

This morning, I am in the seventh week of a sermon series that I've entitled "The Spirit-Formed Life." During this series, I will be looking at what is known as the fruit of the Spirit, a phrase Paul uses in Galatians 5:22 to describe the kind of character that is formed in the person who lives under the influence of the Holy Spirit, walking not according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit of God. In case you're unfamiliar with the concept of the fruit of the Spirit, it comes from Paul's words in Galatians 5:

Galatians 5:22-23 - But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control.

This, Paul says, is what the Spirit produces in the life of the person who walks in step with God's Holy Spirit. People marked by love, not hatred, hostility or indifference. Joy, not despair or cheap thrill-seeking. Peace, not anxiety or conflict. Forbearance or patience, not anger, irritability, or impatience. Kindness instead of meanness, callousness or cruelty. Goodness instead of selfishness, corruption, or perpetrating evil. Faithfulness instead of faithlessness, unreliability, or a lack of integrity. Gentleness instead of harshness, abusiveness, or aggression. And self-control instead of living a chaotic, out of control life enslaved to desires. And Paul tells us that these qualities will be ours in increasing measure as we learn to walk with the Holy Spirit of God and to yield ourselves in obedience to His fruit-producing work in our lives. That is the Spirit-formed life.

This morning, we will be looking at the seventh characteristics on the list: faithfulness.

1) The rare gift of a faithful person

The word faithfulness in this context has a few connotations:

Dependability. Someone who keeps their word, follows through on commitments and promises, and is loyal and steadfast even when things become uncomfortable or costly.

Honesty. Someone who tells the truth, who does not deceive or manipulate others.

Integrity. Someone who demonstrates consistency of character, who is the same person in private as they are in public.

Take some time to consider that definition in light of people in your life.

What a rare gift it is to be born to faithful parents who are dependable, honest, and people of integrity. What a rare gift it is to find a spouse or significant other who is always dependable through the hard times, honest even when it is hard, and a person of integrity. What a rare gift to find friends, a pastor or spiritual leader, and other people who demonstrate these qualities.

And what wounds can be created when our parents, or our spouse or significant other, or friends or pastor or spiritual leader are not these things. What pain is caused when others who we want to depend upon prove to be untrustworthy, dishonest, or people who lack integrity. As the writer of Proverbs put it:

Proverbs 20:6 - Many claim to have unfailing love, but a faithful person who can find?

If you have a friend or person in your life who fits this description, then praise God and thank them for their faithfulness to you. But either way, thank God there is a God who is always faithful, who is always dependable and honest and is the same yesterday, today and forever.

2) The certain gift of a faithful God

The faithful person is dependable, honest, and a person of integrity. But a faithful person is hard to find. But praise God, our God is all of those things perfectly. And so, even when our closest friends or family members fail us, we can rely on Him completely, for He never fails us.

God's faithfulness is a recurring theme throughout the Bible. There are so many Bible verses and stories I could share to back up this claim, but let me just share a few with you today to encourage you about God's faithfulness towards you.

God is dependable

God keeps His word, follows through on commitments and promises, and is loyal and steadfast even when things become uncomfortable or costly.

Deuteronomy 32:3–4 - I will proclaim the name of the Lord. Oh, praise the greatness of our God! ⁴ He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he.

The Bible writers often use the imagery of a Rock to describe the dependability and reliability of God, that He is a stable place to stand in the midst of an ever-changing world.

Psalms 33:4–5 - For the word of the Lord is right and true; he is faithful in all he does. ⁵ The Lord loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of his unfailing love.

There are many Psalms that proclaim the faithfulness of God, that He is always true to His promises. For example:

1 John 1:9 - If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

1 Corinthians 10:13 - No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.

Romans 8:35–39 - Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶ As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” ³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

His word is sure, and His promises do not change. Even when times are hard, He is faithful:

Lamentations 3:21–24 - Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: ²² Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. ²³ They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. ²⁴ I say to myself, “The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.”

Even when the world is falling apart, He is still faithful. And even when we are falling apart, He is still faithful.

2 Timothy 2:11–13 - Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him; ¹² if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us; ¹³ if we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself.

Even when we are faithless, He remains faithful.

God does not lie

Praise God that He does not deceive, exaggerate, or manipulate. He is always honest and true to His Word.

Numbers 23:19 - God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?

2 Corinthians 1:18–20 - But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not “Yes” and “No.” ¹⁹ For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us—by me and Silas and Timothy—was not “Yes” and “No,” but in him it has always been “Yes.” ²⁰ For no matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ. And so through him the “Amen” is spoken by us to the glory of God.

