

## 9 Flavors 1 Fruit Faithfulness

Back in 2021, president of the Southern Baptist Convention, Ed Litton was accused of plagiarizing another well-known preacher, JD Greear. 46 sermons were linked to JD Greear. Ed had written permission to use JD's material. The problem was that he used it without citing it. Everyone who heard those sermons believed this was Litton's own material.

Both pastors and churches released statements. Ed Litton's Redemption Church pulled more than 140 videos from their website. Compounding the problem was the fact that much of material JD Greear had shared with Ed Litton, had in fact first come from a third pastor.

We live in a day when practically every sermon preached is available online, and preachers all over are preaching "borrowed" sermons. I wouldn't be surprised if here in Marshfield, there are 15 to 20 sermons being preached today that are not original. I admit I've used other people's sermons before, either because it was really good and I thought people should hear it, or maybe I had been sick the whole week before, and I needed some serious help. But I've always cited my sources.

My father-in-law is fond of saying that preachers will beg, borrow and steal from wherever we can to find good material. We all stand on the shoulders of giants and pass on the blessings of others. But to take someone else's work and pass it off as my own isn't faithful. It isn't faithful to my calling to be a workman approved by God who rightly divides the word of truth. It fails to provide a faithful example for you.

I'm picking on preachers here, but I could be picking on business. I could be picking on politics. I could be picking on popular culture. It really doesn't matter where you point your finger, you will find a hundred examples of unfaithfulness.

The seventh divine quality that the Holy Spirit is growing in the soil of our hearts is faithfulness. Let us once again recite Galatians 5:22-23, as a church family.

*2 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.*

The fruit of the Spirit is faithfulness. The word for faithfulness is used 265 times in the Bible. As you might guess, this is an important word. It is usually translated as faith, faithful, or faithfulness, although it is also translated as assurance, proof, trust, conviction, and belief.

Faith is used in three distinct ways in the New Testament. **First, faith refers to the content of the Christian message, the central tenants of the good news of Jesus.** Faith is the essential truths we believe as Christians. If we say that someone is a great defender of the faith, or that a skeptic is attacking the faith, we mean it in this sense of the word.

Here are some biblical examples of this. Acts 6:7 says, *“And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the **faith**.”*

1 Timothy 4:6, *“If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the **faith** and of the good doctrine that you have followed.”*

Second, is the usual way we think of faith, where it refers to one’s acceptance of the gospel message, your personal belief and trust in Jesus. When we say that you must have faith to be saved, it is in this sense of the word.

Galatians 3:26 says, *“In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through **faith**.”*

Ephesians 2:8 tells us, *“For by grace you have been saved through **faith**. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.”*

The third way in which this word is used is in a more general sense. Faith or faithfulness wasn’t originally a religious or spiritual term. It was a general, everyday word that early Christians used to describe our trust and allegiance to Jesus and his teaching. In this wider sense of the word, faithfulness is the quality of being completely trustworthy and reliable.

We use the word this way when we say things like, “He’s a faithful employee. She’s faithful to her husband. He is faithful to his word.”

We find it used this way in 2 Timothy 2:2, *“And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to **reliable** (same Greek word used here: faithful, trustworthy) people who will also be qualified to teach others.*

Jesus also uses it this way in Luke 12:42, *“Who then is the **faithful** and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time?”*

In which sense is faithfulness being used here in Galatians 5:22? Is it talking about that which we believe? Is it talking about our trust in God? Or is the Spirit trying to grow us into trustworthy people that are dependable and reliable?

When you look at the virtues surrounding faithfulness here in Galatians 5, they don’t seem to be describing our relationship with God, nor what we believe, but rather they are all ethical qualities. They are focused on our relationships and how we behave toward other people.

Peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness and self-control all seem fixated on how we treat others. I need to live at peace with them. I need to be patient with them. I need to be kind to them and act from the goodness that God has placed in my heart. I should be gentle in my dealings with others. I should also be self-controlled in my words and actions.

Given this context, I feel pretty confident is saying that Paul calling us to be trustworthy.

Faithfulness is forged from an alloy of dependability and loyalty. We have a strong allegiance to

what is true. We are loyal to our relationships. We follow through with our commitments. We keep our promises. People can be confident in us because we are faithful—faithful in our words, faithful in our actions. They know they can trust us. And the Holy Spirit is trying to produce this trustworthiness in us.

## I. Faithfulness is Grounded in the Character of God

We are to be a faithful kind of people because the God who has placed His Spirit in us is a faithful kind of God. I love how Alistair Begg puts it, *“Faithfulness is grounded in the character of God; it is exemplified in the Son of God; and it is cultivated in the people of God.”* Our faithfulness begins with the faithfulness of God. We could do an entire series on the faithfulness of God, but I’m going to try to do it in just a few paragraphs.

Our forever God is forever faithful. Deut. 32:4 declares, *“He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he.”* Hebrews 10:23 invites us, *“Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised his faithful.”* His faithfulness is never in doubt, never distracted and never delayed. His faithfulness never falters and never fades. His faithfulness endures throughout all generations.

