

Faith Lift: Forty

Mentioned 146 times in Scripture, the number 40 generally symbolizes a period of testing, trial or probation.

When Noah finished the ark it rained for 40 days and 40 nights. During Moses' life he lived forty years in Egypt and forty years in the desert before God called him to lead his people out of slavery. After they crossed the Red Sea they wandered in the desert for 40 years.

Moses was also on Mount Sinai for 40 days and nights, on two separate occasions (Exodus 24:18, 34:1 - 28), receiving God's laws. He also sent spies, for forty days, to investigate the land God promised the Israelites as an inheritance (Numbers 13:25, 14:34).

The prophet Jonah powerfully warned ancient Nineveh, for forty days, that its destruction would come because of its many sins. The prophet Ezekiel laid on His right side for 40 days to symbolize Judah's sins (Ezekiel 4:6). Elijah went 40 days without food or water at Mount Horeb.

Jesus was tempted by the devil not just three times, but MANY times during the 40 days and nights he fasted in the wilderness just before his ministry began. He also appeared to his disciples and others for 40 days after his resurrection from the dead.

This Sunday, August 21, Anne and I will have been married for 40 years. It too has been a time of testing, and trial ... and even some probation. Our 40 years has seen some flooding- Allison, some hurricanes-- Alicia, Rita and Ike. It has seen some mountaintops and some valleys andsome plains. We have done our share of wandering. We've pitched out tents in Austin to Beaumont to Houston to San Antonio to Spring Branch to Pearland to Tomball to Odessa to Houston and now to Baytown. However, we have also had more than our share of joys.

One of my favorite scriptures is from Phillipian 3:13-14. Since we are in the middle of the Olympics I think it is a fitting scripture for this week, and for our 40 years together. "Forgetting what lies behind, press on to what's ahead. Press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Jesus Christ."

The word, "forgetting" there doesn't mean we should not remember the past. We have old photo albums for that and those are always fun to revisit. It means more like we should not let the past hold us back. Sometimes our past failures can hold us back from trying old things. Sometimes our past successes can hold us back from trying new things. Sometimes the past can hold us back from trying at all. No, we are to let go of the past and press on to what lies ahead.

As Eleanor Roosevelt once said, "Yesterday is history. Tomorrow is a mystery. Today is a gift. That's why they call it the present." I know I won't live to see another 40 years, but I'm grateful for the gift of every day of the last ... 40.