

**Pastor Jim Lloyd**

**Date: November 11, 2018**

**Title: Fruit of the Spirit Series – 8. Faithfulness: Incredible Consistency**

**Text: Matthew 25:14-30**

Our series key verses are Galatians 5:22-23. The fruit of the Spirit has nine parts or components and is a trio of threes. The first trio is love, joy and peace. These deal, to a large extent, with our relationship to God. If our relationship with God is right, we will have love, joy and peace in our lives. The second trio is patience, kindness and goodness. These three attributes greatly concern our relationships with other people. When these are present in our lives, our relationships tend to be healthier. If we are consistently patient, kind and given to goodness, we have removed much of what puts us at odds with others. The third and final trio is composed of faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. This trio pertains to our relationship to OURSELVES or what kind of people we are. Today we look at FAITHFULNESS. (Read Today's Text.) Faithfulness results in God's favor and blessing. If you've ever been to Yellowstone National Park, you probably took the time to see its greatest attraction. I'm talking about that geyser known as Old Faithful. A geyser, as you know, is a natural spring characterized by an intermittent upward gush of water, as high as 200 feet in the air. I'm told that to see one in action is a breathtaking experience. With most geysers, you don't know EXACTLY WHEN they will erupt, but with Old Faithful you can just about set your watch by it. Since 1870, when it was first identified by an expedition of westward explorers, there have been more than one million eruptions recorded – that comes down to one eruption every 35 to 120 minutes. The eruption of any geyser would be fascinating to watch, but this one is especially fascinating because of its INCREDIBLE CONSISTENCY. Day in, day out, hour after hour, whether the weather is good or bad, whether the park is open or closed, whether there is a big crowd, small crowd or NO crowd – Old Faithful does its thing! It doesn't even matter who's in the Oval office, or who controls the House or Senate, or what's trending on Twitter, or how the dollar stacks up against foreign currency – Old Faithful erupts 17 or so times EVERY day. And people find that kind of consistency remarkable enough to get in the car and go watch it happen. There's something to be said for consistency, for faithfulness.

We're in week eight of our series on the Fruit of the Spirit. For the last eight weeks we've been looking at each quality that is evident in the Spirit-filled life, and we've seen how each one is unique. Joy is an emotion that you can experience daily. Peace can also be considered an emotion. Kindness is an attitude that drives our interactions with others. Goodness, as we saw last week, has nothing at all to do with our feelings, but is an action that is determined on a case-by-case basis. Faithfulness, as we will see today, is unique in that it is a title that one earns over the course of time. You could say that it is a title reserved for the last lap of life's race. Faithful is not just a one-time momentary event. It is a day-in, day-out process of consistency. Eugene Peterson, who just recently passed, defined faithfulness as "a long obedience in the same direction."

**1. THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD.** In GOD we see the perfect example of faithfulness. He is faithful TO HIMSELF, meaning that, He never does anything that is inconsistent with His character. *"Who is like you, LORD God Almighty? You, LORD, are mighty, and your faithfulness surrounds you"* (Psalm 89:8). He is faithful TO HIS WORD, meaning that, He keeps His promises. *"The Lord is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all He has made"* (Psalm 145:13). And, He is faithful TO HIS PEOPLE, faithful to take care of them, to watch over them. You see this again and again all throughout scripture. *"He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful"* (1 Corinthians 1:9). When we face temptation, He is faithful. *"And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it"* (1 Corinthians 10:13). When we fall or fail and confess, he is faithful. *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:9). When we are under attack, he is faithful. *"But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one"* (2 Thessalonians 3:3). I could go on and on, but suffice it to say that God calls us to be faithful, because he is faithful, and that faithfulness is demonstrated to us again and again and again. That's because... *"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness"* (Lamentations 3:23). Just as you can count on the sun to rise each and every day, you can count on the faithfulness of God's mercy and His steadfast love, each and every day. He is faithful, thus He wants you to be faithful. Some of you may be ready to say, "Oops, too late. If faithfulness is consistency in character, I'm the most inconsistent person I know. If faithfulness is keeping one's promises, I've racked up far too many broken promises. If faithfulness is dependability, I'm not proud of my record there, either." None of us are as faithful in every area as we ought to be, or as we want to be.

