

WITH FAITHFULNESS

Live Fully

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We're going to continue in the series "The Fruit of the Spirit." Galatians 5:22 "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness..." The fruit we speak of today – the seventh fruit of the Spirit is faithfulness.

In the older English translations of the Bible you will find the word written "faith." The fruit of the Spirit is faith. In the newer translations you will see the word "faithfulness." The difference is not really all that consequential. Both words come from the same Greek word – faith and faithfulness. Perhaps it's best when thinking of faith to describe it as a gift given by God and when that same Greek root occurs as described in the human quality it reflects the concept of *faithfulness*. Faith being a gift and faithfulness being a fruit.

Really the two are dependent upon the other. You cannot be a person of faith if you're not faithful. And you can't be faithful if you don't have faith.

A faithful person is steady, reliable, dependable, trustworthy, you can count on a faithful person. God himself is our primary example of faithfulness. Jeremiah cries out in Lamentations "Great is Thy faithfulness." The psalmist declares "With my mouth I will make known thy faithfulness to all generations." Paul declares in 1 Corinthians 1 "God is faithful." In Hebrews Jesus is seen as a faithful high priest. And in Revelation 19:11 when Jesus returns in glory, his name is bannered for all to see "Faithful and true."

The New Testament tells us that God is faithful to us. He is faithful to strengthen and protect us from the evil one. He's faithful to forgive us our sins. He is faithful to not let us be tempted or tested beyond that which we are able. He is faithful even when we are not. And he is going to faithfully present us blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I'm not blameless at this moment except in Christ. You could find some faults with me if you looked long enough. But he is so faithful to me and so faithful to you that he has purposed to remain steady and dependable for us to bring us to that moment when he will present us before the presence of the Father with exceeding great joy.

So God is faithful. Because God is faithful and because all the fruit of the Spirit are simply the transference of characteristics or attributes that are in the character of God to us it makes sense that when talking about faithfulness we first of all would look at the faithfulness of God. In having us want this quality in our life we're wanting God to place that aspect of his being into us so that we become those who manifest in our life the divine nature – Christ in you.

Since God is faithful to his word, the Spirit is going to seek to faithfully develop the qualities of faith. First the faith filled person lives with a set of unshakable assumptions. Certain things faith settles. Those four assumptions for me that are unshakable that the faith filled person's most bedrock assumption is that Jesus is Lord.

Jesus is risen from the dead. He could only be liar, lunatic, legend or Lord. And he is Lord. His resurrection settles all the questions about who God is and is his word valid for us when I came

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to that point in my life that I knew he was risen and therefore Lord it settled all questions as to what I was going to believe and how I was going to behave.

The second unshakable assumption is my life and your life is not your own. It is really his. That must be an assumption of a faith filled person.

Here in California there's not only a lot of earthquakes, we have a lot of leased land. In other parts of the country you wouldn't think of leasing land. This church is setting on six acres of leased land. Irvine Company in this area owns much land that is leased.

Our lives are leased. It's not *my* house, *my* car. It's really God's. It's not my money. It's God's. It's not my church, it's God's. It's not my Sunday school class, it's God's. The ownership is his and I am a trustee. I must live with the faith filled life of understanding as an unshakable assumption that whatever I have is not a possession. It is a trust. I do not have ownership of it. I simply have a custody interest in it.

The third unshakable assumption is what happens in me is more important than what happens to me.

A faith filled person knows that circumstances are not always controllable. Cannot always order the circumstances you want. But a faith filled person knows that God is always working in you in the midst of the circumstances. That's where the faith filled person is going to have bedrock.

The fourth faith filled assumption is that God is working all things for the good.

The faith filled person knows that at any particular moment in our life we may feel like a piece of puzzle. We do not know where we fit the other pieces or how we're going to blend into the picture that God is developing. It's especially hard to put a puzzle together when you don't see the total plan. But the faith filled person knows that God has a plan. And he is working it for the good.

Unshakable assumptions. What are your unshakable assumptions? What are the principles by which your life functions? Things that you know to be true no matter what happens to you. The worst disaster in the world, whatever it can be, can happen and these things could not be taken from you. A faith filled person has found a level for their faith, a floor upon which to stand.

