

# FAITHFULNESS



THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS LOVE, JOY, PEACE,  
PATIENCE, KINDNESS, GENEROSITY, FAITHFULNESS,  
GENTLENESS, AND SELF-CONTROL . . .

IF WE LIVE BY THE SPIRIT,  
LET US ALSO BE GUIDED BY THE SPIRIT

GALATIANS 5: 22-25

reliability

devotion

trustworthiness

# FAITHFULNESS

fidelity

loyalty

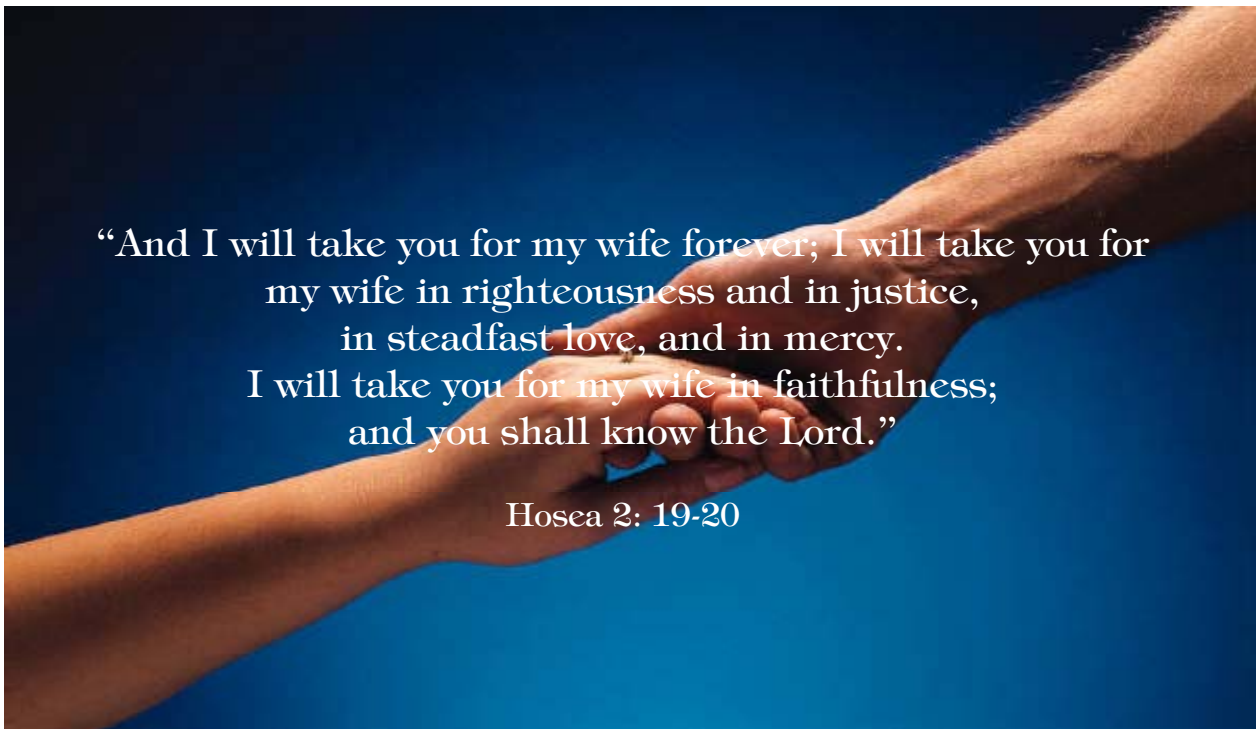
constancy

promise-keeping

dependability

allegiance

steadfastness



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# FAITHFULNESS

“As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.” Colossians 2:6-7

## The Theme

In contrast to the faithfulness and reliability of God, we live in a culture characterized by rapid change, instability, and impermanence. It seems we are encouraged to be “deeply committed to being uncommitted.” How do Christians cultivate the fruit of faithfulness in such a context?

## The Word

- ◆ **DAY 1: Read Deuteronomy 7:6-11 (*God’s covenant as faithfulness*)**  
Keep in mind the meaning of the Hebrew *hesed* as you read God proclaiming his faithfulness in Deuteronomy 7.
- ◆ **DAY 2: Read Hosea 1-3 (*metaphor of God’s faithfulness*)**  
Reflect on what it means that God’s faithfulness is not diminished by any degree of our unfaithfulness.
- ◆ **DAY 3: Read Matthew 25:14-30 (*parable of faithfulness*)**  
As you read Jesus’ parable of the talents, think about the connections between faithfulness and stewardship.
- ◆ **DAY 4: Read Hebrews 3 (*faithfulness of Christ, the standard*)**  
Consider what the writer of Hebrews means by calling Christ’s followers “his house.”
- ◆ **DAY 5: Read Chapter 8 in *Life On The Vine*** Also read the Old Testament verses listed in the chapter’s last paragraph on page 181. Be alert to connections between God’s covenant love and God’s faithfulness. After reading the chapter, work through the study guide on the following pages.

LIFE ON THE VINE

## The Book

Like each of the fruit, the Spirit's fruit of faithfulness has its roots in the very character of God. When we allow the Spirit to do its work in our lives, we do not simply become more human; we also become more like God, in whose image we were created. That image is slowly but most assuredly being restored by the work of Christ through his Spirit.

