

EVERYDAY FAITHFULNESS



THE BEAUTY OF ORDINARY PERSEVERANCE
IN A DEMANDING WORLD

Glenna Marshall

“If you’ve ever struggled to maintain daily Bible reading, questioned the importance of regular prayer, or faltered in your efforts to commit to the local church, this book is for you. In other words, this book is for all of us—for who doesn’t sometimes need a good friend to remind us of the value of healthy spiritual habits and point us to the everlasting treasure that awaits? In the pages of *Everyday Faithfulness*, Glenna Marshall is that friend. She comes alongside readers with personal testimony, biblical truth, warm encouragement, and an occasional, well-placed elbow when we need it most. Whether you’ve been a Christian for days or decades, this book will equip you to persevere and, in the process, find joy.”

Megan Hill, author, *Praying Together* and *A Place to Belong*; Editor, The Gospel Coalition

“*Everyday Faithfulness* is a wonderful gift for Christian women who long for encouragement to walk closely with their Lord throughout life’s challenges and joys. Glenna Marshall approaches our need for ordinary perseverance with conviction, grace, and great hope in our faithful Savior. She offers us a fresh look at the many opportunities we’re given to live like we belong to Christ, today and every day. *Everyday Faithfulness* is what we all need, and these words will spur you on through every season in your own walk with Jesus.”

Bethany Barendregt, Content Director and Podcast Host, *Women Encouraged*

“Every Christian wants to be faithful. Unfortunately, many of us are really more concerned with the results of faithfulness than with the ordinary plodding and perseverance of daily faithfulness itself. Glenna Marshall writes to encourage us in the midst of this everyday perseverance. Her writing is a blend of humble transparency and biblical insight, all written in the voice of a trusted friend. I’m so thankful for her and for *Everyday Faithfulness*. What a gift to the church!”

Jaquelle Crowe Ferris, author, *This Changes Everything: How the Gospel Transforms the Teen Years*

“When it comes to spiritual growth, we’re often hoping for big changes to happen overnight. While we may long for a fast sprint toward holiness, Glenna Marshall reminds us that spiritual growth usually consists of ordinary moments of everyday faithfulness. *Everyday Faithfulness* is a needed and encouraging book that points us to the joy of walking with God one day at a time, one step at a time.”

Melissa B. Kruger, Director of Women’s Initiatives, The Gospel Coalition; author, *Growing Together*

Everyday Faithfulness

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in a Demanding World

Glenna Marshall

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For Leota, whose everyday faithfulness
has encouraged me in mine.
I miss your quiet presence on the pew behind me at church.

Contents

Introduction: Think Like a Farmer	11
1 What Is Everyday Faithfulness?	17
2 Faithful When You're Just Not Disciplined	33
3 Faithful When Your Hands Are Full	49
4 Faithful When You're Waiting	65
5 Faithful When You Doubt	81
6 Faithful When You're Suffering	97
7 Faithful When Your Heart Is Cold	113
8 Faithful When You Sin	129
9 Faithful to the End	145
Acknowledgments	161
General Index	163
Scripture Index	169

Introduction

Think Like a Farmer

In the humid, mosquito-thick summers of Southeast Missouri where I've lived for the past fifteen years, I've attempted to grow a vegetable garden exactly once. My next-door neighbor Bob, a retiree who used to run his own landscaping business, leaned over the adjoining fence one day and watched while I staked out the square allotted for my future cornucopia of summer produce. "I'll bring my tiller over and chew up that dirt for you, if you want," he offered.

Throughout the late spring and early summer, he volunteered bits of advice while I planted tomatoes, peppers, and squash—and pretended I knew what I was doing. He'd lean across the fence and make suggestions for keeping the squirrels out, for protecting against pop-up thunderstorms, for the best times to water when rain was scarce. I did everything Bob said, but I quickly discovered that I didn't have the patience for gardening. I hated the heat, the bugs, and the incessant need for weeding. I especially hated the weeks of waiting for plants to break through the earth, grow, blossom, and then turn out

vegetables. I mean, I could just drive to the grocery store and buy some tomatoes, right?

