

WHY DID THIS HAPPEN TO ME?

Ray Pritchard

This PDF file contains copyrighted material.
Use of this file for any purpose other than viewing
on the Harvest House website is strictly prohibited.



HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS

EUGENE, OREGON

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by the International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

Verses marked kjv are taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

Verses marked nasb are taken from the New American Standard Bible®, © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org)

Author photo © 2002, Lee Balgemann Photographics

Cover design by Koechel Peterson & Associates, Inc., Minneapolis, Minnesota

WHY DID THIS HAPPEN TO ME?

Formerly titled *The God You Can Trust*

Copyright © 2003 by Ray Pritchard

Published by Harvest House Publishers

Eugene, Oregon 97402

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Pritchard, Ray, 1952–

[God you can trust]

Why did this happen to me? / Ray Pritchard.

p. cm.

Originally published: The God you can trust. Eugene, Or. : Harvest House Publishers, c2003.

ISBN-13: 978-0-7369-1699-8 (pbk.)

ISBN-10: 0-7369-1699-7

1. Trust in God. I. Title.

BV4637.P757 2006

248.8'6—dc22

2005019198

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, digital, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America

05 06 07 08 09 10 11 12 / DPS-MS / 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

Whom Can We Trust?	7
1. The Lord Who Is Faithful	11
2. His Faithfulness in Every Circumstance	27
3. His Faithfulness to the Suffering	43
4. His Faithfulness to the Defeated	59
5. His Faithfulness to the Sick	75
6. His Faithfulness to the Fearful	93
7. His Faithfulness to the Fallen	105
8. His Faithfulness to the Doubting	121
9. His Faithfulness to the Dying	133
10. His Faithfulness to Finish His Work in You	153
11. His Faithfulness to Every Generation	169
Giving In, Giving Up, or Giving Thanks	187

CHAPTER I

The Lord Who Is Faithful



The call came while I was getting ready to go to work. I must have been in another room because I didn't hear the phone ring, so the caller left a message on our answering machine. When I listened to the message, I heard a man's voice say that their 12-day-old baby had died during the night. Would I come to the hospital and pray with them?

A few minutes later I pulled into the hospital parking lot and the thought came to me that there is no greater tragedy than the death of a child. I wondered as I waited for the elevator what I would say when I finally saw the parents. A nurse met me and took me to a small room. When I walked in, I saw the mother and father sitting together, holding the body of their infant son. He had died a few hours earlier.

The medical story was quite simple. He had been born almost five months early, weighing less than a pound and a half. The doctors had told the parents early on that despite their best efforts, and some amazingly advanced technology, there was only a slim chance for survival. Little Christopher hung on for 12 days, fighting through one crisis after another. Finally, his little body could fight no longer.

Although I stayed with the parents for over an hour, most of that time is a blur in my mind. I remember the father saying that his son had long skinny legs just like his. The mother wept as she held her baby and repeated, “Why did this happen?” Near the end of my visit, I held my hand under the baby’s head and thought about all the dreams and all the prayers that had been invested in him. Now he was gone almost before he arrived. “God must have a reason,” the mother said. “He has a reason, doesn’t He?”

As I am writing these words, I just paused and looked up from my computer and thought to myself, *This is the hardest moment*. I have been a pastor for over 25 years, and in that time I have been privileged to walk with multitudes of people through some very dark moments of life. And I want you to know that I do not use the word *privileged* lightly. Like most pastors, no two of my days are exactly alike. Some days are spent studying the Bible, others seem to disappear in an unending series of meetings and phone calls and a blizzard of church trivia that is hard to remember, much less to explain. But there are moments when every pastor deals with what you might call Ultimate Reality—the real stuff of life and death, of joy and sorrow, of gain and loss, those moments when we all learn once again that time is but the nursery of eternity.

