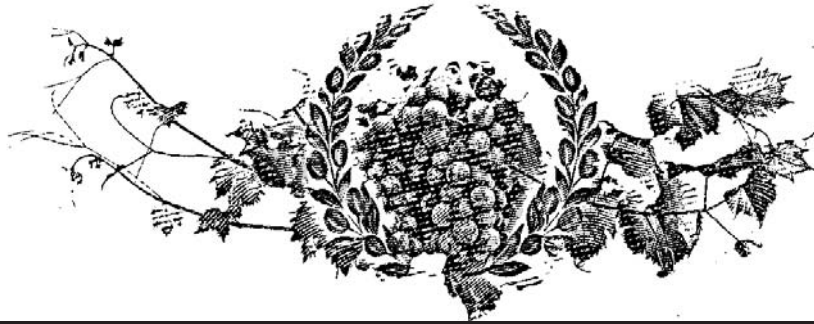


The Fruit of the Spirit Is Faithfulness (Being Faithful)



SABBATH—FEBRUARY 13

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Matthew 25:1–13; Luke 16:10; 1 Thesalonians 5:23, 24; 2 Timothy 3:1–5; Hebrews 11.

MEMORY VERSE: “Let us not become tired of doing good. At the right time we will gather [harvest] a crop if we don’t [do not] give up” (Galatians 6:9, NIrV).

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT KNOWN AS “FAITHFULNESS” also could be called “fidelity [loyalty to God].” It speaks of a firmness of purpose, especially when we feel discouraged. Faithfulness suggests staying on course and not giving up. Loyalty means always being faithful. Constancy means staying on the track and being sure of one’s beliefs. Staunchness suggests firmness in following one’s principles (rules) or purposes. A staunch person cannot be turned aside. And resoluteness means a strong desire to do something.

“Faith” and “faithfulness” are closely connected. But they are not the same thing. Faith is a gift from God. It helps us to believe that God is real, even if we cannot see Him. “Faith is being sure of what we hope for. It is being certain [sure] of what we do not see” (Hebrews 11:1, NIrV). Faithfulness is the working out (result) of this belief in God. When we have faith in God, we act in faithful ways. Acts of faithfulness are examples of our faith. Such acts are the threads holding our belief and behavior (actions) system together.

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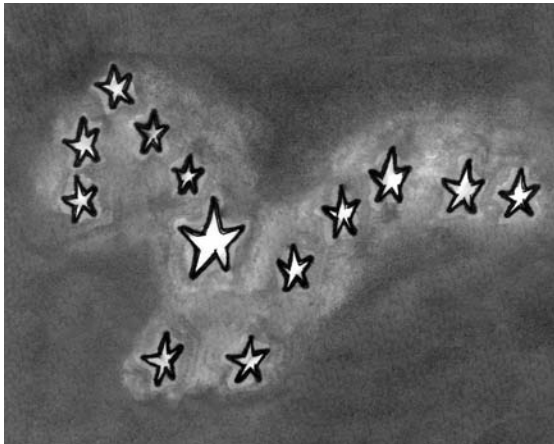
SUNDAY—FEBRUARY 14

GOD IS FAITHFUL (Psalm 89:9)

As with all the fruit of the Spirit, God Himself is the example of faithfulness for us to study. God is as faithful now as He was three trillion years before creating the earth. He will be just as faithful three trillion years into the future as He was in the past. Nothing will cause Him to change His plan.

Note the good points of God's faithfulness:

- God's faithfulness is far-reaching (Psalm 36:5).
- God's faithfulness is sure (Psalm 89:33).
- God's faithfulness is great (Lamentations 3:23).
- God's faithfulness is set in heaven (Psalm 89:2).



God's faithfulness is set in the heavens.

List the blessings in 1 Corinthians 10:13; 1 Thessalonians 5:23, 24; 2 Thessalonians 3:3; and Hebrews 10:23 that come to us as a result of God's faithfulness.

Why is the faithfulness of God so important to the Christian's life? Remember a time in your life when knowing that God was faithful brought you through a crisis. On a day-to-day basis, which blessing of God's faithfulness is the greatest help to you?

MONDAY—FEBRUARY 15

FAITHLESSNESS: A SIGN OF THE END (Luke 18:8)

What does Jesus' question in Luke 18:8 suggest?

