



A 10-DAY DEVOTIONAL

UNSHAKEN

FOR UNCERTAIN TIMES

FAMILYLIFE®

DAY 1

When the Ground Shakes

The LORD is exalted, for he dwells on high; he will fill Zion with justice and righteousness, and he will be the stability of your times, abundance of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge; the fear of the LORD is Zion's treasure.

ISAIAH 33:5-6

Years ago our family of eight and some dear friends of ours with their two kids vacationed in a small condo on a bluff overlooking the Pacific Ocean in Southern California. It was a beautiful setting and a wonderful time for our families, but one night we were introduced to an experience that Southern Californians face regularly.

At 2 a.m. I awoke to a boom that made me think a truck had hit the building. Then I noticed that everything was shaking. Dennis and I jumped out of bed and hurried to the living room where all our children were sleeping on the floor in sleeping bags. The chandelier over the dining room table was swinging.

It was an earthquake—not very large, but very unsettling. We felt disoriented and confused. We wondered how long it would last and what we should do. The earth is supposed to be steady and solid, and now it wasn't.

When it finally stopped, we couldn't go back to sleep for hours because our fears had been awakened and our security threatened.

Unsettling Times

Does our experience describe what you have gone through emotionally recently? Many Americans have felt shaken by the coronavirus pandemic and ensuing economic fallout,

not to mention the racial conflict, mass shootings, and terrorist threats that have unfortunately become a normal part of life for us. Even the current political races have left us anxious, troubled, disoriented. We wonder what to do. We are afraid as the ground shakes beneath our feet.

Many followers of Christ feel just as unsettled over the unprecedented transformation in the moral climate of our culture. Views on human sexuality, especially, have changed so quickly that Christians are often labeled as bigots for holding to biblical standards.

We don't know how to act, what to say or not say. Inside your homes, many of you may be feeling disoriented and disheartened because of illness, hardships, failed relationships, or recent deaths of friends or family, like a friend of mine who just received a cancer diagnosis. Her world has just been shaken. Perhaps your world has been shaken, too.

The Stability of Our Times

In 2008, my Bible study group was going through Isaiah, and I came across a passage I had never noticed before. Isaiah 33:5-6:

The Lord is exalted, for he dwells on high; he will fill Zion with justice and righteousness, and he will be the stability of your times, abundance of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge; the fear of the Lord is Zion's treasure.

I was struck by that phrase in the middle: “and he will be the stability of your times...” At the time our country was experiencing an economic downturn. Everyone in America was feeling the impact.

When life feels insecure and unstable—not just in the world outside but also inside your family—remember that God is ultimately in control.

No matter what is happening around you or how unsteady the world feels, He is our sure and stable foundation. In many ways, America has been a pretty stable country for the last few decades. But it may not always be as we've known it.

When you feel the ground shift beneath your feet, it's good to remember that Jesus is our rock and our fortress.

He will be the stability of your times.

— BARBARA RAINEY

DAY 2

Six Truths to Remember in Troubled Times

Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable.

ISAIAH 40:28

Life will never be easy. I wish I could tell you something different, but we will always face problems and hardship.

That would be true even if our culture felt more stable than it does today, for the Scriptures promise us, “In the world you shall have tribulation.”

So how will we deal with loss, with grief, with fear, with suffering? How do we respond when things don’t go our way? And how do we teach our children to face the hardships of life?

Christians today need to know more about God, more about ourselves, and more about the mission God has given us. **Here are six things to remember:**

1. God is alive.

He has not disappeared. He is eternal, all-powerful and all-knowing, just as He has been from the beginning of time. As Isaiah 40:28 tells us, “... The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary ... “

2. If you know God, you have eternal life.

If you have placed your faith in Christ, your sins have been forgiven because of His sacrifice on the cross. You are a child of God, and as Romans 8:38-39 (NASB) tells us, “neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Those words bring comfort, courage, and stability in challenging times.

3. God has won the battle.

He has defeated death. History will culminate in Christ’s return. No matter what we experience in the world, we can find peace in Him. Jesus tells us, “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Remind one another of the true hope that Jesus Christ is coming back.

