## Title: TOUGH SHOES FOR A TOUGH TRIP

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## TOUGH SHOES FOR A TOUGH TRIP

There is a method in what I do. I grew up in the church, and this church is not designed to be another one of the normal ones. When I came to town ten years ago, I said if you want just another church to attend, walk down any street—it won't take you many blocks to find one. I've also said over these last ten years you can have a new pastor next Sunday. Just go to another church. It's always interesting for me to watch, particularly as we move downtown, because the ads and other things have brought people who come curiously, and they hear "Great Balls of Fire".

You see, I've watched people for years in the traditional church use Sunday for some emotional catharsis in neurotic behavior that if they did it on the street, they would be committed. I've watched them because their theology has so abnormal-ized them that they can't participate in any of the joyful things of life. The church service becomes a banana-boat catharsis moment when, in the name of worshiping God, they just go on an emotional binge. And most of their energy is dissipated at some wailing altar experience until having done that, they go right back to their abnormal sub-spiritual behavior the rest of their week. Churches create little monasteries with so-called "women's missionary societies" that are designed to cut personalities through gossip more than cut-up cloth to make quilts for missionary kids. And the big event of the week in one of my churches was when they had the young people's group meetings, so they could do such exotic things as play "Spin the Bottle".

Supernatural means "more natural". Christianity doesn't make a freak out of you. As I often say, you don't have to float forty feet off the ground... to be spiritual. Christians ought to be the salt that preserves this earth. And this is a university classroom that meets once a week, not because you are going to be any better Christian by the fact you move your body down here. You can go to heaven and never go inside a church. It is about time some pastor tells you that—you don't have to go to church to be a Christian. The church is a people that belong to the Lord who go to the Lord's house. Simply claim the promise: "Where two or three are gathered together in His name He is in the midst"; and the most meaningful thing that that Spirit of God in our midst can accomplish is quicken the Word of God to our hearts until there is sight to see light, and quicken the speaker until he unveils God's Word—the result of which will be the coming of faith, for "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

Church services are not to be encapsulated freak societies with their own little dirges being played and, once you leave, what you do on Sunday never will anywhere approach what you face through the week. And there is probably as much bad theology in some of the dumb songs that are sung in church—and they've done more to warp the minds of Christians than all the "Rock n' roll" in the world. Example: "Hold the fort for I am coming; wave the answer back to heaven. By thy grace we will." Horse spit!

Jesus said, "I'll build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Don't give me one of those "dig-in-brethren and hope-for-survival" songs. The church is on the offensive, not the defensive. That's a bunch of bunk! "Retreat, hell! We advance to the rear." In some of these stupid little ditties of modern Christian songs, "If you want joy, jump for it!" I remember the last church convention I was at where they sang that song, "If you want joy, jump for it!" Some jerk grabbed me and made me jump! I'm a living testimony that it produced everything except joy!

You know what's wrong with the church today? The average church people who have never been to our church, if they would attend this service, would feel uncomfortable because they heard: "Great Balls of Fire" and "Georgia". Well, the average sinner attending the average church would feel uncomfortable hearing: "From Pisgah's stormy plains...." Well that does something for you, doesn't it? "From Pisgah's stormy plains"!

Now Paul in the New Testament talked about the *glossolalia*. Those Corinthians were more concerned about showing off their spiritual gifts than they were carrying out the commission. He said if a stranger comes in and you are talking in tongues all the time, he'll think you are nuts. The implication of that is we ought to not act in such a way that only this little cluster can understand the spiritual meaning thereof—we shouldn't look like nuts.

The Word of God is the centerpiece of this church, and by God's grace I'll keep preaching it in a way that people can understand it, which is more than can be said for most people. The basic claim of the church is: God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, and the substance of God that no man had seen—to use John's word *exegesis*, "He moved from behind the curtain and put God on display"—He struck a tent in human flesh, and walked ordinary streets. The religious people didn't even recognize Him. The religious people hated Him.

They called Him "a winebibber and a glutton." That wasn't invented out of whole cloth. He enjoyed His relationship. My Bible says Jesus was a friend of sinners. It has been a long time since I've noted that quality out of the church.

