

Faithfulness

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August 9, 2026 | 1 Corinthians 4:2; Galatians 5:22-23; Matthew 25:14-30

Prepared from the spoken message and lightly edited for readability. Scripture quotations and spoken phrasing are preserved as delivered.

It's a privilege to be with you today. I bring you greetings from your brothers and sisters in upstate New York, near the capital of New York, and we are so excited to be here today. My son and I, Pastor Jarrett has been such a dear, dear friend for many, many years, and it's exciting to see in person what God is doing here at Champion Forest.

Has there ever been a time in your life when you were disappointed to discover that something wasn't what you thought it was?

I remember every summer when I'd go visit my grandmother, she would cut me off a slice of this pumpkin pie. I mean, it was just delicious. And there was one thing that I wanted to be on top of that pumpkin pie. I knew exactly where it was. You know where it was? It was in the refrigerator.

So I'd go in there, I'd get the Cool Whip, and I'd open it up. But here's the problem: it wasn't Cool Whip on the inside. You know what it was? It was spaghetti. It's like, "Ah, man, that's an interesting pie topping."

Then Sunday after church, we'd be sitting at her table, and we would have baked potatoes. She'd forget one of the best toppings for a potato. She'd say, "Hey, why don't you go to the fridge and get the sour cream?"

I'd get the sour cream. Of course, I'd open it up, and it's not sour cream. You know what it is? It's beans on the inside. And, of course, she'd yell at me. She's like, "That's not the sour cream. That's the beans."

I'm like, "Well, excuse me. The label on the outside clearly says sour cream."

We'd go get the Country Crock margarine. It's not margarine. You know what it is? It's gravy from breakfast. It's like I entered the refrigerator multiverse, right? It's like you can't believe anything that you are seeing. It's not what you were expecting.

Of course, the greatest betrayal of childhood was this metal tin that, on the outside of it, said cookies. But you opened it up, and it's not cookies. What is it? It's a sewing kit on the inside, right? How many of your grandmothers did that to you as well growing up?

How does every grandmother in America get the same starter kit? How do they know, "This is how you are supposed to be a grandmother"? I don't know, but it's the same thing in New York and the same thing here in Texas.

Of course, our grandmothers were just trying to be frugal. There was no harm in what they were doing. It might have been disappointing and maybe even confusing for us growing up, but it was harmless.

That is not the case with what we're talking about today. When the outside label doesn't match what's on the inside, that has the potential to do tremendous damage not only to our own soul, but also to a watching world that's looking to see what it means to know and follow Jesus.

The Fruit of Faithfulness

I want to talk to you today about this idea of faithfulness. I think that's another way we could say that what's on the outside of the container of our life matches what's on the inside of our life. We would call that faithfulness.

When you think about the fruit of the Spirit, the Apostle Paul writes in Galatians 5:22-23, and he says, "This is the kind of fruit that the Holy Spirit produces in your life and in my life." Then he goes on and lists nine different things. One of those, right near the end, is what? Faithfulness. Faithfulness.

Just to encourage you about the fruit of the Spirit, I love what the Apostle Paul says. He says, "The Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in your life and in my life."

Do you know why that's good news? It's good news because these nine things are not our self-improvement list. This isn't like, "These are all the things that are wrong with you and me and all the things that you need to fix." The good news is that the Holy Spirit is at work even right now, in this moment, producing this kind of fruit.

Now, it might be confusing to you to say, "Why does it say the fruit of the Spirit, singular, and then go on to list nine things? Why don't we call it the fruits of the Spirit?"

Do you know the one thing that the Holy Spirit is trying to produce in your life and in my life? He's trying to produce the character of Jesus. The character of Jesus looks like these nine different things. The facets of Jesus' character consist of these nine things. Today, I want us to look at this facet of faithfulness.

As a working definition for us today, I think we could say that faithfulness is becoming the type of people who are worthy of trust, of being trusted. Is that true of your life? Is that true of my life?

When we say faithfulness, we're not saying that you are flawless, that you'll never make a mistake or that you'll never break a promise. There will be certain kinds of situations or circumstances that happen that could keep you and me from keeping our word. But the key with faithfulness is that this would be something rare and not something regular.

