

## Sermon Series: *The Fruit of the Spirit*

# The Fruit of the Spirit Is Faithfulness

### Galatians 5:22-23

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

### Introduction

The northwest corner of the state of Wyoming, in the area surrounding Yellowstone Lake, contains some of the most picturesque landscape in this country. In 1870 the Washburn-Langford-Doane expedition, made up of about twenty civilians and military personnel, was sent to explore this region. On September 18 they traveled down the Firehole River and noted a wide open basin, which they went into to explore. Nathaniel P. Langford records what they witnessed.

Imagine “our astonishment, as we entered the basin at mid-afternoon of our second day's travel, to see in the clear sunlight, at no great distance, an immense volume of clear, sparkling water projected into the air to the height of one hundred and twenty-five feet. ‘Geysers! geysers!’ exclaimed one of our company, and, spurring our jaded horses, we soon gathered around this wonderful phenomenon. It was indeed a perfect geyser. It spouted at regular intervals nine times during our stay, the columns of boiling water being thrown from ninety to one hundred and twenty-five feet at each discharge. We gave it the name of “Old Faithful.”<sup>1</sup>



Old Faithful is the most famous of the 15 geysers found in Yellowstone National Park. Earlier in its history it was thought to erupt “every hour on the hour.” However, further study and observation revealed that was not quite the case. In 1938 it was learned that the interval of time between eruptions is determined by the duration of each eruption. Eruptions last anywhere from 1.5 to 5 minutes.

The longer the duration of the eruption, the longer it will be until the next eruption. Discovering this has allowed the park staff to predict with incredible accuracy each subsequent eruption. For example, if the eruption lasts only 1.5 minutes the next eruption will follow in 50 minutes. If the eruption lasts 2.5 minutes the next eruption will follow in 65 minutes. If the duration is 3.5 minutes, the next will come in 76 minutes. If it lasts 4.5 minutes, then you will have to wait 89 minutes to see it again. And if the duration is 5 minutes, it will not spout again for 95 minutes. The geyser operates regularly and

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<sup>1</sup> Nathaniel P. Langford, (May–June 1871) “The Wonders of the Yellowstone”. *Scribner's Monthly* II (1-2): 123

consistently not because of the clock, but because of its own internal characteristics—the water pressure, steam buildup and the combination of cool air from above and warm air from below. Old faithful is a fitting name.

## The Meaning of the Word “Faithful”

The word ‘faithful,’ when used of an object, means “constant, regular, and reliable.”<sup>2</sup> However, when faithful is used in relation to a person it means;

Faithful: firm in adherence to one’s promises and firm in observance of duty; dependable; reliable; trustworthy; loyal—especially to one’s spouse, being true to the marriage covenant; consistent and completely honest; devoted to one’s religious beliefs.<sup>3</sup>

We might summarize faithfulness as, **complete honesty**, **consistent reliability**, and **unswerving loyalty**. Paul tells us in Galatians 5:22 that faithfulness is one of the nine virtues he lists as being the “fruit of the Spirit.” The Spirit of God produces faithfulness within the people of God because faithfulness comes from God Himself as He manifests His own life in us through the indwelling presence of His own Holy Spirit. The people of God will be faithful people because God is faithful<sup>4</sup> and He is a God of faithfulness?<sup>5</sup>

## The Faithfulness of God

The faithfulness of God is literally attested to and praised from Genesis to Revelation—52 times the faithfulness of God is mentioned in the book of Psalms alone. Faithfulness is part of the fabric of His essence. Faithfulness is in His DNA. The faithfulness of God supplies the foundation for faith in God.

## Faithfulness Is Complete Honesty

What is the faithfulness of God? It is **complete honesty**. God is completely honest. It means He always tells the truth and never lies. The author of Hebrews tells us “It is impossible for God to lie” (6:18). This means that God *always keeps His promises*. “When used of God in the OT, the word ‘faithfulness’ frequently refers to his unwavering commitment to his promises.”<sup>6</sup>

## God’s Faithfulness In Keeping His Promises

The first mention of God’s faithfulness comes from the mouth of Abraham’s oldest servant.<sup>7</sup> Abraham had sent him on an errand of immense importance. Abraham was about to die and he wanted to ensure that Isaac had a good wife. So he sent his oldest and presumably most trusted servant back to his homeland to find a wife.

His servant prayed (see Gen 24:12-14) that God would show him which girl to choose for he felt the weight of this task. He prayed and asked God that the girl who came to him and said, “Here’s a drink for you and while you drink I will water your camels,” would be the girl whom God had chosen.

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<sup>2</sup> New Oxford American Dictionary.

