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Faithfulness



Individual Topics - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg discusses the importance of faithfulness as a characteristic that leads to personal transformation and a deeper relationship with God. He emphasizes the need for Christians to seek an understanding of God's character through studying Scripture and integrating those values into their own lives. Gregg notes that God is described as a faithful God who keeps his promises and remains consistent with his character, and Christians should strive to exemplify this faithfulness in all aspects of their lives.

Transcript

The whole key to character transformation is to be able to know the character of God so that we can be like Him. The Bible implies that people become like their God. Whether they serve the true God or some other false God, they become like their God.

It says in the Psalm concerning the gods of the heathen, it says the gods of the heathen are idols. They have eyes, but they cannot see. They've got mouths, but they cannot speak.

They have ears, but they cannot hear. They have feet, but they cannot walk. And then it goes on to say, they that make them are like unto them.

That is to say, just like the idols are blind and deaf and impotent, so also those who make those idols, those who worship those gods, are also blind and deaf, spiritually speaking, and lacking in any spiritual strength or vitality. A person does become like the God he worships. The Bible clearly says that as we behold the glory of the Lord, we are changed also from glory to glory into that image.

And we are told in 1 John chapter 3, and I think verse 2 or 3, it says, Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear, but we shall be. But we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. That is, when we see Him clearly, we will be like Him.

It is seeing Him properly that brings about a proper development of our character into His likeness. So it's important that we conceive of His character as He really is, and this

is why every time we select a particular characteristic or trait that we hope to have blossoming within our own nature and within our own character, that we first seek to see this in God. And we go to the Scriptures in order to see what the Scripture reveals on each of these matters about God.

Now, one of the Scriptures that we've been using all along so far is one where Jesus said to the Pharisees in Matthew 23, 23, that they neglect the weightier matters of the law. And these weightier matters which were being neglected were matters of character. They neglected, Jesus said, justice, mercy, and the King James Version says faith, but really the Greek means faithfulness, and I think that a newer translation will make that correction.

Faithfulness or fidelity. Now, we've talked about justice, we've talked about mercy. Tonight I want to talk about faithfulness, fidelity.

And when faithfulness is found in a person's behavior consistently, we say of that person that he is a man of integrity. And I'd like to perhaps just say something about this word integrity, because I believe to a great extent integrity is that characteristic internally that produces faithfulness of behavior. Faithfulness is more of a description of our responses where integrity is perhaps that core trait that leads us to be faithful.

Integrity comes from the word, or from the same root as the word integrated, as you might not be surprised to find out. And maybe I could even draw something on the board here. I don't know if I can, because I've never done this before.

I mean, I know I can draw, but I don't know if I can draw what I'm thinking, because I've never illustrated this before. But if we see, if we draw a line here, a continuum, that's not a very straight line, but over here we could say this is what we believe, and at the other end how we behave. That is what we really do, what we believe and what we do.

Now, this line we would desire to have very short. We would in fact prefer that there be no line at all, but that what we behave would be entirely the same thing as what we believe. For instance, we believe that certain things are wrong, but that doesn't mean we don't do those things.

Remember Romans chapter 7? Paul said, I do the things I hate, the things that I don't allow, those things I do, the things that I resolve to do, I neglect to do. The things that I would never permit, I find myself doing. Right? Anyone able to relate with that? I thought so.

Okay, well that is this distance, this is the gap. I would call it the integrity gap, because there's no integration, or at least not a high enough level of integration or intermixing or merging of what the person believes, what his real values are, as far as his convictions and his principles and so forth, and the way he really lives. And I might even add to this,

along with what we believe, is what we say, because out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh.

And of course, the things we say should agree with the things we do also. The idea here is, this line ought not so to be. There ought to be no line, and our whole desire in spiritual growth would be to shorten that line, and we would certainly desire that we come to a place where there's no line at all, so that this, how we behave, moves closer and closer into agreement, or into being integrated with the things we say, and the things we believe.

Now I don't know if that, that might not be a very clear way of doing it, I've never done that before, but I was trying to think of some way to talk about that. If we are integrated people, so that the things we say, and the principles that we hold, are consistent or integrated with the way we act, then we are people of integrity. We can be trusted, that if we say we're going to do something, people know we're going to do it.

If we say we have convictions or principles, along a certain line, people will trust that we will act according to those convictions and principles, because we have integrity. And this is the same thing that I believe Jesus is referring to when he's talking about faithfulness. He says, the weightier matters of the law are justice, mercy, and faithfulness, fidelity, integrity.

And we're going to talk about that, and as usual we're going to begin by talking about the faithfulness of God. And then we'll talk about faithfulness in our lives, and how to go about cooperating with God to develop it, as part of our character. First of all, let's turn to Deuteronomy chapter 9. If I'm not mistaken, now I don't remember looking this up recently in the concordance, but I think this is the first statement in the Bible that mentions the faithfulness of God.

I could be wrong, but I don't think there's one earlier than this. Deuteronomy chapter 7, and verse 9. Moses says to the people of Israel, know therefore that the Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God. Now how is that faithfulness demonstrated? Which keeps covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations, and repayeth them that hate him to their face, to destroy them.

He will not be slack to him that hate of him, he will repay him to his face. Now God is a person of integrity. He's a faithful God, it says.

Now in saying that he's a faithful God, he illustrates that God is very integrated. He's a person of integrity. What he says, he will do.

He acts consistently with the principles that he holds to, so that those who love him and keep his commandments can expect the blessing of God to a thousand generations. That is to say, you meet his conditions and he will keep his promises for those thousands of

generations, presumably forever. God will never change.

As long as we are living in harmony with the principles that he has declared, he will continue to live in harmony with those principles. On the other hand, it says, in verse 10, he repays those who hate him to their face. Now he, of course, that's in harmony with his principles too.

All of his laws that he's stated carry with them blessings and curses. Blessings on those who keep and curses on those who neglect or who violate. And therefore, it is very faithful for God both to keep his promises and his threats.

Now the interesting thing here about the faithfulness of God on the negative side, about those who hate him, he says he repays them to their face. That is, he doesn't sneak around and hide what he really thinks about them. He stands by his words and he says what he means.

He'll say it to your face. One characteristic of a person who lacks integrity is when he is really angry at you but he won't say so. And he'll pretend like he's not.

Or when, you know, he really hates you but he puts on a very diplomatic and polite front in order to hide his real feelings. He doesn't hide the fact that he hates you. Now you might say, well I thought in one of those earlier classes about building a frame, building a mold, that if we hate a person we should behave as though we love them.

And that is true, but we're not talking about hypocrisy here. Behaving as though you love them doesn't mean that you seek to conceal your real feelings. It means that you do toward them as you would do if you loved them so that you do good to them as you would to a person that you love.

As it says in the law in Exodus, it says if you see your enemy's ox wandering free, you take it back and give it back to him just as you would if it was your friend. If you see the ass of him that hates you falling under his load and you would prepare to help, he says yes, you should go and help it to its feet. You must behave toward your enemy as though he was your friend.

That doesn't mean you paste on a waxy smile and act like everything's rosy because in fact true faithfulness will mean that when there are serious problems in a relationship you don't hide them. You don't pretend like there are none because true concern for a person and true value in a person will mean that you value the relationship and therefore are willing to confront situations that are hindering a healthiness in the relationship and therefore there is a need to speak plainly and if there is a problem in a relationship there is a need to bring that forward. You still treat the person as you would if they were a friend, as if you loved them.

This is of course acting in a Christian manner toward your enemies, doing good to those

who persecute you and pray for those who despitefully use you and blessing those who curse you. But the point here is that while you're doing those things you're not pretending to be something that you aren't and if there is really serious problems between you and another person you're not hiding that fact or pretending it's not so. You're doing good to them but at the same time you make it plain that there's something that needs to be worked out between you because otherwise you're not acting in harmony with your own principles.

Your outer actions are not integrated with your inner feelings or with your inner attitudes I should say. And therefore it's necessary. God is faithful.

He does good to those who live according to his principles to a thousand generations. That is to say he is faithful and then he continues to be faithful and then he just continues to be faithful. He never really changes.

Man changes but God is not a man that he should repent or change his mind. He will remain faithful to himself. It says in fact in a very interesting statement in 2 Timothy 2.13, Though we be faithless or though we believe not yet he about us faithful for he cannot deny himself.

It's an interesting thing because some people say well God can do anything. No there's some things God can't do. You ever heard anyone pose a question that's supposed to stump you as a Christian and they say well can God do anything and of course you say yes he can do anything.

They say well can God make a rock that he can't move? Ever heard that one? Can God make a rock that he can't move? Well if you say yes, then they say well if he can't move it then there's something he can't do. They say well no. Then there's something he can't do.

He can't make a rock that he can't move. Right? So they think they've got you on the horns of a dilemma. Your mistake was saying in the first place yes God can do anything.

The fact is God can't do everything. One thing he cannot do is sin. Another thing he cannot do is be tempted to sin it says in James.

Another thing he cannot do is lie. The scripture says God who cannot lie. And another thing he cannot do according to this scripture in 2 Timothy 2.13 he cannot deny himself and that means that he cannot behave inconsistently with his character and with his attributes.