Though I was thrilled by the first vegetables we picked and ate, I quickly lost interest in the work, and my garden grew wild. By that time, the tomatoes had failed anyway. At the end of the season, I uprooted everything and tossed the leavings in the brush pile. We intended to carry off the brush in the fall, but we didn't get around to it until the next summer. That's when I discovered two sturdy tomato plants growing in the wild stack of fallen tree branches and compost. I was a bit resentful. The tomatoes that wouldn't grow under my watering, weeding, and mulching were flourishing in a forgotten pile of garbage. Their green stems heavy with plump, red orbs mocked me.

I'm certain Bob laughed at me too each time he ducked back behind the fence to head indoors. My patience for the slow growth of summer vegetables was thin, and he knew it. I didn't want to do the work, and he knew it. What I did want was fruit without the investment, the life of a gardener without actually gardening, and Bob knew it all.



In his epistle, James encourages believers to be patient until the Lord returns. Since Christ's ascension, his people have believed he will return for his church, and that he will present her pure and spotless before the Father. Jesus's brother left us the encouragement to be steadfast while we wait for the day of Christ's appearing. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, James turns our impatient hearts to the farmer and says, "Be patient, therefore, brothers until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being

patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand" (James 5:7–8).

When my husband and I first moved to our Missouri farming community, I was surprised by how the fields of crops leaned into the city limits. A bank in the middle of town might be flanked by a cotton field one year and a cornfield the next. Crop rotation is something I've turned into a yearly guessing game, and seasonal field-burning always sends me to bed with raging allergies.

I'll never forget my first midweek prayer meeting at the church where my husband serves as pastor. One of the members stood to pray at the end of the service. I remember his prayer distinctly because I was struck with its simplicity and humility: he prayed for us to follow Christ faithfully, and he prayed for rain. At least two congregants at the time were full-time farmers, and their livelihoods depended on summer rains. Not too much and not too little. Every year, they waited patiently and trusted the Lord to provide for their fields of cotton, rice, corn, and soybeans. I always think of that prayer when I read James's encouragement to be faithful like farmers. Faithfulness by definition calls us to be loyal, steadfast, constant, and reliable. But outside the agrarian corners of the world, we struggle to model our spiritual faithfulness after farmers waiting for rain like their lives depend on it.

Life or death. That's what we're talking about here.

Like my experience with a small twenty-by-twenty-foot garden, following Christ with everyday faithfulness—doing the work of perseverance while also trusting God to work—can feel like an endless endeavor with slow-yielding results. The devices we chain ourselves to for knowledge, connection, and entertainment do not require that we wait or try

very hard. We press buttons or give voice commands, and the world rushes to our fingertips. If the Wi-Fi is poor, we bristle with impatience. If the content on one site bores us, we click over to another. Our culture does not aid us in the discipline of perseverance, and yet God calls us to persevere in faithfulness to him. Jesus said, “The one who endures to the end will be saved” (Matt. 10:22). The farmer’s perseverance keeps his fields irrigated and free from pests so the crops are pleased to grow. The Christian’s perseverance keeps her life rooted in the habits and practices that keep her near the Father’s side so that her spiritual maturity is pleased to grow.

Perseverance reveals the fruit of true, saving faith. It is both an exercise of genuine faith and evidence of it. Perseverance doesn’t save us, but it reveals that we have been saved. Paul charged young pastor Timothy to persist in sharing the message of the gospel whether or not it was convenient (2 Tim. 4:2). This is the underpinning of true faithfulness: persistence whether or not it is convenient. Faithfulness in following Christ isn’t optional for true believers. Whatever seasons we find ourselves in this side of heaven, God still calls us to faithfulness. Perseverance in Christ is our daily work. A steadfast grip on the gospel is still God’s charge to us even when our schedules are full, our trials are many, or our days are mundane.

Faithfulness is an everyday calling. It’s regular, it’s ordinary, it’s taking a really long view of the Christian life. It’s reshaping our desires for immediate fruit and committing to following Jesus for the long haul. It’s getting up every single day and believing that God is your treasure, that the gospel of Jesus is worth your every breath, and that he is enough. Faithfulness is doing this again tomorrow and the next day and ten years from now. Faithfulness is ordinary. It’s unremarkable. It

plods. It is also precious in the sight of the God who works out lifelong sanctifying perseverance in your life for your good and his glory.

