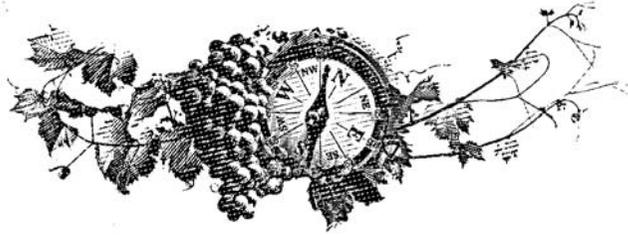


The Fruit of the Spirit Is Faithfulness



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?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Hebrews 11:6*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Recognize that faithfulness is faith in action. Its motivation is trust in God.

Feel: Express confidence and trust in God's faithfulness.

Do: Believe that faithfulness is our witness to the world of God's power in our lives.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: The Living Gift of God's Faithfulness

A Our trust, obedience, and submission to the will and purposes of God are founded on His trustworthiness.

1. In what way do our acts of faithfulness serve God?
2. In what ways can our unfaithfulness limit God's power?
3. Recall acts of faithfulness in Scripture and personal experience that demonstrate:
 - a) How God was able to reveal His power.
 - b) When God's ability to act in behalf of His people was compromised by their rebellion against Him.

II. Feel: The Emotional Effects of Expressing Faithfulness

A Positive effects are produced by acts of faith. So then, how should we deal with the negative effects produced by a spirit of unfaithfulness?

B Egotism and self-centeredness are fatal to faithfulness. In what ways does being so concerned with what others think of us endanger our faithfulness toward God?

III. Do: The Test of Faith

A Faith never can be static. It either grows by exercise or dies from neglect.

1. In what ways do Sabbath observance and tithing develop faithfulness?
2. How does the wise use of time and finances develop a godly character?

► **Summary:** Faith's foundation is God's faithfulness. In trusting Him, we act out faith in what we do, say, and believe.

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?

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1**—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Faithfulness is the long-term product of faith in the heart. It is expressed as the constancy of a life devoted to God, a loyalty to Him that remains steadfast through both prosperity and adversity.

Few animals can match a dog for faithfulness and devotion. And history furnishes us with enough examples of canine loyalty to convince us of this truth. Greyfriars Bobby was a Skye terrier whose master was a policeman. When his master died on February 8, 1858, Greyfriars Bobby kept watch at his grave for 14 years until he died.

Delta's remains were found across the body of a small child near ancient Pompeii. According to Delta's collar, she had saved her small master three times: once from drowning, once from four robbers, and once from a wolf. But Delta couldn't save him from the hot ash of a volcano, though it is evident that the dog tried (information retrieved from <http://www.rusticgirls.com/animals/most-faithful-dogs-in-history.html>).

These stories touch our hearts, especially when faithfulness is displayed even when there is no hope. How much more inspiring are the lives of men and women who stay faithful throughout their lives and are rewarded at last, by seeing the Object of their love and loyalty return for them, to take them home forever!

Consider This: Discuss with your class the definition of *faithfulness*. What is the difference between faith and faithfulness?

► **STEP 2**—Explore

Just for Teachers: Find someone to dramatize Elisha's life, or even better, do it yourself. Dress up as Elisha, wearing Elijah's cloak, a robe, a skin, and sandals. Tell the story from 1 Kings 19:19–21 and 2 Kings 1, 2 about how Elijah came to you while you were plowing a field and tried hard to discourage you from following him just before he was taken to heaven in a fiery chariot. Describe the cloak coming down to you.

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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.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Bible Commentary

I. The Foundations of Faithfulness *(Review 1 Kings 19:19–21 with your class.)*

Elisha was plowing a field when Elijah found him and called him to serve God. These were simple duties, but in working on his father's land, doing the duties of an obedient son, Elisha was receiving a training that was fitting him for leadership.

Elijah did not ask Elisha to follow him right away; Elisha was to count the cost and decide for himself whether he wanted to accept the call. But he took the oxen he was using to plow, made a sacrifice, and followed Elijah. Like the disciples who left their nets and followed Jesus, Elisha accepted the call from God that had come through His prophet Elijah. He left his father's farm and entered God's work as a servant of Elijah. First in Elisha's heart was God's work. Even as he was doing farm work, he was consecrated to doing God's will in everything, and when the call came to leave his home, he was ready.

