

Phenomenological Inclusions of Proclamation of God's Faithfulness in Challenging Times Through the 'Corridors' of Christian Education

Helen Olomu Ishola-Esan

President, Baptist Theological Seminary, Eku, Delta State, Nigeria.

Associate Professor, Educational Leadership and Administration

ABSTRACT

This paper highlights the necessity of proclaiming God's faithfulness in challenging times. It attempts to bring to light how leaders such as pastors and Christian educators could demonstrate God's faithfulness at all times, especially in challenging times, anywhere, and with all men. The article makes use of descriptive and phenomenological methodologies/approaches. It presents some faithful attributes of God through biblical evidences and through the sharing of four significant personal experiences. The paper enunciates that proclaiming God's faithfulness through 'corridors' of Christian education are didactic and pragmatic in nature. The paper recommends that Christians, leaders/pastors, Christian educators etc should appreciate, speak of, or declare God's faithfulness at all times, primarily through their life experiences, calling and professional training, and living a lifestyle that demonstrates the celebration of God's faithfulness at all times: challenging and pleasant times.

Keywords: Praxis, Phenomenological, Proclaiming God's faithfulness, Challenging times, 'Corridors' of Christian education.

INTRODUCTION

The theme of God's faithfulness is exceptionally rooted in various parts of the Scripture, not only in the images provided but in the frequency of its mention. Attributes of God's faithfulness, runs through the entirety of the universe, right from the beginning of the world to the present dispensation. The faithfulness of God passes through the processes of understanding and goes on to become a nourishing food for the soul; this is so because the Scriptures not only teach this theme, it shows its usage for humanity. Upon this, faithfulness rests human hope of future blessedness as such it behooves on mankind to proclaim the faithfulness of God at all times but more in challenging times. The phenomenological proclamation of God's acts of faithfulness is apt for God's people in teaching, expressing and encouraging others as they live in this world.

Challenging times refers to periods of trails, difficulty, hardship, troubles and many more. Christians are not exempted from such times in their walk and experience with God. The world is not exempted either. One very obvious recent challenging time in the world is the global scourge; COVID-19 Pandemic that has affected many families, churches being shut down for quite a considerable period of time in the year 2020 and restrained the church from physical congregational worship. Social distancing and other COVID-19 rules and regulations pervade the atmosphere till date. The Pandemic affected economic activities via the imposed social

distancing rules with different stages of strictness [1]. COVID has ravaged the society economically, socially, physically, psychologically and even spiritually to an extent. In whatever challenging time Christians find themselves, as they face it and expresses as well as demonstrates their faith in God's word; God would always proof his faithfulness.

The psalmist saw this necessary and he proclaims the faithfulness of God in several of the psalms (to mention a few of them are Psalm 145, Psalm 33:4, Psalm 119:86, and psalm 89). Psalm 89 begins with words of praise for Yahweh's goodness and covenant faithfulness: "I will sing of the Lord's great love forever; with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations. I will declare that your love stands firm forever, that you have established your faithfulness in heaven itself." (Psalm 89:1-2, NIV).

Faithfulness is an intricate part of God that stands above all else. As Moses spoke to an Israelite assembly, he reminded the nation of God's faithfulness. Amid struggles against worldly injustice, the Christian can remain hopeful because of the faithfulness of God! Lamentations chapter 3 is one of the utmost significant texts explaining God's faithfulness. Notably, faithfulness is a quality or attribute applied in the Scripture to both God and man. In the same vein, faithfulness is viewed as one among the characteristics of God's moral nature, to be referred to as integrity. It represents the steadfastness or constancy of God in His relations with humanity.

It is against the above bedrock, that this paper seeks to itemize some possibilities through the corridors of Christian education which Christians/churches could adopt in proclaiming (announcing or declaring) God's faithfulness, thereby revealing the same to all men. In the same vein, this paper attempts to bring to light how pastors and Christian educators could demonstrate God's faithfulness at all times, especially in challenging times, anywhere, with all men. Hence, the article is limited to the sharing of personal encounters of god's faithfulness and consideration of the teaching of the Scriptures concerning the meaning of faithfulness in its application to God.

DESCRIBING GOD'S FAITHFULNESS AND CORRIDORS OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

God's faithfulness is His reliability, His determination to fulfill all that he promises. His faithfulness is grounded in his absolute truth. God is perfectly sincere in all his undertakings and dependable in discharging all his engagements[2]. God's faithfulness is made possible by His omnipotence. This presupposes that, he could never commit himself to do something of which he would eventually prove incapable. God is capable always and in all situations and seasons. God's faithfulness is His steadiness or steadfastness, His firmness, His unswerving nature. "Faithfulness is the idea of the very name Yahweh, the One who can be counted upon to be present"[3].

