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The Importance of Faithfulness
Douglas Scalise, Brewster Baptist Church *Proverbs 3:3-4*
2 Samuel 15:17-23

As we continue our journey through the fruit of the Spirit, we've covered love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and goodness—how are you doing? How are you working in partnership with the Holy Spirit to cultivate these in your life? Before we move on to faithfulness, I want to express my thanks that all of you were so encouraging and supportive to Nate Ryan who preached last Sunday. I received text messages and emails last Sunday before I even preached in Maine from people sharing what a wonderful job he did, and I heard more comments here during the week including at the cookout to celebrate the end of VBS. It's been a pleasure having Nate, Jennie and Christina here at BBC as interns this summer, and I hope you feel they've all made a positive contribution.

When I was studying my Bible about the theme of faithfulness, I noticed something I hadn't picked up on before. It's always cool when that happens. What I noticed is that in my Bible the word "faithfulness" occurs four times in the Book of Proverbs and each time it appears it's paired with the word "loyalty."

Proverbs 3:3-4, "Do not let **loyalty and faithfulness** forsake you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. So you will find favor and good repute in the sight of God and of people."

Proverbs 14:22, "Do they not err that plan evil? Those who plan good find **loyalty and faithfulness.**"

Proverbs 16:6, "By **loyalty and faithfulness** iniquity is atoned for, and by the fear of the LORD one avoids evil."

Proverbs 20:28, "**Loyalty and faithfulness** preserve the king, and his throne is upheld by righteousness."

As I thought about those four scriptures it dawned on me that there was a story that seemed to touch on all those different aspects of faithfulness and loyalty. It's a story in the Bible about King David and his family and a time when faithfulness and loyalty were lacking in his family, but were found in an unexpected person; when an individual erred in planning evil which led to terrible consequences, however, the loyalty and faithfulness of a little known person helped to preserve the king and uphold his throne. That story is found in *2 Samuel 15:17-23*, but before I share it with you, I need to give you the context and catch you up on what's happened. It's a complicated story. The relationship between King David and his son Absalom had been strained for five years, going back to a terrible incident involving one of David's other sons Amnon committing a violent act against Absalom's sister, Tamar. When David failed to punish Amnon, Absalom had him killed and the strong bond that should have

existed for life between father and son was frayed to the breaking point. Absalom was heir to the throne—he was young, handsome and enormously ambitious but he didn't want to have to wait to rule; perhaps because of anger over his father's treatment, his desire for power, or the fear that his father might choose someone else. Absalom developed an entourage of chariots, horses and runners to call attention to himself. He undermined his father's authority by standing at the gate of Jerusalem and listening to everyone who came with a complaint and telling them, "Your claims are good and right, it's too bad I'm not the judge of the land because I would give you justice." Of course, he said this without even investigating to see if their claims were valid. David was a better military leader than he was a peace-time ruler. He was responsible for seeing that justice was administered, and he seems to have failed his judicial responsibility. Meanwhile, for four years Absalom worked to build support by telling people what they wanted to hear and by doing so he stole the hearts of the people from his father (v. 6).

After four years, he lied to his dad and said he needed to go to the city of Hebron to worship and fulfill a vow he'd made. David trusted his son and told him to go ahead. What Absalom really was doing was being disloyal and unfaithful to his father the king, and going to stage a coup and to be declared king himself. Hebron, which was 20 miles south of Jerusalem, had been the capital before David moved it to Jerusalem so Absalom was likely to find some people there who resented the loss of influence and prestige when the capital was moved. The conspiracy grew strong and Absalom's followers kept increasing. A messenger came to David and told him what was happening (v. 13). While the hearts of the Israelites were with Absalom, David was left with the paid help, the bureaucracy of Jerusalem. The people were with Absalom, David had servants and mercenaries. It didn't look good for David, but his keen military instincts kicked in. He knew he had to flee for his life and was better suited to be in the open where he had freedom of movement. He knew that only those who were faithful and loyal to him would take the risk of joining him in leaving Jerusalem and exposing themselves to danger. That brings us to today's scripture from *2 Samuel 15:17-23*, "The king left, followed by all the people; and they stopped at the last house. All his officials passed by him; and all the Cherethites, and all the Pelethites, and all the six hundred Gittites who had followed him from Gath, passed on before the king. Then the king said to Ittai (it'tie) the Gittite, 'Why are you also coming with us? Go back, and stay with the king; for you are **a foreigner**, and also **an exile** from your home. **You came only yesterday**, and shall I today make you wander about with us, while I go wherever I can? Go back, and take your kinsfolk with you; **and may the LORD show steadfast love and faithfulness to you.**' But Ittai answered the king, '**As the LORD lives, and as my lord the king lives, wherever my lord the king may be, whether for death or for life, there also your servant will be.**' David said to Ittai, 'Go then, march on.' So Ittai the Gittite marched on, with all his men and all the little ones who were with him. The whole country wept aloud as