When we're talking about faithfulness, we're talking about becoming the type of people that others aren't disappointed they trusted. Is that true of our lives? Faithfulness is being the type of people who are worthy of being trusted.

But maybe we could dial it in a little bit more. The root of the word faithfulness comes from the word faith. When we think about faith, what are we saying? We're saying that faith is trusting that God will keep His word. He'll keep His word.

That's one of the things that gives you comfort and gives me comfort. It's one of the things that strengthens our faith, knowing that you and I follow and serve the type of God who keeps His word and keeps His promises.

There are certain promises that God has made to each one of His children that strengthen our faith. Maybe you're in financial need right now, and you're just like, "I don't know how this is going to happen. I don't know how this is going to work out. How am I even going to get back-to-school clothes for my kids?"

It gives us comfort and strength to know the promises that God has made, that He's faithful to supply all of our needs according to His riches in Christ Jesus.

Maybe you feel like your back is up against a wall. You don't know which way to turn. You don't know what to do, and you're just thinking, "Man, how could anything good come out of this situation?"

Of course, we know that one of the promises God has made to us is that He will take all things together and work them for good - for the good of His kingdom and for the good of what He's trying to do in your life and in my life. God promises to bring good out of every situation.

Faith is that we believe God will keep His word and the promises He's made to you and me, and it strengthens us. Faithfulness is you and me becoming the type of people who keep our word.

Why? Because it's a reflection of Jesus. Remember, what is the fruit of the Spirit? It's the Holy Spirit developing the fruit of Jesus, the character of Jesus, in your life and in my life. As you and I become the type of people who are worthy of trust, we're reflecting God. We're reflecting the Spirit. We're reflecting our Heavenly Father. We're reflecting Jesus and His love for you and me.

The Parable of the Talents

There are lots of stories Jesus told about faithfulness, and I want us to look at one. It's found in Matthew 25. If you have your Bibles, you can turn there with me today. We're going to start in verse 14. You can open your digital Bible. If you don't have either one of those, you can follow along with us here on the screen.

It's right in the middle of three stories Jesus is telling in this chapter. He's saying, "This is what the kingdom of heaven is like," and then, of course, what it looks like when it's worked out in your life and in mine.

Jesus says this:

Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them.

To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey.

— Matthew 25:14-15

You may have heard of this as the parable of the talents. Picture this scenario with me: A boss, an employer, comes to his employees and says, "I'm going on vacation, and I want to entrust a division or a department to you. When I come back, I want to see a return."

To one of his employees, he gives five bags of gold. To another, he gives two bags of gold. To another employee, he only gives one bag of gold.

The NIV here kind of flattens, or maybe we could say dulls, the meaning of this idea of the bags of gold.

Scholars tell us that a talent is equivalent to 20 years' worth of wages.

How much do you make a year? Just shout it out. No, just kidding. You don't have to do it.

But think about how much you make a year, and multiply that times 20. You'd be like, "That's a lot of money. That's a lot of money."

Let's just take, for round math, \$50,000 a year times 20. How much is that? You're like, "I don't know." It's a million dollars. It's a million dollars.

Imagine this boss is giving one of his employees \$5 million, another \$2 million and another \$1 million. That's a lot of money. Can you imagine your boss going to you tomorrow and saying, "Hey, I'm going to give you \$5 million"?

You're like, "I like my boss."

But then he's like, "No, no. It's not for you. I'm entrusting this to you, and I want you to grow it. I want you to grow this division, this department. I want you to grow my business. I'm entrusting it to you."

How would you feel? You might be like, "Ooh, I don't know. That's a lot of pressure." That's what each one of these servants was feeling in this moment. They were entrusted with a lot. It wasn't a little bit of money. Even the person who only got one bag of gold, which we would say was \$1 million, got a significant bag of gold.

The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more.

So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more.

But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them.

The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. "Master," he said, "you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more."

— Matthew 25:19-20

He doubled it. And notice the response that Jesus records:

His master replied, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!"

— Matthew 25:21

He doesn't say, "Well done, my good and successful servant." He doesn't say, "Well done, my good and impressive servant." He says, "Well done, my good and faithful servant."

The man with two bags of gold also came. "Master," he said, "you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more."

His master replied, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!"

— Matthew 25:22-23

That's something each one of us as followers of Jesus hopes to hear one day, isn't it? When we stand before Jesus, we hope to hear Jesus say to us that we were faithful with what He entrusted to us.

