

Our Immutable, Ever-Faithful God

What can you count on these days? And of all the people you know, who can you put your trust in knowing that they'll never let you down? Your doctor, pastor, teacher, or friend? Maybe. But sometimes even these people let you down.

A young mother tells about the friendship that sprang up between her 5-year-old son, Christopher, and Katie, their next-door neighbor. All summer long the two children were inseparable—climbing trees, riding bikes, playing together. Then September came and the first day of Kindergarten arrived. Katie put on a pretty pink dress with long trim and headed for Christopher's house, so they could walk to school together. When he heard the bell, Christopher ran to the door, opened it, took one look at Katie, and ran back to his bedroom crying. His mother ran after him to find out what was wrong. "It's Katie!" he sobbed. "She's a girl!"

Husbands. Wives. Doctors. Teachers. Church leaders. Public servants. Family. Friends. These are the people we ought to be able to rely upon. Unfortunately, oftentimes we cannot. In fact, as I go down the list of people and things you and I typically depend on, my conclusion is there isn't anybody or anything in life that is perfectly reliable...except God Himself. Friends falter. Doctors make wrong diagnoses. Spouses cheat. Politicians are notorious for empty campaign promises. Teachers make mistakes. Even parents fail their children at times. So what can we absolutely trust in knowing without question that they will never disappoint us? A well-known preacher summed it up like this:

Trust in yourself, and you are doomed to disappointment; Trust in your friends, and they will die and leave you; Trust in money, and you may have it taken from you; Trust in reputation, and some slanderous tongue may blast it; But trust in God, and you will never be disappointed in time or eternity.

The reason we can trust God is that He is the one unchangeable constant in an otherwise ever-changing universe. He is unchanging in His person, unchanging in His character, unchanging in His purposes, and unchanging in His promises to you and me. This was David's confidence as he wrote Psalm 20:7, "Some boast in chariots, and some in horses, but we will boast in the name of the Lord our God." Why? Because He is the Only Person who will never let us down. James 1:17 tells us, "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow." Hebrews 13:8 adds this assurance, "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today, and forever."

This post continues my series entitled "God: A Self-Portrait." This week's study will focus on His changelessness, or as theologians call it, His immutability. But again, the reason for this study is not to fill our minds with information about God, but to fill our hearts with love for Him, to increase our capacity to trust Him, and to become more like Him in all we think, do, and say.

His Immutable Person

When our daughter Rebecca was little, she asked a lot of questions, most of them good and insightful questions. For example, I'll never forget the question she asked me while on our way to school one day. She said, "Daddy, when we get to heaven, how old will God be? About 20 years old?" I knew she was getting at something, but I wasn't sure what. So I asked her, "What do you mean, Honey?" "Well," she went on to add, "God never gets older. So I was just wondering, how old will He be when

we get to heaven? About 20 years old?” Apparently that sounded pretty old to her at the time. (She is 28 years old now, and I doubt that 20 seems old to her any longer.) So I encouraged her, “You’re right, Honey! God doesn’t get older. He always stays the same. So that means He won’t be any age when we get to heaven, because in heaven there is no age. No matter how long we’re there, we’ll be just as young as the moment we arrive!”

I don’t know if you appreciate the sophistication of her question, but she was actually touching on one of the most difficult concepts for the human mind to grasp, because this is one of the great differences between God and His creation. Hebrews 1:10 declares, “In the beginning, O Lord, You laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands; they will perish, but You remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end.”

We age. We adapt. We change, hopefully for the better. But God never changes, matures, or develops. Nor does He ever get stronger, better, or wiser. Why not? Arthur Pink explains it like this in his book on the attributes of God, “He cannot change for the better, for He is already perfect, and being perfect, He cannot change for the worst.” As the great hymn puts it, He is:

Immortal, invisible, God only wise; in light inaccessible hid from our eyes; we blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree; and wither and perish, but naught changeth Thee.”

