

The Faith That Brings Me Peace

Betsy Chalmers

I believe in faithfulness.

I met him when I was 19, married him at 20, and we were separated when I turned 22 because he was arrested for, and then convicted of, a violent crime. He had failed himself, his family, his wife, and his future, but he was my husband. I was mad, sad, disappointed, and frightened, but I loved him and he needed me, so I stayed.

I stayed through weeks of trials, years in jail, and decades in prison. I have faith in the covenant of marriage and in the God we stood before when we took those vows. I have faith in my husband and his ability to grow and change and become a better man, no matter where he is, and he has. I have faith that time makes changes in all of us we cannot avoid or ignore.

I am now 50; he is 55. He is still my husband and my best friend. I see him four hours every weekend, and I talk to him on the phone twice a week for 20 minutes. I am not deceived or a martyr. I am not stupid, uneducated, or desperate. I am a wife. I work, have a mortgage, a 19-year-old car, two dogs, and bills just like everyone else. This is so close to me it is hard sometimes to realize I am only one wife of over 2 million people who live behind bars. I have not made many friends at the prison. I keep that part of my life separate but it's always there, always a part of every decision and choice I make.

Somewhere in here I think I'm supposed to say I believe my husband is innocent, that the system didn't work, and we're victims of whatever, but that isn't the point. How do we choose what crime is over the edge, or what sin is too great to be forgiven? Yes, I rail against popular opinions based on slanted political rhetoric. I have grieved the loss of many of the normal things others have and have done, like having children and vacations abroad.

This is not the life I would have expected for myself 30 years ago and it isn't one I would recommend to others, but it is my life. At 50 I have come to the conclusion it is not the life I have that defines me, it is the way I choose to live that life. I choose to live it being faithful. This brings me peace, this allows me to have joy, this keeps me aware of my husband. My spiritual faith has given me the foundation to live this life, not just survive it. Faith in a God who has not abandoned me; faith in a man who loves me; faith in myself.

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Betsy Chalmers works for a communications company in Richmond, Virginia, helping to produce medical and scientific journals. Chalmers is also a deacon in her church, and says she learned faithfulness from her parents, who have been married for 58 years.