

“Defining Faithfulness”
Selected Texts
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July 31, 2016 – Evening sermon

Prayer:

Father God, we thank You for the gift of worship. We thank You for the gift of Your Word and we pray that You would fill us with the Holy Spirit to listen to Your Word, to be impacted by Your Word, to be transformed from one degree of glory to the next that we might be transformed into the image of Christ. Give us wisdom and insight about how we can better live life to please, honor and serve You and we pray this all in Christ’s Name, Amen.

I’d like to start by looking at Matthew 25. I think it’s a parable that many are familiar with. Essentially it is the parable where there is a master that represents God and He gives out different talents, portions of money to different servants. Then He sends them to do business with it for His glory. Then when they return He wants a return on His investment. He wants to see what they have done for Him. Different servants come and tell Him what they did with His talents and there are different rewards or either punishments. A great and fair application people would make from this parable is whatever the Lord has given you in life you need to use it to serve Him and be faithful with all that God has given you. We say to be faithful with your time, your treasures and talents and that is a great application.

Imagine this scenario with me. Imagine that you just had the privilege to lead somebody to Christ, a person who didn’t grow up in the church or know anything about the Bible and was a brand new Christian. They heard this parable taught and said ‘what does it mean to be faithful to Christ and in my time, treasure and talents?’ You might respond, ‘with your time you ought to spend time reading the Bible.’ They might say ‘how often, every day?’ ‘Yes, reading the Bible every day is a great idea!’ Then take them to different verses like Joshua 1:8 which says *[8] This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.* Psalm 1 makes these great promises when you meditate on the Word of God every day and night. So they will understand what it means to be faithful to God with their time.

Then they may say ‘what does it mean to be faithful with my treasures, do I have to give some of my money away?’ ‘Absolutely, in fact start by giving ten percent to the church.’ Malachi talks about bringing the tithe into the storehouse which is the Old Testament way to talk about giving ten percent to the church. Then they might say ‘what is this deal about my talents?’ You might respond by saying ‘any gifts or abilities you have you would use to serve the Lord, for instance any friends you have that don’t know Christ you should talk to them about Christ.’ The Great Commission talks about that.

The point I’m trying to make is that in a sense you’d be defining faithfulness. You would be helping that young believer understand what faithfulness looks like in their life on a day to day basis but here’s the thing. Most of us on a Sunday night at Briarwood Presbyterian Church aren’t wrestling with if they should read their Bible every day or not or if we should be tithing or sharing our faith. There is this very real sense as you mature as a Christian, faithfulness can become a little bit more complicated at times to figure out personally in your life. Here is an example of this.

In the Sunday school class I was in this morning someone was talking about the importance of reading through the Bible in a year. I have had others ask me about a good Bible reading plan and how to know what books to read. Practically what would it look like to read through the Bible in a year? Is that realistic? Is that too much or should I do more? There is not a verse in the Bible to tell you that. Wouldn't that be nice if all the questions you ever had about your spiritual life you could flip to a verse that would tell you exactly what you needed to do or know? Think about it when it comes to your money. I bet many of you might feel you need to give above and beyond the tithe and they know they are to give ten percent to their local church but there are also many great ministries out there.

There is a great ministry called Campus Outreach, and Alliance Defense Fund which is trying to help our country not go down the tubes. There is Save-A-Life that helps fight abortion. There are all these other international ministries that are trying to take the Gospel to unreached places. I'd like to give to some of them but I can't give to all of them. How many do I give to and how much do I give them? Think about your talents.

One of the reasons I wanted to speak on this is that the fall season which is right around the corner is the time to ramp up your commitments to Jesus. Want to sing in the choir, we have a spot for you. We have an impact weekend coming up, who'd like to let us use their house? We have this fellows program, so who'd like to let us have their house for a whole year? We're going to start Men of the Covenant Bible studies and we need table leaders. We'd like to ask some to be elders, deacons and shepherd a new Sunday school class. I'm glad I go to a church like this. Briarwood is not a church producing couch potato, is it? Briarwood is a church that wants every member to be a minister and those are good legitimate ministries but you can't do them all. So how do you discern which ones you'll be a part of?

I hope this sets the stage for you because what I'm going to try to do in this study is walk through ten short Biblical passages and make ten different points that I think will help us answer those types of questions when it gets into the nitty gritty of how we personally define faithfulness in our lives. The first one comes from this parable in Matthew 25. This is when they are coming back. Matthew 25:20–23 says [20] *And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.'* [21] *His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'* [22] *And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.'* [23] *His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'* There are several important things to note just from these couple of verses.

