

Series: "The Fruit of the Spirit"
"Faithfulness"

So far in this series of messages we've looked at 6 fruit of the Spirit – qualities of life or character traits that will be evident in us if God's Spirit is in us and controlling us. Today we will think about *faithfulness*: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, *faithfulness*" (Galatians 5:22). It's the Greek word that means "that which causes trust or faith". Outside of the New Testament, in common usage, this word was translated "trustworthiness". Worthy of trust.

Are you faithful? Reliable? Can people trust you and depend on you? Do you keep your word? Do you keep your promises? This is what this word is all about.

As we've seen with the other fruit of the Spirit, these are qualities that mark God's character, and Jesus' life: Love - God loves, God *is* love. Joy, peace – Jesus wants to give us His joy, His peace. Patience – God is a patient God. God is kind, God is good. The same holds true of this fruit of the Spirit: faithfulness.

God is faithful. The psalmist said, "Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens, your *faithfulness* to the clouds" (Psalm 36:5). Psalm 119:90 says of God, "Your faithfulness endures to all generations." 1 Corinthians 1:9 echoes this faithfulness on God's part: "God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." God is reliable. God can be depended on. God can be trusted. God keeps His Word and promises. God's own faithfulness is the model and inspiration for our being faithful.

If this fruit of the Spirit is evident in us, how will that play out? ***We will be faithful to God.***

The Bible is the drama of God's faithfulness in creating us and redeeming us. He created us in His own image, and when we fell into sin He set in motion a plan of salvation. He chooses Israel as the people through whom He will reveal Himself and His purposes to the whole world. He binds Himself to them in a *covenant* to be their God and is faithful to that covenant.

But Israel fails in this mission. They stray from God again and again. They are *unfaithful* – like an unfaithful spouse, "a-whoring after other gods" – as the King James Version puts it! So God makes a new covenant with humanity by sending His Son Jesus to save the world. And those who believe in Jesus and follow Him become the "new Israel", through whom God wants to get the message of salvation out to the world.

But like the Israel of the Old Testament, how often believers – the Church - are unfaithful to God. We sin, and break God's commandments. We too are prone to go our own way and do our own thing. We put self-interest first. *So being faithful to God means we seek to love God with our whole heart and soul and mind and strength, turn from our evil ways, and strive to put God first.* Here's a beautiful thing: Even when we're not faithful to Him, God remains faithful. "If we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself" (2 Timothy 2:13).

Being faithful to God also involves keeping the promises we've made in the presence of God.

Some of us got married in a church, or by a pastor, with a religious ceremony, and we made promises "in the sight of God" to be faithful to our spouse. If we joined a church we made promises to support that church. In the United Methodist Church, we promised to support the church with our "prayers...presence...gifts...and service." Some of us who are parents had our children baptized (or dedicated), and promised God we would raise that child in the ways of the Lord.

We also show faithfulness in our relationship with God when we are good stewards, or caretakers, of the gifts God has given to us. 1 Corinthians 4:2 tells us: "Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found *faithful*." None of us are owners of life and its gifts. Everything we have belongs to God. We are only stewards, managers, caretakers. So, being faithful to God means that we take the gifts God has placed in our hands, and we use them, not just for selfish ends, but for His glory and the benefit of others. All of us are given some measure of talents and abilities. Some of us have more money and assets than what we need to survive. Whatever little, or much, God has entrusted to us, can be used to do good and honor the Lord.

Do you remember the Parable of Talents in Matthew 25? A master was going on a trip and entrusted his property with his servants. To one he gave 5 talents, to another 2 talents, and to a third 1 talent. (A talent was actually a sum of money). Two of the three servants took what the master entrusted to them and made more with them. And I love the way the master commends these servants: "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" (Matthew 25:21, 23).

When this fruit of the Spirit – faithfulness – is evident in our lives, we will be faithful in our obligations to God!

We will also be faithful in our relationships with other people. Are we trustworthy - can people trust us? Are we reliable? Can people depend on us? Do we keep our word?

