

Text: Galatians 5:22-23

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Sermon Outline: Jeremy Tao/Kevin White

Series: Marks of a Flourishing Life/a study on the fruits of the spirit

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Good Morning! My name is Kevin and I'm your friendly neighbourhood youth pastor here at Cornerstone. We are winding down a series called, "Marks of a Flourishing Life." We've been working through Galatians 5:22-23 – the Fruit of the Spirit. For us, a flourishing life is about growing in the character of God and developing the heart and skills to bring that character into our relationships. So far, we've heard messages on love, joy, peace, patience, kindness and goodness. Today we are going to talk about faithfulness. Special thank-you to pastor Jeremy who helped me with this outline. We also used some stuff from a book, "Life on the Vine" by Philip Kenneson.

PROBLEMS WITH FAITHFULNESS IN OUR CULTURE

I don't have to go on and on about the lack of faithfulness in our culture. You know the statistics about divorce, you know how often people move, switch jobs, careers, stop talking to friends, change churches. If there is one thing our world struggles with – it's faithfulness. And this is the world that we find ourselves in.

So what is faithfulness?

WHAT IS FAITHFULNESS

The Greek word we find in Galatians 5:22 is the word "pistis" – which of course means faith – like faith in God but it also means trust-worthiness or reliability – a person on whom others can rely.

Look at the story of God's faithfulness to Abraham. He had promised Abraham (in Genesis 15) that he would bless him and make him great. Abraham is questioning God about this because he and his wife Sarah are old and they can't have kids. God promises to work a miracle. After a long time, they get tired of waiting, so they take matters into their own hands: Abraham sleeps with his servant, she gets pregnant, that causes all kinds of drama. Time passes and Sarah actually does give birth to a son (Isaac) and all seems to be well. Years later, Abraham knows he is going to die soon. He sends his servant to find a wife for Isaac. Long story short, the servant finds the perfect wife for Isaac. And if you follow the story of Abraham, his son, Isaac, then Jacob, then the Israelites - you will see a common theme: God's faithfulness.

God is faithful. He doesn't just make promises. He makes what is called a **covenant**.

What is a covenant? A covenant is a relationship between two partners who make binding promises to each other and work together to reach a common goal. The thing about it is, all throughout the Bible - God makes covenants with humans - and even when they don't hold up their part, he still remains faithful. Faithfulness is part of God's character.

FAITHFULNESS IS PART OF GOD'S CHARACTER

This is the kind of God that we are talking about today. He doesn't just start the world, and then leave it spinning while he's off somewhere else. No, he's the God who enters the story.

He refuses to give up on those to whom he is bound. He still remains faithful and honours his covenant.

Lamentations 3:21 – 24 (listen to these verses)

Vs. 21 – yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope;

Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail.

They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.

The vital word in vs. 22 is “great love” – Hebrew “hesed” the covenant love and loyalty of the Lord that leads to COMPASSION, MERCY – this is passion from the womb – like a mother for her child. The same covenant that God has with Israel is the same loving mercy from God that won’t end - and is extended to us.

When you reflect on that - it’s inspiring - it makes you want to be faithful

And yet - in many situations we’re not.

So what gets in the way of faithfulness?

WHAT GETS IN THE WAY OF FAITHFULNESS?

1. Disposable mentality

We are surrounded by things that aren’t made to last. They are not made to be faithful. Look at cell phones for example. We have 2 year contracts, but the goal of every company is to get us to break those contracts. To be unfaithful. I want to be true to my phone. I want to be steadfast. But every year a new version comes out. And then there are incentives. And it’s basically like they are giving me the phone for free. Plus, the new systems don’t work well – or sometimes at all with the old phones. Then you have someone like our children’s director Kerri, who kept her phone so long she went from iPhone 6 to 12., who, if it were up to her she would probably still have her very first phone - but it’s just not possible - Cause it won’t work now – plus they won’t allow you to keep your old plan... so you have to DISPOSE of your old phone, and your old plan. But don’t worry, the new phone and plan is better. But wait, now there’s a new plan and a new phone, so your new phone – well, it’s not new now – needs to be disposed of again.

I was watching a documentary that was saying some clothing companies are destroying their entire line WEEKLY – to force you to buy new clothes – some clothes are made to fall apart or lose their colour after a few washes or fade, so that they will need to be replaced - they call it fast fashion.

These are silly examples - but what about things that are more important?

