



Found Faithful

When Nancy and I were newly married we had little time and little money. One Saturday afternoon in the fall she was going to be gone for a few hours and made a very reasonable request of things for me to get done while she was gone. We'd then top the day off with an inexpensive date night.

The problem was there was a college football game I really wanted to watch. I devised a strategy whereby I would watch the game, scramble some at halftime, and then scurry around some more after it was over. I knew going in I could not possibly finish the chores with this approach, but I figured if I made it look like I had been hard at work the whole time that would be enough to stay in her good graces.

It was a good game. It was a bad strategy. Nancy came home shortly after the final whistle while I was still getting out the tools. There was no date night.

Here's the problem. I was willing to be satisfied with creating an impression of faithfulness rather than actually being faithful; merely being thought of as faithful was a fully acceptable outcome. The illusion became as good as the standard. But half-step faithfulness will always and ultimately be exposed.

I think of Saul, the first king of Israel. His reign started well. He led Israel to victory after key victory to secure the land. In approaching a major battle with the dreaded Amalekites, God explicitly instructed that the entire spoils of victory be destroyed—every bit of the gold, silver, precious stones, and livestock. When the victory was won, a big public display was made of destroying the treasure. Except Saul had secreted some of it away for himself. He had let his title create a sense of entitlement. God exposed his feigned faithfulness. From that point on, his reign was disgraced, eventually to be replaced by David.

By contrast, there is the poor widow who hoards nothing, but instead in her poverty drops two copper coins into the temple offering. Unknown to her, Jesus is watching. She receives the commendation of the Son of God. She is found faithful.

I have served with three generations of Covenant pastors: the generation ahead of me that

modeled so much, my own generation, and the gifted and godly younger leaders now making their mark.

No pastor is perfect. But every pastor I have ever known has wanted only one thing beneath it all: to be found faithful.

Well done, good and faithful servant. Aren't those the very words, and ultimately *the only words*, you want to hear?

As your president, that is my deepest longing for us as a movement. In the hard decisions, in the challenging moments, in the earnest pleas for God's mercy and guidance, I can in all sincerity say that my hope for us is irreducibly captured in these two words: found faithful.

If the hard road is the faithful road, I want us to take the hard road. If the narrow road is the faithful road, I want us to take the narrow road. And if there is no road yet to the faithful place, I want us to make a new road.

That's why we are introducing a new extended theme of the same wording: found faithful. We are tying it to our clarified priorities, which I have previewed in an earlier column. In following the heart of God into the world, our five priorities are to start and strengthen churches; make and deepen disciples; develop leaders; love mercy—do justice; and serve globally.

Over the next five years, we will bring a spotlight to what we are doing in each of those areas. We will kick things off this year at the Annual Meeting with "Found Faithful: Serving Globally." Join us June 21-23 in Irvine, California.

Superintendent Garth Bolinder of the Midsouth Conference shared this insight with me: we make our commitments, and then our commitments make us. In other words, overtly naming our commitments (say, as in marriage and ordination vows) helps us keep our commitments. Keeping our commitments in turn shapes even deeper levels of identity and conviction around those same priorities.

We make this commitment: to be found faithful. Now may that commitment make us increasingly so. ■

Gary Walter is president of the Evangelical Covenant Church.

If the narrow road is the faithful road, I want us to take the narrow road.