

CHAPTER 28

Faithfulness

KEY IDEA

I have established a good name with God and others based on my loyalty to those relationships.

KEY VERSE

Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man.

–Proverbs 3:3-4

BEGIN BY RECITING THE KEY VERSE AND THE KEY IDEA TOGETHER AS A GROUP.

LESSON

INTRODUCTION

It is only a faithful person who truly believes that God sovereignly controls his circumstances. ... To be faithful in every circumstance means that we have only one loyalty, or object of our faith--the Lord Jesus Christ. ... The goal of faithfulness is not that we will do work for God, but that He will be free to do His work through us. -OSWALD CHAMBERS

Why is faithfulness to God an important part of a Christian's life? Without faithfulness to God there can be no Christian life.

> Christianity is based first on faith that God is, and then that through Christ Jesus we can be forgiven and are saved.

> Our faithfulness is a commitment to be devoted to the One God who is true and supreme and to keep His commandments.

< The first two of the Ten Commandments deal directly with our being faithful to God.

> God assumes a covenant relationship with His people.

< He states that he will not tolerate unfaithfulness. There is to be no competition with anything else.

What are the benefits of faithfulness to God?

> To some, perhaps the most beneficial aspect of faithfulness to God would include the fact that the faithful will not suffer God's judgment.

> Until our judgment day, there are many other benefits while we are here on earth.

< Psalm 37:28 - *"For the LORD loves the just and will not forsake his faithful ones."*

< Proverbs 3:12 - *"My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, for they will prolong your life many years and bring your prosperity."*

< Proverbs 16:6-7 - *"Through love and faithfulness sin is atoned for; through the fear of the LORD a man avoids evil. When a man's ways are pleasing to the LORD, he makes even his enemies live at peace with him."*

< Proverbs 28:20a - *"A faithful man will be richly blessed, but one eager to get rich will not go unpunished."*

< Revelation 2:10 - "Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. ... Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life."

The most significant element in our Christian life is faithfulness to God. The days we live in now are uncertain. There are wars, famines, economic collapse, and many natural disasters.

> Being faithful to God gives us great peace and assurance that we will go through this life with His promises of blessings and the reward of eternal life in Heaven.

> Our faithful allegiance to God is the only thing on which we can really count.

< He is our hope in a fallen world.

< His provision of forgiveness and salvation through Jesus is the greatest benefit of all faithful believers.

What value would the promises of God be without His faithfulness and of what value would we be to God, to our families, to the body of Christ, and to society without faithfulness?

> The faithful person is one who can be counted on to carry out his or her responsibilities and promises to the best of his/her ability, no matter how bad the situation.



MODELS OF FAITHFULNESS

The Bible has many examples of faithfulness.

> In the Old Testament, there are Noah, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, David, Daniel and his three friends and many others.

> In the New Testament there are the Disciples, Paul, Timothy and Titus and many others.

< Jesus is our supreme model of faithfulness.

THE MEANING OF FAITHFULNESS

The American Heritage Dictionary defines *faithful* as "(1) Adhering firmly and devotedly, as to a person, a cause, or an idea; loyal. (2) Worthy of trust or belief; reliable.

> The word used for *faithfulness* in the New Testament is the noun *pistis*, which has both an active and a passive sense or use.

< In its active use, it often refers to "faith, belief, trust."

< In the passive sense, it means "faithfulness, reliability, fidelity." It is used for the "faithfulness" of God, of Christ, and of man.

< A person of faith has the capacity to be faithful in their responsibilities before God and man.

> In the Old Testament several words are used for faithfulness— *emun*, "trusting, faithfulness," *emuna*, "firmness, faithfulness, fidelity," *emet*, "firmness, truth, faithfulness."

< All of these are derivatives of the verb *aman*, "to confirm, support, uphold," and so, "be established, be faithful, certain, i.e. to believe in.

Interesting Note: The primary Hebrew terms for "faith" and "faithfulness" are derived from the root *aman*. An original meaning connected with "firmness, stability" leads to the idea of "trust, constancy," which is prominent in the OT. The related word AMEN, which is used frequently in the OT and NT, shows the confident affirmation associated with the verb.

< In all of these words there is the element of being firm, steady, or lasting.

^ Thus, the idea of being *firm* or *lasting* naturally leads to the ideas of *reliable*, *trustworthy*, *faithful*.

THE ESSENCE OF FAITHFULNESS

The definition of "essence" is:

1. The intrinsic or indispensable quality or qualities that serve to characterize or identify something;
The inherent, unchanging nature of a thing or class of things.

2. The most important part or aspect of something:

The essence of something is its nature--what it is and cannot be changed.

ESSENCE: FAITHFULNESS AND SUCCESS

In looking at the essence of faithfulness, we look to Moses who was called *to be faithful* to God and to fulfill the commission he was given.

> He was not called to "succeed" or to "fail." When we see his name in Hebrews 3:2 the commendation of Moses focuses not on what Moses accomplished, but on his faithfulness

> Faithfulness is not a matter of success or failure from the standpoint of results.

< If faithfulness is in action, failure does not bring blame nor should it lead to a sense of guilt.