But the story, of course, takes a turn.

Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. "Master," he said, "I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed.

So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you."

— Matthew 25:24-25

Jesus records this response:

His master replied, "You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed?

Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.

So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags.

For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them."

— Matthew 25:26-29

Then Jesus says this. It's the stuff of nightmares:

And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

— Matthew 25:30

We read that, and we're like, "I'm a little confused here. What is Jesus saying? Is Jesus saying that if you and I miss one Sunday of serving, we're going to hell? What is Jesus saying here?"

There are two important things. First, Jesus calls him lazy. He was talking about what he had done, or what we should say he didn't do. Second, He says that he is wicked. He's talking about what's inside the container.

On the outside, this servant had the label that he was faithful to his master. But on the inside, it was totally different. He's bad-mouthing his master. He's not working for the master. He's not doing anything for him.

Jesus is not saying that faithfulness is the way you and I earn our way to heaven. That's not what He's saying. He is saying that faithfulness is a fruit of you and me being connected to the Master. There's a huge difference.

Maybe some of you here today are new to church. Maybe it's been a long time since you've been to church. Maybe you are like this third servant, where you have the label of a follower of Jesus on the outside.

You come to church. Maybe you serve. Maybe you come on Christmas and Easter. Maybe you even give a little bit of money and help out some in the community. You have this label of servant or Christian on the outside, and most people would think that you are a Christian. But you know that, on the inside, you don't truly have a relationship with Jesus.

If that's you today, first of all, I'm so glad that you're here. If that's where you are right now in your relationship with Jesus, at the end of this message I want to give you an opportunity to decide to follow Him.

For the rest of us, I think it's important, as we think about this story Jesus is telling, that each person is given a different amount. But every person has the same opportunity. No matter how much we're given, we all have the same opportunity to do what? To be faithful.

For some people, that's the reason they say they're not faithful. "Well, I didn't have the same starting point they had. Man, I wish I had those opportunities. Their parents really set them up for success. That would be nice to have, but I wasn't given that. Because I wasn't given that, I don't have to be faithful."

Jesus' story is not that everybody is given the same thing. In fact, Jesus says that everybody is given different amounts according to their abilities. He's asking, "Are you being faithful with what God has entrusted to you?"

We are faithful not to earn God's love or approval, but as a reflection of God's Spirit living in you and in me. As people unpack our lives, what should they see inside of us? They should see the character of Jesus that we know as the fruit of His Spirit living inside of you and living inside of me.

No matter what we've been given, we can always be faithful.

The Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 4:2:

Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.

— 1 Corinthians 4:2

One of the characteristics of being a manager or a leader, whether in spiritual leadership or secular leadership, is that you would be found faithful.

Sometimes people come to me and say, "Pastor, I'm coming up for this new job interview, and I just really, really want to get this job." Or they say, "How do I become a leader here at the church?"

The first thing I want to say is, "Before we pray about that, let me ask you: Have you been faithful with what has already been entrusted to you?"

Because if you haven't been faithful, if you're always showing up late, shirking responsibilities and trying to do just the bare minimum, why in the world would anyone, secular or spiritual, ever want to entrust more responsibilities to you? You haven't shown yourself to be faithful.

The same thing applies, even more importantly, to the spiritual things God has entrusted to us. Are we being faithful with those things? Sometimes we say, "God, I want You to do something big in my life and through my life." Well, are you being faithful with the small things God has already put into your hands?

Hundreds and Thousands of Yeses

When I think about faithfulness, do you know what I often think about? I think about grapes. Do you like grapes?

How many of you are green-grape people? Raise your hand. Okay, that's quite a few. That's more than I expected.

How many of you are red-grape people? Okay, I think the green grapes might - well, I don't know. Hold them up again, red grapes. Okay, that's pretty good.

I'm personally a red-grape person. I asked Pastor Stephen, and he said that he was a red-grape person. I asked Pastor Jarrett, and he said that he's a green-grape person and that he puts them in the freezer. He said he loves to eat them.

But can you imagine going to H-E-B, taking one grape to the checkout register and saying, "That's all I want. One grape"?