And the ordinary common people heard Him gladly. He demystified.... I repeat, John said "No man has seen God but Christ hath declared him." The word is the word from which we get *exegesis*, which is "to lead from behind a curtain and put on display". He displayed God in the streets of man and demystified it. The church has been trying to hurl it back out in space and their mark of spirituality is "being above everybody"—with profound spiritual truths that only the stupid can understand, but they don't understand. So let me say again: We're not trying to be just another church.

I listen to these people dumping on "Rock n' roll" music because they don't have enough scholarly ability to find some new fount of truth from Scripture. I can't live long enough to mine the depths of this Book. And if the devil's going to talk to you backwards on a "Rock n' roll" record, he ain't much of a match. The only time I ever heard a record played backwards is when our director did it one night after these guys played "Heartbreak Hotel". And for the life of me, if the devil was talking I couldn't understand him, so he didn't have much of a message. (Really something to fear: a devil who talks backwards on "Rock n' roll".) I watched people from the jungles of Africa to the highlands of Brazil with music in their heart take their native music and express it in joy to God, and then I see some provincial little wimp who can't find a message get on some bandwagon of condemnation... and I say, "God, help us build this church of sanity in the midst of all these idiots."

So it's always interesting here to watch every Sunday—those who come in that want to escape from the world and go through that sort of spiritual orgy where it's 'u-u-u-h, u-u-u-h, u-u-u-h!' You see, I grew up in that. If I were like Paul, willing to boast—if we were to call that particular revival movement the Pharisees then, I was the Pharisee of the Pharisees living in the home of their superintendent; his protégé with great destiny in his mind; one of four or five picked or called for every major convention where there was a speaker. I still remember preaching the third time to the largest church gathering of its kind in the nation of Australia, watching the same people go through the same gyrations, returning to the same water level of spiritual experience that I watched them go through the previous times. By the third

trip, you start recognizing them! They would attain this spiritual blow-out stage and then slip back until the next year for refilling.

I went to Sydney with a week off, prepared to go back and be the floor director in the major organizational annual meeting of the denomination I'd been working in. I sat down in the Wentworth Hotel in the city of Sydney. An American recognized my accent as I was ordering, and introduced himself to me. He was an M.D. graduate from Stanford, so we had an immediate *alma mater* connection. He was a medic in Vietnam who introduced his companion, a cowboy from Montana—his helicopter pilot. They were there on "R and R". They asked me to join them. It was the height of the "R and R" period when they had put \$166 in the pocket of one of those service men; fly them into Hong Kong or Sydney... or some other recreation spot; leave them two days; and they would try to get whatever they could out of their system and into their system before flying back into those jungles to death and maiming and terror. We toured every pub in that city. The last one to close was the "Taxi Club" at 5:30 in the morning and the first pub was to open at 6:00, so it consumed the walking time between the "Taxi Club" and the pub.

I left them about 6:30, very disturbed over a simple thing. As I witnessed that night, I came irrevocably to the conclusion the church is involved in transplanting saints. It not only is not reaching the world; it doesn't even know where the world is at. I promptly resigned my position in the denomination and made up my mind that I would try to get on that beam of revelation where God moved into the stuff of life, and made God and His Word intelligible to ordinary people.

And that's what started me on this trip of separation from the establishment and the preaching of God's Word from which faith comes, and the wonderful good news of the Gospel that Paul could take and shake an empire—that God's looking for people that trust Him. Whatever your condition, He takes you where you are, as you are; and if you'll trust Him, He'll do the work of changing you. You don't have to memorize all this theological jargon, and you don't have to go through all these theological gyrations. You just learn to trust God because of His performance. He'll take care of the changing.

Now how many of you here hadn't been in a church for ten years when you started coming to the church I preach in? Would you stand? Well now, that's something isn't it? You may be seated. That makes it worth the ten years that we've been here. Lots of people left the church because of the "bunk". You never left God; and He never left you. And the rest of the churches in town can compete for the saints and the church tramps can move back and forth. I've said all these ten years, "Send me every sinner in town that knows his need of God. You are welcome here as long as God's Word is respected." And this university platform for the teaching of God's Word will remain with that sense of direction. We know how to sing hymns, but we're not going to fall over dead at "Great Balls of Fire".

