

In his story-telling style, Ronnie McBrayer reminds us that faith is not something written on paper, recited from memory, or owned and managed by the church. Faith is the pursuit of Christ, finding in him the only thing worth keeping.

Keeping the Faith; Passages, Proverbs, Parables

**Buy The Complete Version of This Book at
Booklocker.com:**

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/3642.html?s=pdf>

Keeping the Faith

passages ◦ proverbs ◦ parables

Copyright © 2008 Ronnie McBrayer

ISBN 978-1-60145-611-3

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, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

Printed in the United States of America.

A Leaving Salem Book Project (www.LeavingSalem.net)
2008

Cover Art by Michael and Laura Granberry

Keeping the Faith

passages ° proverbs ° parables

Ronnie McBrayer

Table of Contents

Preface	xi
PASSAGES	1
Of Fog And Faith	3
I Haven't Moved	6
"Judy Burgers" And Hope	9
I Wonder About Your Wonder Bread	12
Baseball And Baptists	15
Fences.....	18
Promises Kept	21
The Monastery Master Mix.....	24
Get Out Of The Way	27
Old Man River	30
Holiday Heresy	33
WHY?	36
One Hell Of A Sermon.....	39
Summer	42
Homesick	45
Can You Hear Me Now?.....	48
For Charles.....	51
Is There Any Hope?	55
The Will And Won't Of God.....	58
Fools And Drunks	61
PROVERBS	65
Some Assembly Required.....	67
What Do I Turn Now?.....	70
Strike Three, Surdykowski, Strike Three.....	73
Warning: This Is Controversial.....	77
The Gospel According To Rwanda.....	80
McDonaldization.....	83
Sprinkles.....	86
My Jesus Is Better Than Your Jesus	89

Ronnie McBrayer

Which Path To Peace?	92
God @#%!	95
Babushka.....	98
Have A Coke And A Smile!	101
The Hazards of Gallbladders And Glove Boxes.....	104
Crashing Computers, Crashing Faith.....	107
Up The Hill Again... And Again... And Again... ..	110
<i>Ite Missa Est</i>	113
Unwrapped.....	116
Low Food Or No Food.....	119
Of Jackrabbits And Jethro.....	122
Bad Juju	125
PARABLES.....	129
Catch The Wave.....	131
He Who Must Not Be Named.....	134
Jump.....	138
Color Blind.....	141
Spinning My Wheels.....	144
<i>Sancta Ignorantia</i>	147
If Only Speedy Had Been More... Speedy.....	150
Red, Red Wine.....	153
This Is Just Like Church	156
Please Talk To Me!	159
Take A Mulligan.....	162
This Is Going To Be Good.....	165
The Wheels On The Bus.....	168
All You Can Do Is All You Can Do.....	171
Ode To Barley.....	174
The Preacher	177
My Last \$5	180
Who Will Roll Away The Stone?	183
Blue Bomber	186
God Is In The Goulash.....	189
About The Author.....	193

Ronnie McBrayer

Summer

Ten years ago Melinda Mayton was sitting in a small Bible study. As part of the study a question was circulated through the group: What would you do if you were given a million dollars?

That's a great question. Customary answers from the group followed. "I would pay off all my bills," one said. "I would buy my mother and father a new house," another chimed in. "My family and I would travel the world," still another offered. When the question made its way to Melinda she answered, "I would take children with cancer to the beach."

At the time Melinda was an oncology nurse at a children's hospital in Atlanta, Georgia. Every day she saw the overwhelming impact on these children and their families who were grappling with a cancer diagnosis. It was more than physical. Fighting the good fight against disease threatened to tear these families apart. In Melinda's mind, a week of retreat might just do the trick for these precious souls. Let the family recharge their batteries. Let mom and dad rediscover one another. Let the siblings of a sick child get caught up on some parental attention – all while enjoying the beauty of sand, sun, and ocean.

Melinda dreamed of giving parents and children a week without hospital visits, without chemo treatments, without needle sticks and without the financial, emotional, and spiritual exhaustion of

Keeping the Faith

fighting cancer. She didn't let the lack of a million dollars stop her. Leaving her successful career in medicine Melinda founded the Lighthouse Family Retreat. Since 1999 she, with a committed group of volunteers, has provided week-long respites for some 500 children with cancer and their families.

Recently I participated in one of these retreats at Seaside, Florida. There were a dozen or so sets of moms and dads and their kids. The children were at all different stages of sickness and recovery. Some were newly diagnosed. Others were cancer free and had been so for months. It was a beautifully diverse group.

In the group was a coltish little girl named Summer. Summer is a ten-year-old from Dublin, Georgia, with the spirit and tenacity of a championship prize fighter. She has a difficult prognosis but you would not know it if you met her.

While at the beach Summer wanted to be baptized. I was honored to lend a hand. She and I stepped into the warm Gulf of Mexico early one morning, surrounded by her family, the participants in the week of retreat, and even a few strangers out for their morning walk.

