

## Fruit of the Spirit – Faithfulness

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. Faithfulness comes from a place of trust and loyalty. Hebrews 11:1 says, *“Now faith is a confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.”* As a Christian, it is important to be faithful to God. Faithfulness requires us to submit our ways to God. Our faithfulness is a commitment to adhere to the One God who is true and supreme and to keep His commandments. Faithfulness leads to obedience, and obedience brings about rich blessings from the Lord. Proverbs 28:20 tells that a faithful man will be richly blessed. God is always faithful to us, even when we are not faithful to Him.

God's faithfulness and covenant love are closely related.(DEU7:9; PSA25:10 ; 85:10 ) The example of his faithfulness is the bond between God and the people of Israel. In spite of their unfaithfulness, God reminds them that he is promised to them in faithfulness. *“I will betroth you in faithfulness, And you shall know the Lord.”*(HOS2:20) The Israelites were expected to respond in faithfulness to God because he had acted faithfully to them through the covenant. David and other godly people chose to walk the faithful way the way of truth.(PSA119:30) Just as God is both faithful and loving, those who believe in God need to exhibit faithfulness and steadfast love in their lives.(PRO3:3) God also acts in faithfulness: He provides for both good and evil people(MAT5:45 ); he remains faithful as he fulfills his promises.(2CO1:18-19 ) Jesus is the faithful and true witness (REV3:14 ), Faithful and True.(REV19:11 ) God remains faithful to believers, and always fulfilling His promises.

Christians, like the Israelites, are to respond to God in faithfulness. Trustworthy servants must prove themselves to be faithful.(1CO4:2 ) Epaphrus and Tychicus are identified as faithful ministers of Christ(COL1:7:4:7) Paul remains faithful to God in spite of tremendous pressures.(1TIM1:12) Timothy is to select teachers who will exhibit faithfulness, one of the characteristics of Christians. The Spirit of God enables Christians to remain faithful to God and other believers.(GAL5:22) Faithful means having true, constant support or loyalty, steadfast in affection, adherence to promises, in observance of duty. In fact, the first two of the Ten Commandments (EXO20), deal directly with our being faithful to God. *“You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them;”* These are the words given directly from God to Moses for all people, for all time. Since God assumes a covenant relationship with His people, He is declaring that He will not accept unfaithfulness and competition with anything else. An idol can be in the form of anything that you might place in a higher priority over God. This includes placing anything in our lives that has supremacy over God.

When a person walks consistently with God, in humble service to Him, he can be called “faithful.” Faithfulness to God consists in serving God in obedience to commands us: Faithfulness is shown in devotion to God. This devotion must be exercised in active service. Belief, religious feeling, will not satisfy God. We are called to do His will. (MAT7:24-27) Faithful service is obedient service. We must work for God in His way, doing His will, and fulfilling His commandments. Self-will is deadly to the merit of the most zealous service. *I desire to do your will, my God; your law is within my heart.* (PSA40:8) Perfect fidelity requires obedience in all things. we should sacrifice our feelings to God's will and His command. *A faithful man will be richly blessed, but one eager to get rich will not go unpunished.”*(PRO28:20a) Until our judgment day, there are many other benefits while we are here on earth. *Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart.* (PRO3:3) The most significant element in our Christian life is faithfulness to God. In the days we now live in, we are unsure of what will happen next across the world. There are wars, famines, economic collapse, natural disasters. Being faithful to God gives us great peace and assurance that we will be brought thru by His promises of blessings and reward of eternal life in Heaven. Our faithful commitment to Almighty God is the only thing that we can really count on; He is our hope in a fallen world. His provision of forgiveness and salvation through Jesus is the benefit of all. God preserves, protects, guards his faithful. *Oh, love the Lord, all you His saints!*(PSA31:23)

What God looks for mainly in his people is confidence; faithfulness; trust; loyalty. Thanksgiving grew out of an experience in David's life in which his foes plotted to kill him. That incident reminded that the Lord would protect those who trust in Him. In view of God's consistent faithfulness to His promises to bless the righteous and punish the wicked. The man working pride reference is who is confident in himself; who seeks to glorify himself, and who in doing this is regardless of the rights of others. The godly can endure persecution, suffering with confidence. We can trust in the Lord's deliverance, praise Him as we endure rough times. *“For the Lord loves the just and will not forsake his faithful ones.”*(PSA37:28)

Hebrews 11 gives a list of faithful men and women who trusted God. Abel's understanding of God made his sacrifice real and authentic. Noah trusted God's word about the coming judgment as well as God's promise to save his family. Abraham and Sarah believed against all evidence that they would have a child. Rahab trusted God to protect her family when the Israelites destroyed Jericho. Gideon's mustard-seed faith routed an entire army. Enoch, who obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God. They believed God would do as He promised. They lived by faith and not by sight. Faithfully commit everything you do to the Lord. Moses is among great cloud of witnesses. By faith Moses choose to suffer affliction with the people of God. *And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant,*(HEB3:5)

While we most often remember Daniel as the one in the lions' den, there was a lot more to his life. Daniel, we learn about how to remain faithful in all circumstances. He ran into several trying situations, but Daniel stayed strong. He quickly established a reputation for intelligence and for absolute faithfulness to his God. The prophecies humble the arrogant rulers and exalt sovereignty of God. Daniel himself is held up as a model of faith, he kept his eyes firmly focused on God.

