

Sermon 2-14-21 - Fruit of the Spirit: Faithfulness  
Kim Fields  
Central Church

Today we move on to the seventh fruit of the Spirit — faithfulness. What is the fruit of the Spirit? Paul tells us:

**The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. — Galatians 5:22**

The word that we translate faithfulness comes from the **Greek root “Peitho”**. It means to persuade. From which it follows that faithfulness means to act as one who has been persuaded, that is convinced to be true to God and to the life God calls us to live.

Which, if you think about it, is exactly how we should live. We are all created in God’s image. Which means that if someone looks at the way we live they should see a reflection of God. So, what would a life that reflected God look like? Can you tell me what biblical word is used most frequently to describe God? It is the word “love”. I bet you knew that. But can you also tell me what is the second most frequently used word? It is “faithful”. God is faithful. That means that we can count on God, for God is unchanging and his promises endure. There is something both grounding and comforting about an unchanging God. It provides us with a rock we can cling to in an ever-changing, bewildering world. Even better, God has promised that he will never abandon or turn his back on his children.

God is faithful, and asks us to be faithful, too. I believe that most of us understand that and try to be faithful, we do. But I can’t help but question just how faithful I sometimes am? I wonder what I would do if I was told that had to denounce God or face a horrible death? Do I have the faith of a martyr? Or what, if like so many Christians in the world, to live out my faith meant risking imprisonments or my economic survival, or that of my family? I’m a pastor. I’m paid to be faithful. Yet, I sometimes wonder how much I would be willing to sacrifice for my faith. I wonder how faithful I would be if I was put to the test. Do you ever wonder that?

Those are questions. **Important questions, but hard ones.** Yet, in truth, they aren’t the most important questions. After all, faithfulness is rarely determined by the big questions of life. For most of us the battle for faithfulness is won or lost in the little details of everyday living. Much like a marriage, it is seldom the final act of infidelity that tears a couple apart. Instead, it is the **little questions**, the daily, faithless acts that stretch the relationship to its breaking point. By the same token it rarely the big decisions that test the faithfulness of we Christians.

In fact, I once heard a talk from a missionary who had recently returned from spreading the gospel at great personal risk. He explained, “It is really not that hard to make a one time decision to risk your life or even die for your faith. What is hard is to decide to live faithfully, day after day after day. Indeed,” he added, “it is those little daily decisions that decide what we will choose when the time comes when we have to make a big decision.”

Perhaps that is what Luke was getting at when he wrote (16:10): **“He who is faithful in that which is least, will also be faithful in much.”** Faithfulness is what we do in the ordinary, everyday moments of our lives.

Jesus illustrated this in a parable he told in the 25th chapter of Matthew. There he told a story of three stewards. The master was going on a trip and he left his wealth in the hands of three of his servants. To

one he gave five talents, to another two, and to the final servant only one, each according to their abilities. He entrusted his wealth to them expecting them to be faithful and give an accounting of the money when he returned.

You know the story. Eventually the master returned and went to each of his stewards in turn. The first and second stewards informed their master that they had invested his money and gave him back twice what they had been given. The master thanked them, commending them as good and faithful servants, and rewarded them by giving them even more property to manage.

However, the third steward was frightened of both his master and the responsibility of caring for his wealth. Rather than invest his master's money he decided to bury his talent to keep it safe and brought it quickly to his master when he returned. No doubt he hoped to receive his master's approval, but do you recall what the master said? The master called him lazy, saying that he could have at least placed the money in a bank where it would have drawn interest. Moreover, because he was faithless, he took away the single talent he had been given and fired him on the spot.

So, what is the point of the parable? Actually, there are several. First, it reminds us that we are not born equal. We each receive different talents. Which means that God's expectations of us are different. God expects us each to use the talents that we have been given. The sin of the unfaithful steward was not that he lacked talent. He was unfaithful because he failed to make use of the little he had been given. He didn't even try.

The first thing this parable teaches us is that faithful people try. They don't say, "I can't". When God calls they act. They do something. I don't think that the third servant would have been condemned if he had invested the talent and lost it. He was condemned because he gave into the temptation, that so many give into, of saying, "I have been given so little. I don't dare risk what little I have. Let those who have more take the risks. Besides it won't make much difference anyway. Best to protect what I have by doing nothing."

However, God calls us to be faithful in doing something, to use the talent we have been given.

Years ago, when I was raising cattle, a neighbor told me a joke about up shepherder from Montana. He was a small time operator. Never had much. He just tried to get by. That is until an oil company discovered oil on his land. Suddenly, he went from being broke to being a very wealthy man. When his first royalty check came in he decided that he was going to buy a new car. He had never owned a new car. He headed into Helena and did it right. He bought a Rolls Royce limousine, the kind that is usually driven by a chauffeur who sits behind a glass partition. He drove the limo into town and one of his neighbors sauntered over to admire the car. He asked the shepherder what he liked best about it. "Not only is it handy. It is really comfortable" answered the shepherder. "Now I can haul my sheep to market without having them lick my neck."

That may not have been the wisest use of the money he received but at least the shepherder did something with it. At least he was faithful in trying. Which is a good lesson for those of us who too often allow our fears to keep us from trying things. Remember the words of Mother Teresa, who said, "**God does not call us to be successful. God calls us to be faithful.**" And being faithful means making use of what God has given us.

