

“Fruit of the Spirit” series- STUDY 8

FAITHFULNESS

The price of loyalty is second to none.
Jesus described it as the greatest of love.
To give one's life for the sake of another;
Be willing to love each man as a brother.
Are we faithful to those around us?
Do we appreciate the ones who stick by us?
How easy it is to sing your own song.
How easy to point out somebody doing wrong.
Let's turn it around and learn from the master;
Jesus without faithfulness would be a disaster:
-no promises are kept, his love is failing
-His word means nothing we are but lost.
How important faithfulness is now we can see,
It's the glue that binds us together as new.
Your faithfulness surrounds you it goes before you.
It's your calling card of love and truth.
You never forget us O Lord, in spite of what we do.
Your promises are kept from generation to generation.
Your love stands firm, you present us to the Father
You died in our place, than have us go under
Lord teach us to be faithful to your Word,
To walk by your side, amidst persecution.
Let us live lives of faithfulness and humility.
Through honesty and love let your word be our bond.
Your faithfulness saved the nations long ago
Through your teachings now I pray O God
Let my faith in you help save even a few.

Joel Douma 7-6-03

Introduction. I often get frustrated when I have to buy a card for a birthday or anniversary. When I am at a newsagency at the Macquarie Centre there are so many cards to choose from, but so few have anything decent to say. They are either rude & crude or soppy & sentimental. I'd rather buy a plain card and write up my own message. Hallmark have a card that says "I can't promise you forever, but I can promise you today." That's about as deep a commitment as some are willing to make. It doesn't happen so much any more that couples remain married for 40 –50 years. It requires commitment, sacrifice, loyalty- in other words faithfulness. When I was young our family lived on a farm, which meant a 40-50 minute drive to the church. We went to church twice every Sunday. And Dad also brought us boys to Catechism each week, and the youth club. Though Dad was a rough diamond, his faith was expressed in his commitment, his faithfulness. Story is told of a man who had prayed 50 years for his friend when he was finally converted. Such is the fruit of faithfulness.

We all live by faith. The seventh "*Fruit of the Spirit- faithfulness*" is not such a well-used word any more. But it is faithfulness that keeps society together. Every human being lives by faith. From the moment we wake and get ready for work, we are continually trusting and dependent on others. We breathe air we cannot see, we eat food we have not examined, we keep appointments with people we trust will be there, we go through traffic lights assuming the others won't go through the red, we board planes we trust will stay up till they are meant to come down. We live by faith because we were created to live in an environment of dependence- dependence on each other & especially dependence on God. But faith requires faithfulness or it will produce only disaster. What happens when Sydney water is not clean, when vitamin tablets don't contain what they say, when we trust a banker and get a crook, trust a husband and get a drunk, trust a boss and get the sack? To live properly we live by faith in each other, which depends on our faithfulness.

Greek

pistis –to be assured

patho – to trust, to have obedience

Hebrew

ahman – to believe, to be faithful

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Defining faith biblically. The Greek language shows how close faith and faithfulness go together. Only one word is used to describe both –"*pistis*". That's why some translations of the bible list "*faith*" as the seventh fruit of the spirit and others "*faithfulness*." The word "*pistis*" means "to be assured, a firm persuasion, a conviction based upon hearing, reliability or dependability". The closely related word "*patho*" means "to persuade, to trust, to have obedience, to believe, to be confident in." The Hebrew word for faith is "*ahman*" which means "to believe, to have assurance in, to be faithful, to be established, to be verified." Our faithfulness verifies the faith we have. If I say I have faith in God, but I don't do anything to show my faith, then I do not show myself to be faithful to what I believe. It is interesting that the Hebrew word "*ahman*" has as its original meaning "the mother or nurse of a child." Very deep is the love of a mother for her child. The child is totally

dependent and trusting on its mother and the mother in her love is always caring and reliable. (*“Can a mother forget the child at her breast?”* Isaiah 49:15) So faithfulness can be defined, as the dictionary says, “To follow through with commitment regardless of difficulty.” One commentator says “Faithfulness is the Christ-like quality of dependability- stability in our relationship with God and reliability in our relationship with others.” Another commentator put it “Faithfulness is love hanging on.”