all the people passed by; the king crossed the Wadi Kidron, and all the people moved on toward the wilderness.”

A little background: the Cherethites, and the Pelethites who were leaving with David were foreign mercenaries or paid guards, likely they were Cretans and Philistines. As a young man David defeated Goliath, the champion of the Philistines so it's kind of surprising to find so many Philistines in David's army. It may be that David won the loyalty and faithfulness of these men when he served as a commander under the king of Gath (*1 Samuel 23:13, 27:2, 30:9*) when David was trying to escape from his own father-in-law King Saul who wanted him dead. Goliath was from Gath (*1 Samuel 17:4-10*), and the Gittites who were with David were also from Gath, (they weren't called (Gathites).

What I want to focus on is the brief vignette of David's meeting with the man named Ittai. Ittai is a foreigner and an exile. We might expect David to mistrust a newly arrived foreigner with a coup taking place, but there's no hint of suspicion. David is gracious and generous, aware that Ittai has only now just found a place to live. While David flees for his life because of his son's lack of love and unfaithfulness, he wishes for this foreigner **“steadfast love and faithfulness”** (v. 20). He's basically saying, “This isn't your fight, you don't owe me anything,” and he seeks to relieve him and his men of any obligation. Ittai's response is equally gracious and generous; he vows passionate loyalty and faithfulness to David, promising to stay with him in every circumstance (v. 21). Ittai's promise of faithfulness is similar to the one Ruth, David's great grandmother, made to her mother-in-law Naomi (*Ruth 1:16-17*). David is so moved by this expression of faithfulness that he agrees that Ittai may go with him. Eventually, in *2 Samuel 18:2,5* before the climactic battle, David made Ittai one of his top three commanders because he so valued his faithfulness. Faithfulness is something we all long for in our relationships.

To be faithful is “having or showing true and constant support or loyalty; deserving trust: keeping your promises or doing what you are supposed to do.” “Old Faithful” is a famous geyser in Wyoming's Yellowstone National Park. It was so named in 1870 because it reliably erupts at somewhat consistent and predictable intervals. It does what it's supposed to do—so people know when to expect the geyser to erupt. A famous Latin motto, adopted by the United States Marine Corps, *Semper Fidelis*, means, “Always faithful.” “Semper Fi” is often how Marines will greet each other and the mutual commitment to always be faithful to one's comrades and country, to show true and constant support and loyalty, is a big part of a US Marine's identity. When I officiate at a wedding later this week, the bride and groom will vow to be faithful to one another as long as they both shall live. Keeping our promises, being faithful to our vows and principles whether we're with our spouse or whether we're apart is a key ingredient in a happy and secure marriage and indeed in any relationship.

In talking about faithfulness, we begin with the faithfulness of **God** as we heard in *Psalm 57*, which was the Call to Worship. God has and shows “true and constant support or loyalty;” God is “deserving of trust.” We are motivated to be faithful and able to be faithful because God is faithful. God shows us what faithfulness is like, Jesus says God (*Matthew 5:45*), “makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.” Paul says in *Romans 1:20*, “Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made.” God has been faithful to us in giving us life and sustaining us each day.

What about us? Let’s start with the negative: **few things in life are as heartbreaking as unfaithfulness in a relationship.** When someone is unfaithful in a marriage, in a family, in a friendship, as an employer or employee, as a citizen of a country, it’s very painful and the damage can be widespread and long lasting. It’s devastating for any relationship when a person fails to honor his or her commitments. It takes repentance, hard work, a determination to change, forgiveness, and grace to overcome unfaithfulness in a relationship, but it can be done, if, and only if, both parties are willing to do the hard work to repair the damage that’s been done. However, often unfaithfulness is so devastating that trust, respect and intimacy cannot be repaired or rebuilt. That’s why remembering ***Proverbs 3:3-4*** is so important. “Do not let **loyalty and faithfulness** forsake you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. So you will find favor and good repute in the sight of God and of people.”