That day in that cramped hospital room, sitting next to grieving parents who held their dead baby in their hands, was one of those moments when I remember why I became a pastor in the first place. And yet it is also the hardest moment of all. When tragedy strikes, the question always comes sooner or later: Why did this happen? Why would God allow it? Why didn’t God stop it? I will say simply and honestly that I do not always have what seems a sufficient answer to that question. Not that I do not have an answer, or that my answer is untrue. I simply mean that the answer I give is the one that Christians have given for 2000 years. It

is good and true and biblical. It's just that in the moment that the question is uttered, the answer does not always seem sufficient. But, then, what answer *would* be sufficient when you hold your child, your firstborn, in your hands and realize that he did not live long enough to open his eyes?

I do not believe in easy answers to hard questions. Easy answers may get us off the hook in the short run, but precisely because they are “easy,” they often hurt more in the long run. Over the years I have discovered that there are answers that will give us strength to go on, and there is abundant hope to be found in the Word of God. I hope to share some of those answers with you in the pages that follow. And, as you'll discover, I don't mind saying, “I don't know” when I really don't know. When I told those parents that I didn't know why their child died, I meant it quite literally. I know there are various medical explanations that provide some perspective regarding premature birth. But as to why God allowed that to happen to this particular baby, that is a mystery that, as far as I can tell, is completely hidden from us. We can speculate, and perhaps our speculations will provide some comfort, but as the years pass, I find a growing sense of comfort in admitting that there are some things (many things, really) that we simply cannot fully explain.

God and Change

The flip side of that truth is just as important. After a quarter century as a pastor, there are some things that I believe more fervently now than when I started in the ministry. Foremost among them is the faithfulness of God. *By that I mean that I believe in a God who cares for His people and who always keeps His word.* When I was a teenager in Alabama, I spent a week at a Methodist church camp. This was during the revolutionary days of the 1960s when the

talk was of LSD, the Beatles, hippies, the Vietnam War, and protests in the streets. No one had heard of fax machines, virtual reality, or compact discs. Even though I was too young to understand it all, I remember feeling that this was the most exciting time in history to be alive. Of that long-forgotten week, I remember only the theme: “God and Change.” It was a fitting slogan for the psychedelic age, the message being that only two things are constant: God (who never changes) and change (which is always with us). More than 30 years later, that statement seems entirely true. In a fickle, ever-changing world, only God never changes. He alone is entirely faithful, all the time. Consider the following verses from the Bible:

He passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness...” (Exodus 34:6).

Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands (Deuteronomy 7:9).

This is what the LORD says—the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel—to him who was despised and abhorred by the nation, to the servant of rulers: “Kings will see you and rise up, princes will see and bow down, because of the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you” (Isaiah 49:7).

The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it (1 Thessalonians 5:24).

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful (Hebrews 10:23).

Let's isolate the key phrases:

“Abounding in love and faithfulness”

“He is the faithful God”

“The LORD, who is faithful”

“The one who calls you is faithful”

“He who promised is faithful”

The Ever-Faithful God

Many other Bible verses can be added to this list to bring home the point that God is faithful.

But is it true? An old friend from another time and another place sent me a message. The last several years have been difficult for him because of problems with a wayward child. He wrote to say that the child will soon be sentenced to serve time in a juvenile detention facility. Then he wrote, “God has been ever faithful to us and her through this period of ‘the spirit of Cain’ (irrational and total rebellion). Perhaps she will yet become like the prodigal in repenting.” Here is a man who has discovered—and is daily learning anew—the truth that God is faithful even in the midst of a heartbreaking family crisis.

Not long ago my friend Bruce Thorn called from his home in Sheffield, Alabama. During our conversation he mentioned that God had been speaking to his heart on a certain subject. He had asked several other friends about it, and they confirmed it to him. The message was this: *God is challenging His people to trust Him.* In a world where every day brings new revelations of chaos and moral confusion, we need to ask ourselves if we really trust God. It's one thing to say, “I trust in the Lord” when the sun is shining and all the bills are

paid. It's something else to trust Him when the dark clouds settle round us and the bill collectors are at the door.