One man had five talents, he was faithful and produced five more. Another one had two but was faithful and produced two more. The response of the Master to both of them is the same. The first point is not to get into the comparison game. Don't compare your capacity to other people, just be faithful with the capacity the Lord has given you. I am going to try and give an example on all these points.

Two days ago I heard about a man who reads through the Bible, at minimum, at least once a month. He said last year that he only read through the Bible fourteen times and he felt a little disappointed in himself. Some may say that man is a legalist. Imagine if you planned to read through the Bible in a year and you hear that but it intimidates you so you just give up. The comparison game never works out well because if you think you are doing better than others you become arrogant. If you think you are doing worse than others you despair. This man who reads

through the Bible in a month is a retired grandfather so if you are a working mother with three young children it is probably not realistic for you to sit around reading fifty chapters of the Bible every day.

So as you prayerfully discern what your Bible reading plan ought to look like don't compare your capacity. Another way to say the same thing is to say to be motivated by your Master. Your motives should not be to look to the left and the right and want to be better than everybody else. Your motive should be that you just want to please the Master. Lord Jesus, help me figure out what I can do daily in my Bible reading that will be the most pleasing to You. That is the first principle and all of these ten principles work together.

Next let's look at Proverbs 11:14. There are actually about three or four Proverbs that say virtually the same thing. Proverbs 11:14 says *[14] Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety.* Counselors are one of the best methods to discern the Lord's will and I don't mean someone you have to pay to see but perhaps sometimes you might need that. I just mean in general good Godly friends, mentors that know you, your situation and that you trust. When you have to make a decision and there is not a clear verse to tell you what to do, the second best thing to a clear verse is compilation of counselors that agree.

I primarily work with college students and many have been involved with ministry. Many wrestle with knowing whether to go into a more business type opportunity or into some type of full time ministry to be faithful to God in their life. When they ask me about this, I will tend to ask them 'who knows you best? Who do you trust the most in your life?' Some will say their pastor or their father or a best friend roommate who is Godly and wise. I will tell them to ask those three people and if they haven't that is a problem, why not? If they say yes then I generally hear something like 'all three of them say I'd be really gifted in the business world and they would have a salt and light influence there.' That is basically the voice of God. God is speaking through the body of Christ.

John MacArthur said 'The more crucial the decision, the more appropriate is corporate wisdom.' So when you face questions that seem a little bit more gray as far as the exact text, ask Godly counselors that can help you. Now I'd like to look at Psalm 37. This will be a verse that many are very familiar with.

Psalm 37:4 says *[4] Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.* Charles Spurgeon said 'Our innermost desires are here meant, not our casual wishes.' William Hendricksen said 'Proper desires should be cultivated, not killed.' So the third point is to design your life and ministries around your desires. I'm not talking about the sinful desires. I'm talking about God-given desires. Many times God gives you those desires to point you in a certain direction.

In the last month I've talked with two different members of this church where one volunteers with the high school group and one volunteers with the middle school group. Both have said to me 'I just love doing ministry.' I tell them then keep doing it for a long time because there are a lot of people who don't like those groups of ministries. That is a gift, a unique desire and design that God has given them. I'm glad there are others who feel called to minister in that way.

Now we are on the fourth point. Let's look at Psalm 103:13-14 which says *[13] As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him. [14] For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.* The fourth point is that the Father knows your frame. The Father knows your fragility, your frailty, and how weak you are. How

does this help? It helps in this way. If you start praying how much and where should I give it can feel overwhelming. Think about this.

If the picture that the Bible presented about our God was of a tyrannical dictator, not a Father or an angry coach that didn't like you looking for any reason to kick you off the team, then think of the trembling and fear you'd bring to trying to plan what your next year would look like. You'd begin to question like what if I don't make the right decision and I get zapped with a lightning bolt but this word compassion in Psalm 103 is similar to the Hebrew word for womb. It has the idea of the compassion of a mom and dad feel for their children and that is the kind of tender pity that God in heaven feels for us. Take the weight off your back. Does God want you to be faithful? Of course He does but there is not this hyper pressure on your shoulders saying that you have to get it just right.

