

## KEEPING THE FAITH

By John F. Hall

There is a sad wind of change, according to a study by Pew Research, that while “grandparents might have been regular churchgoers, their children would say they believe



in God, but not go to church regularly. By the time millennials came around, they had little experience or relationship with churchgoing or religion. In 2017, Life Research surveyed young adults aged between 18 and 22 who had attended church regularly, for at least a year during high school. The survey results showed seven out of ten had stopped attending church regularly. One of the reasons given was, that as people moved away from college or started a new job, that made it difficult to attend church.” What I see, at the little church that I attend, supports the Life Research. Sometimes, I think that my stories,

that I mail to my young adult readers, are about as close to church that they receive. Catherine Pulsifer wrote the poem, “My Faith Grows Deeper.” These are her words: “O Lord, my faith in You grows deeper; as I marvel at each miracle of life. Your divine grace and power so great; stronger faith comes as You give and take. Blessings that come with such appreciation; love, joy and peace untold declaration. Your mighty hand works with our frail; I offer heartfelt praise and worship to avail.”

Don Goodman and Becky Hobbs wrote the song, “Angels Among Us.” Several years ago, I had serious skin cancer on my forehead, that had gotten down to my skull. Thanks to the surgical skills of Dr. Natalie Curcio, I survived. One day, I told her that she saved my life. She nonchalantly replied, “I know.” I told her that she was my “angel.” These are some of Don Goodman's and Becky Hobbs' lyrics: “I was walking home from school on a cold winter day; took a shortcut through the woods, and I lost my way. It was getting late, and I was scared and alone. But then a kind old man took my hand and led me home. My mama couldn't see him, oh, but he was standing there, and I knew in my heart, he was the answer to my prayers. Oh, I believe there are angels among us sent down from somewhere up above. They come to you and me in our darkest hours, to show us how to live, to teach us how to give, to guide us with the light of love. When life held troubled times and had me down on my knees, there's always been someone to come and comfort me. A kind word from a stranger to lend a helping hand; a phone call from a friend just to say I understand. But ain't it kind of funny at the dark end of the road, that someone lights the way with just a single ray of hope. They wear so many faces, show up in the strangest places, to grace us with their mercy in our time of need. Oh, I believe there are angels among us, sent down from somewhere up above...”

This is Memorial Day. My thoughts and prayers go out to my former “Band of Brothers” in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon, B Company, 327<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division, that died in Vietnam in 1966. I was once, a teenage paratrooper, and an M-60 machine gunner, in that platoon.

There was another time, in 1990 when the skin cancer, on my back, might have killed me. I had been mobilized on Fort Knox and was assigned to the Division Headquarters. Because I had completed a two-week Mobilization and Deployment course, at Fort Sam Houston, in Texas, I was assigned as the Liaison Officer. My duty was to authorize mobilized Army Reserve and National Guard units to come onto Fort Knox, when barracks and food service facilities became available. Once the unit completed weapons qualification and other requirements, I would hand-carry the certification for deployment, signed by the unit commander, to the Assistant Division Commander, for his signature. I would follow the unit, as they traveled to the airport in Louisville, and watch as they boarded the commercial planes, that would fly the soldiers to Iraq. One day, after working for 20 straight hours, I drove over to the Army hospital, to have an Army doctor look at a suspicious spot on my back.

My wife, Paula was concerned about that spot on my back. I went into the hospital emergency room and asked the Army doctor, on duty, to exam my back. He told me to take off my shirt and my tee shirt. He looked at my back and then he told me a story. There was another soldier that had a similar spot on his back. His wife had been after him for six months to have it checked out by an Army doctor. By the time the soldier came to him, it was too late. The melanoma skin cancer had spread, and that soldier died six months later. The Army doctor told me to lay face down on a table. He put some kind of disinfection and pain killer all around the spot on my back. He then picked up a scalpel and cut out a deep section. He stitched it up and told me not to take a shower for a few days. The pain hit me later that night. I had to give a daily briefing to the Division Commander and, it was hard to mask the pain.

