

## Faithfulness

[Galatians 5:22-23 HCSB](#) But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, (23) gentleness, self-control. Against such things there is no law.

### Introduction

**ILL.** The headline of a major supermarket tabloid proclaimed, "And they said it wouldn't last!" The paper was celebrating the first wedding anniversary of a very well-known couple whose marriage many had predicted wouldn't last. The tabloid was gleefully proclaiming that the predictions were all wrong, and that the marriage was healthy and strong.

Who were they talking about? Who was this famous couple? It was Michael Jackson and Lisa Marie Presley, whose marriage ended soon afterwards.

Now not only was the tabloid absolutely wrong about the state of their marriage, but it also revealed the weakness of modern society in suggesting that if a marriage lasts one year, it has really lasted.

**ILL.** Hallmark has a card that fits the mood of our time by saying, "I can't promise you forever, but I can promise you today." That's about as deep a commitment as some are willing to make.

But in contrast to that, God exhibits and honors faithfulness. Psalm 100:5 says,

- [Psalms 100:5 HCSB](#) For the LORD is good, and His love is eternal; His faithfulness endures through all generations.

Every time you see a rainbow, remember that God is faithful - He keeps His promises.

- [Genesis 9:11-17 HCSB](#) I confirm My covenant with you that never again will all flesh be wiped out by the waters of a deluge; there will never again be a deluge to destroy the earth." (12) And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant I am making between Me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all future generations: (13) I have placed My bow in the clouds, and it will be a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. (14) Whenever I form clouds over the earth and the bow appears in the clouds, (15) I will remember My covenant between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh: water will never again become a deluge to destroy all flesh. (16) The bow will be in the clouds, and I will look at it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh on earth." (17) God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant that I have confirmed between Me and all flesh on earth."

Every time you pick up a Bible, remember that He said,

- [Matthew 24:35 HCSB](#) Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will never pass away.

Every time you gather to worship with brothers and sisters in Christ, remember that He said,

- [Matthew 18:20 HCSB](#) For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there among them."

Every time you partake of communion, every time someone answers the invitation, remember that He said,

- [Matthew 28:20 HCSB](#) teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

And when you stand on the brink of death, remember His promise,

- **John 14:2-3 HCSB** In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if not, I would have told you. I am going away to prepare a place for you. (3) If I go away and prepare a place for you, I will come back and receive you to Myself, so that where I am you may be also.

**ILL.** The songwriter is right:

"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."

We must proclaim that our God is a faithful God; that "His faithfulness continues through all generations."

And if we allow His Spirit to work within us, then the fruit of faithfulness will be real and evident in our lives, too. The more we yield to His guidance, the less fickle, the less vulnerable to discouragement and temptation we'll become.

And as we are filled with His Spirit, others will find in us a reliability, a trustworthiness, a staying power through both good and bad, a faithfulness that the world doesn't understand.

## **I. FAITHFULNESS DEFINED**

To begin with, let's define "faithfulness" and make sure that we're talking about the same thing. If you were going to define faithfulness, as Paul uses it in the N.T., how would you do it? Well, if you looked in the dictionary, you would 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.

**ILL.** If a husband says, "I really love my wife," and then he goes out and has an affair, you may call him a liar. You may call him a cheat. But most of all, you will say, "He is unfaithful." Because that is what he has been. And no matter how strong his arguments may be, no matter how loudly he proclaims his love for his wife, you will not believe him because his unfaithfulness negates his proclamation of love.

**ILL.** And if someone says, "I really love the Lord," or "I really love the church," and then is unfaithful, then it's hard to believe that he really does love the Lord. Because, you see, faithfulness and love always go hand in hand. Faithfulness is love hanging on.

You may get discouraged. You may be disappointed. But faithfulness says, "Even though there is discouragement and disappointment, I will not let go, I will not quit. I will keep on attending and giving and serving, because God 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.
- Proverbs 31:26 speaks of faithful instruction.
- 3 John 3 says we are to be faithful in the truth.
- Revelation 13:10 speaks of faithfulness even in times of persecution.
- Revelation 2:10 says we are to be faithful unto death and then we'll receive the crown of life.

**ILL.** One of the hot box office attractions two years ago was a movie called "Bridges Over Madison County." It was advertised as "the world's greatest love story." It starred Clint Eastwood as a traveling photographer and Meryl Streep as a housewife. They meet, and begin having a sordid affair. Then, after 4 days, they end it and go their separate ways. And Hollywood called it "the world's greatest love story."

You see, this world really 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."

## **II. FAITHFULNESS DEMONSTRATED**

To help us better understand it, let's look at a demonstration of faithfulness in the Bible. Once again, the example is Jesus, and it is found in the 16th chapter of Matthew.

Vs. 21 tells us that Jesus brings His disciples together, and tells them that He is going to Jerusalem. He tells them, "I know what will happen there. I'm going to be arrested, and beaten, and crucified. But I'm going anyway."