That's why it's important for us to remember that earning the title of "faithful servant" is an extended journey. Over the course of time we learn to grow in faithfulness. It's a "long obedience in the same direction."

**2. CULTIVATE THE QUALITY OF FAITHFULNESS.** Today I want to talk to you about how to cultivate the quality of faithfulness. We'll take a closer look at the parable that we read earlier (our text). In this story, Jesus tells us about a man who was about to leave on a journey, so he called his servants and gave them a certain amount of money, each according to his ability. One servant received five talents. Another servant was given two talents. Another servant was given one talent. A talent is a measure of money worth about a thousand dollars – the equivalent of several fortunes back then – so each servant, even the last one, had quite a bit of capital to work with. The one who was given five talents doubled his money and turned it into ten. The master said, in effect, "Good job! You were faithful in this, I'll give you even more." The servant who was given two talents doubled his money and turned it into four. The master said, again, "Good job; now I'll give you even more." The servant who was given one talent said, in effect, "Master, I was afraid of what you would do if I lost this money, so I just buried it in the ground to keep it safe. So, here's the money you gave me, it's all there, you can have it back, and we're even-stein." The master said, "No, we're not even-stein. You're wicked and lazy. You could have at least put it in the bank and let it earn interest. So give your talent to the one who has ten, and you go outside, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth." There are a number of lessons to be learned from this story:

**A. Start today with what you have, even if it doesn't seem like much.** We have a tendency to think that we have less to work with than we actually have. That's likely because we often compare ourselves unfavorably with others: "Look at their abundance, look at my little." I recently read the results of a survey in which most millionaires (70%) don't consider themselves wealthy. Maybe that was the problem with the servant who received only one talent. But, as I mentioned, in those days a talent was a lot of money – a semi fortune. You could do a lot with it. God will never call you to be faithful with what He HASN'T given you. He only expects you to be faithful with what you have. I've heard people say – and I've said it myself: "If I just had more money, I would manage it well." But the truth is, there is nothing stopping us from doing our best with the little we have today. I've heard people say: "If I just had a decent job, I would work harder." Or, "If I could just get married, I would be sexually pure." Or, "If I could live in a better house, I would take care of it." With this attitude, we are trying to reverse the faithfulness equation. You can't say, "God, give me abundance and I will manage it well." That's not what faithfulness is. Faithfulness says: "I will do my very best with what I have, even if, at times, it doesn't seem like much." Many times we hear about a movie star, or a politician, or an athlete, or even a minister, who seems to have it all and yet throws it away with foolish decisions and reckless behavior. And we wonder: Why would someone squander such a huge opportunity? It's only natural to ask this question, but the real question we must ask ourselves is: Why should I risk squandering MY opportunity? Even if my opportunity isn't as visible as theirs, why should I squander my chance? You may not be a household name, you may be serving in obscurity, but GOD IS CALLING YOU TO BE FAITHFUL TODAY WITH WHAT YOU HAVE – no matter how your holdings compare with those of others. You can be sure of this: When you're faithful with what you have, you open the door for greater opportunities. This is why Jesus said... *"You have been faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things."* If you want to earn the label faithful, you begin today with what you have – even if it doesn't seem like much. **B. Do your best with what you've got, even when no one is looking.** A key phrase in today's text is found in verse 15. After the master distributed the talents to his servants, Jesus said... *"Then he went on his journey."* In other words, he let them do their job without supervision. If you need someone looking over your shoulder 24/7, in order to do what's right, you will have a hard time developing the quality of faithfulness, because much of what you do is unobserved. H. Jackson Brown said, "Our character is what we do when we think no one is looking." Your greatest strides in the quality of faithfulness will be made without an audience. Here's an important distinction we all need to make. I believe that there should be an accountability structure in place for everyone. I'm talking about the "checks and balances" we establish to make sure we stay on track. We all would do well to answer to someone. However, no amount of accountability can overcome a LACK of character, and our faithfulness is an extension of our character. There will be times in your life when the master, so to speak, is on a journey. And it may feel like no one is watching – not even God! And it may feel like He's never coming back, and all you've got to work with is this little amount – not nearly as much as everyone else – and who's going to notice if you invest it or spend it or bury it. What difference will it make? I want you to know that it makes a HUGE difference. What you do when no one is looking is where you build a foundation of faithfulness. Great actors don't become great actors just because they got a lucky break and found themselves in a blockbuster movie. Sometimes mediocre actors get a lucky break, but they're just a "flash in the pan," a "one-hit wonder." GREAT actors become great actors because they have taken the time to perfect their craft and learn their lines and create their character – EVEN WHEN NO ONE IS WATCHING. **C. Make it a daily endeavor, even though you can't predict the outcome of your efforts.** These servants who were given the talents didn't know what would happen with their investment. It was a risk they had to take, and the first two were willing to take it.