Well, this is another Sunday where I'm not too sure God knows what He's doing. I had a good message planned; and He is impressing me to do something else, so if you don't like it, blame Him. And tell Him from now on to let Scott preach what he wants to preach. I think just once in ten years God let me preach what I wanted to preach. The rest of the time He just scares me to death making me start on things that I know even He can't get across.

How many of you know I preach seven messages a year whether you like them or not? And I said to God, "Now that we're down at that fancy new place, don't do that!" And He didn't say a word. He is just determined He would make me do it. You say, "Well how does God impress on you?" Well, everything else that I had planned goes out of my mind—I can't think of anything but this. I don't need some bird to come by and talk English.

One of the messages that I preach is the one I'm preaching today—Deuteronomy 33. It is that kind of message you can hear a thousand times. It's like a promise in God's Book, which is what it is. You can hear it a thousand times, but then as Karl Barth once said, "like a beast the verse will leap out and seize you" and you know that the Spirit of God has applied it to your life in that moment. Some of the richest verses of Scripture have been exhausted in meaning, preached on tens of thousands of times, but there comes a time when the 23rd Psalm means something to you as an individual—"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." And these seven messages are built around verses like that. It doesn't matter how many times you look at them, there comes a time when you need that particular verse and that makes it different.

Now there are messages that I preach I expect every single person in the congregation to receive some learning from it, some inspiration..., some basis for faith. This is the kind of message when I preach it as I have over the last ten years, different individuals needed it each of those different years. I need it today. And I was kidding about God, as you know I was. I need this message today. If you don't need it, go to sleep; but don't look obvious about it.

And we keep instructing people. The only thing I would do different if I'd built this church is put the restrooms back there. Now if you have to go to a restroom, don't come down this aisle and across the platform and up through there and down the stairs. Go that way! Don't wait till it's at the brink, or you'll never make it. Go that way and let the ushers lead you all the way around. Allow yourself an extra two minutes. Clear?

Now the message is Deuteronomy 33, "The Song of Asher". You already know what it is. II Corinthians 1:20 gives each of us a fishing license to go through the Old and New Testament and find promises that fit. Now last Sunday, remember I told you there is a big difference between "legalistic preaching" that gives you a bunch of laws to conform to and "promise preaching" which gives you a lever to grab in faith which establishes your connection with God, enabling Him to put His life in you and do the work of changing you into His image because of that connection? II Corinthians 1:20 gives you a license to fish through God's Book and find every promise, and when you come to one that fits your circumstance grab it because II Corinthians 1:20 says, "All"—no exception, "All the promises of God in him,"—in Christ, "are yea," or yes to you, "and in him Amen," or so be it unto you. That's all the excuse I need to claim this one.

"It was to Asher"—you may say, just like it was to Israel and Jehovah said, "I'm the Lord that healeth thee." Well that's mine to claim when I need it. This Song of Asher is a promise and the New Testament says, "All the promises in him"—and I'm "in Him" when I'm acting in faith. And Romans 8 says you get in Him when He comes in you. You act in faith; He comes in you. *Ipso facto*, to use a Latin word, you are "in Him". Therefore in Him as a *faith-er*, I can claim any promise. End of the tautology. Now let's grab it!

What is the promise? "Thy shoes..." (verse 25) Now I suppose I'm boring you already because you know about this. "Thy shoes shall be iron and brass." You know what I am going to say, don't you? "Tough shoes for a tough trip!"

You don't need iron and brass shoes to lay on a hammock... Huh? You don't need iron and brass shoes for featherbeds... You don't need iron and brass shoes for these super-spiritual magic carpets that waft you to glory every day. You need iron and brass shoes if the trip is tough. Where does this idea come from, that a 50-yard walk... or a 50-foot walk... or a 5-foot walk up an aisle to an altar would put you on easy street? Remember what I said to you? Become a Christian so all hell will break loose on you. You want things to get tough, come to Jesus.

You know what I hate about most of you? You nod your head like smart-alecks and the first little stone in your path you start bawling, "Oh yeah, that's right pastor!" So God knocks your block off, and you stumble over something next Tuesday; and you're mad at God. I can just tell by the looks on your faces. You know if you would look a little more shocked at this message I would move on! What is it I say to you? "Cheer up, Christian. It's going to get worse!" "Oh God! Why is this happening to me?" Because you are following God, stupid! If you swim upstream, it takes some muscles.