Everyday faithfulness requires patience and fortitude that's desperately dependent upon God's own faithfulness to us. Yet the fruit, the harvest, the return for our everyday plodding is worth more than all the days, months, and years of our long-haul perseverance. When Christ is our daily treasure during the seasons that challenge our steadfastness, we'll reap the benefits of being safely fastened to his side during every shifting shadow and change in life. We'll know him more through his word. Our love for him will increase as our love for sin decreases. We'll look to him more and more, and our regular beholding of his glorious nature will in turn cause others to look to him more. We'll be well-suited for a lifetime of living and longing for Jesus to be our greatest treasure and our deepest joy.

The plodding may last for a lifetime, but the glory will last forever.

Faithful Like . . .

At the end of each chapter, I'll share about the faithfulness of a woman who has encouraged me with her perseverance in regard to the subject matter of the particular chapter. These are real people who have lived the very definition of everyday faithfulness with no accolades, applause, or notoriety. They are not famous, nor do they seek to be. They are everyday, regular people like you and me. Some are still living, and some are now with Christ. May their everyday faithfulness encourage you in yours.

What Is Everyday Faithfulness?

“I don’t know what’s wrong with me,” I confessed to my friend. She raised her eyebrows, took a sip of coffee, and silently beckoned me to continue. I’d just shared that I hadn’t touched my Bible in weeks, maybe longer. It was something I’d confessed to her many times in the past. “I know I have no excuse. I know that Christians are supposed to read the Bible regularly. I just can’t seem to get into a good routine. I do pray sometimes, but you know—sporadically.” My friend nodded but didn’t reply.

“Maybe I’m just too busy,” I said with a sigh. My words fell flat between us; we both saw it for the excuse that it was. I knew my friend had a regular habit of waking at six o’clock in the morning to read the Bible before her kids got up. I felt guilty just sitting in the same room with her. Her discipline seemed to cast a spotlight on my lack of it. “I want to be *eager* to read Scripture. Maybe then I wouldn’t feel so disconnected from the Lord all the time,” I told my friend.

My friend wisely responded the way she always did—with a gentle encouragement to start fresh tomorrow. I knew starts and stops were better than nothing, but I didn’t want to be

sitting in her living room ten years later having the same conversation. Still, I held on to a thin strand of hope that someday I'd drift toward maturity in Christ. Someday.

Later, during a prolonged season of difficult trials, I found myself unprepared for suffering. In desperation I began to seek the Lord in Scripture, and, slowly, the habit of reaching for my Bible every morning began to change my life. I often thank the Lord for the trials that sent me to his word because I know now that I would never have run toward Christ otherwise.

We've All Been Her

As a pastor's wife, I've heard many similar confessions from women who, like me, have tried desperately to get their spiritual acts together apart from regular Bible reading, prayer, and corporate worship. I've witnessed one friend live in continual defeat and regret over long lapses of any kind of spiritual discipline. I've watched another friend spend many years hoping that when life settles down, she'll finally find a routine of daily faithfulness to Christ—only to discover yet another sharp bend in the road to keep her from it. I know now that unless we all commit to regular, daily faithfulness to Christ, we'll be confessing our prayerlessness and dusty Bible covers for years to come to another believer who's heard it many, many times before.

I see her all the time—the Christian woman who wants to follow Jesus but can't seem to get past life's hurdles to know him in his word. She's everywhere. She's the accountability partners, the Bible study members, the church visitors who never make it past the first meeting. She's the woman who has gradually tapered down church attendance in favor of weekends at the lake, ball tournaments, or leisurely Sunday mornings spent prioritizing biological familial ties over spiritual

ones. She's the person who thinks one day she'll wake up holier without having fed the faithfulness that holiness requires. She's me, and, likely, she's been you.