^ Where there is faithfulness to serve as God directs, regardless of the results, there is success in God's sight.

^ We are to be faithful to the gifts, abilities, and opportunities God gives us and leave the results to Him.

^ Paul stresses this point in 1 Corinthians 3:5-8.

^ A servant is simply to be faithful to his/her God-given responsibilities and leave the results to the Lord. The results are His job.

^ Faithful Christians often work faithfully in fields that yield little fruit humanly speaking, but this does not mean they are not faithful.

ESSENCE: OBEDIENCE TO RESPONSIBILITIES:

There is a general faithfulness for which we are all responsible -- prayer, Bible study, loving one another, worshiping together, encouragement and edification of each other, giving, mercy, etc.

> The fruit of faith in God and His Word produces a faithfulness which will manifest itself in various forms of reliability depending on the responsibilities and the situation of the one with faith.

< We each need to be alert to the specific responsibilities to which God calls us.

KEY AREAS TO BUILD FAITHFULNESS

⇨ *Faithfulness and Our Focus and Expectations:*

> When facing difficult circumstances, we can easily become discouraged. In that discouragement, along with false expectations, we think about giving up and fail to carry on in or minimize our responsibilities.

> Life is full of disappointments and if we are not careful, those failed expectations will discourage us as they become demands of our heart and distract from our faithfulness.

< It is not wrong for us to hope for the best and to look to the Lord for that. (See 1 Corinthians 13:7 -- "*love...believes all things, hopes all things.*")

^ The same is true for faith according to Hebrews 11:1.

^ But 1 Cor. 13:7 also says, "*love bears all things,...endures all things.*"

} Note that believing and hoping is sandwiched between bearing and enduring.

< We would love for our life to be beautiful -- without problems, but it's simply not the way things are in our broken world. Wanting and expecting everything to go our way is not only unrealistic, it is self-centered.

^ It also suggests we are seeking our security and happiness in good times rather than in the Lord.

^ It is living according to sight, not faith.

↪ *Faithfulness and God's Truth:*

> Faithfulness is always related to God's truth. His Word is totally reliable.

> It is God's Word of truth that establishes us in the way of truth or the way of faithfulness because His Word is an expression of His faithfulness and trustworthiness (Psalm 33:4; 119:86a).

< God's way is a choice for us to make. – (Psalm 119:30).

^ The path of faithfulness is the product of a life committed to God and His Word.

↪ *Faithfulness and the Character of God:*

> Faithfulness is an attribute of God. This makes it a vital part of the character of God Himself.

< His faithfulness becomes a resource for the faithfulness in His people. (See Deut. 7:9; 32:4; 1 Sam. 26:23; Ps. 36:5; 40:10; 143:1, Lam. 3:23)

< In Deut. 32, Moses proclaimed the name of the Lord—he gave a description of the Lord's character and His works, at the heart of which lay His faithfulness or reliability. (see verse 4)

> All that the Lord does reveals His steadfast faithfulness.

< This makes us aware of what/who He is.

> Remembering and keeping one's focus on God's unchangeable character and faithfulness becomes one of our greatest resources for courage and faithfulness.

< We need to go on even when things seem their bleakest.

↪ *Faithfulness and the Holy Spirit:*

> Another source of faithfulness in a believer's life is the Holy Spirit – the Spirit of Truth.

< Faithfulness is one of the components of the Fruit of the Spirit – a grace given to us through the Holy Spirit.

> It is the Spirit of Truth who takes the things of Christ and makes them real to us and to motivate us to act in faith and obedience.

< The flesh is weak, in ourselves we lack the strength and ability to live faithfully.

< It is the Holy Spirit who empowers us to live the Christian life. (See Gal. 5:16; ph. 5:18.)

> Only those who walk in dependence on the power of the Spirit will experience the discipline and courage needed for faithfulness.

↪ *Faithfulness and the Body of Christ:*

> The Church – the Body of Christ – plays a big part in the spiritual life and growth of one another.

< As members of One Body, believers are to show the same care for one another and be involved in ministering to one another. (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:25).

> Ephesians 4:11-16 teaches us that the goal of Christ-like maturity occurs through the mutual work of the whole body of Christ.

MOTIVATIONS FOR FAITHFULNESS

↪ *The impact of Motives of Faithfulness*

> People have different motives for their faithfulness.

< There are aspects of faithfulness of the worldly nature: e.g. spouse, family, job, friends. But in it's worldly nature our faithfulness is usually done with a motive of self-preservation, or self-gratification.

< For Christians, motives need to be guided and in keeping with eternal values and with God's will and purpose the priority.

^ We see an example of this in Colossians 3:22-25. Paul wrote that slaves were to serve their masters from a different motive—from the desire to serve the Lord.

> Motives are crucial to everything a Christian does.

< God's promises of eternal rewards are related to both faithfulness and motives.

- Prov. 16:2 (*All a person's ways seem pure to them, but motives are weighed by the LORD.*)

- 1 Cor. 4:5 (*Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart. At that time each will receive their praise from God.*)

- 2 Cor. 1:12 (¹² *Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, with integrity and godly sincerity. We have done so, relying not on worldly wisdom but on God's grace.*)

< Impure motives ruin one's capacity for faithfulness, godly motives promote one's ability to be faithful stewards of God's grace. (1 Thess. 2:1-12; Phil. 1:12-17)

^ Believers may be doing good deeds or fulfilling their duties, but if their motives are impure, it does not honor God and is not true faithfulness.

