

# A Family of Faithfulness

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*For belated 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration at Kirckville, June 9, 2024*

**Scripture: Psalm 89:1-8,14,15; Heb. 10:19-25**

**Key Thought: Our lives should reflect the faithfulness of God!**

## **Intro:**

Yellowstone National Park is a favorite destination for vacationing Americans. And when I mention that park, probably the first feature that comes to mind is Old Faithful Geyser. I had the privilege of seeing it with my family in 1995. It is not the tallest geyser in the park, nor is it the largest. But it has become the iconic symbol of Yellowstone for just one reason. It faithfully spouts water and steam on average every 90 minutes. You can schedule your visit to see Old Faithful in action. Faithfulness is its key characteristic.

Faithfulness is the keyword of our theme for this weekend here at Alive Wesleyan. I love the theme – “A Family of Faithfulness.” I’m reminded that the Bible tells us that faithfulness is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit’s presence in the lives of Christians.

*The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Gal 5:22-23 84NIV*

Did you ever stop to wonder why faithfulness is a fruit of the Spirit? The answer is simple. **Faithfulness is a character trait of God.** Now when we think of God today, the verse that immediately comes to mind is “God is love” (1 John 4:8,16) and rightfully so. But when people of Jesus’ day, including Jesus, thought of God, what OT verse likely came to mind? It might have been this one from one of the defining events in the history of Israel, the giving of the law to Moses, in Exodus we read God’s self-disclosure,

*Then the Lord came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the Lord. And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Ex 34:5-7 NIV*

This longer verse was distilled for Israel in these familiar words in Psalms 86.

*But you, Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness. Ps 86:15*

What characteristic is coupled with God’s love in both verses? It is God’s faithfulness. So, again, **faithfulness is a character trait of God!**

Why then should faithfulness be a characteristic of God's people both individually and as the family of God? Because by showing faithfulness we display the spiritual DNA that comes to us through the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. By being faithful people, we reflect the light of God's presence in our lives!

The faithfulness that has been and continues to be displayed here at Alive Wesleyan is evidence that we together are a lighthouse displaying to a darkening world the light of the presence of the Risen Christ among us. As Paul put it.

*And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. 2 Cor 3:18 NIV*

Now let's move on and ask for some practical ways that our lives can reflect the faithfulness of God. I believe we reflect God's faithfulness in three foundational ways. First, by our ...

## **Faithfulness in devotion to God**

Today we read the statistics that church attendance in the United states has decreased rapidly over the last 10 years. According to Gallup, ten years ago, 38% of Americans reportedly attending religious services every week or nearly every week. Now that percentage is 30%. (<https://news.gallup.com/poll/642548/church-attendance-declined-religious-groups.aspx>) (Penn-York district bucking the declining trend this year! Hallelujah). But I've noted that there are many people, young and old, who upon questioning claim to be Christian- indeed many can answer questions about personal faith very well- yet they have no desire to express that faith in relationship to a church. They are not part of the "nones" that we read about, those increasing number of younger Americans who claim no faith at all. Rather they are Christians who just don't bother to express their devotion by the most visible and recognizable sign of Christian devotion, regular worship at a church. But this is not the picture of faithful Christian devotion that the Bible gives to us. And I want to encourage you today. You are here so I'm talking to the choir, praise God. You have chosen to come apart once again and participate in worship for Almighty God. You are honoring God with your presence, with your voice, and with your heart. The Bible encourages us never to be lacking in zeal. You are doing what the passage that we read from Hebrews admonishes us to do- to continue to gather together as the family of God for worship and encouragement. Now I know some are absent for health reasons and others are away on necessary work. But the Bible is saying that we need to avoid the creeping habit so prevalent today of just skipping church. Now I know quite well that churches aren't perfect. Alive Wesleyan here in Kirkville may be close, but all of us know that any organization made of human beings who are still in process toward heaven will not be perfect. We sometimes rub one another the wrong way- can you believe it? Preachers might talk too much or too little-the nerve of them! Well, let's face it. It's like so much of life, we can either focus on what irritates us and be unhappy, or we can fix our thoughts on Jesus and give thanks for the good gifts of the house of God! AMEN!

Better to think like David did when he said,

*How priceless is your unfailing love, O God!  
People take refuge in the shadow of your wings.  
They feast on the abundance of your house;  
you give them drink from your river of delights. Ps 36:7-8 NIV*

I thank God for the joy, the inspiration and the guidance that I have received and continue to receive in the house of God from week to week. Now being in the House of God is not the end of our devotion. It is only one type of practical devotional expression. But it is certainly a key one and it is usually where we learn about and are encouraged to try other spiritual disciplines like regular Bible readings, personal prayer times, devotional reading, etc. That's why the writer of Hebrews wants us to be faithful at services just like you are today. So, our faithfulness is first expressed in acts of worshipful devotion, of which worship at church is usually a centerpiece. So my first "take it home" question is this.

### **What daily and weekly devotional practices reflect your faithfulness to God?**

A second way that we reflect the faithfulness of God is a copy of the way that God's faithfulness to David was reflected in Psalm 89. It was relational! We reflect the faithfulness of God through our...

### **Faithfulness in caring for one another**

We have already noted that God's love and his faithfulness go together. They are intertwined. It's not an accident that both the Hebrew word for God's covenant love (Hesed) and the word for faithfulness (emunah) occur 7 times in Psalm 89 (verses 1,2,5, 8, 24,33,49). Because God is faithful, his love can be depended upon. Because God is loving His faithfulness is filled with kindness. As David said,

*"All the ways of the Lord are loving and faithful!" Psalm 25:10 NIV*

In our homes, our Christian faith is reflected in our faithfulness to one another. Husbands and wives are faithful to one another in covenant just as God is faithful to us in his covenant of love and grace.

