

Faithfulness

Topical Sermon

7 June 2020 | Grace Bible Church Corinda | Ben Shannon

Big Question: Why are Christians faithful?

Big Idea: Faith in God produces faithfulness in us.

Introduction

I've known Simon and Simone (not their real names) my whole life.

Most of you don't know them, but I hope that you know people like them.

They're the kind of people who always ask how you're going and you know that they actually care because they stop to listen to the answer.

They're the type of people that others often step on in their own rise to glory, since they only step into the limelight to serve when no one else wants to.

Simone carried the Sunday School ministry in their church, has been the backbone of the prayer ministry, as well as cleaning and feeding others.

If you look carefully, you'll find Simon quietly going about doing all the rubbish jobs.

I mean that literally – doing the rubbish – that job most people haven't ever even considered needs to be done.

Turning up early and leaving late to serve in the most unimpressive ways, week after week after week.

As other people have come and gone, get excited and then get bored, they've just kept serving in their church.

I know that they're the same at work, school and family too.

When other people lose their bundle, they're the ones who're there to pick up the pieces.

They've had more than their fair share of struggles themselves, yet time and again when most other people would be falling apart, they're still there serving others.

When I think of their lives, I think of the amazing example they've been to me of what the fruit of the Spirit look like – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness.

But when I think of Simon and Simone, the thing I think of the most is their faithfulness.

Their faith in Jesus drives them to be faithful to others.

Not just for years, but for decades and not just with a little, but with their whole lives.

Outline

We're continuing our series on the fruit of the Spirit.

I hope that you've been blessed as we've been served by all the men who've preached over the last few weeks.

God's Word has certainly challenged me as we've spent time thinking about how he works these graces in our lives.

Instead of producing the fruit of the flesh – the kind of things that Paul names a few verses earlier in Galatians 5 – these virtues are the outworking of God's Spirit.

Flee from all evil and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness.¹

My prayer is that God will produce more of his character in us.

Today, we're going to be looking at the seventh characteristic that Paul lists.

Some older translations – like the KJV – say 'faith'.

Faith is one of those words that can sometimes sound like it's a bit mysterious when really it basically means 'trust'.

The word that Paul uses here is often used to describe the act or attitude of believing.

That's how he uses the word, for example, in Galatians 3:9 and other places in the New Testament.

In the first four chapters of Galatians, Paul's talking about saving faith – that we're saved by faith alone.

He encourages the Galatians to be faithful to the gospel because they'd got it wrong.

But, being a Christian means that we're not just freed from the penalty sin, but also its power.

Knowing the true gospel leads to a gospel lifestyle.

Lose the gospel and lose gospel lifestyle.

In chapter five, Paul starts talking about how saving faith changes the way we live.

I agree with the majority of modern scholars, who say that this word should be understood as 'faithfulness' here.

Not saving faith, but the ethical quality produced by the Holy Spirit in our lives.

This isn't about saving faith so much as those with saving faith being faithful.

Faithfulness is about being worthy of belief.

Faithfulness includes trustworthiness, loyalty and dependability, reliability.

Someone who's faithful is someone that you put your trust and confidence in.

It isn't just about being predictable and boring, but it is about sticking at something over the long haul.

The opposite is an opportunist, someone who's a friend only in the good times.

The big idea for today is: **faith in God produces faithfulness in us.**

We'll be considering three questions:

- Can we rely on God?
- Can God rely on us?
- Can others rely on us?

#1 Can we rely on God?

Part of our God – the God of the Bible's – character is that he's faithful.

He's described as faithful in a whole bunch of places throughout the Old and New Testaments.

That means he's 100% reliable and can be completely trusted.

You can count on his word, that he'll deliver on his promises.

How do we know that we can rely on God though?

God's been faithful to each and every one of us, if we'll just have the eyes to look out the window and see.

He keeps the earth turning, sustaining his world, sending the rain (often at just the right moment).

I knew that, unless Jesus returned in glory, that the sun was going to come up this morning

And it will do again tomorrow.

We know that he's faithful by looking at his track record.

In my own life, time and time again, I've seen him come through at just the right moment.

Very often after what I thought was the right moment.

Sometimes, it doesn't feel like God is faithful and we get a little bit impatient with him because he doesn't deliver in our timeframe, yet his timing is always perfect.

