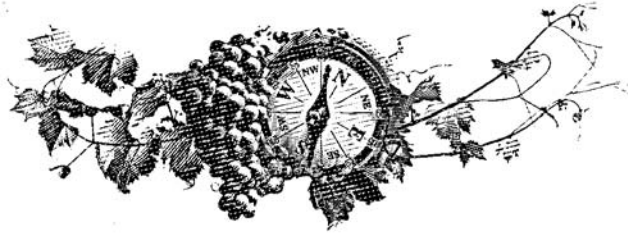


The Fruit of the Spirit Is Faithfulness



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 25:1–13; Luke 16:10; 1 Thess. 5:23, 24; 2 Tim. 3:1–5; Hebrews 11.*

Memory Text: “And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart” (*Galatians 6:9, NKJV*).

The fruit of the Spirit known as “faithfulness” could also be called “fidelity.” It speaks of endurance, a firmness of purpose, especially when the going is tough.

Faithfulness implies steadfast adherence. Synonyms include *loyalty*, implying undeviating allegiance; *constancy*, suggesting freedom from uncertainty; *staunchness*, implying such a strong allegiance to one’s principles or purposes that they cannot be turned aside; and *resoluteness*, stressing unwavering determination.

“Faith” and “faithfulness,” though closely linked, are not the same thing. Faith is that indefinable power, a gift from God, through which we can believe in a reality that yet remains unseen. “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (*Heb. 11:1*). Faithfulness, in contrast, is the working out of this inner-belief system. When we have faith in God, we act in faithful ways. Acts of faithfulness are a demonstration of our faith, and such acts are the threads holding our belief and behavior system together.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 20.*

God Is Faithful

“O Lord God of hosts, Who is mighty like You, O Lord? Your faithfulness also surrounds You” (*Ps. 89:8, NKJV*).

As with all the fruit of the Spirit, God Himself is the model we must study for examples of faithfulness. God is as faithful now as He was three trillion years before creating the earth. He will be just as faithful three trillion years into the future as He was when He set the decrees in eternity past. Nothing will deter Him or alter His course.

Note some of the attributes of God’s faithfulness:

- God’s faithfulness is far-reaching in its extent—“Your faithfulness reaches to the clouds” (*Ps. 36:5, NKJV*).
- God’s faithfulness is sure—“Nevertheless My lovingkindness I will not utterly take from him, nor allow My faithfulness to fail” (*Ps. 89:33, NKJV*).
- God’s faithfulness is great—“Great is Your faithfulness” (*Lam. 3:23, NKJV*).
- God’s faithfulness is set in heaven—“For I have said, ‘Mercy shall be built up forever; Your faithfulness You shall establish in the very heavens’ ” (*Ps. 89:2, NKJV*).

Identify the blessings that come to us as a result of His faithfulness:

1 Cor. 10:13

1 Thess. 5:23, 24

2 Thess. 3:3

Heb. 10:23

Why is the faithfulness of God so important to the Christian’s life? Recount a time in your life when knowing that God was faithful brought you through a crisis. On a day-to-day basis, which of the blessings of God’s faithfulness listed above is the greatest help to you?

Faithlessness: A Sign of the End

Read Luke 18:8. What is implied in Jesus' question here?

The apostle Paul writes that “evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived” (*2 Tim. 3:13, NKJV*). People today are like what they were when Moses wrote the Pentateuch or Paul his epistles. One could argue, however, that our society today makes it easier to sin, that it all but encourages it. In other words, our environment grows ever more amenable to sin, and our fallen human natures naturally will take advantage of it. Self-centeredness constantly is promoted. Advertising hammers away at us to gratify ourselves: why wait, why deny ourselves, why sacrifice, why not go along with everyone else? Constantly we hear, “Indulge yourself because you deserve it” or the like.

Read 2 Timothy 3:1–5. What is the first characteristic found there? How do we find it so overtly manifested today?