Whom or what can we trust? *We live in an era of planned obsolescence.* We buy a car knowing that it will last a handful of years. We buy new clothes knowing they won't last more than a year or two. It's worse with computers. Several years ago I purchased a whiz-bang, superfast computer from an Internet auction house. I bought it knowing that technological advances would quickly make it obsolete. Today I use it only with great reluctance because my "superfast" computer is now a dinosaur, a relic from the past, like the Edsels in a Memorial Day parade.

Add to that the uncertainty of life. Companies downsize. Bosses say, "Let's talk about your future because it's not here." Friends move away, marriages dissolve, children leave home, and our health doesn't last forever. Friends and loved ones pass away. And we live in fear of cancer or a sudden heart attack.

In this world of ceaseless change, God is the only constant. As Moses declared, "He is the faithful God." That's an important word for today. The Marine Corps motto is *Semper Fidelis* (or shortened to *Semper Fi*)—Always faithful. But how many people do you know who do exactly what they say? Before you answer, let me rephrase the question. How many people do you know who do exactly what they say every single time? Let me rephrase it again. How many people do you know who do exactly what they say every single time and do it with such thoroughness and perfection that you never have to worry about anything they say or do? Again, before you answer, let me ask it this way: *How many people do you know who, no matter what the circumstances and no matter how they feel, will always do exactly what they say every single time and do it with such thoroughness and perfection that you never have to worry about anything they say or do because you know if they say it, they will definitely do it without fail, without change, and without excuse?*

The answer to any question depends on how you ask it. Most of us probably think we know some people who do exactly what they say. That is, we all know some reliable people who seem very dependable to us. But in the end, the question is not about reliable or very dependable people. *It's really not about people at all because no person could meet all the qualifications of the last question, which is really about God.* He alone is 100 percent faithful 100 percent of the time.

A World of Broken Promises

We live in a world of broken promises. Leaders pledge peace and secretly make plans for a war. Marriages end over trivial disputes. And presidents wag their finger and say, "I didn't," knowing full well that they did. I happened to catch a few minutes of a national radio talk show where the host discussed several prominent celebrities whose personal hypocrisies have been exposed. He then asked a penetrating question: "Is there anyone out there who is what he claims to be?" If you're looking in this world, the answer is no. But if you look outside this world, you discover that God is what He claims to be.

- God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind; does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill? (Numbers 23:19).
- ...the only true God (John 17:3).
- God...is faithful (1 Corinthians 1:9).
- God is faithful (1 Corinthians 10:13).
- He is faithful (1 John 1:9).
- ...him who is true (1 John 5:20).

When taken together, these verses establish that God's faithfulness is not some minor or secondary part of God's character. *To say that God is faithful goes to the core of who God really is.* He keeps His word because if He didn't, He wouldn't be God! We could multiply similar verses in every direction because all that God does rests on His faithfulness and every blessing we receive comes because He is faithful to keep His promises to us. If God were not faithful, we could not be saved, would not dare to pray, would have no sure hope for the future, and would go down in death in desperate fear wondering if God will keep His promises. But we can live in faith and die in hope precisely because our God is faithful.

Because God is faithful, there are three certainties we can lean upon at all times.

Every Word He Says Is True

The Bible contains several words for *truth*. One of the most important is the Hebrew word *emet*, which means "stability, firmness, or certainty." We get the English word *amen* from the Hebrew *emet*. Every time we say, "Amen," we are really saying, "It is certain" or, "Yes, it is absolutely true." Therefore, to say "God is true" is the same as saying "God is faithful." Here's a simple definition: *God's faithfulness means that because He is the truth, everything He says and does is certain.* That means He is 100 percent reliable 100 percent of the time. In the words of Lewis Sperry Chafer: "He not only advances and confirms that which is true, but in faithfulness abides by his promises, and executes every threat or warning he has made." He says what He means and means what He says and therefore does everything He says He will do. He does not fail, forget, falter, or vacillate. If He says it, He means it, and you can stake your life upon it.