We see the same thing on the pages of the Bible as time and again God comes through for his people.

Just one example is when he rescued the Israelites out of Egypt and even allows them to take some loot with them.

Their backs are against the wall – with an army on one side and a sea on the other, God solves both problems.

It's no wonder that in the book of Exodus (which explains these things), he's described as, "*The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.*"²

As we read through the Bible, time and again, we see that God keeps his promises.

From the very beginning, when Adam and Eve were kicked out of the Garden, God promised that he'd deal with sin.

Then he promised Abraham that he'd make a people for himself to dwell in his place under his rule.

God's people waited through the wilderness and then saw those promises fulfilled in part when they came into the promised land.

They waited through exile and saw the promises partly fulfilled when they were allowed home again.

For four hundred years, God's people waited without so much as a peep from a prophet.

And then Jesus burst onto the scene and showed God's faithfulness to his promises.

God is so faithful that he sent his own Son to deal with our sin problem.

At the right time, Christ died for the ungodly.

He dealt with sin fully and completely on the cross.

There isn't a sin that's too ugly, too big or too hard for Jesus to have dealt with.

That's a reliable word, that Jesus came to save sinners (1 Timothy 1:15).

Because of what Jesus has already done, God's faithful to forgive our sins if we come asking forgiveness.

When you come to him, you don't need to wonder if you're going to be okay.

Sometimes – let's be honest – we don't want to fess up because we're worried about the consequences.

It's all too easy to despair when we realise that whoops, I've done it again, I've got caught in the game.

Like a dog that returns to its vomit or a sow that washes and then goes and lies in its own faeces, Proverbs so graphically puts it, we return to our sin.

We wonder, "Will God really forgive me again?"

Sometimes, we ask other people for forgiveness and we don't know if we're actually going to receive it.

Burned into my memory is hurting another kid at the park on afternoon.

I knew I'd done the wrong thing and that made me feel bad.

What was worse was going to him to say that I was sorry and having him completely reject me.

He wouldn't forgive, he wouldn't even talk to me. That hurt.

God is faithful, even when people aren't.³

What I think is one of the most precious verses in the Bible:

1 John 1:9 (NIV11) ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

We don't need to be worried about him flying off the handle at us.

He is faithful to forgive.

Friend, have you confessed your sin to God?

If not, today is the day and if you do you will find forgiveness.

Jesus shows that God is faithful to promises in the past and so we can trust him to be faithful now and into the future.

We won't be stopped because he can't be stopped.

He'll protect us from the evil one.⁴

God will keep us until the very end - what a precious thought that is!

1 Corinthians 1:8–9 (NIV11) ⁸ He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

God's faithfulness means that we can have hope.

Hebrews 10:23 (NIV11) ²³ Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

Do you feel like you're living with hope?

Do you really trust God, that he has forgiven your sins?

God is always faithful to us.

We can hold onto God's words and promises.

Christians have faith in the one who is faithful and trust in the one who's trustworthy.

#2 Can God rely on us?

That might sound like a strange question to ask.

It makes is sound like the God of the universe needs us otherwise his plans won't happen.

That's simply not the case, but God has entrusted us with a mission – his mission.

Will we be faithful with it?

We're going to camp out for a little while in Matthew 25, so turn there with me.

Jesus tells a parable about talents – or as the NIV helpfully explains (in terms that I can actually understand), bags of gold.

A bloke goes on a journey and he gives his servants some cash to look after.

One gets five bags, one two bags and another gets one bag.

Servant A puts it to work and gets another five bags.

Servant B puts it to work and gets another two bags.

Servant C keeps it safe by sticking it in the ground.

The master comes back and he praises Servant A for what he's done.

He says that he's good (remember last week) and faithful.

Verse 21:

Matthew 25:21 (NIV11) ²¹ "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

Servant B hands over what he's done and again the Master is pleased.

Notice that the doesn't compare the two servants – he's thankful that the second servant's done well with what he was given.

Compare verses 23 and 21. They're word-for-word identical.

The master isn't concerned about how much they made – a little or a lot, the point is that they were faithful with what they were given.

Servant C comes along and the master lays into him for being wicked and lazy, not even bothering to get a little bit of interest on the money:

Matthew 25:26 (NIV11) ²⁶ "His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant!

At this point, we're thinking that the master couldn't possibly be Jesus because he wouldn't speak like that.

