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## A Hallmark Faith



Almost from the beginning, the success of Joyce C. Hall was in the cards — greeting cards, that is. He founded the Hallmark empire.

When he was just nine, the lad helped out at home by selling perfume door-to-door for a company that would become Avon. At age 18 he left school and went to Kansas City, arriving with two shoe boxes of scenic postcards he hoped to sell to dealers across the Midwest.

And sell, he did, working out of a room at the YMCA. In just a few years, he opened the Norfolk Post Card Company with his brothers, Rollie and William. But, long before others,

J.C. saw how greeting cards could express deep-seated feelings, and enhance relationships, so he added them to his product line in 1912.

Just three years later, a fire destroyed the company but the brothers found a small engraving press and started over, just down the street, producing their own cards. J.C. called the new company Hallmark, a play on his name. It was also a word that originated in the 1300s when the Goldsmith's Hall in London marked gold and silver to signify quality, and where coins and other items of high quality received a "Hall mark". A five-point crown was chosen as the company's logo.

The first Hallmark card came out in 1916. It read, "I'd like to be the kind of friend you are to me." But the company's success also had much to do with presentation. Previously, cards were kept behind the counter where clerks selected one for the customer. But in 1936, J.C. worked with an architect and introduced display cases that allowed consumers to browse on their own. Sales skyrocketed.

Well into the 1970s, every greeting card sold by the company had to be personally approved by the founder who would scrawl O.K. J.C. on the design. In 1982, when J.C. died at age 91, the company he



*Read the Bible.  
We live happily  
ever after, but  
it's no fairy tale.*

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started in a couple of shoe boxes was worth \$1.5 billion. And it continues to thrive. Hallmark introduced online greeting cards in 1995 and, run by J.C.'s grandchildren, still sells 10 million cards each year.

There's another Family venture that specializes in communicating matters of the heart while enhancing our most significant relationships. It, too, rose from humble beginnings to become a world wide presence, thanks to the insistence of its Founder that everything be focussed on meeting the emotional, spiritual needs of those served.

The essence of the gospel is love and the supreme value of faith and forgiveness found in Jesus Christ. In many ways, the Bible is a collection of heartfelt messages encompassing everything from Christmas to Easter; joy and celebration over new life to comfort and sympathy in the face of death; expressions of thankfulness to love notes from an ardent Suitor who pursues us with passion and astonishing patience.

Among believers, the hall mark — our sign of spiritual quality and approval — is the Holy Spirit who attests we are saved by God. *"So don't bring sorrow upon God's Holy Spirit by the way you live,"* writes Paul. *"Remember, he has put his seal on you and identified you as his own, guaranteeing you'll be saved on the day of redemption."* (Eph. 4:30)

On that day, there will be *"a crown of life"* for those who remain faithful (Rev. 2:10). *"Hold on to what you have,"* we're told, *"so no one will take away your crown."* (4:11). Yet it's hard to stay faithful, for all of us. We yearn to be able to say to Jesus, "I'd like to be the kind of friend you are to me." but our flaws so often get in the way.

And yet, the only way to truly come to know God is through his Word and by experiencing his loving grace as we trust him with our sins and our circumstances. In the scriptures, Jesus makes his messages available to everyone and we're free to see for ourselves what he has to say, without anyone else choosing what we should think or do.

Most of all, God wants us to respond in gratitude and obedience because Jesus died for our sins on the cross and cancelled our guilt. *"You were separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions. Yet now he has reconciled you to himself through the death of Christ... He has brought you into his own presence and you are holy and blameless, without a single fault."* (Col. 1:21,22). That's what happens when you care to send the very best.