Here is an example of how this might work out in your life. I was teaching a Sunday school class talking about evangelism and how I like to evangelize which is to pick up hitchhikers. It's amazing how well they listen when you pick up a hitchhiker and you're driving down an interstate at 70 miles an hour. I was exhorting the class to do this next time they wanted to evangelize someone. I was trying to be very practical and one of the ladies in the class raised her hand and asked "Olan, are you really suggesting that me as a woman, if I'm driving around by myself that I should pick up a hitchhiker even if it's a man? I don't feel comfortable doing that." I said 'ye of little faith', no of course I didn't say that. I told her I hadn't thought about that and realized that might not be smart for a woman to do that. For me, I just think most of the time that if the hitchhiker tried to jump me that I could take him but maybe I shouldn't think that way. That was a wise question for the woman to ask. In light of this principle your capacity, design or frame may not be the same as someone else so don't feel your application to evangelism has to look the same as someone else's.

Let's move to the fifth point and look at Psalm 119. Some might be wondering why I haven't mentioned the principle of the Word of God at this point. I'm getting ready to but the whole dilemma I'm trying to address is when you come to a decision that the Scripture doesn't specifically address then what do you do. Those are many dilemmas we have to make decisions about but that doesn't mean you ignore the Scripture. Psalm 119:104-105 says *[104] Through your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way. [105] Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.*

The fifth principle is that the precepts light your path. The idea here is of a little foot lantern that probably shows you the next step. If you want to see steps two and three you have to take step one first. I wish that verse 105 said that the Word of God is a GPS system. If I go downtown and I don't know how to get back on the interstate all I have to do is punch in my home address and then it tells me how to get home. The point is that it makes it so easy. God's Word isn't just like that. It shows us the next step. It's a foot lantern. We have to use the brain that God has given us, sanctified in wisdom, often times to figure things out, to discern things. As you read, love, meditate, journal, study and listen to others teach on the Bible, part of what Psalm 119:105 is promising is that the Bible will start to so transform your mind that as II Timothy 3:16, 17 says, you'll be equipped for every good work. You'll know. Here is an example.

Imagine if a single guy came to you and said 'I'm thinking about starting a discipleship group.' You say 'that's a good idea.' He says 'I have three lovely ladies I have picked out to be in my group.' Then you might say 'that's not such a great idea.' Some are probably thinking this is a stupid question and who would ever say that and that's because you have never done

college ministry. If this was a college student they probably would respond ‘can you show me a verse that says this isn’t a good idea?’ ‘I can’t but I can point to some examples like Jesus only had 12 male disciples and Paul lays forth principles about older women teaching younger women and older men teaching younger men.’ I think you can take those principles and glean good wisdom that says it is not a good decision. So that is a way you can apply that principle.

Let’s move to point six and look at Philippians 4. This is a favorite passage of mine. Philippians 4:6–7 says [6] *do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. [7] And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* Have you ever thought what a radical command this is? All worry is basically sin. So how does this fit in to the point about decision making? Some of the decisions you make are big and there can be this sense of not making the right decision.

Here is an example that I’m sure some have struggled with. Where are you going to send your kids to school? Is it best for your family to homeschool or to send them to a private school, a Christian school, a public school? If you choose a Christian school do you only go the covenant route that only allows Christians or the evangelical route where they take anybody? How do you choose? In my family we went for years where every year we reconsidered what to do on this matter with our kids. There are different kinds of fears or worries that can come up. What if we homeschool and then our kids can’t really relate to a lost world because they don’t have lost friends? What if we send them to a private school that is really too expensive and we really can’t afford it and it really effects all the giving we just said we’d do? What if we send them to a public school and they get too influenced by non-Christians? You can start to worry.

One of the reasons I love this passage is because there is a very clear, realistic and practical promise. Here is my personal definition of worry is a conversation that you have with yourself about something you can’t really do anything about. The weight of it is causing you to worry about it. What is prayer? Prayer is simply a conversation with God about something He can do everything about. A good summation of this verse is turn worry into prayer. When you begin to worry or have anxiety about something you say ‘my Daddy runs the whole universe. He sits on the throne and I don’t know what to do. He knows how to fix this’ and then you pray to Him. The wonderful promise from this verse is the peace of God will come down around your heart like a fortress. It may not even make sense to you at times but it will make it impossible for you to worry.

I have experienced this literally hundreds of times. I’m worried about something and I start to pray and a real sense of peace comes over me to the point that sometimes my facial expression and body language even change. My wife may even ask me if I figured out how I was going to solve that problem and I have no clue. She says ‘you seem better so what happened?’ I had my eyes on myself and now I have my eyes on the Lord. William Hendricksen says it will be like the Lord will assign a guard to stand by the door of your heart and He won’t let worry come in. So make sure you are praying when you are going through these decisions.