⇒ *The Fruits of Faithfulness*

> The Bible promises rewards for our service as a motivation for faithful ministry.

< Faithful service may not lead to recognition and may even lead to persecution, but as Christians we must never allow the absence of immediate reward deter us from being steadfast in our faithfulness.

^ Sometimes we continue to labor and see few results, but the promise of scripture is that if we continue to be faithful to the Lord, we will eventually receive rewards for our efforts. If not in this life, in the life to come. (1 Cor. 15:58)

> The fruit of faithfulness is a blessing to others.

< Faithfulness will lead to multiple blessings in a variety of ways. (See Prov. 28:20 ²⁰ *A faithful person will be richly blessed, but one eager to get rich will not go unpunished.*)

< Not only will a faithful person be richly blessed, he will become a blessing to others. (Prov. 13:17 [*A wicked messenger falls into trouble, but a trustworthy envoy brings healing.*])

< See also

} Acts 20:27; 1 Thessalonians 2:4; 1 Timothy 1:11; 4:16; 6:20 -- demonstrate how a faithful messenger, who is faithful to proclaim, leads to the salvation of sinners and the transformation of believers.

} (Eph. 4:1-6; Phil. 1:7 & 27 -- show that faithfulness to truth will lead to spiritual growth, unity in the body of Christ, and the provision of the needs of others

} Gal. 6:5 -- help with stumbling saints.

} Rom. 6-8; Phil. 4:6-7. Faithfulness to believe and obtain the truth of the salvation that is in Christ leads to freedom from sin's control and a peace that passes all understanding.

GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

Between the Divine call to salvation and the full accomplishment of salvation, the Christian needs faith to watch and wait, to work and walk through the darkness.

> The rock on which he must build this faith is *God's faithfulness*.

> Many times in the Psalms we find the faithfulness of God highlighted as a source of encouragement and comfort (see Psalm 25:10; 30:9; 33:4; 36:5).

< Because of God's faithfulness we can always count on God even though the picture is bleak and the circumstances impossible

CHARACTERISTICS OF GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

> God performs what he promises.

< We see in His promises/covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses and Israel, and the new covenant sealed by the blood of Christ.

< God also promises by his actions.

< God's promises are felt through natural instincts. They are a part on the essence of all his creatures.

^ Our innate thirst for truth

^ Our desire for immortality

< God's faithfulness means that he will honor these promises through our faithfulness.

> God is true to himself. His consistency and unchanging nature are the basis of his faithfulness.

< Because he is true to himself he will be true to us.

> God justifies the confidence of his followers.

< Faithfulness implies trustworthiness.

^ If we commit ourselves to God, he accepts our trust, and thereby promises, on his honor, not to forsake us.

FOUNDATIONS FOR BELIEVING IN GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

> Our knowledge of the nature of God.

< If we believe in God at all, we must believe in him as moral, good, and perfect; and unchangeable in all his attributes.

^ A weak and limited god may change and fail. God is too great to be less.

> The testimony of those who can best speak for God.

< We judge a person's character largely on the evidence of those who have the most intimate acquaintance with them.

^ In the Old Testament we find prophets and saints who are nearest to God.

} They expressed a positive belief in God's faithfulness.

^ In the New Testament we find the apostles and followers of God who found Him faithful, even unto death.

^ Today we see witness of God's faithfulness in the lives of Christians around the world—even if it means persecution to the point of death.

> The evidence given through the life of Christ.

< Christ was the great Revealer of the character of God; and was faithful even to death.

> The witness of history to the past faithfulness of God, e.g.:

< The deliverance of the Hebrew nation from Egypt

< The return from the Israelite's Assyrian/Babylonian captivity

< The coming of Christ

- < The presence of Christ in his Church to guide and strengthen and bless
- > The confirmation of personal experience.
 - < Many have proved God's faithfulness in their own lives.

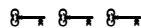
Write down an example of God's faithfulness in your own life.

TEMPTATIONS TO DOUBT GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

- > Growing tired and weary of waiting.
 - < God does not fulfill his promises as soon as he makes them. Long intervals try our faith.
 - ^ The Jewish expectation of the Messiah can be compared with the Christian expectation of Christ's return.
 - ^ Though we may grow discouraged with hope deferred, we should not doubt.
- > Appearances of unfaithfulness.
 - < Nothing tries our faithfulness quite like circumstances that cause us to doubt God's constancy.
 - ^ God seems to desert us, or we feel punished.
 - < The truest love will not shrink from the greater good when it is necessary.
 - ^ It is this greater faithfulness that leads God to act in what may seem an array of circumstances that cloud our vision of his love and faithfulness.
- > The unexpected fulfillment of Divine promises.
 - < God does not always fulfill his promises in the way expected by us.
 - ^ We become disappointed, but the error was on our part, not in any change on God's part.
 - ^ When we experience this type of Divine fulfillment, at first it may seem less pleasing to us than our expectation of it, but it always proves, in the long run, to be far better.