While this generation is hardly the first to be selfish, it is unique in that selfishness actually is recommended. “Look out for number one,” “Love yourself first,” is the cry. Self-centeredness has spawned another phenomenon, which is irresponsibility. This generation could well be the one of which it was written, “There is a generation that curses its father, and does not bless its mother. There is a generation that is pure in its own eyes, yet is not washed from its filthiness” (*Prov. 30:11, 12, NKJV*). It would seem that everything wrong with everyone is now laid at the foot of someone else, most often the parents.

How has the mass media contributed to unfaithfulness, even among church members? Be honest with yourself: how has it affected your thinking? Try to step back and ask yourself, How might the things I read, watch, and listen to be negatively affecting my own faithfulness to God?

Models of Faithfulness *(Hebrews 11)*

Read Hebrews 11, the list of characters who are given as examples of faithfulness. Pick three characters and write down how their faithfulness was revealed, even amid struggles, trials, and temptations. That is, what did they do that revealed their faithfulness? At the same time, what were their struggles, their trials, their temptations? More so, in what ways, however different the variables, are the principles involved the same for us today as they were for the characters in Hebrews?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Think how easy it could have been for some of these people to have become discouraged. Think of Joseph in the dungeon or Sarah waiting and waiting and waiting for the promised child or Moses tempted with the riches of a kingdom as opposed to suffering “affliction with the people of God” (*vs. 25*). We sometimes tend to look at these people as if they were larger than life, kind of superhuman, and yet, they were just as real as we are, just as prone to sin, just as prone to question and to fear and to fall. Despite all their own weaknesses and mistakes, however, they showed faithfulness, they acted out the faith they professed, and they were able to be used by God to do remarkable things.

What are the things that challenge you in your desire to be faithful? Put them into two categories: (1) the things you can do nothing about and (2) the things you can remove from your life.

Faithfulness in Daily Living

“He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much” (*Luke 16:10, NKJV*). How have you seen this principle manifested in your own life? After all, if we are not faithful in the little things, why should we think we would be in the larger ones?

“The greatest want of the world is the want of men—men who will not be bought or sold, men who in their inmost souls are true and honest, men who do not fear to call sin by its right name, men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole, men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 57.

The following words are some of the components of faithfulness:

Dependability—Dependability means people can count on you. When was the last time someone let you down? Do you remember how that made you feel? What does it say about your character if you lack dependability?

Honesty—Honesty is truthfulness. It means you are not going to lie or cheat or steal. Honesty is a cardinal building block of a strong character and should be in play every day of our lives.

Integrity—Integrity is like a code of honor. If you have integrity, you have certain values and beliefs that you live by. It also means you respect the values and beliefs of others. Integrity is also one of the building blocks of character.

Loyalty—Loyalty is allegiance. It means standing by someone even when times get tough. Loyalty is an important part of friendship. But does loyalty include doing something wrong for a friend? Does loyalty have limits? How might someone take a good thing, loyalty, too far?

Take a closer look at these elements. How well do you fare in these different categories? Where can you do better? Most important, what changes do you need to make in order to be more faithful to what you know is right? How can you make the needed changes?

Faithful Until the End

Could it be that we are suffering another Great Disappointment? Not that we fixed another date for the coming of Jesus, but something just as real, if more subtle, and that is a diminished emphasis on the Second Coming, if for no other reason than that we expected it to have happened by now.

Read Matthew 25:1–13. Notice that everyone who was waiting for the bridegroom went to sleep. When the bridegroom finally arrived and all awakened, it was too late for five of them. In what ways could we, in the twenty-first century, be in danger of doing the same thing?

Read Matthew 24:44–50. Notice how the evil servant changes his lifestyle when he becomes convinced that his master is not coming back as soon as he had expected. What is the message to us who feel there has been a delay in the coming of Jesus?

Things have not happened as soon as we expected, but we take comfort from the promise in Galatians 6:9, “And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart” (*NKJV*).