That is integrity. That is faithfulness. Now to make a rock that he cannot move would have to violate his own character because it is his character to have no limits on himself.

And to create that which would in itself limit him would be a violation of his own

character. There cannot exist anything that would limit him in such a way. Something too big for him to move.

Therefore no he can't make a rock that he can't move. Because a nature of his omnipotence. Now that may seem like just a silly philosophical conundrum that no real sincere person would ever raise and that's true.

No sincere seeker after truth would ever raise a question like that. It's mainly intended to be a trap for Christians. But the fact is no God cannot do everything.

He can't deny himself. He cannot act inconsistently with his own nature and his own character. That is why the scripture can say he cannot lie and he cannot sin.

Because he is by nature truthful, faithful, holy. And therefore he describes himself as the faithful God. And though everything else change he will never change.

Now as far as God's faithfulness being manifest to us in our lives we see it in many ways. One way in which we count on the faithfulness of God regularly is in his faithfulness to his covenant. Now that's what it said in Deuteronomy 7.9. Know therefore that the Lord thy God he is God the faithful God which keepeth covenant.

Now keeping covenant means that when he makes a covenant he will not violate it. Now what is a covenant? Well we could probably if we tried to describe what a covenant is we'd have trouble using modern imagery because we would say maybe a contract. We might say a promise.

Something like that. But those things are not those don't quite carry the same meaning as the Oriental concept of a covenant. A covenant in the Orient and in the Middle East and so forth was a contract that was so thorough going and so binding it was a life joining kind of a thing.

So much so that it used to be that covenants were entered into by cutting the two parties who were entered into covenant and intermingling in blood. The American Indians for instance did this also. They called themselves blood brothers.

They were intermingling of their blood. There was a certain oneness into which the covenanting parties entered which was not to be broken until death. And nothing but death was considered to be a valid ending of the covenant.

It was deeper than just a contract. And in our society the only thing like a covenant in fact this is a true covenant that we have in our regular society is marriage. And of course when two parties enter into marriage they enter into I think the only Western agreement that could properly be called a covenant in the sense that the Bible uses that term.

Because parties who marry make a covenant to be joined into one until death parts them

and that's exactly what a covenant is. Now a covenant can be broken but not rightly so. If one party breaks the covenant then the other party is free to take his liberty from it.

But assuming one party remains faithful to the covenant the other party has no right ever to nullify his side of the covenant. It is lifelong. Now that's what a covenant is.

Now God entered into covenant in the Old Testament with Israel or even before there was an Israel he entered into covenant with Abraham. And there's what's called the Abrahamic covenant. And God said if Abraham would leave his family and follow God to a place that he would show him that he would make of him a great nation and make him a blessing to all nations and give him many offspring and through his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed.

This is the Abrahamic covenant. Later on much later at Mount Sinai God basically allowed the Jews to enter into the terms of that covenant. The Abrahamic covenant was already in force but God gave Israel as a nation an opportunity to be the seed that would bless all nations.

And there were additional factors to the covenant which included the law of Moses. If they kept this law then they would be this Abrahamic seed to bless all nations. Now we know from what the New Testament teaches they didn't keep that covenant.

In fact we know that from the Old Testament too. They didn't keep the covenant for one week. And so God was in the position that he could have canceled the covenant any time after they broke it.

But he didn't. And at least not for many thousands of years until of course Jesus came and then he said okay Israel you have blown it on your side of the covenant. You've committed spiritual adultery with me.

I'm now going to give it to another people. And Jesus sat in the upper room with his disciples and he said this cup is the new covenant in my blood which I make with you. And so a new covenant was entered into between God and another group of people.

A new Israel. A new people which were the believers in Jesus Christ. Now this is the covenant that we celebrate whenever we take communion.

We have a covenant relationship with God. And so this covenant relationship with God is one where we make an agreement with God that we will be wholly his. And if we are wholly his he will accept us as wholly his and give us of course status as sons in his family.

Now that is what we all take for granted now that we're Christians pretty much. I mean we just take that for granted. We belong to God.

We're his people. And yet this faithfulness of God in this covenant is something that has very practical value to us every day. Because every time we sin we violate that covenant.

And there's always of course God always has the option if we violate the covenant to break it. But does he do so? Well at least not quickly. We know 1 John 1 9 In fact I think you memorized it yesterday.

It's a memory verse. 1 John 1 9 says if we confess our sins he is what? Faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. He is faithful to his covenant.

The covenant is this. Jesus' blood was shed for our sins. If we confess our sins we appropriate the cleansing that he has made available by the blood of his covenant.

And because of his covenant relationship that he has made in Christ with us he is faithful to that covenant. And whenever we sin we know that though we have been unfaithful yet God abides faithful to his covenant. And if we come back to him on the terms that his covenant dictates that is the confession of our sins he is faithful.

He will not break the covenant. It is only when we refuse to confess our sin and when we refuse to repent that our covenant relationship with God is really in jeopardy. But if we are quick to repent and quick to confess our sins we know that God is never going to break his side of the bargain because he is totally faithful and we depend on this every day.

Now of course another area where the faithfulness of God is important is in terms of answered prayer. There is not really any characteristic of God that I can think of that can get me as choked up as the consideration of the faithfulness of God simply because in my life I have just seen how God has faithfully answered my prayers, how he has faithfully taken me back when I have wandered away for a period of time, how that he has been faithful to me through the covenant he has with me in Christ that he and I entered together when I was a child. And while I was not faithful to him on many occasions yet when I returned to him I found he was still faithful to that covenant and that was still enforced as long as he remained unchanged and he is unchanged.

He is the one invariable that to which we can always return and we always know we are going to find him there because he is faithful. He is like a rock and that is what the Bible calls him. It calls him the rock because he is an immovable constant.

The one constant in the changing universe and even my life is changing all the time but whenever I come back he is faithful to be there. He is faithful to be there and to respond the same way he always responded when I would come on the same terms. And this is something that is very wonderful not only for the forgiveness of sins but also just for

expecting him to keep his promises, his many promises.

He has promised us that he will never let us starve. Remember what Jesus said about you of little faith? He said, why do you worry about what you shall eat? Why do you worry about what you shall drink? The birds of the air know the faithfulness of God better than you do. They don't worry about it and God feeds them.

The flowers of the field know the faithfulness of God better than you do. They don't worry about how they will be clothed and yet they are adorned more beautifully than the most gorgeously appareled king. And he says, so what about you, little faith? You know, the fact of the matter is, God has made many promises to provide for us, to deliver us from temptation and so forth.

And we, if we really walk with him very long, will learn to count on his faithfulness to his promises. He has made a promise to answer our prayers when we pray in Jesus' name, when we pray according to his will. He hears us and if we know that he hears us, we know that we have the petitions we desire of him.

And many of us have proved his faithfulness over and over by seeing his hand in motion in answering the prayers or in providing for us the things he has promised or in simply restoring us when we thought we had sinned and beyond the point of being able to be restored, the faithfulness of God has always been demonstrated to us. Anyone who walks with God for very long should have many, many testimonies of the faithfulness of God. And there's hardly anything that touches our hearts more than when we see his faithfulness when we've been unfaithful.

You might notice that in this series on character traits, we are not going to be having a study on love. You might think it's strange since the Bible speaks of love as the ultimate character trait of a Christian. But the reason that we're not having a separate study on love is because all the things that we're discussing are so many aspects of love.

Justice, mercy, faithfulness, humility, all these things are just different aspects of love. What is love? What is a relationship of love where there's no faithfulness or where there's no justice or there's no mercy? Those are just so many characteristics that are part of love. Some have said that in Galatians 5.22, when it says, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, gentleness, meekness, goodness, long-suffering, faithfulness, one of the fruit of the Spirit, and so forth, that it's not plural when it says the fruit of the Spirit is.

It doesn't say the fruit of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, etc. as though each of these is a fruit. It says the fruit of the Spirit is, singular, love.

All the other words simply describe so many aspects of love, as though Paul is writing the Amplified Version. Love, then in parenthesis, which includes joy, peace, gentleness, meekness, goodness, self-control, these are all aspects of love. And I do believe that

whether that's how Paul intended Galatians 5 to be read or not, that it is quite true.

That we don't need to talk about love as a separate issue when we consider all these other things, because these are all aspects of God's love toward us. His justice, His mercy, His faithfulness are all representations of His love. Well, what are some of the things that the Bible says He's faithful to us in? He is faithful to deliver us from temptation.

It says in 1 Corinthians 10.13, There hath no temptation taken you, but such as is common unto men. And God is, it says, faithful, who will not permit you to be tempted beyond that which you are able to endure, but will with the temptation provide also a way of escape that you may be able to bear it. Now, it says that God is faithful.

This is an issue of His faithfulness. That when we are tempted, He will never abandon us to our temptation. Now, that's kind of humbling to realize that, since we have sometimes fallen to temptation.

In fact, frequently have been known to do so. And we cannot blame anyone but ourselves, because we cannot say that God was not there to deliver us. God's faithfulness is a given.

It's established. He is faithful. He will not permit us to be tempted beyond our endurance, or our ability to endure.

