

A New Hope - Faithfulness

This week, we are going to explore the aspect of the Fruit of the Spirit known as Faithfulness. The Fruit of the Spirit are all characteristics of God, and everything that God is, God is relentlessly. It is God's relentless nature that is best seen in His faithfulness. Think of it this way, God is always to be love... no matter what we do or say, God's love toward us is unchanging. No matter what our response is to God, God will always be loving and faithful towards us – that is grace.

Faithfulness is the unchanging unwavering nature of God. God is consistent, constant, God is unceasing, firm in His promises and can be trusted at all times. God is relentless! And that relentlessness of God is what cultivates the aspect of the Fruit of the Spirit that is faithfulness in us, because we know exactly what we can believe in God for.

Remember, in his letter to the Galatians 5:22, the Apostle Paul wrote, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness & self-control." Today we'll talk about "faithfulness."

Often, we hear about the news proclaiming about another couple whose marriage didn't last! What the tabloid news are doing is actually revealing a weakness in our society today - if a marriage lasts one year, it really lasted.

Hallmark has an appropriate card that says, "I can't promise you forever, but I can promise you today." That's about as deep a commitment some people are willing to make today.

But God is different! God demonstrates & honors faithfulness. Today's scripture, Psalm 100:5 says, "For the Lord is good and His love endures forever; His faithfulness continues through all generations." Like it say's in Genesis 9:13, every time you see a rainbow; remember, God is faithful - He keeps His promises. Every time you pick up a Bible, remember what Jesus said, "Heaven & earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away" [Matt 24:35].

And when you stand on the brink of death, remember another of the Lord's promises, "In my Father's house are many rooms...I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go & prepare a place for you, I will come back & take you to be with me. For where I am, there you will be also" [Matthew 14:2-4].

Or as the old classic hymn (UMH#140) goes:

"Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father...

Morning by morning new mercies I see.

All I have needed Thy hand hath provided.

Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me."

God's faithfulness continues through all generations – what a promise! If we allow the Holy Spirit to work within us, if we participate in God's grace... the fruit of faithfulness will be real and evident in our lives, too. **My point** - the more we yield to Lord's will, power and guidance - - the less fickle, the less vulnerable we'll become to discouragement and temptation. As we allow the Holy Spirit to transform us, other people will find us to be more reliable and trustworthy, we'll have a faithfulness the world doesn't understand.

DEFINITION OF FAITHFULNESS

Lets start with a definition of "faithfulness" so we can make sure that we're talking about the same thing. If you were going to define faithfulness, as Paul uses it in the New Testament, how would you do it? **Well**, if you looked in the dictionary, you'd find a technical definition that says, "To follow through with a commitment regardless of difficulty." That's a good definition.

But let me give you one that may be easier to remember, "**Faithfulness is love hanging on.**" It is love saying, "**I will not quit.** There may be misunderstandings, there may be disappointments, there may be discouragements, but I will not quit." It is love hanging on.

If a husband says, "I really love my wife," then he goes out and has an affair, you may call him a liar or a cheat. But most of all, you'd say, "He is unfaithful." Because that's what he has been, no matter how strong his arguments, no matter how loudly he proclaims his love for his wife, you will not believe him because his acts of unfaithfulness cancels out his proclamation of love. In the same way, if someone says, "I really love the Lord," or "I really love the church," and yet is unfaithful, they behave as the Message bible explains Galatians 5:19-21:

If a person is living a life where they are always trying to get their own way; repeatedly looking for loveless, cheap sex; carrying a stinking accumulation of mental and emotional garbage; frenzied - joyless attempts for happiness; trinket gods; paranoid loneliness; cutthroat competition; all-consuming-yet-never-satisfied wants; a brutal temper; an impotence to love or be loved; divided homes and divided lives; small-minded and lopsided pursuits; the vicious habit of depersonalizing everyone into a rival; uncontrolled and uncontrollable addictions!

If a someone claims to be a Christian and still lives this way, it's hard to believe that person really does love God. **Why?** Because faithfulness & love always go hand in hand... **faithfulness is love hanging on.** Faithfulness says, "Even though I may be discouraged and disappointed, even though I may be struggling in life... I will not let go, I will not quit. I will keep on, keeping on – worshipping our Triune God of grace and giving to the Lord and serving God! **Why?** Because the Lord has called me to be faithful!"

Listen to what the Bible says. Here are some of the scriptures that challenge us to be faithful.

1 Corinthians 4:1-2 challenges us to be faithful in stewardship. Ephesians 6:21 talks about being faithful in service. 1 Timothy 5:9 speaks of being faithful in our marriages. Revelation 2:15 speaks of being faithful in witnessing. Romans 12:12 says we are to be faithful in prayer. Colossians 1:7 speaks of being faithful in ministry. Revelation 17:14 says we are to be faithful in following the Lord. 3 John 3 says we are to be faithful in the truth. Revelation 13:10 speaks of faithfulness even in times of persecution.

Remember "Bridges Over Madison County" it was advertised as "the world's greatest love story." Staring Clint Eastwood as a traveling photographer and Meryl Streep as a housewife who meet and have an affair. Then, after 4 days, they end it and go their separate ways. Hollywood called it "the world's greatest love story." My point is that the world we live in doesn't understand faithfulness. It

doesn't even have a clue as to what Paul is talking about when he says the fruit of the Spirit is "faithfulness."