4. God is still in control.

He is not surprised by anything going on in the world, or in your life. He is the sovereign, omnipotent King of kings. Even in times of uncertainty and chaos, Romans 8:28 is still in force: “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”

So is 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, which tells us, “Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

5. God will provide your needs.

Especially in times of global health crisis and economic uncertainty, it’s easy to grow anxious about the most basic things, like whether we will keep our jobs, or whether our families will have enough to eat. But Jesus tells us we should not be worried about what we eat, or what we will wear:

“Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field,

how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?... But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

MATTHEW 6:26-33

6. God has given us good works to do.

Jesus' words also remind us that there is more to life than meeting our daily material needs. When we seek God's kingdom and His righteousness, we operate according to His priorities—we're concerned about building our family relationships, and connecting the hearts of our children to God's heart, and impacting future generations by proclaiming Christ.

We're concerned about God using us to reach and influence others with the gospel. That's what life is really about.

These are the timeless truths we need to focus on—the words we should read together as husband and wife, and the words we should be reading to our children. No matter what troubles we are experiencing in our world and in our families, He is in control. He will not abandon us. He will provide for us.

This may look different than you expect, but His promises have not expired in the 21st century.

— DENNIS RAINEY

DAY 3

That's Enough Bad News

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

PHILIPPIANS 4:8-9

Once upon a time we lived in an age of information overload. Through books, newspapers, magazines, radio, TV, and films, we had access to far more news, data, and knowledge than we could ever consume.

And then came a little thing called the internet ... Now we have email and podcasts and YouTube and blogs and tweets and social media and smartphones and apps. And however much we enjoy our digital access, we also should recognize that we now live in an age of information overindulgence and overkill.

It's also important to understand the role that information overkill plays in feeding our fears. Marketers, media managers, and politicians have long known that bad news sells. They want you to feel scared, and they want to convince you that your fears will be relieved if you vote for them or purchase their product.

What Does Your Mind Dwell On?

Philippians 4:8-9 exhorts us to think about whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and praiseworthy. If you often feel fearful about the cultural landscape, *part of the problem may be what you let your mind dwell on.*

Think about the news shows you watch. The television dramas and films. The books, articles, or blogs you read. The time you spend with social media.

And then ask yourself: Are these experiences making me negative or fearful? Are they drawing me closer to Christ and helping me mature in my faith? Am I trusting God and experiencing His peace and joy?

It's important to know what's going on in our world. You can't avoid negative news. It's a question of balance.

Let's Go to Work

After a significant stock-market crash in 1987, Little Rock financier W.R. "Witt" Stephens wrote a memo in which he encouraged his firm to avoid focusing too much on bad news. He recalled how his father reacted to reports they received:

When I was a boy on a small farm in Grant County, news wasn't as quickly available as it is today and reached us mainly by word of mouth. A "drummer" [traveling salesman] would come by or one of our neighbors returned from a trip to Little Rock or Memphis and we saw the news through their eyes. Mostly it was about what was bad in big cities or throughout the country. After listening a while, my father would say, "That's enough bad news for one day. Let's go to work."

At some point you may need to say, "That's enough bad news for today," and move on. Set your mind on something good. The more you think about the things of God, the more you will understand His perspective on whatever is happening in our world and in your life. And that will help you trust Him more.

— DAVE BOEHI

DAY 4

He Never Changes

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

HEBREWS 13:8

Day after day more news of tragedy fills our world. Often I choose not to read the news because I become depressed with so much sadness.

Hearing stories of terrorist atrocities, sexual slavery, prisoners unjustly incarcerated, I'm tempted to let despair and fear creep into my heart. Do you feel the same way?

We work to keep our anxiety suppressed and pretend it doesn't affect us. Yet underneath our confident exteriors, we still feel fear.

But fear is not what I want to rule my heart. I want God's truth to govern my heart and my focus. So here's one of those truths that I've been focusing on lately, in this time of instability: **God never changes.**

Our Help in Ages Past

Psalm 90 (KJV) begins, "Lord Thou has been our dwelling place in all generations ... even from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God." Inspired by these words, Isaac Watts wrote the enduring hymn, "O God, Our Help in Ages Past." These words remind us that our fears, though circumstantially different than his in ages past, are still the same:

*O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come.
Our shelter from the stormy blast, and our eternal home.
Under the shadow of Thy throne Thy saints have dwelt secure;
Sufficient is Thine arm alone, and our defense is sure.*

I'm so grateful for the words of this hymn, which often plays as background music in my mind, reminding me of His enduring, unshakable, eternal presence.

