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*Faith Enough to Finish*

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CHAPTER ONE

# FAITH IN GOD'S FAITHFULNESS



## GOD IS GOD ENOUGH

Because of the Lord's great love we  
are not consumed, for his compassions  
never fail. They are new every morning;  
great is your faithfulness.

LAMENTATIONS 3:22-23

THE YEAR WAS 2000, AND I HAD ARRIVED AT THE AGE WHERE publishers were asking me to write books about the empty nest—what I would do differently as I looked back over a “long” life of ministry or what grandmothering has taught me!

I acknowledged the fact that I most certainly was looking back on more than I was looking forward to, but I still caught myself thinking, *When I grow up, I want to be \_\_\_\_\_*. Stuart shared the same wonder at our ages. Each birthday my husband would wake up and say something like, “How can someone as young as I am be as old as this?” He was seventy and I was sixty-five when God called us out of the pastorate as surely as he had called us in. It was November 12, 2000, and we were just about to start a whole new chapter of our ministry lives. After spending thirty years at Elmbrook Church, we were about to be commissioned as ministers-at-large and sent around the world on a new assignment.

“They must be crazy; they’re workaholics; they can’t let go,” a few whisperers whispered. But all of our family and most of our friends, intercessors, and colleagues—and significantly, our beloved church family—were sweetly and thoroughly excited for us. For this we were humbly grateful. This was a new calling, you see. And those who had loved and supported us for three decades entered

into a sweet sense of partnership with us. This was a new day and a new way of making full proof of our ministry. This moment started a new age on a new page of eternal history. My main concern is that we have faith enough to finish whatever chapters are left in the book of our lives—and to finish well—so that when God finally closes the book, others will be glad they have read it.

It was no coincidence that I was studying, teaching, and writing this book about the prophet Jeremiah and his friend Baruch at the time. We have little in common with this man, of course. We have not lived at the lowest point of our nation's history, offered babies as living sacrifices in our church, or known what it's like to have the most powerful nations on earth sack our city. Nor have we had the incredible personal trials and troubles this lover of God faced (though we have had our moments!).

We also know nothing about the punishing nonresponse to over forty years of preaching and prophesying that Jeremiah experienced. Instead, we have been blessed with generous and gratifying comments from those to whom and with whom we have ministered. But we do have the main thing in common with the weeping prophet, and that is the main thing! We share a common goal and the same intense desire to fulfill our primary calling to a relationship with God and our secondary calling to the task he has in mind for us—whatever the odds.

Married in 1958, Stuart and I are lifelong partners, together in heart and focus, united in body, soul, and mind. By the grace of God, we sleep at night as forgiven sinners. We are, at the end of the day, simply and only Jesus lovers and glory givers. We love each other irrevocably; we love our children and their spouses and our children's children until it hurts; we love Jesus to distraction. We are ever conscious of the fact that we've only just begun to plumb the depths of all of these great loves of our lives.

There is breadth, depth, and height to both God's mercy and grace in allowing us borrowed hours to go deeper and higher with God than we have ever been before. We have committed what's left of our numbered years to the ride.

And what has Jeremiah had to say to us two excited and thankful people at this point in our lives? Actually, God's words to me through his prophet have come from the prophet's lamentations! It may seem a little on the strange side to be finding my inspiration from the book of Lamentations. This choice of text, however, should surprise no one who knows me. My dear friends well know that I love a good lamentation! In fact, some of them might be tempted to think Jill Briscoe must believe that "a lament a day keeps the devil away!"

But first and foremost, I have been reminded through Jeremiah that God is God enough! That his loving-kindness never fails. That his mercies are new every morning, and great is his faithfulness! The context of the incredible words in Lamentations 3:22-23 is the lowest point of Jeremiah's life and ministry. He is watching the rape of Jerusalem and the end of all his wildest dreams. Yet he is saying to all of us, "God is God enough!"

"But Jill," you may say, "God is God enough for what?"

And I answer, "Not for *what* but rather for *whom*!" That one is easy to answer: God is God enough for Jill Briscoe. Stuart and I can reaffirm, as we did on November 12, 2000, that God has been, is, and will be all that we need him to be when we need him to be all that we need! Whatever and wherever we are at any given moment of any given day, God is God enough! Morning by morning his mercy, love, and grace are ours.

And who better than God to know what we need? After all, he knew us before we knew us! And he chose us before we ever came to be. Because God has never had a thought he hasn't always had, we have always been heavy on his mind. Do you know how overwhelmingly grateful I am for that? God said to Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart" (Jeremiah 1:5). God called Jeremiah first and foremost to himself.

I know also that I am shaped by the same heavenly Potter who shaped Jeremiah's life. I am hand painted with the colors of my culture. If you search for the trademark, you will find "Made in England" indelibly written somewhere on this woman's soul. The

English girl who lives inside this body thanks God for a wonderful English sister, red buses, high tea, roses, and a heritage of Churchill, the battle of Britain, Beatrix Potter, C. S. Lewis, Cambridge, Wordsworth, and his hosts of golden daffodils. I've been a long time away from my homeland, but then Jesus understands. It's just a few years shy of the years he spent away from his homeland (heaven) for me.

Like Jeremiah, I have not only been created, called, commissioned, and sent to another culture, but also God has shown me the work he had for me to do. What mercy; what grace! God put his plan in my life, his work in my hands, and his words in my mouth. He said to me as he said to Jeremiah, "I have put my words in your mouth" (Jeremiah 1:9) and added, "Tell them everything I command you; do not omit a word" (Jeremiah 26:2). And now it seems that he is saying it again!

Like Jeremiah, I have so often said, "I cannot do it. I cannot speak, I am a child." Many years ago I even wrote a book about my struggles in this regard called *Here am I; Send Aaron!* My excuses have been a little different from the excuses Moses or Jeremiah gave. In those days I would use the "I'm too young" excuse. A little later, I tried the "I'm too married" excuse, the "I'm too woman" excuse, and the "I'm too middle-aged" excuse. Lately, as you can imagine, I've been very tempted to voice the "I'm too tired" excuse and, of course, the "I'm too old" excuse!

But God has said to me in the depths of my soul, "*I am God enough!* I am God enough for all of your excuses!" And he has told me, as he told his prophet, to just do it and go on doing it until he tells me to stop. He has told me to do it for him and to do it with fire in my bones. So day by day by day I have told him what he already knows: I'll do it, and do it again and again in his daily strength and power because I love him.

There's quite enough mercy, quite enough compassion, and quite enough loving-kindness to go around. God is God enough, God is kind enough, God is good enough, and above all, God is love

enough for the whole wide world. That includes you, me, and everybody else!

The faith God will give us to finish is the same faith he gave us to start this incredible adventure, this laughing life, this miracle of moments that has been touched with the Spirit's fragrance like wet grass shining after rain. He will turn laments into laughter and sorrow into shouts of triumph. You'll see, for he never changes, and great indeed is his faithfulness!