Let’s look at a few more things on prayer in Proverbs 30. Proverbs is a book of wisdom and this is a very interesting point. This is the only prayer in the book of Proverbs. It is a great and wise prayer. Proverbs 30:8–9 says [8] *Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, [9] lest I be full and deny you and say, “Who is the LORD?” or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God.* Point seven is to pray for your portion. Think about this with me.

I'm sure if I asked how many of you have ever prayed about money every hand would go up. Even if you're not a Christian you have probably prayed about money before. Then if I asked if when you pray about money do you pray about more money or less money I think everyone would say more. I'd like to meet anyone who would pray for less money or that you would lose your job or that the stock market would crash so you would lose your money. The one who prays in Proverbs here is very wise. He basically says he doesn't want too much that he might become arrogant but he doesn't want too little either. He is wise enough to know that there is a danger at both ends of the spectrum.

I have heard Randy Pope, a PCA pastor in Atlanta, preach on this passage and he shows how you can apply this to any area of life, including your ministry opportunities. Imagine you're an elder and you teach Sunday school a lot and you like it but it's hard work. You have a full time job so you have to take the majority of your Saturday to study and prepare for that Sunday school lesson. Then when you teach it goes okay where some like it but some never come back again after you teach. Some say thank you and that it was helpful but overall you kind of feel discouraged. You have a good friend who only spends about 30 minutes preparing and when he teaches it's like a golden tongue where he is booked up for the next five years. It can be easy to say 'Lord, I want to have his portion. I don't want to have to study and I want to be a great teacher.' This passage in Proverbs says not to fall into that. Just say 'Lord, give me my portion. Make me the best Sunday school teacher I can be' and you can apply this in any realm.

Here is a prayer I pray often; I want to live up to all my potential in Christ for His glory, no more, no less. I think this is a helpful prayer. Now let's look at Hebrews 4:15-16 which says *[15] For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. [16] Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.* The point here is similar to the one I made from Psalm 103 where the Father knows your frame but the eighth point here is to pray to your Priest. Remember your great High Priest.

Here is the way I envision this happening in some of our lives. Some of you have already made some pretty hard commitments – maybe to be a foster parent or to adopt a child or you found out you were having a special needs child and you are keeping it regardless of what the doctors or anyone else says. Now a few years into this hard commitment there are times you are very weary, worn out and discouraged. In your darkest moments if you get really gut level honest you might say 'I'm having second thoughts about the decision/commitment I have made.' Sometimes we can feel as if we need to keep a stiff upper lip because I'm a committed Christian. You never want them to see you sweat.

That is not what this passage says. This passage says you can go to the Lord Jesus Christ and say 'Lord, I want to be faithful but if I'm being honest I want out. I don't know if I can handle this. I feel weak and overwhelmed with work and weariness.' What do you think the Lord Jesus in His heart might be feeling back to you? I don't think it's hard to imagine. I think He looks at you with tenderness and compassion and says 'there was a time when I made a commitment, a ministry calling, a big one, and I didn't have to do it. I volunteered to go to earth, to suffer and die for some sinners. There was a point that you could say I had some second thoughts for I said 'Father if there is any other way let it pass but not My will but Thine.'"

When you remember that you have such a gracious Savior, isn't it encouraging and life giving to remember that this Savior who is so strong willingly became weak for our sake, to save

us and take the wrath of God? When you start to look at Him, it gives me strength to say I can stand up by faith looking at that strong Savior who became weak for me. That helps me to persevere to the end. Make sure you are doing that as you walk through ministry. Don't try to be strong in ministry out of your own strength. Be strong in ministry out of the strength of the Savior. He made the ultimate sacrifice so we can make little, small sacrifices. You might think your sacrifices don't feel small but when you look at the grand sacrifice He made on the cross 2,000 years ago, it makes our sacrifices pale in comparison. So make sure you are worshipping and praying to your Priest and He will give you strength.

We have two more points left. The next point is from James 1:5–6 which says [5] *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. [6] But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.* These verses mean so much to me personally and here's another clear promise. The ninth point is wait for wisdom. When you feel you lack wisdom just pray for it, wait for it and watch what the Lord will do. You probably won't hear a voice or see a vision but the Lord promises to guide the natural thinking processes of your mind and give you wisdom.