Who Will be With Us?

We all fear the loss of life, health, freedom, and peace. We fear the unknown future. But do you know who will be with us? Jesus, the one who is “the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). These words have been of comfort to me through my roller coaster experiences in life.

In my menopause years, when I felt crazy at times, I reminded myself: **He never changes.**

When I faced cancer a few years ago—when I felt so alone as I waited in sterile, cold hospital rooms for the next procedure or for more results—I reminded myself He was with me, because **He never changes.**

When I've faced heartache with children or family members, or challenges that seemed too difficult to face, I rely on Christ because **He never changes.**

When the next terrorist bomb explodes and my fears multiply yet again with the frightening aftermath, I will remember, **He never changes.**

He is my only hope for the years to come. He is my shelter from the stormy blast. He is and will be my eternal home. When the next storm shakes your life and world where will your hope be? **He never changes!**

— BARBARA RAINEY

DAY 5

The New Normal?

When I am afraid, I put my trust in you.

PSALM 56:3

There's no doubt that many feel like the world is turned upside down. Like we are facing a unique period of instability. So is it the new normal?

In one sense, you could say that the troubles we're seeing in our world are just a continuation of instability throughout history. There have always been wars, plagues, and disasters. Civilizations come and go.

A hundred years ago the world was in the midst of what it called "The Great War"—a conflict that cost millions of lives, swept away monarchies that had ruled Europe for hundreds of years, and sparked the triumph of communism in Russia. Just 20 years after, that we saw an even greater catastrophe with World War II.

Rapid Changes

In another sense, however, we are living in a culture that is changing rapidly on many levels—politically, economically, and morally. These changes have sometimes felt shocking in their speed and scope.

Says William J. Bennett, an author and former cabinet member under Ronald Reagan, "There have been so many changes in the culture that to many Americans, it's an unrecognizable country. It's a country where you have to watch everything you say, and you can't count on your kids having it better than you did, where the middle class doesn't prosper and things that were once honored aren't honored anymore."

Many of us feel the ground shifting in our personal lives. An unexpected divorce ... a sudden death ... a life-threatening surgery ... the unforeseen loss of a job ... these experiences leave us feeling that the world has changed, and we don't know how to cope.

Comfort in Scripture

Whatever your circumstances, it's encouraging to note that the Bible is full of comfort to those who are feeling anxiety, sorrow, and despair. The Psalms, for example, include many passages that encourage us to "fear not" and trust God in times of trouble: Psalm 118:6:

"The Lord is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?" Psalm 23:4: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me."

The Key to Life

The closer you are to God, the less you will fear. In his book *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis provides a helpful analogy: "God made us: invented us as a man invents an engine. A car is made to run on petrol, and it would not run properly on anything else. Now God designed the human machine to run on Himself. He Himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn, or the food our spirits were designed to feed on. There is no other. ... God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there."

Don't miss this, because it is the key to life: When you are feeling troubled and insecure, turn to God. Turn to His Word. He is your refuge. Your soul requires it.

— DENNIS RAINEY

DAY 6

Our Firm Foundation

Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.

MATTHEW 7:24 - 27

A few years ago, Japan was rocked by an offshore earthquake that measured 9.0 on the Richter scale and unleashed a powerful tsunami. Many of you watched news reports of water raging through Japanese villages—tossing boats and cars about like toys and uprooting buildings from their foundations in seconds.

Overnight, a prosperous nation was rocked to its core. As one reporter noted, “Torn up and terrified by a disaster that keeps on getting worse, Japan has transformed ... from one of the world’s most comfortable countries into one of its most distressed.”

True Stability

Disasters like this remind me of how powerless we are in life. We may think we are in control, but in reality we are far more fragile than we are willing to admit. Our lives are merely a blip in human history.

Our true hope and stability are found in God and His Word. According to 2 Corinthians 4:18, "... we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal."

Building on the Rock

In Matthew 7 we find the story about the wise man who built his house on the rock—a foundation of knowing and following God's Word. Floods and winds could not shake the home built on the rock.

However, "everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it" (verses 24-27).

This passage reminds us that the storms of life are inevitable. We cannot control or prevent them. But God provides a rock of stability and refuge.