The apostle Paul writes that "Evil people and pretenders will go from bad to worse. They will fool others, and others will fool them" (2 Timothy 3:13, NIV). People today are like what they were when Moses wrote his five books or Paul his letters. A person could argue that our society today makes it easier to sin because sin is encouraged. In other words, our environment grows more friendly toward sin. And then our fallen human natures¹ naturally will sin even more. People encourage self-centeredness (self-pride). Advertising encourages us to satisfy ourselves:

1. human natures—any of the qualities or aspects of humans (men, women, and children) that make us who we are. Without God, our natures are sinful, fallen, selfish, proud, unkind, and so on.

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why wait, why deny ourselves, why sacrifice, why not go along with everyone else? All the time we hear, “Satisfy yourself because you deserve it.”



Faithlessness is a sign of the end of time.

What basic character trait² is shown in 2 Timothy 3:1–5? Why is it so clearly found in so many people?

This generation³ is not the first to be selfish. But what is unusual about it is that selfishness seems to be recommended in this society. “Look out for number one,” “Love yourself first” is the cry. Self-centeredness (self-pride, selfishness) causes people to not want to take responsibility for anything they do or say or should do. This generation could well be described by these verses: “Some people call down curses on their fathers. Others don’t [do not] bless their mothers.

2. character trait—qualities, such as being honest and faithful, that make a person who he or she is.

3. generation—all the people born about the same time. Your parents belong to one generation. You and your friends who are your age belong to another generation.

4. influenced—to have power, or an effect, over persons or things.

5. temptations—things that can turn us away from God and that try to get us to do, think, feel, or say what is wrong.

Some are pure in their own eyes. But their dirty sins haven’t [have not] been washed away” (Proverbs 30:11, 12, NIV). It would seem that everything wrong with everyone is now blamed on other people, most often the parents.

How have TV and the newspapers helped with the unfaithfulness (not being faithful) even among church members? Be honest with yourself: how have they influenced⁴ your thinking? Take a step back and ask yourself, “How might the things I read, watch, and listen to hurt my own faithfulness to God?”

TUESDAY—FEBRUARY 16

EXAMPLES OF FAITHFULNESS (Hebrews 11)

Read Hebrews 11, the list of characters who are given as examples of faithfulness. Pick three characters and write down how their faithfulness was shown, even when they struggled with temptations.⁵ What did they do that showed their faithfulness? At the same time, what were their struggles, their trials, their temptations? How are the principles involved the same for us today as they were for these people in Hebrews 11?

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Think how easy it could have been for some of these people to have become discouraged. Think of Joseph in prison. Think of Sarah waiting and waiting and waiting for the promised child. Or think of Moses, tempted⁶ with the riches of a kingdom, but who chose “to be treated badly together with the people of God” (Hebrews 11:25, NIV). We sometimes think of these people as if they were larger than life, kind of superhuman. But they were just as real as we are. They faced temptations to sin as we do. They would question God, fear results, and sometimes fail as we do. They might have all their own weaknesses and mistakes, but they showed faithfulness. They acted out the faith they claimed to have. And they were able to be used by God to do wonderful things.



By faith, Sarah waited for the promised child to come and did not grow discouraged.

What are the things that challenge you in your desire to be faithful? Put them in two groups: (1) the things you can do nothing about and (2) the things you can remove from your life.

WEDNESDAY—FEBRUARY 17

FAITHFULNESS IN DAILY LIVING (Luke 16:10)

How has the principle (rule) of Luke 16:10 shown itself to be true in your own life? If we are not faithful in the little things, why should we think we would be faithful in the larger ones?

“The greatest lack of the world is the lack of honest men. The world needs men who will not be bought or sold. It needs men who are always true and honest. It needs men who do not fear to call sin by its right name. It needs men who are as true to duty as the needle to the pole. It needs men who will stand for the right, even if the heavens should fall.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Education*, page 57.

The following words are important parts of faithfulness:

Dependability—Dependability means people can depend on you. When was the last time someone let you down? Do you remember how that made you feel? What does it say about your character⁷ if you lack dependability?

6. tempted—being presented with an opportunity (chance) to do wrong.