THE RESPONSE WE SHOULD HAVE TOWARD GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

- > Worship and Adoration.
 - <The faithfulness of God is one of the most worthy themes of worship.
- > Trusting God's faithfulness brings confidence.
 - < We must have confidence in God's faithfulness.
- > Fidelity.
 - <If God is faithful to us, he has a right to expect us be faithful to Him.



Many of the authors of the Bible recorded their reflections about God's faithfulness. In the song of Moses recorded in Deuteronomy 32, Moses exalts the faithfulness of the covenant-keeping God.

Deuteronomy 32:1-4 (CEV)

¹Earth and Sky, listen to what I say!² Israel, I will teach you. My words will be like gentle rain on tender young plants, or like dew on the grass.³ Join with me in praising the wonderful name of the LORD our God.⁴ The LORD is a mighty rock, and he never does wrong. God can always be trusted to bring justice.

Moses ascribes to the Lord perfection, greatness, justice, truth, righteousness, and faithfulness.
> He describes God as “the mighty rock.” This image for God speaks of Him as being stable, strong, unchanging, faithful, and enduring.
> Moses wanted to focus the attention of the people on the greatness of God.
< If they understood his greatness, the people would remain faithful.



Likewise, while living in a world with so much uncertainty, the author of Psalm 36 took great comfort in the extent of God’s devotion.

Psalm 36:5-9 (CEV)

⁵ Your love is faithful, LORD, and even the clouds in the sky can depend on you.⁶ Your decisions are always fair. They are firm like mountains, deep like the sea, and all people and animals are under your care.⁷ Your love is a treasure, and everyone finds shelter in the shadow of your wings.⁸ You give your guests a feast in your house, and you serve a tasty drink that flows like a river. ⁹ The life-giving fountain belongs to you, and your light gives light to each of us.

God’s mercy and faithfulness are as limitless as the skies. He is faithful to take care of people and animals on earth.

> The “shelter” in verse 7 is probably the Holy of Holies in the sanctuary of the temple, because of the mention in verse 8 of “your house.”
< If this is what the psalmist is referring to, then the “wings” are those of the cherubim on the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant.

FROM THE ESV STUDY BIBLE

This stanza has two descriptions of God’s steadfast love: it extends to the heavens, so that God can save man and beast; and it is precious to those who know it from the children of mankind. The pairing of steadfast love and faithfulness...describing God’s benevolence; ... helps readers to see that the other terms, righteousness and judgments, also express God’s enduring commitment to act kindly toward his creatures and to save them. In view of this, people can take refuge under his wings and find themselves welcome guests at his table. Although the psalm is a hymn for Israel, it looks beyond Israel to the rest of mankind; Israel’s calling was to live in their land in a way that displayed the true image of God, with a view toward bringing its blessing to the whole world.



While God always remained faithful, the Israelites did not and he disciplined them for it. By 586 BC Jerusalem and the temple had been destroyed and the people had been exiled to Babylon. God called the prophet Jeremiah to witness these events and warn the southern kingdom of Judah of God’s just punishment. The author (ancient tradition credits Jeremiah with writing Lamentations) of this series of alphabetic acrostic poems lamented about what he saw and felt but also reminded the people of God’s consistent faithfulness.

Lamentations 3:19-24 (CEV)

¹⁹ Just thinking of my troubles and my lonely wandering makes me miserable.²⁰ That’s all I ever think about, and I am depressed.²¹ Then I remember something that fills me with hope.²² The LORD’s kindness never fails! If he had not been merciful, we would have been destroyed.²³ The LORD

can always be trusted to show mercy each morning.²⁴ Deep in my heart I say, "The LORD is all I need; I can depend on him!"

All the heartaches and hardships experienced by Jerusalem in Lamentations had been predicted about 900 years earlier by Moses.

> God had warned of the consequences of disobedience and, as Jeremiah carefully noted, God faithfully carried out those curses. Surprisingly, this characteristic makes Lamentations a book of hope for Israel.

< God was *faithful* in honoring every aspect of the covenant He had made. Israel was punished for disobedience, but not destroyed. God's covenant was still in force.

^ The same covenant that promised judgment for disobedience also promised restoration for repentance (Deut. 30:1-10).

< Because of God's unchanging faithfulness, Jeremiah could speak of hope in the midst of Israel's despair because God's faithfulness was great. (Lam. 3:21-32).

< Jeremiah's message to the Israelites in captivity was to know that **just as** God had been faithful to the warnings and promises of Deuteronomy 28, He would be faithful to the future promises of being restored from captivity.

At the heart of Lamentation we find one of the greatest confessions of faith found anywhere in the Bible. Jeremiah had been dwelling on his sorrows and the sorrows of his people, but then he lifted his eyes to the Lord—and this was the turning point.

> In the midst of sorrow he remembered the mercy of the Lord. "His compassions fail not." We have failed Him, but He cannot fail us.

The faithfulness of God is a tremendous encouragement in days when people's hearts are frail and failing.