How does this disposable mentality affect our relationships?

When things aren’t going well, instead of digging deeper and pushing through - we dispose of any relationship that doesn’t serve us the way we feel we deserve.

At work, people are disposable. Companies lay people off without notice, benefits or anything – because of a bottom line. People leave companies because other companies pay more or have less politics...

Not saying that you need to stay at one job forever - certainly you need to listen to the Spirit and make decisions that are right for your health and family.

Look at Cornerstone for example. Andrew has been at this church since it started, Steve has been at this church for 25 years, Jeremy’s been at this church for 25 years. Kerri’s the newbie - she’s only been at the church for 13 years.

Not to say that we’re a perfect church - certainly not - but there is something about long faithfulness in the same direction that I believe is at least a part of what makes Cornerstone so special.

And it’s not just staff...

I just had a meeting with some parents to go over some youth ministry stuff. These were all parents who have been at the church longer than I’ve been. What stood out to me was their care. Their heart for Cornerstone and their families and youth ministry. These are people who are deeply committed to being committed.

How committed are you to Cornerstone? If this is the place that God is calling you to in this season, how committed are you? Are you willing to show up, to have hard conversations, to love people who need extra grace, to jump in and serve where needed?

What about friendships?

Friendships are so beautiful. And challenging at times

The world tells us, when things aren't working out, just stop talking. Make new friends and dispose of our old ones.

2. We become deeply committed to being uncommitted

The commitment required to foster deep relationships is staggering. To make yourself available when someone is in need can be exhausting. To have a friend who is available when you are in need is one of the most beautiful things in the world.

Relationships go through ups and downs. People go through ups and downs. Are you willing not only to celebrate your friends in the highest of highs but also go through the lowest of lows with them?

And what does that actually look like?

I myself went through the lowest of lows a couple of years ago. I had a family adopt me. I went over to their house every Tuesday for about 2 years. They were there for me and with me.

I had nothing to offer. But they loved me. God used them in a mighty way to be a part of my healing journey.

Don't give up on your worst day. And don't give up on others on their worst days.

What about marriages?

Instead of being faithful, and loving the one who we made a covenant to – we give up. We get tired. We divorce. We have an affair. We shut down. We check out.

Or – we don't even get married in the first place. We just date, and live together. And do all the things that are supposed to be done only in the covenant of marriage. We keep our options open in case... So we are surrounded by UNfaithfulness. Is it any wonder being faithful is so hard?

We keep our options open. We shop. For the best church, the best friends, best job, and the best family...

I remember a good friend of mine saying to me "Why didn't anyone tell me marriage was going to be this hard?" They said this after they got a divorce. Relationships are hard - family, friends, church, marriage, work...

What do you do when things become difficult? What does it look like to be faithful in our relationships?

What about students in school? What happens when you suddenly face a course that's hard? Do you give up? Cheat and use Ai? Get tutoring? I remember a student who was struggling with math tutoring pretty much every Sunday before church and all throughout the Christmas break. They were faithful to this course which they felt they needed for university and you know what? They passed!!! Even more important, they practiced that faithfulness muscle so it grew a little bit more.

That faithfulness muscle will come in handy when life hits - because it does and will.

3. You take the shape of what you believe in.

If you remain faithful, you will take the shape of a faithful person. If you decide to bail – bail from school, bail from work, bail from friendships, marriage, church or anyone or anything that causes you tension – then you will take the shape of an unfaithful person.

May I take a little commercial break here?

A big piece of Christianity is grace - it's so undeserved it's literally amazing - they even have a song about it :) If you have been unfaithful, that doesn't mean it's the end of your story. God is the God of second chances, third chances, a million chances. Maybe this is the part that you need to hear this morning. God loves you so much that there's nothing that you could do for him to love you more - there's also nothing that you could do to make him love you less. So don't give up...

God is a master of redemption, reconciliation and resurrection - Jesus shows us that even dead things can come alive - amen?

But also, that doesn't mean that you should stay in an unhealthy work environment or marriage or friendship. But man, please try. Please get help. Talk about it. Pray about it. Fast about it.

Back to our regularly scheduled sermon :)

Imagine what this world would look like if we were more faithful?

What would schools look like if boards were more faithful with resources, teachers and admin more faithful in working together for the students, students more faithful in treating others with respect and love.

What would this world look like if politicians were more faithful with tax dollars, if the world were more faithful in sharing our resources and providing for each human.

