

**“The LORD’s lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness.” ~ Lamentations 3:22–23 (NASB)**

Infidelity. Disloyalty. Betrayal. Unfaithfulness. Sadly, these words are common in describing experiences in every sphere of human existence. A. W. Pink summarized it well when he wrote,

Unfaithfulness is one of the most outstanding sins of these evil days. In the business world, a man’s word is no longer his bond. In the social world, marital infidelity abounds on every hand, the sacred bonds of wedlock being broken with as little regard as the discarding of an old garment. In the ecclesiastical realm, thousands who have solemnly covenanted to preach the truth make no scruple to attack and deny it. Nor can reader or writer claim complete immunity from this fearful sin: in how many ways have we been unfaithful to Christ, and to the light and privileges which God has entrusted to us! (*Attributes of God*, 66)

But against this black backdrop stands God’s perfect faithfulness. Whereas man’s reliability ebbs and flows according to circumstances, God is always steadfast and immovable in His character and commitments. As the last installment in our series on God’s perfections, it is appropriate to turn to this most precious quality.

## I. Definition of “Divine Faithfulness”

### A. What faithfulness means.

The faithfulness of God refers to His reliability.

God is always motivated by the same purposes, He always acts according to His unchanging nature, and He always fulfills the promises He makes. He is unwaveringly consistent with what He has revealed Himself to be and will always accomplish what He said He will do. Nothing intrinsic to His character will ever prompt Him to deviate from His purposes; nothing external to His being can ever distract or tempt Him to renege on His promises.

The primary emphasis found in the biblical texts that testify to God’s faithfulness is that of **promise** or **covenant**. A “promise” is “a declaration or assurance that one will do something or that a particular thing will happen,” and a “covenant” is “a formal agreement, contract, or promise” (Oxford Dictionary). In other words, **God’s faithfulness is especially displayed in His commitment to honor His word**. Consequently, Robert Reymond helpfully describes God’s faithfulness as follows: “Because he is ethically reliable, God is covenantally *faithful*, that is, there is a precise equivalency between *what he says he will do and what he actually does*” (*A New Systematic Theology*, 201). Similarly, A. A. Hodge wrote, “God’s faithfulness is His reliability, His determination to fulfill all that He promises. His faithfulness is grounded in His absolute truth. God is perfectly sincere in all His undertakings and dependable in discharging all His engagements” (*Outline of Theology*, 161).

**FAITHFULNESS:**  
God’s reliability

This reliability is inseparably related to God’s other perfections. For example, **God’s faithfulness is contingent upon His truthfulness**. God only reveals what is true about Himself and only makes promises that are sincere; He can never mislead or lie (see Numbers 23:19; 1 Samuel 15:29; Titus 1:2). Furthermore, **God’s faithfulness is possible because of His omnipotence**. God is never prevented from achieving His intent. He has inexhaustible power to accomplish exactly that which He promised He would do. As Millard Erickson rightly states, “He could never commit himself to do something of which he would eventually prove incapable” (*Christian Theology*, 317). To add to this, **God’s faithfulness is inseparable from His immutability**. As Thomas O. Chisolm penned, “Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father; there is no shadow of turning with Thee.” In other words, God is faithful precisely because He never will turn or change. He will always be the perfect God He always has been. A. W. Tozer summarizes this well:

God, being who He is, cannot cease to be what He is, and being what He is, He cannot act out of character with Himself. He is at once faithful and immutable, so all His words and acts must be and must remain faithful. . . . God's immutability presupposes His faithfulness. If He is unchanging, it follows that He could not be unfaithful. Upon God's faithfulness rests our whole hope of future blessedness. Only as He is faithful will His covenants stand and His promises be honored.

Key Old Testament terms for the concept of "faithfulness" are the verb אָמַן (*'āman*) and its related noun אֱמֶת (*'ēmet*). The verb *'āman* communicates the ideas of "trustworthiness," "reliability," "faithfulness," and "permanence" (*HALOT*, אָמַן, 1:63). The related noun *'ēmet* can have the idea of "true" or "truth," but it also contains the notion of "trustworthiness," "constancy," and "faithfulness" (*HALOT*, אֱמֶת, 1:68–69). The connection between the two ideas—between *truth* and *trustworthiness*—is obvious. Because God speaks only truth, His promises are sure, reliable, trustworthy, or faithful. As Herman Bavinck states, "Veracity and truth, trustworthiness and faithfulness, are too closely associated . . . for us to split them apart" (Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:207).