<sup>3</sup> Webster’s 1828 Dictionary

<sup>4</sup> Dt 7:9; Ps 31:5; 1 Cor 1:9; 10:13; 2 Cor 1:18; 1 Ptr 4:19.

<sup>5</sup> Gen 24:27; Ex 34:6; Dt 32:4; Ps 57:3; 69:13; 71:22; 86:15; 89:8; Zech 8:8; Rom 3:3.

<sup>6</sup> Walter A. Elwell and Philip Wesley Comfort, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, Tyndale reference library (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 472.

<sup>7</sup> Genesis 24:2.

Indeed that is exactly the way it happened. Before he had even finished his prayer Rebekah showed up and said those exact words to him (Gen 24:15). His prayer of response is recorded in Genesis 24:27.

**Genesis 24:27 (ESV)**

*27 and said, “Blessed be the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken his steadfast love and his faithfulness toward my master. As for me, the LORD has led me in the way to the house of my master's kinsmen.”*

God had promised Abraham that He would make Abraham’s offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven. God had told Abraham that He would fulfill this promise through Isaac and Isaac was not yet married. If the boy was going to have numerous offspring, then it all started with a wife. The finding of Rebekah was among the first steps in fulfilling that promise. God was faithful to Abraham. He provided a good wife for his son—a wife that Abraham was able to see with his eyes before his eyes closed and never opened again.

## The Faithfulness of God: His Very Name

Later through the life of Moses we learn that faithfulness is part of the very name of God. Remember when Moses asked the Lord to show him all of His glory? (Ex 33:18-34:6-7).

**Exodus 34:5-6 (ESV)**

*5 The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. 6 The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness...”<sup>8</sup>*

Faithfulness is part of the very essence of God’s character. God is the source of all faithfulness however dimly it is displayed in broken and sinful creatures. It is God’s very nature to be completely honest and diligent in keeping every word of every single promise He has ever made. This was the summary of Joshua at the end of his life. Joshua had Moses’ servant and he had walked with the LORD all his life. He had also led Israel into the land that God had promised to give them so long before.

**Joshua 23:14 (ESV)**

*14 “And now I am about to go the way of all the earth, and you know in your hearts and souls, all of you, that not one word has failed of all the good things that the LORD your God promised concerning you. All have come to pass for you; not one of them has failed.” (See also Josh 21:45)*

## Application

Faithfulness is “consistently doing what one says one will do.”<sup>9</sup> Can this be said of us? Can this be said of you? Are you completely honest in all that you say? Are you faithful in retelling stories of events that happen in your life? Do you always tell the truth and never lie? When you give your word do you keep it? When you promise your friends you will do something, do you do it? When you give your word to your spouse or children, do you plan to do what you say? Or do you say things in such a way that you “leave yourself some wiggle room?” God never leaves Himself “wiggle room.” If we desire to draw people to the Lord, then we must be people of our word. If we are to be trusted,

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<sup>8</sup> See Psalm 86:15.

<sup>9</sup> ESV Study Bible, marginal note.

then our words must be completely true. If we desire people to trust in God, then we must be the kind of people whose words are completely honest. If we serve a true God then we must love truth and hate all falsehood. Is this too much to expect? Is this setting the bar too high? Let me tell you a little story.

### Daniel's Example

Long, long ago in kingdom far, far away there was a great King who entrusted the governance of his vast kingdom into the hands of three presidents. Those three presidents presided over 120 governors. There came a time when two of the presidents sought to get rid of the third. They successfully persuaded the 120 governors to join them. A plan was crafted that would certainly remove the third president from power.

A private investigator and an auditor were hired. The private investigator was hired to examine his past and his present personal life and the auditor was hired to examine his professional practice and to examine all of his personal income tax returns.

After a thorough investigation was conducted the presidents called a late night meeting so the examiners could present their findings before the entire gubernatorial body. The two presidents sat in giddy exuberance anxiously awaiting the declaration of all the mud the examiners would have unearthed. Here is the written report of the private investigator and the auditor.

“We could find no ground for complaint and no error or fault was found in him because he was faithful.”

That sentence comes from the book of Daniel chapter 6 verse 4. No ground for complaint was found in Daniel. No error of addition in his own favor or falsification of exemptions was found in any of Daniel's tax returns. All of Daniel's expense reports had the receipts attached to them. There had been no inappropriate receipt of gifts from lobbyists. No mishandling of government money was discovered. There were no faults with campaign finances funds. His FaceBook page was clean and his twitter account would not have caused anyone to blush.