We may not understand why the world has so much violence and injustice, or why the culture sometimes feels strange and hostile. We may not understand why God allows us to experience sorrow or hardship. But we can cling to the truth of His Word. And we can turn to Him for strength and wisdom.

Fear Not, I am With Thee . . .

I can't help but think of the classic hymn, "How Firm a Foundation." These are words every couple, every family, should take to heart:

*How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord, is laid for your faith in His excellent Word!
What more can He say than to you He hath said, to you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?
Fear not, I am with thee, oh, be not dismayed, for I am thy God, and will still give thee aid;
I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand, upheld by My gracious, omnipotent hand.
When through the deep waters I call thee to go, the rivers of sorrow shall not overflow;
For I will be with thee thy trouble to bless, and sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.
The soul that on Jesus doth lean for repose, I will not, I will not, desert to his foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake, I'll never, no never, no never forsake.*

I'm not sure I fully understand why, but those final lines touch me deeply every time I read or sing them. What a comfort it is to know and serve a God who loves us that much!

— DAVE BOEHI

DAY 7

Let Your Light Shine

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

MATTHEW 5:14-16

Because of the Oscar-winning film, *Chariots of Fire*, Eric Liddell is known by many today as the “runner who wouldn’t compete on Sunday.” A top sprinter for Scotland, he chose to stay out of the 100-meter competition at the 1924 Paris Olympics because the opening heats were held on the Sabbath.

Instead he ran the 400 meters, where he shocked the favored Americans by winning in a world-record time. What many people don’t know is what happened to Eric Liddell over the next two decades.

Born of missionary parents in China, he returned to that nation as a missionary himself in 1925. He served during a time of great instability for China—a civil war, a communist insurgence, and a bloody invasion by Japan in 1937.

In 1941, when British nationals were advised to leave the country, Liddell sent his wife and children to Canada but stayed behind. Eventually in 1943, he found himself in a Japanese internment camp.

"Be Still My Soul"

At the camp, Liddell stood out for his compassion, wisdom, and faith. He organized athletic

events and other community activities. He cared for the elderly and sick, led a Christian fellowship, and taught science to teenagers.

He was so respected that, when some wealthy prisoners arranged to purchase some food from the black market, he persuaded them to share it with everyone else.

He suffered from ill health and from the worsening effects of a brain tumor. His favorite hymn, “Be Still My Soul,” is especially meaningful when you consider his circumstances:

*Be still, my soul, the Lord is on thy side;
Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain;
Leave to thy God to order and provide;
In every change He faithful will remain
Be still, my soul, thy best, thy heavenly Friend
Through thorny ways leads to a joyful end.*

One teenager later wrote, “Often in the evening I would see him bent over a chessboard or a model boat, pouring all of himself into this effort to capture the imagination of these penned-up youths. He was overflowing with good humour and love for life, and with enthusiasm and charm. It is rare indeed that a person has the good fortune to meet a saint, but he came as close to it as anyone I have ever known.”

Liddell never saw freedom again, dying in the camp. But today people are still telling the story of a man who didn’t let the trials of life defeat him. Instead he turned the difficulties of his situation into an opportunity to reach others for Christ with the gospel.

Why We are Here

I love this story because it shows what happens when a man sees his troubles as an opportunity. Eric Liddell saw the needs around him and trusted God to use him to help others with the love of Christ. He embodied the words of Matthew 5:16: “... let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

We need to remember who we belong to and why we are here. Second Corinthians 5:20 tells us we are ambassadors for Christ. Have you considered that your best opportunities to fulfill this role—to represent Christ and His Kingdom—may come in times like these when so many need help and encouragement?

Consider this: If you are feeling troubled by the instability in our world, then many of the people you encounter each day are concerned and fearful as well. What makes you different is that you have a firm foundation in Christ. This is an opportunity for us to shine.

Unshaken

If we obey His words, then the Scriptures tell us we have built our home on the rock (Matthew 7:24-27). We will remain unshaken.

That in itself is a witness to the watching world that there is something different about Christians.

And if you then reach out to help others who struggle without that foundation, that makes you rare indeed.

These are fascinating days. What is God up to? And why would you want to be about anything else but what God is doing?

The Christian life was designed by God to be an exhilarating adventure with the Lord God Almighty ... what a privilege we have to experience His presence, love and forgiveness as we face uncertain days.

— DENNIS RAINEY

DAY 8

Don't be a Grasshopper

We became like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight.