For that reason, it is theologically accurate and entirely reverent to say that God has never learned anything, for He has no need to learn. He was and is and always will be omniscient (all-knowing) and omnisapient (all-wise) forever using His perfect understanding to advance His purposes and bless His children. This is why, in pouring out our hearts in prayer, we should be as specific as we can be, not for His sake, but for our sakes—so that we can leave the matter in His hands, knowing that we have fully expressed our hearts to Him. But He already understands our need far better than we do, as well as the best ways of meeting it. Nor can God ever improve, for He is already as good, as kind, as loving, as wise, and as powerful as He can possibly be—infinite in all of His attributes.

Therefore, given how perfectly complete and consistent He is, what should we do and how should we live? We should invest our lives, not in things that wither and change and perish, but in this one “thing” that will never disappoint us. Consider again the things that people typically depend upon for their happiness and security—their health, their home, their work, their savings, their family, and their friends—most of which seem like they will be here forever. But live a little longer and reflect on them a little more honestly, and you’ll soon discover how quickly things change.

Eleven years ago, when we first returned from the mission field, our girls were in high school and still living at home. My mother and my wife’s parents were still living. Our retirement fund was going up. And both my wife and I were in good health. But eleven years later, things have definitely changed. Both our daughters have graduated from college and lived in other states with families of their own. All of our parents are with the Lord except for my father-in-law who is an Alzheimer care facility and unlikely to live much longer. My wife has been battling cervical cancer, and winning! And I don’t have to tell you how our mutual funds have been doing lately.

What are we learning from all these changes in our lives? There is nothing in this world that we can absolutely depend upon. Consequently, we need to find our hope and happiness and security, not in the things this world has to offer, but in the everlasting love and faithfulness of our Heavenly Father,

because that is the one “Thing” that will never let us down. In fact, I believe the reason He allows us to suffer the many trials and disappointments of life is not to discourage us, but to help us remember the most important things of all. As C.S. Lewis warned, “Our Father refreshes us on our journey with some pleasant inns, but will not encourage us to mistake them for home.” This, then, is the first eternal thing we must learn to depend upon, more than we ever have before—the changelessness and immutability of God Himself, for He is the one “Thing” that will never let us down.

His Immutable Character

You and I are fickle creatures. We change with the seasons. When we’re rested and well-fed, we’re patient and kind; and when we’re healthy and all our bills are paid, we’re hopeful and happy. But let hunger and weariness set in, illness and debt pressing in upon us, and suddenly we’re cranky and complaining, callous and critical. But bless God! He is never like that.

God never hungers. He never tires. He never feels the pain of illness, the pressure of finances, or the panic of finishing everything on His to-do list. Isaiah 40:28 declares, “Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth does not become weary or tired.” Instead, “He gives strength to the weary, and to him who lacks might He increases power.” (40:29) Therefore, not only doesn’t He change, He’s never even tempted to do so. He’s never apt to be unloving, impatient, or unkind. Nor is He tempted to be unjust or shade the truth. As Balaam learned when he tried to curse the children of Israel, “God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good? ...He has blessed, and I cannot reverse it.” (Num. 23:19)

God is infinite and immutable in His goodness, justice, wisdom, and love. Consequently, what does He expect of us who have become His followers? As Malachi warned His Old Testament people, “I will draw near to you for judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against those who swear falsely, and against those who oppress the wage earner in his wages, the widow and the orphan, and those who turn aside the alien and do not fear Me, says the LORD of hosts. For I, the Lord do not change.” (Mal. 3:5-6) In other words, what God expects of us in light of His unchanging goodness, is the same immutable goodness in our lives too. Having described Christ’s resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul goes on to encourage us in light of this great victory, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.” (1 Cor. 15:58)

Corrie Ten Boom gave an example in [The Hiding Place](#). A customer walked into her father’s watchmaking shop one day with a roll of cash in one hand and the need for a watch in the other. Just that morning their family had been praying for such a customer, because they were in need of a way to pay off some long overdue bills. So this purchase seemed to be a direct answer to prayer. But, then, just as the sale was to be finalized, the customer began to complain about another watchmaker from whom he felt he got a bad deal. Knowing the man, Corrie’s father asked to see the watch in question. Maybe he could tell what was wrong. Needing only a minor repair, he quickly fixed the watch and assured the customer that the other watchmaker was a good man and could be trusted. The customer was surprised but thanked him, returned the new watch, and asked for his money back.