Daniel was faithful! He was completely honest. Daniel was a man who was completely honest because his God is completely honest. Daniel kept his promises because his God kept His promises. Daniel was faithful. Can that be said of me? Can that be said of you? Faithfulness means being **completely honest** and being completely honest is possible when the Holy Spirit is at work within you.

### Faithfulness Is Being Consistently Reliable

Secondly, faithfulness means being **consistently reliable**. The Bible teaches us that God is consistently reliable. God will always do for us all that He, according to His infinite wisdom,<sup>10</sup> determines is for our greatest good and His greatest glory, even if that means we must endure suffering.<sup>11</sup> In Psalm 119 David writes,

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<sup>10</sup> **Romans 11:33** “*Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable His ways!*”

<sup>11</sup> See 1 Peter 3:17; 4:19; Rev 6:11.

**Psalm 119:75 (ESV)**

*75 I know, O Lord, that your rules are righteous,  
and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me.*

God was not unfaithful because He failed to keep David's life free from all affliction. It was the very faithfulness of God that lead David into affliction. Why? Because God knew what it would take to cause David to love God's word. It would take experiencing some affliction before David would learn the righteousness of God's rules and commands. Evidently there are times in our lives when God, because He is faithful, decides that we need some affliction in our lives in order to throw our attention upon Him and His word. Affliction in our lives does not nullify the faithfulness of God. It affirms it. David also said,

**Psalm 119:71 (ESV)**

*71 It is good for me that I was afflicted,  
that I might learn your statutes.*

Being **consistently reliable** does not mean that God will always free us from all suffering. It means that He is always with us **through** all suffering, and that He has a purpose for the suffering. He uses suffering and affliction to train us, to teach us, and to sanctify us.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, His invitation stands.

**Psalm 50:15 (ESV)**

*15 Call upon Me<sup>13</sup> in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me.*

These words were spoken by the God who cannot lie. The deliverance will be according to His wisdom and not our wants. The deliverance will be for the glory of His name, not the glory of our name. The deliverance will come in a time that is ultimately good for us, but not necessarily convenient for us.

**Psalm 69:13 (ESV)**

*13 But as for me, my prayer is to you, O LORD.  
At an acceptable time, O God,  
in the abundance of your steadfast love answer me in your saving faithfulness.*

God is **consistently reliable**. He will answer the prayers of His children at an acceptable time and through the abundance of His steadfast love and saving faithfulness.

**Application**

If our God is consistently reliable, then are we? Whom do you know who is consistently reliable? Are you? Nearly everyone will say they are reliable, but it is a rare person who actually is. This is not a new problem. This has been a problem since at least the days of Solomon.

**Proverbs 20:6 (ESV)**

*6 Many a man proclaims his own steadfast love, but a faithful man who can find?*

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<sup>12</sup> See 1 Thessalonians 5:24 for God's faithfulness in our sanctification.

<sup>13</sup> See also Jeremiah 33:3; Ps 17:6; 28:1; 55:16; 61:2; 86:7; 116:2.

In our culture, most people are only reliable until something better comes along. How many times has a someone told you he or she would be there for you only to receive a phone call the day before saying, “Oh, I’m so sorry. I know you were counting on me to teach Sunday school, but something has come up and I can’t make it. I’m sure you can find someone to cover for me.” When really what happened was, you delayed your preparation until Saturday night and just now someone, whom you probably shouldn’t be hanging around with anyway, called you up and invited you to go to see the director’s cut edition of Harry Potter 17 in 3D and you’ve decided you’d rather go see a movie than stay home and do the hard work of preparing a Sunday school lesson. How many times have you been the one making that phone call?

It seems that we are only as reliable as the commitment is convenient. As soon as keeping a commitment becomes costly, suddenly “something else comes up.” This might describe the character of man, but this does **not** describe the character of God.

**Psalms 15:1, 4c (ESV)**

**1** O LORD, who shall sojourn in your tent?  
Who shall dwell on your holy hill?

**4c** who swears to his own hurt and does not change;

Who are the kind of people who will dwell happily with the LORD? It will be the kind of people who promise to be there for you and who *will* be there for you even though it may hurt to do so. Faithful people are people who are consistently reliable even when it is inconvenient and even when it is costly. Jerry Bridges says, “This is what distinguishes godly faithfulness from the ordinary dependability of secular society.”<sup>14</sup> Faithfulness is **complete honesty and it is consistent reliability**.

## Faithfulness Is Unswerving Loyalty

Third, faithfulness is *unswerving loyalty*. I think the best illustration of God’s unswerving loyalty to His people is seen in life of Hosea. God did a crazy thing in the life of His prophet Hosea. Hosea became to Israel a living parable of God’s faithfulness toward Israel and Israel’s faithlessness toward God. To illustrate this horrendous evil, God commanded Hosea to marry a prostitute. Her name was Gomer.

