

## Pastoral Letter October 2012

### Faint, yet pursuing

These very familiar words come in Judges 8:4, during the days when Gideon was Israel's judge. The particular enemies of God's people at that time were the Midianites. Chapter 7 of Judges records the defeat of Midian, after God had whittled down the fighting men of Israel from 32,000 to just 300. Then, as Gideon and his men continued to chase after Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian, who had managed to make their escape, Gideon describes Israel's force as '*faint, yet pursuing*'. This telling phrase is a very realistic statement of how we often feel in the Christian life. We are '*faint*'; yet, by God's grace, we are not at a standstill – we have not come to the end of the road – we have not given it all up as a bad job or a hopeless task - we are still '*pursuing*', if only, sometimes, at a snail's pace.

We are '*faint*'. The word can also be translated 'exhausted' or 'weary', and certainly we are often exactly that. The sense of being discouraged, dispirited, cast down can also be captured in the word. What makes us '*faint*'? There are many single things, some of which can then conspire together or appear to 'gang up' on us. Sometimes our exhaustion is chiefly physical; we are overtired, worn out. This can be related to actual poorliness, though need not be so. Maybe we are not sleeping, or we have more work to do than we can cope with, or it's a long time since we had a 'proper' holiday, or through external pressures that thrust themselves upon us.

Yet there are other causes. Among them may be such as these: inadequate feeding upon the spiritual provisions of God's Word – lack of progress in the mortifying of our sins – the telling nature of the battle we are in as Christians – easing up on prayer – having to carry heavy burdens and responsibilities in the different realms and relationships of life – failure to lean upon the LORD in the right manner.

Yet however '*faint*' we are, we must still be '*pursuing*'. First and foremost, pursuing *the LORD himself* – to know him more closely, love him more fervently, serve him more obediently, follow him more wholeheartedly, fear him more reverently, desire him more passionately, honour him more consistently. Other things then proceed from that. We are to pursue *holiness* (of mind, heart and life) – pursue *boldness* (as soldiers of the cross) – pursue *faithfulness* (as prayer warriors for the cause of God and truth in this evil day) – pursue *heavenliness* (keeping our horizons clearly fixed upon 'the end of the journey', being with Christ in glory). Can you add to this list as you meditate upon our theme?

And lest we respond by saying, 'but I'm so faint I can't pursue, I'm past pursuing, I've pursued as far and as much as I can', then remember some of the great and matchless *promises* from our covenant God and Father given to us by him specifically to encourage us to pursue, however faint we are. Here are just a few of them. '... and as your days, so shall your strength be ... The eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms' (Deuteronomy 33:25, 27). 'Cast your burden on the LORD, and he will sustain you' (Psalm 55:22). 'He does not faint or grow weary ... He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint' (Isaiah 40:28-31). 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness' (2 Corinthians 12:9). 'I will never leave you nor forsake you' (Hebrews 13:5).