

## ***The Fruit of the Spirit***

# ***The Fruit of the Spirit Is Faithfulness***

Lesson #8 for February 20, 2010

Scriptures: Matthew 25:1-13; Luke 16:10; 1 Thessalonians 5:23,24; 2 Timothy 3:1-5; Hebrews 11.

1. This lesson is about faithfulness. Faithfulness is not the same as faith. Faithfulness might be described as faith in action. It includes fidelity, staunchness, constancy, loyalty, even resoluteness. It often refers to action—doing the right thing even under difficult circumstances. Do these attributes describe us?
2. Faith is described in our Bible study guide as:

That indefinable power, a gift from God, through which we can believe in the reality that yet remains unseen. “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (*Heb. 11:1*). (*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for February 13, 2010)

Hebrews 11:1 does not really tell us what faith is, but rather, it tells us what faith does. By contrast, in this class we have often defined faith like this:

***Faith is just a word we use to describe a relationship with God as with a Person well-known. The better we know Him, the better the relationship may be.***

***Faith implies an attitude toward God of love, trust, and deepest admiration. It means having enough confidence in God—based on the more-than-adequate evidence revealed—to be willing to believe what He says (as soon as we are sure that He has said it), to accept what He offers (as soon as we are sure that He is the One offering it), and to do what He wishes (as soon as we are sure that He is the One wishing it)—without reservation—for the rest of eternity. Anyone who has such faith would be perfectly safe to save. This is why faith is the only requirement for heaven.***

***Faith also means that, like Abraham and Moses, we know God well enough to reverently ask Him, “Why?”—A Graham Maxwell***

This is quite different from the understanding of many Christians. Most of them believe that God is sovereign—He gives the orders and we just have to accept. We do not need to know why, and we should not ask any questions. They would say that the “faithful” are the ones who have “faith” without having to know why, while we would say that the faithful are the ones who have faith because they have come to understand why!

3. What is the relationship between God’s promises and His character? Is our faith based on just doing what God asks us to do (trusting His promises), or is it based on getting to know Him personally and having a true relationship with Him/Them? Numerous psalms describe God’s faithfulness. (Psalm 89:8; 36:5; 89:33; 89:2; compare Lamentations 3:23) Do these passages enhance your faith? What do they teach you about God? Should we just accept that God is faithful because He says so, or do we need to investigate the evidence?
4. The Bible describes God as unchanging. (1 Samuel 15:29 [contrast 1 Samuel 15:10,11,35; Genesis 6:6]; Numbers 23:19; Ezekiel 24:14; Malachi 3:6; Titus 1:2) How could God say, “I am sorry that I made Saul king,” and then say, “Israel’s majestic God does not lie or change his mind,” and then say again in the same chapter, “The Lord was sorry that he had made

Saul king”? These challenging verses are not mentioned in our *Bible Study Guide* as you could guess! It takes a “larger view” of Scripture to understand what is going on in those instances. God gave the children of Israel Saul for a king because that is the kind of person they wanted! Later, He gave them David because that was the kind of person He wanted. Can you think of times described in Scripture when it looked like God was unfaithful? Was God unfaithful when He did not protect the northern country of Israel from being scattered by the Assyrians? Or when He did not protect Judah from going into exile?