You may remember that in the next verse Peter tries to stop Him. He said, "Lord, don't go!" But Jesus says, "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.

Again and again 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 going to be too tough. There will be too many obstacles, too many difficulties. Just turn around and quit."

Yet here the Bible tells us that "Jesus set His face steadfastly toward Jerusalem." Jesus was determined that no matter what happened, He would be faithful to the mission God had for Him to do. So "steadfastly" He goes to Jerusalem.

Even while He was hanging on the cross, the people below Him were mocking Him, saying, "If you really are the Son of God, come down from the cross." That's what Satan was saying, too. "Quit! Come down. It's not worth it. The pain is too intense. The people don't care anyway. Just quit!"

But He continued to hang there until finally He says, "Father, forgive them for they don't know what they are doing." And "Into thy hands I commit my spirit." That's faithfulness. That's faithfulness unto death.

And the faithfulness of Jesus has inspired the faithfulness of others down through the ages, those who hung in there, through the good and the bad, through times of plenty and times of want.

**ILL.** They're the people who were here when this church began on the back porch of Bob and Carmen's house. They're the people who, by faith began using the building that Cram it and Go used to be in. By even greater faith they purchased a little furniture store. They REALLY stepped out and hired a short, bow-legged, half deaf pastor from North Carolina. After a couple of years of growth they realized that God had no limits and so followed His leading in buying the old Carver Lumber mill and transformed it into a church. Now you are joining in that faith as we look toward turning the North Shed into a larger auditorium and expand our class room space in our present building. They're the faithful who have followed God all these years and sacrificed through the years to pay for it. They were here praying when it wasn't easy to pray. They were here through the good times and they were here through the bad.

There must have been many time they were tempted to quit, tempted to say, "I'm sorry, it's too big a job. I don't want to hang in there." But God had called them to be faithful. So down through the years they hung in there and they were faithful. And we are the recipients of their faithfulness.

**ILL.** George Muller began praying for 5 of his friends. He prayed 5 years before the first one was converted; for the next one he prayed 10 years; for the third one 25 years; for the fourth nearly 50 years. The last one was converted after 52 years, at George Muller's funeral. George Muller was faithful, even unto death.

### **III. FAITHFULNESS DEVELOPED**

Finally, let's ask the question, "How do we develop faithfulness?" In order to answer this you need to realize that an apple tree doesn't stand out in the middle of an orchard saying, "Now how do I develop apples?" An apple tree produces apples because that's what apple trees do.

And when we are Spirit-led Christians, when we are a branch attached to the vine who is Jesus Christ, then we produce fruit because it's the natural thing to do. We don't have to sit around and think about it and analyze it. But we do have to be careful that our branch is never detached from the vine, or that some disease will destroy our fruitfulness.

So there are certain things that we need to be careful about.

**1.** #1, we need to realize that temptations will come. Just as surely as Jesus was tempted to be unfaithful, we will be tempted to be unfaithful - in our marriage, in our relationship with the Lord, and in the church. That's what Satan does. He will tempt us to be unfaithful.

**2.** Secondly, we need to seek the Holy Spirit's reinforcement and develop regular, positive, spiritual habits. This world is not a Christian world. This nation is not a Christian nation. And we're being pressured on every side to develop negative habits, tempting us to be unfaithful in church attendance, to be unfaithful in prayer, and in studying the Word of God.

But if we'll say, "Get behind me, Satan," and be determined to serve God faithfully, 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 automatically. And when Satan tempts us, we will not be severely tempted because we've developed the habits of faithfulness, and we will not quit.

**3.** Finally, we need to get back up when we fall or are knocked down.

**ILL.** Simon Peter is one of my heroes in the scriptures, but not because he always did right. Sometimes he made glaring mistakes, even denying the Lord, and he wept bitterly because of what he had done. But every time he fell down, he got back up again. So 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, "Simon Peter, you do it. You've had the experience of being down and getting back up again. You've made some mistakes, and these people need to know that. They need to hear how vulnerable you've been, but despite all that, God is able to do His work through you."

**ILL.** The same is true of Saul of Tarsus who became the Apostle Paul. He experienced all kinds of persecution, all kinds of discouragement, all kinds of temptations. Yet he didn't give up.

Then came that glorious day when the old Apostle Paul wrote these words to Timothy,

- [2 Timothy 4:6-8 HCSB](#) For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time for my departure is close. (7) I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. (8) In the future, there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me, but to all those who have loved His appearing.

**CONCLUSION:** I wonder, are you going through a painful experience? Do you feel that you've been knocked down, or maybe that you've fallen? Have you been fickle and irresponsible? Are you tempted to quit? Don't stop. Keep pressing on. Hang in there, because 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, we want you to know that Jesus didn't quit. He went all the way to the cross and gave His life so that you and 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 and 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 and you have a decision on your heart, we encourage you to come forward and make that decision this morning, and not delay any longer. Will you come as we stand and as we sing?