"I baptize you, my sister, in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit," I invoked as I dipped her perfectly bald head under the water. She emerged with a million dollar smile to the cheers of the scores gathered on the beach. It was one of the more awesome things in which I have ever participated.

Ronnie McBrayer

We are tempted to wipe the tears from our eyes and say, “What a nice thing to do because time is running out for this child.” But I disagree. Summer’s decision was not the decision of one who is dying. Rather, this was a decision of faith and hope, a decision made by someone very much alive. A person doesn’t make a commitment to follow Christ without believing she will be there to keep up her end of the deal. She believes in this Christ who calls her to himself; a Christ who can and will do incredible things in her life – because she will let him.

A sporadic blessing. A once-in-a-while epiphany. A blue moon movement of God. That is what most of us are living on. But God wants us to experience so much more. He wants us to experience what “eye has not seen, what ear has not heard, what imagination cannot contain.” And we will experience this kind of life, if only we believe and follow. Like Melinda. Like Summer.

I do not know what the future holds for Summer, no more than I do for you or me. But I wish her life. I wish her wellness. I pray that she have many years on this earth living out her faith. Still, even if her time is short, her faith is great. And that faith has made her alive – more alive than many of us ever will be.

Addendum: In the time that this world had her, Summer taught us much. She is now alive and well in the presence of God.

Homesick

This past summer friends of mine sent their eight-year-old daughter to camp. This camp was a primitive affair with lodges, sleeping bags, and creatures of the night. Conspicuously absent were all the comforts of home. Air conditioning, television, soft mattresses, beloved pets, video games, fast-food: Not here. This was the roughing-it world of swarming bugs, cold showers, drill-instructor-camp-counselors, and homesickness. Terrible homesickness.

My friends' nostalgic daughter mailed home a letter worthy of comparison to "Greetings from Camp Hiawatha." It did not begin with, "Hello Mother, hello Father..." No, she cut to the chase: "I wish I was home with you."

The letter, a mere two dozen words, made inquiry about her pet cat and best friend and eloquently concluded, "These tents are hotter than hell at night." Now there's a child longing for home.

Aren't we all longing for home?

The Teacher of the Old Testament wrote, God "has planted eternity in the human heart" (Ecclesiastes 3:11). Inside each of us the Creator has placed a sort of homing device. The coordinates are preprogrammed. Our destination – called heaven or nirvana or swarga or paradise – is a return to the God who made us, for only there are our souls truly at home.

Ronnie McBrayer

The extraordinary conclusion of the Christian Scriptures is the apocalyptic book of Revelation. While much of the book is perplexing, not all of it is so. Revelation 21 paints a beautiful picture of the future heavens and earth. It is a place where there will be no more tears, no more death, no more crying or pain. There will be no more cold camp showers, no more miserable sleepless nights, no more homesickness.

The earth and heaven will be re-created, made new, made as one. The universe will be washed clean of all that is wrong with it. And it will be a place that we will call home with the God who made us. The writer of the book of Revelation does not invent this scene or these words. Largely he is quoting the Jewish prophets of the Old Testament who a millennia before prophesied the same thing.

The prophets envisioned a world where everything – everything – that is now wrong will be made right. It will be made the way God first made things, when he looked out on his creation and said, “This is very good.” This good world that we will call home will have no more kids with cancer. There will be no more looting of the earth’s resources. There will be no more broken relationships or failures to forgive. There will be no more government corruption or religious hypocrites.

I will rejoice over the demise of all funeral homes and hospitals. I will celebrate the closure of all courts and police forces. I will cheer with you as the doors are locked on all soup kitchens, all

Keeping the Faith

psychiatrists' offices, all environmental protection agencies, and all military installations. Why will such organizations go out of business? Because their services will no longer be needed: Everything will be put back into place.

Of course this all sounds well and good: Perfection, justice, wholeness, a brave new world, all this waiting on some far away horizon. But isn't this a bit like trying to explain the joys of college and career to a kindergartner? Isn't this like telling an eight-year-old that she can survive two weeks of camp without electricity? Relief and home are so far away. Isn't this little more than a teasing mirage in the distance? No, it is not.

If I believe anything at all, I believe this promise of God: That while the world certainly appears to be one long, hellacious night, the cool of morning is coming. Like campers sweating it out in the darkness, we are waiting for the new creation of God to dawn.

Yet, we are not merely marking time. We live with the hope of eternity always before us. We live, no matter the sufferings or injustices we face, knowing that we are just passing through on our journey, aliens and strangers in a strange land. Somehow, all of creation – the heavens and the earth, human beings, all that is – is in process. It is moving toward the destination of renewal and redemption. It is moving toward home, a home where everything will be as it should.

In his story-telling style, Ronnie McBrayer reminds us that faith is not something written on paper, recited from memory, or owned and managed by the church. Faith is the pursuit of Christ, finding in him the only thing worth keeping.

Keeping the Faith; Passages, Proverbs, Parables

**Buy The Complete Version of This Book at
Booklocker.com:**

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/3642.html?s=pdf>