**Series: An Excellent Harvest**

**Sermon: Fix or Replace?**

Brain teaser: What do the following have in common?

* These room lights
* My watch
* My garage door opener

Additional clues:

* My contact lenses
* Weather report

These are all things that I expect to be faithful. I expect the lights to come one when we flip the switch – otherwise I ask Dick and Ted to look into why not.

* I expect my watch to give me the correct time – or I get a new battery or a new watch
* I expect my garage door to open when I push the button
* I expect my contact lenses to help me see or I head to Dr. Sommers’ office
* I expect the weather report to be at least sort of accurate

Other things from which I expect faithfulness:

* My truck
* Leaf blower
* TV
* Furnace
* Cell phone
* The U S postal service
* A/C
* Computer
* Power tools
* Medicine
* My zipper
* Smoke and CO2 detector
* Washing machine
* Plumbing

These and many other things I expect to be faithful. If not I fix or replace.

There are people I expect to be faithful as well:

* Police and firefighters
* Doctor and dentist
* Store clerks and bank tellers
* News reporters
* Lawyer
* Other drivers, esp. at stop and go lights
* People who prepare my food at a restaurant
* Friends
* The Elders of our church’
* The staff here, Ben and Theresa and Erika and Dick

I expect people to be faithful. You do too. I can’t fix people who aren’t nor can I always replace them if they’re not, but people who are not faithful I won’t trust.

Life works on trust. We trust the people and things in our lives to do what they’re supposed to do and not do what they’re not supposed to do.

* When you hold US currency in your hand you expect the government to back it up.
* When you get on an airplane you expect the flight crew to do what they said they will do.
* Every marriage requires that both husband and wife deliver on what they promised.

*The Fruit of the Spirit is faithfulness.* Galatians 5:22 It makes perfect sense to include faithfulness among the Fruit of the Spirit because faithfulness immediately impacts the people in our lives. Everyone expects faithfulness from each other.

**Faithfulness demonstrates that we care about how what we do affects other people, and lacking faithfulness demonstrates the opposite**.

Stuart Briscoe, long time preacher at Elmbrook Church near Waukesha, WI wrote:

*Faithfulness is doing what you say you’ll do, delivering on what you promise. Being faithful means being reliable, turning up on time, finishing the job, being there when you need to be there*.

\*\*Would you agree with me that God probably expects us to be faithful? Would you agree with that God probably expects us to do what we’re supposed to do and not do what we’re not supposed to do; that we’ll do what we say we’re going to do; that we’ll live up to our commitments as Jesus followers?

Faithfulness is fruit the Holy Spirit seeks to grow in us.

**Faithfulness as a fruit is not about whether or not we believe,** **it’s about doing and being what we say we will do and be; and it’s about doing and being what we’re legitimately expected to do and be**.

It’s a good thing the Holy Spirit is helping us because faithfulness isn’t easy. It isn’t easy but it’s always right. One day we want to hear Jesus say, “*Well done good and faithful servant.*”

Faithfulness isn’t easy because it’s not highly regarded in our culture, in fact it’s considered “out of date”.

People in our culture look out for their own interests at the expense of others. People seem to think like this:

* *If my faithfulness benefits you, that’s nice, but if my lack of faithfulness harms you in some way, well that’s the way it goes. I have to take care of myself.*
* *Times change. People change. Commitments must be fluid so that all options remain open for me, unencumbered by promises I made earlier.*
* *Being faithful is unnecessary, at times even dangerous, because it may cause me to lose an opportunity that greatly benefits me*.

Examples you can experience this afternoon:

* People drive with little or no regard for others
* Shoppers pick an item up, then after changing their minds leave it on the shelf somewhere else in the store
* Or they leave a shopping cart in the middle of a parking spot

It’s not that their trying to annoy everyone, it’s just that they don’t think about how their behavior affects anybody else.

The greatest model of faithfulness is God Himself. We see this over and over in the Old Testament. God is totally reliable; unchanging in His commitments. He did what He said He would do.

Even though His people were not faithful, He was. His people grumbled about Him, rebelled against Him, cheated on Him, tested Him, and questioned Him, yet God remained faithful.

Through every circumstance and condition He proved to be reliable. He did what He promised: He loved them, protected them, provided for them and saved them.

In the New Testament Jesus proved to be completely faithful. following His father’s will no matter how uncomfortable or painful. “*Not my will be yours*” He prayed in the garden as He looked toward crucifixion.

The word “faithfulness” is “πιστις”. It can be translated faith, faithful, faithfulness, or even trust. The context tells us which English variant we should understand. The New Testament writers used “πιστις” to show specific ways God is faithful.

1. **God is a faithful creator.**

The major theme of the book of 1 Peter concerns the struggles and persecution Christians faced. It was hard being a Christian. If you were a Jesus follower you suffered for it. Peter wrote that Christians shouldn’t think that suffering is something strange. People hate God and thus they hate God’s people.

Then he wrote, *So then, those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.* 1 Peter 4:19 Based on God’s faithfulness demonstrated in His creation, we should be faithful.