Well, at least we hope that's the case because that would mean that we're the servants and he might speak like that to us.

That's a sober warning for us, isn't it?

You might be thinking, "I'm happy with what I've got. Actually, please don't give me any more!"

Just give me salvation and don't ask anything more from me!

It doesn't work like that – either you're faithful and more is given, or you're cast out.

God doesn't call us to achieve great things for him, he calls us to be faithful to him with whatever we've been given.

The reason that we're often not faithful is because we don't really believe God's promises and command.

We don't really have trust in God and so we don't live in light of it.

I think because it takes a lot of faith to be faithful.

Not truly trusting the gospel is the power of salvation means that we won't do anything significant with it.

It means trusting that his kingdom and his righteousness really are better than all the other things that we could pursue.

We've just been through this time where life had the pause button pressed.

Or, at the very least, life has been played at half speed.

How many series of Netflix did you get to binge watch?

What new dance moves did you learn?

Did you manage to perfect the sour dough starter recipe?

Perhaps you managed to defeat the Ender Dragon in Minecraft.

I think that makes it an excellent time to stop and reflect on your life during that time.

There's nothing wrong with any of those things I listed, God wants you to enjoy good gifts.

But the big question is: were you faithful?

We all know that there have been all kinds of challenges over the last couple of weeks.

What responsibilities has the Lord given you?

That's not a question you can answer in ten seconds, however it's worth sitting down and pondering.

It's probably not just a "yes" or "no" answer.

You might've been faithful in some parts of your life and not in others.

As things change again, it's worthwhile reflecting on what's been important to us – the things that we've prioritised, given time and energy to.

What does it look like to be faithful?

It means doing everything that God's told us to do.

"To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God," to take the words of Micah 6:8.

To "seek first his kingdom and his righteousness," Matthew 6:33.

To "work out your salvation with fear and trembling," Philippians 2:12.

To "go and make disciples of all nations," Matthew 28:19.

Most of all to be faithful to the gospel – keeping sound doctrine – like Epaphras, Onesimus and Silas.⁵

I think's interesting that in Matthew 23, Jesus is talking to the Pharisees who think they're doing the right thing in so many ways.

They've even been careful about tithing their spices.

Jesus lays into them because they fail at justice and mercy.

I think it makes sense to most of us that he would be disappointed about that.

Jesus. also says that they fail at faithfulness.

Faithfulness is a big deal to him.

Don't believe me? Think about Jesus for a second. He's our example.

We sing:

*Consider Christ, that he should trust his Father
In the garden of Gethsemane
Though full of dread and fearful of the anguish
He drank the cup that was reserved for me.*

The pain was real and Jesus knew going to the cross wasn't going to be a picnic.

Can you imagine knowing that you had to go through the physical pain of the cross, but even more that the full tidal wave of God's wrath was about to come crashing down on you?

Yet Jesus prayed that his father's will be done and not his own.

The cross was a big thing, but God calls us to be faithful in the small things as well.

How we speak to other people and what we do.

How you are faithful in these little things says a lot about your character.

Being faithful to Jesus isn't easy.

Especially when it involves suffering for being a follower of Jesus.

Jesus praises the church in Pergamum for their unwavering loyalty to himself.⁶

Faithfulness matters to people of faith.

If you feel like you haven't been faithful, God's word gives us reassurance that everything's not lost, though.

2 Timothy 2:13 (NIV) ¹³ if we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself.

Our salvation doesn't depend on us, but on Jesus our faithful high priest.⁷

He has been faithful to God and as we follow him, we can be as well.⁸

Can God rely on us? Not unless we're relying on Jesus!

1 Thessalonians 5:24 (NIV11) ²⁴ The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.

Being faithful means sticking to salvation by grace alone through faith alone.⁹

Being faithful comes from having faith in our faithful God.

It takes faith to be faithful and trust to be trustworthy.

#3 Can others rely on us?

Finally, the Spirit helps us to be people that can be relied on by others as well.

Sometimes, when we're going through a rough patch, that's all that we can see.

From horizon to horizon is full of suffering and we begin to wonder if God doesn't care about us.

How could God allow a virus like this to happen? Doesn't he care?

If you've been there, you're not alone. Most (if not all) of us have been there.

Trusting in God gives us a different perspective though.

Knowing that our God is in control of everything and working it for good utterly changes the way we look at the world.