Therefore, when we succumb to temptation, there's only one thing we can say, and that is that we gave up when we didn't have to. We stopped fighting when there was really the opportunity to endure and to win. And so, really, though it's a humbling thing, a shameful thing, to realize that it's always our fault when we sin, and never God's, because He was always there ready to help us get out of that temptation.

Yet, it's an encouraging thing, when we face temptation at any time, to know that, though I'm being tempted, sometimes to the utmost of my strength to resist, even at those moments when I feel like I must succumb, the faithfulness of God has guaranteed that He will provide a way of escape. And it is simply a matter of my trust in His unfailing faithfulness that causes me not to give up the battle and to hang in there until the temptation has gone away, or until the escape route has been realized. And God is faithful, and whenever we're tempted, deliverance from temptation is something that God is faithful to provide.

But, of course, if He gives us deliverance from it, and we still decide to go into it, and we don't appropriate His deliverance, what can He say? He can't be blamed. Also, the Bible says He's faithful to establish us, and this means that establishing means to set upon a firm foundation, to make stable, to make us stable, to establish, or to establish us. So, I'd like you to look at 2 Thessalonians, chapter 3, 2 Thessalonians 3, and verse 3. It says,

But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you, or establish you, to make you stable, and keep you from evil.

The Lord is faithful, He will establish you, and keep you from evil. Now, what that means is that it is God's commitment to you, and He will keep His commitment because He's faithful. It is His commitment to make you stable.

Of course, again, this is all contingent upon our cooperation. If we're continually making the wrong choices, and choosing to indulge our flesh, or to make excursions off into sin, rather than pursuing the way of holiness, obviously we're not going to get stable that way, because we're not cooperating with God. But if it is our commitment to become stable Christians, it is also God's commitment to us, and He will keep His side of the bargain.

Obviously, all the variability is on our side. And it means, of course, that when we think of the difficulties that we can anticipate lying in the way of our future Christian wants, the sacrifices we may have to make, the pains, the persecutions that may lie ahead of us, and we think, will I be stable enough as a Christian, or will I be moved by these things? Will my roots be deep enough to avoid being blown down like a tree in the wind of stiff persecution? Or will I be strong, will I be stable, and will I stand fast? The question is not dependent upon you, but on the faithfulness of God. And of course, on your trusting in that faithfulness.

Maybe before I go any further on these scriptures that speak of what God is faithful to do, I might just add this. If God is faithful, how in the world do things go wrong? If God is faithful to establish me, to keep me from falling, to keep me strong, to give me a deliverance from every temptation, then why isn't everything rosy in my life? The reason is, of course, because I'm not faithful. And faithful can mean full of faith.

And our response to God's faithfulness must be faith, or trust. You see, a lot of people have faith in untrustworthy objects. And there is no value in faith.

The Bible does not teach that there is any value in faith. Faith itself is not a valuable thing. There are many teachers who teach faith in faith.

Just think positively, just believe and everything is going to turn out okay. As though positive belief makes things happen. As though faith itself is a dynamic that changes things.

The Bible does not teach any such thing. The Bible talks about those who trusted in Pharaoh. They had faith, but Pharaoh failed them.

And things didn't turn out right. Even though they had faith. There are many people who put their faith in things that can't be trusted.

And faith does them no good at all. The only thing that makes faith have any value at all is when it is placed in an object that is trustworthy or faithful. Now, almost every day when I'm driving between here and Coos Bay or even just into town, I go over bridges.

There are a number of bridges where creeks and things run under the road. And these bridges, I normally assume that they're faithful. I normally assume that they can support the weight of my car.

In fact, I have so much faith in them that I hardly even notice when I've gone over them. I don't think about it. If I see a ravine coming up and notice the road goes over, I don't even pay attention to it.

I just believe that road is going to be strong. And as long as the road and the bridge is strong enough to hold me, my faith does me good. Because if I didn't have faith in it, then I'd be paranoid driving down the road.

I mean, if the road was quite adequate to support the weight of my car, and yet I was always wondering, I was always tentative in my decision. Every time I saw it, I thought, can I make it? I don't know, it looks pretty good, but I don't know, it's a pretty heavy car here, I don't know. You know, I'd never get anywhere, for one thing.

Faith is valuable. It gets you places if it's placed in a trustworthy object. But you know, there was a time a few years ago when there was a family moving from here out of town in a big U-Haul, and they pulled onto a bridge, abandoned, and the bridge caved in because all the wood, though it looked good on the surface, was rotten.

It was full of worms, and it was just rotten wood. And their U-Haul almost fell, I suppose it was 10 feet or so, into a little creek. But some of the wood was strong enough to support it, but there were several beams that went out under the wheels of the U-Haul.

Now, they didn't give it a thought when they were pulling on that bridge, because most bridges can be trusted, or at least most ones we encounter regularly, and so they just trusted that one. But it turned out their faith was unfounded. Their faith was put in something that couldn't be trusted.

And faith didn't help them. Because faith itself, what's the difference in trusting that bridge and trusting the bridges that can be trusted? Faith is the same in either case. The only trouble is the bridges aren't the same.

And it's not faith that had any power. It is the object of faith. There are many people who firmly believe that there is no God, or at least they say they do.

That doesn't change anything. There is a God. There are people who firmly believe that God is other than the Bible describes Him to be.

That God is a non-judgmental God. He'll never judge sin. They can believe that very strongly, but when they really meet Him, they'll find out that faith did not save them.

Because it was not faith in the truth. It was not faith in a trustworthy saying. How many times does Paul say in his writings, this is a trustworthy saying, and worthy of all acceptance.

In other words, you can believe this and you'll never be disappointed because it's a faithful saying. Because that which is faithful, when it is trusted, when faith is put in that which is faithful, then you've got the winning team. When faith is put into that which is unreliable, or untrustworthy, then you've got nothing but disappointment and maybe danger, both in the spiritual and in the natural.

But the reason that the Christian walk is a walk of faith, and the reason that faith saves us, and the reason that faith gets our prayers answered, is only for one reason. That's because there's a faithful God on the other end of our faith. The faith that we have is placed in one who cannot lie.

In one who cannot violate His promises, or His commitments, or His own character. One that we can trust will be as He was yesterday, and He was 10,000 years ago. If we read the stories of how God spared the Jews, how He kept His promises to Abraham by bringing His feet out of Egypt in the Exodus, hundreds of years after Abraham's lifetime, yet God was faithful to Abraham by bringing His feet out.

The God who showed Himself faithful then is no less faithful today. And I can trust in Him. And that is why I don't have to worry about what I eat, or what I drink, or what I wear, or any other thing.

Not because I have great faith, but because God has great faithfulness. Somebody here is reading, or was reading Hudson Taylor's story. Who's reading Hudson Taylor? Okay, Bruce is.

Hudson Taylor was well known for disclaiming any special faith. People constantly said, oh, you're such a man of faith. Because he went to China without any supporters.

He went pretty much just by faith. And he wouldn't even tell people what his needs were. He just told God, and just trusted that God would provide for him.

And when people saw a man living like this, they said, oh, what a man of great faith. And Hudson Taylor always said, I'm not a man of great faith. I just have a God of great faithfulness.

And if you have a God of great faithfulness, what can you have toward Him but faith? I mean, it says in the Scriptures, in 1 John 5, I think it's verse 10, if we believe the witness of man, the witness of God is greater. And we believe the witness of man every day. Any

time you believe what you read in the newspapers, and maybe you don't always believe everything you read in the newspapers, but I would say if you read the newspaper today and it gave the results of the election yesterday, you probably didn't doubt that the results were accurate.

You probably felt, well, these newspaper people, I mean, they couldn't get away with lying, because the information is common knowledge, nothing in the media, that they wouldn't lie. So you simply trust what they say. And trusting the witness of man is common.

But the sad thing is, is that sometimes the witness of man is unreliable. Most of the time, it would seem, most people seem to tell the truth, or at least think they're telling the truth, or try to tell the truth, and therefore we get in the habit of trusting people. But occasionally we'll run into one who isn't a truth teller, and of course then we get in trouble, because our faith was in an unreliable object.

But with God, He's always faithful. And if we receive the witness of man, which we do all the time, it says the witness of God is greater. That is, if you can trust a man, you ought to be able to trust God.

Now a lot of people have not had trustworthy parents. And some parents have been deliberately untrustworthy. I've heard of cases where fathers would set their little children, three-year-olds or two-year-olds, up on a table and say, jump to daddy, and the child would jump and the daddy would automatically step back and not catch the child and let him fall to the floor, and say, I've got to teach my kid early not to trust anyone.

You know? There are people like that. But of course that's obviously extremely damaging to the child, and a child who has an unreliable father like that is going to have difficulty later trusting God, unless there's a miracle working in his personality. But because we develop patterns of trust or distrust, very often in our most primal relationships in the home, and some of those give us either some easiness or difficulty in trusting God when we come into a relationship with Him.

If my father showed himself to be trustworthy, I just assume God's going to be trustworthy. If I can receive the witness of man, I can receive the witness of God. Now I want to say this too, about this.

Parents are not always faithful, even though they would never dream that they're being unfaithful sometimes. My father, for instance, when he was a child, believed, because his parents told him, that there was a Santa Claus. Well, his parents just forgot to ever tell him that there wasn't.