Another related Old Testament term which emphasizes the faithfulness of God is the term חֶסֶד (*hesed*), which can be translated as "steadfast love," "lovingkindness," or "faithfulness." It contains a strong *relational* aspect, emphasizing *commitment* and *loyalty* to others that far exceeds emotional connections or commitments based on convenience or reciprocity. Thus, in the great declaration of **Exodus 34:6-7**, Yahweh declares Himself to be "abounding in lovingkindness [חֶסֶד, *hesed*] and truth [אֱמֶת, *'ēmet*]" (NASB), or as the ESV states, "abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness." As this declaration shows, the terms "lovingkindness" or "steadfast love," and "truth" or "faithfulness," are twin terms. With slightly different emphases they describe God as one who holds fast to His commitment to others, despite their own unworthiness.

One of the most vivid examples of God's faithfulness is seen in the fulfillment of His promise to **Abraham and Sarah**. God first made His promise to give Abraham and Sarah a son when they were 75 and 65 years of age respectively. At the time Sarah herself was not only barren but well past the age of bearing children. Moreover, God did not fulfill the promise immediately. Abraham and Sarah had to wait another twenty-five years for the fulfillment of this promise—until they were 100 and 90 years of age! But God proved faithful, and Abraham and Sarah—despite occasional doubts—clung to the promise. As Hebrews 11:11 testifies, "By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised." And Abraham's faith in God's faithfulness to His promise came to be regarded as the classic definition of authentic faith:

- **Genesis 15:5-6** – "And He [the LORD] brought him [Abram] outside and said, 'Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.' Then he [God] said to him [Abram], 'So shall your offspring be.' And he [Abram] believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness."

Ultimately, the conviction that God will fulfill His promise is the chief ingredient of authentic, salvific faith. **Biblical faith is inseparably linked to the affirmation of God's faithfulness.** Conversely, skepticism, and unbelief are direct challenges to God's faithfulness. It is no virtue to doubt whether God will indeed fulfill that which He has promised to do. To do so is the antithesis of faith.

## B. What God's faithfulness does not mean.

That God is unwaveringly consistent in His motivations, nature, and promises does not mean that He cannot change the way He *interacts* with His creation. In fact, the Scriptures describes different *dispensations* or *eras* in redemptive history in which God relates differently to His people. Although the *way of salvation* has always remained the same (see Gen 15:6; Rom 4:1–5), different dispensations show God working differently at different times (pre-Fall; post-Fall; patriarchal; Mosaic Law; church age; etc.). Even so, God remains faithful to what He has revealed in each era in the progress of redemption.

## II. Biblical Testimony to God's Faithfulness

There are numerous ways in which Scripture testifies to God's faithfulness.

- A. **God's faithfulness is extolled for its immeasurable greatness.** The biblical writers extoll God's faithfulness in terms of its *limitless dimensions*. It cannot be measured in terms of quantity, quality, or duration:
  - Psalm 36:5; 100:5; 119:89–91; 146:5–6; Lamentations 3:22–23
- B. **God's faithfulness is evident in the titles used to describe Him.** The biblical writers employ various titles—including those based on metaphors of constancy—that highlight God's faithfulness.
  - *God is "the Rock"*: Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalm 18:2–3; Isaiah 26:4
  - *God is "the faithful Creator"*: 1 Peter 4:19
  - *Jesus is "a faithful high priest"*: Hebrews 2:12
  - *Jesus is "Faithful and True"*: Revelation 19:11; see also 1:5; 3:14
- C. **God's faithfulness is established by His nature as promise-keeper.** Wherever God's perfection of faithfulness is in view, the concept of *covenant* or *promise* is usually close by:
  - Deuteronomy 4:31; 7:7–9; 2 Samuel 22:31; Nehemiah 1:5; Psalm 105:8–9; 119:65; 2 Corinthians 1:18–22; Hebrews 10:23; 11:11

"God's faithfulness toward us springs from his faithfulness to himself. When he speaks a promise to us, his character is on the line. To break a promise to us would be to deny himself." —Mark Jones, *God Is*, 172

- D. **God's faithfulness is exhibited in His plan of salvation.** The biblical writers testify that God's faithfulness is manifested uniquely in His work of redemption. He not only begins the process, but He is faithful to bring it to its ultimate destiny. Salvation becomes the great stage where God puts His supreme dependability on full display. He issues the promise of salvation, and then fulfills it unconditionally.
  - 1 Corinthians 1:7–9; 10:13; Philippians 1:6; 1 Thessalonians 5:23–24; 2 Thessalonians 3:3; Hebrews 6:17–18; 1 John 1:9

God's faithfulness is even exhibited in His discipline of His children as He refines their character:

- Psalm 119:75
- E. **God's faithfulness is emphasized in contrast to man's infidelity.** The consistent message from the Scriptures is that while man is faithless and fickle, God remains steadfast and faithful.
  - Daniel 9:4–5; Psalm 78:36–39; Romans 3:1–4a; 2 Timothy 2:13

## III. What God's Faithfulness Demands from Us

While the applications that can be drawn from this perfection are many, these three stand out:

- A. **Adore God for His faithfulness.** As we see with the psalmists in particular, when presented with the truth of God's faithfulness our right response is to *worship*:
  - Psalm 40:10; 89:1, 2, 5, 8; 92:1–2; 100:4–5; Isaiah 25:1

Phillip Keller states it well: "I know of nothing which so stimulates my faith in my Heavenly Father as to look back and reflect on His faithfulness to me in every crisis and every chilling circumstance of life. Over and over He has proved His care and concern for my welfare. Again and again I have been conscious of the Good Shepherd's guidance through dark days and deep valleys" (*A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, 82).

**B. Trust God's promises.** One of the immediate implications of God's perfection of faithfulness is the necessity of *trust*. We cannot affirm this truth about God's character and remain in doubt. Because God is faithful, we must trust; it is the only logical option. To doubt Him is the epitome of insanity. As Reymond states, "His covenantal faithfulness is the saint's ground of confidence, the foundation of his hope, the cause of his rejoicing, and the source of his courage" (*A New Systematic Theology*, 202).

- Isaiah 50:10; Hebrews 10:23; 1 Peter 4:13

In a sermon entitled "The Righteous Man's Refuge—The Faithfulness of God," Puritan John Flavel lists five principal enemies which wage war against our confidence in the faithfulness of God:

1. **Distracting cares**, which divide the mind and eat out the peace and comfort of the heart, and which worst of all reflect very dishonorably upon God who hath pledged his faithfulness and truth for our security.
2. **Unchristian despondency**, another enemy to the sweet repose of your souls in this comfortable and quiet chamber of divine faithfulness: you will find this unbecoming and uncomfortable distemper of mind insinuating and creeping in upon you, except you believe and reason it out, as David did (Ps 42:11).
3. **Carnal policies and sinful shifts**, which war against your own faith and God's faithfulness as much as any other enemy whatsoever.
4. **Discontentment at and murmurings against the dispositions of providence**, whatever you feel or fear: I persuade you not to a stoical apathy and senselessness of the evils of the times; that would preclude the exercise of patience. If the martyrs had all had the dead palsy before they came to the fire, their faith and patience would not have triumphed so gloriously as they did; but on the contrary, beware of complaints against the ways and will of God.
5. **Suspensions and jealousies of the firmness and stability of the promises**, when you find all sensible comforts shaking and trembling under your feet; have a care of such dangerous questions as that, "Doth his promise fail?" (Ps 77:8). These are the things which undermine the foundation both of your faith and comfort.

**C. Imitate God's reliability.** Faithfulness is a communicable attribute; God's image-bearers were created to be *faithful*. Sin has marred man's capacity for and appreciation of faithfulness (Psalm 12:1; Proverbs 20:6), but regeneration and sanctification restore this desire and capacity (Galatians 5:22). Fundamental for God's people, then, is the cultivation of faithfulness to one's own promises and commitments (Numbers 30:2; Matthew 5:33–36; Luke 16:10), for their God is Himself a promise-keeping God.

God's faithfulness to us must translate into our faithfulness to others—to our wives, families, employers, churches, friends, neighbors, and strangers. Ultimately, faithfulness is not proven in easy times or in easy commitments; it is a quality that shines brightest in hardship, difficulty, and suffering. As Solomon states, "He who pursues righteousness and loyalty finds life, righteousness and honor" (Proverbs 21:21).

### For Further Study

**Memorize:** Lamentations 3:22–23

**Sing:** "Great Is Thy Faithfulness" (*Hymns of Grace* #86)

**Discuss:**

- 1) In your own words, define God's "faithfulness."
- 2) How does the truth of God's faithfulness bring comfort to you?
- 3) What promises of God have been most difficult for you to believe? Why? How will you confront that skepticism in light of this study?
- 4) How would you assess your own faithfulness to your word? How well do you fulfill your commitments?
- 5) In what area or areas of life do you find it most difficult to imitate God's faithfulness or dependability? What will you now do to change this?

**Audio, video, and handouts for this session:** [gracechurch.org/motw](http://gracechurch.org/motw)

**Next meeting:** 6:30pm, May 31, Spring Fellowship – Family Center (final meeting of the season)