And where will we find the true words of God? In the Bible. God has given us an entire book filled with His words. If that be so, then our job is to read that book. Study it. Memorize it. Learn it. Build our life upon it. We are to love God's Word to the point that His words flow through us like the blood that flows through our veins. God says, "Amen" over every word He speaks. This means that we can trust the entire Bible because it all comes from God. Whether we read in Genesis or Joshua or 2 Kings or Ezra or Lamentations or Luke or Galatians or 2 Thessalonians or 3 John or Revelation, we can trust what we read because God is the ultimate author and every word He speaks is true.

Several years ago, as the twentieth century wound to a close and the twenty-first century was dawning, I wondered to myself what our congregation could do to properly celebrate the beginning of a new millennium. It would not do to call this a once-in-a-lifetime event. It would be more like once-in-40-lifetimes. None of us were around when the calendar changed from 999 to 1000, and none of us would be around a thousand years hence to mark the change from the year 2999 to 3000. So how exactly should we celebrate such an unusual event? After some deliberation, we decided to have a Bible reading marathon. For the last 90 hours of 1999, hundreds of people, from little children to senior citizens, joined in the public reading of the Bible from the pulpit in our sanctuary, from the first verse of Genesis 1 to the last verse of Revelation 22. We started at 6:00 A.M. on December 28, 1999, and continued around the clock until midnight, December 31. This was an unbroken reading of God's Word from beginning to end with no stopping at all. No music, no prayer times, no testimonies, no sermons, no stops for personal commentary, no stops for any reason. One person after another read the Word of God. When one person finished, another continued. We read through Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and we eventually read through 2 Kings,

Job, Isaiah, Daniel, and Zechariah. As I recall, it took us over two days of reading to reach the New Testament. On we went, in 15-minute segments, reading Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, and the epistles of Paul. The reading continued morning, noon, and night. Audience size varied from two or three to 30 or 40 or more. As we neared the end on New Year's Eve, hundreds of people came to listen to the reading of the book of Revelation. A large clock next to the pulpit counted down the hours, minutes, and seconds. When we finally reached midnight, we were at the last few verses of Revelation 22. When we finished, the choir sang "The Hallelujah Chorus" from Handel's *Messiah*. The Millennium 2000 Bible Reading Marathon was covered by radio and television and by Chicago newspapers and by the *Boston Globe*.

The reporters kept asking why we would do something like this. We told them we did it to proclaim our confidence that God's Word is true and that every part of it deserved to be read and believed as we entered a new millennium. We wanted the world to know that the same message that has carried the church for 2000 years will take us into the future. Looking back, that 90 hours we spent reading the Bible seems like one of the most significant things our church has ever done. It reminded us all over again that because God is faithful, His Word can be trusted. It's all true, every part of it, from first to last.

Here is a second certainty connected to God's faithfulness...

Every Promise Will Be Kept

Because God is faithful, He keeps every promise He makes. Have you taken the time to trace God's promises through the Bible? If you haven't, I recommend that you begin underlining every promise you find. When did God make the promise? To whom was it given? What were the

conditions? How was it fulfilled? How does it apply to us today? There are thousands of promises covering every situation we face—including salvation, the forgiveness of sin, prayer, marriage, children, disappointment, insecurity, and a whole host of other issues. Second Corinthians 1:20 says that “no matter how many promises God has made, they are ‘Yes’ in Christ. And so through him the ‘Amen’ is spoken by us to the glory of God.” Eugene Peterson (*The Message*) translates the first phrase this way: “Whatever God has promised gets stamped with the Yes of Jesus.” When God the Father makes a promise, God the Son says from heaven, “Yes, it is so.” God the Holy Spirit writes the promise in the Word and then applies that Word to our hearts. Thus, all three Persons of the Godhead unite in bringing God’s promises to us. That’s why when we read a promise of God, we can truly say, “Amen.” If God has said it, we can count on it.

Many years ago I came across this powerful summary statement in Joshua 21:43-45:

The LORD gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give their forefathers, and they took possession of it and settled there. The LORD gave them rest on every side, just as he had sworn to their forefathers. Not one of their enemies withstood them; the LORD handed all their enemies over to them. Not one of all the LORD’s good promises to the house of Israel failed; every one was fulfilled.