Again, I am not just talking about the big decisions like deciding how to spend oil money. I am mostly talking about being faithful in the little decisions. In most cases the direction of our lives is not determined by huge, fateful choices or miracles that ask for a one-in-a-lifetime decision. Far more often our lives are directed by the many, little, daily choices we make. Which means that faithfulness is not

determined by a single decision but is the result of a lifetime of choices made day by day, moment by moment.

Faithfulness means saying “Yes” to the path God has placed in front of us and using the talents we have been given as we journey down it. For most of us that path does not lead to the mission field in Africa, or to confronting big social issues, or even starting a new ministry. It may mean patiently caring for a sick spouse or an ailing parent. It may mean confronting a straying child. It may mean witnessing to a neighbor or doing the right thing at work. More often than not it involves tending to the little tasks that God has given us right now, this day.

The road to God is not an **autobahn freeway** where we can drive as fast we want. The path God calls us to walk is filled with turns and bumps and rough spots. Much of the journey has to be driven in first gear. It is not speed, but faithful, steady travel that gets us there. Like the children’s story of the tortoise and the hare, it is slow and steady that wins the race. It is a matter of remaining faithful, especially in the little things. Little things, that in turn, determine what we will choose when the big choices come.

Prior to becoming President of the United States, Teddy Roosevelt managed a ranch. One day he, and a cowhand, were riding across a bit of range land belonging to a neighbor by the name of Lang. As they were riding his cowhand spotted a maverick, an unbranded, two-year-old steer. They stopped, built a fire, put an iron in it to heat and then **roped the steer, stretching it out by the fire**. The cowhand took up the iron and was about to brand the steer when Roosevelt stopped him, saying, “Why are you applying my brand. We should be branding the steer with a thistle, Lang’s brand.”

“That’s all right boss,” replied the cowhand. “I always put the boss’s brand on.”

Roosevelt fired him right on the spot. When the cowhand protested, he replied, “A man who will steal for me will steal from me.” And with those words he sent him packing.

Roosevelt understood one of life’s great truths. Whether a person is faithful in the little things determines whether they will be faithful in the larger things. It is the little daily acts that reveal who we are.

Which is why, when we leave this world and stand before the judge, I don’t think he will ask, “What did you do that was miraculous or brought you fame?” Rather he will ask us if we were faithful where he placed us. God does not care how wealthy or famous or even talented we are. He just wants us to be faithful in using the talents we have been given.

And if we are not? If we are not faithful with what God has given us? What happens then? Well, what happened to the unfaithful cowhand? What happened to the unfaithful steward? Don’t get me wrong this is not a question of salvation. It is a matter of what God entrusts us with in this life. If we are not faithful with the little God entrusts us with, God will take even that little away.

The old saying, “Use it or lose it,” is true. When I was in junior high and high school I played trumpet. I played trumpet for five years and got pretty good. I rose to first chair in the band and even played in the state band one year. But when I graduated from high school I packed my trumpet away and forgot all about it. A dozen years later I was going through things as we were packing to move to seminary. I ran across the trumpet and pulled it out to show my kids. I decided to play a couple of tunes, but rather than producing the beautiful music I remembered, I sounded like a dying cow. I stopped using my talent and what happened? I lost it.

God gifts us with talents. He then provides opportunities to use them. But if we are unfaithful, if we don't use them, God takes both the talents and the opportunities away. That is true of individuals and I believe it is true of churches, as well.

On the other hand, what happens if we are faithful? What happens when we say yes and faithfully use the talent God has given us as best we can? Well, how were the faithful stewards rewarded? Let me tell you what God did not do. After God commended his faithful stewards he did not say, "Well done my faithful servants, now you can take it easy and rest on your laurels." Instead, he said, "You did well in the little I gave you, so now I will entrust you with even more talent."

Some of you may moan, "Who wants more? I have too much on my plate already. I am not sure I can handle more responsibility." We all feel that way at times. But imagine for a moment what it would be like not to have any responsibilities, challenges, or purpose in life. Where is the joy in that? Joy does not come from sitting back with nothing to do. Indeed, when we do that we begin to sink into inertia, eventually losing the desire and ability to do anything.

Studies show that those who are happiest in retirement are not those who quit and do nothing. Those who are happiest are those who stay active. Who stretch their bodies and minds by doing new things. And those who are happiest of all are those who faithfully serve others in ways that make a difference.

Indeed, as I recall from our Bible story, it was the faithful stewards who entered into the happiness of their master. Joy comes not from having nothing to do. Joy comes from having a purpose and faithfully fulfilling it. Joy comes from growing in faith and talent as we say yes to God and devote our lives to making disciples in Christ's name. Joy comes from faithfully serving the master and one day hearing him say, **"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!" (Matt. 25:23)** I don't know about you but those are words I can hardly wait to hear.

There you have it. The fruit of the Spirit we are focusing on this week is faithfulness. Let's add it to the passage we are memorizing, meditating on, and seeking the Spirit's aid in making it a part of our lives. So what is the passage now?

**"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, and faithfulness." — Galatians 5:22.** Just two more fruits to go. Join us next week as we look more closely at gentleness.