

Let's Go Deeper
Wednesday, May 31, 2017
David Shirey

Twenty years ago this past Memorial Day weekend, I witnessed a miracle.

Many years ago, the late pastor and preacher John Claypool suffered the loss of his youngest daughter. In recalling those anguished days, Claypool made a reference to **Isaiah 40**:

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.
He gives power to the faint,
and strengthens the powerless.
Even youths will faint and be weary,
and the young will fall exhausted;
but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength,
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
they shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not faint.

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~ The Fresh Quotes ~

There are times, Claypool remarked, when God's Spirit affects us in such a way that we are able to soar "**with wings like eagles.**" And, he continued, there are moments when we are so energized and enthused by a powerful sense of God's presence that we feel like we really could run and "**not be weary.**"

However, Claypool adds, there are times in the course of our lives when it is a miracle that we are merely able to "**walk and not faint.**" That he survived the months of excruciating grief he experienced over his daughter's death he counts as a case in point. There was no soaring and running, just the ability to make his way step by painful step through one day and then another without fainting. That he was able to do so Claypool counted as a miracle of God.

He's right. We've been led to believe miracles are eagle-soaring spectacles to the point that we fail to notice some of the humbler, but no less wondrous of God's doings—those of the walk-without-fainting variety.

As I went through my prayer list on Monday morning, I was mindful of a number of the names on my list who are "walking without fainting." I'll not name names out of respect for confidentiality, but these are people whose circumstances—acute grief, chronic pain, 'round the clock caring for a loved one, daily grappling with unrelenting uncertainty, guilt, or regret—would render lesser souls utterly paralyzed, sour-faced cynical, and irretrievably bitter. Yet to my wonderment, they get up each morning, get dressed, and proceed through the day doing what they must with grace and dignity. They walk without fainting.

Charles was a member of the church Jennie and I served in North Carolina two decades ago. He was on the Search Committee that called me to First Christian, making a case to the committee that they ought to give a 29-year-old a chance to serve a church whose challenges were beyond his lived experience. An elder, I looked up to him for his wisdom and encouragement. His courage, too.

During the course of my decade there, Charles was diagnosed with Parkinson's. As the disease progressed, it tested Charles' body, will, and spirit, making even the simplest things difficult. Sleeping. Dressing. Eating.

He labored to fulfill his responsibilities as an elder. Ascending the three chancel steps to the communion table became more and more difficult. Handling the communion elements became precarious. Some Sundays in the latter season of his struggle, he would tell another elder before the service began that he simply could not make it to the altar that day. The steps. The stairs. The holding of the bread and cup. His spirit was willing, but his flesh was weakened by the disease that had no regard for his dignity or desire. On those Sundays, there was no soaring on eagles' wings, nor running, nor even walking.

In the months of his decline, Charles shared with me his one desire: that he be able to walk down the aisle arm-in-arm with his daughter on the day of her wedding. As he shared his hope, his wife Nancy, sitting beside him, shook her head in loving admiration and aching doubt. She hoped, too, but doubted. In private, she and I and their daughter discussed a Plan B if Charles could not walk on that Saturday. He, meanwhile, persisted in hoping that he would be able to walk to the altar.

He did. He walked. Thanks be to God, Charles walked down the aisle without fainting. He walked sure and stately. With his head up, his shoulders back, his arm extended to his side so as to escort his daughter, face fierce with pride and radiant with joy, he did what he and we prayed he would be able to do.

Standing at the head of the aisle that Saturday of Memorial Day weekend, I witnessed that miracle of God. He didn't fly. He didn't run. But he did walk all the way to the altar where he and his daughter, her husband-to-be, the wedding party and I, stood together before Almighty God.

Charles provided me a sight that day that caused my soul to mount up on wings like eagles. And he taught me that our intercessory prayers can take many forms. It's entirely appropriate to implore God to impart to others the ability to soar and run. Sure. Go ahead. With God all things are possible. But thanks to Charles, my petitions for some of you, given the circumstances under which you labor, are simply that you continue to be able to walk the walk of faith day in and day out.

That so many of you do is something I notice and for which I give thanks to God.