

**FROM ONESELF TO GOD**

**18<sup>th</sup> January 2026**

**(2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany)**

**READINGS<sup>1</sup>**

**Isaiah 49:1-7**

**Psalm 40:1-11**

**1 Corinthians 1:1-9.**

**REFLECTION (Rev. Toby Keva)**

Last week, my youngest son, Arka, asked me to put him to bed. Now, with his eczema, it would take at least half an hour to an hour before he sleeps—and I still had other things to do.

So, initially, I refused, asking him to go to bed instead with his mum. But he knew me all too well. He knew that I would, eventually, relent. So, he simply lying on the carpet in the living room, waiting for me to return to him to pick him up.

And, he was ... right! I eventually returned to him, picked him up, and spent the next hour trying to help him sleep!

Sometimes I wonder what is it actually that compels me to keep meeting his needs, even when I'm feeling almost completely exhausted? The answer may sound rather like a cliché, but it is forever true. The reason is love. In the end of the day, my love for him will always triumph over my frustration and exhaustion. He knows this, and he often uses it to get what he wants!

The people of Israel has words for this kind of love; the kind of love that their God also often shows to them as God's children.

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<sup>1</sup> New Revised Standard Version Updated of the Bible.

The first word is the word, *khesed* (חסֵד) which is often translated into English as “steadfast love”. God’s love is indeed not only occasional; God loves us loyally.

The second word is *aman* (כָּמֵן), which is often translated as *faithfulness*.

We can see both these words in our reading from the book of Psalm:

“I have not concealed your *steadfast love* and your *faithfulness*  
from the great congregation.”

(Psalm 40:10 NRSV)

“Do not, O LORD, withhold your mercy from me;  
let your *steadfast love* and your *faithfulness*  
keep me safe forever.”

(Psalm 40:11 NRSV)

To understand the depth of the meaning of these words in today’s world, let me share with you a story about Janet Yancey, the wife of the world-famous Christian author, Philip Yancey. You may know Philip Yancey as the author of global best-selling Christian books like What’s so Amazing about Grace, the Jesus I Never Knew, and Prayer: Does It Make any Difference?

Recently, Phillip, the much-revered Christian writer and thinker, released a statement that shook the global Christian world. In the statement, he admits to an extramarital affair with another married woman for eight–year long! In his statement, he apologizes profusely to his wife and to his millions of readers.

But I don't want to talk about him. I would like to talk about Janet, his wife for 55 years! In a separate statement, she offers her side of the story. She says, "I, Janet Yancey, am speaking from a place of trauma and devastation that only people who have lived through betrayal can understand. Yet I made a sacred and binding marriage vow 55½ years ago, and I will not break that promise." She continues, "I accept and understand that God through Jesus has paid for and forgiven the sins of the world, including Philip's. God grant me the grace to forgive also, despite my trauma. Please pray for us."

In the midst of the 'unfathomable trauma' that has been caused by her husband's betrayal, Janet Yancey somehow decides to stay in the marriage. And by doing that, she shows to us what *khesed* and *aman* mean; what steadfast love and faithfulness look like.

Friends, *khesed* and *aman* are the kind of love that stays loyal because it is grounded not in external factors, but in a binding covenant. For God, that covenant is the promise that God makes to Israel's ancestors: Abraham, Jacob, and Moses. For Janet Yancey, that covenant is that marriage vow that she made to her husband 55 years ago!

It is by relying on God's *khesed* and *aman*, God's loyal love and faithfulness, that the author of Psalm 40 could get out of the desolate pit and miry bog. It is by relying on God's *khesed* and *aman*, God's loyal love and faithfulness that he can put his feet on the rock and secure his footing. It is by relying on God's *khesed* and *aman*, God's loyal love and faithfulness that he can have a new song in his mouth to praise God!<sup>2</sup>

We find the same word, *aman* or faithfulness in our reading today from the book of Isaiah.

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<sup>2</sup> Psalm 40:1-3.

Here, in our reading from the book of Isaiah, we hear how God's servant laments that his life and work have led to nothing.

"I have labored in vain;  
I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity...."  
(Isaiah 49:4 NRSV)

Now, whether we see this servant figure in Isaiah as a foretelling of Jesus or as Israel, we meet here an all-too-human person who voices and who is lost in his deep disappointment.

His redemption comes not from his own strength or ingenuity, but from the *faithfulness* of his God.

"because of the Lord, who is *faithful*,  
the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."  
(Isaiah 49:7 NRSV)

No wonder that the servant in our Isaiah reading relies not on his inner strength, but on the One who has called him: God.

"yet surely my cause is with the LORD  
and my reward with my God."  
(Isaiah 49: 4 NRSV)

"for I am honored in the sight of the LORD,  
and my God has become my strength...."  
(Isaiah 49:5 NRSV)

Let me tell you a story about another figure in today's Christianity, John Piper. He is considered to be one of the most well-known and influential Christian thinker and leader not only in the United States, but also globally.

In 1980, as a 34-year-old Preacher, he said the following words in his first ever sermon to his church in Minneapolis, USA.

“I have nothing of abiding worth to say to you. But God does. And of that Word I hope and pray that I never tire of speaking. The life of the church depends on it.”

Fast forward 33 years later, in his last sermon as a 67-year-old Pastor, he offered a similar message to the people in his church:

“It has been our commitment in all these years together to preach not ourselves but Jesus Christ as Lord (2 Corinthians 4:5). People ought not to go to church to hear the sentiments or the ideas of a man, but to hear the word of God.”

Now, I don’t know his life and ministry in details, but I bet there must have been moments when he felt like the servant in Isaiah; when he must have felt disillusioned and disappointed with his life and ministry.

Yet, he preserved until the end because it was his deep conviction that he never proclaimed his own words, but God’s Word. Like a good book, John Piper began and ended his ministry with the same message, which, unsurprisingly, did not point to himself, but to God: the one whom he served and proclaimed.

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul too shared a similar insight to the church that he helped founded.

Now, Paul's letter is not like today's postcard. Paul sent a letter not only to say hello or to share what he had been doing. These are certainly parts of his letter, but the main purpose of his letter was to solve problems that the recipients of his letter had been dealing with.

Today, we only read the greeting part of his first letter to the Corinthians. But don't try to dismiss it because, in an ancient Hellenistic letter like Paul's, the greeting was an important part of the letter. Here, in his greeting, Paul explained the theological thoughts that would become the foundation of the next parts of his letter as he responded to the problems that the Corinthians were facing.

Here, in the opening part of his letter, Paul claims that his identity as Christ's Apostle is based not on his own will but on God's will (1 Cor.1:1). Likewise, the believers' in the city of Corinth have also been sanctified, meaning they have been set apart by God's calling of them as God's saints (1 Cor.1:2). As such, it is God who will equip them to fulfill their calling (1 Cor.1:5) and who will strengthen them to the end (1 Cor.1:8). Paul offers this as the framework from within which the believers in the city of Corinth ought to approach their problems.

Friends, we too can find everlasting and ever-renewing strength not by relying on our own strength, but by shifting our focus away from ourselves to Christ; by immersing ourselves not in our external values, but in our identity as God's beloved, God's chosen one.

No, we didn't choose ourselves; it is God who has chosen us, and it is God who will empower us until the end. It is in this that we can truly find our strength to carry on.

Amen.

### Questions for Reflection

1. When you are feeling down, what is the one thing that you usually turn to so you can regain your strength?
2. What do you feel if someone tells you that it is not about you; it is about God who has chosen you to do God's work?
3. Have you had an experience of God's *steadfast love* and *faithfulness* in your life?