

But will you love Me tomorrow?

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HAWKINS, Texas—Back in 1961 the vocal pop group The Shirelles sang a popular song composed by Carole King titled "Will You Love Me Tomorrow?" The lyrics to the first verse went:

Tonight you're mine completely
You give your love so sweetly
Tonight the light of love is in your eyes
But will you love me tomorrow?

The last line stresses the poignant concern that the relationship that seems so permanent in the present might fade or dissolve in the future. In the backdrop of the '60s, when Haight-Ashbury, Woodstock, LSD and free love were happening events, the prospects for a steadfast, rock-solid relationship seemed to ebb away in a cloud of smoke. The popularity of Carole King's song may have actually been a cry of anguish concerning the uncertainty and temporariness of commitments.

Disturbing phenomenon

Alvin Toffler in his book *Future Shock* described a disturbing new phenomenon in the late 20th century called modular relationships in which people, losing the security of the extended family and small community, would begin to form short-term commitments with barbers, mechanics, plumbers, bankers, grocers, doctors, dentists, etc., replacing them frequently as disposable modules rather than forming decade-long or perhaps lifetime commitments, as formerly would occur in small rural communities.

This "disposable" aspect became more prevalent when the entire society became more mobile and the extended family (Grandpa, Grandma, Mom and Dad and the children all living in the same locale as in the *Waltons*) was replaced by the nuclear family (Dad, Mom and baby against the world.)

Now, sadly for an emerging moral relativistic culture, even the components of the nuclear family have become modular and recyclable.

Interestingly, remaining committed and steadfast looms large in the commendations, reprimands and recommendations for the seven churches in Revelation 2-3:

Determined Ephesians

The Ephesus church received commendations, reprimands and recommendations relating to steadfastness:

- A commendation: "And you have *persevered* and *have patience*, and have labored for My name's sake and *have not become weary*" (Revelation 2:3).
- A reprimand for wavering in the commitment: "Nevertheless I have this against you that you have left your first love" (verse 4).
- A recommendation to renew the commitment to steadfastness: "Remember from where you have fallen [a weakening of steadfast commitment]; repent and do the first works" (verse 5).

Faithful Smyrna

The Smyrna church received:

- A recommendation to remain steadfast: "Be *faithful until death*, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 9:10).

Notice how steadfastness and reward have a cause- effect relationship.

Wavering Pergamos

The Pergamos church received a commendation, a reprimand and a recommendation to steadfastness:

- A commendation: "And you *hold fast* to my name and did not deny my faith" (Revelation 2:13).
- A reprimand for syncretizing, or compromising, with the doctrines of Balaam and the Nicolaitans.
- A recommendation to repent of the wavering compromise.

Patient Thyatira

The Thyatira church received a commendation, reprimand and recommendation related to steadfastness:

- A commendation for past steadfastness: "I know your works, love, service, *faith*, and your *patience*" (inextricable ingredients of steadfastness) (Revelation 2:19).
- A reprimand for tolerating Jezebel, leading to spiritual sexual immorality (Revelation 2:20).
- A recommendation to be steadfast: "But *hold fast to what you have* till I come" (verse 25).

Dying Sardis

The Sardis church received a reprimand and a recommendation related to steadfastness:

- A reprimand for letting what it had received become in danger of perishing (Revelation 3:1).
- A recommendation to "*hold fast* and repent," warning that He will come "as a thief in the night" (verse 3).

Persevering Philadelphia

The Philadelphia church received a commendation and recommendation related to steadfastness:

- A commendation for past steadfastness: "Because you have kept my command to *persevere*, I will keep you from the hour of trial which will come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth" (Revelation 3:10).
- A recommendation to stay steadfast: "Behold I come quickly! *Hold fast what you have*, that no one may take your crown" (verse 11).

Lukewarm Laodicea

The Laodicea church received a reprimand and recommendation related to its lack of steadfastness:

- A reprimand for its lack of commitment and lack of steadfastness: "You are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot" (Revelation 3:16).
- A recommendation to become steadfast: "Be zealous and repent" of the wishy-washy lack of commitment and steadfastness (verse 19).

Christ had something to say to each of these congregations about steadfastness and commitment.

Steadfastness can be defined as doing things we *have to do* with the same ardor as the things we like to do.

Dad's routines

One of my fond early memories of my dad was his passion for routine in so many areas of his life. One routine I recall was how he secured the car against the bitter Minnesota winter cold. I could almost set my watch by his predictable behavior:

After driving the car up to the pump house, Dad would open the hood, plug in the block heater, place the trouble light on top of the engine, gently close the hood while taking care not to latch it, throw a canvas tarp over the hood, grab the snow scoop next to the pump house, shovel one, two, three, four, five, six scoops of snow onto the hood, place the shovel near the pump house, and trudge up the walk into the house.

Through the winter months, whether in snow, high wind, sleet or blizzard, the behaviors Dad exhibited were rhythmical, steady and predictable, leaving me a sterling model of steadfastness.

Through his devotion to routine, method and sequential order (in hundreds of similar tasks) Dad, as the head of our family, inspired a sense of trust, confidence and well-being in the family members.

Godly routines

Likewise, God Almighty as the Patriarch of our spiritual family has developed the reputation for absolute steadfast, routine behavior in all things.

One of the most inspiring psalms set to music by Felix Mendelssohn, Psalm 121, focuses on God's steadfast watchfulness.

