

Faithful

Adapted from, The Faithfulness Factor by David Welch

We live in a world of unfaithfulness; unfaithful marriages, business dealings, friendships, family, even church relationships. People fail, falter, forget, or forsake their commitments on a regular basis. Everything fails at some point in this fallen world. Every parent fails at one point or another. Some of those failures are inconsequential, others catastrophic. Some are eventually forgotten, others scar for a lifetime. But what about God? Is God faithful, can He be trusted?

In our scripture reading for today, as the second generation of Israelites are preparing to enter the Promised Land, God again reminds them,

Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, **THE FAITHFUL GOD** who maintains covenant loyalty with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations, Deuteronomy 7:9

And He warns them: *If you heed these ordinances, by diligently observing them, the Lord your God will maintain with you the covenant loyalty that he swore to your ancestors;* (Deuteronomy 7:12)

Thus, God has declared Himself to be a faithful God. With this thought in mind, let's take a few moments this morning to learn about FAITHFULNESS, both our feeble attempts in contrast with God's steadfast faithfulness.

First, how would you define "Faithfulness?"

Faithfulness is a characteristic that can be best understood by enlisting a number of other synonyms. We would describe someone as faithful, who is dependable, reliable, trustworthy, steadfast, a person of their word, true, loyal, committed, consistent, unflinching in their promises, unwavering in their convictions.

The core concept has to do with **dependability**; one who is faithful can be trusted to carry out what was promised no matter what else happens. We often apply the term to trusted things or animals as well as humans: here is a trustworthy horse, a faithful marriage, this is my trusty knife and loyal dog; my dedicated employee, trusted friend, and dependable Maytag washer.

So, what causes unfaithfulness? A number of factors enter into lapses in faithfulness.

- Lack of interest or commitment
- Lack of knowledge
- Lack of ability
- Lack of authority
- Lack of energy
- Lack of time

- Lack of focus
- Lack of memory
- Lack of discipline or self-control
- Distraction
- Oppression
- Sin and selfishness

Unfaithfulness may be intentional or unintentional. No matter the reason, the result is the same. The unfaithful person, car, horse, or washing machine did not provide the expected benefit when we needed it.

What then makes God faithful? Because, none of these factors affect God.

- His divine love eternally commits Him to His creatures and His creation.
- His omniscience enables Him to know everything about everything at all times.
- His omnipotence provides all the necessary energy and power to carry out His word.
- His eternity eliminates the limitations of time.
- His sovereignty gives Him absolute authority.
- His holiness eliminates the sin and selfishness factors.
- He can't be distracted or oppressed.
- He never falters, forgets, forsakes, or forfeits His word, or fails.

God is absolutely faithful. It is His character. He does not change. He can be nothing else. This makes God faithful in all things at all times. As the psalmist declares, *the word of the Lord is upright, and all his work is done in faithfulness.* Psalm 33:4

God says what He means and does what He says. In today's text, Moses told the Israelites, *It was not because you were more numerous than any other people that the Lord set his heart on you and chose you—for you were the fewest of all peoples. It was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath that he swore to your ancestors, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of slavery,* Deut 7:7-8

Psalm 100 further assures us that,

the Lord is good; His steadfast love endures forever, and His faithfulness to all generations. Psalm 100:5

God's faithfulness is in fact immeasurable, as another Psalm declares.

*Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens,
your faithfulness to the clouds.
Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains,*

*your judgments are like the great deep;
you save humans and animals alike, O Lord.
How precious is your steadfast love, O God!
All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings.*
Psalm 36:5-7

So much for declarations, but how can we know that God is faithful?

The regularity of creation declares God's faithfulness. The universe continues to function in absolute precision. The fact that we still have air to breathe and food to eat on this planet testify to God's daily faithfulness.

After the flood, God promised Noah, *while the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.*" Genesis 8:22 Thus, the rise of every sun and the turn of every season continually testifies to God's faithfulness.

The Bible also records numerous accounts of God's faithfulness. Every historical event in the Bible testifies that God always does what He said HE would do. Answers to prayer, precise fulfillment of hundreds of prophecies, healing, deliverance, direction given, promises made, all testify to God's faithfulness.

- **Sarah** considered God faithful to do what He promised and her womb was opened and she conceived well beyond her child bearing years.
- God told Elijah that He was going to stop the rain and it stopped. Three years later He said He would start it again and once again it started.
- God said death would result from sin - and death came upon all people.
- God told Israel He would take them to the Promised Land and He did.
- God promised judgment for sin and judgment came.
- God promised deliverance and He delivered.

The core of our faith has to do with a fundamental trust in God's faithfulness to keep His promises.

People tell stories of God's faithfulness. Volumes have been written recounting stories of God's faithfulness. Scripture assures us of God's faithfulness in spite of our current circumstance ...

BUT we can't help not struggling with the times it seems God hasn't been faithful. There are times when it seems God faltered. There are times when it seems God forgot. There are even times when we feel like God didn't honor His word. What about the times when it felt like God failed to act on our behalf? How can I proclaim that God is faithful when I sometimes feel the opposite?

If you have such feelings, realize that you are not alone. First, listen to one of the most powerful and heart-felt declarations on the faithfulness of God.

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. Lamentations 3:22-24

This sounds like the testimony of someone who has had a glorious answer to prayer. These are the words of unflagging trust in the faithfulness of God by experience.

Now listen to how this same writer felt just moments before he made this statement.