Many of us long to follow Jesus more closely, but we are more focused on our present circumstances than on a long view of faithfulness. We want visible change after a week of Bible reading or a month of church attendance. We desire instant returns for our minimal efforts, but a lifetime marked by steadfast faith doesn't happen overnight. It's built upon years and months of many ordinary days of ordinary perseverance. Though beautiful when traced in decades of retrospect, faithfulness is unremarkable in real-time practice. Daily and weekly spiritual disciplines require common exercises like frequent alarm-setting for Bible reading and getting to church on time for corporate worship. Diligent, unremarkable practices make way for lifelong spiritual growth. We practice perseverance today—every single day—so that we can practice perseverance ten, twenty, and thirty years from now.

We've all had seasons of life when investing in our relationship with Christ has taken a back seat to work, parenting, health, and relationships. We might justify it—*as long as I still believe the gospel now, I can get to growth later*. I used to live with this kind of mature future faithfulness in mind. I thought I'd become more disciplined when I was older, when the kids were older, when I had more life experience, when life wasn't so busy. It was like expecting my garden to be free of weeds and full of vegetables without ever stepping outdoors to tend it.

God expects spiritual growth in every believer—it's proof we've tasted that the Lord is good (1 Pet. 2:3). But there's no switch that flips when we suddenly reach maturity. Expecting to wake up holy some morning in the future is folly if we aren't vigilant in following Christ *this morning*. Faithfulness

to Christ, the kind that perseveres to the end, comes in persevering to the end of *today*.

God has given us the means we need to persevere today, twenty years from now, and all the days in between. Through his word, prayer, and the church, we are equipped to draw near to God, hold fast to our confession of faith, and remain rooted in truth through the people of God. We'll talk about the importance of these regular expressions of faith in the next chapter, but it's these gifts from God that ready us for lifelong faithfulness no matter what seasons we encounter.

The most faithful saints I have known and loved all have had the same trait: a determination to follow Jesus more today than yesterday. These people don't have advanced degrees or illustrious careers. You won't read about them in magazines or spot them on the red carpet. They're regular folks: car salesmen, bank tellers, stay-at-home moms, insurance agents, teachers, nurses, retirees. But they are people who studied their Bibles daily, prayed without ceasing, and showed up at church every Sunday. Their professions of faith were publicly proclaimed through baptism and inwardly examined at the Lord's Table. They grew in maturity as they fed their faithfulness regularly. They are proof that our daily decisions to follow Christ closely are incredibly important for our perseverance in the faith. Perhaps more than we realize.

Swerving from the Truth

A few names in the New Testament make me nervous, like Alexander, Hymenaeus, and Philetus. Don't get me wrong, they're nice names (well, the first one is). But the stories behind these men are sobering when we consider what they teach us about following Christ. We don't know a lot about them, but what we do know is alarming. Paul mentioned Hymenaeus

and Philetus by name when he warned Timothy that mishandling God's word leads to false teaching. The gangrenous effect of heresy had upset the faith of others when, Paul explained, these men "swerved from the truth" (2 Tim. 2:18). Paul also mentioned that Alexander with Hymenaeus had rejected the faith. As a result of their apostasy, Paul "handed [them] over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme" (1 Tim. 1:20). Tampering with the truth of the gospel has grave consequences. These men had rejected God's truth and the church's protection of it. If they had been faithful followers of Christ at one point, how did they slip downward into blasphemy?

Paul captured it in a phrase: they swerved from the truth. We put our souls in danger when we wander outside the safety of connectedness within the church and lose the truth of Scripture. The regular teaching and intake of Scripture in the community of faith protects us against falling away. The author of Hebrews tells us to "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" (Heb. 3:13-14). The church is vital in offering protection for our souls and helping us hold on to the truth of the gospel. Paul told young pastor Timothy to devote himself to the public reading of Scripture, to immerse himself in it, and to persist in keeping a close watch on himself (1 Tim. 4:13-16). While this was pastoral advice, there is great wisdom here for us. Persistent, regular exposure to Scripture and consistent connection to the church anchor our faith. Vigilance matters because the enemy wants to devour what he can.