> If you build your life on people or on the things of this world, you will have no hope or security; but if you build on Christ, the Faithful One, you will be safe forever.

< He is *faithful to chasten* (Ps. 119:75); Lamentations itself teaches this lesson.

< He wants to bring us to the place of repentance and confession (Lam. 3:39–41).

< He is *faithful to forgive* when we do confess our sins (1 John 1:9).

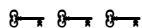
< He is *faithful to sympathize* when we have burdens and problems (Heb. 2:17–18; 4:14–16).

< We never need fear that He is too busy to listen or too tired to help.

< He is *faithful to deliver* when we cry out for help in temptation (1 Cor. 10:13).

< He is *faithful to keep us* in this life and unto life eternal (1 Tim. 1:15; 1 Thes. 5:23–24).

< We can commit our lives and souls into the hands of the faithful Creator (1 Peter 4:19) and know that He will do all things well.



CALLED TO FAITHFULNESS

THE DEVELOPMENT OF FAITHFULNESS

> How do we develop faithfulness?

< A good way to answer this question is with an illustration.

^ Does an apple tree stand out in the middle of an orchard saying, "Now how do I develop apples?" No, an apple tree produces apples because that's what apple trees do.

- < The fruit of the Spirit is the product of the Holy Spirit that is produced in us.
 - ^ One of those products the Spirit produces is faithfulness.
 - ^ Faithfulness should not be something that we are striving to develop, but something that we need to allow the Spirit to create in us.
 - ^ When we are Spirit-led Christians, 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.
 - ^ We do, however, need to be careful that we are constantly in tune with the Holy Spirit's work in and through us so that we are not allowing anything to destroy the product within us.
- > How do we allow the Spirit to develop faithfulness in us? Here are some things to be aware of.
 - < First, we need to realize that temptations will come.
 - ^ Just 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.
 - ^ We need to recognize those temptations and allow God to help us stand up under them.
 - < Second, we need to seek the Holy Spirit's reinforcement by developing regular, positive, spiritual habits.
 - ^ This world is not a Christian world. We face pressure to develop negative habits.
 - } We are tempted to be unfaithful in church attendance, prayer, and Bible study.
 - } We must be determined to serve God faithfully, and to be consistent, trustworthy, and reliable.
 - < Finally, we need to get back up when we fall or are knocked down.
 - ^ When we look at the life of Peter we see that he did not always do the right thing. Sometimes he made mistakes, even to denying the Lord. But every time he fell, he got back up again. Peter eventually became one of our greatest individuals to bring the Gospel of Christ to the world.
 - ^ Faithfulness doesn't mean always doing it right, but it does mean staying at it and trying to get it right.

The writers of the wisdom books call the reader to a life of faithfulness and also highlight its rich rewards in our lives.

Proverbs 3:1-6

¹My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart,² for they will prolong your life many years and bring you peace and prosperity. ³Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. ⁴Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man.

⁵Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; ⁶in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.

Many people turn to God, acknowledge him by their prayers of request in times of anxiousness, distress or danger; but the true and faithful servant of God continually acknowledges him, without interruption.

> People trust many things. Some trust money. Some trust governments. Other people trust luck or fate. Some trust family or church. All these things will fail. But God never fails. (Psalm 46:1)

> We must trust God with our whole heart.

< Some trust God only sometimes and make God a part of their lives only part-time.

^ God wants our whole hearts. We should always desire his wisdom. We must trust God, even when our lives are difficult. God encourages us to trust him in everything.

> The future is unknown to us, but not to God. He is able to lead and guide us. We should trust him, and not our own ideas.

Proverbs 20:6

⁶ Many claim to have unfailing love, but a faithful person who can find?

People often say that they are loyal to their friends. Troubles will test whether their words are true. Anyone can say such words. But when problems come, many people do not try to help their friends.

> In verses 6, Solomon tries to find an honest man. Many people seem honest. They say the right words. But when Solomon requests help, these people disappoint him.

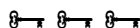
Proverbs 28:20

²⁰ A faithful person will be richly blessed, but one eager to get rich will not go unpunished.

You can trust the faithful person. Christians should behave like faithful people. Other people should be able to trust a Christian.

> But the person who is eager to gain material wealth only wants money. In his eagerness to get rich, he does not care about his ethics and resorts to tactics such as cheating, lazy work habits, and wrong intentions. He deserves punishment and will receive it.

< As faithful Christians we should not allow the love of money and possession dictate our faithfulness to God and others. (1 Timothy 6:10).



STORIES OF FAITHFULNESS: JOSEPH

THE ENTIRE STORY OF JOSEPH CAN BE FOUND IN GENESIS 37-50.

God built the nation of Israel from scratch, starting with Abraham, to reveal his name, his power and his plan to provide a way for everyone to come back into a relationship with him. Israel's faithfulness to God over the next 2,000 years was sketchy at best. They were essentially a dysfunctional family, generation after generation. However, there were a few bright spots of tenacious faithfulness both to God and to others. One such example is Joseph, one of the twelve sons of Jacob. He provides a human model of faithfulness for all believers. (See Genesis 37:1-36, pgs. 439-442.)