In the beginning of the marriage everything seemed to be going OK. However, after a few children and experiencing the burdens of home-life, Gomer ran away from her husband and returned to the streets and she returned to the dirty life of prostitution. Things became so bad that she sold herself into slavery and Hosea, the faithful husband, was there that day at the auction block and purchased back his unfaithful wife. God commanded Hosea to love an unfaithful wife, because God Himself loved an unfaithful nation (Hos 3:1). Through the faithfulness demonstrated by Hosea to Gomer, God said to Israel,

**Hosea 2:19-20 (ESV)**

**19** And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy.

**20** I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the LORD.

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<sup>14</sup> Jerry Bridges, *The Fruitful Life: The Overflow of God’s Love Through You* (Colorado Springs, NavPress, 2006), 134.



The word betroth meant that God was starting all over again with Israel. The relationship would be as it was in first days of the betrothal. God promised unswerving loyalty to His people, a loyalty that would last forever. Similarly, God spoke to Israel through Jeremiah.

**Jeremiah 31:3 (ESV)**

**3 ...** *I have loved you with an everlasting love;  
therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.*

The everlasting love of God overflows out into an unswerving loyalty toward His people. The faithfulness of God will never end.

**Psalms 100:5 (ESV)**

**5** *For the LORD is good;  
his steadfast love endures forever,  
and his faithfulness to all generations.*

**Psalms 117:2 (ESV)**

**2** *For great is his steadfast love toward us,  
and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever.  
Praise the LORD!*

God is **unswervingly loyal** to His people. His faithfulness endures to all generations. How long does our loyalty last? How long is our faithfulness good for? A few years?

The members of the Washburn-Langford-Doane expedition named the geyser Old Faithful because of its regularity and consistency. The geyser has been regularly and consistently throwing an average of 6,000 gallons of boiling water an average of 145 feet into the air at predictable intervals for the entirety of its 141 years of recored history.

God has been faithful for as long as He has been God because faithfulness makes up the very fabric of His being, which extends far beyond 141 years. If anyone should affectionately be referred to as Old Faithful, it's God, not some whole in the ground in Wyoming.

The God we serve and the God whose Spirit dwells within us (if you have are putting your faith in Jesus) has been **completely honest** since the beginning of time. God the Father has been **consistently reliable** since the foundation of the earth. Yahweh of Israel has been **unswervingly loyal** to His people since He uttered the first promise to Abraham. He always has been completely honest, consistently reliable, and unswervingly loyal and He always will be because that is who He is and that is who He wants us to be.

## Application/Conclusion

However weak we may be on the faithfulness scale, it is possible for there to be growth. It is possible to become more faithful. The Spirit of the God who is faithful dwells within us. He is at work producing faithfulness within us. How might we cooperate with Him? Let me suggest two ways. First, make faithfulness a friend. And second, begin to be faithful.

Here's the advice of king David.

**Psalms 37:3 (ESV)**

**3** *Trust in the LORD, and do good;  
dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness.*

Another possible translation of “befriend faithfulness” is, “feed on faithfulness.” In other words, fill yourself with faithfulness. Set faithfulness before your face and welcome it like you would welcome a feast. Surround yourself with faithfulness. Fill your life with faithful people. Look at faithfulness as that long lost friend who is looking for a place to stay and welcome faithfulness into your home and into your life. Make faithfulness your close friend. And get rid of all faithlessness. Remove anything from your life that drains faithfulness. Remove anything that does not fill you with faith.

Secondly, begin to be faithful in your life and your daily choices.

**Luke 16:10 (ESV)**

**10** *“One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much.”*

Begin to be faithful in the little things. Be faithful in what you say. Determine in your heart not to stretch the truth. Think before you make a promise. Can you actually do what you are promising to do? If you cannot, then do not say you will do it. And if you do give your word that you will do something, then do it. If you tell your kids you will take them to the mall, then keep your word and take them to the mall. If you tell your wife you are going to fix the broken bathroom fixture, then turn off the TV and fix it.

If you tell your boss you’ll work on Saturday, then work on Saturday even if the Patriots are playing. And if you promised you would babysit Saturday night, then when Tom Cruise calls and asks you out, then tell him no, but feel free to invite him to church with you on Sunday.

Be faithful in the small things and the Holy Spirit will give you strength to become increasingly more faithful in all you do. Befriend faithfulness. Our God is faithful and we must be too. And if we are faithful and filled with faith in Jesus in this life, then at the end of our lives we will hear those precious words, the most precious words that could ever be heard...

**Matthew 25:21 (ESV)**

*Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.*