NUMBERS 13:31, 33

I remember the first time I walked into the office of Bill Bright, the founder of Cru. As I looked on his desk and walls, I was fascinated to see what he valued.

Of course, there were pictures of his wife and family, awards he'd received, and mementos from around the world. But on his desk there was an engraved brass plate with the most unusual phrase I've ever seen in an executive office: *"I'm no grasshopper."*

I asked what it meant. Bill chuckled and started telling me the Old Testament story about the Israelites returning to their homeland after centuries of slavery in Egypt. Their leader, Moses, sent a dozen spies into the land of Canaan (Numbers 13). This land was inhabited by others but God said He would give it to the Israelites.

Too Strong?

Ten of the 12 came back reporting that it was impossible for the Israelites to conquer the land. "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are too strong for us," they said. "We became like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight" (Numbers 13:31,33).

Only two of the spies, Caleb and Joshua, said the land could be taken. Joshua said there would be nothing to fear because his trust was in the Lord. But the people would not listen. As a result, the Israelites did not attempt to conquer the land God said He was giving them, and they spent 40 years wandering around in the wilderness because of unbelief.

A Big God

After recounting this story, Bill turned to me and said, “Dennis, when I arrive in heaven, I don't want my life here on earth to have been characterized by viewing myself as a grasshopper. My God is so big, I want to expect and believe Him for great things.”

Our troubled times leave us with the same choice. Will we respond to bad news like grasshoppers, or will we respond with trust in our God, who is in control of our fate today just as He was in the days of Moses and Caleb and Joshua?

At the end of those 40 years in the wilderness, God finally instructed Joshua to take the Israelites into the land He had promised them. Note what God told them, knowing that they faced opposition that would seem impossible to defeat: “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:9).

By themselves, they had no power. They were grasshoppers. With God, they were conquerors.

— DENNIS RAINEY

DAY 9

A Simple Act of Kindness

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

EPHESIANS 2:10

In one of the qualifying heats for the women's 5000-meter race at the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, two runners got their feet tangled and fell hard to the track. That's not unusual.

But what happened next was extraordinary.

One of the runners, an American named Abbey D'Agostino, immediately jumped to her feet. Normally a runner in this situation would immediately begin chasing the other runners. But instead she noticed that the other runner, Nikki Hamblin from New Zealand, was still on the ground.

She went to Nikki and said, "Get up! We've got to finish the race! It's the Olympics!"

So the two runners took off together—until Abbey realized her knee was injured (she learned later she had torn her ACL and meniscus). She fell to the track again, and this time the New Zealand runner helped *her* up and urged her to keep going.

They both finished the race and hugged at the finish line. When Abbey's knee gave way again, Nikki called for medical help.

Abbey's Motivation

Their show of sportsmanship became one of the biggest stories of the Olympics. Abbey said she was amazed how people were affected by "a simple act of kindness."

It quickly became clear that Abbey's motivation was her strong faith in Christ. A week before going to Rio she talked about her hardships that year, recovering from injuries: "God has taken me on an unparalleled journey. I feel like I have learned so much through this spring—there have been a lot of ups and downs. But I would not have been able to learn any of the lessons and I would never have reached such a familiarity and understanding of Christ without the way that's it's happened."

She told people that she wanted Christ to be first in her life, that she hoped her experience in Rio "is a reflection of that." Well, that certainly came true, but in a way she could not have expected.

Abbey was often asked why she helped Nicki get to her feet. In a statement to the media she said, "Although my actions were instinctual at that moment, the only way I can and have rationalized it is that God prepared my heart to respond that way. This whole time here He's made clear to me that my experience in Rio was going to be about more than my race performance—and as soon as Nikki got up I knew that was it."

Now to Him Who is Able

When asked how she ran the final mile with such a serious injury to her knee, she said she "prayed" her way to the finish line.

Before the race she wrote on her hand, "Now to Him who is able." That's the beginning of Ephesians 3:20-21: "Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen."

Another verse in Ephesians tells us that we are God's workmanship, "created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." You could say that all her growth in Christ helped prepare Abbey for those few seconds when she turned to help a fellow runner.

In what could have been her greatest calamity, Abbey took her eyes off herself and allowed God to work through her. And then God used it to influence people around the world.

Makes you wonder what works God is preparing you for ... even in times of calamity.

