

Whatever Happened to Faithfulness?

Two elderly missionaries inspired me this week to value character so I can finish well.

You've probably never heard of Hobert and Marguerite Howard. They didn't write best-selling books. They aren't rich. They don't preach on television or pastor a megachurch. Fame was the farthest thing from their minds when they both surrendered their lives to serve God on the mission field.

In 1951 this Pentecostal couple boarded a steamship and sailed for 50 days to India, where they built orphanages, schools and churches and trained Christian leaders. This week the Howards officially retired, and I had the privilege of attending a special reception to honor them for 60 years of service.

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I had to choke back a few tears as I listened to Hobert talk about the fruit of his labor. Many of the children he and his

wife cared for in their three orphanages are leading churches today. One boy, R.D. Murmu, was just 24 days old when the Howards took him in and raised him to love Jesus. Today R.D. oversees many churches in the north Indian region of Jharkhand.

Another orphan boy, Samuel Banerjee, from the Bihar region, was just six days old when he was brought to the Howards. They raised him in their orphanages and schools, and today he is the pastor of New Life Center in New Delhi.

The Howards also trained three little boys from the Balla family: Moses, Vijay and Sundar. Today they are all in ministry—Vijay is a missionary to Bangladesh, Sundar leads church-planting efforts in north India, and Moses is the overseer of all Pentecostal Holiness churches in his country.

Hobert says at least 30 of the children he and his team trained in their 12 schools are now in full-time ministry, reaching Asia with the gospel. When I asked him how it feels to leave such an enduring legacy, his wrinkled face beamed. “It’s more humbling than gratifying,” he said.

As these spiritual heroes shared their story with a crowd in North Carolina this week, I was struck by their remarkable faithfulness. Besides the fact that they’ve been married for more than 60 years

(some Americans view that as weird), they dedicated their lives to a spiritual cause and never gave up—in spite of huge financial challenges, pressures on their family and intense spiritual opposition.

They prayed, fasted, preached, waited, prayed some more, preached again and waited for years to see spiritual breakthroughs in a predominantly Hindu nation. They fought through discouragement time after time after time. They never gave up. They understood that faithfulness, as one preacher has said, is “the crowbar of God.” His promises will eventually open to those who don’t quit.

Faithfulness is such a rare commodity today that it has disappeared from our lexicon. So let me insert the dictionary definition: “Reliable; trusted; steady in allegiance or affection; loyal; constant.” In this day of quick divorce, loan defaults, addictive personalities, broken contracts, deadbeat dads and religious scandals, we’re surprised when somebody actually follows through and keeps their promises.

The Bible says faithfulness is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (see Gal. 5:22-23), yet even in the church we see failed marriages, unstable families and pastors with unreliable character. In our topsy-turvy charismatic world we downplay the need for faithful leaders and instead exalt pulpit entertainers who provide cheap spiritual thrills.

We think we can offset our lack of solid character with a big dose of Holy Ghost hoopla. But when faithfulness is missing, everybody can see our noisy show is a sham. Instead of being doctrinally reliable, we promote goofy, “flavor of the month” doctrines and lose credibility in the process. Instead of being steady in tough times, we are spineless and unstable. Instead of being loyal, we revel in our independence and flaunt our rebellion.

Early 20th century preacher Arthur W. Pink wrote this about faithfulness: “No matter how gifted a man may be, if he is untrue to this trust, he is an offense unto Christ and a stumbling block to His people.” He added: “It cost Joseph something to be faithful! It did Daniel; it did Paul; and it does every minister of Christ in this degenerate and adulterous age.”

Hobert and Marguerite Howard’s faithfulness—and their testimony of a faithful God who rewards obedience—inspired me to keep my hand on the plow and go the distance. I hope you will do the same.

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