And when he was little, they told him there was a Santa Claus, and they neglected to ever tell him that they had lied. Of course, parents don't think they're lying when they

tell lies like that to their children, but lies are lies, especially if they're believed. And most children believe their parents when they lie to them about Santa Claus.

And my father was no exception. He believed his parents. However, by the time he was in fourth grade, all of his friends in school knew there was no Santa Claus, but he still thought there was, because he trusted his parents in the way children do.

And he got into an argument defending his parents' integrity with a fellow student at school. A fellow student said, there's no Santa Claus. My father, standing up for his father and mother's integrity, said, there is too.

My parents said so, and the kid mocked him and so forth. But he still stood fast in his resolve to trust his parents. And so he said, well, come on, we'll go ask my mom.

So after school, they went home, and he and his friend went into the kitchen and saw my grandmother there. And my dad says, Mom, there is a Santa Claus that isn't there. And it suddenly dawned on her that she'd never corrected her earlier lies.

And she had said it was time to let him know the truth. He said, no, there's not. And he was crushed, of course, because here he'd made a fool of himself standing for the integrity of his parents, who were not reliable.

And he determined he would never deceive his children. And so none of us kids ever believed in Santa Claus. And praise the Lord for that.

Because you know what? To this day, I cannot imagine my father lying. I just can't imagine. My father is not perfect, and he doesn't know everything.

And I've known him to make statements which he didn't know were wrong and turned out to be wrong. But I've never known him to willfully deceive. But if he had told me when I was a child that there was a Santa Claus, and I later learned there wasn't, it would be possible to imagine him lying.

Because I would have a case history of it. And a lot of times parents, this maybe seems like a side point, but it's very much involved in the whole question of faithfulness in our character. A lot of parents think it's just good, jolly fun to tell their kids lies, like there's an Easter Bunny or a Santa Claus or a Tooth Fairy or whatever.

But they don't realize the damage that's doing to a child. The child will eventually learn, oh, my parents let me believe something which they knew was not true. And then later, when they're trying to reevaluate Christianity, which you've also taught them about, they'll say, wait a minute, what's the difference here? Santa Claus, Jesus, look how many things they have in common.

You never see either of them. Allegedly, they both reward goodness. They're supposed

to hear us when we're talking to them and they know our desires and so forth.

They're sort of an invisible benefactor that you never ever meet. They told me that about Santa Claus and that turned out to be a lie. Probably they're lying about Jesus too.

Or at least if they don't reason it that logically, subconsciously they have no choice but to think that way. Because they have found their parents to be unfaithful before. And so they cannot accept their parents' testimony unreservedly on any other thing.

And that is no doubt one of the serious reasons why a whole generation of kids grew up doubting every authority figure. I mean not just because of Santa Claus issue, but simply because parents were not committed to telling the truth and being faithful to the truth for their children. And of course the whole hippie movement, one of the mottos of the hippie movement is don't trust anyone over 30.

Now all the hippies are way over 30, so... And now they know you can't trust anyone over 30. But you see, not everyone that you trust is trustworthy. And faith in itself can be a dangerous thing unless faith is put in something that is trustworthy.

A bridge that is faulty will do you no good to put faith in. An untruthful witness, it will do you no good to put faith in them. And of course many people become very cynical because nobody has consistently told them the truth.

This is where Christians of course need to be different. And here is the important reason why. Because God is faithful.

And there is hardly anything God wants people to know more than that. People are designed to live by faith. And whether people believe in God or not, they do live by faith.

All of us live by faith. If we don't trust in God, then we trust in ourselves, in our wisdom, in our money, whatever. We put our trust in something because if we don't trust in anything, we go into a mental institution.

If you can't trust anybody or anything, even your own self, you need a padded cell. Because the whole human psyche operates on faith. The only way you can live in this world is to somehow trust that the waitress that filled your cup didn't poison the coffee.

Now of course, very seldom, probably never do waitresses poison coffee. But it's always possible that one could. But you trust they didn't.

And to trust that the car is coming on the other side of the road in your direction will stay on their side of the road. They don't always. Most of the time they do.

And you trust they will. If you didn't trust they would, you wouldn't go on the street. If you didn't trust the person who prepared your food, you wouldn't eat anything that you didn't prepare yourself.

If you didn't trust that reporters sometimes told the truth, then you wouldn't believe anything you read. And you wouldn't have any belief system except that which you had personally verified from your own experience. You wouldn't believe in atoms.

You wouldn't believe in the planet Pluto. You wouldn't believe in Papua New Guinea. You wouldn't believe in anything you've never seen.

You wouldn't believe there was air because you'd never seen any of those things and you couldn't trust the testimony of anyone. You'd be, you'd go crazy. Because you are built to, you have to trust.

Over 95% of everything you believe, you believe on the authority of someone that you've come to trust on the matter simply because you cannot personally verify everything you've been told. And therefore you establish relationships of trust. You trust these persons because they have certain credentials to speak on this subject or because you know them intimately and you know they're truthful people or whatever.

But we are creatures of trust. And men always trust something. And I would say that most men who become extremely cynical trust nothing but themselves.

They don't trust anything but their own eyes. What did Thomas say? I won't believe it until I see it. Until I put my fingers in the holes in his hand and thrust my hand into his side.

Then I'll believe it. I don't trust anything but what I can see and experience. And that's what many cynics come down to.

But they still try. That's what they trust. They trust their sight.

They trust their experience. But the point here is they still need to trust something. Everybody trusts something.

And what God has done is built us that we have to trust something. And of course He designed us to trust Him. Because He is the only object of trust that will never disappoint us.

The Bible says, Whosoever putteth his trust in Him shall not be ashamed. Or not be disappointed. One of the hymns of the church says, Those who trust Him wholly find Him wholly true.

Because the faithfulness of God is such that He can always be trusted. He's the only person or thing that exists that can always be trusted. He's the only absolute unchanging constant.

And that is what He wants people to know. That is what the message is. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you'll be saved.

Believe. Only believe. Now, you see the message that we have is the message of trust God.

Believe God. But how are people going to believe God if they have never seen trustworthiness anywhere? If every person they've ever met has been false, then how are they going to conceive of a person who is entirely true? Now, you might say, Well, that's their problem. God says He's fully true and if they don't believe it, that's their problem.

Well, it's partly our problem too. Because we are supposed to be the ones who show them the character of God. We are supposed to be the ones in whom they see Jesus.

Let me show you an important scripture if I can remember where it is. I think it's in the Psalms. I know that.

Let me see if I can locate it quickly here. Boy, now I wish I knew. Okay, Psalm 4. I had to quickly search all 115 from the back to front.

I found it in Psalm 4 in verse 6. You don't believe that I did that? Okay. In my mind, I did that. Psalm 4, 6. It says, There be many that say, Who will show us any good? The typical skeptic, the typical cynic.

There's no good. There's no one can be trusted. Who can show us anyone who's not corrupt? Who can show us an uncorrupt politician? Who can show us a man who you can trust with your wife alone? Who can show us a man who if he finds a thousand dollars in a wallet is going to return it to the owner? Who can show us any good like that? And many people have come to the conclusion from their sorry experience that no one can show them that quality of good.

And the answer is a prayer. Lift thou up the light of your countenance upon us. In other words, may your faith, may your light, may your character and your glory be seen on us.

There are many asking, craving to see it. Wondering if it really exists. Wondering if any true faithfulness is a reality at all.

And the prayer is, Lord, let them see it on us. Let them see your faithfulness in our lives. Let them see your goodness.

Let them see your character in us. That's what the world needs to see. They need to see a tangible, visible demonstration of the character of God so they'll know there is such a thing as truth.

They'll know there is such a thing as faithfulness because they see people who are faithful people. People who keep their word. People who carry out a job and fulfill their obligation without trying to sneak around and cut corners.

People who can be trusted to do what they're expected to do or what they say they're going to do. When they see people like this, then they can almost believe there's a God like that. Because that's the whole purpose, you see, of God's character being manifested in us so people can see what God is like.

Sometimes when we're witnessing to people, they'll say to us, well, don't talk to me about God and Christianity because I knew a Christian once and everyone thought he was so religious. But you know what? He, on the side, was going to, you know, he owned a gambling house in Reno or whatever, you know, and no one knew it but he turned out to be a real sleaze. Well, people say those kind of things and our real temptation is to say, don't look at Christians, look at Jesus.

We're not advertising Christians, we're advertising Jesus and we say that because Christians are so unlike Jesus so often. But it's a shame we have to say something like that. Why should we have to say don't look at Christians? That's what they're supposed to look at.

Where are they supposed to look at Jesus but in the Christians? Where are they going to see him? It's a tragedy that we are ever forced to say don't look at Christians, look at Jesus. We should be able to say, you want to see Jesus? Look at the Christians. And no wonder people are cynical because many Christians have never made any progress in conformity into the image of Christ and never become people of justice or mercy or faithfulness.

They've neglected these weightier matters of the law and therefore people have no conception of a God who has these characteristics because everyone knows a person becomes like the God he worships. And if these Christians are unfaithful then that must be what their God is like. Well, it isn't what their God is like.