Paul assures us in 1 Corinthians 10:13, *“God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.”* And in 2 Thessalonians 3:3, *“But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one.”*

He remains as faithful today as he was with Paul and Silas behind the bars of a Philippian jail one 1,973 years ago. He is as faithful today as he was with Daniel in a den of lions more than 2,500 years ago. You can open a concordance in a vain attempt to describe the faithfulness of God, but even wielded by the most accomplished wordsmith, all attempts of language to describe the faithfulness of God will crumble. But some have made beautiful attempts.

*Great is Thy Faithfulness* is one such attempt. It’s a song that just celebrated its 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. Not old enough to be considered ancient, but old enough to be considered old fashioned, and yet the mere hum of its melodious strains can still stir the hearts of countless believers.

It was written by Thomas Chisholm, a simple man with modest beginnings, born in a Kentucky log cabin in 1866. He lived a rather unremarkable life working as school teacher, a newspaper editor and later as an insurance agent. And yet more than a thousand poems and songs flowed from his heart through his pen onto page, including this great hymn of praise.

Unlike other great songs of worship from this era that are still sung in the churches, *Great is Thy Faithfulness* wasn’t inspired by any dramatic story or heart-wrenching tale. *It is Well With My Soul* flowed from the mixture of the tears and sea that had drowned the daughters of Horatio Spafford. *Amazing Grace* grew out of the soil of guilt and forgiveness of a former slave ship

captain, but *Great is Thy Faithfulness*, was the result of reflecting on the staying power of God and how He is at work in our lives on a daily basis through events both big and insignificant.

Thomas Chisholm wrote, "My income has not been large at any time due to impaired health in the earlier years which has followed me on until now. Although I must not fail to record here the unfailing faithfulness of a covenant-keeping God and that He has given me many wonderful displays of His providing care, for which I am filled with astonishing gratefulness."

And from such a humble platform come such lofty words of praise.

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father;  
there is no shadow of turning with Thee;  
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not;  
as Thou hast been, Thou forever wilt be.

Great is Thy faithfulness!  
Great is Thy faithfulness!  
Morning by morning new mercies I see;  
all I have needed Thy hand hath provided:  
great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

## II. Faithfulness is Exemplified in the Son of God

Just as faithfulness is grounded in the character of God, so it is exemplified in the Son of God. If you want to know what faithfulness looks like, simply look at the life of Jesus. Looking forward to Jesus in one of his prophecies, Isaiah says in Isaiah 11:5, "*Righteousness will be his belt, and faithfulness the sash around his waist.*"

The prophet is picturing the Messiah a future king who will rule with justice and he will be faithful and true. And He was. He was faithful and true to his father. His will and the Father's will were one. Every word spoken, every deed performed was faithful to his Father. He was faithful to his people. He was faithful to the little people, the broken, the outcast, the downtrodden, and the wounded, what Isaiah calls a bruised reed and a smoldering wick. Jesus invites us in Mt. 11:28-30

*28 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."*

Every gentle word of comfort spoken, every word of confrontation shouted, every word of truth declared, only enhance his faithfulness. Every eye made to see again, every lame leg strengthened to walk again, every beleaguered soul relieved of the oppression of demons all testify that he is indeed faithful.

His faithfulness continued right up until the end. Listen to these beautiful words in John 13:1, "*It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave*

*this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end."*

He loved them to the end, and he will love you to the end, because He is faithful. That's who Jesus is. That's what Jesus does. Hebrews 13:8, *"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."* He is still the same Savior. James 1:17 promises, *"He never changes or casts a shifting shadow."*

That faithfulness will continue all the way until the end of all things. In the book of Revelation, the apostle John has a vision of a heavenly warrior riding upon a white horse, clothed in white, the color of victory. He is described in the very same terms as Jesus is seen in the opening vision of Revelation. We know who this rider is. He is the returning Messiah, come to conquer every last enemy to right every last wrong, and to reign over his eternal kingdom with his people. And listen to how Jesus is described in John's vision in Revelation 19:11, *"I saw heaven standing open and there before me was white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True."*

That's our Savior. He is faithful and He will see you through to the end.

### **III. Faithfulness is Cultivated in the People of God**

Faithfulness is grounded in the character of God, it is exemplified in the character of God, and it is cultivated in the people of God. God is faithful in order to make us fruitful, and God's Spirit wants to produce in me and in you the fruit of faithfulness. He wants you to be faithful and true, someone whose word is dependable and whose work is reliable.

You don't need me to tell you that we live in a world is that is quite content with broken vows, and will accept the flimsiest excuse for unkept promises. I was just reading this week about a company that advertises its warranty. Buy this product with confidence because it is backed by our money back guarantee. That's what's printed in big, bold letters on the outside of the box, but when you read all the legal, fine print, there's so much wiggle room, almost no one is ever able to successfully make a warranty claim.