Later, Corrie asked her father, “Papa, why did you do that? Aren’t worried about our bills?” “Corrie, don’t forget,” he said. “There is blessed money and unblessed money. God wouldn’t be glorified in the ruined reputation of another Christian. So we must simply pray and wait.” Sure enough, three days later, another man came into the shop and bought the most expensive watch they made, not only allowing them to pay off their bills, but also making it possible for Corrie to take two years of watchmaking training in Switzerland.

You and I are fickle. As the bills and burdens stack up and weigh us down, we're tempted to exchange what we know is good and right and honorable for that which is easy, comfortable, and safe—until we remember God's immutability—that He never changes. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. And therefore, we too must be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that our labor is not in vain in the Lord. So if you're tired, discouraged, or anxious, don't stop being the new creature God has made you in Christ—filled with the fruit of His Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Get some rest. Ask for prayer. Listen to the counsel of those who are spiritually mature and committed to Christ. And let your brothers and sisters in Christ encourage you and bear the burden with you. But don't let your circumstances change you, unless it's for the better. For He has set you apart as a person of infinite value and called you to be holy, just as He is holy, in all you think, do, and say

For “those who wait on the LORD shall renew *their* strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.” (Isa. 40:31)

His Immutable Purposes

Have you ever damaged a relationship with someone you love by losing your cool in a moment of conflict? Or have you let the love between you grow cold by giving your time and attention to something other than them. Relationships are easy to damage and often difficult to repair. So the question arises, especially for a new believer, can I do something to break my relationship with God and lose my salvation? That was my big worry when I started to follow Christ. Knowing how holy He is and how sinful I am, I worried, “Maybe in a moment of weakness, I'll sin so badly that He'll never be able to forgive me!” I knew I was—

***Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love.
Here's my heart, O take and seal it. Seal it for Thy courts above.***

What's God's remedy for this uncertainty? The changelessness of His purposes. 1 Samuel 15:29 declares, “The Glory of Israel does not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man, that He should change His mind.” Numbers 23:19 adds: “Does He speak and then not act? Does He promise and not fulfill?” Because God is not subject to human weakness, His plans are never frustrated. What He sets out to do, He carries through to the very end. What a comfort that ought to be to those of us who love Him! For if salvation originated with us, it would depend on us to keep it. But Jesus is the Author of Finisher of our faith. It was His Spirit who touched our hearts and freed us to believe. Therefore, since it was He who performed the miracle of salvation in our hearts, only He can undo it, and He won't. Why? His purposes never waver. As Philippians 1:6 promises, “He who began a good work in you shall perform it until the day of Christ Jesus.”

Case in point: Jonah. If anyone deserved to forfeit his salvation, it was he. For when God said, “Go,” Jonah said “No,” and boarded a ship headed as far from where God wanted him as possible. But did God give up on Jonah? No. Romans 11:29 says, “The gifts and calling of God are irrevocable.” So, instead of damning Jonah, God disciplined him by sending a storm to disrupt his rebellious plans, a storm so fierce it caused the sailors to repent and call upon the God of Jonah for salvation. But Jonah was stubborn. Instead of heading for Nineveh, he had the sailors throw him overboard to keep the ship from capsizing. Only then, as he sank like a rock and was about to drown, did he surrender to God's will. So God, in His mercy, sent a fish to rescue Jonah and carry him to shore. From there, he finally headed to Nineveh where he warned them of God's judgment.