It was through this daily consecration and faithfulness in every small duty that his character developed noble symmetry, and he gained strength of purpose and knowledge of God's ways. This character development prepared him to take up God's call to service.

Consider This: How did Elisha's early years of home life prepare him for service? What did he do just before he left to join Elijah that illustrated the strength of his relationship to his family and community?

II. A Life of Faithfulness *(Review 2 Kings 13:14–21 with your class.)*

How many leaders of Israel started off faithfully but didn't stick to God all the way? Jeroboam was raised from obscurity to be king but didn't follow God (*1 Kings 14:7–9*). Jehu did some of God's bidding but failed in the long run (*2 Kings 10:30, 31*). Jehoash followed God but only as long as the high priest who raised him was alive (*2 Kings 12:1, 2*). Asa (*2 Chronicles 16*) and Uzziah (*2 Chronicles 26*) had a checkerboard history.

However, Elisha never wavered or lost trust in God. Even though the kings and people around him were engulfed in the dark shadows of long years of idolatry and apostasy, Elisha remained faithful through many long years as a teacher of righteousness to all around him. When the way seemed

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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?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

closed before him, he moved forward in faith, and God honored his trust. Even during the illness of his last days, by faith he held on to God’s promises. He wasn’t taken up into heaven as a grand finale to his work as Elijah was, but through faith he knew that he constantly was attended and comforted by heavenly messengers right to the end of his life.

This is the life God calls us to. Like Elisha, God calls us to devote our whole life to His work. He is looking for men and women who have the moral courage to stand for God’s cause, who have a deep, ardent love for people, and who don’t give up in their labors with God for lost lives. “Such workers will find no task too arduous, no prospect too hopeless; they will labor on, undaunted, until apparent defeat is turned into glorious victory. Not even prison walls nor the martyr’s stake beyond will cause them to swerve from their purpose of laboring together with God for the upbuilding of His kingdom.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 263.

Consider This: How does the story of Elisha inform us about what it takes to stay faithful throughout a lifetime?

► STEP 3—Apply

Activity: Study Hebrews 11 and make a list, on a blackboard, of the people mentioned. In another column, make a list of the challenges each person faced in order to be faithful. Which faith warriors faced challenges similar to those you face today?

Application Questions:

1 Review Matthew 25:1–13 and Matthew 24:44–50. What qualities did the five wise virgins have that were similar to those of the five foolish virgins? How were they different? What is the challenge to faithfulness that comes with what appears to be a delay in Jesus’ second coming? What does it take to live a life of faithfulness during these last days, when we are surrounded by apostasy?

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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?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

2 Reflect on the lives of other leaders, such as Joseph and Moses and Samuel. How did their early background and life experiences prepare them for lives of faithfulness? What challenges did they face?

► **STEP 4—Create**

1 “He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much” (*Luke 16:10, NKJV*). What are the areas of your life in which you are challenged to be faithful in that which is least? Consider such things as habits, the use of money and time, diet and other areas of health, the way you treat family at home or those whom some might consider insignificant. Consider devoting these “weak links” to God and asking for His help in being faithful.

2 What do you need to do this week in order to be faithful to what God has called you to do in His service? If you were to “allow no day to pass without doing something to advance His work in the earth,” what would you need to do?—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 221.

3 Elisha recognized that he could not proceed in his work without the Spirit that had guided Elijah. What role does the Holy Spirit play in your work? What can you do to improve that role?

4 What call have you received for service? What do you need to place on the altar in order to follow the call?

Closing Activity: “God Has Spoken by His Prophets,” number 413 in *The Seventh-Day Adventist Hymnal*, acknowledges our debt to faithful prophets who have gone before us, as well as the role of Christ and the Spirit, in strengthening our faith. “Great Is Thy Faithfulness,” number 100, extols God’s faithfulness to us. Choose one of these songs to sing or read as a poem before closing your Sabbath School class with prayer.

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:

- ❶ 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?
- ❷ 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?
- ❸ 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?
- ❹ 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?
- ❺ 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?