The Greek word that Paul uses in his list in Galatians is *pistis*, the same word that in other contexts is translated as "faith." Although some of the older translations render this fruit as "faith," given the clear ethical character of the fruit previously listed, a better rendering may be "faithfulness." It would be a mistake, however, to drive a wedge between these two meanings, since there is an obvious connection between faith as trust and faithfulness as trustworthiness. Or said another way, if we stop thinking of faith in purely cognitive terms and accentuate instead faith's character as trust, then faith itself will be seen to have ethical implications. Surely one's life is profoundly shaped by whether, whom, what, when and how one trusts. Once we recover this richer sense of faith, we are in a better position to see God's double claim on our lives: God' calls us both to trust God (who is trustworthy) and to emulate God's trustworthiness. Trust requires steadfastness. Trust cannot be fickle, but must be constant and firm.

(Kenneson, p. 180)

# The STUDY GUIDE

## Exploring the Roots of Faithfulness

As Kenneson makes clear in this chapter, any conversation about what *faithfulness* entails should begin with a discussion about *God's faithfulness*. Take a look at the word *faithfulness* and its various synonyms printed on page 2 of the participant guide. Which synonyms best capture the meaning of God's faithfulness? What evidence do you have that God is (or has been) faithful to you?

Reread Deuteronomy 7:6-11 with these questions in mind:

- ◆ What evidence did the Hebrew people have that God was “the faithful God who maintains covenant loyalty”?
- ◆ What was God's purpose in proclaiming his faithfulness to the people?
- ◆ What Old Testament stories of God's relationship with particular people (for example, Noah, Abraham and Sarah, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, etc.) depict most vividly for you God's faithfulness?

Just as God is faithful and calls his people to faithfulness, the Bible makes clear the people's “habitual unfaithfulness.” And yet God never gives up. Consider Hosea 1-3 and imagine yourself in the place of the prophet Hosea. Imagine what it was like for Hosea to live out his own prophetic word. Then reflect on these questions:

- ◆ What does Hosea's marriage to Gomer in Chapter 1 signify?
- ◆ How does the image of adultery or harlotry describe the nature of Israel's unfaithfulness to God?
- ◆ What attributes of God are emphasized in Hosea 2:16-23?
- ◆ What does Hosea's act in Chapter 3 signify?
- ◆ Since this relationship between Hosea and Gomer, including the naming of their children, is a prophetic enactment, what is God's message to his people? to us today?

## Examining the Fruit of Faithfulness

### *Character of the Fruit*

Even though Scripture attests to the truth that “our unfaithfulness cannot provoke God to unfaithfulness,” faithfulness is to be part of the character of the Christian. To explore the character of Christian faithfulness, consider the two New Testament texts you read this week, using these questions to guide your thinking:

### Hebrews 3

- ◆ What does the writer mean by saying Jesus “was faithful to the one who appointed him” (verse 2)?
- ◆ What does the writer mean by saying Jesus “was faithful over God’s house as a son” (verse 6)?
- ◆ What does the phrase “we are his house” (verse 6) say about the Christian’s faithfulness to God?
- ◆ What is it that has the potential to cause you to be unfaithful, to turn away from God?
- ◆ When have you experienced a lack of trust in God? What reestablished that trust?

### Matthew 25:14-30

- ◆ What does Jesus’ parable say about the connection between stewardship and faithfulness?
- ◆ Why are the first two slaves (or servants) praised as being trustworthy (or faithful)?
- ◆ What is the mistake of the servant with the one talent?
- ◆ Compare the message implied by the ending of this parable to the message at the end of Hosea 3. How do we hold together in our understanding, both a God who is unwavering in faithfulness to us, and a God who holds us accountable for our unfaithfulness toward him?

### *Obstacles to Bearing the Fruit*

Recall Kenneson’s observation that “we are, in short, encouraged to be deeply committed to being uncommitted” (p. 185).

- ◆ What does he mean by that statement means? Where in our lives and in our culture do we see evidence of the truth in that statement?

Think about some examples of the value our culture puts on disposability (paper plates and cups, for example), planned obsolescence (computers, for example), and lack of commitment (live-in relationships, for example).

- ◆ In what ways do you see the values of disposability, obsolescence, and impermanence affecting your capacity for faithfulness toward God? your faithfulness as part of a congregation?
- ◆ Where do you see examples of genuine faithfulness among Christians in the world today?

Along with the culture’s discouragement of faithfulness, Kenneson points out that another obstacle to faithfulness is loyalty or commitment that is misplaced.

- ◆ When does one’s allegiance to such things as family, work, sports, even one’s country, come into conflict with one’s allegiance—that is, faithfulness—to God?

## Bearing the Fruit of Faithfulness in the World

### *Cultivating the Fruit*

Kenneson suggests several resources for cultivating faithfulness as Christians, including:

1. celebrating God's faithful presence in worship; and
2. making and keeping promises to one another.

Consider these responses:

- ◆ Make an effort in worship to hear in the Scriptures read and hymns sung and words spoken, a reminder of a God who is faithful to us and who calls us to be faithful. Try repeating to yourself this line from Psalm 100:5: "For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations."
- ◆ On one side of a sheet of paper list people to whom you have made significant promises or commitments; on the other side of the paper, list people on whom you could rely no matter what. Then consider:
  - What would your life be like if the people on your two lists were not involved in your life and you were not involved in theirs?
  - How has your faithfulness in relationship to others nourished or been nourished by your faithfulness to God?
- ◆ Consider this statement from Kenneson: "*Faithful friendships and marriages have at least one thing in common: they are sustained and nourished by a vision that encompasses more than simply maintaining that relationship*" (p. 193).
  - What does "faithfulness" in a friendship or a marriage require of you, particularly from a Christian perspective?
  - In what ways do the promises you make to a friend or spouse open you to the transforming power of God's grace?
  - When has a marriage or a friendship been a witness to you of God's faithfulness?