The International Space Station is a habitable artificial satellite in low earth orbit operated by five space agencies. Since November of 2000 people have lived and worked aboard the ISS. They get there and back via a variety of space craft.

Some scientists believe all creation is the result of chance, but no one would strap in to a rocket if he/she wasn’t confident that science is faithful. It’s only faithful if it’s the result of a creative faithful mind. Chance is not reliable, ask any gambler. God is a faithful creator so science that He created can be trusted.

Here’s Peter’s point: As God is proven faithful in creation, we can trust Him in our circumstances and remain faithful ourselves.

1. **God is faithful in relationships**.

For His part, God is faithful to maintain relationships even if we’re not.

*You do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God, who has called you into fellowship with His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.* 1 Corinthians 1:7-9

God gives us His Holy Spirit, including gifts and Fruit of the Spirit in order to maintain the relationship. His relationship does not change. We may change, but He will not. He is faithful in relationships.

1. **God is faithful in trying times.**

Even when it feels to us like God has turned His back, He hasn’t.

*No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. 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 stand up under it.* 1 Corinthians 10:13

Temptation, πειρασμος, is anything that tests your resolve. In your temptations, whatever they are, God will both protect you from being overwhelmed and He will provide an escape.

The problem for us often is that we don’t want to endure temptations. We want God to take them away. How easily we forget the promise we just read. We forget that our trials help us grow into Spiritual maturity.

We forget that…*the testing of our faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that we may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.* James 1:3f

We forget that Jesus didn’t pray for God to take away our trials. Rather He prayed, *My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.* John 17:15 God is faithful in our trying times.

1. **God is faithful to do what He says He will do.**

Sometimes I tend to be rather bone-headed. I’m anything but an example of a godly, blameless, sinless man of God.

But one day I will be absolutely without sin in body, mind, and soul. How do I know? Because God makes me righteous.

*May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and He will do it.* 1 Thessalonians 5:23f

The word “may” is not a wish. It’s actually not in the Greek words. This is a declarative statement. In English we could insert the word “will”. *God Himself, the one of peace,* ***will*** *make you completely holy; your whole being blameless when Jesus comes*.

God is faithful and He’ll do what He says He’ll do.

1. **God is faithful to protect us from Satan.**

*The Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil one.* 2 Thessalonians 3:3

We’re not at Satan’s mercy*. The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.* 1 John 4:4 Satan can deceive and influence, but he cannot control us because God protects us from him.

1. **God is faithful to forgive us,** even when we’re not faithful.

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

God demonstrates faithfulness for us. We know what faithfulness means because we see it in God.

Now let’s talk about the nature of our faithfulness. I can think of five characteristics of faithfulness.

1. Faithfulness begins as an intellectual decision.

Faithfulness begins with a decision to believe. *I told you…if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins.* John 8:24

Paul added to 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

However you get there, whether you grew up in a Christian home and simply assimilated faith, or you came to Christ through an emotional experience, or by examining the evidence, faithfulness starts with believing.

1. Faithfulness is a relational experience.

As opposed to a religious experience, Christian faithfulness is based on a relationship with Jesus. Faithfulness is not about rituals and rites but about connecting with the person of Jesus.

1. Faithfulness is volitional.

It’s a choice. That’s why we don’t do infant baptism here. No one can make you faithful. Your family, the church, other people can influence you toward faith, but you have to choose it for yourself.

In Romans 9:33 Paul, citing Isaiah 8:14 wrote, *I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who trusts in Him will never be put to shame.* “Trust” here is the same word we translate faith or faithfulness. Some people stumble over Jesus, while those who choose to be faithful to Him will be blessed.

1. Faithfulness is a crucial action.

Crucial means something is serious, marked by a final decision. Choosing to believe Jesus includes putting off the sin of our old way of life and putting on Godly righteous behavior.

1. Finally faithfulness is a continuous action.

Faithfulness is not a “one and done” type thing. We don’t make a decision, get baptized then put it on the back shelf of our lives. That wouldn’t be faithful. We are faithful when our faith becomes the central focus of our lives. We live in Jesus and for Jesus. We continue believing; continue obeying; continue becoming like Him.

The Fruit of the Spirit is faithfulness. Like a good farmer God looks for an excellent harvest. To that end He prepares the soil, provides good seed, introduces optimum growing conditions, and then waits for the harvest.

If the Fruit of the Spirit is faithfulness, and if faithfulness is about living up to our commitments, doing what we say we’re going to do and being what we say we’re going to be, what do you think faithfulness looks like?

In terms of:

* Behavior - the things you do and don’t do
* Your relationship to your church
  + participation
  + support ($)
  + how you speak of your church
  + involvement in ministries
* The places you go
* Sharing the truth of Christ with the lost
* The kind of husband or wife or parent you are

When things in my life don’t work like they’re supposed to I fix or replace them. As long as we believe Jesus we don’t have to worry about God replacing us. He is faithful to save us as He promised.

Now He will try to fix us but that’s a different sermon.

I guess what I’m asking is this: Has the Holy Spirit produced faithfulness in you?

* Do you deliver?
* Are you reliable?

If He has, praise God. If He has not, perhaps you need to make a crucial decision.