"Corridors of Christian education" is a coinage of the author of this paper used simply to connote the access strips or passageways (which are didactic in nature) for pragmatic demonstration of God's faithfulness. Christian education in this paper is taken to mean an act of teaching others to cultivate a life style of proclaiming and guarding God's faithfulness. The task of teaching is anticipated to be holistic to cut across the three domains of learning/education: cognitive, affective and psychomotor/behavioural. The domains of education expressed in secular education also reflects as well as applies in christian education.

Lamport had observed that the essential difference between secular education and Christian education is the adjectival description of the word "Christian". "To be Christian, Christian education must: have God's esteem for the human being, sense the task to be a whole-life experience of growth and maturity, and give opportunity for service through experiential action" [4]. Experiential action involves the act of sharing or expressing phenomenological experiences of the subject of discourse in this paper which is, God's faithfulness. The focus of God's concern with respect to Christian education is primarily on "action". Later in Scripture an emphasis on affections and intentions appears, but in the final analysis God requires properly motivated action, not just good intentions or a warm heart. For this reason Christian education must teach not just knowledge or skills but service of God through responsible action" [5] such as proclaiming God's acts of faithfulness through some pragmatic and dictatic measures.

THE FAITHFUL ATTRIBUTES OF GOD: BIBLICAL EVIDENCES AND PERSONAL EXPERIENCES PERSPECTIVES

God is known for several wondrous things He had done that goes beyond human imagination. His existence is beyond contention and the Christian faith cannot hesitate to ascribe Him the dignity of existence, which is the doorway to discussing His attributes. Only the personality that exists can be given attributes. God's attributes are products of His nature and character. His character is often approached in various ways peculiar to individuals who have experienced Him and also through the record of the scriptures. Some practical revelation of God to describe the nature and character of God based on the reflection he did on Exodus 34: 5-7 are resented below [6]. These include:

The Awesomeness of God and His Trustworthiness and Attribute

The awesomeness of God and his trustworthiness and attribute are projecting God as overwhelming, credible, magnificent and beyond human imagination. He is such a God that is worthy to be lean on and a personality the whole human depends on. God's awesomeness and trustworthiness are a requisite for His integrity. The Goodness and the Caring nature of God depicts His faithfulness in meeting the needs of His people; His compassionate acts; His grace, mercy and love are exceptionally bestowed on those who are His. God is good; He is kind, He is ever faithful. He cannot be compared to man and His existence is the reason for the existence of the world [6].

- The Just and Holiness of God [6] depicts His fairness to justice. His emotions are never displayed in anger. He is pure and just; in Him is no trace of darkness, for He is light and life to those who belong to Him. God is the perfect being that cannot commit an error or make mistakes. His ways are ours, His deeds are far from ours and His life is not complicated and cannot be contaminated. The holiness and just nature of God will make it impossible for Him not to be faithful. Similarly, attributes of God as has been classified into communicable and incommunicable attributes [7].
- His truthful nature is explicit of His character of faithfulness. His truthfulness connotes that He is the true God and that all things about Him, His knowledge, His Words and His actions are authentic expressions of His personality and a foundation for His faithful acts. "God's truthfulness means that He is the true God and that all knowledge and words are both true and the final standard of truth" [7].
- Other incommunicable attributes include spirituality (the spiritual nature of God), invisibility; knowledge of God (omniscience); wisdom; love; righteousness, justice; jealousy; and wrath [7]. He further gave the communicable attributes of God to

include; His Will (God's intention), freedom (not constraint by any law or rule); powerfulness and sovereignty (omnipotence); perfection; blessedness; beauty and glory [7]. All these attributes describe the character of God, of which none of these attributes would ever live Him unfaithful. Therefore, God's faithfulness is expressible not only in the testimonies of what He had done but importantly on who He is.

Biblical Evidence of God's Faithfulness

Human comprehension is incapacitated to fathom the existence of God. Some philosophers and scientists objected to the reality of God's existence and declared Him not worthy to be worshipped, acclaiming the creation of the universe to the mere natural scientific occurrence. God is not a visible individual, not sizeable, and cannot be subjected epistemologically to mere human cognitive adventures. God is Spirit (John 4: 24) and could be partially comprehended spiritually. It is without a doubt that God is incomprehensible, unfathomable and very invisible but the works of His hands are evidences of His person and what He is capable of doing. The faithfulness of God cannot be discussed outside the context of the Bible, the book foundational to all forms of beliefs and stands the bedrock for the activities of individuals within the Christian fold [8].