***“Your love, O Lord, reaches to the heavens,
Your faithfulness to the skies”
Psalm 36:5***

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God’s example of faithfulness. The greatest example of faithfulness is God Himself. (You will remember that the “Fruit of the Spirit” are in fact the characteristics of God that God’s Spirit develops in us as believers.) God’s faithfulness means that God is trustworthy. He is very dependable. He doesn’t change. He is as solid as a rock, all His words in the Bible are trustworthy. God keeps His promises. Behind the universe is a faithful God. Listen to the Psalmists praising the faithfulness of God: (Psalm 36:5) *“Your love, O Lord, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies.”* (Ps. 89:2) *“I will declare that your love stands firm forever, that you established your faithfulness in heaven itself.”* (Ps. 100:5) *“The LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.”* (Ps. 146:5-6) *“Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God, the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them- the LORD, who remains faithful forever.”* The universe is an enormous place, with billions of stars all orbiting in an orderly way, so orderly we have been able to navigate by the stars for thousands of years. There is without fail a day after each night, the seasons come and go, because God is faithful (Genesis 8:22). Scientists conduct experiments, make notes and search out patterns that can be mathematically described. They depend on the reliability of everything in nature behaving as it has in the past and will in the future, so they can develop theories and formulae which they call “laws of nature”. What they are, in fact, describing are the habits of God. They are witnessing and documenting God’s timeless and enduring manner of maintaining and caring for the creation He made. These laws are a grand exhibit of the faithfulness of God.

God’s covenants. God’s faithfulness is also seen in the covenants He made in salvation history and all the promises he kept. He promised Abraham that he would be a *“blessing to all the nations”*. After saving Israel from slavery in Egypt he promised to care for them and bless them if they were obedient and to punish them if they were not. And He faithfully did. God promised David that one of his sons would always remain on the throne – culminating in the Son who would rule forever. All of God’s covenants were fulfilled in Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ the faithfulness of God finds its fullest and deepest expression. Through Jesus’ death and resurrection all the promises of redemption were fulfilled including the very first promise in Genesis 3:15 *“He will strike your head and you will bruise His heel.”* God is faithful. He keeps His promises.

“All God’s covenants
were fulfilled
in Jesus Christ”

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Jesus’ faithfulness. Jesus too, fulfilled all He did through obedience, through faithfulness. Not once did Jesus sin, even though sorely tempted by the devil. He remained faithful even when in the garden the reality of His suffering in hell that was soon coming seemed to overwhelm Him. But he said, *“Not my will, but yours be done.”* It was Jesus’ faithfulness that kept him hanging on the cross when everyone tormented him to come off the cross and prove he was the Son of God. Hebrews 3:1-2 reminds us *“fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest we confess. He was faithful to the one who appointed him...”* Revelation describes Jesus (Rev. 19:11) as *“faithful and true”*.

Our dependence on God’s faithfulness. All that we have as Christians, our forgiveness and treasures in Christ, have come about because God is faithful and Jesus was faithful. And our hope for what is yet to come is based on the faithfulness of God. Remember that every time you see a rainbow. Every time you pick up a bible, remember that God said *“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.”* (Matthew 24:35). Every time you come to worship remember Jesus said *“Where two or three come together in my Name, there am I with them.”* (Matthew 18:20). Every time you participate in the Lord’s Supper, remember Jesus saying *“I will be with you always to the end of the age.”* One passage summarises it all (Lamentations 3:22,23)

*“Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed,
for his compassions never fail.
They are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.”*

So right is the songwriter who responded to that and wrote,

*“Great is your faithfulness, O God my father...
morning by morning new mercies I see.
All I have needed your hand has provided;
great is your faithfulness Lord unto me.”*

Our response of faithfulness. God and Jesus have set the example. They have shown their character. Now the Spirit is to work that faithfulness in us. Because God is faithful to us, we are to be faithful to Him. If we have faith in God, then it will express itself in our faithfulness. The church is described in Ephesians as *“the bride of Christ.”* So like a faithful spouse we are called to remain true in our love for Jesus. He is to be the number one object of our time and love and attention. Serving Him is to be the first goal of our lives. To do less, to turn our heads and give first place to some one or something else is (like in marriage) adultery. So there is for us the call to personal devotion to Jesus. If we call ourselves Christians, if we say we love Jesus, then how much time do we spend with the one we love? Is prayer and personal bible reading part of what we do every day? We say we love Jesus: is that evident in the language that comes out of our mouth, in the business

we do, in the friends we make, in the way we handle our time and money and talents, in the way we teach our children, in the time we spend with our spouse, -in all this are we faithful to Jesus? A little word study of faithfulness in the New testament sees it connected with service (Ephesians 6:21), marriage (1 Timothy 5:9), prayer (Romans 12:12), ministry (Colossians 1;7), truth (3John 3) persecution (Rev.13:10) death (Rev 2:10).