God does not change

He is a God of integrity who does not change. He will not be someone different tomorrow.

James 1:16–17 - Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. ¹⁷ Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

Hebrews 13:8 - Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

If you have been let down by people in your life, the good news is that there is a God who is always faithful. He does not change, He does not lie, and He is always dependable. His Word is trustworthy.

Isaiah 40:8 - The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever.

Let me pray for you, that you might trust in Him and find healing for your wounded soul.

3) Producing the fruit of faithfulness

So what about you? Would the people in your life describe you as faithful, someone who follows through on their commitments and fulfills their promises? Would they call you a person of integrity, someone who is honest and dependable? Or do you struggle to tell the truth instead of deceiving and manipulating? Do you have a hard time following through on your promises and commitments? Have you been a different person in private than you are in public? Are you faithful in your intimate relationship, faithful in raising children, faithful to your parents, faithful at work?

And what about God? Would God consider you a dependable person, a person of integrity, someone He can count on with kingdom work? After all, remember what Jesus said:

Luke 16:10–13 - “Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.¹¹ So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?¹² And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else’s property, who will give you property of your own?¹³ “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”

Jesus tells us that God rewards faithfulness and trustworthiness with greater kingdom responsibility. Are you faithful towards God? Will you hear on that day:

Matthew 25:21 - “His master replied, ‘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!’”

And if you know you have fallen short, that you have not been a person of integrity, how can you partner with God to become someone who demonstrates the fruit of the Spirit that is faithfulness in greater measure? Three specific ways that the Spirit produces this fruit in us:

Know who you are in Christ

If you want to grow in faithfulness, you need to know your identity. Think about why you lie and deceive; is it not often out of fear? I am afraid of being punished or rejected, so I don't tell the truth. What would change that? I need to know my identity. I need to know that I am loved perfectly by God, even with my faults, and no matter how others may treat me or perceive me. Even if they reject me, He never will.

Isaiah 49:15–16 - “Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! ¹⁶ See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands”

It is our fears which often leads us to a lack of honesty and integrity. John tells us that the key to driving out fear is to know and experience God's perfect love.

1 John 4:18 – There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

When you know how loved you are, then you can tell the truth, because your worth is not tied up in how others treat you or what they think of you. The God who knows the worst things about you did not reject you but gave His life for you.

Romans 5:6–8 - You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Love others more than you love yourself

Often our lack of integrity or dependability comes because we are more concerned with our own selfish needs than what is good for another person. The less selfish and self-centered you are, the more you will value others above yourself.

Philippians 2:1–4 - Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above

yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

As the Spirit produces in me a greater understanding of God's love for me and a greater love for others, then increasingly I won't manipulate or deceive in order to get what I want. I will speak the truth in love, and be faithful to others as He has been faithful to me.

Matthew 7:12 - So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

If I want trustworthiness in others, then I need to display it myself.

Live your life for the one who is always faithful to you

Sometimes our lack of faithfulness to others comes because we believe there is something better for us out in the world. But as the Spirit works within me, I can be faithful in my relationships here on earth because I believe that everything my heart is longing for will be mine forever when I am with God, so I do not need to go chasing after it here on earth. The grass is not greener with another man or woman, nor do I need to chase after money or possessions, for everything I desire will be mine forever when I am with God. And so, the more I see His faithfulness to me, especially in my unfaithfulness, the more I want to give me life to honor Him.

How does the Spirit produce faithfulness in us? He assures us of who we are in Christ, that we are beloved children of God. He increases our love for others, so that we are not so self-centered. And He gives us an increasing desire to live for the One who is always faithful to us, to honor Him by reflecting His character to the world.

One day we will stand before our faithful God. I pray that on that day, we will be able to say:

2 Timothy 4:7-8 - I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

Alistair Begg tells a story about Kenneth McRae, a 20th century pastor in Scotland. At a conference in 1962, he shared this story:

I remember when I was a young divinity student, being called upon to unexpectedly lead the service of the congregation in which I used to worship as a small boy. It was also the church in which the great Dr. Kennedy had exercised his ministry. I felt overwhelmed at the thought throughout the day, and after the evening service was over, felt greatly troubled, depressed, and downcast. The church officer, a worthy man known as Alexander MacLean, was waiting for me in the vestry. He was a large man and was especially fond of young men. When I came into the vestry, he just put his big arms around me and said, “never you mind, my boy. As Mr. Finlayson of Helmsdale used to say, it is not ‘well done, good and successful servant,’ but ‘well done, good and faithful servant.’” What is going to count at the end of the day is not success but faithfulness.

Hebrews 10:23 - Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.