The issue that confronts God’s people in the twenty-first century is not “Will God be faithful?” We should know by now that He is faithful to all that He has promised. The crucial issue is, “Will I be faithful until the end?”

In many ways the answer to the question about the future (“Will I be faithful to the end?”) can be found in the present. What is the basic trend of your spiritual life now? Are you daily committed to the Lord, growing in grace and faithfulness, or are you slowly, bit by bit, easing up, growing more accustomed to the world and its ways? What does your answer tell you about yourself and your walk with the Lord?

Further Study: “But like the stars in the vast circuit of their appointed path, *God’s purposes know no haste and no delay*. Through the symbols of the great darkness and the smoking furnace, God had revealed to Abraham the bondage of Israel in Egypt, and had declared that the time of their sojourning should be four hundred years. ‘Afterward,’ He said, ‘shall they come out with great substance.’ Gen. 15:14. Against that word, all the power of Pharaoh’s proud empire battled in vain. On ‘the self-same day’ appointed in the divine promise, ‘it came to pass, that all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt.’ Ex. 12:41. So in heaven’s council the hour for the coming of Christ had been determined. When the great clock of time pointed to that hour, Jesus was born in Bethlehem.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 32, emphasis supplied.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** What are some of the things in your own culture that present challenges to those who want to be faithful to Jesus? How can we meet those challenges? How can we help one another in this struggle?
- 2** Dwell on the things that you have read, watched, or listened to for the past twenty-four hours. Were they the kind of things that could encourage you in your faith, or were they things that worked against it? What are the implications of your answer?
- 3** Look at the question of loyalty. In what contexts is loyalty good? Is it always good? When might being loyal to someone mean being disloyal to God?
- 4** What kind of danger, if any, could arise from being overtly obsessed with faithfulness? That is, in what ways could it be taken too far?
- 5** What are practical ways that we can keep alive in our churches and in our homes the reality of the Second Coming? It is true: The longer it takes, the easier and easier it gets to forget about it and fall into wrong habits and patterns of thought. How can we instill, especially in those who have been in the church a long time, the importance of keeping the reality and promise of the Second Coming passionately before us?

God Made a Way

by BENSON CHILUMPHA

I know firsthand that God is the answer when there is no answer. He has guided me through many obstacles so that I could study at Malawi Adventist College.

I had been a primary school teacher for 14 years and wanted to return to college to earn my bachelor's degree in education. I had to retake my high school leaving exams, and I scored high. But I was not offered admission to attend the university. I took the tests again the following year and again scored high. Again I was disappointed when I was not invited to enroll in the university.

Disappointed, I knelt and asked God, "Why me? Why am I overlooked when others with lower scores have been admitted to college?" I heard God whisper, "Wait. I have a plan."

So I waited. Then I learned that Malawi Adventist College was broadening its degree program and would offer degrees in education and business management. I applied. While I awaited word on my application, I dreamed that I was sitting in a class. I could see the lecturer standing before the class asking questions. Soon after this I received a call from my pastor saying I had been accepted to study at the Adventist college.

I was overjoyed. But I had no money for school fees. So I went back to God. "God, you are the source of all answers," I prayed. "You have given me a place in this school, so now I turn to you to provide the school fees I need."

I applied for a scholarship from a national organization in Malawi and was accepted. The scholarship would pay half my fees. I knelt and thanked God for providing this scholarship and asked where I should look for the rest of my fees so that Satan would not triumph. After praying, I remembered an organization that had helped me when I was in college 14 years earlier. I was not sure they would even get my letter, but I wrote, and they responded in the affirmative. They would pay the remainder of my school fees. God provided for my school fees, and I trust Him to provide the money my family needs for food and clothes and the children's school fees. I can trust God, for, as you can see, He has not let me down.

Part of a Thirteenth Sabbath Offering is helping to build a women's dormitory at Malawi Adventist College, making it possible for more students to receive a quality Christian education for service to the Master. Thank you!

BENSON CHILUMPHA *lives in southern Malawi.*