



FAITHFULNESS

When Chris thinks of **stability**, he thinks of his dad. He's Mr. Stability, the person you can count on in any situation. He takes care of houses. He takes care of people. He led family Bible time with Chris and his brother every night when they were kids, using My Very First Bible illustrated by Russ Flint. Chris's mom and dad stuck it out in the same church for decades through drama and painful church splits.

Stability. Consistency. Reliability. That's at the heart of **faithfulness**. The Hebrew word for "faith" is connected to the Greek word translated "faithfulness" in Galatians 5:22. Earlier in Galatians, Paul cites the Hebrew prophet Habakkuk's words that "the righteous will live by faith" (3:5 ESV, cf. Habakkuk 2:4). The Hebrew word for "faith" in that passage is *emunah* (אֱמוּנָה), which literally means "sturdiness."⁹

A good wall has *emunah*. You can steady yourself against it. The word is used metaphorically to describe firm character and conviction: someone you can count on. When we bear the fruit of faithfulness, we become people that others can count on.

FAITHFUL TO THE COVENANT

Faithfulness is also connected to the idea of **covenant**. In our cultural context, the closest analogue to a biblical covenant is marriage. We understand that when you are married to someone, you should be **faithful** to them. In older versions of wedding vows, this line was included: "Thereto I pledge thee my **faith**" or (even earlier) "Thereto I pledge thee my **troth**." Spouses were pledging to **be true** to each other.

Throughout the Scriptures, covenant is about God's relationship with his covenant people: Israel, the descendants of Abraham. One of the key moments in this covenant story comes when God gives the Torah to Moses:

"So Moses chiseled out two stone tablets like the first ones and went up Mount Sinai early in the morning, as the LORD had commanded him; and he carried the two stone tablets in his hands. 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. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.'

"Moses bowed to the ground at once and worshiped. 'Lord,' he said, 'if I have found favor in your eyes, then let the Lord go with us. Although this is a stiff-necked people, forgive our wickedness and our sin, and take us as your inheritance.'

"Then the Lord said: 'I am making a covenant with you. Before all your people I will do wonders never before done in any nation in all the world.'"

—Exodus 34:4-10 NIV

A name in Scripture is more than a label for someone. It's a summary of their heart. Just as Jesus summarized his heart as "gentle and lowly" (Matthew 11:29 ESV), God gives a summary of his heart here as "compassionate . . . gracious . . . slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands" (Exodus 34:6-7 NIV).

God is saying, "I will be true to you."



What do we make of God saying that “he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation” (Exodus 34:7 NIV)? God is speaking to the reality of the consequences of sin. When there’s a pattern of sin in a family or a community, the sins of fathers and mothers **do** get passed down to the third and fourth generation. These patterns are also something God can redeem.

PENTECOST: FROM THE COURSE OF LIFE TO THE SOURCE OF LIFE

God gave the Torah to his people so they could reflect his character of love in the way they treated one another. The Torah included a calendar of feasts and fasts. One of these feasts became known as **Pentecost**, which commemorated both the harvest and this moment with Moses: the giving of the Law and the revelation of God’s character in his name.

As disciples of Jesus, we remember that Pentecost is also the feast when the Holy Spirit was given to the early believers after Jesus’ death and resurrection. It’s what kicked off the spread of the Good News and the church throughout the known world.

It’s not an accident that it’s the same feast day. God revealed his character to his people in the giving of the Torah, the course of life. God now gives us his Spirit, the source of life, who can realize that character **in us** from the inside out. The Law shows us what we need to do but it doesn’t give us the power to do it. But the Spirit we receive through faith in Jesus can change our hearts, bringing his fruit about inside of us.

God’s faithfulness is seen in the gift of the Holy Spirit. He is fulfilling his covenant to his people by sending Jesus and sending the Holy Spirit, so that his people **can** walk in the course of life. The fact that we can become faithful, a little like God is, is itself proof of God’s faithfulness to us.

TRUE TO EACH OTHER

Who are we supposed to be faithful to? The primary context of Paul’s words is the people of God in their relationships with one another. We’re all members of the same covenant.

It’s hard for us to get our minds around what it means to be united to one another in a covenant. A covenant is not like a gym membership. It’s not something that we autonomously choose and can casually leave. It’s closer to marriage than to that.

We can be true to each other because God is true to us.

PRACTICE TO TRY: SHOW UP AT CHURCH

It’s not a law to show up at church on Sunday. We don’t show up at church because it’s a law; we show up at church because it’s our family. Part of being faithful to one another is being present enough—showing up enough—so that we can open up our hearts to each other and form a measure of mutual reliability and trust.

PRACTICE TO TRY: SHOW UP AT WORK

At work, we may not have the same sense of a covenant bond with our coworkers who are not fellow believers. But there’s still the question of whether we, in our character, are faithful. Can people count on us? Are we trustworthy? Will we keep faith in the things entrusted to us?

Paul concludes his description of the fruit of the Spirit by saying, “Against such things there is no law” (5:23 NIV). When you open up your company handbook, you’re not going to find a page that says “Sorry, you can’t be self-controlled in this workplace. Sorry, you can’t be faithful in this workplace.” You are always free to bring the fruit of the Spirit, including faithfulness, to your workplace.



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You can use faithfulness at work as a diagnostic for your soul:

Can your boss count on you?

Can your coworkers rely on you?

Can your clients trust you?

If not, that's an area where the Spirit can work in you to bring more of the fruit of the Spirit in your life and work.

It's all about the small steps we take to grow in character. It's not about big heroic things; it's about showing up at work today, doing the next right thing.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Is there a person you know who embodies stability and sturdiness? What is it like when they are around?

When you imagine God, does the God you imagine fit the description from Exodus 34: "compassionate . . . gracious . . . slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands"? If not, why do you think that is?

What would it look like to open your heart to the Holy Spirit to form God's faithful character in you? Is that something you desire?

What does showing up at church look like for you these days? Could you take a next step to be present to those who are bonded to you in God's covenant?

What does showing up at work look like for you these days? What's the "next right thing" for you to do at work?