What would work look like if people weren't quiet-quitting or being burnt out?

What would families look like if more people were honest, and challenged each other and comforted each other, if more couples stayed together?

What would friendships look like if people were honest?

What would church look like if we really acted like a family? Like brothers and sisters?

My people - it's there. It can be. It's the Jesus way.

(story about Adam and Eve - I was afraid so I hid...)

Don't be afraid. Don't hide. And don't go it alone.

One thing that we can do is to gather together. Why is this so important?

GATHER TOGETHER

Small groups

Semester groups

Sunday gatherings

OTT - Fall

I just met with some families who were talking about being more intentional in getting to know other families with kids the same age and maybe having get-togethers.

Next: We can comfort each other and challenge each other...

COMFORT/CHALLENGE EACH OTHER

Next, we are called to be witnesses of God's faithfulness – Pastor Steve always talks about this when he says “Remember well.” You may be like me – I have a good memory – but it's short.

So we share the stories of all the people in the Bible and their faithfulness. And gain insights from them on how to be faithful.

We remember the stories of God in the past and we rehearse – but we also remember and rehearse God stories in our lives now – For me, I heard a call from God – to leave the church I grew up in– a church I loved – to go – nowhere – people thought I was crazy. I thought I was crazy. And 4 months after I left that church, God brought me here. I have been here for 16 years now. I've almost started to figure it out :)

What about you and your story? Every time we have a service where people share their testimonies, people say, oh that was the best part – but we hardly have people sharing testimonies – how can we rehearse God's stories with each other? There are people in this church who have amazing stories of battling sickness, going through job loss, infertility, singleness, bullying, anxiety, singleness, divorce... and many of us are in the middle of the journey and need to know how to be faithful. How can we walk beside each other? How can we rehearse the reality of God's faithfulness and our call to be faithful? Share your stories. I guarantee you God will use your story to bless others.

Email phil@cornerstonechurch.ca if you'd like to share your story

MAKE PROMISES AND KEEP PROMISES

Don't just keep our options open. Don't live the disposable life. More than any other people on the planet, we should be making and keeping promises. We should be faithful – because we serve a promise keeping, faithful God.

Keep your promise to be a good student, that sheds light in the darkness of the school system. Make and keep a promise to be a good son, daughter, brother, sister, friend, spouse, co-worker, parent, a good member of this church family here.

A few weeks ago a parent confronted me about something in the youth ministry that she thought could be better. She was right. She was faithful because she saw an issue and cared enough to confront it.

I can't lie, when I first heard it, I felt a ways... But I went home and I was thinking about it and journaling - and I did a devo that night that seemed to be saying the same thing - this lady was right - God used her to speak to me.

To be faithful to others – you don't just maintain the relationship – you call them to be more than they already are – so you have the courage to be faithful and tell the truth (in love) even when it hurts. You take that risk.

It's not that we need people to be more in order to love them – it's because we love them that we want them to be more.

If you're like me, at this point you are feeling overwhelmed. You feel like, I get it, but I JUST. CAN'T. DO IT. The fruit of the spirit is great, but it's all too much for me. And then you start beating yourself up. Stop. That is from the enemy. He wants to discourage you. Distract you. Divide and conquer. Destroy. But not Jesus.

It's understandable to feel overwhelmed by the challenges of faithfulness. Sometimes it feels like an insurmountable task. However, Jesus doesn't call you based on what you already have, he calls you for what you lack. If you are empty, that's the perfect place. When you are empty, you can receive.

That's the good news. That's the gospel.

That even when we were sinners - Jesus died for us. He took our place...

So I'm going to get you to bow your heads this morning. And reach out your hands – palms up – to admit that you are empty – and need Jesus to fill you. To have an open posture where you can receive.

Father, this morning we ask that you fill us with your spirit. Thank you for being faithful. Even when we are faithless. Help us to have faith. And help us to be faithful. Help us to not worry about what we have to give to others, but help us to focus on connecting with you. Then you can shine through us to others. Help us to be your display people. Help us to have fruit that doesn't spoil but that can be shared with others. Thank you again for your faithfulness to us.

In Jesus name, Amen.

Benediction challenge

Every time you see a fruit this week – ask God to fill you with his spirit so you can be more faithful – to him and to others.

Hopefully you all and we all will blend all the fruit together - like a nice smoothie :)

Benediction: 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24