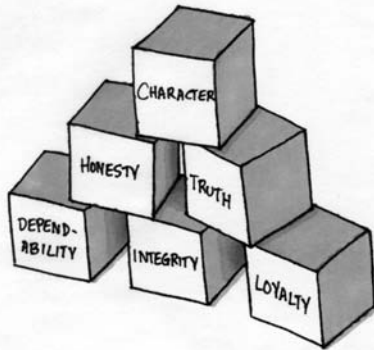
7. character—who someone is; all that a person does, feels, and thinks are what he or she is made of.

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Honesty—Honesty is truthfulness. It means you are not going to lie or cheat or steal. Honesty is an important building block of a strong character and should be shown every day in our lives.

Integrity—Integrity (doing what is right) is like a code of honor. If you have integrity, you always follow certain beliefs and principles in your daily life. It also means you respect the beliefs and principles of others. Integrity is also one of the important building blocks of character.

Loyalty—Loyalty is showing support. It means standing by someone even when times get tough. Loyalty is an important part of friendship. But does loyalty include doing something wrong for a friend? Does loyalty have limits? How might someone go too far in showing loyalty to a friend?



Honesty is an important building block of a strong character.

Think carefully about these parts of faithfulness. How faithful are you in each of these different areas? Where can you do better? Most important, what changes do you

need to make to be more faithful to what you know is right? How can you make the needed changes?

THURSDAY—FEBRUARY 18

FAITHFUL UNTIL THE END (Matthew 25:1–13)

Read the parable in Matthew 25:1–13. Notice that everyone who was waiting for the bridegroom went to sleep. When the bridegroom arrives and all wake up, it is too late for five of them. In what ways could we, in the twenty-first century, be in danger of doing the same thing?

Read Matthew 24:44–50. Notice how the evil servant changes his lifestyle when he believes his master is not coming back as soon as he expected. What is the message to us who feel there has been a delay in the coming of Jesus?

Things have not happened as soon as we expected. But we take comfort from the promise in Galatians 6:9, “Let us not become tired of doing good. At the right time we will gather [harvest] a crop if we don’t [do not] give up” (NIRV).

The issue that faces God’s people in the twenty-first century is not “Will God be faithful?” We should know by now that He is faithful to all that He has promised. The important issue is, “Will I be faithful until the end?”

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In many ways the answer to the question about the future (“Will I be faithful to the end?”) can be found in the present. What is the basic condition of your spiritual life now? Are you daily dedicated to serving the Lord, growing in grace and faithfulness? Or are you slowly, bit by bit, giving up, growing more like the world and its ways? What does your answer tell you about yourself and your walk with the Lord?

FRIDAY—FEBRUARY 19

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “But like the stars orbiting⁸ in their paths, *God’s purposes know no haste and no delay.* Through the symbols⁹ of the great darkness and the smoking furnace, God had shown Abraham Israel’s slavery in Egypt. And God had declared to Abraham that the time of Israel’s stay in Egypt should be four hundred years. But God also said, ‘After that, they [the people of Israel] will leave with all kinds of valuable things.’ Genesis 15:14, NIV. Against God’s word, all the power of Pharaoh’s proud empire fought for nothing. ‘At the end of the 430 years, to the very day, all of the Lord’s people marched out of Egypt like an army.’ Exodus 12:41, NIV. So in heaven’s court the hour for the coming of Christ had been determined. When the great clock of time pointed to that hour, Jesus was born in Bethlehem.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page

8. orbiting—to travel in a circle.

9. symbols—objects, marks, signs, or persons that stand for, or mean the same thing as other objects, ideas, or things.

10. culture—the way that people live, dress, think, eat, and get along with one another.

32, emphasis supplied.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

① What are some of the things in your own culture¹⁰ that present challenges to those who want to be faithful to Jesus? How can we meet those challenges? How can we help one another in this struggle?

② Think about the things that you have read, watched, or listened to for the past twenty-four hours. Were they the kind of things that could encourage you in your faith? Or were they things that worked against it? What does your answer suggest?

③ Consider the question of loyalty. What are the limits of loyalty that are good? Is it always good? When might being loyal to someone mean being disloyal to God?

④ What kind of danger, if any, could come up from being “too” faithful? In what ways could it be taken too far?

⑤ What are useful ways that we can keep the Second Coming alive in our churches and in our homes? It is true: the longer the Second Coming is put off, the easier and easier it gets to forget about it and fall into wrong habits and thoughts. How can we keep those who have been in the church a long time excited about the Second Coming?