

Debbie and I had been hanging together quite a while when this took place. We had dated long enough to know that we were in love. We have even started to visit about getting married.

That was when we took a really big step. I just didn't know it at the time.

One of Debbie's sisters went into the hospital in Stevens Point with an ailment. Debbie asked me if I would be interested in going to visit her sister with her in Steven's Point. I said, "Of course I will go with you."

So we both made arrangements to travel up to Steven's Point from Southern Wisconsin. As we were driving, we had a terrific visit on a beautiful day. When we got closer to Steven's Point, I noticed that Debbie became more and more nervous. I thought that was odd and even somewhat interesting.

We were about three miles away from our exit into Steven's Point and she turned and looked at me, very nervous and said, "Please, oh please don't judge me by my family."

I gave a little laugh and told her not to worry about it. Everything was going to be just fine.

She went on to explain to me that her family really likes to make people laugh. They even like to put people on the spot and surprise them, just to see how they react. She warned me that one of her brothers likes to dress up and he might come to the hospital room looking kind of funny. Again, I just tried to reassure her.

We made it to the hospital room. I visited with her sister. I met several of her brothers (who were all dressed normally), I met another sister. The conversation seemed normal. The meeting went well. Afterward many of us decided to go out for lunch.

It was Debbie and me. It was one of her brothers and one of her sisters. We made it to the restaurant. We ordered our food. Then Debbie got up and went to the bathroom. She was gone from

the table for a short time when her sister looked at me and said, "Okay. I want to know. What are your intentions toward my sister?"

I let out a loud laugh in order to stall and started to panic. I found myself thinking, how do I respond? What is she looking for?

What are your intentions? Debbie's sister asked this of me, because she was being an older sister, wondering who on earth I was. She asked this of me, because she really wanted to know, would I be good to Debbie. What are your intentions?

What are your intentions? At some level, the author of this Psalm is wondering that about the people of his day. He is wondering do you really want to be faithful? Do you know how to be faithful? Are you willing to do what it takes to be faithful?

The author of this Psalm wanted to find a way to challenge the people of his day and of every generation to live more faithful. He does so by asking God a question. Who may worship you? Who may enter your presence? *In essence he is asking what does it really mean to be faithful today?*

Then he answers the question. Faithfulness is about doing what is right. It is about speaking honestly, speaking sincerely. Faithfulness is about choosing to do no harm to others. Faithfulness is about not speaking behind others backs. Faithfulness is about keeping promises, even when it might hurt us. He ends this passage by saying, "those who do these things will stand firm forever."

I love that. Are you willing to be faithful? What are your intentions?

Living faithfully doesn't mean that we will never experience bad things or tough things. The reality is that sometimes we let other people down. Sometimes others hurt us and let us down. The challenge is to remember that just because someone else has let us down, that doesn't mean God has let us down.

Living faithfully is all about building the practices into our life that allow us to connect with God on a regular basis, so that when we are tempted to do unhealthy behaviors, we can turn to God, or we can turn to a support group or our small group, and get the courage we need to lean on God and face the challenges.

For when we can connect with God and trust in God, then we can discover the big and little ways God comes to support us. Recently I was sent a great story about faithfulness that touched my heart and I want to share it with you.

A mom wrote, "Our 14 year old dog, Abbey, died last month. The day after she died, my 4 year old daughter Meredith was crying and talking about how much she missed Abbey. She asked if we could write a letter to God so that when Abbey got to heaven, God would recognize her. I told her that I thought we could so she dictated these words:

*Dear God,*

*Will you please take care of my dog? She died yesterday and is with you in heaven. I miss her very much. I am happy that you let me have her as my dog even though she got sick. I hope you will play with her. She likes to play with balls and to swim. I am sending a picture of her so when you see her you will know that she is my dog. I really miss her.*

*Love, Meredith.*

We put the letter in an envelope with a picture of Abbey and Meredith and addressed it to God/Heaven. We put our return address on it. Then Meredith pasted several stamps on the front of the envelope because she said it would take lots of stamps to get the letter all the way to heaven. That afternoon she dropped it into the letter box at the post office. A few days later, she asked if God had gotten the letter yet. I told her that I thought He had.

Yesterday, there was a package wrapped in gold paper on our front porch addressed, "To Meredith" in an unfamiliar hand. Meredith opened it.

Inside was a book by Mr. Rogers called, "When a Pet Dies." Taped to the inside front cover was the letter we had written to God in its opened envelope. On the opposite page was the picture of Abbey & Meredith and this note:

*Dear Meredith,*

*Abbey arrived safely in heaven. Having the picture was a big help. I recognized Abbey right away. Abbey isn't sick anymore. Her spirit is here with me just like it stays in your heart. Abbey loved being your dog. Since we don't need our bodies in heaven, I don't have any pockets to keep your picture in, so I am sending it back to you in this little book for you to keep and have something to remember Abbey by.*

*Thank you for the beautiful letter and thank your mother for helping you write it and sending it to me. What a wonderful mother you have. I picked her especially for you. I send my blessings every day and remember that I love you very much. By the way, I am wherever there is love.*

*Love, God*

I love that story. Whoever responded to that little girl touched her, with the hand of God, to reassure her and let her now that she isn't forgotten. That is what living faithfully does. It helps us and others to know that God does not, will not leave us.

So I ask you, what are your intentions? Are you willing to live faithfully?

May God help us examine our intentions, so we can live faithfully.

Amen