Our faith in Jesus means that we're secure.

We don't have to spend hours worrying and fretting about what is going to happen since we know that he's in control of it all.

That's great in and of itself, but most importantly it can free us up to serve others.

To do good to other people.

1 Peter 4:19 (NIV11) ¹⁹ So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.

Especially our brothers and sisters in Christ.¹⁰

Finding people who are faithful often isn't as easy as it seems.

Fair-weather friends are people who you can rely on when things are easy.

It's much more difficult when things are tough – when the going gets tough, the tough get going.

People claim to be faithful, but to be really relied on is another matter.

Proverbs 20:6 (NIV11) ⁶ Many claim to have unfailing love, but a faithful person who can find?

We all know the pain of unfaithfulness.

The hurt that comes from lies and broken promises.

Some of us have experienced that in small ways and others in big ways.

And we know the pain we've caused others due to our own unfaithfulness.

A faithful person fulfils their responsibilities.

When we were trying to sell a property, we found out that even a sale contract is basically meaningless.

You can get out of anything if you want to.

Christians should be different.

In his commentary on Galatians, Tom Schreiner writes:

“Those led by the Spirit are loyal and dependable, and one can count on them to fulfil their responsibilities.”¹¹

Reading that made me think of the number of times that I don't keep my commitments.

Paul tells Titus to instruct slaves that they should be so trustworthy – not talking back or stealing – Titus 2:10.

The purpose of this is so that “they will make the teaching about God our Saviour attractive.”

Can other people depend on you?

And by that, I mean can they depend on you in a good way?

Some of us can be depended on to turn up late or to say the wrong thing. That's not what we mean.

We live in a very low commitment, low loyalty age.

This is the time of the "definite maybe".

Facebooks has the "interested" response which means that we care, but not enough to commit to actually coming.

30, 40, 50 years ago, people worked for the same company for life and often lived in the same place.

Now people move all around the world at the drop of a hat.

When my friend began working at a large multi-national, at the first orientation session he was told not to be loyal to the company because the company wouldn't be loyal to him.

We're naïve if we think that doesn't affect how we do relationships.

The movie *Toy Story* is all about having a friend in need and helping in the tough times.

*If you've got troubles, I've got 'em too
There isn't anything I wouldn't do for you
We stick together and can see it through
'Cause you've got a friend in me
Yeah, you've got a friend in me*

We look at that and know that it's the ideal.

Yet many of us have friendships where we're just waiting to be stabbed in the back.

Or it's only a matter of time before the other person moves on.

In case you think I'm being too pessimistic, please know that I'm so thankful for the people in our church and the way you've faithfully served each other over the last couple of months.

I know that there are many who've appreciated the faithful and ongoing support of others.

I'm thankful for the way that you've faithfully given of your money in uncertain economic times.

You've even been faithful to our government, following the rules and requests they've made.

Can others rely on you and what does that tell them about your faith in Jesus?

Faith makes us faithful.

Conclusion

Faithfulness. It seems so easy.

What a challenge it is to be faithful, especially when we live at a time that it's not valued.

Faithful to our God, the mission he's given us and faithful to those who are around us is a fruit of God's Spirit.

For those of us who know the Lord who is unchanging, we can be faithful to others too.

May we all grow in faithfulness as we head towards that day when Jesus will say to us, "Well done, good and faithful servant! Come and share your master's happiness!"

¹ 1 Timothy 6:11

² Exodus 34:6

³ Romans 3:3

⁴ 2 Thessalonians 3:3

⁵ Colossians 1:7; 4:9; 1 Peter 5:12;

⁶ Revelation 2:13

⁷ Hebrews 2:17

⁸ Hebrews 3:2, 5

⁹ Titus 1:9

¹⁰ 3 John 5

¹¹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary Series : New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2010), 350.

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Big Question: Why are Christians faithful?

Big Idea: Faith in God produces faithfulness in us.

Discussion Questions

1. Who comes to your mind as an example of faithfulness?
2. What's the difference between faith and faithfulness?
3. What are some ways that we know God is faithful?
4. How do we know that God is faithful to forgive our sins?
5. What do we learn from about faithfulness from the parable that Jesus told in Matthew 25?
6. How do we know if we're being faithful to the Lord?
7. Why is unfaithfulness so painful?
8. How does faith in God help us to be faithful?