

The Fruit of a God-Filled Life: Flourishing Faithfulness

May 11, 2008

2 Timothy 4:6-8

Galatians 5:22-23

We are getting closer to putting the finishing touches on our fruit salad. Today we are going to add the fruit of faithfulness to the salad that we have been making over the last few weeks. When we give our lives over to Christ, He does some wonderful things in our lives through His Spirit which is within us.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Galatians 5:22-23

The fruit of faithfulness is a fruit **makes your fruit salad taste even sweeter**. It is a fruit that if missing can cause your fruit salad not to taste very good. This fruit when it is growing in our lives will make our lives and the lives of those around us so much better; it will be something that other people will take notice of, it is a fruit that other **people desperately want to see** in the lives of those around them.

Faithfulness is a fruit that seems to be **sorely lacking** in our society and in the church.

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, "*The Lord is good and His love endures forever; His faithfulness continues through all generations.*"

Every time you pick up a Bible, remember that He said, "*Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away*" [Matthew 24:35].

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

Even when you mess up. Even when you disobey God's Word, do what you know is wrong, or fail to do what you know is right, we have this promise:

If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself. 2 Timothy 2:13 (NASB)

God's faithfulness does not depend on us. Our faithfulness should not depend on what others do either.

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."

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. That is the **fruit of a God-filled life!**

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.

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 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.

We are to be faithful in:

Stewardship - 1 Corinthians 4:1-2

Service - Ephesians 6:21

Marriage - 1 Timothy 5:9

Witnessing - Revelation 2:15

Prayer - Romans 12:12

Ministry - Colossians 1:7

When it comes to church - 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."

Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. Rev 2:10 (NIV)

One of the hot box office attractions a couple of years ago was a movie called "**Bridges Over Madison County.**" It starred Clint Eastwood as a traveling photographer and Meryl Streep as a housewife. They meet, and begin having an 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. A DEMONSTRATION OF FAITHFULNESS

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 thee 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."

Jesus was determined that no matter what happened, He would be **faithful to the mission** God had for Him to do.

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.

George Muller was a Christian evangelist born in **1805**. In his lifetime he cared for **tens of thousands of orphans** with the love of Jesus. He was well-known for providing an **education** to the children under his care, to the point where he was accused of **raising the poor above their natural station in life**. By the way, his faith was so great that in all his years of ministry, establishing orphanages throughout England, he **never asked anyone for money**, yet he raised over \$7,000,000. He said, that if they ever had to go without a meal he would take it as evidence that the Lord did not will the work to continue. They never missed a meal.

He doesn't look like an imposing character, does he? At one point, **he 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. HOW DO WE DEVELOP FAITHFULNESS?

"How do we develop faithfulness?"

There are certain things that we need to be careful about.

1. **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. 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.

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man abides in me & I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." John 15:5

That's why it is so important to **develop positive habits** that keep us connected with Jesus Christ, growing in our faith, and nourished with the Word of God. It's much easier to be faithful to God when you just spent 15 minutes talking with him that morning. (CLASS 201)

3. Get back up when we fall.

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."

As a child, **Norman Geisler** went to a **VBS** because he was invited by some neighbor children. He **went back to the same church for Sunday School classes for 400 Sundays.** Each week he was faithfully picked up by a bus driver. Week after week he attended church, but **never made a commitment to Christ.** Finally, during his **senior year in High School**, after being picked up for church over 400 times, **he did commit** his life to Christ.

Norman Geisler went on to become the founder and president of **Southern Evangelical Seminary** in Charlotte, North Carolina. He is the author of over **60 Christian books** and hundreds of articles, and considered one of the premier **Christian apologists** of our century.

What if that bus driver had given up on Geisler at 395? What if the bus driver had said, "This kid is going nowhere spiritually, why waste any more time on him?"

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, *"The time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day - and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for His appearing"* [2 Timothy 4:6b-8].

CONCL. 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 GIVE UP. 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.