Several passages of the Bible project the activities of God concerning other creatures, especially Man which He made in His image and likeness. It would be believed that God had from the instance of the world began to demonstrate God-head integrity despite the failure and fall of man. His actions and reactions express His eternal love for man. His actions and reactions found their basis from His Spiritual nature. His appearance, according to Holmes, is first about His spiritual nature [9]. His spiritual nature depicts His capability of not working or operating in the like of humans. This is the rationale behind the statement that "God is not human that He should lie, not a human being that he should change his mind" (Numbers 23: 19 NIV). God is unlike a human being, who can say a word now and later recount or deny his utterances; man is capable of changing his counsel from time to time; he can change course and defile agreement. Nevertheless, in the case of the living God, His words are *ye and Amen*, enduring forever.

God cannot fail; He has never failed, and would never fail. He never changes His mind despite the iniquity of man. God is such a wonderful God that does not deal with a man based on His wickedness; rather, He will still behold a man with Mercy, and because of His love, His great love, man, is not consumed. The daily evil perpetrated by man is capable of automatically disqualifying man from existence, but the covenant of God stands sure. God, after beholding the evil in the activities and lives of men, became sad and regretted ever making man (Genesis 6: 6-7: "The Lord was grieved that He had made man on the earth, and His heart was filled with pain. So the Lord said, I will wipe mankind, whom I have created from the face of the earth- men and animals and creatures that move along the ground and birds of the air for I am grieved that I have made them"). However, the prevalent mercy of God prevails over His wrath as Noah found favour before Him.

God has been faithful from time immemorial; the various encounter of the early biblical fathers (the patriarchs) was a vivid expression of how faithful God is. His faithfulness endures from time initial, time present and in times to come. While the evil of man upon the surface of the earth was brutal and enormous, God decided to wipe off the entire earth, but the favour He

bestowed on one man called Noah made God sustain the joy of creating man. God wiped off the majority of the people and raised a new generation with Noah. God's faithfulness here, is the demonstration of mercy and expression of divine law that debarred God from destroying the entire world- the works of His hands. His faithfulness kept the earthen together and sustain the firmament without pillars. God established a covenant with Noah after the flood experience and promised He would no longer wipe off the entirety of man with the flood (Genesis 9: 9-11). The establishment of the covenant to this day remains valid. God began to raise generations of His own through Noah. The time for God to visit and raised a man of faith for Himself came and Abraham (formerly Abram) found favour with God; was required to walk with God and embrace perfection; and then experienced a divine encounter that led him into an everlasting covenant, through which all human claims "Abraham blessings are mine..."[10].

God also established an everlasting covenant with Abraham, just as He did with Noah. God expressed His special Love toward Abraham by calling him out of his father's house and land and then established a covenant with Him and His descendants. The entirety of the scriptures make provisions for various kinds of the covenant relationship of God with man, but there seems not to have been compelling as that of Abraham, probably because of the level of faith He demonstrated before God. It has been established that God establishes a covenant with individuals who fear Him [11]; this presupposes that, the fear of God is requisite to enjoying the faithfulness of God through His established and situated covenant. He further reports that God's covenant with Abraham and his descendants in Genesis 17: 7 was a signed and sealed occurrence, experienced with the demand of circumcision [11].

Covenant experienced throughout the Old and New Testament is the significant metaphor used to describe the relationship that exists between God and Man (especially the house of Israel) [12]. Covenant thus becomes the instrument constituting the rule of God [13] which man must follow through to keep the side of the contract of the covenant as a response to appreciating the faithfulness of God. Honestly, God's faithfulness is two-edged; one is the faithfulness expressed through love and mercy which gives the man room to relate with God; the other is the faithfulness of God in establishing a covenant with unfaithful man and yet keep to the terms of His words. God is such a faithful father.

The New Testament scripture is believed to be the fulfilment of God's promises to the Israelites (the house-hold of faith). Christ Jesus is seen as the ultimate mediator of the New Testament [11] bringing to reality all God had said and promised in the OT. God's ordained covenants were not meant for Abraham and other Old Testament prophets, patriarchs and the Jews, they were extended to the Gentiles through the advent of Christ, and by that, all human, with the fear of God, and that is born of the Spirit can boldly confess Abrahamic blessings and also believe in its functionality in their lives; Abraham's Blessings are Mine [10].