It is a society where the words "until death do us part," are only a tradition that most don't take seriously. In fact, there is a trend of changing this part of the wedding vow. Instead of "until death do us part," it is "until we are no longer compatible." We moved the goal post from commitment to convenience. A journalist bragged in an article on Business Insider how she and her husband sealed their nuptials with this vow, "until or unless we determine that our flourishing would be more greatly enhanced through dissolution." What sort of non-committal garbage is that? Others promise before family and friends to "love and cherish each other as long as we choose to do so." I don't know what their friends thought, but surely God must be shaking His head. These are marriages doomed to failure the moment they walk down the aisle.

In this election year, we have all these candidates out there campaigning for your vote. Vote for me and I will do this. I will do that. But we know right now, don't we, less than 100 days from election, that no matter who we fill in the little circle for, that they will get to Jefferson City or Washington DC, and they will accomplish almost none of what they promised.

Our culture says that if something becomes inconvenient or it no longer suits you, then just quit. Leave. Move on to the next thing. Abort it. If faithfulness becomes too much of a burden then be unfaithful. If keeping your word is too big of a demand, then break your promise. The world accepts and even promotes unfaithfulness.

But we have been saved by a faithful Savior to serve a faithful God who's put His faithful Spirit in our hearts to make us a faithful people. We have got to quit going along with the culture on this. We have been called out of this darkness into his wonderful light. The world needs to see in us what it means to be trustworthy.

It becomes easier to understand how to cultivate faithfulness in our lives, if we substitute some of the other words we used to define it. How do I become more faithful? I become more dependable. I become more loyal. I become more reliable. I become more trustworthy.

Faithfulness is something that should define all of our relationships whether they are at home, at work, at church, with your friends, or your next door neighbor. Let me give you some application principles that will help you cultivate faithfulness in all of your life regardless of what kind of relationship it is.

**Learn to love, even when it is the hard thing.** Loving someone only when it comes easy or it's convenient isn't love. True love is doing the right thing for someone, even when it's the hard thing to do. Proverbs 10:12 says, "Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses."

Jackie Robinson was the first black to play major league baseball. Breaking baseball's color barrier, he faced jeering crowds in every stadium. While playing one day in his home stadium in Brooklyn, he committed an error. The fans began to ridicule him. He stood at second base, humiliated, while the fans jeered. Then, shortstop Pee Wee Reese came over and stood next to him. He put his arm around Jackie Robinson and faced the crowd. The fans grew quiet. Robinson later said that arm around his shoulder saved his career.

This is one similar. **Learn to be there in the hard times as well as the good times.** A faithful friend, neighbor, coworker is more than a fair weather friend. Jesus says in John 15:13, "*Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.*"

A British publication once offered a prize for the best definition of a friend. Among the thousands of answers the winning definition read: "A friend is the one who comes in when the whole world has gone out."

**Learn to be honest, even when it hurts.** Even when the outcome will go against you, tell the truth. Honesty builds trust. Trust is the heart of faithfulness. Proverbs 12:22, *“The Lord detests lying lips, but He delights in people who are trustworthy.”*

**Learn to stand alone.** Don’t give in to the crowd. The crowd is often wrong. Peer pressure makes us make unwise choices. Choose to be faithful, even if you’re the only one. People will learn that you are the only one they can depend on.

**Learn to keep your mouth shut.** Don’t gossip. Keep confidences. If someone tells you something because they trust you, don’t betray that trust. Proverbs 21:23 says, *“Those who guard their mouths and their tongues keep themselves from calamity.”*

**Learn to say, “I’m sorry.”** Don’t be afraid to admit you were wrong. We aren’t Jesus. We won’t be perfect. Being a faithful friend means owning our mistakes.

**Learn to be the same when no one is looking as when they are.** Boss in or boss out; parents home or parent out, it doesn’t matter. You’re the same person either way. Inconsistency and duplicity will always get you in the long run. When you do the right thing even when no one is looking, no private message, no secret acts will come back to haunt you. The best way to keep skeletons from coming out of the closet, is locking the door to them in the first place.

**Learn to be on time.** We are all late sometimes, but when you are late all the time, you are telling others that you don’t value them or their time. You are telling them you are not dependable. Being where you’re supposed to be when you’re supposed to be there is an act of faithfulness

**Learn to follow through.** Keep your promises. Fulfill your commitments. If you say you’re going to do something, do everything within your power to do it. Seeing things through is the trademark of a trustworthy person. Psalm 15:4 praises the person, *“who keeps an oath even when it hurts, and does not change their mind.”*

**Learn to be predictable,** in a good way. A predictable person is dependable. Dependability is trustworthiness. Don’t let your emotions run away with you. Faithfulness requires steadiness. Be the steady person. Old faithful is called Old Faithful for a reason: it’s predictable.

At the end of our lives, and at the end of time when our Savior returns for us, It won’t be our many accomplishments that He rewards. We won’t receive a crown for our successes. It won’t be our titles and achievements He congratulates us for. It will be our faithfulness. We follow Jesus, we run the race, to hear the words, “Well done, my good and faithful servant.” He will reward not just our faithfulness to him, but the faithfulness which His produced in our lives in all things.