"If you were of the world, the world would love its own." The faith path has turned you around. Satan isn't crazy. You don't go out and shoot prisoners all the time; they ain't bothering you. You let somebody raise up the standard of faith and start marching as these children of Asher did into the land that God's Word promised them, they are going to run into some problems. I've been easy on this church for the last couple of weeks. Some of you are settling back into your little 10-percent wave at God: once a month show up at Hope Street; turn on old Scott once a week—"Oh he'll be there"; schedule to be a Voice of Faith—"but I don't feel like going tonight."

This is a tough trip folks! It's a tough trip for tough people. I don't think very many people can make it in our church. Christianity was never a society of wimps—never intended to be. This is a tough trip; and if you're going to serve God, expect it to be a tough trip.

Now you want me to detail it? I'm not going to. How many of you can testify that when you started acting in faith all of a sudden things started landing on you. You thought you were going to die? You know why I'm against most preaching and most Christian B.S.-ers? They set you up for the devil to destroy your faith. This is a bunch of baloney: You come to God everything will get easy. This is a bunch of baloney! You come to God, give to God, get rich, healthy, and live an old age; and all the women will chase you thereafter, or vice-versa. It's baloney! You come to God; all hell is going to break loose!

Paul says, "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers." There are forces in this world—the "prince of the power of the air". He doesn't want you to have faith; and as long as you don't have it, you know, he'll pat you on the bottom gently and say, "Go for it!" You listen to one of these mental midgets preach Christianity as a new set of rules to follow.... The world that Jesus came to was full of ritual... and full of rules... and full of doctrines... and they missed Him! If you start practicing faith—which is to trust God; you got an enemy now, because he has had one goal from the day he came to Adam and Eve and said what God said will not happen! From that first challenge to God's Word, he has been at it ever since. You start acting on God's Word, and all hell will raise against you. Once a year I want you to be reminded of that. "Huh! I'm not sure I want to make this trip!" Well, go to hell then! Forever! That's the choice: hell arrayed against you here; or hell surrounding you there. Forever! We need to reduce this Christianity down to what the issue is. There is one target that Satan wants to get: anyone who will act in faith on this Word. Therefore, the journey to the promised land is a path that is tough. You can't make the trip in house shoes; can't toddle along in ballet slippers.

## Tough trip!

But, what is the promise? "Shoes tough enough to make the trip." "Huh?" "Yeah!" How many of you know...? Come on now, when you started this journey, how many of you thought you would be killed by things ten years ago—to you that were that long in the way—that now don't even bother you? Let me see your hands. I mean, you can climb hills now that just looking at collapsed you ten years ago? Now how many of you, if anybody had told you ten years ago you could do in faith what you've done in

the last six months, you would have known they were crazy? How many of you would never have dared attempt ten years ago what you now just walk out and hit every day? (I'm not talking about you that got married in the last ten years), I'm talking about.... What is that message? "Cheer up, saints. It'll get worse!" But we are tougher! "Well it is going to land on me today!" "I am going to land on it today!" Tough path, tough shoes! Christians make it! *Faith-ers* survive!

September what? Twenty-first, 1986. You think it has been bad this last year, saints? You ain't seen nothing! It is going to get worse, but we're going to get better. That is the message! Never say die! Never say die! Okay—I don't like it, but so be it.

What is next? "As thy days, so shall thy strength be." I'm going to have a real easy day today. I got up feeling so miserable. Do you ever have those nights when you could stand on your head, feet, back, or whatever and you couldn't sleep? Huh? When the mattress is like embracing a porcupine? And then through the kindness of the Lord, He puts a deep sleep on you five minutes before the alarm goes off? And you get up so weak, you can't—you are not even sure you got legs? This promise says: "As thy day"—very individualized. This is not a message for all of you. It is a message for each of you. "As thy day, so shall thy strength be." The Giver of strength programs the strength for your day.

Now the wonderful good news of that message is it pays to get up feeling bad. If you get up weak, the measure of strength is piddling. "As thy day, so shall thy strength be." I'm going to have a day that doesn't call for much strength—best thing about that, the devil is going to come in midget form today.