More positively, **few things give us a greater sense of security in relationships and in life than faithfulness.** Whether it’s a spouse, parent and child, or a friend, faithfulness gives us a sense of security and comfort in the midst of life’s challenges and uncertainties. Faithfulness is like an anchor that helps hold us fast and not be shipwrecked in the storms of life. We all long for faithfulness in relationships. Faithfulness gives us a sense of trust, confidence and certainty. Faithfulness gives a relationship the belief that we can count on a person to be true and to be there for us and that others can count on us to be true, faithful and there for them.

There are some things we all can do to ensure our faithfulness to another person and to strengthen our sense of loyalty and commitment. All of us can keep these things in mind in all our relationships.

- If you’re married, make decisions together, as a team, especially ones concerning finances and children, so each person feels considered and valued, and work together toward your family goals, values and dreams.
- Resolve issues privately and try to do so with as much love and respect as possible.

- Speak highly of others. Don't say anything that will tarnish the other person's reputation. Speak positively of each other.
- Defend each other.
- Keep your commitments.
- Work through any issues or fears that affect your commitment and faithfulness.
- Strive with God's help to be more faithful, loyal and committed.

If faithfulness is to be part of our character, we need to learn to be faithful in all things, big and small. Jesus says in *Luke 16:10* about how we handle money, "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much." We're to prove our trustworthiness in even the smallest duties like how we earn and manage money to more important things like spiritual truth. On an almost weekly basis the news reveals the most recent powerful and famous people who have been unfaithful in key areas of their character, relationships and responsibilities. Jesus goes on to say (*Luke 16:11*), "So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?" God judges our character by how faithfully we manage everything in life—our money, our marriage, our work, you name it.

Faithfulness includes Perseverance. Perseverance is a key to success in everything including being faithful in our relationships. Remember from *1 Corinthians 13* that love always protects, always hopes and **always perseveres**. When Paul wrote his second letter to Timothy, he was in prison awaiting almost certain execution. But he was at peace because he knew of his faithfulness to God. Paul wrote, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (*2 Timothy 4:7*). May we have this same confidence at the end of our race.

The ultimate reward for faithfulness and perseverance is eternal life! In *Matthew 24*, Christ was giving His disciples prophecies of the "end of the age" (verse 3). In verses 9 through 12, He speaks of tribulation and persecution. Then in verse 13 He says, "But he who endures to the end shall be saved." In ***Revelation 2:10***, the Risen Christ says, **"Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life."**

In *2 Samuel*, we see the contrast between an unfaithful son and a foreigner whose faithfulness is greater than a son. Ittai is the one who receives the approval and affirmation of King David. In *Matthew 25:14-30*, Jesus told the parable of the talents (a "talent" was a measure of money). The parable portrays Christ rewarding His **faithful** followers—those who love and serve God and live accordingly. To each of the profitable servants, the master said, **"Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I**

will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord” (*Matthew 25:21, 23*).

Faithfulness is the key that opens the door to the joy of the Lord.

Blessing: *Hebrews 12:1-3*, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, **looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith**, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, **so that you may not grow weary or lose heart.**”

Questions for Discussion & Reflection:

1. Many scriptures testify to the faithfulness of God—look up these verses in the *Book of Psalms*: *Psalm 57:10*, *Psalm 85:10-11*, *Psalm 86:15*, *Psalm 89:1, 14-15*. What do these scriptures reveal about God’s faithfulness?
2. What does faithfulness mean to you? What do you think of when you hear the word “faithfulness?”
3. Why is faithfulness so important to relationships, especially in a marriage?
4. What are some of the blessings that come with faithfulness?
5. What harm and damage are caused by unfaithfulness?
6. Why do you think faithfulness and loyalty go together in the *Book of Proverbs* and in life?
7. How will you practice faithfulness this week? Who can you share God’s faithfulness with this week?