One of the reasons I love this promise so much is that it has three conditions. The first condition is that you have to lack wisdom. I have that one down pat. The second condition is to ask. It's not hard – Lord, give me wisdom, please. That's how easy it is. The third condition is that you have to trust Him. Now if you ask for wisdom for what the next forty years of your life will be like it will probably not happen. You need to take these principles and use them together. Psalm 119:105 says it is just a lamp to your feet but perhaps you have three ministry opportunities that have come up and you only have time for two but you don't know which two then pray for wisdom and trust that when the deadline comes up He is guiding you. H.A. Ironside says “Be assured that it is always His desire to impart the necessary wisdom to His people that'll enable them to pursue a right course.”

The last principle we'll end with is found in Ephesians 2:8–10 which says [8] *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, [9] not a result of works, so that no one may boast. [10] For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.* Take all these principles together. God knows how weak you are and He knows your capacity. He is not going to give you more than you can do. He has unique good works for you to walk in. So the tenth principle is for you to be faithful to walk in your good works, and not others.

One of the reformers, Martin Luther, said, “God's work are not all the same for everyone. Each individual calling has its own particular kind of good works.” I hope for all of you reading this that you will take these ten principles and apply it to a decision you're making. Pray, read and meditate through them to see if the Lord won't use them to help clarify and give you wisdom on the decision you are making. Then use these principles to keep you on the path because I've noticed when things get busy in our life we get overwhelmed with life.

How many of you have ever said ‘there is just too much to get done today’? There shouldn't be because God knows you only have 24 hours in a day and He is not going to give you more in that 24 hour period that you can't handle or do. The problem sometimes is that we want to overwork ourselves. We tend to make our own list that really is not the list the Lord has for us. So when I start to feel overwhelmed at times the question I have to ask myself is ‘who's list am I living off of? Have I invented a list of good works that the Lord doesn't even expect of me?’ Or am I faithfully applying these principles trying my best by His grace, with His Spirit,

with His wisdom and the body of Christ to figure out what works to best please Him and then just simply trying to be faithful doing that and leaving the rest at His feet.

I want to close with this thought. If our salvation was up to us then it would be by your works that you have been saved, not by faith, not by grace but your own doing is what will save you, then we should probably all be work-a-holics, right? There is a lot left undone and a lot of sin to cover up. It is an impossible task but the fact that we have the Savior who says, 'you're saved totally by My works and not by your own works' then that frees us to do good works, not drained like a slave serving an evil master, but to do good works to please a gracious, heavenly Father and an empathetic, sympathetic High Priest. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father God, I pray that You would take these words of mine and purify out whatever is not of You but I pray that Your Word would ring true and that we would remember it. There are probably different principles in here that would be more important for different people reading this to apply so I pray for everyone reading this that there would be at least one nugget of truth, one Biblical principle that really sticks with us, convicts us, encourages us and gets our eyes off of ourselves and onto You. Help us to worship. Help our motivation to please You so we can experience more and more of the joy of our Master. I pray all of this in Christ's Name, Amen.

Power Point

I. Compare not your capacity

(Matthew 25:20–23)

Be motivated by your Master

II. Consult with your counselors

(Proverbs 11:14, 15:22, 24:6)

“The more crucial the decision, the more appropriate is corporate wisdom.” ~ J. MacArthur

III. Design around your desires

(Psalm 37:4)

“Our innermost desires are here meant, not our casual wishes.” ~ C.H. Spurgeon

“Proper desires should be cultivated, not killed.” ~ H. Hendriksen

IV. Father knows your frame

(Psalm 103:13–14)

V. Precepts light your path

(Psalm 119:104–105)

VI. Pray for your peace (Philippians 4:6–7)

“Anxiety is unconscious blasphemy.” ~ O. Chambers

Worry is usually a conversation with yourself about something you can't do anything about.

Prayer is a conversation with God about something He can do everything about. So just

bring Him into the conversation in your mind when you are wrestling with some big decision. Thus, turn worry into prayer.

VII. Pray for your portion

(Proverbs 30:8–9)

Pray this—I want to live up to all my potential in Christ for His glory, no more, no less.

VIII. Pray to your Priest

(Hebrews 4:15–16)

IX. Wait for your wisdom

(James 1:5–6)

“Be assured it is always His desire to impart the necessary wisdom to His people that’ll enable them to pursue a right course.” ~ H. Ironside

X. Walk in your works

(Ephesians 2:8–10)

“God’s works aren’t all the same for everyone...each individual calling has its own particular kind of good works.” ~ M. Bucer

CONCLUSION

“Are you living off your list, or God’s?”