I think maybe someone should try that, video it, post it on social media later and tag me. Let's see how it goes. I wonder what their response would be if you just went up there. They'd be like, "Are you pranking me?" They'd be looking for the cell phone somewhere to see what happened.

I wonder if they'd just be like, "Just take it and go. We're not going to charge you the two cents for it." I definitely think something would happen, right?

No one buys one grape. We buy a bunch of grapes.

Can I tell you today that faithfulness is not just one yes? It's hundreds of yeses. It's thousands of yeses.

Sometimes people think, "Well, to get married, all I need is one big yes." That's true. But can I tell you what gets you to your 50th wedding anniversary? Hundreds and thousands of faithful yeses.

One yes can make you a parent. Hundreds and thousands of faithful yeses make you a mother or a father your children want to have a relationship with, and that makes it easier for them to follow Jesus.

One yes starts a relationship with Jesus. But hundreds and thousands of yeses are what make you and me disciples of Jesus.

So many times we get it confused and think, "Well, I'm faithful because I signed up to serve one Sunday." That's important. But one time doesn't make us a servant. Hundreds of times faithfully serving behind the scenes, where we're not doing it for credit, are what develop a servant's heart in you and me.

One big gift doesn't create a spirit of generosity in us. Every single time you and I get paid, honoring Christ and putting Him and His kingdom first, hundreds and thousands of little yeses make us faithful, generous people.

One amazing Easter service doesn't make us a faithful church. Thousands of yeses and thousands of

services, week in and week out, showing up to share and show the love of Jesus with other people, begin the process of making us a faithful church to Jesus and His kingdom.

We live in a culture that doesn't value faithfulness. Would you agree with me on that? And I'm not just talking about outside the church. I'm talking about inside the church, where Christians will share the same memes that non-Christians share.

The memes say, "Well, if someone doesn't make you happy, leave them. Life's too short to be with anyone who doesn't make you happy."

And I think, "But what about faithfulness? What about faithfulness?"

Or it's totally acceptable to ghost people and call it protecting our peace. "I know I said I would show up, but something else came up. Sorry. These things happen. I got a better opportunity. This sounds like way more fun than helping you move."

Faithfulness becomes a casualty for us.

You see, it's not just signing up. It's showing up. Pastor Jarrett told me about your amazing generosity through the NEXT campaign. It's not just showing up one time. It's showing up repeatedly over this three-year process.

It's very exciting to sign up one time. But it's not just signing up. It's showing up. Signing up is the one time. This represents faithfulness. This represents showing up.

Do you know how you can tell that you are entering an era of faithfulness? Do you know what the beginning of faithfulness is? The beginning of faithfulness is when the excitement has worn off.

You don't need faithfulness on your honeymoon. There's lots of excitement about all of that. But, man, you need faithfulness to get to that 50-year mark. You need faithfulness as you begin to follow Christ in that journey. Faithfulness begins when the excitement has worn off.

Some of you know exactly what I'm talking about. Some of you are like, "I can't believe this is what we're talking about today."

Do you know why this is what we're talking about today and why you're here? It's because the Holy Spirit wants to speak to you. The Holy Spirit is saying, "You're about to quit something of significant importance because the excitement has worn off. There's this temporary pain that's more difficult than the eternal reward that it's gaining for you and what it's accomplishing for God's kingdom."

Do you know there's an enemy who wants you to quit as well? There's an enemy who wants to say, "No one cares. No one sees. No one appreciates. So why don't you quit?"

But the Holy Spirit is saying, "No, no, no. I want you to be faithful. Keep being faithful. Keep being faithful."

Do you know how you can tell when faithfulness is growing in your life? If the beginning of it is when the excitement is gone, faithfulness is growing when quitting looks easier.

All of a sudden, we say, "Well, I've been married for 10 years, and I'm still young enough. I think I could start over if I needed to. Maybe next time will be different. Maybe next time will be easier."

Can I tell you, quitting will always look easier than being faithful. And, of course, the more we quit, what does it do? It begins to develop a pattern in our lives. It begins to develop this thing where you and I aren't known for our faithfulness. We're known for quitting.

What does it look like when people get close to our lives? We have "follower of Jesus" on the outside of our container. When they open up the inside of our lives, do they find Jesus?

Can People Count on You?

Let me ask you two questions as I wrap up today.