Perhaps the stories of Alexander, Hymenaeus, and Philetus seem like overstated warnings of something unlikely to happen to us, but the truth is that without regular Bible

intake, communion with the Lord in prayer, and connection to the church, it's easier to swerve from the truth than you might think. It might not be as obvious in your life as it was in theirs. It might not take the form of embracing false teaching. It might look like nothing more than a reluctance to hold on to the things that keep us attached to Christ. But it is still the path that leads to death.

I've observed all kinds of people who either were never truly converted or whose profession of faith in Christ was smothered beneath the stress and strains of life. Countless predators and distractions are ready to gobble up our faithfulness after the gospel seed has been sown (Matt. 13:1–23). Some obstacles are so effective at scraping away anything appearing like perseverance that all that's left is a nominal faith at best, which really isn't faith at all.

Here's the thing about true saving faith: it will always be evidenced by continued faithfulness to Christ. And that's what we *don't* see in Alexander, Hymenaeus, or Philetus—continued faithfulness. The way we distinguish good soil from bad soil in Jesus's parable of the sower is by the evidence of fruit that grows in it. Faithfulness is proof of life. Jesus said it succinctly: "By your endurance you will gain your lives" (Luke 21:19). Jesus wasn't talking about gaining physical lives but rather eternal ones. Perseverance reveals that the profession of faith was real, and it will result in real life with him in heaven. Paul said it similarly: "If we endure, we will also reign with him" (2 Tim. 2:12).

Faithfulness to Christ isn't a one-time decision. It cannot be sequestered to a faded memory of standing next to a pastor in front of a church and signing your name to a membership card. Nor can it depend on mountaintop experiences like conferences or concerts for nourishment. It can't breathe be-

tween tiny spurts of Bible reading or emergency prayers. It can't grow disconnected from the truth of Scripture, and it is unlikely to flourish apart from the body of Christ.

Faithfulness to Christ is a daily, lifelong pursuit. A lifetime of daily faithfulness will be full of unremarkable single days of faithfulness. And what encourages us to be steadfast on a daily basis is keeping an eye on this lifelong perseverance Jesus spoke of in Matthew 24:13. Rather than fading from following him because our love has grown cold, "the one who endures to the end will be saved."

Like anything that blossoms and produces fruit, faithfulness requires daily sustenance to grow. If you want to ensure that you'll still be reading your Bible and carving out time to pray each day ten years from now, then you must begin making it a daily practice now. If you want to make certain that you don't drift from the church when you're older, then make sure you're invested in the body of Christ now. Today's efforts aren't just for today! They're for tomorrow and next week and next month and five years from now. If you want to guarantee that you don't swerve from the truth someday, build your life around practices that keep you connected to Christ, his gospel, and his church.

Faithfulness to Christ requires dying to your desires every single day and instead submitting them to what pleases God. Faithfulness requires us to release our clenched fists, letting the love of entertainment, comfort, and laziness fall through our fingers, and watching it shatter, confident that God can bring good from our efforts at killing sin. It means believing that when Jesus died on the cross, he really did break the power of sin over you, so you are free to fight sin instead of catering to it. Faithfulness requires that we construct our days around the disciplines of Bible reading, prayer, and investment in the body of Christ rather than fitting those things in when we can.

If we want our lives to be marked by steadfastness to Christ, then we can find comfort in knowing God has equipped us to that end. Beginning is as uncomplicated as getting up in the morning to read your Bible, and then doing the same thing the next day after that. And the day after that. Uncomplicated, but not always easy. Regular, everyday faithfulness to Christ doesn't usually bring about fame or praise. No one is clapping when you roll out of bed a half hour earlier to pray or when you spend your lunch break reading your Bible, but you will grow in wisdom and in nearness to Christ as you persevere. You won't get a raise when you leave work early to attend the midweek prayer service at church, but you will be knit tightly with other believers who are also walking a steadfast path with Christ. The accolades are few when you turn off the television to work on Scripture memory before bed, yet you'll find that God's word has the power to change the way you think. Everyday faithfulness feels ordinary because it should be ordinary for the believer. It's expected, but it must be fed every single day to thrive. Faithfulness to Christ recognizes that the miracle of salvation continues in the miracle of sanctification. We are dependent upon God's grace for both.