The truth of the matter is they're not really worshipping the faithful God and that's why they're not faithful people, you see. Because if they were, they'd become like him. Well, let's go on.

A few more scriptures about faithful. You can see the urgency of being faithful people because if people are going to believe God's faithful they're only going to believe it most of the time because they meet someone who can be trusted. And, you know, there's a lot of people who've been disappointed so many times because they've met someone they thought they could trust and it was a hope deferred situation.

You know, the Bible says hope deferred makes the heart sick. That means they got their hopes up and they really were hoping this was really going to be the person they could trust and then they let them down too. And each time their hope is deferred in this way their heart gets sicker and sicker and more cynical and more skeptical and more incredulous or whatever the right word would be.

Unable to believe. And this is damaging obviously to any walk with God that they may eventually have. What we need to do is reverse that trend.

And when people meet us they should be amazed to find that we do the right thing. That when they do give us back more change than we have coming and we discover it when we've already left that we come all the way back and give back and say hey, I just realized you gave me too much money back. I mean, people sometimes are astounded when we do those things.

And they shouldn't be but that's just basic integrity. That's just basic faithfulness. But people don't see it very often.

Who will show us any good, they say. And our prayer should be Lord, let the light of your countenance be seen upon us. Lift up the light of your countenance upon us.

God is faithful. He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins. He is faithful.

He will not allow us to be tempted beyond that which we are able to endure. He is faithful to establish us. Look at 1 Thessalonians chapter 5. 1 Thessalonians 5 and verse 24 says, faithful is he that calleth you who also will do it.

Now there's an exciting thing. It tells us a lot about the call of God. Because if God calls, then He will be faithful to accomplish.

You know, if I just kind of got an emotional burden from watching a TV special about the starving in Ethiopia or something and I decide I'm going to go to Ethiopia and I'm going to be a missionary and I'm going to serve God over there and lead these people to Christ because I'm so concerned I've got this burden for them. But I don't really have a call of God. Then, and I don't sense any call of God, I just kind of have this burden and I feel like I've just got to do this.

I can do nothing else. But it's not necessarily that I sense the call of God in any particular way. Then I can't really be sure that I'll be successful.

I can't really be sure that I'll have any fruit. I can't really be sure that I'll even be able to endure the hardships of that choice because the call of God is not a factor in it. But if I hear from God and the Holy Spirit says, separate unto me Barnabas and Saul through the mysteries of which I have called them.

Well, I have the call of God on my life and every Christian should know the call of God on their life. Know what God is calling you to do. If you don't know yet, expect it because God calls you to a work.

But once you know the call of God, you can know that He who called is faithful who will also do it or He will accomplish it. That if He is the one who has put the call there, He has

guaranteed success in it. Now, it might be success such as He wants.

For instance, when He called Jim Elliot and four other missionaries to go down to the Auckus, He clearly had His call on their lives. But they were killed very rapidly when they arrived in the jungle of Ecuador. But it's very clear that God had called them nonetheless because God still accomplished what they were hoping to accomplish.

That is, of course, the conversion of the Auckus because after the husbands were murdered, some of the wives went in and converted the tribe. God was faithful to do that which He called them to even though it didn't happen the way they expected. Some might have thought, well, what a waste.

Where was God when these men went in and they were trusting God? They were trusting God and supposed to be faithful. They go there and what happens? God abandons them. They are speared to death.

And they never get to even preach one word of the Gospel of the Auckus. Where is the faithfulness of God there? The faithfulness of God is that He will accomplish it in His ways and He accomplished it. God who calls is faithful to perform or to accomplish.

And if we have the call of God, that sustains us because we know that if God is the one who calls, He is faithful. Jesus once told the disciples, I'll wait here and you row the boat to the other side of the lake and I'll meet you there tomorrow. So the disciples started rowing across the lake and a storm came up.

And that was the time when Jesus went walking on the water out to them in the storm. But while they were at the storm, they were rowing hard at the oars and it seemed as though the boat would sink. But there was no reason for fear because Jesus had said, go across the lake and I'll meet you there.

He had called them or told them that that's where they should go. Therefore, they should know that if He had called them to get to the other side, that He would be faithful to bring them there. And He did.

When they came walking in the water, they got in the boat and immediately their boat was at the other side. But the God who calls us will do it. And God has always shown Himself faithful to stand behind His legitimate call on people's lives.

It says in 1 Peter 4 and verse 19 that those who suffer according to the will of God should commit the keeping of their souls to Him by well-doing as unto a faithful Creator. That's 1 Peter 4 and verse 19. This is saying that if we are suffering, if we're doing the will of God and suffering comes as a result of it, that we are simply to trust Him, to commit our souls into His hands.

Trust Him as though He is faithful because He is. And that we can trust that He is faithful.

He's a faithful Creator.

Therefore, we can entrust our case. We can commit our case into His hands because it's for His will that we're suffering. And He is faithful and can be trusted with our case.

Jesus committed His case into God's hands when He was on the cross. He said, Father, into Thy hands I commit my spirit or commend my spirit. And this obviously meant that I'm trusting You to do the best thing in this.

And what happened next? He went to Hades. But also, while He was in Hades, He had this hope. Thou wilt not let Thy holy ones be corruption.

You will not leave My soul in hell. And there was the hope of the resurrection because His soul was not in the devil's hands. His soul was in God's hands.

He had put His soul, His spirit into the hands of a faithful Creator. Those who suffer according to the will of God can commit the keeping of their souls to Him as unto a faithful Creator and know that the will of God will be done insofar as we trust and rely and commit ourselves into Him. God is more faithful to us than anyone else can be.

Probably the most faithful person to another person that can be imagined in the natural is a mother to her baby. Although we know there are cases where mothers are unfaithful to their children. Yet, the strongest natural bonding, the strongest cabling of relationship between any two parties, normally in nature, is between a mother and child.

And God stresses in the prophets that His commitment and His faithfulness to His people is greater even than that very strong natural bond. In one of the chapters, it's Isaiah 49, we have this very moving disclosure of the faithfulness of God. Isaiah 49, beginning with verse 14.

It says, But Zion said... Now, Zion is Jerusalem. Zion said, The Lord has forsaken me and my Lord has forgotten me. In other words, God has not been faithful to His covenant.

He's left us. He's forsaken us. He's run away when He said He would stay.

They question His faithfulness and He answers this way. Verse 15, Can a woman forget her second child? That she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget. Yet will I not forget thee? Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.

Your walls are continually before me. Your children shall make haste. Thy destroyers and they that made thee waste shall go forth from you.

Now, he's saying, you think God has forgotten you? You think God, His faithfulness has reached its limit and His promises to you are no longer to be kept? He says, Well, have you ever seen a nursing mother who forgets her baby and isn't committed to that baby?

He says, Well, you might have run into a few. He says, They may forget the child they're nursing, but I won't. But it's very rare to find a mother who does.

At least in former times it was. So, the point here is just as a mother is mindful of a baby, many times you've seen an attentive mother. You know what I'm talking about.

That's not like God is. Because He's more attentive and more faithful than that. Because some mothers are not faithful to their children.

Though they have to go very much against their natural instincts to be unfaithful. Yet God is always faithful. So, the faithfulness of God is what our whole faith is built on.

What Christianity is built on. Even the belief that Jesus is God's son is a belief that God has kept His promises. God is faithful to His ancient promises that He would send a Savior.

And that when He said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am most pleased, He was telling the truth. That too is faithfulness and integrity. Also, that the blood of Jesus God will accept on our behalf because He said He would.

That again is a matter of His integrity and His faithfulness. That He will answer our prayers and keep His promises is strictly a matter of His faithfulness. Everything that has to do with our Christian walk is a matter of faith in God's faithfulness.

And so, you can see that the faithfulness of God is not a small matter. It's as important as any matter can be. It may be more important than most.

And therefore, when we consider our own character, we have to realize that correspondingly, faithfulness must be one of the major characteristics in a godly person's nature. Godly character must be epitomized or it should epitomize integrity and faithfulness. And that's why Jesus said the weightier matters of the law are justice, mercy, and faithfulness.

These are the things that really weigh heavily in the balances of God's value system and His priorities. Well, let's talk about faithfulness in our lives. We've been talking about the faithfulness of God all this time and it certainly has been no waste of time to lay this foundation.

Let me quickly run through some thoughts about faithfulness in our lives. I mentioned earlier that in Galatians 5.22 where the fruit of the Spirit is given, faithfulness is listed among the nine traits that are mentioned there. Faithfulness is found.

Again, in the King James, it's the word faith, but the Greek word is fidelity or faithfulness. And therefore, fruit of the Spirit, of course, is that which is produced by the Spirit. The fruit of an apple tree is that which is produced from the nature of the apple tree.

Because it's an apple tree, it produces apples. You can tell by its fruit what it is, what kind of a tree it is. Also, if the Holy Spirit is within us, it is the nature of the Holy Spirit to produce certain characteristics in our lives.

Love, joy, peace, gentleness, forgiveness, faithfulness, goodness, temperance. These are products of the fullness of the Spirit in our lives. If we are Spirit-filled people, these are developing as fruit.

And faithfulness, obviously, could not be omitted from the list. Now, there's three senses in which I want to underscore aspects of faithfulness. And I'm sure that we could include more if we thought more about it.