The first part of Ps. 89 reflects God's faithfulness to the promises he made to David. God had promised David victory and God had kept his promise. But the writer of Psalm 89 is writing at a later time in Israel's history, when the people had departed from God and times were not so good, when enemies were oppressing them, and they wondered whether God was faithful. Thankfully, we have the advantage of history to know that God was indeed faithful to his promises to David by raising up Jesus our Savior from the ancestral line of David.

However, we also go through tough times when the faithfulness of God seems remote to us. That's when we need someone else to faithfully show God's love to us. Just as Christ's coming in history assured the people of God that God was faithful to his promises, so we need to be the hands and feet of Jesus showing his love to someone else and assuring them that God has not forgotten them. We are the faithful people of God bringing them assurance by showing love to them in tangible ways in Jesus' name.

Today, while I am here with you, I will be missing what has become a regular Sunday appointment for me. A man I knew fairly well through my last church has been recovering from complications of cancer treatments. He has been in and out of several hospitals and nursing homes for over a year. He was so low that he could not get out of bed anymore. Recently, each week, I have been stopping by his skilled nursing home bedside on Sundays to bring a word of cheer and to pray for him and anoint him with oil for his recovery. God has been reminding me to be faithful to my calling even in my retirement because God needs people like me and like you showing his faithful love to others in small tangible ways.

In our day, God expects that his faithfulness will be modeled by us through our care for one another as Peter admonished his readers,

*“Love one another deeply from the heart.” 1 Peter 1:22 NIV*

And as the apostle John told us

*Let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth. 1 John 3:18 NIV*

It is the little acts of caring for one another, especially in the family of God that make a big difference. When someone else is hurting, we might text them, give them a call, lend a helping hand, or even send them a card. Who doesn't like getting a cheery card in the mail. Showing God's love to others day by day is part of our faithfulness because it reflects God's faithful love. (Take home question)

**To whom can you faithfully show God's love in tangible ways this week?**

Finally, the third way that our faithfulness is demonstrated is in...

## **Faithfulness to the mission Jesus gave us**

I have really appreciated the focus that Dr. Wayne Schmidt has given to the Wesleyan Church over the past few years by calling us to keep our attention on the mission – making disciples for Jesus. It is too easy for churches to become comfortable social clubs enjoying their nice inspiring music and fellowship times without purposefully giving attention to the Great Commission.

The Bible clearly says that the way to tell if we love Jesus is by whether or not we obey his commands. The last command that he gave to his church was to go and make disciples. So, if we are to be devoted to Jesus, if we are to be faithful followers of the one who said that he came to seek and to save those who are lost, then we cannot be satisfied unless we are finding ways to give testimony to others about Jesus our Lord. We have been entrusted with the message by Jesus himself. Paul wrote,

*“Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.” 1 Cor. 4:2.*

In this day and age, our witness to Jesus will be done in many new and creative ways, online and in person, individually and collectively, in both words and action. But being a faithful family of God in witness and discipling continues to be an essential expression of our faithfulness. So, we all need to review our focus and ask,

**What activities or conversations in my life directly reflect my faithfulness to the Great Commission?**

## Conclusion

In conclusion, we also need to be faithful because we are repeatedly warned by Jesus that a day of reckoning is coming. Think about the parables and stories that Jesus told that involved a coming day of accountability. Some of those parables were especially for those who were not yet followers of Jesus and needed to take warning. For example, Jesus told about a rich man whose farm had produced abundant crops. He decided to tear down his existing barns and build bigger ones. Then he laid back, complimented himself on his success and decided to take life easy, enjoying his good fortune (Luke 12). But Jesus called him a fool saying that even that very night his soul may be required of him and then what will happen with all his accoutrements of success? He was spiritually unprepared for the coming day of accountability. So, we need to ask ourselves, “Am I spiritually prepared by trusting in Jesus as my Savior and then doing good deeds that show it is so?”

We also need to remember that one of Jesus’ most famous parables about a day of reckoning was aimed squarely at those like most of us here who were already servants of the Master to urge us on to faithfulness. In Matthew 25:14-30, you can read about the parable of the talents. In Jesus’ day, talent was a unit of weight used for weighing various metals used as currency such as gold or silver. NIV simply says “bags of gold” which, indeed, it may have been. Jesus talked about a man who was going on a journey and entrusted his wealth to his servants. In our day we would say to his most loyal and trusted personal assistants. He gave them varying amounts of money according to their abilities. Upon the leader’s return he called the managers in to settle accounts with them. You recall that the one who received 5 bags of gold and the one who received two had each doubled what they had received while the one who had received only one bag had literally buried the resources rather than using them wisely. The master, who represents Jesus, commended the first two managers as “good and faithful servants” because they had worked diligently at the task to which they had been assigned. But on the day of accounting, the third manager who had done nothing with what he had been given was condemned. He had not been faithful to the mission. One of the key reasons we need to be faithful is so that we will be prepared as servants ready to give an account to the master when our time comes. As Paul put it,

*“Each of us will give an account of ourselves to God” (Rom 14:12).*

So “A Family of Faithfulness,” cannot be just a joyful description of what we believe God has allowed us to be in the past. Though it is that, it can’t stop there! It must also be an expression of our continuing aspiration, our collective desire to be faithful together to the one who has called us, so that at the end of the next decade at Alive Wesleyan, if Jesus tarries, those who celebrate can continue to rejoice in this “Family of Faithfulness.” As Paul put it,

*I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. Phil*

*3:12-14 NIV*