My mom tells me my dad gets up some days..., he's got arthritic pains and dad's pretty good for 80—but he gets up with pain most of the morning. Mom gets up with pain most of the morning and I inherited much of it. And when dad will get up on a rare day and feel good, he worries. He gets up and he worries—worries his head off. For the first hour he is not sure, but what he died and he's in heaven. Right, mom? Dad gets up and he feels so good he starts moaning because he feels so good. He knows there is something wrong because he can't feel this good. It is too abnormal.

Do you get up—you ever get up where you feel like, "Boy, I mean if a lion walked in here, I could break his jaw"? Look out man! "As thy day"—that's the bad news of it, "As thy day, so shall thy strength be." You know, you can't win. You can't win! You either got to feel bad with the good news there is not much trouble today; or you've got to have a good feeling ruined by the knowledge that you got so much strength, it is going to be a terrible day. Like the doctor that went to the guy—who just cut his leg off, and said, "I got good news for you, and bad news for you! The bad news is: we cut off the wrong leg. The good news is: the leg we thought we needed to cut off, we discovered it doesn't have to be cut off." You can't win for losing. You get up feeling good; you know the demons are going to land. You get up feeling bad; you are feeling too bad to enjoy the fact that the demons won't be very numerous. The good news is if you feel bad, not much trouble today. The bad news is if you feel good, all hell is coming. "As thy day, so shall thy strength be."

But what is the bottom line? No matter what the day, the Giver of strength is going to give us enough to handle it.

This is perhaps the hardest lesson that I've had to learn in my entire Christian life—don't ever quit at the end of the day. Don't ever quit at the end of the day. Don't we have this agreement? If your pastor resigns at night, it don't count. It doesn't count. The promise of God is, "As thy day, so shall thy strength be." That means that, individualized, the Lord of hosts and God of all glory is going to measure the strength out for each of us, and we are going to make it through this day.

Now faith begins to operate when you grab that promise and resist that ever-present temptation and.... How many of you, any day in your life, were convinced you weren't going to make it? How many of you are here? Now some people preach a Christianity that's all laid out. When you're 20 you come to God, and you know exactly what you're going to do when you're 83.

That is not the way God works, and I told you I needed this message. I don't know what you are facing today, and I'm not here to entertain. This is a message I want to be realized. Whatever you are facing today and whatever you face tomorrow and whatever you face the next day, nobody ever had a nervous breakdown over today's problems. There isn't a one of you in my eyesight or in the sound of my voice that doesn't know, way down deep, you can make it through today. Nervous breakdowns come because of what we fear is going to happen tomorrow or the next day.

Well, God's promise is when tomorrow becomes today, individualized to you. "Well you don't know what I'm facing—I got to meet the IRS Wednesday!" "You don't know what I'm facing—I'm going bankrupt Tuesday and my wife is divorcing me the same day!" Remember when the guy called me one night on TV? He said, "I don't know what to do. I just went bankrupt and my wife divorced me." You know what I said to him? "Man, leap for joy! Very few men have a chance to start over that clean in this world!"

Quit letting tomorrow kill you! "As thy day, so shall thy strength be." Think of it—God, like the spiritual alchemist, measuring out each day the strength! The One who knows what is to come figured out, "I ain't going to waste any of my strength on Scott today because he ain't going to face a very big problem. So just let him get up miserable. Don't give him a night's sleep. You let him sleep good tonight and get up tomorrow full of vinegar, he'll use a neutron bomb to kill a fly!"

Program this properly. How many of you feel miserable today? Come on, be honest! You are the lucky ones. You are like me—the devil is not going to bother you much. Now where's the rest of you that are going to be under attack? You got up feeling like a giant? Let's pray for them! I'm trying to preach some common-sense Christianity, so you don't get knocked for a loop. "Tough shoes for a tough trip." Simply said, we are going to make it! Bring on the tough road! My shoes can handle it. "Tomorrow; sufficient to the day thereof is the evil thereof", Jesus said. Let us take it and settle it in our mind, God having responded to our faith by putting His life in us—"As thy day, so shall thy strength be."

What's next? "The eternal God is thy refuge." Oh, here we go again. It's almost an embarrassing word! The Hebrew letters are pictorial words. They carry a meaning that has to be gestalted, almost felt. What is really said here is, "The God of the forefront will be your refuge." Okay, I accept the fact it is a tough trip. I accept the fact that I can't get a barrel of oil for future days. God gives the strength by the day, and He pours out the strength to match what my day is going to bring, but I'm still anxious about tomorrow. God knowing that, adds this promise. Whew!