— DAVE BOEHI

DAY 10

Helping Your Children Put Their Trust in Christ

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

DEUTERONOMY 6:4-9

One of the biggest challenges parents face is knowing how to transfer their faith to their children. Because we have learned how challenging life can be, we want our kids to know how to depend on Christ as their rock in hard times, whether it's on the battlefield of the school playground or on a real battlefield one day.

Years ago I read a story about a family who lived a comfortable, peaceful life in a happy community. Unexpected national events in their country changed everything for this mom and dad and their two daughters, 11 and 8.

In the months leading up to the beginning of World War I, life changed dramatically for Elizabeth, 11, and her Armenian family living in Turkey, the land of their ancestors. Raised by parents who followed Christ and taught the truths of Scripture, Elizabeth's world began to implode in April 1915 when her father was arrested and beaten by Turkish soldiers, who accused him of crimes he did not commit.

He was offered sanctuary if he renounced Christ and gave allegiance to Mohammad, but he refused. After he was arrested a second time, Elizabeth searched for him and found him badly beaten. On her knees, with her face near his, she heard him say, "Never give up Christ no matter how much suffering might come. Christ died for us. We can be as brave in His name."

That was the last time Elizabeth saw her father. She fled with her mother and sister to another city, where they found work as servants. Elizabeth's employers began to pressure her to deny Christ, but her mother told her, "Remember your father's example."

Then she admitted, "My own time for facing that question has come. I was told today that all Armenian adults must acknowledge Mohammed or be exiled."

Her mother began crying and continued, "I cannot give up Christ no matter how much you girls will need me. I cannot give Him up. I know that He will watch over you both." The next day she was taken away, along with hundreds of other Armenians. Elizabeth and her sister were now orphans.

Can you imagine the pain that Elizabeth's parents felt when they talked to her for the last time? They desperately wanted to protect their children, to keep them from suffering. But they knew they could not renounce their Savior. So they did the very best thing—they put her hand in the hand of Jesus. By faith.

God did rescue the two girls and kept them safe through the end of the war. They eventually emigrated to the United States.

Could I Trust God?

When I first read this story, all of my children were safely in my nest. I wondered if I had the faith to act as these parents did. Could I trust God to take care of my children if He took me or both Dennis and me to heaven? Did I believe His sovereignty and goodness would be unchanging if He allowed them to go through something harmful or painful?

What most of us face today is nothing like the instability in Turkey a hundred years ago. But the answer is still the same. Jesus Christ is still on His throne, and He can still be trusted to take care of us—no matter what that looks like. That's what we need to teach our children so they can put their faith in Christ and trust Him in everything.

If our kids are anxious and fearful, they're probably picking it up from us. And if you want them to be full of faith, they need to pick that up from you, too.

So that's the question for moms and dads. Do you really believe God is big enough? Followers of Christ today stand on the same rock that believers have trusted for over 2,000 years. No matter what is happening in the world, that rock is Jesus Christ.

Teaching Your Children

So how do you pass this truth on to your children, so they will rely on this same solid foundation as they grow into adulthood?

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 was a consistent source of guidance for Dennis and me as we raised our children. It begins with a statement that Jesus later identified as the "greatest commandment": "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."

This is what you need to teach your children, and it should be a way of life—not something you restrict to Sunday school or family devotions. God's Word should be "on your heart"—something that is so central to your existence that you can't help but talk about it to your children. In the daily circumstances of life, you will find many opportunities to tell your children about God, about His Son Jesus Christ, and about what He did for us.

Point Them to Christ

As they grow older, initiate conversations with your children when they encounter the normal troubles kids face in life: difficulties at school, with friends or unfair adults, with bullies. These are great times to point them to Christ and teach them how to trust God. They will encounter trouble, and if you don't teach them how to handle it, you're setting them up for great disappointment.

Give your kids permission to articulate what they're feeling and experiencing. The family needs to be a safe place to express their disappointments and fears.

Those are great moments for you to love them, affirm them, and help them make wise choices. And in times of cultural instability, you can act as a "spiritual commentator" of sorts—talking through current issues and help them see a biblical perspective.

I think that's our calling as parents, to model a faith that is authentic and strong and rooted in the rock, and that's what our children will notice, and will follow that. We have to remember to model that in what we say and what we do, because our kids are paying attention.

— BARBARA RAINEY