The third servant wasn't willing to risk anything. So he did nothing. Think of all the effort involved in doubling your money. Have you tried it? It's not easy. If you want to double your money – and I want to make it clear I'm not speaking from experience here – you have to make some extremely shrewd, well-informed decisions. You buy a property and you flip it. You invest in an expanding business. You short-sell overvalued stocks; you go long on the hidden gems. You work at it day after day after day to double your return. It's a daily grind in which you must be both CONSISTENT and PERSISTENT. And...Success is NEVER guaranteed. Your other option is to go out and bury everything in the ground and do nothing. (Put your money under the mattress.) There are many people who want – in theory – to be faithful and effective in the Christian life. Except they hold to their nagging doubts: "WHAT IF it doesn't work? WHAT IF I'm faithful and I never get blessed? WHAT IF I'm faithful and I can't make ends meet? WHAT IF I'm faithful and I end up unhappy? WHAT IF I'm faithful and life just passes me by? Am I willing to take that risk? Oftentimes it's not the fear of failure that holds us back. It's more the fear of futility. Do you know what the backup quarterback does on every NFL team? He prepares each week as if he is the one to start. He studies film. He memorizes the playbook. He goes over the game plan. He is ready IN CASE he goes in. He never knows when his chance will come...but when it comes, HE HAS TO BE READY. Illustration: You remember that, Nick Foles – Super Bowl winning quarterback Nick Foles – was a backup quarterback last year. The starter (Carson Wentz) was injured late in the season and many thought his injury put an end to any chance the Eagles had of winning a championship. But, Foles had been faithful in his commitment to prepare, and, being faithful, he was ready for the challenge. The same can be said of any understudy on Broadway. The understudy prepares and practices just like the star of the show, and they never know when their chance will come, but they have to be ready. Here's what I'm saying. You don't always know the outcome of your efforts. You could write a book, but who knows if anyone will read it? It's a risk. You can start a business, but who knows if the business will be a success? It's a risk. You can work in ministry for years – even decades – but who knows if you'll ever draw a huge crowd or even see results? It's a risk. BUT...it's a risk worth taking, because even though you cannot predict the exact outcome of your efforts, you can know this: Your faithfulness will not go unnoticed by the ONE WHO MATTERS MOST – your Heavenly Father. He sees what no one else sees – *"Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you"* (Matthew 6:4). This is why Paul said, *"Therefore dear brothers, stand firm, let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know your labor in the Lord is not in vain"* (1 Corinthians 15:58). In the chapter before today's text, Jesus tells a story about the importance of being ready. He says, *"Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns"* (Matthew 24:45-46). When Jesus says, *"finds him doing so,"* He's talking about being faithful – every day – because you never know when your chance will come. If you want to establish a foundation of faithfulness, make it a daily endeavor – even if you can't predict the outcome of your efforts.

**3. Conclusion.** Of the hundreds (even thousands) of geysers that exist throughout the world – some of them in breathtaking locations – Old Faithful is the most famous for one reason, and that reason is found in its name – FAITHFUL. It means that it's consistent – dependable – reliable – EVERY DAY. This quality alone makes it far more than a novelty of nature; it makes it a standout – a natural wonder of the world. Do you want to stand out – in your work, in your relationships, in your finances, and in your walk with Christ? Then cultivate this quality. EVEN IF you don't have much to work with – EVEN WHEN nobody is looking over your shoulder – EVEN THOUGH the outcome is uncertain – Make it your DAILY ENDEAVOR to be as faithful as you can be in every area of life. Make it your endeavor to LIVE A LONG OBEDIENCE IN THE SAME DIRECTION. Perhaps none of us are as faithful as we want to be, but no matter where you are today, you can develop a more faithful quality of character. You know what you need to do. START TODAY and continue to the end of your journey. FAITHFUL to the VERY END!