

The Faithfulness of God  
Ps 119:90, Ps 145:13-16, Is 55:10-11, 2 Tim 2:11-13  
August 19, 2012

God's faithfulness is so great that it reaches to the very bottom of human despair. That's a very bold statement, but it's true. Today we will examine God's faithfulness so we know that claim is true. However, before we look at God's faithfulness, let's take a look at the depth of human despair.

*I'm the man who has seen trouble, trouble coming from the lash of God's anger.  
He took me by the hand and walked me into pitch-black darkness.  
Yes, he's given me the back of his hand over and over and over again.  
He turned me into a scarecrow of skin and bones, then broke the bones.  
He hemmed me in, ganged up on me, poured on the trouble and hard times.  
He locked me up in deep darkness, like a corpse nailed inside a coffin.  
He shuts me in so I'll never get out, manacles my hands, shackles my feet.  
Even when I cry out and plead for help, he locks up my prayers and throws away the key.  
He sets up blockades with quarried limestone. He's got me cornered.  
He's a prowling bear tracking me down, a lion in hiding ready to pounce.  
He knocked me from the path and ripped me to pieces.  
When he finished, there was nothing left of me.  
He took out his bow and arrows and used me for target practice.  
He shot me in the stomach with arrows from his quiver.  
Everyone took me for a joke, made me the butt of their mocking ballads.  
He forced rotten, stinking food down my throat, bloated me with vile drinks.  
He ground my face into the gravel. He pounded me into the mud.  
I gave up on life altogether. I've forgotten what the good life is like.  
I said to myself, "This is it. I'm finished. God is a lost cause."  
I'll never forget the trouble, the utter lostness, the taste of ashes, the poison I've swallowed.  
I remember it all – oh, how well I remember – the feeling of hitting the bottom. (Lam 3:1-20 Message Bible)*

Have you ever felt that low? Can you identify with any of those complaints? These are the words of one of God's Old Testament prophets. Jeremiah didn't believe in holding anything back. When he prayed to God, he told God exactly what was on his mind. Judging from this prayer, you might get the idea that Jeremiah had given up on God. Jeremiah, sometimes called "the weeping prophet", never lost sight of God's faithfulness. Listen to the next thing that Jeremiah had to say:

*But there's one other thing I remember, and remembering, I keep a grip on hope: God's loyal love couldn't have run out, his merciful love couldn't have dried up. They're created new every morning. How great your faithfulness! (Lam 3:21-23)*

Jeremiah's "grip on hope" was his trust in God's faithfulness. Is your hope grounded in God's faithfulness or do you see the things happening in your life as true reality? What you see as reality depends on where you place your hope. The difficulties of life serve to show us where we place our hope.

Before we begin to look at God's faithfulness, let's consider three roles that hope plays in our lives.

We all depend on **someone** or **something** to hold our lives together. Whether you are a believer or an unbeliever, there is something or someone in your life that gives you significance and keeps you going – even if it's just faith in yourself.

When that someone or something is "**coming through** for us" we experience peace, satisfaction, and hope for the future. When whatever we put our hope in success, money, family, beauty, ability, is going well, we are happy and we say to ourselves, "Life is good!"

When that someone or something "**fails us**" we experience anxiety, dissatisfaction, and despair. Our hope can vanish in a heartbeat. When the job disappears, when the money runs out, when the family explodes, when the beauty fades, when the ability slips, our hope evaporates.

This is serious because a person cannot live without hope. You can live several days without water. You can live several weeks without food. But hope is like oxygen. Without oxygen the body dies almost immediately. Without hope the soul dies almost immediately.

Therefore, where you put your hope is one of the most important decisions you can ever make. If you put your hope in something that is subject to change, sooner or later you will be disappointed. Notice I left no room for another outcome. It's not a matter that you may be disappointed – you will be disappointed. Even if that disappointment is waiting on the other side of the grave.

There is no thing that will not disappoint. There is only one person who will never disappoint. That person is God. Only God possesses faithfulness in an unlimited supply. If you truly place your hope in God, disappointment isn't even the slightest possibility. It can't happen!

At this point, we need to get a working definition of God's faithfulness. To be accurate, we must be sure we don't confuse God's faithfulness with the faithfulness of humans. People can always change and let us down. Not so with God. When we speak of God's faithfulness we are speaking in terms of eternity and perfection. God's faithfulness is like all this other attributes – dependable, trustworthy, resolute, constant, reliable.

God's faithfulness is important when we hurt. At the low points in our lives, we need to know that God is with us and he cares. In times of trouble, our hope will fail unless our hope is in God's faithfulness to keep his promise to never leave us or forsake us – even when we hit rock bottom. God is faithful to his Word, to his promises, to his people. He can be no other. What God has promised us in his Holy Word, you can take to the bank.

If God is that faithful, then surely his faithfulness must show. It does. God shows us his faithfulness in seven different ways.

God shows his faithfulness through his **Creation**. When science claims to discover a new planet or galaxy, it is only noticing what has been there from the beginning. God set the order of the universe and it is so precise that ancient civilizations built towers and pyramids to correspond with the heavenly bodies.

Science only exists because people have discovered the physical laws that God set in motion at Creation. Gravity, the speed of light, thermodynamics, and all the other laws of science aren't accidents. They're God displaying his faithfulness in ordering an environment for the people he created.

God shows his faithfulness through his **people**. When you read the Old Testament, you find that God made promises to Abraham, Noah, and Moses. God also made promises through Isaiah, Jeremiah, Micah, and all the other prophets. All of those promises came true. Whether the promise was for blessing or curse, they all came true.

Jesus promised to build and preserve his church and the church stands. The church of Christ has weathered all the slings and arrows of Satan and it will prevail until Christ returns. Therefore, when Jesus promises to be with his people to the very end of time, it's a fact.