Faithfulness is one of the inspired perfections of His being. He is, as it were, clothed with faithfulness: "O LORD God of hosts, who is a strong LORD like unto thee? or to thy faithfulness round about thee?(Psalm 89:8). So too when God became incarnate it was said, "Righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins" (Isaiah 11:5). What a word is that in Psalm 36:5: "Thy mercy, O LORD, is in the heavens; and thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds." Far above all finite comprehension is the unchanging

faithfulness of God. Everything about God is great, vast, incomparable. He never forgets, never fails, never falters, never forfeits His Word. To every declaration of promise or prophecy the Lord has exactly adhered. Every engagement of covenant or threatening He will make good, for "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" (Numbers 23:19). Therefore does the believer exclaim, "His compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22-23). Scripture abounds in illustrations of God's faithfulness. More than four thousand years ago, He said, "While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease" (Gen 8:22) [14].

Phenomenological proclamation of Author's Personal Experience of God's Faithful Acts in Challenging Times

Proclaim it on the rooftops... Talk about the Lord's goodness with others. Share His Word, His promises, His miracles; the ones He has done for you, the ones you read about, the ones He has done for others, and the ones you are believing Him for! Talk about them, write about them, sing about them, shout them aloud but whatever you do, make them known [15].

The life of the author of this paper is a vivid historical event worth sharing to testify and declare truly the faithfulness of God. As I fondly say, "I am a product of Faith and Grace." God's grace keeps and positions me to testify to His goodness by sharing to the entire world that "what He says He will do, and that is what He will do..." that is why He is called Jehovah." (This is a song of praise and declaration fondly song in Nigeria to declare how faithful God is). I wish to share among several others, four significant testimonies of God's faithful acts in my life; phenomenological expression of God's faithfulness in my life.

First faithful act of God was in finding my life partner after seemingly long wait for marriage. It was a challenging while waiting. God took me outside Nigeria in the year 2008, to a country to meet my life partner (unknown to me at the moment of meeting him and being cordial with him), through an Educational tour and thereafter, God brought me back to Nigeria. And later took the young man left that country to another distant country (for research and pursuit of Ph.D studies) where he finally made his proposal for marriage (through the telephone) in the early hours of one faithful day in the year 2009. The long wait on God and the fulfillment of His Rhemas to me- (Habakkuk 2:3 and Rev. 21:6a) came to bear.

The second faithful act of God in challenging times took place in the year 2011 and that was in my child bearing experiences. After two miscarriages of a single and twin pregnancies, I encountered the God of BODMAS (Emphasis mine), who **Bracketed Off** sorrow, caused the **Division** of an embryo in my womb to miraculously **Multiply** in an **Additional** manner; thereby giving me a set of Triplets, an handsome boy and two pretty girls: a complete package of blessings of the faithful God (that all came in a moment with distinctive personalities), the faithful God **Subtracted/eliminated** miscarriage and made it a foregone issue in my life.

The third faithful act of God in another challenging time in my life was in the fulfillment of prophecy made in the year 2000 concerning my emergence as a Seminary President (amidst other positions/statuses) which was fulfilled in the year 2019 with a grand history being made;

as the first female to Head a theological institution in the Nigerian Baptist Convention and in Africa. Faithful is he who has promised. The word of God in Romans 4:20-21 are apt here: "Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he has promised that God was able to do what he has promised" (NIV). Therefore, like Hebrews 10:23 admonishes "let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful" (NIV).

The fourth Faithful acts of God in challenging times is deliverance from death on Sunday, April 25, 2021 wherein myself, my triplets and two other persons were involved in a ghastly automobile accident. The Scripture of Psalm 23:4, which says "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me, your rod and your staff, they comfort me" becomes our testimony as well as the proof of God's faithfulness.

PROCLAIMING GOD'S FAITHFULNESS THROUGH CORRIDORS OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Pastors, Christian educators, Missionaries, theological educators and Christians could through corridors of Christian teaching help people to proclaim God's faithfulness through:

Experiential Didactic Demonstrations

The sharing of personal experiences of testimonies of God's faithfulness is a pragmatic way of proclaiming God's faithfulness. It is also capable of bringing about deliverance and victory over the power of sin and death, evil and frustrations (see Rev. 12: 11). Encouraging people with their testimonies to find significance for life [16] is crucial in teaching out of experience. The testimonies of people are of more significance to minister to the devastated. The evidence of who God is, in one's life, goes a long way in motivating others to make the right decisions at the time of difficulties. There is nothing as ultimate for Pastors and Christian educators more than meeting the needs of the individuals, and one of the means to get this done is to help others realize the importance of their existence and significance of their life to God, the church and humanity in general. Pastors and Christian educators need to identify people's problems and help them realize the possible solution(s).