However, at this point we run into a theological problem. Though God said He would destroy Nineveh because of its sin, Jonah 3:10 says: “When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God repented concerning the calamity which He had declared that He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.” Did God change His mind? If so, doesn’t that contradict what I’ve said about God’s unchangeable purposes? No. What we have to recognize is that “this change” was not an unplanned alteration in God’s plans. For nothing takes God by surprise! When we make plans, we change them in light of our circumstances. Think about the last time you started a diet only to break it when the dessert arrived! But not so with God! Based on His perfect wisdom, God is faithful to complete whatever He begins. In fact, this is why Jonah originally refused to go to Nineveh. He suspected that destroying Nineveh was actually God’s Plan B. Plan A, which wasn’t revealed at first, was for Nineveh to repent, so that God could forgive them. As Jonah complained following Nineveh’s repentance—

“O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.” Jonah 4:2-3

What angered the bigoted prophet should be a source of comfort to us! For we too are sinful people! Yet Jonah’s God has shed His grace on us as well, not only promising to withhold His judgment, but to save us to the very end. Romans 8:28 promises us who believe, “We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” What purpose is that? Verse 29: “For those God foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren.” This is comforting for two reasons: 1) It guarantees that nothing in this life can undo God’s work of our salvation, for He is working all things together for our good, not our harm. 2) It promises us that we won’t get lost in the process of salvation, for verse 30 adds: “Those He predestined, He also called; and those He called, He also justified; and those He justified, He also glorified.” He finishes with the same number with which He began! Having loved us from the beginning, He will love us to the end.

However, if you haven’t yet surrendered your life to Jesus, be warned. God’s immutability should be terrifying to those who are not yet safe within His fold. For it means that His judgment never changes either. Sometimes we imagine that God is so loving that after a million years or so, He’ll probably say, “Enough is enough,” and let those in hell “off the hook.” Wrong! Apart from Jesus Christ there is no provision for salvation and forgiveness, which is why it is important for you to give your life to Christ now while you still have the chance.

So let me ask you, in light of God’s unchanging purposes, have His purposes become your purpose for living? Matthew 28:19 commands, “Make disciples of all nations.” Mark 16:15 orders, “Preach the gospel to all nations.” Acts 1:8 adds, “You shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.” The question is: Are you praying for and sharing your faith with those who don’t yet believe? And are you doing what you can to make sure the good news about Jesus is preached to the ends of the earth? Like Jonah, He’ll give you the ability to do what might otherwise frighten you, if you lean upon Him in faith. For He is both the One who saves us and empowers us to do the things we could never do before. Bless His name forever!

To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.
Jude 24-25

His Immutable Promises

If a friend made you promises, but rarely kept them, how apt would you be to trust him or how long would you keep her as your friend? Trust is the bedrock of every healthy relationship, and this includes our friendship with God. The Bible is filled with thousands of divine promises, urging us to believe them and test God's faithfulness by acting on them in faith. In fact, the Apostle Peter says our faith in His promises is the very thing that secures our salvation, seals our friendship with God, gives us power over this wicked world. He writes:

“His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who has called us by His own glory and goodness. Through these He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.” (2 Peter 1:3-4)

Sometimes we worry, will God keep His promises to me? Of this there is no doubt, for God's promises are as faithful as His holy character. Abraham is the quintessential example of one who learned this. God said, “Leave your home, your family, and your country, and go to a land that I will show you; and I will make you a great nation.” So Abraham obeyed as much as his faith allowed. He left his homeland but took his family along, delaying his obedience because his father insisted on settling in Haran. Then his father died, and Abraham renewed his commitment to God and moved to Canaan. But even there his faith faltered many times. At one point, frustrated that God hadn't given him an heir, he took Hagar, his wife's servant girl as his concubine. She gave birth to Ishmael, father of the Arab nations, and the Middle East hasn't been the same since. And yet, despite his slow growth in faith, did God keep His word to Abraham? Absolutely! From the moment Abraham showed the first hint of faith, God kept every detail of His promise as a testament to us that His Word can always be trusted. For that reason, Hebrews 6:12-19 urges us to make the journey of faith as well:

“Follow the example of those who are going to inherit God's promises because of their faith and endurance. For example, there was God's promise to Abraham. Since there was no one greater to swear by, God took an oath in His own name, saying: ‘I will certainly bless you, and I will multiply your descendants beyond number.’ Then Abraham waited patiently, and he received what God has promised...So God has given us both His promise and His oath. These two things are unchangeable because it is impossible for God to lie. Therefore, we who have fled to Him for refuge can have great confidence as we hold to the hope that lies before us.”