God shows his faithfulness through his **Spirit**. God not only keeps his promises externally, he also keeps his promises internally. Jesus gives us this promise: *"If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you."* (John 14:15-18 NIV)

The Holy Spirit lives in us just as Jesus promised. It is by the power of the Spirit we are able to lead lives pleasing to God and beneficial to our neighbors. The Spirit of God in us is our guarantee that God will keep all of the promises his Word offers to us.

God shows his faithfulness through his **character**. The issue of God's faithfulness is a matter of God putting his reputation on the line. We trust in God because we see his faithfulness in the past. The first time God's faithfulness fails, the first time God reneges on one promise, God ceases to be God. The 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm promises, *"He leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake"* (Ps 23:3). God puts his name and his character on the line with every promise.

God shows his faithfulness through his **Word**. Because God's character is faithful, his statements are always true. God promises that his Word will not go out and come back void, or empty. That means there will always be a consequence which results from contact with God's Word.

Whether that result is a new member in the family of God through faith, or whether it is a sinner running from the light of the truth, there will be a consequence. God promises that the seed of his Word will always reveal the true nature of the soil it lands on.

God shows his faithfulness through his **Son**. The ultimate demonstration of all of God's attributes comes through Jesus Christ. Isaiah describes the Savior to come with these words: "*Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist*" (Is 11:5). In the book of Revelation, John describes the Savior who has come and who will come again with these words: "*I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True*" (Rev 19:11). At the close of history, the name that Jesus has chosen for himself is our reason for eternal hope. We will eternally celebrate the fact that Jesus is Faithful and True.

The final way God shows his faithfulness is through his shaping of **our lives**. The fact that God shapes our lives is where the rubber of God's truth meets the road of our experience. The evidence we've seen so far has been objective. God shaping our lives is personal, it's subjective. This is God's personal and individual contact with each of his children. God uses this contact with each of us to bring the truth of his faithfulness to our heads and our hearts.

God shapes our lives by being faithful when we are **weak**. None of us are perfect. Our weaknesses get us in trouble, damage our relationships, and keep us from being all that we can be. God knows our personal weaknesses and he stands ready to give us what we lack.

It is in our moments of weakness where we are most likely to give in to despair. But when we are weak, when we feel we don't have what it takes, if we call on the Lord he will be faithful and support us in our weakness. When, with God's help, you conquer your weakness, your life takes on a new a shape.

God shapes us by revealing his faithfulness when we are **tempted**. Everyone is tempted and it's important we know the difference between temptation and sin. Temptation turns into sin only when we give in to the temptation.

Here's how that works. Let's say you go to a party and on the table is a beautiful piece of chocolate cake. Everything in your being screams for you to eat that piece of chocolate cake. Everything except that little voice that keeps reminding you about that thing you call your diet. So far it's just temptation. You walk around the table several times admiring that piece of chocolate cake. It's still just temptation but you're playing a dangerous game. Finally, you grab that cake and down it in two bites. Now you crossed the line.

There is a piece of chocolate cake in everyone's life. Whether it's alcohol, drugs, an affair, gossip, stealing, or pornography doesn't matter. Everyone has some temptation that screams for them to indulge. At your point of temptation, God will give you the strength to walk away – if you just ask. God has promised not to let you be tempted

beyond what you can bear but you can only master your temptation with his help. When, with God's help, you master your temptation, your life takes on a new shape.

God shapes us by showing his faithfulness when **we sin**. We can conquer all temptation with God's help but we don't always avail ourselves of God's help. Quite often we just cave in and dive head first into the things our sinful nature lusts after. God has promised that when that happens he will forgive.

St John tells us, *"If we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:9). God has promised to not only forgive our sin but to forget our sin. God offers us a clean slate with our confession, repentance, and faith. When you truly know and believe that God has completely forgiven you, your life takes on a new shape.

With all this faithfulness on God's part, what should be the response on our part? If God's faithfulness is to be meaningful to us, we must respond in the proper ways.

First, put your **past behind** you. No matter what skeletons haunt your past, if you have confessed and repented, God has forgiven those sins and removed them from you as far as the east is from the west. That's very important. That means those things are gone. There is no reason to beat yourself up over the past. There might still be negative consequences from your actions, but the important thing is God has been faithful and forgiven you. Put your past to rest – God has.

Second, bring your present **problems** and **failures** to the Lord. God is interested in helping you with everything in your life that is too big for you to manage on your own. Jesus tells us: *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light"* (Matt 11:28-30 NIV),

There is not one thing in your life, that if you take it to God, he will not help with. The promise of Jesus is the promise of God's faithfulness. Bad moods, inner struggles, self-condemnation, selfishness, Jesus says bring these things to me and I will faithfully walk with you so that you can overcome your burdens and live in the joy of God.

Third, place your **hope** for the future in the **One** who will never let you down. This is a big one. We began today listening to Jeremiah's lament. Anyone who puts their trust in something or someone other and God will end up there. The proper way to respond to God's faithfulness is to put our complete hope in God's faithfulness. When it seems like the world is closing in around you and there is no hope, remember the words of Jeremiah:

*"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."* (Lam 3:21-24 NIV)

The last way to respond to God's faithfulness is to **tell someone** how God has been faithful to you. God's faithfulness is too good to keep to yourself. Sharing your story of God's faithfulness is one of the most effective witnesses you can perform. The news of God's faithfulness is news that the unbelieving world is literally dying to hear.

It is God's faithfulness that validates and supports God's goodness, his sovereignty, his holiness, his wisdom, his justice, and his love. That is why, when all is said and done, we can bask in the Good News of the old hymn, "Great is thy faithfulness, Lord unto me."