Faithfulness as a church. Not only must we be faithful as individual Christians, but as a church. Are we faithful in gathering together each Sunday? Acts 2 reminds us that those who were converted after Pentecost “*met constantly to hear the apostles teach and to share the common life, to break bread and to pray.*” Are we faithful as a congregation in searching out God’s will for us in the time and place he has put us? Are we faithful as God’s people to sound out the call of God against abuse and injustice, to stand up for those who suffer and are trampled upon? Are we ready to expend our effort and time and money to help bring in the kingdom? In the parable of the talents (Matthew 25 :14ff) there is a strong emphasis on “*faithfulness*”- the word is mentioned four times. We are to be faithful with the things God has given us and made us stewards of- things like time, spiritual gifts, money, the gospel message of Christ. What are we doing with these things? Are we burying them? Or are we investing them in the kingdom, so that when Jesus returns he will say “*Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things.*”

Growing in faithfulness

The Spirit teaches us to crawl before walking.

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Growing in faithfulness. Faithfulness is something we all need to grow in. For us to grow we need to be led by the Spirit. Remember we are dealing with the “*Fruit of the Spirit*”. It is the Spirit who opens our eyes to the bible as it teaches us about God’s faithfulness. The Spirit brings to our minds just how much we need the benefits that come because of God’s faithfulness. The Spirit stimulates us to respond in faith, to express trust, to praise God for his wonderful faithfulness. Sometimes the Spirit gives us little, very manageable opportunities to practice faithfulness. As we develop we are faced with larger challenges to increase our spiritual stamina. As the parable of the talents says “*You have been faithful in small ways. I will put you in charge of much more.*” We need to crawl before we walk. We learn to be faithful in tithing with our pocket money, so we learn to remain faithful in giving when the mortgage is high. We are faithful in sharing the faith with a special friend, then challenged to faithfully witness in a public setting. Sometimes the Holy Spirit places us in situations where we are forced to rely on God, to trust Him, to be faithful in accepting His provisions. Or the Spirit gives us quiet moments of teaching, by allowing us to observe the wonder of creation and see God’s faithfulness in the seasons and the laws of nature. Sometimes the Spirit develops faithfulness in us through the faithfulness of our church community. He uses the spiritual

momentum of others to carry us along where our faithfulness is lacking, to be an example for the immature and an inspiration for those who are tired or discouraged. We see it when we celebrate a baptism or profession of faith and as a community we pledge support. When we wonder if there is anything in this Jesus business and our faith takes a tumble, the faithfulness of others impresses us that God is indeed faithful, in Jesus there is indeed forgiveness and life.

The key thing in our relationship with Jesus is that we remain faithful to Him. Will you do that? Will Jesus say of you “Well done, good and faithful servant”?

DISCUSSION.

Preparation. Read the sermon notes.

Readings. Exodus 34:1-17; Ecclesiastes 7:1-9; 2 Peter 3:3-10; Galatians 5:22,23

Questions.

1. Give examples, from what you have seen in your life, that express what you think faithfulness is.
2. Explain how it is that “faithfulness keeps society together. Every human being lives by faith”.
3. Define the biblical meaning of faith. What do the words “*pistis*”, “*patho*” and “*ahman*” mean?
4. Explain the statement “our faithfulness verifies the faith we have”.
5. Explain from the bible what it means that God is faithful. What are the implications for science? What does it mean about how we worship God at work, in science, in technology?
6. How is God’s faithfulness seen in the covenants he made in salvation history?
7. Explain how Jesus faithfulness brought about redemption.
8. Explain how all our hopes and desires, our deepest needs and longings are dependent on the faithfulness of God. Is that something that gives you confidence or concern? Why?
9. In considering our faithful response to Jesus, express how you feel about the following (and how you go about doing it) :
 - a. “Like a faithful spouse we are called to remain true in our love for Jesus. He is to be the number one object of our time and love and attention.”
 - b. “We say we love Jesus. Is that evident in the language that comes out of our mouths, in the business we do, in the friends we make, in the way we handle our time and money and talents, in the way we teach our children, in the time we spend with our spouse.”
10. Consider the question : “Are we faithful as a congregation in searching out God’s will for us in the time and place he has put us”?
11. Explain how the Spirit helps us grow in faithfulness. Can you give examples of how that has happened in your life?