A second mark of a faith filled person is not only that they have unshakable assumptions but that they have learned how to approach mountains. There's two ways of a faith filled person has of dealing with mountains. Sometimes the faith filled person, with God's help, moves the mountain. And sometimes he tunnels through them.

Hebrews 11:32-38 shows us both kinds. Shows us the mountain movers – they conquered kingdoms, administered justice, gained what was promised, shut the mouth of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, escaped the edge of the sword, saw their weakness turned into strength, became powerful in battle, routed foreign armies and received back their dead through resurrection. They moved mountains.

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Then the writer goes right on to tell us about the people who weren't the mountain movers. The mountain stayed on top of them. They had to endure. They tunneled through the mountain. Their faith kept them while the mountain was oppressing them. They were tortured, refused to be released, faced jeers and flogging, were chained and put in prison, were stoned, sawn in two, put to death by the sword, went about in sheepskins and goatskins, became destitute, were persecuted and mistreated, wandered in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground." Yet the writer of Hebrews says "These all [the mountain movers and the mountain tunnelers] had faith."

The church of Jesus Christ needs to be filled with faithful persons, who stay by their commitments.

Tunneling through your mountains or moving them. Which is the case? How about your mountains? Some of you have seen God move mountains in your way. And wonderful things have happened in your life that could only be attributed to the power of God intervening. Others of you are being called upon to tunnel through. The mountain is not being moved but that does not mean you are not a person of faith. People of faith have got to have faith to tunnel through.

The third characteristic of a faith filled person is that they live by commitment rather than by feeling.

We must live by our commitments rather than by our emotions. My father and mother answered the call of the Lord to a distant land. If there's anything I've learned from my family about serving Jesus Christ it simply is *be faithful*. Mom and Dad would tell us over and over again, "When you stand before the Lord on that day, he is not going to ask you if you have been successful. He's going to ask you if you have been faithful. It is not 'Well done, good and successful servant.' It is 'Well down, good and faithful servant.'" It takes commitment to remain faithful.

These are days when people make commitments and go away from them because they no longer feel emotionally attached to that commitment. But Jesus commands the potential martyrs of the Smyrna church "Be thou faithful unto death." It is no thrill to be martyred. There is no emotional kick to being killed for Jesus. There is no emotional kick of having to go through some hard trial. Our commitments must be stronger than our feelings.

What about your faithfulness and mine? Are we plugged in faithfully to the Lord, to our commitments? To a place of service in the body? To personal spiritual disciplines – faithful? To be counted upon to be at our place in the Lord's work in the Lord's house? Faithful to invest our resources – his resources – in his work? Faithful!

Are we dependable? Can we be counted upon as a believer and as a person committed to follow and obey Jesus Christ?

A faith filled person lives with unshakable assumptions, moves or tunnels through mountains, functions from commitment rather than feeling and...

Fourthly, rests in God's approval

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A faithful person lives for the approval of God upon their life. Too much living of the Christian life is playing for the grandstands. We're playing our life before God. It's God's approval that we seek upon our existence. We must care about what God thinks of our attitude and our conduct.

Faithful to seek God's approval. If you're faithful you may not live to see all the results or the fruit of what you're doing but we live for God's approval. We need to be God's faithful servants.

What about you? What about me? Are we God's faithful servants? Jeremiah says of God "Great is thy faithfulness." Won't it be wonderful when God can say to us "Great is your faithfulness."

Lord, we thank you for this time to meet and hear your word. We ask, Holy Spirit of God, that you will use this time to deeply strengthen our life. Where there are friends in this congregation that are facing times of loneliness and discouragement and trouble may this word be word of healing and strength and power in our lives. Lord, if it's you that we live for everything else will have its proper place. We can take it when nobody says Thanks. We can take it when there is no encouragement. We can take it when our efforts go unnoticed. God, we want to live for you and we want to see your will done in our lives. Help us to be a faithful person, a faithful Christian, faithful in every detail of our life. Let this fruit of the Spirit be present in us, your people, in the name of the Lord. Amen.