Joseph was the 11th son of Jacob. As a 17-year-old shepherd, Joseph is something of a tattletale, bringing a bad report about his brothers to their father. This behavior, combined with Jacob's obvious favoritism towards Joseph, causes his older brothers to resent him to the point of hatred.

> Because of Jacob's open love for Joseph, his favoritism brought jealousy to his other sons. And when Jacob presented Joseph with a highly decorated coat--something that was to be reserved for the oldest son--he was hated and resented by his brothers all the more .

As a teenager Joseph was given dreams of greatness but was quickly cast into a pit generated by his jealous siblings. From this first pit God lifted him up. (See Genesis 39:1-6, pg 442 in BELIEVE.)

To make matters worse, Joseph begins relating his dreams—prophetic visions showing Joseph one day ruling over his family.

> *The animosity towards Joseph peaks when his brothers plot to kill him when Joseph visits them in the wilderness.*

< *Reuben, the eldest, objects to outright murder, so instead, the brothers sell Joseph as a slave and deceive their father into thinking his favorite son had been killed by wild beasts.*

> *Joseph is sold to a high-ranking Egyptian named Potiphar and eventually becomes the supervisor of Potiphar's household.*

As part of God's master plan, Joseph rose again only to be cast into another pit. Potiphar's wife tried to seduce Joseph, but Joseph maintained his integrity and faithfulness to both Potiphar and God by resisting the temptation. Because he rejected her, Potiphar's wife made false accusations against Joseph, and he was thrown into prison. But God was with him there too and lifted him up yet again. (See Genesis 40:1-23, pgs 442-444 in BELIEVE.)

Joseph excelled at his duties and became one of Potiphar's most trusted servants and was put in charge of his household. Potiphar could see that whatever Joseph did, God looked favorably on him and he prospered in all that he did.

> *However, Potiphar's wife becomes attracted to Joseph's good looks and attempts to seduce him, and when her advances are rebuffed, she falsely accuses him of attempted rape. Joseph, although innocent in the matter, is cast into prison.*

< *In jail, Joseph interprets the dreams of two of his fellow prisoners. Both interpretations prove to be true, and one of the men is later released from jail and restored to his position as the king's cupbearer.*

Joseph sat in prison two more years. It wasn't until Pharaoh had a dream that none of his magicians or wise men could interpret that the restored cupbearer finally remembered Joseph, and he was brought from the dungeon to explain the dream's meaning. As he stood before the king, Joseph maintained his faithfulness to God. (See Genesis 41:14-46, pgs. 444-446 in BELIEVE.)

Two years later, the king himself has some troubling dreams, and the cupbearer remembers Joseph's gift of interpretation. The king calls for Joseph and relates his dreams.

> *Joseph predicts seven years of bountiful harvests followed by seven years of severe famine in Egypt and advises the king to begin storing grain in preparation for the coming famine.*

> *For his wisdom, Joseph is made a ruler in Egypt, second only to the king.*

As Joseph had predicted, there were seven years of back-to-back bumper crops. Egypt was the only nation who adequately set aside food for the season about to unfold. Sure enough, in the eighth year a severe famine broke out that would last a solid seven years. Meanwhile, back in the land of Canaan a conversation broke out in Jacob's household. (See Genesis 42:1-6, pg. 446 in BELIEVE.)

When the famine strikes, even Canaan is affected, and Jacob sends ten of his sons to Egypt to buy grain. While there, they meet their long-lost brother, whom they do not recognize.

> *Joseph's brothers bow down to him, fulfilling the earlier prophecy.*

> *Joseph eventually reveals his identity to his brothers and forgives their wrongdoing.*

> *Jacob and his family move to Egypt to be with Joseph. Jacob's descendants stay in Egypt for 400 years, until the time of Moses.*

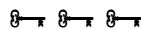
What examples of faithfulness did you see in the story of Joseph?

What can we learn from the story of Joseph?

- > For parents, we need to remain faithful to all our children without showing favoritism.
- > We have a good example of how to handle sexual temptation—run! Be faithful to the Biblical moral compass.
- > We have a clear picture of God’s faithfulness. He does not forsake His children, even in the midst of suffering: “the Lord was with Joseph”.
 - < There may be many distressing circumstances we find ourselves in, and some of them may even be unjust, as were those in Joseph’s life. However, as we learn from Joseph’s life, by remaining faithful and accepting that God is ultimately in charge, we can be confident that God will reward our faithfulness in the fullness of time.

Joseph’s story presents amazing insight into how God sovereignly works to overcome evil and bring about His plan.

- > After all his ordeals, Joseph is able to see God’s hand at work.
 - < As he reveals his identity to his brothers, Joseph speaks of their sin this way: “*Do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. . . . It was not you who sent me here, but God*”.
 - < Later, Joseph again reassures his brothers, offering forgiveness and saying, “*You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good*”.



STORIES OF FAITHFULNESS: RUTH

Fast forward to the period in Israel’s history when the Israelites had occupied the land of Canaan. One of the most heart-touching stories of faithfulness and loyalty does not involve an Israelite but a young Moabite woman. (See Ruth 1:1-22, pgs. 447-448 in BELIEVE.)