We have done this every year for ten years; it usually falls flat. Don't we get nervous about tomorrow? And history is marching on and I don't know what is around that bend up there. And what this verse is saying is: "the God of the forefront" is our safety. When you get to that, you are already covered. Now, time... you do accept. If you have gone to school, there are some things about reality that are vastly different from the way we perceive it. Looking at me, you may find it hard to conceive that I'm mostly space, and I am made up of the tiniest particles moving around. But how many of you have finally, through the study of physics and science, come to know that that is true? Well, time is relative. Time is relative. God says, "I'm Alpha" —beginning, "and Omega"—the end. Time is relative to us.

...Now we view time in such a manner that history is what is past, right? And the future is upfront. Come on now! Future is yet to come, isn't it? It's upfront. I'm marching into the future, right? History is all behind me. What is yet to come is upfront, right? Come on, think with me!

I don't like those churches where people go in and look at the preacher like this, with their mind somewhere else. History has passed me by, and the future is yet to come. It is behind me; and no, it is up here. History is behind me, right? Isn't that the way we look at time?

Let's do it again. Where is history? Behind me. Where is the future? In front of me.

Now, God doesn't view it the way we view it. He views history the way we look at a parade. He knows the beginning. He knows the end. And when you look at a parade, what is upfront has already gone by and what is behind is yet to come. In fact, those little clowns have already cleaned up the mess of what is upfront having gone by. You got it? I'm not too sure.

We look at time, and what is history is behind, and future is upfront. You look at a parade: future is behind; and what is upfront is past. Huh? Well now, wait a minute! Future is in front of me, and history is behind me; but if I flip my brain to the God view, what is upfront has already past, and what is behind is yet to come. Huh.

And that is what this pictorial word is saying...., that what is scaring us upfront "the God of the forefront" is already on that corner; cleaned up the mess; and provided the shelter when we get there. "Hey, that ain't bad! It's hard to believe but it ain't bad." How many of you got it? Well you are smart!

Think of this! "Tough shoes"... "iron and brass"... "for a tough trip"; "As thy day so shall thy strength be"; and the "God of the forefront", who is already rounded the bend and encountered every mess, is there for my refuge when I get there. And what I thought was future, He has already made the trip; and what I thought was yet to come, is behind Him as He led the parade; and, believe it or not comes at the end. We are encompassed with His care!

In the New Testament it says, "God will not tempt you beyond what you're able"; and I told you this a thousand times: the Greek has it that He will specifically provide the specific way of escape for the specific temptation. There is no temptation you or I are facing that God has not worked out the way of escape, so don't lose heart.

Come on, let's say it! We haven't said it since we have been down here: "We made it through 1986." David so believed God that he put the future in the past tense: "We made it through 1986!" Boy, that's wonderful!

Last, "Underneath are the everlasting arms." Again, we got a Hebrew word that is pictorial. Can you conceive of what "bottomless" is? I can't, but I can have a little bit of a feel. It is one hell of a way down there.

"Underneath." The Hebrew word grabs at an abstract thought really impossible to conceive—wherever bottomless is, underneath that...! That means if you slip and fall all the way down to bottomless—wherever that is and whatever that is, underneath that are the everlasting arms. Now, bottomless must be far enough down, and God must be quick enough that when He sees us start to fall, He can move His hands over there.

Do I make sense? I mean, bottomless is a "fer piece"! God is quick enough. Some angel says, "Hey, Scott is falling and the establishment is treading on him. Get your arms over here, God!" He can make it; but that my security might be magnified, the promise is everlasting... never-moving... down-underneath-bottomless—everlasting arms.

That's why I preach "grace", friends. I'm sick and tired of the church condemning everybody. It is a tough trip. It's about time we recognize it, but the shoes will make it. There are good days and bad days; but "As thy day, so shall thy strength be." There's uncertainties about the future; but "the God of the forefront" is on the corner, and He has got it worked out. And when our day reaches that day, and it is today for us, then He'll give us the strength to make it. And when we stumble, damn the condemnation mongers! God's Word says, "Underneath are the everlasting arms." They never move. Doesn't that make you feel good? Huh?

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