Encouraging Waiting and Watching with Prayer

Encouraging people to wait on God raises the hope of the hopeless and give strength to those fainting through the Word of God. Appealing to human emotion in this wise is of great importance. Stirring people to tarry before the Lord would help them to seek the Faithful God. Waiting on the Lord is always a severe time of drought; people at this level need people who can stand by them and that they would lean on. In waiting a lot of watching is embedded and praying as led by the Holy Spirit. Availability of Pastors and Christian educators to such persons will help them to respond, acknowledge, and proclaim the faithfulness of God in all ramifications.

Engaging in Social Welfare Ministry

In difficult times of lack of food or basic needs of man, provision of material needs could be of help in meeting needs of such. In the COVID-19 Pandemic challenge in Nigeria, Government, churches, individuals etc sent palliatives to persons and groups of persons to alleviate the challenge of hunger. Rahman stated some social welfare actions that could be helpful for the church and church leaders to emulate [17]. These include:

Ending hunger by achieving food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture. Once agriculture is sustainable hunger could be tackled effectively.

Achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. Community organising for empowerment initiatives through vocational and entrepreneurial training would help a great deal.

Alleviating poverty in all its forms everywhere. Poverty has been the bane of most African countries. The church could educate her congregants of measures of alleviating poverty.

Ensuring healthy lives and promoting wellbeing for all at all ages. Health talks and provision of free health services at affordable levels using available medical personnel in the churches. Some churches engage in medical missions. And its quite beneficial to recipients.

Engaging in Mesmerizing Bible Study

Engaging individuals for consistent piety where their relationship with God will be enhanced through mesmerizing Bible study helps the growth and development of individuals. The more people can seek God, the better to find and enjoy His presence. The closer one is to God, the better he will experience the evidence of His faithfulness. Creating time to learn more about God and his faithfulness helps Christians to be more faithful to his Word and bring glory to him by exercising their faith in a God Who is faithful; proclaiming this truth of God's faithfulness to others; modeling this attribute in our lives (that others may "see our good works and glorify our Father Who is in heaven!").

Engaging in Preparing People for Faithful Commitment to God's Service

The wealth of knowledge of a Pastor, Christian educator, theologians etc would be useful by nurturing, mentoring and leading others through corporate devotions, discipleship programmes, leadership summits and seminars that are aimed at recruiting and training potential leaders so that God's work both within the church and after will not suffer.

Manifesting the Character of Faithfulness through Singing

In manifesting the character of faithfulness, the admonition of Sheba [18] is apt. Sheba encourages Christians to sing and talk about wondrous deeds God has done for us to friends, family members, and other persons. He stated that:

Whenever there is an opportunity in such a way that the hearers would put their trust in God. We need to identify the performance of God, celebrate God's wonderful works with songs and hymns. Do not stop praising God even in your difficult times. Remembering God's goodness helps us to go through the tough times with a strong sense of hope and courage and an increased faith in God.

Some areas of manifesting God's faithfulness aside singing may include:

Faithfulness in the service of God and in the workplace, where Christians represent Christ as his ambassadors.

Faithfulness in using the gifts and abilities God has given to believers.

Faithfulness in the specific assignments bestowed on Christians.

Faithfulness in the use of financial and material blessings that the Lord has granted individuals, his church and Christians in general.

Faithfulness in evangelizing the world, our mission field.

Faithfulness in ministering to one another, bearing one another's burden.

Faithfulness in at work place and in business relationships.

Faithfulness in celebrating God's Faithfulness. Psalm 145 is a celebration of God's faithfulness and character.

CONCLUSION

God's faithfulness is undebatable. God has been faithful from before the creation of the world to this present time. His dealings with people over the ages have given testimonies of His consistency, integrity; uniqueness; awesomeness; powerfulness and the God of possibilities in seemingly impossible situations and challenging times. His faithfulness is evident in all creations. Without a doubt, this paper has addressed and developed a concept through which believers could rather proclaim, or speak of God's faithfulness, thereby revealing the same to all men; and has also provided possible ways Pastors and Christian educators can appreciate God's faithfulness at all times, primarily through their life experiences, calling and professional training, and living a lifestyle that demonstrates the celebration of God's faithfulness at all times: challenging and pleasant times.

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