I know that keeping the faith in Christ, at times is not easy. If I did not receive His grace and His inspiration, I would not have been able to continue writing stories. Society does not expect a writer, like me, at my age, to be productive at all. Joe Henry, Matt Rollins, and Tom Douglas wrote the song, "Faith In You." These are their lyrics: "I don't have faith in technology, even though we created it. All this stuff just breaks down anyway, and you never get it fixed. But I do have faith in You. I don't have faith in politics, but I do believe in the will of the people. I don't know much about big time religion, but I believe in the cross on the steeple. And I do have faith in You. And after all this time the lie becomes the truth. We traded in our innocence and sacrificed our youth. But You gave me Your love, the one thing I can't lose. You believe in me, and I still have faith in You. The more I search for my significance, the more I disappear. And I wonder, have I made a difference in anybody's life since I have been here. And I can hear Your laughter it's the sweetest sound I've ever known. I don't know how love happens, but I know I'm not alone. And I do have faith in You. And after all this time sometimes I see the truth, and I'm touched by Your innocence and now I'm not confused. You give me Your love, the love I can't lose. You believe in me, and I still have faith in...I do have faith in You."

The Army's Criminal Investigation Division (CID) had a unit on Fort Knox during Operation Desert Storm. I was notified that the CID unit pulled out of Fort Knox, over night, lock, stock, and barrel, without notifying Division Headquarters. At the daily briefing, the Division Commander turned to me, and demanded to know why the CID

unit pulled out from Fort Knox, without notifying him. I told the Division Commander that the CID unit on Fort Knox is under a separate higher headquarters, and they don't report to him. He was not happy hearing that bit of news. The CID's Headquarters is located at the Marine Corps Base Quantico, in Virginia. The following week, my wife, Paula and my son, John drove up to Fort Knox for my promotion ceremony. In the Division Headquarters, I was promoted to the rank of Major. Paula pinned the new rank on my formal uniform.

For the past three years, I have tried to mentor the young adults in my life. I use lyrics from hymns and songs, and poems and short pieces to enhance what I write. Charles Clevenger wrote, "A Test of Faith." These are his words: "Sometimes God examines our faith, though He knows our every whim. And though we may be unworthy, our faults and failings - we trust to Him. When black clouds of gloom surround me, and follow wherever I go, it is then I look toward Heaven...Where God hears my prayers -- I know. Perhaps God sends us tribulations to test the faith we profess. To endure the trials and travail of life, we must be steadfast in the faith we confess. The months of Winter can be long and cold, when clouds of gray hang on for days. Remember, though, to count your blessings...Keep the faith - and give God the praise. Life's highs and lows can be testing; to keep the faith, we must be strong. God, in His goodness, will see us through; we are His children...to Him we belong."

Stories have always interested people. Christ used stories to convey His message. It is because I have done so many different things, that I am able to write so many nonfiction stories, that others find to be interesting. I call myself the "door keeper" at the small church that I attend. On Sunday mornings I will drive to the Church, and get a key to open a side door to the church. Once inside, I turn on all the interior church lights. I get another key and I unlock the main church door. No one else arrives for about a half hour. The main church door is metal and heavy glass. I will pull up a chair, sit, and watch as the cars come onto the church parking lot. I will then open the church door for the people coming into the Church. I greet and welcome them. Once all the-congregation is inside, I will continue to serve as an usher.

I will end this story with the words of Edna Massimilla: "Because of faith, God grants us power, hope and peace through every hour. Because of faith, we now can live life abundantly. The world was helpless...with no way to escape, until that day when Jesus came to save each soul...He came to heal and make us whole. Because of faith, we do believe life eternal we shall receive. Because of faith, our lives now glow, and we want the world to know...that on the cross we've been forgiven, and we'll have our place in Heaven. Because of faith, Jesus' love we claim...We praise God's holy, precious Name."

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