But we wouldn't have time for one thing, and I, to tell you the truth, didn't think of any others. We've been talking about... Another word for faithfulness is integrity. There's another aspect of faithfulness I want to talk about, and that is responsibility.

That is, being responsible to perform what you're expected to perform. That's a matter of faithfulness, too. And another aspect is loyalty.

Now, I want to talk about these three things, and each of them in our discussion will attach to a different area of our lives. In the first case, we're going to talk about the way we speak, the things we say. Because, certainly, one of the most... well, one of the most common things we do is talk.

We do more talk than action. They say, when all has been said and done, there's been more said than done. And that's true, because we talk more than we do.

And so, speaking is a major part of our lives. And faithfulness, if it is part of our character, will be seen in the way we speak. Jesus said, out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.

Which means, whatever the quality of the heart is, whatever the quality of the character of the man is, will be demonstrated by what comes out of the mouth. An interesting verse in Psalm 89, in verse 1. Psalm 89, verse 1 says, I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever. With my mouth, I will make known thy faithfulness.

Now, probably, that statement, with my mouth, I will make known thy faithfulness, means, I will speak about your faithfulness. But also, it could be understood this way. My mouth will demonstrate the faithfulness of God.

With my mouth, when people hear what comes out of my mouth, I will be making known to them God's faithfulness. They will see faithfulness, God's character of faithfulness in my life, by the things that come out of my mouth. Psalm 89, verse 1. With my mouth, I will make known thy faithfulness.

People need to see the faithfulness of God in our mouth. One of the tools that we have to make people know the faithfulness of God, and yet, of course, it's in speaking that unfaithfulness comes out most often in our character. One of the Ten Commandments was, Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.

And it means, of course, that we should always tell the truth. Jesus made an interesting statement in the Sermon on the Mount, which many people wonder about the meaning of, in Matthew chapter 5, verses 33 through 37. Jesus said, You have heard that it has been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself.

Or we would say, perjure yourself. Swear falsely. But thou shalt perform all thy oaths unto the Lord.

But he says, But I say unto you, swear not at all, neither by heaven, because that's God's throne, neither by the earth, because that is God's footstool, neither by Jerusalem, for that's the city of the great king. And don't even swear by your own head, because you can't turn one hair white or black. But let your yea be yea, and your nay, nay.

For all that comes beyond this is of the wicked one. Now what's he talking about there? That's a confusing passage. A lot of people wonder about it.

I believe what he's talking about is this. He's not talking about the innate immorality of using oaths. We don't use oaths so much in the same way that they did in those days.

In the Jewish society, an oath was made in order to affirm that you were telling the truth. If I said, Well, this is true. And you said, I doubt it.

I might say, Well, I swear by God that this is true. Now, in saying that, what I'm saying is, if you don't believe in my integrity, you certainly would believe in the integrity of God, and I'll drag his integrity into this matter. And I'm willing to even say that, as Paul even said, God is my witness.

How that I long after you, or I pray for you, or whatever. He says, God is my witness. That's in a sense swearing.

It's a bit like it. Because you're basically saying, If you don't believe me, believe God. And when you swear, or when a person would swear, they were impugning, or at least endangering, the integrity of something by which they were swearing.

They were bringing that into it. It says in Hebrews, a man would always swear by something greater than himself. Because if a person didn't believe you, just for your own integrity, you'd have to call in a more impressive witness.

So you'd swear by heaven, you'd swear by earth, you'd swear by Jerusalem, you'd swear by God, or whatever. Now, all those things were quite okay to do. We would kind of raise

our eyebrows if we heard a Christian swearing by the name of Jesus or something, simply because taking oaths isn't done in our society, nor is it Christian.

But the Jews, it was okay to swear in the name of Jehovah. That was permitted. The only restriction was, they shouldn't swear falsely in the name of Jehovah.

Because if they swore in the name of Jehovah, and they happened to be telling a lie, they were defiling his name. But the point here, Jesus said, you have heard that it was said, any oaths you make to the Lord, you shall perform. They said, I just say, don't swear any oaths at all.

Not because oaths are wrong in themselves, but what do you need them for? If you just tell the truth all the time, let your yea be yea, and let your nay be nay, who's going to require they take oaths? If you're a person of integrity, your integrity should be evident enough from your lifestyle, and from people knowing you, that you're a person of truth, that to call upon the integrity of another will be totally superfluous. Why bother? A man of integrity doesn't need to protest so much about his integrity. People will know, this is a trustworthy man.

I believe what Jesus is saying, essentially, is instead of relying on oaths to convince people of your integrity, why don't you just be people of integrity, who when they say yes, they mean yes. And it is truly yes when they say yes. And they don't say no unless it really is no.

And you don't have to add all the other gibbers, because people will soon know whether you are a faithful person. And so we need to be people who always speak the truth, so that people will learn whatever this person says is probably true. This man has never been caught in a lie, to our knowledge.

Like I said about my father, I have never caught him in a lie. And because of that, I can never imagine him lying. And while he might tell me something that I doubt that he knows enough about to be correct, yet, if he tells me that he saw such and such a thing to be the case, or had such and such an experience, I would never doubt it.

Never. Because he'd never lie. I know he'd never lie.

And that's how a man is supposed to be. A man is supposed to be so known for his truthfulness, that he never needs to make a note about it. He's a man of integrity, and people know it.

It's evident. His mouth demonstrates faithfulness. It's his mouth that makes known the faithfulness of God.

He demonstrates it. Well, of course, this has to do with also keeping your promises. Not only your affirmations are trustworthy, but the promises you make can be relied upon.

There used to be a time when a handshake was adequate for sealing a contract. Because men were, in general, more people of integrity and faithfulness than they are now. Today, if you don't have it in writing, you're out of luck.

And even if you do, you might be out of luck. If someone's got a clever lawyer to say, Well, you didn't really mean that when you wrote it down. You meant it differently.

And we can interpret it differently than it seems to say. Because people can't be trusted anymore, mostly. But people who formally would say, I will do this.

The average person was faithful enough that you just kind of think, Well, if he said he'd do it, I guess he'll do it. And so many contracts were made on that kind of a casual basis, because faithfulness was just more commonly seen among people than it is today. And it was never like God's faithfulness necessarily, but it was just more considered to be a necessary thing for people to be truthful.

God is truthful. God keeps his promises. He keeps his commitments.

And therefore, we have few people who do so. We say, We'll be there at three o'clock. And we better get there at three o'clock.

Now, you might say, It doesn't make any difference if I'm there five after three. No big deal. Well, maybe whatever issue is at stake there, for which you're getting there at three, might not be affected by you getting there at three o'clock, but your integrity is.

Because if somebody's waiting for you to arrive at three, and you don't get there until three o'clock, then the next time you say you'll be there at three, they'll say, He really means some little while after three. He doesn't mean what he says. And eventually, because the person doesn't, you know, he compromises a little bit about his commitment, and says, Well, it doesn't really matter if I'm a little late on this.

People just get used to the fact, Well, he said he'd be here at five, but you might as well not really expect anything until five-thirty. At least. I mean, aren't there people that you know that that is exactly how you think about them? When they say, Well, I'll be there at this time, you take it with a grain of salt, right? Because you know they don't keep their commitments.

Now, maybe the things about which they have been slack in keeping their word in the past have been minor issues. But their reputation is not a minor issue. The Bible says a good name is more to be desired than great riches.

And a person will sacrifice his good name. That is, his reputation for faithfulness, for integrity, just out of laziness. And he doesn't know what he's giving up.

You know, once you have been caught in a lie, it's extremely difficult to ever regain

credibility. Think of Richard Nixon. How many of you are ever going to believe him again? I'm not saying he won't ever tell a truth.

In fact, for all I know, he may have only told one lie in his whole life. I don't know. But because he was caught in a lie, no one's ever going to trust him again.

People generally believe what they're told, if you have an honest face, or if you don't look like some kind of a crook, you know. People generally trust you at first. And they'll continue to trust you as you continue to be faithful.

It's not usually too hard, unless you're dealing with an extremely cynical person, to establish a relationship of trust. A lot of people are gullible too, and they trust everybody. But once you're caught in a lie, you may never get trust back.

One thing about God, he's never been caught in a lie. I heard a case just today, though, where someone thinks that God was unfaithful, only because he was improperly instructed about God. It was a case we heard about a while ago, where a fishing boat was lost out at sea, and it was a man and some children on the boat, and it was never found.

But when the boat was lost, the brother of the man on the boat, who is the husband of a Christian friend of ours, the brother of the lost man, is not a Christian, but had been attending church. And he sent a message to the church to pray that the boat would be found. Well, the boat was never found, and this man has never been to church since.

And he told his wife, you can go, but I'm not going anymore. I'm finished with that. In other words, he apparently thinks God was unfaithful, because he prayed for his brother to be found at sea, and he never was.

What the man needs to realize is that God is not our servant. God is not the one that we order around, and if he doesn't do it our way, then he's cheated us. God is not obligated to order the universe the way every unbeliever wants it to happen.

But the point here is, this man may never trust God again, because he thinks he's caught God in an untruth. He hasn't. But it certainly happens that way.