Behold, He who keeps Israel
Shall neither slumber nor sleep [verse 4]

Psalm 119:90 affirms this steadfastness, suggesting that

Your faithfulness endures to all generations: You establish the earth, and it abides.

Godly maintenance

After God created our world, He set Himself the task to faithfully execute the daily routines of maintenance. Notice Psalm 104 beginning in verse 10:

He sends the springs into the valleys which flow among the hills;
They give drink to every beast of the field;
The wild donkeys quench their thirst
By them, the birds of the heaven have their habitation;
They sing among the branches.
He waters the hills from His upper chambers:
The earth is satisfied with the fruit of your works.
He causes the grass to grow for the cattle and vegetation to grow for the service of men that he may bring forth food from the earth [verses 10-14].

Billions of cycles

The Patriarch of our spiritual family has undertaken without complaint billions of repeatable cyclical chores including maintaining the steady lub-dub of our heart chambers, turning the earth on its axis and maintaining the stars in their courses.

So impressed were the 18th-century deists with the cyclical regularity of the universe that Sir Isaac Newton referred to God Almighty as the Divine Mechanic.

When my son was 9 years old, he rarely forgot to give the cat his daily bowl of water, but, when he did forget, we had had to point out the myriad daily chores that God has set Himself to perform without ever forgetting.

Steadfastness (doing things we *have to do* with the same ardor as the things we like to do) is one of the most essential principles in Christian character.

Laboring not in vain

The Apostle Paul admonishes us, "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 Corinthians 15:58).

In the same vein, Paul encourages the Galatians: "And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart" (Galatians 6:9).

Doing things that *have to be done* on a routine basis is neither always enjoyable nor fun. My grandfather for years and years would adhere to a self-imposed schedule of waking up every morning at 4 o'clock to feed the livestock and take care of routine chores. It seemed he actually accomplished more in those early hours before breakfast than some people accomplish the entire day.

One time when I asked him where he got the energy to keep on keeping on, he replied with a resigned tone, "Somebody has to do this."

Even when we don't feel like it

For sure, steadfastness does not involve doing things when we *feel* like it. Occasionally, we may feel a strong desire to pray and do our Bible study, but most of us realize that many times we don't *feel* like it.

Herbert Armstrong, founder of the Worldwide Church of God, claimed during a Bible study that, to him, prayer often seemed like an arduous chore. The steadfast individual will execute his spiritual obligations whether or not he is *in the mood* or *feels like it*. Many students disappear from graduate school because they haven't developed the *sitzfleisch* (literally "sitting flesh," or padding on the backside, to endure long hours of dull routine research).

Avoid emotional reasoning

Dr. David Burns in his book *Feeling Good* has identified *emotional reasoning* as a major cognitive distortion (twisted thought). In this distortion the person is tempted to say, "I don't feel like doing the assignment or chore, so I won't do it."

I'm appalled at the prevalence of this attitude among our young people in the public schools. A large segment of Generation X-ers are governed by their feelings and have developed no tolerance for discomfort or inconvenience.

Dr. Burns aptly points out that the motivation to continue doing something occurs only after we have started the project. If we wait for the *right moment* or the good vibration, we may never *feel* inclined to do anything. Axiomatically, we should expect that the motivation to do something irksome will come only after we have initiated that action.

Jesus didn't always feel like it

Jesus Christ, our Elder Brother, didn't always *feel* like going through what He obligated Himself to do, but He always moved steadfastly toward the task at hand. In Mark 14:36 His *feelings* don't exactly correspond to His steadfast commitment to duty:

"Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will."

By contrast, His weary disciples gave in to their *feelings*, shirking their obligation to remain watchful in prayer (verse 37).

Many of Christ's parables focus on the quality of steadfastness and commitment. The parables of the talents measure spiritual success in terms of faithfulness and steadfastness more than native skill or vast accomplishments. The Lord commended both the recipient of many talents and few talents with the same approbation: "Well done, good and *faithful servant*; you were *faithful* over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things . . ." (Matthew 25:21).

Even if it's no longer fun

Steadfastness involves keeping on keeping on, even when the novelty wears off and it is no longer fun to do it.

Keeping watch over our spiritual condition is fairly easy when we have peak energy in the middle of the day, but can we maintain the same intensity of watchfulness during the graveyard shift? God the Father does (Psalm 121:4). Our Elder Brother does (Hebrews 13:8). But are we expected to maintain this same steadfastness when we are weary and don't *feel* like it?

Apparently our Elder Brother puts a high priority on this character trait. In the parable of the expectant steward, Jesus commends servants who steadfastly keep alert during the second and third watch (Luke 12:38). Can we maintain steady perseverance if we find ourselves on the graveyard shift? Our Lord may have in mind that we keep on keeping on when it is no longer fun, when it is no longer novel.

At this stage in the history of the greater Church of God, many people no longer want to *hold fast* or maintain ironclad commitment. Too many of our brethren have allowed this lack of fun and lack of novelty to lead them to be "tossed to and fro, carried away by every wind of doctrine" (Ephesians 4:14; Jude 12).

As in Carole King's song, we have already arrived at that "tomorrow." The novelty has perhaps worn off, and we might find ourselves in an advanced state of fatigue, feeling weary of well-doing. What we need now more than ever before is some spiritual *sitzfleisch*.

As Paul admonished the Ephesians: "Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to *withstand* in the evil day, and having done all, to *stand!*" (Ephesians 6:13).