Probably all of us know people who just aren't reliable or dependable! Sometimes we make light of it: "Oh, Aunt Sally, she makes all these promises...but...". "Oh yeah, Jack, he's all talk. But you can never depend on him." Sometimes, it isn't so funny. Someone we love, someone we trusted, really let's us down. A divorced mother who had custody of her teenaged daughter shared with me how her ex-husband, the girl's father, disappointed his daughter repeatedly. He would promise to come and take her somewhere, then never show up. And this crushed this young girl's spirit. He just wasn't reliable.

Our lives are enriched by people who are faithful in their responsibilities to others. Workers who faithfully show up for work, and put in an honest days' effort. Neighbors whom we can trust to watch our house when we're away, or look out for us in other ways. Repairmen and women whom we can trust to fix our car or truck or washing machine and not overcharge us or cheat us. Politicians who keep their campaign promises. (Oops – should have left that one out)!

Often these reliable, dependable people are behind-the-scenes people. The person on the night

shift who stocks the shelves at the grocery store. The maid who cleans the motel room so that it's presentable when we arrive. The cooks in the hot kitchens of the restaurants where we enjoy eating out (and we know it if one or two of them decide not to show up for work that day).

People faithful in their obligations and responsibilities to others make the world go around!

When we embody this fruit of the Spirit, faithfulness, in the church, it makes church life so much more satisfying and productive. I've been a pastor to hundreds (thousands) of people in my career – some of whom have been faithful and worthy of trust, and others not so much!

I've supervised other pastors on staff, other staff members, and I much prefer those who've been dependable! I've worked with many committee chairpersons and other church leaders, most of whom I could rely on.....*most!* In my first church the treasurer was a man who didn't come to church much. Nice man. Early on, I didn't get a paycheck for 8 weeks! I was young, (19), I didn't know what I was doing, too timid to say anything. It was kind of hard to develop much trust in this treasurer!

When we're filled with the Spirit, we will be faithful and dependable and worthy of trust: in our life outside the church, and in our church involvement. Congregations rely on people whom they can rely on! Committee chairpersons and members of church boards who will faithfully show up for meetings. I talked recently with a young pastor who was frustrated that the Chairperson of the Trustees was spotty in church attendance, and hadn't called a meeting in a while, even though there was important business to conduct.

Our Sunday morning worship depends on people who are faithful and reliable, often doing behind the scenes work to prepare for 9 a.m. Sunday morning. Preparing the church bulletin and sermon slides. Changing the altar cloths and putting oil in the candles. Setting up music stands and microphones, turning on the computer and video projector and the sound board (no, the music and tech fairy doesn't visit the church at 7 a.m. Sunday morning and get everything ready!). Operating the audio-visual equipment during the service. Having a faithful and reliable janitor who keeps the church clean.

Churches thrive when people are faithful in their obligations to the church. People who make church attendance a priority – who come even on rainy days, or mornings when they feel like sleeping in or staying home. Who will be there at a Bible study or Sunday School class or small group meeting – even if they're not thrilled with the current study being offered. Years ago, the church I pastored got involved in an extensive Bible study experience called The Bethel Series. I spent two weeks in Madison, Wisconsin, being trained to spend 2 years teaching some lay people how to teach this to the congregation. The man who founded the study told us that he was so committed to meeting each week with those whom he was training, that even if he was far away from home he would fly back for that meeting, so as not to have to miss it. I've never forgotten this as an example of the kind of commitment we could use more of in our churches.

Churches are blessed by faithful members who will stick by a church – even if something happens they don't like, or when they don't particularly care for the pastor.

The Apostle Paul was arguably the greatest missionary-evangelist of the first century church. He caught the headlines, but found support in many faithful believers: *Epaphras*, for example: "This you learned from Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf" (Colossians 1:7). *Tychicus and Onesimus*: "Tychicus will tell you all the news about me; he is a beloved brother, a *faithful* minister, and a fellow servant in the Lord. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts; he is coming with Onesimus, the *faithful* and beloved brother, who is one of you" (Colossians 4:7-9).

I thank God for the faithful people I've worked with over many years in the church!

"But the fruit of the Spirit is....faithfulness" (Galatians 5:22).

Do you have a reputation for being reliable, dependable, trustworthy? If we're followers of Jesus, we should.

I love this promise of God, found in the Book of Revelation: "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10).

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