The first question is: Are you the type of person people can count on?

Maybe this will help. If you signed up to volunteer this weekend, maybe for the first service or maybe this service, and your leader here at Champion Forest saw your name, did they sleep well last night?

Or did they stay up all night in prayer, like, "Please, Lord Jesus, let them show up. Let their alarm go off. We need them to show up. We're counting on them"?

Are we the type of people who have an asterisk beside our name, where people say, "Well, maybe they'll be here. Maybe they won't. They're really good at signing up, but I don't know that they're really good at showing up"?

As followers of Jesus who have a label of faithfulness on the outside, are we becoming the type of people that others can count on?

Here's the second question I want you to think about: What does it take for you and me to break our yes?

For every single one of us, it's impossible to be faithful 100 percent of the time. Maybe you signed up for something and someone got sick. Maybe there's a health issue and you just can't do it.

Again, what did we say? We said faithfulness is not flawlessness. We said these things should be rare and not regular.

So what does it take for you to break your yes? Is it one of those things where people are like, "Oh, well, that's just them. Maybe they're here, maybe they're not"?

We have a lady at our church. You heard Pastor Stephens say that we have five services, and she volunteers for all five services every single weekend. She's just a faithful, faithful volunteer. She loves Jesus and loves what God is doing in New York, and we're so thankful for her.

Well, one day she doesn't show up. It's the 8:30 service, and all of a sudden people get alarmed. They're like, "This is not like Miss Connie. Something's wrong with her. We need to find out."

So they gave her a call. Do you know what they found out? She was in a car accident. Thank the Lord, she was okay and she was fine. But people instantly knew by her character, the reflection of the character of Jesus, that something was wrong because she wasn't there. It was out of character for her not to be faithful.

What does it look like for you and me? Would people put an asterisk by our name and say, "Well, they probably just slept in"? Or would they say, "Oh no, something is definitely wrong"?

Do the Next Faithful Thing

When we think about faithfulness, the good news is that God's faithfulness is not based on our performance. Do you know what God's faithfulness is based on? It's based on His character.

Can we just say, "Amen"? Can we just say, "Thank You, Jesus, that it's not based on how faithful I am. He continues to be faithful"?

Now, you might be saying, "Well, Pastor, I'm a little confused here, because it sounds like you just spent the last 20 minutes telling me about how I need to be faithful, and now this kind of sounds like it doesn't even matter if I'm faithful or not."

No, no, no. We're saying:

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

— Hebrews 13:8

We say that every single day His mercies and faithfulness are new to us. God's faithfulness to us isn't dependent upon how faithful we are, but faithfulness matters.

Why does faithfulness matter? Because it's the fruit of God living in our lives. Faithfulness is not how we earn our way into heaven. Faithfulness is not how you and I make God like us, love us or want to have a relationship with us.

While we were still sinners, Christ loved us at our worst. Faithfulness is not something that makes us more pleasing to God. It's not what we're doing to earn our salvation. Instead, faithfulness is one of the ways we show our salvation. We show the difference Jesus has made in our lives. We show what the Holy Spirit is producing in your life and my life.

When you find yourself at a place where you want to quit, can I tell you, you are exactly at the right place you need to be. Right there in that moment, the Holy Spirit is producing inside of you and me the character of Jesus.

Now, I get that, as we think about faithfulness, some of you might be thinking, "Pastor, if this is faithfulness, and it's thousands of little yeses, I don't know that I can do that. It took everything I had to get here today. It took everything I have to be sitting beside the person I'm sitting beside right now. I don't know that I have the strength to do this."

Can I encourage you this morning? You don't have to do all of this. Do you know what you have to do? You

have to do this.

Do you know what this is? The next faithful thing.

Just do the next faithful thing. You do that today and go to bed. You wake up in the morning, and what do you do? The next faithful thing. Then you go to bed.

You wake up the next day, and what do you do? The next faithful thing.

If you do that, guess what happens? You create a life of faithfulness. By doing what? Doing the next faithful thing.

So what is it? What is that next faithful thing that you want to quit, that seems too hard, that seems too difficult, that seems too impossible?

What if Jesus brought you here today so that His Holy Spirit could tell you, "Don't quit. Keep being faithful. Let the Holy Spirit produce this fruit in your life and in my life."