What a grand statement that is! If we go back and read Joshua carefully, we see how God kept His promises:

- Not quickly* (it took seven years)
- Not without a struggle* (there were many battles)
- Not without some failure along the way* (such as the sin of Achan in Joshua 7)

—*Not without some loss of life* (many soldiers died in various battles)

But what God said, He did. No one could have known in advance how it would happen. But it did. In the end, the Israelites were totally victorious.

Gladys Aylward served as a missionary in China before World War II. When the Japanese army invaded northern China, she was forced to flee Yangcheng, taking with her 100 orphans. As she led the orphans into the mountains, she despaired of ever making it to safety. After a sleepless night, she was reminded by a 13-year-old girl of the story of Moses and the parting of the Red Sea. “‘But I am not Moses,’ she replied. ‘Of course you aren’t,’ the girl said, ‘but Jehovah is still God.’” Is that not a word for today? No matter what mountains may loom before us, God is still God, and we can trust in Him.

Do you feel squeezed by your circumstances? Dwell much on the promises of God. Read the promises. Write them down. Put them where you can see them in the morning when you wake up. Put them on the dashboard of your car. Tell them to your friends. Most of all, repeat the promises of God to the Lord when you pray. Stand on God’s promises—and do not let yourself be moved.

Every Trial Has a Purpose

Nothing happens by chance to the children of God. I have observed that when hard times come, we tend to think that God has forgotten about us or that what has happened is a mistake or has no purpose. And I have seen that God’s people can endure almost anything if they know there is a reason for it.

Consider these four truths from Scripture:

1. *He knows what I am going through*—“He knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold” (Job 23:10).
2. *He uses my trials to help me grow*—“We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us” (Romans 5:3-4).
3. *He calls me to rejoice in my pain*—“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything” (James 1:2-4).
4. *He invites me to submit to my faithful Creator*—“Those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good” (1 Peter 4:19).

A small boy was flying a kite high in the sky when it drifted into a cloud bank and disappeared from view. A passerby asked the little boy what he was doing. “I’m flying my kite,” the child responded. The man, looking up and seeing only the cloud bank, said, “I don’t see any kite. How do you know it’s still there?” “I don’t see it either,” replied the boy, “but I know it’s up there because every once in a while there’s a tug on my string.”

Many Christians feel God has disappeared just when they need Him most. Take heart, child of God. Just because you can’t see Him doesn’t mean He is not there. Keep holding on

to the Lord. He is faithful even when you cannot feel His presence. Hang on, and sooner or later you will feel the “tug on the line” that lets you know He is still there.

The Challenge for Us

I received a letter from a prisoner who had read my book *What a Christian Believes*. He received a free copy through Prison Fellowship and wrote to say thanks. Here is part of his letter:

Hello, Sir! My name is Brandon and I am currently in prison in Arizona. I have just finished reading your book for the first time about 2½ hours ago. Your book has moved me greatly towards picking up the Bible once again.

I was raised a Catholic, went to St. Francis of Assisi from first to eighth grade. But as I grew older I lost my way down the road and I am so far lost I don't even know how many miles I will have to back-track just to find the spot where I detoured at, then start down the proper path again.

I do not know if I can pick a favorite chapter but I will say that I plan on reading “Did Mickey Mantle Go to Heaven?” over and over because not only do I like what it says, but I need to read it more times than one just to remind me what I am supposed to believe about the forgiveness of sins.

That is an extremely hard part of my faith to remember. Shoot, just the faith part is hard for me, Mr. Pritchard.

He signed his letter, “Searching for Christ.” I believe he is not far from the kingdom. Being in prison is not an easy thing, but it can be good if your prison time leads you to salvation. And I smiled when I read that the “faith part” is hard for him. There are times when the “faith part” is hard for all of us.

How faithful is God? He is so faithful that anyone who seeks Him can find Him. Faith is a gift, but even a gift must be opened to be enjoyed. As we exercise our faith, we begin to discover more and more about God’s purpose in our trials. Our challenge is to trust when we cannot see and to hold on to the rope of faith until we feel the tug from heaven that tells us He is there.