When people think that they've caught you in a lie, or even if it wasn't what people would call a lie, but they expected you to do something on the basis of your word, and you didn't do it. You may not regain credibility easily. It says in Psalm 15 that a man who will dwell in the holy hill of God is a man who swears to his own hurt and changes not.

This is faithfulness. I said I'd do it, but now I found out it's going to cost me a lot more than I thought it was. I've sworn to my own hurt.

I swore that I'd do it, but now it turns out to be doing my own hurt. But the man who is

godly in the Psalm is a man who swears his own hurt, but doesn't change. In other words, he does what he swore he'd do.

He made a commitment. He keeps his commitment no matter what it costs him. This happened to me many times.

When I was making my living washing windows, I was sometimes grossly underbid at jobs. I remember one case in particular, a big house. I looked at it and I said, I can wash these windows for you for \$50.

They said, do it. And I thought, okay, this will take me half a day. I'll make a good day's wage.

\$50 for half a day's work would be good. And I came out, and when I began to work on the windows, I found that the house had been spread with some sealer swappily, and it had all this sealer on the windows. It had to be scraped off with razor blades every inch of the windows.

It had all these windows. Some of them were high cathedral ceilings, big, you know, triangular windows. I had to get up on a ladder and reach up.

It took two days to do the job, and even then I couldn't hardly do it right. But after I realized it was going to take so long, I thought, well, I'd better go tell them I can't do this for \$50. But then I remembered the scripture says he that swears his own hurt and changes not.

I said, well, my integrity is involved here. And my integrity is worth a lot more than the difference between \$50 and what this job is really worth. And so I went ahead and finished it, and I didn't even suggest that any more money be paid, but it was really a ridiculous wage, a ridiculously low wage.

But that happens a lot to people who are contract bidders, you know, and they underbid something. But there's a lot of times when we say, yeah, I'll do such and such a thing, and then later we find out it's going to be much more difficult or costly to do it than we thought. That's what it means to swear to your own hurt.

But a person of faithfulness will continue to do the right thing that he is sworn to do, whether it turns out to be to his own hurt or not. Because of his faithfulness, he keeps his commitments, keeps his promises. I said it, and what I say can be trusted, because I speak the truth.

And I will do what I say, because I'm a person of integrity. Also, another way that your mouth can demonstrate faithfulness is by keeping confidence. Somebody tells you something that isn't supposed to be blabbed around to avoid gossip.

It's an unfaithful person who shares a secret with someone else. Let me show you a scripture about this. Proverbs 11.13 Proverbs 11.13 says, a talebearer, which means a gossip, a talebearer reveals secrets, but he that is of a faithful spirit conceals the matter.

A person who is faithful conceals the matter. When you hear a secret, you keep the secret. Now, there are times when better judgment requires that you disclose a secret, or where duty would.

I heard Jay Adams once telling counselors, don't ever promise that you'll never tell anyone what you're told. How many times does a person say, I'll tell you something, but don't tell anyone this. Don't agree to it.

Jay Adams says, what if a woman calls you, you're a pastor, and calls you on the phone and says, I'll tell you something, but you have to promise you won't tell anyone. So you say, okay, I won't tell anyone. What is it? Well, I just shot my husband.

Well, what do you do now? It's your duty to reveal that you've already committed yourself not to tell. And so, obviously, what you need to do is not make such commitments. There was a case where someone was talking to my wife about something, and they said, don't tell even Steve about this.

And Kristen said, if I'd known you were going to require that I don't tell Steve this, I wouldn't have ever listened to you, because I can't guarantee you that I won't tell him anything. And if someone comes to you and says, listen, I want to tell you something, but promise you'll never tell anyone. Don't agree.

You should say, well, I'll tell you what, I won't share it unless I feel compelled by conscience to share it with someone. If I feel it's my duty to share it with someone, I will. And if you don't like that, then don't tell me.

You know? You don't have to tell me. You don't like your tickling ears or your desire to hear some juicy secret leads you into a trap, because you may commit yourself, you may swear to your own hurt. Say, I said I wouldn't tell anyone, now I really have to tell someone.

What do I do now? Break confidence. Well, it's better not to enter into such confidence, but when somebody has told you something that clearly they don't intend to be blabbed around, and there's no good reason to blab it around except for the sake of patching on a juicy morsel, a faithful person will keep the confidence, will conceal the matter. He that is of a faithful spirit conceals the matter.

Also, another way your mouth can demonstrate faithfulness is by reproving the wrong of a person. Really, it is a faithful thing to tell someone when they're wrong. And it's a hard thing to do.

It's much easier not to confirm. It's much easier to let it go by. But that's, it's unfaithful.

If you were going the wrong way heading toward a cliff that you didn't know was there and you're going to fall off and die, wouldn't you consider that a friend was faithful who told you you were going the wrong way, even if you really wanted to believe you were going the right way? Would you consider a person faithful to you who knew you were going the wrong way and didn't say so? Well, how can a person be considered faithful to a person if he sees him going the wrong way spiritually or morally, heading for moral disaster, and says, I don't want to get involved. I don't want an unpleasant confrontation. I'll just let it go.

Out of faithfulness, you need to rebuke sometimes. It says in one of the Proverbs, Proverbs 27, in verse 6, Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful. A friend may have to cross you.

A friend may have to wound you. He may have to tell you an unpleasant truth, an unflattering truth. If he's faithful, he'll do it.

A faithful friend will wound you when you need to be wounded. It's an unfaithful enemy who kisses you when he ought to be rebuking you, who pretends that nothing is wrong when there really is something wrong. My mouth can demonstrate faithfulness by telling the truth, by keeping my commitment, making commitments only that I am willing to keep even if it hurts me, by keeping confidence and not becoming a gossip of secrets that people have told me, and, of course, by rebuking people when they ought to be rebuked, when friendship would require it.

Okay, that's in the area of speaking. Now, how about in the area of fulfilling obligations and duties, for instance, in business or simply personal agreements that you've made with a person? This is where responsibility comes in. It says in 1 Corinthians 4, 2, Paul said, I'm a steward of the mysteries of God, and he says, it is required of stewards that they be faithful.

1 Corinthians 4, 2. It is required of stewards that they be faithful. They are entrusted with a duty, and therefore they must faithfully or responsibly carry out their duty. A man is not faithful who has a job and he cuts corners when the employer isn't looking, or when the employer is not looking and he does a good job.

He's not faithfully carrying out his responsibility. He's a deceiver. He's not a person of integrity or of faithfulness.

If he does a good job when the employer is looking, he knows that that's what the employer expects him to be doing all the time, or else he wouldn't change when the employer is looking. And the fact that he knows the employer expects him to be doing that should lead him to do it that way whether the employer is looking or not. That's why

the Bible gives instructions to servants that they should be obedient to the masters, not with eye service.

That is, not only when the master is looking, but even when he's not looking because you're really serving the Lord. He's your real master. Let me give you a couple of Proverbs on this also.

This is good. In Proverbs 25, verse 13, says, As the cold of snow in the time of harvest, in other words, refreshing, so is a faithful messenger to them that send him. For he refresheth the soul of his masters.

How refreshing it is to find someone who just does what he's told and does it right without having to be checked on all the time. How refreshing to find a faithful messenger who's not going to take all the shortcuts. Look later in the same chapter, verse 19, the opposite side of the coin.

Proverbs 25, 19, Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a broken tooth or a foot out of joint. In other words, constantly annoying. Putting confidence in an unfaithful man is always a disappointment.

So, being responsible. That's part of being a faithful person is you are responsible to do the things for which you have responsibility. And it's an annoying thing when you meet people who can't be trusted in these areas.

It's refreshing to find one who can. Then, finally, I would say, in our relationships of various kinds. For instance, husbands and wives.

Marriage counselors say the thing that really destroys marriages, two things, really are behind most divorces. One thing, they say, are sexual problems. The other is financial problems.

They say these are the two things that are really the causes of most divorces. Sexual problems and financial problems. That is not true.

Those are not the cause of divorce. The cause of divorce is unfaithfulness. There is never a divorce when both parties are faithful.

Because both parties, the fact that they are married means that they at one time stood before some witnesses and said, we will be true to each other, we will remain married to each other through in sickness and in health, for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, until death do us part. They made a commitment and the fact that they are divorced means they have been unfaithful to that commitment. I don't care what their sexual problems were.

I don't care what their financial problems were. My first marriage, I had very serious

sexual problems. We didn't have sex at all.

My wife just cut me off after about the first week of marriage and we lived together without a relationship. Now that's very serious sexual problems. But we were divorced not because of that.

We were divorced because she divorced me. She broke the covenant. She divorced me.

She was unfaithful. I would have, and I determined this before God, I would have lived the rest of my life with her with those kinds of sexual problems. And we also had financial problems.

And I would have lived the rest of my life with those too. Those things don't ruin marriages. It is unfaithful character that ruins marriages because two faithful people can have a fulfilling life together without money and even with great sexual difficulties.

Suppose a person has some kind of injuries that forbid them from having normal sexual relations. That doesn't mean the marriage has to be ruined. If people are faithful they can still have a meaningful relationship.

Unfaithfulness is the cause of divorce because divorce is unfaithfulness. It is breaking a covenant. It is breaking an agreement.