DEMONSTRATION OF FAITHFULNESS

To help us better understand Faithfulness, let's look at how Jesus demonstrated it, Matthew 16:21 when Jesus brings His disciples together and tells them that He is going to Jerusalem.

Jesus explains, "I know what will happen there. I'm going to be arrested, & beaten, & crucified. But I'm going anyway." Then in the next verse, Peter tried to stop Him, he said, "Lord, don't go!" But Jesus replied, "Get behind me, Satan." Now here's the reason that He called Peter "Satan" - because Satan was using Peter to try to get Jesus to quit, to be unfaithful.

All throughout his ministry, Satan tried to tempt Jesus to be unfaithful. "Don't go to the cross. Don't die for their sins. Just quit. It's too tough, too many obstacles, too many difficulties. Just quit." But the scriptures tell us that "Jesus set His face steadfastly toward Jerusalem." Jesus was determined that no matter what happened, He'd be faithful to the mission God had for Him to do. So he went to Jerusalem.

Even while He was hanging on the cross and the people mocked Him, saying, "If you really are the Son of God, come down from the cross." That's what Satan was saying, "Quit! Come down. It's not worth it. The pain is too intense. The people don't care anyway. Just quit!" **But Jesus continued to hang there** until He said, "Father, forgive them for they don't know what they are doing." And "Into your hands I commit my spirit." That's faithfulness, faithfulness unto death... a faithfulness that has inspired the faithfulness of Christians through the ages, those who hung in there, through the good & the bad.

HOW DO WE DEVELOP FAITHFULNESS?

So, "How do we develop faithfulness?" Well, think how apple trees don't stand in an orchard asking, "Now how do I make apples?" Apple tree make apples... **because** that's what apple trees do. When we allow the Holy Spirit to lead us, we produce fruit because it's the natural thing to do. **But we do** have to be careful not to wander from God, if we do it'll destroy our fruitfulness. How do we keep this from happening?

- **First and foremost: We must MANAGE OUR MINDS**

For example, people don't just fall away from a marriage, they're not moral and upright one day and have an affair the next day. It doesn't work that way... although sometimes it looks that way. There's always a series of events that come before the fall. The problem or the temptation begins and ends in our minds.

And in the same way, unfaithfulness toward God happens the same way, there are always a series of temptations before the fall. **James 1:14-15** "Temptation is the pull of a person's own evil thoughts and wishes. These evil thoughts lead to evil actions, and afterwards to death." The problem is that most Christians don't think that **our thought life** is that important. But if your mind and what you think about isn't such a big deal, Madison Avenue wouldn't spend billions of dollars every year attempting to influence what you think. They know what you think, influences what you feel and how you feel will influence how you act.

II Timothy 2:22 explains, "*Turn your back on lustful desires and give your positive attention to goodness, integrity, love, and peace.*" Romans 16:19 "*I want you to be wise about what is good and innocent about what is evil.*" That's the exact opposite state of America today. America is wise about evil and innocent about good. This is not the way it is to be. It breaks my heart to see kids who are exposed by their parents to evil things in movies and TV as if it's OK and it doesn't affect them. But it does.

Nobody but you and God know what thoughts go through your head. You have the responsibility to be your own thought policemen. You know what movies you can see and what affects you and what doesn't. You know what music bring up feelings in you and which books you can't read. You know and you have to be responsible before God to guard your own thoughts. If you don't it can lead to this next step.

Other ways to develop faithfulness:

- We need to **realize temptations will come.** Just as Jesus was tempted to be unfaithful, we will be tempted to be unfaithful - in our marriage and in our relationship with the Lord, in our faithfulness to the church, the Body of Christ. That's what Satan does, he tempts us to be unfaithful.
- We need to **seek the Holy Spirit's power and develop solid, biblical spiritual habits.** This world isn't a Christian world or a Christian nation. We're pressured on every side to develop bad habits, tempted to be unfaithful in church attendance, unfaithful in prayer and in studying God's Word. But if we're determined to be faithful to God, then people will be able to count on us. We'll be consistent and trustworthy and reliable. We'll develop these habits so they come automatic and we will not give up on things.
- Finally, we need to **get back up when we fall or are knocked down.** Peter is one of my heroes, not because he always did right, he made a lot of mistakes, he even denied the Lord. But every time he screwed up, he got back up again. And when it came time to choose someone to preach the very first gospel sermon on the Day of Pentecost, guess who was chosen? The Holy Spirit said, "Peter, you do it. You've made mistakes, and these people need to know that, but despite all that, God is able to do His work through you."

Are you going through a painful experience? Feel like you've been knocked down, or maybe you've messed up big time? Have you been irresponsible or tempted to quit? Don't stop. **Hang in there!** Faithfulness is love hanging on. If you're here this morning... outside of Jesus and you don't know Him as your Lord and Savior, hat Jesus didn't quit. He went all the way to the cross & gave His life so that you & I might have the promise of everlasting life. And His salvation is available to you. This morning you can begin your journey with Him. He will never leave you or forsake you. And when you're knocked down & you try to get up by yourself, you'll find His strong arm there to help you get back on your feet again.

So if you're here & you have a decision on your heart, don't delay any longer. Let's close as we sing: