

[41 : 06] Run hard. Don't give up, Olivia. Well, that's what we say to each other in the Christian life. We're running this race and we're joyfully exhorting each other on. We're not standing there going, I don't know.

We'll see if you make it to the end. I hope you do, but I don't know. No, we press on together and we do it with joy. Thankful that it is God who is faithful to sustain us to the end.

And when we get to the end, how will we be presented to Him? As those who kind of were beat up in the race, just barely getting to the finish line, I guess we kind of made it there. No, we're guiltless. We're going to stand blameless before the throne. We're going to be the bride beautifully adorned for her husband, the Lord Jesus Christ. What a day that will be.

So we press on and we press on together. We say with the writer of Hebrews, but we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls. [42 : 08] So we run the race with great effort, remembering the stern warnings and letting those warnings spur us on. And at the same time, we remember the reassuring encouragements.

God is faithful. God will get me to the finish line. Only He can get me to the finish line. I don't stand on my own. I don't run on my own. It's only by the grace of God that any of us would then finish. Oh, how I need His strength to sustain me to the end. And He promises that He'll give that strength. He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability.

The good work that He began, He will finish. He promises to preserve His people. And we can trust Him to do just as He says. Why? Because God is faithful.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we give You thanks that You have called so many here to Yourself.

[43 : 12] That You have brought us into Your family. That we are Your sons and daughters by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And we thank You that You give us Your Spirit that we could then run this race with endurance.

So Father, we pray that You would apply these words that You've given to us to our hearts tonight. We pray that if we are beginning to get towards the edge and think lightly of sin, oh, we pray that those warnings would hit home for us.

That we would see the fall over that precipice that awaits. But Father, if we are also oftentimes feeling a sense of how could I possibly be worthy of You?

Oh, I must not be doing enough. We pray that we would see and cling to the promises, the reassuring promises that it is because of Your grace at work in our hearts that we are sustained.

And so meet us just where we need to be met this night, whether with warnings or with encouragements or with the wonderful blend of both. We thank You for Your Word. Now do a good work in us and leave us here rejoicing and sober-minded.

[44 : 26] We pray all these things in Christ's name. Amen.