Daniel's Holiness: There are risks, reasons, and rewards for remaining undefiled by the world. Holy people are powerful tools in the hands of God. As they stand strong in the face of trials, they bear witness to the reality of their Lord and Savior. They inspire and challenge us to also stand strong for God's truth and righteousness. Daniel lived out this kind genuine holiness. At great risk of losing his life, he chose to remain undefiled by pagan Babylon. Daniel refused to eat and drink anything that would defile them. *"But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief.*(DAN1:8,11-12)

Three Men Trust: Through a series of trials of their faith, Daniel remained loyal to the true God. Genuine faith remains strong amid dire circumstances and uncertain outcomes. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did not operate on the popular notion that faith is about having confidence in expected or desired outcomes. By their words and actions, they proclaim a truly biblical faith: confidence in a sovereign God regardless of the outcomes. According to the promise of Isaiah 43, God will walk with you in the fire. Whatever the trouble or trial may be, you will have a tangible sense of his presence.

Daniel's Call to Trust and Live: Beyond the lions' den. Daniel leaves with a vivid picture of an impetuous king manipulated by advisers to destroy a man of God. As we progress through the story, we first see the envy of the king's advisers, then the folly of the king, followed by the peril to Daniel and the anguish of the king. Finally, we see God's deliverance of Daniel and His judgment on Daniel's adversaries. Significantly, a test of faith based on prayer itself. We must have faith to believe that God hears our prayers and that He answers us.(HEB11:1, 6) In Daniel's case, though, the very act of kneeling before God was a test of his faith. *"when Daniel knew that the writing was signed," he knelt and prayed as he always had. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God.*(DAN6:10) Daniel knew the type of men who shared governmental authority with him. He knew they would be watching. He knew they had set a trap. But Daniel also knew the God he served!

Even though the king was compelled to have Daniel thrown into the lions' den, God miraculously spared Daniel's life. As Daniel told the king the next morning, *"My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths, so that they have not hurt me"* (verse 22). Daniel's enemies did not prevail against this servant of God. We should also note that only the true God has unchangeable laws, purposes and promises: *"So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it"* (Isaiah 55:11)

In each case, the servants of God prevailed over kings, idol-worshippers and magicians. Jesus reveals himself in the fire. In Tribulation the true Christians will stand up for Jesus and they will refuse to bow down to the antichrist.[like Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego] They have to refuse the mark of the beast or number of his name and be martyrs [die in the Lord] *"Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up."*(DAN3:16-18) Throughout the ordeal, all the way to the lion's den Daniel remained faithful to God.

Remember, the Lord Jesus Himself was persecuted, this means we should be prepared and willing to face. Faithfulness is a characteristic we can build in our lives, just as Jesus Christ did. Jesus Christ lived the Father's will perfectly, it took discipline, and it took moment-by-moment decisions to love and obey God. *Christ Jesus; Who was faithful to him that appointed him.*(HEB3:1,2) Jesus is the personification of faithfulness, as evidenced by His great love for us on the cross. On the road to the cross, He constantly prayed to the Father for strength and was determined to obey to the end.(PHI2:8) Our greatest example of faithfulness is found in the person of Jesus. When we choose to be faithful as followers of Christ, people will take notice. If we truly want others to encounter the love of Christ, we will walk faithfully. When our lives set apart for His glory, we have privilege, joy of pointing them to our faithful Heavenly Father. Jesus is always our model. As God's children, let's be faithful followers of Jesus, walking in his footsteps, our relationship with our God grow closer. In Mat.24:3,9-13, Jesus Christ was giving His disciples prophecies of "end of the age" He speaks of tribulation, persecution. *"But he who endures to the end shall be saved."* Jesus is speaking of His second coming—at a time when most people will not be expecting it! It is the "faithful and wise servant" will be richly rewarded—the one who, motivated by faith, continue to do God's will and God's work. God is faithful to all of us. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. Jesus is the one steadfast and unchanging anchor who can hold our lives together. So let us take confidence in him.