As faithfulness blooms and grows in your life, it will become a way of life, and it will bring about deep joy that cannot be eclipsed by the ordinariness of your days. The culmination of individual days of faithfulness results in a lifetime of following Jesus and becoming like him. Following Jesus will *be* your life!

The Intersection of God's Sovereignty and Our Perseverance

Thankfully, the maturity of a steadfast heart that reflects the image of your Savior and clings to the truth doesn't weigh on only your shoulders. You've likely heard theologians, pastors, or church members debate the tension between God's sover-

eignty and man's responsibility. Hopefully, you've heard it debated kindly and with proper use of Scripture. When it comes to perseverance and faithfulness in the life of the believer, the same question looms large before us. Do we persevere or does God persevere us?

Well, *yes*. The apostle Paul encouraged the first-century Christians in Philippi, and us by extension, to obey the Lord and to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:12–13). I don't think Paul is speaking out of both sides of his mouth here. He's saying yes to both. We are commanded to work out our salvation, to persevere in the faith, to obey the commands of Christ *while recognizing* that it is God who works in us to do those things. Any desire to be holy, any inclination to obey, any hope anchored in him comes *from* him and is initiated by him. We obey God and credit him for our obedience.

When we repent and believe in order to be saved, we do so because God predestined us for salvation, called us, justified us, and will one day glorify us (see Rom. 8:30). When it comes to following Christ between justification and glorification (that long journey we call sanctification), we obey him *and* we acknowledge that he gives us the will and follow-through to obey. The Godhead is personally invested in your faithfulness! John Piper says:

If you are persevering in faith today, you owe it to the blood of Jesus. The Holy Spirit, who is working in you to preserve your faith, is honoring the purchase of Jesus. God the Spirit works in us what God the Son obtained for us. The Father planned it. Jesus bought it. The Spirit applies it—all of them infallibly.¹

1. John Piper. "Eternal Security Is a Community Project," Desiring God website, September 15, 2012, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/eternal-security-is-a-community-project—2/>.

Paul gives us the purpose of working out our salvation and recognizing God's work in it in Philippians 2:14–16: “Do all things without grumbling or disputing, *that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life.*” Here is the purpose in our everyday faithfulness: *to know him and to make him known.* Perhaps it seems a daunting endeavor to shine perpetually bright in a world dark with hostility toward the gospel and the people of God. But faithfulness leans into the world while keeping us from becoming like it. Holding firmly to the message of life every day ensures that we do not deviate from it.

Everyday faithfulness is a protection from reverting back to the life you lived before Jesus saved you, from abandoning faith in him when life takes a hard turn, from accepting a false gospel in a world of tantalizing but twisted versions of it. Reorienting our hearts to the truths of Scripture each day keeps us aligned with that purpose of knowing and making him known. Meeting with the body of Christ on a regular basis holds us accountable and encourages our faith. Individual and corporate spiritual disciplines are tools for knowing Christ better on a daily and weekly basis. These tools equip us to point others to Christ as well. Speaking the gospel message to our unbelieving friends and family requires that we live in a manner that upholds our claim that Jesus is worth our very lives. Faithful evangelism assumes we know well the one we are sharing with our lost neighbors and family members.

Yes, it's weighty to know that so much of our spiritual trajectory hangs on our perseverance. But this is where Paul's follow-up statement to his exhortation to “work out” is so glorious. It's *God* who is working in your perseverance! Paul uses

similar language in Colossians when he explains that presenting everyone mature in Christ is his goal. He says, “For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me” (Col. 1:29). Paul labored for the maturity of believers, but he did so with Christ’s energy that worked powerfully in him. Paul’s labor, Christ’s energy and power.

And here’s more good news to encourage you: God has promised to preserve those who are his, and he always keeps his promises. If you are working out your salvation with fear and trembling, then be comforted knowing you are not in any way doing it alone. He is working in you, enabling you to remain faithful. If you belong to him, no one can pluck you out of his hand (see John 10:27–29). You will persevere because he has purposed to finish the good work he began. “I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6).

