



The Gauge of Faith, part 1

The iconic TV series “Little House on the Prairie” exposed us regularly to the antics of the Olsen family, or to be more precise, the shenanigans of the conniving matriarch Harriet.

From time to time, the story line turned to Nellie’s restaurant, named for the barely tolerable daughter who bore no resemblance either to a cook or a business owner. Mama Harriet, of course, took matters in hand, leaving the town’s only store to the tolerant hands of her husband Nels to serve as the functional restaurateur.

When she was approached with a business proposition by a man from “back east” claiming to have “the wave of the future” that would reduce their work load and increase profits, Harriet needed to hear no more. She signs a contract without checking the small print.

The restaurant will serve only three options on the menu, all prepared ahead of time and reheated when the customers come during specific hours. A flawed plan, unforeseen circumstances, dubious management, and a whole lot of unplanned twists cause the whole venture to collapse in an embarrassing failure.

In the tag scene, after the final commercial, a distinguished looking gentleman in the tell-tale white suit of a Kentucky Colonel, shows us with a proposal for the restaurant to serve only *one* item: chicken. The Olsens sent him packing with his incredulous idea. The show ends as they roll their eyes and chuckle in disdain at an idea that has no chance of succeeding. They simply had no reason to put their trust in the odd little Colonel.

Trust is at the center of this story just as clearly as it is at the center of our lives. In fact, trust is a core value issue for all of us. At the very center of personal values lies the capacity to trust.

And it is the core issue in defining our faith.

Just as the Olsens’ degree of trust was effected by their unpleasant and painful experience, many – including many believers – have trust issues in their spiritual pilgrimages.

The steps we have walked are filled with the jarring realities of life in an imperfect world. Cancer, joblessness, injustices, and illnesses have intruded on our lives. People have lied and slandered us, abused and misused us. From time to time, often time after time, the unexpected that has fallen across our paths has covered us like a shroud, and we have found ourselves flailing against the undertow of circumstances that have dragged us toward the bog of fear and despair.

Therein lies our struggle.

If a loving God is sovereign, we wonder, why did He allow my spouse to die when I prayed for healing? Why did I send in hundreds of job applications with no response? Why were those who slandered me allowed to go unpunished? Why did He let my reputation be tarnished?

The failure to trust is evidence of a failure of faith. When we read that “the LORD is trustworthy in all he promises and faithful in all he does” (Psalm 145:13b), we have a choice. We can succumb to the limitations of our mortal perspective or we can act on faith. We can trust that God, Sovereign and Holy, sees what we cannot see and is perfect even when our feeble human eyes have been dimmed by doubt and pain and fear.

We can ask “Why?” But are we able to live by the oxygen of faith when there is no answer?

Taking Our Next Step Together

As we ponder Your sovereignty, Lord, fill us with the passionate honesty of the father who came to Jesus seeking healing for his son, and let us echo his words: I believe, help my unbelief (Mark 9:24). Alert us to the rip tides of surrendered doubt and fear. We commit to Your providential care and Your sovereignty in all things including what bewilders us, even frightens us. We declare by faith that You are Lord.