This passage says that God has staked His very character upon His faithfulness to His promises. We're assured that because God can never lie, His promises will never fail. In Abraham's case, the Bible says he was so old that he was “as good as dead” when God promised him a son. (Hebrew 11:12) And yet, right on schedule according to God's promise, Isaac was born and from that one beloved son have come a multitude of descendants for Abraham, “as numerous as the stars in heaven and as countless as the sand which is on the seashore.”

What is the lesson for us? Like Abraham, we're to be patient, believing God's promises, and standing firm in the faith even when our circumstances seem to say just the opposite. In fact, that's the Christian life in a nutshell—believing in the immutability of His promises, even when the world, the flesh, and the devil seek to overpower us with doubt. Again, the Apostle Peter encourages us, “Be

self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls about like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith...and after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To Him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.” (1 Peter 5:8-11)

Stanley Dale didn't seem destined for greatness as a boy. His dad was an abusive drunk and his mother coped by living in a dream world believing she'd become a great actress one day. Nor did his suffering end at home. The smallest boy in his class, he was a constant target of bullies at school. One day, after a beating, he ran home crying to his father only to hear him say, “They're right! You are a weakling.” Now travel ahead 24 years in time to Irian Jaya. Stanley has given his life to Christ and been called to the mission field. He has baptized a few converts, but the work is painfully slow. The priests of Kembu refuse to turn to God from idols. So in a moment of boldness, Stanley burns their gods proving they're nothing but wood. Then the trouble begins. The priests attack Stanley leaving him for dead. But Stan refuses to die. He drags himself back to the mission compound to heal, and then promptly marches back to the same village with the love of Christ burning in his heart. Don Richardson tells the rest of the story—

“The war cry sounded again, closer now. Suddenly they came leaping out of the forest bows held high. Stan and Yemu stood at the lower end of the gravel beach, facing them. Phil was alone 50 yards away. Looking back in horror, he saw Stan raise his staff, grimly facing the Wikboon horde. “Yemu, leave me,” Stan shouted over his shoulder. He kept his staff raised, not to strike, but to form a barrier against the advancing tide of warriors. “All of you, turn around and go home,” he commanded. A priest named Bereway slipped behind Stan and, at point blank range, shot an arrow under his upraised arm. Another priest shot a shaft into Stan's back, just below the shoulder. As the arrows entered his flesh, Stan pulled them out one by one, broke them, and cast them away.

Nalimo reached the scene after 30 arrows found their mark in Stan. “How can he stand there so long?” he gasped. “Why doesn't he fall? Any one of us would have fallen long ago! Maybe he's immortal?” Nalimo's normally impassive face melted with fear. Because of his fear, he did not shoot an arrow into Stan. Stan faced his enemies steady and unwavering except for the jolt of each new strike. Yemu ran to where Phil stood and together they watched in anguish at Stan's agony. As some 50 or more warriors detached from the main force and came toward them, Phil pushed Yemu behind him and gestured speechlessly, ‘Run!’ 50 arrows. 60! Red ribbons of blood trailed from the wounds, but Stan stood his ground. Nalimo saw he was not alone in his fear. The attack had begun with hilarity, but now the warriors shot their arrows with desperation bordering on panic. Maybe Kusaho was right! Maybe they were committing a crime against the supernatural rather than defending it. ‘Fall,’ they screamed at Stan. ‘Die!’ It was almost a plea. ‘Please, die!’” (From the book, Lords of the Earth)

Stanley Dale did die that day, but the tribe who killed him was so overcome by his steadfastness that they soon repented and gave their lives to Christ. But the question is: How did such a coward and weakling become such a mighty man of valor? He met the Unbendable, Immoveable, Unshakeable One, and having met him, he was never the same. What about you? Have you surrendered your life to Christ? If so, are you unchangeable in your goodness and immoveable in your commitment to Him? You will be if you lay hold of the Unshakeable Rock of Ages and never let go. For He never changes. “We blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree, and wither and perish, but naught changeth Thee.”