If all of this is true, how do we “work out” our faithfulness when so many predators and distractions are out to thwart our perseverance? The suffering, hostility, and apathy we face on this fallen planet will require us to be vigilant in every season. There will never be a season of our sanctification when we will casually arrive at holiness. Following isn’t passive, and it isn’t drifting. Following Christ assumes action.

Follow Means Follow

Following Christ means *following* him. It means emulating him, learning to be like him, responding like he would, taking up his message and sharing it, obeying him, and expecting the world to respond to you in the way it responded to him. If you’ve read the Gospels closely, you know that following Jesus leads to some hard places in life. The New Testament writers paradoxically called it *blessing* to share in the sufferings of Christ. They

knew that intimacy with the Savior grows from clinging to him when life is unraveling at the seams. It thrives when we latch on to his promise to be faithful though our hearts ache with longing or our bodies pulse with pain. Nearness to Christ is joy when our days are bursting with busyness.

Suffering, waiting, fear, busyness, plodding in anonymity—these are not times to waste in apathy or wishful thinking about future sanctification. These are pressing opportunities to share in Christ's sufferings by clinging to him tightly. If we follow faithfully only when life is free of trouble, we will value only that trouble-free existence. But if we fasten ourselves to Christ when life is a sinking ship, then we learn to treasure him as our anchor. We discover that our faithfulness is tethered to his, especially during the troubling seasons of life.

When I look back at the last twenty years of my life, I see only a few stretches of what I'd call ease. If we spend only the tranquil days of our sanctification seeking Christ, then we will have long periods of life when we're not trusting him, knowing him, or making him known. And because this world is broken down with sin, your life might be marked by more long, hard winters than carefree springs.

We must be vigilant because our hearts will not casually become more holy while we sit around and do nothing to feed our faithfulness. My expectation to arrive at spiritual maturity someday was dangerous. D. A. Carson words it well:

People do not drift toward holiness. Apart from grace-driven effort, people do not gravitate toward godliness, prayer, obedience to Scripture, faith, and delight in the Lord. We drift toward compromise and call it tolerance; we drift toward disobedience and call it freedom; we drift toward superstition and call it faith. We cherish the indiscipline of lost self-control and call it relaxation; we slouch

toward prayerlessness and delude ourselves into thinking we have escaped legalism; we slide toward godlessness and convince ourselves we have been liberated.²

This side of heaven, we always struggle to grow in godliness and to feed our faithfulness. On the easiest days, our flesh will pull hard toward self-gratification, apathy, laziness, pleasure. All the more on the hard days. Everyday faithfulness requires vigilance. It takes discipline and cultivates patience. It requires a long-term plan because it requires commitment to a long view of sanctification. There will be no instant gains. But there will be joy and growth as daily perseverance yields a life of faithfulness to Jesus.

Each day that we persevere will bring us closer to the mind of Christ, nearer to reflecting his image. Even when we feel we've failed (because we will), when holding on to the truth in a hostile culture feels too hard, when we're spread too thin, when we wonder if steadfastness matters when no one is looking, we can still get up in the morning knowing that new mercies abound from the God who works in us as we press forward in everyday faithfulness. Our confidence is rooted in God's faithfulness, and our obedience is fed by Christ's example of it.

I don't want you to take this book as a call to "do more" or "be better." This is not a book about walking a straight line of discipline to earn God's favor. Because of Jesus's work at the cross, you already have his favor. Christ's righteousness has been credited to your account, there is no more condemnation for you, and you can rest securely in God's love for you (Rom. 8:1, 38-39). Instead, I want to encourage you through the following chapters to build habits into your life that will aid you in knowing and enjoying Christ now so you'll still be

2. D. A. Carson, *For the Love of God, Vol. 2: A Daily Companion for Discovering the Riches of God's Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 23.

knowing and enjoying him long after you put this book down. Growth doesn't come from rigidly following rules. Rather, it is a gift that God gives to those who have truly tasted his goodness (see 1 Pet. 2:2-3). In building your life around tasting his goodness, you'll be equipped to enjoy him no matter what demands and pressures of life press against your faith. With God's help, we'll follow him more tomorrow than we did today. This is everyday faithfulness.