It says, concerning the virtuous wife, in Proverbs 31, verses 10 through 12, who can find a virtuous woman for her price is far above rubies? Now, they're rare. The heart of her husband does safely trust in her. Now, it's not just that her husband trusts her, but it's safe for him to do so.

She's faithful. He can safely trust in her so that he shall have no need of spoils. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life.

I've known men who trusted their wives but it wasn't safe to do so because their wives were untrustworthy. A virtuous wife is faithful so her husband can safely trust in her. Now, by the way, Proverbs 31 is sometimes thought to be a tribute to women.

It's not a tribute to women. It's not a flattery of women. It says, who can find one like this? Essentially, it is saying that women are very seldom like this.

Well, women are very seldom faithful. Who can find it? It's like finding a ruby to find one like this. Now, you might say, well, that's a chauvinistic chapter.

No, it's written by a woman. If you look at the beginning of the chapter, it says, the words of King Lemuel, the prophet that his mother taught him. She told her son, who can find a virtuous woman? She knew women.

She was one. And she said, it's hard to find them. As soon as you find a ruby laying on

the ground, it's fine to find a woman that's faithful.

But you know what? She wasn't overly cynical. She was just realistic. But she wasn't chauvinistic against women either.

Because the proverb says the same thing about men. It says, most men will proclaim every man his own goodness, but a faithful man, who can find? The same thing it says here. Who can find a virtuous woman? It says, a faithful man who can find.

That's in Proverbs 20, verse 6. Who can find a faithful man? Who can find a faithful woman? Good question. But God's still looking. And a lot of other people are too.

And I'll tell you, after you've been through a divorce, you sometimes wonder if the opposite sex can be trusted at all. And it doesn't matter which side of the divorce you're on, probably both parties wonder. Because it doesn't take too many disappointments for the heart to be made sick about things like that.

But let me tell you something. My first wife was totally unfaithful in every respect that wives can be unfaithful, she was. And I must say, since she was the first relationship I ever had with a woman, it kind of soured me toward women.

And some people might think I'm soured toward women. No, I'm not. But I certainly was when that first marriage ended.

I thought, who can find a virtuous woman? I really doubted that anyone could. But my second wife, who was killed, to whom I was married for only six months, changed my whole opinion about women. And that's kind of hard to do.

When a person has become skeptical, like I said, once trust has been lost, it's hard to establish it again. But I met a faithful person. And my present wife is also very faithful.

So faithful, in fact, I mean, my heart's safely trusted. It's amazing the trust that I'm able to have in a woman after my first marriage, which had made me so cynical. But the Lord brought some faithful people to me.

A faithful wife who was killed, and the faithful wife who is now the mother of my children. And these women have restored my faith in the fact that there can be faithful people. There can be faithful women.

And it's a good thing, too, because there are some. But it's easy to think there aren't after you've had a few disappointments. And I know a lot of women turn that way about me.

And I think that's what leads a lot of people, believe it or not, into homosexuality. I think in some cases, it's not just perversion of sexual desire. It's just they understand and trust their own sex more than they trust the other sex.

That's my own armchair psychological evaluation of that. And I don't know a thing about it. But I think that that's really true, in some cases, at least.

So in marriage, faithfulness has to be demonstrated. It means, of course, that a wife doesn't even look at the man who whistles at her. She doesn't get secretly flattered by it.

It means that the man isn't looking around at other women and doesn't in any way try to convince any other woman that he's available. But that he's just... It's very clear. The husband and wife make it very clear to all members of the opposite sex, I am not available at all.

This kind of faithfulness is pretty rare in the world. And I'm sorry to say, even in the church, because I can remember when I was divorced and therefore single, coming to a new church. And it's kind of a strange thing because there were some rather flirtatious women in the church and some of them were married women.

And I was a gas. I mean, that was another thing that confirmed to me that women weren't faithful. After my first marriage, it ended that way.

Then to meet these other married women who were somewhat flirtatious. Now, it may be that they would have never had an affair if I'd been amenable. I wasn't.

But, for all they were advertising, you couldn't prove to me they're faithful women. And, of course, many times men are the same way. And this is the kind of stuff that has to be eliminated from all Christian relationships.

Friendships. Disordinary friendships are another sphere in which faithfulness needs to be demonstrated. Loyalty.

Loyalty of husbands to wives. Loyalty of friends to friends. I remember Jim telling me a story of how he and two other people went out to a restaurant once in Santa Cruz.

And one of these two other people began to talk about a third person who wasn't there. And just began to talk about something. And it was very soon before very much was said, it was evident that this was going to be a negative discussion about this person who wasn't present.

And as this one party was speaking, the other party, who was with Jim there, interrupted and said, Now, Justin, I want to let you know something. This person that you're speaking about is a friend of mine. And I will not listen to any gossip about this person.

And suddenly the conversation changed to other subjects. And Jim told me about this. He said he just made such a powerful impression on him.

You know, of faithful, loyal friendship. That this person would not even hear gossip about his friends. And when I heard about it, I was kind of impressed with that too.

As a matter of fact, I think that's a rare thing. Most people have itchy ears to hear gossip. And yet, faithfulness to a friend.

There's not very many people that any of us have that we can call really faithful friends. Probably, I hope, everyone here has some. But I know probably you could list a lot of people that would call themselves your friends, but you really couldn't trust them completely.

The Apostle Paul found that to be true. He said to Timothy that Timothy was the only man he had who was like-minded with him at the end of his ministry. In 2 Timothy, he said, Demas, who was a former companion of his, has forsaken me, having loved this present world.

This is in 2 Timothy 4. Later in the same chapter, he said, At my first answer, that's when he first stood trial before Nero, he says, at my first answer, all men forsook me. And I pray the Lord will not hold it against them. Now there's a faithful friend.

Here's a guy, all his friends had forsaken him in his hour of need. He says, Lord, please don't hold that against them. I mean, he stood for them even though they didn't stand for him.

They were unfaithful friends, but he was a faithful one. He still prayed for them. He was that way toward his countrymen, the Jews too.

The Jews gave him more problems than anyone else did. Persecuted him from town to town. But he said, I'd give up my salvation if I could for their salvation.

I could wish myself a curse from Christ for their sakes. There's faithfulness in horizontal relationships with people. There's a friend, the Bible says, that sticks closer than a brother in Proverbs 18.24. There's a friend that sticks closer, who's more faithful even than brothers are.

And Christians should be that kind of friend to the people who confide in them and who trust in them. And of course, finally, our faithfulness to God is the most important aspect of our faithfulness. We talk about faithfulness of speech, faithfulness in our responsibilities, our stewardship, faithfulness in our relationships, such as marriage and friendship, but especially our relationship to God.

Faithfulness to God is, of course, the most important area of all. It says in Revelation 17, in verse 14, there's a vision of Christ returning. And there are some with him, on his side.

In Revelation 17, verse 14, it says, and those who are with him are called and chosen and faithful. Those who return with him are those who have not only been called and chosen but faithful. Remember Jesus said, many are called, few are chosen.

But these are not only called and chosen, but they're also faithful. And I would dare say, many are called, few are chosen, and even fewer are faithful. Jesus said in Revelation 2.10, And be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Meaning faithful to me. Faithful to Jesus, unto death. That's what faithfulness requires.

He was faithful to you unto death, and you need to be faithful to him, unto death. Now you might say, well, that's kind of a big thing, to be faithful unto death. I'm not sure I'm that faithful.

How do I become more faithful? I certainly would hope that if someone put a gun to my head and said, deny Christ or perish, I'd hope that I'd make the right decision, but I really don't know if I'm that kind of a faithful person. Well, there is a conditioning process. Jesus said, He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in that which is greatest.

In Luke 16.10. In Luke 16.10, Jesus said, He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful in that which is greatest. If you want to be faithful in the great things, you have to start being faithful in the small things. It's going to have to mean keeping your word in your everyday mundane relationships.

It's going to mean doing your job responsibly when you're not being watched. Doing what's expected. To bring it right down home to even just life here in this community, every one of these students signed a student agreement that said, we agree to do these, these, these and these and these things.

If you didn't sign one, you shouldn't be here. That was part of the application process. Are you doing those things? Maybe you ought to read it again.

If you can't be faithful in that which is least, don't kid yourself. You're not going to be faithful until death. If you're not faithful and no one's holding a gun to your head, you're not going to be faithful when they are.

And so, we need to learn to be faithful in the little things. To learn how to be faithful to our husbands or wives if we happen to fit that category. Faithful to our friends.

We need to learn to develop integrity, responsibility, loyalty. And under loyalty, I would even say tenacity. It takes that in a friendship and in a relationship with God for it to be successful.

In a marriage, there has to be tenacity because there's going to be fingers of the world grabbing at you and pulling you in the direction away from faithfulness. And you've got to have a tenacity and a loyalty to your friend or to your spouse or to your God that is extreme, that is fanatical. And we should be fanatically faithful people because God clearly is fanatically faithful to us and that is the aspect of His character that the world most needs to see, I think, is the faithfulness of God.

And they need to see the tenacity and the faithfulness of His people. Okay, well, that's all I have to share tonight, I think.