SUMMARY

Ruth was from Moab, but was genetically linked to Israel through Lot, the nephew of Abraham (Gen. 11:31). Ruth had married the son of an Israelite family while they were living in Moab, but at some point, her father-in-law, her husband, and her husband’s only brother passed away. So Ruth had to make a decision whether to stay in Moab, her home, or to go with her mother-in-law, Naomi, to a land she had never known—Judah.

Ruth loved her mother-in-law, and had great compassion for her, seeing that she had lost not only her husband, but both of her sons. Ruth’s sister-in-law, Orpah, made the choice to go back to her people in Moab, but Ruth could not bear to part from Naomi or from the God of Israel that she had come to know. They made the journey back to Judah to the city of Bethlehem, where they decided to settle. Ruth’s testimony preceded her, for the owner of a nearby field, Boaz, had heard of her faithfulness, as recorded in 2:11.

Through the advice of Naomi, Ruth went to glean in Boaz’s field and this was how they met. Ruth and Boaz came to know one another very well, and eventually married.

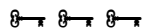
Ruth trusted the Lord, and He rewarded her faithfulness by giving her not only a husband, but a son (Obed), a grandson (Jesse), and a great-grandson named David, the king of Israel. God also gave Ruth the blessing of being listed in the lineage of Jesus (Matthew 1:5).

What examples of faithfulness did you see in the story of Ruth?

Ruth is an example of how God can change a life and take it in a direction He has foreordained, and we see Him working out His perfect plan in Ruth's life, just as He does with all His children (Romans 8:28).
> Although Ruth came from a pagan background in Moab, once she met the God of Israel, she became a living testimonial to Him by faith.

< Even though she lived in humble circumstances before marrying Boaz, she believed that God was faithful to care for His people.

< Ruth is an example to us that God rewards faithfulness.



STORIES OF FAITHFULNESS: MARY

God demonstrated his faithfulness to Naomi and Ruth through Boaz, their "guardian-redeemer," who provided for their needs and married Ruth. Boaz and Ruth had a son named Obed, who had a son named Jesse, who had a son named David — who became the great king of Israel. And later the prophet Micah prophesied that the Messiah would come from David's town of Bethlehem. A thousand years after David lived, the time had come for the Messiah to be born from the tribe of Judah, the family of David, in the city of Bethlehem. God would pull this off through a very young and faithful descendent of Ruth. (See Luke 1:26-56, pgs. 448-450 in BELIEVE.)

Mary committed herself, as "the Lord's servant," to be faithful to God's plan, and she extolled God's faithfulness. After visiting her relative Elizabeth, Mary — now about three months pregnant — returned to her home in Nazareth. But Nazareth was at least a three-day trip from Bethlehem. How then was the prophecy that the Messiah would come from the town of Bethlehem going to be fulfilled? (See Luke 2:1-21, pgs. 450-451 in BELIEVE.)

The angel told Mary the Holy Spirit would come upon her and God's power would cause her to conceive a child. Christ's birth was a miracle in every respect. A young Jewish girl, who was a virgin, would conceive by the power of God.

> The Bible presents her as a godly chaste young Jewish girl who was betrothed/engaged to a devout Jewish carpenter named Joseph.

> Under OT law it was a capital offense to have a child outside of marriage. Yet she exercised her faithfulness and trusted God's divine call on her life.

In most ways she was an ordinary young woman. Biblically we can say she was given no more or less potential than any other young girl or woman living then or today.

> What made the difference in her life was her attitude towards God.

< When she heard God's plan she immediately accepted it. That showed her heart.

^ She accepted this difficulty as God's will and determined to rely on Him.

> Mary had shortcomings as all men and women, yet she was a godly woman who loved the Lord and was faithful to God

< God was able to use her because of her belief in His sovereignty.

^ True belief will show itself in action.

} A true believer will obey God and do His will for their lives.

Often God calls us to do things that are difficult. He calls those who believe and love Him and want to serve Him. He only chooses the faithful, the ones that believe.

> Faith in God's promises fulfilled in Christ enabled Mary to be faithful even through trying times.

< She was to witness the rejection, suffering, crucifixion, death and burial of her son.

^ Many people have been tempted to reject God in the wake of the loss of a child. It is one of the saddest things we can experience. And this loss was magnified for Mary almost beyond belief by the awful circumstances attending Christ's death.

< Yet, when all is said and done, after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, Mary is still numbered among the believers in Acts 1.

Throughout the Bible, the call to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with the God who loves and supports us is clear. So what does this mean? God doesn't want our prideful attempts to atone for our sins. We must not be like the stiff-necked Israelites. Instead, we, as believers and members of the church, are to serve as God's witnesses to the world. This often means we must be willing to live lives that are dramatically different from the world in which we live. We are to turn from corruption and revenge and pride and turn to the Lord, who is always faithful.

What does my faithfulness to God cost me?

What blessing have I received because of my faithfulness to God in a less than Christian world?



KEY QUESTION: Why is it important to be loyal and committed to others?

Loyalty has become a very rare commodity.

> In previous decades children were taught to always tell the truth, help others, be kind, **and be loyal**.

Loyalty was an important element in making up a person's character.

