

'I'm Here Because I Love You Back'

Perhaps it's no coincidence that Thanksgiving and Chanukah are in the same season. Thanksgiving is a uniquely American holiday. Growing up and living in the U.S., it's part of the prism through which I still look at the world, even while living in the Judean mountains, raising my children here, and living God's promise to Abraham, as an orthodox Jew in the Land of Israel.

Americans know that Thanksgiving goes back to the early settlers of the United States as a time to be thankful for the bounty that God bestowed on them. Today, it's still a day for being thankful for what we have in our lives, the things that bless us. Chanukah is the celebration of a victory by the Maccabees over ancient Greeks, re-establishing Jewish autonomy in Israel, and the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem. These are miracles for which we are also grateful to God.

It's a special privilege to share some of the many wonderful things for which I am thankful in my life, particularly as it relates to my calling to be a bridge between Jews and Christians and to restore a breach of a relationship thousands of years old.

There are far too many individual experiences and people who are dear to me to list them all. So I have grouped these into four categories: Sharing, Prayer, Israel, Witnessing.

Sharing: Writing for *Charisma* and *Ministry Today* is an unparalleled honor. In addition to this, I have had the unique privilege of being invited to attend Christian conventions, pastors conferences, and appear on numerous TV and radio ministries, as well as speaking in churches across the U.S. As much as I get to share about my life in Israel and my

ministry, Heart to Heart, the blessings I receive from this are vastly greater.

Prayer: Jews and Christians are united by worshipping and exalting the one true God. I am impressed by how much of Christian worship and Scripture is so familiar, of course because Jesus was a Jew as were all the disciples. When Jews and Christians learn more about one another, including Christianity's roots in Judaism, we see so many things that we have in common. I have prayed with Christians, and been prayed over by Christians, experiencing God through fellowship, and mutually pouring out our hearts to Him. It's awesome having someone dig into the essence of our relationship.

Israel: Many things unite Jews and Christians, but the greatest is Israel. Once, I had the privilege of fellowshiping with a renowned pastor and asked him to share his testimony of sorts by asking the question, "How did you become such a great Christian Zionist leader and role model?" His answer was vivid. He was sitting at the kitchen table with his father the day Israel was born again as a nation, and his father said, "This proves that there is a God and He keeps His promises."

There are many reasons Christians support Israel. For Jews, it's our ancient home and modern refuge. A source of saving lives and living out prophecy. Yet, the unwavering support expressed by millions of Christians for Israel is a tremendous blessing.

Witnessing: Jews come into relationships with Christians with lots of baggage. For much of the past 2,000 years, people representing "the church" committed gross horrors against us. It's legitimate to be wary of strangers' intentions. Because I have deep relationships with so many Christians whose love is unconditional, I get to witness to fellow Jews that this is not the Inquisition, it is not the pogroms, it is not the Holocaust, but this is a genuine love. Many still don't get

it, but some do.

Because of the past, it's understandable that Jews would think twice about engaging with Christians, albeit those who represent a very different church than in the past. However, I believe we are seeing the prophecy of Isaiah 60:14: *"The children of your oppressors will come bowing before you; all who despise you will bow down at your feet and will call you the City of the LORD, Zion of the Holy One of Israel."*

I'm often asked why, as an Orthodox Jew, I would attend such events, speak to Christian audiences, visit churches, etc., or why I even care. I explain that when someone loves us unconditionally and embraces us wholeheartedly, my answer is to love and embrace them back. So if you see a Jewish guy with a *kippah* (head covering) and the back of a shirt that says, "I'm here because I love you back," it's probably me. Please come give me a hug.

Jonathan Feldstein *was born and educated in the U.S. and immigrated to Israel in 2004. He has been blessed by the calling to fellowship with Christian supporters of Israel and shares his experiences of living as an Orthodox Jew in Israel.*