

January 25th, 2026

Psalm 40:1-11 “God Promises Faithfulness”

I think I’ve mentioned this before, but whenever Mary or I offer a word of wisdom or advice to our children—they have a way of letting us know if they’ve heard it before by ringing an imaginary bell. “Ding-ding-ding!” For example, Mary will make gingerbread muffins and the next day she’ll say, “You know, if you put them in the microwave for 12 seconds,” and the kids will say, “ding-ding-ding – they’ll taste like they’re fresh out of the oven. We *know* mom.” One of the things I get “dinged” for is when they talk about feeling overwhelmed with difficulties. I’ll say, “Make sure you know the difference between ants and elephants. Sometimes the ants are what can tip you over the edge.”

What I mean by this is that it’s easy to get overwhelmed by little things. You’ve got a big project or assignment that’s due soon, but during the course of the week your printer, dishwasher, and lawnmower all break down. Then you come down with a really bad cold, and when you get in your car to go get some medicine, you discover that you have a flat tire. After dark. In the rain. The elephant is the project that’s due. That’s the big thing. But all those other things getting in the way are ants. Stay focused on the elephant. Easier said than done, but necessary if you’re going to make it through the week.

But what if you’re dealing with a herd of elephants? What if you have so many big, insurmountable things going on in your life that a flat tire in the rain seems like a welcome break? And have you ever noticed that some people seem like they have *more* than their fair share of elephants to deal with? I’m talking about people who are struggling to be sole caregivers for both their kids and their parents. I know people who are dealing with several major health crises with little or no insurance and who will never in their lifetime be able to pay off their medical debt. I know of people who have had several back-to-back deaths in their family and it has taken a huge emotional toll on them.

It's interesting how we Christians often respond to people when they're getting run over by the elephants. We'll say, "Well, they're going to have to rely on the Lord now!" Think about that for a minute. "They're going to *have* to rely on the Lord *now*." What does that even mean? That we should only rely on the Lord when we get overwhelmed and things get out of control? That sounds like the only people who should rely on God are those in lost-cause situations. "Oh, things are so bad in this person's life that they have no choice but to rely on the Lord!"

What does this say about God? Is this how God works? You're on your own until you run out of options, and there's God behind the "break glass in case of emergency" sign just waiting for you? Is God only there when things get bad or when we're facing a herd of elephants? Is God just the last resort?

I remember that in my early days as a Christian, I thought faith—and faithfulness—were entirely on me. I was the one responsible for being faithful to God, not the other way around. I came into the world wired for self-preservation, trained to look out for myself first, to do whatever it took to survive. At some point, I realized that kind of faith wasn't enough. I couldn't do life on my own. I had to learn to trust others, to belong, to run with a pack instead of going it alone. And as I learned about faith in community, I also learned more about faith as the Bible understands it. That's when I began to notice a problem. Somewhere along the way, I had absorbed the idea that God was always the *object* of faithfulness, but never the *subject*—that faithfulness was something humans had, and God simply demanded. But scripture tells a very different story. Over and over again, it insists that God is faithful—consistently, stubbornly, unfailingly faithful.

I had a tough time with the sermon this week. The lectionary gave us two amazing texts -- one from First Corinthians 1 and the other from Psalm 40 that Georgia read. The First Corinthians text was mostly about baptism which we covered in great detail last week, but the last verse is, "God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son,

Jesus Christ our Lord.” I thought that verse got overshadowed by all the things about baptism, so I decided to stick with the Psalm because of this gem in verse 10, “I have not hidden your saving help within my heart, I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation; I have not concealed your steadfast love and your faithfulness from the great congregation.” But then it occurred to me that this concept of God being always faithful is *all over* the scriptures – Old and New Testaments.

Hebrews 10:23 – “Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful.”

Exodus 34:6 – “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.”

Lamentations 3:22–23 – “The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.”

You all know I don’t like cherry picking scriptures out of the Bible and listing them all just to prove a point. But when God’s faithfulness to us is one of the foundational texts in all of scripture, what else can you do?

And since we’re talking about faithfulness as God’s character rather than a backup plan, we’ve got to include Psalm 100:5, “For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.”

God does not abandon God’s people. God does not break God’s word. God does not withhold forgiveness. God does not hide God’s face. God is profoundly faithful! All of this despite the fact that *we* often abandon God. We break *our* word. We withhold our confessions. *We* turn our faces away from God’s. But not God. God is 100% faithful 100% of the time.

But a lie still creeps into our hearts—and sometimes even into our pulpits. It's the lie that being a "good Christian," or even being a Christian at all, depends entirely on you. On how strong your faith is. How steady you are. How well you manage doubt, weakness, or failure. According to this lie, faithlessness disqualifies you. Doubt makes you suspect. Struggle puts you on thin ice with God. And *grace* quietly turns into a *reward for spiritual performance*. But that's not the story the Bible tells. Grace is *not* something we earn by being faithful enough. As Frederick Buechner so simply puts it, there is "*nothing you have to do.*" Not to make God love you. Not to make God stay with you. Not to make God faithful.

And here's the deeper good news: faithfulness is not a burden God places on us alone. Scripture insists—over and over again—that God is the faithful one. Our faith does not save us; God's faithfulness does. What we bring is not perfection or certainty, but honesty. Our role is not to hold everything together, but to receive what God is already doing.

Here it is in a nutshell -- God does not wait for your life to fall apart before showing up. God does not stand behind a glass case labeled "In Case of Emergency." God is not a last resort. God is already faithful—before the elephants arrive, while they're trampling through your life, and long after you're exhausted from trying to manage them on your own.

When the psalmist says, "*I waited patiently for the LORD; he inclined to me and heard my cry,*" he's not describing a test of spiritual endurance. He's describing a relationship. A God who leans in. A God who hears. A God who acts. And that means that faith is not something you have to manufacture when you're overwhelmed. Faith is what happens when you discover that you are already being held by a faithful God. So when you find yourself surrounded by elephants—when the problems are real and the strength is gone—the invitation is not to *try harder* or *believe better*. The invitation is to tell the truth. To call out. To trust that

God's faithfulness does not depend on your consistency, your certainty, or your perfection.

This week, you don't have to prove anything to God.

You don't have to earn God's presence.

You don't have to wait until things get desperate enough.

God is faithful.

God has always been faithful.

And God will be faithful—no matter how many elephants are in the room.