< It has been said that loyalty seems to be missing in the character make-up of most people today. Being loyal is not a component of who most people are. This lack of loyalty has become a contributing factor to the breakdown of our society, but even more important, the breakdown in the lives of many who claim to know Jesus. This lack of loyalty that exists in many people also carries over into their faith.

Do you feel this is a fair statement about the condition of today's loyalty quotient?

If we have trouble being loyal to people in our earthly relationships, can we be expected to be loyal to the Lord in our spiritual relationships?

> When there is lack of loyalty to spouse, children, to the place you earn your living or the people who help you earn a living, why can we think there would be loyalty to Jesus?

Loyalty requires a commitment to someone or something other than ourselves.

> It often costs to be loyal. We want the benefits of a relationship, a marriage, having a family, our job, knowing Jesus, but we don't want to pay the price of having that relationship.

< We all can be loyal when things are going well, but the true test of loyalty is during times of trouble.

< Being loyal is part of what being a follower of Christ is all about. We are to be loyal to the Lord and to our faith.

< If we are loyal to the Lord then we will be loyal in other areas of our life as well.

In the Bible, the concept of loyalty is purely relational. This means our whole being is thoroughly committed to someone.

> God established the very essence of loyalty through His covenant relationship with His people, The Israelites.

< Through His covenant, God's people are assured of His never-ending love. (Romans 8:35-39)

> In our relationships with one another, we are called to steadfast loyalty.

< For true believers, loyalty is shown in our commitment to Jesus and His gospel (Mark 8:35; Romans 1:16)



PARAPHRASED FROM *THINK, ACT, BELIEVE LIKE JESUS* by Randy Frazee

The ultimate example of faithfulness in the Old Testament is seen in God's relationship with the nation of Israel. No matter what the people did, how quickly they turned on him, or how long they disobeyed him, God remained vigilant and available.

In the New Testament, Jesus showed a striking faithfulness both to the Father and to us, accomplishing the redemption of mankind on the cross. He stayed true to who he was and to his calling to bring us back to God.

The true path of biblical faithfulness is not an isolated event or events, but a way of life. We need not simply do faithful things; we must be faithful people. Then the result will be faith-filled actions flowing from a faithful heart.

KEY IDEA: I have established a good name with God and others based on my loyalty to those relationships.

PARAPHRASED FROM *THINK, ACT, BELIEVE LIKE JESUS* by Randy Frazee

Luke's gospel contains this description of Jesus during his growth into manhood: "Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man." Luke 2:52

This is a pivotal statement in Scripture, because it is the bridge between Jesus' boyhood and the beginning of fulfilling his divine calling as a young man. The Bible establishes Jesus' birth and presence on the earth through fact and historical reference, and then cuts to the chase, jumping straight to the beginning of Jesus' ministry and path to the cross. This verse communicates much in just a few words.

- Jesus grew in *wisdom*. His knowledge and character were developing beyond his years.
- Jesus grew in *stature*. He grew up as a normal, healthy boy into a full-grown adult.
- Jesus grew in *favor with God*. He remained faithful to God throughout boyhood, adolescence, and early manhood.
- Jesus grew in *favor with man*. His faithfulness to God and increasing wisdom resulted in right relationships and a good name as a man of honor and integrity.

Our key idea and this verse encourage us on every possible level to understand that faithfulness and commitment to God will result in the best possible life we can live — never exempt from problems or trials, but consistently walking on the right path toward the character and qualities of our Father.

Putting God's blessings to the best use as a way of expressing our love and commitment to him brings continued blessing — the consequence of faithfulness.



KEY APPLICATION: What difference does this make in the way I live?

FROM THINK, ACT, BELIEVE LIKE JESUS by Randy Frazee
The virtue of faithfulness will translate in two ways in our lives.

- **We will be faithful to God.** No matter who follows or falls away, we remain in God. We do not wait for others to step out in faith; we lead. We don't shrink back when God's commands are not politically correct to obey; we simply do it. When God looks at us, he sees committed followers. Our best motivation for this choice is our love for him and the knowledge that he always does what is best for us. Our own faithfulness is motivated and led by his deep commitment to our lives and eternity. Our commitment to faithfulness leads us to love God more and more.

Christians are not called to be successful as the world defines success. We are called to be faithful to God in what he calls us to do. We faithfully act in faith toward God and leave the results to him. ...

- **We will be faithful to others.** The second way this virtue is seen is in our horizontal relationships. The people around us come to know we are loyal, trustworthy, and consistent. We can be counted on. We will be available. We will listen intently. We will answer the call for help. We model God's faithfulness by our lives freely given to others. Our commitment to faithfulness leads us to love our neighbors more and more. ...

It is important to understand that being faithful to God is never about meeting a requirement to keep our relationship with him, but rather it's about responding to God

out of love and devotion for what Christ has done for us. We choose to remain in him, not out of obligation, but out of desire.

Faithfulness must be a priority, no matter who is watching us. When we are alone or in a crowd, we're faithful; in good times or bad, we're faithful; when confident or in doubt, we're faithful. If we truly want to influence people for Christ, then being faithful has to be more than a desirable quality; it must become a lifestyle.