5. Read Exodus 23:20-33 and Deuteronomy 20:16-18. Why did God’s instructions to the children of Israel about entering the land of Canaan change? Why didn’t God help them to conquer every city in Canaan as He had helped them conquer Jericho? After promising to lead them into the promised land and sending His angel before them, why did He later tell them that they must fight and kill in order to conquer the land? Was it because the people wanted to “conquer” with their own swords and spears? Because of their stubbornness and rebellion, God could not do all that He wanted to do for them. He would have chased their enemies out of Canaan and allowed them to occupy the land on His terms. Have we learned anything?
6. Look at some of God’s other promises. 1 Corinthians 10:13: Are you convinced that God will not allow us to be tempted more than we are able? 1 Thessalonians 5:23,24: In what ways is God preparing you for His second coming? 2 Thessalonians 3:3 and Matthew 6:13: Does God really keep us from the evil one? Hebrews 10:23: Are there any of God’s promises to us that you personally believe have failed?
7. Many Jews turned against God after the Holocaust and World War II. Did God’s faithfulness run out for the Jews? Couldn’t God have prevented that whole disaster? Why didn’t He?
8. Read Hebrews 11:6. Why is faith necessary to “please” God? Is faith a “gift” or a “fruit”?
9. Is it possible that our unfaithfulness could limit God’s power in some way? Is there some kind of limit placed on God’s ability to act on our behalf if we are rebellious or unfaithful? Or, in some sense, is God capricious? How often does God want to bless us and He cannot? What about 2 Peter 3:12? Why is God still waiting?
10. Consider your daily acts of both a religious and a nonreligious nature. How often do you act in a faithful way? How often do you act in a selfish or unfaithful way? How often are our actions motivated by what others might think of us as opposed to our relationship with God and what we know is right? Why does it matter what others think of us?
11. What things can we do to improve our faithfulness towards God? Do tithing and Sabbath-keeping develop a general spirit of faithfulness and commitment to God?
12. Is our faith based primarily on God’s promises or on what we have learned about His character and trustworthiness?
13. The Bible speaks plainly about the difficult times that will lead up to the second coming. (2 Timothy 3:1-5; Matthew 24:6-13; Mark 13:5-9; Luke 21:9-12) Do we see these prophecies being fulfilled in our day? Do you think the number of people who are truly faithful to God is increasing or decreasing? Why do you think that apparently the most “faithful” people that God has ever had killed Him and then rushed home to keep the Sabbath?
14. What impact does the daily news, the news media, and the entertainment common in our world today have on our faithfulness? Do those types of media impact our personal behavior? Why do even pastors use many illustrations from the movies?
15. There are some remarkable stories about animals that were loyal and faithful to their masters. Greyfriar’s Bobby was a Skye terrier which belonged to a policeman in Scotland.

When his master died on February 8, 1858, that small Skye terrier faithfully guarded his master's gravesite for 14 years until the dog died. The remains of a dog named Delta were found in the ashes at Pompeii. Delta's silver collar says that he had saved his master from drowning, from robbers, and once from a wolf. However, he was not able to prevent the death of his child-master from the hot ash of that volcano even though his body lay over the top of that child as he was trying to protect him. Such examples of faithfulness make very good TV movies. They touch our hearts.

16. If you were asked to pick out some examples of true faithfulness in Scripture, who would you choose? Would it be Abraham and Sarah for remaining loyal to God for so many years while they waited for a child? Would it be Moses who so valiantly and faithfully led the children of Israel for those 40 years until that encounter at the rock? In Hebrews 11, the author spelled out the names of many people who are commended for their faith. Were all of those people also faithful? What about Samson? Rahab? Jephthah?
17. Review the life of Elisha. He was called to his work when Elijah threw his cloak over him as he was plowing on his parents' farm. For years, he faithfully assisted Elijah in his work. He stayed close to his master and actually saw him ascend in that fiery chariot to heaven. Imagine miraculously crossing the Jordan River on dry ground, and then seeing your best friend taken from your side in a fiery chariot, and then miraculously crossing the river again! Would that change you? (2 Kings 2:1-14) Despite living in a nation that was very rapidly becoming totally rebellious against God, Elisha "stood firm" especially in his leadership in the schools of the prophets. Instead of being taken to heaven in a fiery chariot, Elisha died a slow death. Even while dying, he was recognized as a moral force in Israel. (2 Kings 13:14-19)
18. What does the story in 2 Kings 13:20,21 tell us about God? Does that miraculous resurrection of a man whose body was thrown into Elisha's grave and touched Elisha's bones have anything to do with Elisha's faithfulness? Try to image that story! What was God telling us about His relationship with His faithful prophet? Contrast 2 Kings 2:23-24.
19. There are so many examples of unfaithful leaders—even kings—in the stories of the nations of Israel and Judah. Consider Jeroboam (1 Kings 14:7-9); Jehu (2 Kings 10:30,31); Joash (2 Kings 12:1,2); Asa (2 Chronicles 16); and Uzzah (2 Chronicles 26). Why is it so easy—particularly for people in positions of authority and power—to lose their faithfulness? Why does power seem to corrupt human beings so quickly?
20. Read Luke 16:10. Do you find it difficult to be faithful in the little things? Does carelessness in dealing with little things eventually lead to carelessness in dealing with larger things?
21. The greatest want of the world is the want of men—men who will not be bought or sold, men who in their inmost souls are true and honest, men who do not fear to call sin by its right name, men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole, men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall.—Ellen G. White, *Education*, page 57.3.

