

The fruit of the Spirit, part 7: Faithfulness

The keys to healthy friendships, businesses,
and marriages

Message for Sunday, February 28, 2016
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Galatians 5:22-23;
Lamentations 3:17-25

Children's Message:

Proverbs 20:6-7, NLT

Many will say they are loyal friends, but who can find one who is really faithful? The godly walk with integrity; blessed are their children after them.

Being faithful means you stick with your decision to do the right thing even when it is hard. When might you have to be faithful? Being a friend to someone when other kids laugh at you or at your friend. Cleaning your room properly instead of just throwing all the clean clothes into the laundry and everything else into the closet. Other examples?

Read *Horton Hatches the Egg*, by Dr. Seuss. Very simply, this is one of the greatest stories of faithfulness ever told: "An elephant's faithful, one hundred percent."

Message: The fruit of the Spirit: Faithfulness

This is the seventh in a series of messages about the fruit of the Spirit:

Galatians 5:22-23, New International Version:
The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

In this series of messages, I want to especially focus on how the fruit of the Spirit are vital for healthy relationships.

Today, we're looking at faithfulness. To be very simple, "faith" is what I trust God to do, or you to do. "Faithfulness" is my commitment about what I'm going to do. That simple definition, though, fails to communicate the incredible power of faithfulness in a relationship.

1) Faithfulness is an amazing power

Leonard Vander Zee, a pastor in the Christian Reformed Church, began a sermon on faithfulness with this wonderful statement:

We possess two great powers from God, one that deals with the past, the other with the future. To deal with the past, we have the power of forgiveness. The power to forgive frees us from past pain and past mistakes. Forgiveness releases us from the anger or guilt from the past that cripples us. To deal with the future we have the power of faithfulness, of commitment; the power to make and keep promises. It's a gift the Bible lists as one of the fruit of the Spirit.

I really like that! God gives us the power to be freed from bondage to the past, and the power to be faithful for the future. I can't control the future. You can't control the future. We can't even predict it. How on earth, then, can we make promises about the future? By being faithful.

When people get married, they make a promise that they will be faithful to one another for the rest of their lives. At one time, it was all the rage for couples getting married to write their own wedding vows. (Some still ask to do that these days, but it's not as common.) Some of the versions people came up with were wonderful; others were, well, interesting. In all this creativity, though, one thing remained constant: there must be a commitment that this marriage relationship shall be for life.

A university student walked into a photography studio with a framed picture of his girlfriend. He wanted the picture duplicated. This involved removing it from the frame. In doing this, the studio owner noticed the inscription on the back of the photograph: "My dearest Tom, I love you with all my heart. I love you more and more each day. I will love you forever and ever. I am yours for all eternity." It was signed "Diane," and it contained a P.S.: "If we ever break up, I want this picture back."

When a couple begin their marriage with anything less than complete faith that they will be together forever, they are planning for trouble.

Compare that with the couple which author and business leader Fred Smith wrote about:

One of my treasured memories comes from a doughnut shop in Grand Saline, Texas. There

was a young farm couple sitting at the table next to mine. He was wearing overalls and she a gingham dress. After finishing their doughnuts, he got up to pay the bill, and I noticed she didn't get up to follow him. But then he came back and stood in front of her.

She put her arms around his neck, and he lifted her up, revealing that she was wearing a full-body brace. He lifted her out of her chair and backed out the front door to the pickup truck, with her hanging from his neck. As he gently put her into the truck, everyone in the shop watched. No one said anything until a waitress remarked, almost reverently, "He took his vows seriously."

Play the country and western song *Austin*. A woman leaves her husband/boyfriend (the song doesn't say which), and goes back to her hometown, Austin, Texas. A year later, she phones the man, and gets his answering machine. His message tells what he's up to and when he'll be home, then closes with—and she is stunned to hear this—"P.S. If this is Austin, I still love you." Sure enough, every day he includes that in his messages. His faithfulness and love win her back.

I cry every time I hear that song. Faithfulness is an incredible power in a relationship.

That's especially true in our relationship with God.

2) Faithfulness has power because it comes from God

The prophet Jeremiah suffered greatly at various periods in his life. One time, he was almost ready to give up...

Lamentations 3:17-25, New International Version:

I have been deprived of peace;

I have forgotten what prosperity is.

So I say, "My splendour is gone

and all that I had hoped from the Lord."

I remember my affliction and my wandering,
the bitterness and the gall.

I well remember them,

and my soul is downcast within me.

Yet this I call to mind

and therefore I have hope:

Because of the Lord's great love we are not
consumed,

for his compassions never fail.

They are new every morning;

great is your faithfulness.

I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion;
therefore I will wait for him."

The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him,
to the one who seeks him.

The wonderful song "Great is thy faithfulness" is based upon this Scripture passage.

It is because of God's faithfulness to us, that we can be faithful to others. The assurance of God's love, the knowledge of our forgiveness and salvation through Jesus, the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit within us — all these are evidence of God's faithfulness to us. With that firm foundation underneath us, we are able to treat others in the same way.

Here it is again. I promised that this theme would come up throughout this series of messages. Faithfulness, like all the other fruit of the Spirit, begins with God. My faithfulness is not so much a reflection of my character; it is more the evidence of God's power in my life. Remember: it is the fruit of the *Spirit*, not the fruit of my labour.

When you wonder whether or not you can stay faithful, whether you even *want* to keep that promise you made some time ago, remember this: it is God's faithfulness working through you that you need, far more than your own weak effort.

Next Steps:

- Thank God for his faithfulness, even when you have ignored or even rejected God at times.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to fill you with that kind of faithfulness, for your relationships with God and with other people.