*I am one who has seen affliction under the rod of God's wrath;
He has driven and brought me into darkness without any light;
against me alone He turns his hand, again and again, all day long.
He has made my flesh and my skin waste away, and broken my bones;
He has besieged and enveloped me with bitterness and tribulation;
He has made me sit in darkness like the dead of long ago....
He has made my teeth grind on gravel, and made me cower in ashes;
my soul is bereft of peace; I have forgotten what happiness is;
so I say, 'Gone is my glory, and all that I had hoped for from the Lord.'*

Lamentations 3:1-18

The speaker is Jeremiah. When he was a young man when God called him to be His spokesman during one of the darkest times in Jewish history. He was called to an awesome task.

Then I said, 'Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.' But the Lord said to me, 'Do not say, "I am only a boy"; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.'

Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the Lord said to me, 'Now I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.' *Jeremiah 1:6-10*

God even promised His protective hand along the journey.

But you, gird up your loins; stand up and tell them everything that I command you. Do not break down before them, or I will break you before them. And I for my part have made you today a fortified city, an iron pillar, and a bronze wall, against the whole land—against the kings of Judah, its princes, its priests, and the people of the land.

They will fight against you; but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, says the Lord, to deliver you. Jeremiah 1:17-19

What more could a pastor or prophet ask for?

What more encouragement than the promise of God's presence?

How could he lose?

In the years that followed, Jeremiah would experience imprisonments, beatings, loneliness (he was even forbidden to marry), rejection, attempted assassinations, public ridicule and – most painful of all – the apparent failure of God's faithfulness.

At the time that Jeremiah wrote the book of Lamentations, he had just survived the siege and fall of Jerusalem. It lasted a year and a half – eighteen hellish months that must have seemed like a decade. Food ran out. Water was scarce. Thousands starved. Disease ran wild. Mothers cannibalized their own babies. Jeremiah himself was despised, branded as a traitor, tortured for declaring the Word of God.

And then it was over. The Temple destroyed. The city dead. According to Jewish tradition, Jeremiah, now literally skin and bones, sat on the side of the Mount of Olives, overlooking the devastation of what was once a beautiful city: city of David, the capital of Solomon's glory. With tears streaming down his gaunt, deeply creased face, Jeremiah wrote

How lonely sits the city that once was full of people! How like a widow she has become, she that was great among the nations! She that was a princess among the provinces has become a vassal.

She weeps bitterly in the night, with tears on her cheeks; among all her lovers she has no one to comfort her; all her friends have dealt treacherously with her, they have become her enemies. Lamentations 1:1-2.

This was followed by the words of excruciating emotional pain I read to you earlier.

Ending with the declaration, *so I say, 'Gone is my glory, and all that I had hoped for from the Lord.'* Lamentations 3:18

"God, you did this. You have forsaken us. You failed me. You turned on me." This was Jeremiah's state of mind just moments before his glorious declaration of God's great faithfulness. What happened?

Did Jeremiah experience some transforming vision?

Did some unrecorded miracle happen between verse 18 and 19 that renewed his faith and restored his hope?

What did Jeremiah "see" that transformed his agonized cries of despair into hope?

The hymn writer made one error in his noble attempt to capture Jeremiah's sentiment in this passage: **Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness! Morning by morning, new mercies I see...**

The reality is, Jeremiah didn't see a thing. There was no visible evidence of God's mercies at all to change his perspective. Morning by morning brought more horror, pain, and dread, certainly not new mercies. Nothing changed about Jeremiah's circumstance. So what changed? The clue can be found in verse 21.

*The thought of my affliction and my homelessness is wormwood and gall! My soul continually thinks of it and is bowed down within me. **But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness.** 'The Lord is my portion,' says my soul, 'therefore I will hope in him.'*
Lamentations 3:19-21

What did Jeremiah recall to mind that brought such inspiring hope? He recalled the truth of the Scriptures regarding the character of God in spite of the circumstances of life. In spite of his present desperate situation, Scripture declares that God is faithful and history has proved Him to be.

Friends, the same is true for you and me. In spite of any circumstance we may face, by the authority of the Word of God concerning the character of God, we can be assured that God is faithful. He never falters. He never forgets. He never forsakes. He never forfeits His word. He never fails! Unfaithfulness is impossible for God. He can no more be unfaithful than He can lie. No matter what man does or says God remains faithful.

Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds.. Psalm 36:5

You might feel like God has forgotten you. The heaviness of your circumstances may cause you to feel abandoned. If so, I urge you to consider three responses today.

1. Remember God's faithfulness. Remember what Scripture tells us of God's faithfulness. Remember that these truths are true in spite of what we see or feel at the present. Remember examples of God's faithfulness in the past. Remember that His mercies are new every morning because of His great faithfulness.

2. Entrust your soul and your future to your faithful Savior. Hebrews 10 encourages us to *holdfast your hope for He who promised is faithful.* This statement comes just before the catalogue of faithful servants in Hebrew 11 half of which saw miraculous deliverance and many others who saw pain and destruction in this life but received God's promises in the next.

3. Entrust your life to your faithful Creator and Father. Jesus endured all that He faced on the cross by trusting His life to His heavenly father. Even as He cried out, "*my God, my God, why have you forsaken me!*" Jesus understood the temporary nature of His pain and looked beyond it to the joy of the ultimate goal; both His victory over death and through it our salvation to a brand new life. Hebrews 12:2-3

Thus Peter encouraged his readers who were suffering persecution and tribulation to keep their faith in God's faithfulness.

Therefore, let those suffering in accordance with God's will entrust themselves to a faithful Creator, while continuing to do good. 1 Peter 4:19

Jeremiah understood that as excruciating as his situation was, it was only momentary in light of eternity. Therefore he was able to trust God in the circumstances while waiting expectantly for the promise of ultimate restoration. And so he concluded, *the Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord...* Lamentations 3:25-26

*The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness..* Lamentations 3:22-23

Let's thank God for this.