This is real faithfulness. This is the kind of people God needs to stand in the last days.

22. Would you consider the following characteristics essential parts of faithfulness? Dependability? Honesty? Integrity? Loyalty? How should Christians react when their loyalty to a friend or an employer seems to lead them into actions which require them to be unfaithful to God? Would you lie for your employer? Have you ever had to speak to a friend and tell him, "No, I cannot do that because it is against what God has told me to do"? Could you do that?
23. Think of all the things that God expects us to do as a part of our Christianity. Are we faithful

in our tithe-paying? Our Sabbath observance? What about our diet? Our entertainment? Do any of these areas reveal an unfaithfulness on our part? Are we daily doing something to advance the cause of God?

The call to place all on the altar of service comes to each one. We are not all asked to serve as Elisha served, nor are we all bidden to sell everything we have; but **God asks us to give His service the first place in our lives, to allow no day to pass without doing something to advance His work in the earth.** He does not expect from all the same kind of service. One may be called to ministry in a foreign land; another may be asked to give of his means for the support of gospel work. God accepts the offering of each. It is the consecration of the life and all its interests, that is necessary. Those who make this consecration will hear and obey the call of Heaven.—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, page 221.3; (*ChS* 105.1; *CC* 222.2; *OFC* 185.6)

24. Do we honestly love to do God's will because we know it is right and because we have found doing so makes our lives better? Or, like the world around us, are we slipping more and more into very selfish behaviors?
25. Read Matthew 24:44-50; 25:1-13. Weddings in those days lasted for about a week, and the bridegroom could come at any time. These two stories talk about two different situations in which people were not prepared for what was coming. Galatians 6:9 tells us not to "grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart." (*NKJV*) Is our Christianity and our faithfulness to God "falling asleep"? Are we becoming lackadaisical in our religion because Jesus' second coming has been so long delayed? What is God still waiting for? Are we becoming like the unfaithful steward and practicing the very selfish trends we see in the world around us instead of being faithful?
26. Do you believe that the second coming has been very long delayed? (See *Ev.* 694-697)
27. **But like the stars in the vast circuit of their appointed path, God's purposes know no haste and no delay.** Through the symbols of the great darkness and the smoking furnace, God had revealed to Abraham the bondage of Israel in Egypt, and had declared that the time of their sojourning should be four hundred years. "Afterward," He said, "shall they come out with great substance." Genesis 15:14. Against that word, all the power of Pharaoh's proud empire battled in vain. On "the self-same day" appointed in the divine promise, "it came to pass, that all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt." Exodus 12:41. So in heaven's council 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.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 32.1.

God's true people will remain faithful in contrast to all around them. God knows at what point that will happen.

28. Those who believe in the "larger-view, great-controversy, trust-healing" model of the plan of salvation want to get to know God and the truth about Him. How can we do that better? Do those who know God the best always serve Him the most faithfully? Are they the most direct targets of Satan? Does knowing God always lead to faith and faithfulness?

© 2009, Kenneth Hart, MD, MA, MPH. Permission is hereby granted for any noncommercial use of these materials. Free distribution is encouraged. It is our goal to see them spread as widely and freely as possible. If you would like to use them for your class or even make copies of portions of them, feel free to do so. We always enjoy hearing about how you might be using the materials, and we might even want to share good ideas with others, so let us know. [Info@theox.org](mailto:Info@theox.org)

Last Modified: January 15, 2010

F:\GPR-KH Added SS-8-Fruit-Spirit-2010\_02\_20-2010\_01\_09-Pres.wpd