Faithful Like Margaret

Margaret was born in 1927 and was saved at the age of ten when the church across the street from her one-room schoolhouse offered revival services after school. After hearing the gospel at one of those services, Margaret repented of her sins and believed in Christ. With little access to discipleship, Margaret struggled to grow in her faith until she was connected to a church family as a young adult.

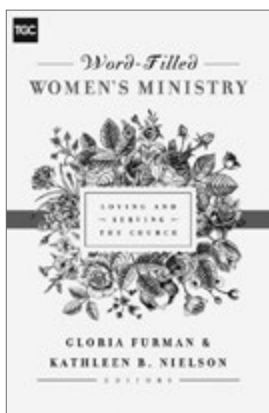
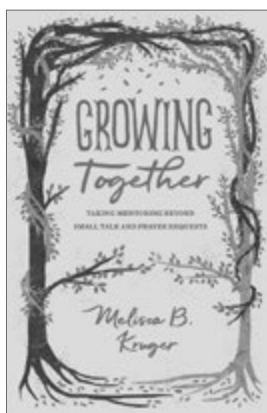
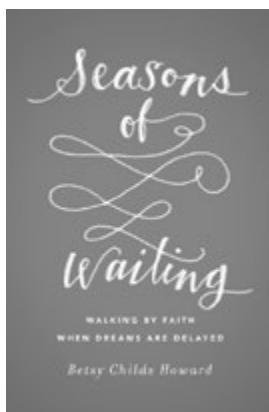
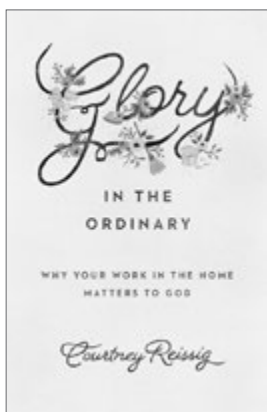
Margaret married, adopted a son after years of infertility, and then had a daughter. She grew in her faith in Christ as she learned to treasure the Bible, value church attendance, and commit to both personal prayer and times of prayer with various prayer partners over the years.

Though she has spent many of her adult years widowed and living alone, Margaret's life has been built around studying the Bible and sharing it with anyone who enters her home—whether that's a neighbor, a relative, or a repairman. Her passion for speaking of Christ is an overflow of a life submerged in the practices of everyday faithfulness. Decades of prayer and Bible study prepared her for trials late in life when she struggled with vision problems. As her vision waned, she worried about being unable to read her Bible. Yet all the years of nourishing her soul with the word meant that the scriptures were stored in her heart and mind.

Anyone who knows Margaret knows that she is committed to prayer every morning. Claiming the access she's been given to the Father through Jesus, Margaret

often remarks that she delights in “taking hold of the horns of the altar” when interceding for others. She has lived many long years in quiet faithfulness to Christ because his word, his church, and his presence have sustained her through every one.

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“WHETHER YOU’VE BEEN A CHRISTIAN FOR DAYS OR DECADES, THIS BOOK WILL EQUIP YOU TO PERSEVERE AND, IN THE PROCESS, FIND JOY.”

MEGAN HILL, author, *Praying Together* and *A Place to Belong*;
Editor, The Gospel Coalition

What does Christian faithfulness look like when life feels unpredictable, hard, or just plain ordinary? We want to follow Jesus, but it’s easy to become more focused on our present situation than on a long view of faithfulness. Working through the unique challenges that come with seasons of waiting, caretaking, suffering, worry, spiritual dryness, and more, *Everyday Faithfulness* delves into practical ways to build habits into everyday life that will aid in spiritual growth throughout a lifetime.

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GLENNA MARSHALL (BA, Union University) is a pastor’s wife and mother of two energetic sons. She is the author of *The Promise Is His Presence* and writes regularly at GlennaMarshall.com on biblical literacy, suffering, and the faithfulness of God. She is a member of Grace Bible Fellowship in Sikeston, Missouri.

WOMEN

