

## **Bearing the Fruit of Faithfulness**

### **May 17 & 18, 2008**

#### **Introduction:**

“Faith” is most frequently defined as a strongly held belief, an internal conviction that supports our daily life. People may describe themselves as belonging to “the Christian faith,” indicating their belief in the traditional Christian teachings. Another might say, “I have faith in Jesus,” demonstrating their loyalty and trust in Jesus. We most often think of faith as a feeling or a thought we experience on the inside, something we decide to believe and accept as true. The apostle Paul said, “That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9). This is a beautiful and biblical definition of faith: A strong internal belief that is unwavering, something we know to be true in our heart. But is that all faith is—an internal thought or decision of which we are the primary beneficiaries? Not according to the Bible. In this lesson, we will look at some *Key Principles* about faithfulness in order to enrich our understanding and practice of this spiritual fruit. In the *Going Deeper* section, we will rediscover the fruit of faithfulness in the lives of our biblical ancestors.

#### **Key Principles about Faithfulness:**

**Faithfulness is demonstrated by God.** God’s love for us is unfailing, His grace is inexhaustible, His desire to be in relationship with us is insatiable, and amazingly, God never requires anything of us that He did not first require of Himself. So if God is calling us to a life of faithfulness, we know that He will provide us with a model for faithfulness. Deuteronomy 7:9 states, “Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; He is the *faithful* God, keeping His covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands.” God uses the language of a covenant, similar to the language of marriage, and demonstrates faithfulness in that covenant relationship. If faith referred only to the sustaining of an internal belief, then why would the Bible describe God as being faithful? Certainly God does not need to be convinced of His own existence! No, *God defines faith and faithfulness as a partnership between belief and action.* Psalm 33:4 states that God is “faithful in all he *does*.” As His children, we are thrilled God does not simply think faithful thoughts our way, but that He acts faithfully towards us. Since the beginning of time, God has demonstrated faithfulness through His covenant of love with humankind. God demonstrated grace and faithfulness to Israel before the Law was given—before Israel could even show their faithfulness through obedience. And God remained faithful even when Israel knew His commands but chose to be unfaithful, following other gods. Throughout the biblical story, God demonstrates for us that faithfulness is a chosen response and independent from the actions or behaviors of others.

**Faithfulness is faith in action.** The Bible tells us that faithfulness is not only words or simple belief, but it is also an action that can be observed. If you are faithful, it means that you act in accordance with your faith. The Bible treats faith as consisting of two

parts: Faith is both believing *and* doing (James 2:17). The two cannot be separated one from another but are inextricably linked. Faith without action is incomplete.

The Gospel of Mark describes a time when Jesus was able to observe the fruit of faithfulness. Jesus was teaching in Capernaum and the room became crowded to the point of overflowing. Some men came bringing a paralytic. Since they could not get in to see Jesus, they made an opening in the roof and lowered their friend down on his mat. Mark 2:5 says, “When Jesus *saw their faith*, he said to the paralytic, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven.’” Jesus, along with the rest of the crowd, was able to *see* the faith of the man’s friends. Faith can be seen. The men knew that Jesus could heal, but they did not simply remain home meditating on His ability to heal. They sought Him out, demonstrating their faith in action. Faithfulness is seen when we act according to our belief in the Lord.

**Faithfulness is practiced in partnership with God.** For those of us who become overwhelmed at the mere thought of bearing such spiritual fruit as faithfulness, there is good news! God does not expect us to be able to bear this fruit on our own. In fact, it is in letting the Holy Spirit rule in our lives that we’re able to practice faithfulness. We are able to be faithful because God is faithful and He will do it (1 Thessalonians 5:23–24). God partners with us in order to bear such fruit.

In Luke 17:5, the disciples pleaded with Jesus to “increase our faith!” Jesus assured them by saying that even faith the size of a mustard seed could uproot a mulberry tree, tossing it into the sea. Our smallest step of faithfulness partnered with God’s mighty power brings about a miraculous impact on the world around us. Jesus said: “Anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father” (John 14:12–14). Because our faithfulness is modeled after God’s own example, because it can be observed and experienced by others, and because it is executed in partnership with God’s awesome power, this spiritual fruit will change not only our own life, but also the lives of those around us. It impacts the very world in which we live, e.g. our relationships, neighbors, jobs and ministries.

### **Going Deeper—Considering the Faithfulness of Our Biblical Ancestors:**

Hebrews 11 is often called the “Hall of Faith” because it describes the faithful lives of our biblical ancestors, such as Noah, Abraham, Moses and Rahab. The author of Hebrews describes the faithful actions of these biblical heroes. Noah’s faith met action when he not only believed God’s warnings but also acted on them by building the ark. Abraham not only believed God’s promises but his faith met action when he left everything he ever knew, and travelled to a land he had never seen, simply to follow God. Verse after verse of Hebrews details the incredible acts of faithfulness that brought about the fulfillment of God’s promised faithfulness to His people. In the face of all reasonable doubt, our ancestors chose faithfulness to God regardless of the outcome. And God was pleased by their faithfulness. In fact, if we don’t put our faith into action, it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6).

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego illustrate this definition of faithfulness well. Threatened with death in a fiery furnace for refusing to break their covenant with God by worshipping an idol, these three Jewish boys chose to respond with faithfulness regardless of the outcome (Daniel 3:17–18). For years, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had heard and studied the stories of God’s faithfulness to Israel in spite of Israel’s infidelity. Even as they faced death while exiled in a foreign kingdom due to the faithlessness of Israel, they remembered Israel’s covenant with the Lord and remained faithful, just as God remained faithful to them. God models faithfulness for us, which in turn calls our faith to action and partnership with Him.

**Group Questions:**

1. Can you recall a time when God demonstrated His faithfulness to you? Describe that time.

---

---

---

2. What part(s) of the message this weekend encouraged you or challenged you? How so?

---

---

---

3. When you think of faithfulness, is there a particular person in your life or in the Bible that comes to mind? What is it about that person that illustrates the fruit of faithfulness? See: Hebrews 11:1–6, 24–31; 1 Timothy 1:12.

---

---

---

4. Read James 2:14–17. In what area(s) of your life does your faith need to be accompanied by action so that you may bear the fruit of faithfulness?

---

---

---