Perseverance is a key to success in everything, including running a race. When Paul was in prison awaiting almost certain execution. But he was at peace because he knew he had been faithful to God. Paul wrote, *"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith"*(2TI4:7) May we have this same confidence at the end of our race! The ultimate reward for perseverance is eternal life! Jesus said, *"Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life"*(REV2:10)

The faithful Christian is to encourage to remain faithful and committed to the Lord. Bible teaches *'The righteous will live by faith.'* (ROM1:17) We obtain that faith, and our faithfulness, by the grace of God. Hence "to live by faith" is to endure through belief and trust in God, thus to possess eternal life. A "faithful" man is "full of faith"; he believes in the reality of God. We can grow in our faithfulness by having a personal relationship with Christ. If we are faithful to Him and obey His commands, this will be evident in our lives. *"Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown"* (REV3:11)

Let's look now at some important lessons on faithfulness from Scripture. These show how God judges our character. *"He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much"* (LUK16:10) In the parable of the Shrewd manager, there was a manager who had wasted his master's funds and was about to be fired. There has been negligence on this manager's part in collecting bills for his master. So he decides to cut the bills down which causes these who are debtors to the master to pay up. He was able to get them to pay most of their bills. There is nothing inherently righteous about money but Jesus telling us in the parable to use our money for the kingdom of God's purpose. That is, when we support ministries that preach the gospel, we are essentially going to be receiving people into our eternal dwellings because we were part of the laboring in the Great Commission. God never overlooks or excuses any irresponsibility. We must prove our trustworthiness in even the smallest duties. Jesus challenges the children of the light to measure up in wisdom, realizing that they stand before God with the final judgement to come.

And God does not accept excuses—not even fear of failure. The call to discipleship of Jesus Christ is the prime need of the Church. But mostly in our tradition, personal relationship with God is abandoned for a religious system. People are comfortable with members of a denomination church, based on observance of religious routine and rituals and above their personal walk with God. The people are thus programmed to see loyalty to physical church as superior to their faithfulness to the God. In this state of ignorance, church folk can be manipulated to do the order of man rather than the will of God. (ROM10:2) Our prior duty is to preach the Gospel and fulfill God's great commission. Do not stumble others or divide the church or Zion. Remember those who fallen from grace and excommunicated. We must obey God rather than human beings.

How we serve God – Matthew 25:21-25 The context here is the parable of the talents. Jesus is about to go away to the Father after his death and resurrection. And so Jesus leaves his kingdom work to his disciples – the church. And to some he gives a lot of responsibility, 5 bars of silver, to some 3 bars of silver and to some only 1 – each according to our ability. God gives each of us different abilities and opportunities, He expects us to thoroughly use them in His service. He will generously reward us according to how much we have spiritually grown and served in this life. An "unprofitable servant" who has wasted his time and opportunities instead of obeying God is called "wicked and lazy" and will be punished. And we are to fulfill our tasks. And then Jesus returns for the final judgment. Here we have little and much principle, as the master says to each of the profitable servants; *"Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord"* He returns to reward His faithful servants!

Faithfulness is part of the fruit of the Spirit; it is created within us when we allow the Spirit to work in us. The fruit of Spirit gives us life; we live by faith. God is faithful, and He grants that quality to His children. The Holy Spirit produces in believers His faithfulness. His faithful character directly affects our lives. God's Spirit imparts the nature of God, which develops in us, like fruit ripening on a tree. As a result, we believe God is who He says When we receive Christ as Lord, the Holy Spirit indwells us and brings the blessings of love, joy, peace, faithfulness. (GAL5:22) Bible says it is a gift from God. We have nothing to fear as we wait for Him to fulfill His promises. The fullness of blessings depends on walking with God and yielding to His Spirit. We should be faithful to read and abide by God's Word and to seek Lord in prayer.

Faithfulness affects every relationship we have. All good relationships are built on the foundation of love and faithfulness of mutual trust born out of trustworthiness. It's vital that we respond to the faithfulness of God with deep and abiding faith, so that we will then give our very best—our commitment, loyalty, obedience, devotion. To reach the level of faith to truly become faithful like God we must wholeheartedly seek His help! Pray for faith and faithfulness. Read the Bible to learn about and come to trust in God's faithfulness. (ROM10:17) Seek the fellowship of "the church of God" where others are trying to faithfully follow God. And to truly "hold fast" spiritually, we must have God's Spirit dwelling within us.

The Bible also warns us of the consequences of unfaithfulness. These warnings are necessary because, our hearts are too often found inconsistent, despite our best intentions. *Most men will proclaim each his own goodness, But who can find a faithful man?* (PRO20:6) many people are changeable and faithless. It's prophecy of wretched attitudes and habits "in the last days" (2TI3:1) "For men will be lovers of themselves blasphemers... unloving... slanderers... traitors" The consequences to society are disastrous. *Give honor to marriage, and remain faithful to one another in marriage.* (HEB13:4) And a great many who do make wedding vows ("before God") later on break those vows. (MAL2:14-16) Breaking a vow to God is essentially lying because you have claimed to do something for God but have not done it. God hates sin of unfaithfulness.

*Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism.*