

May 20, 2018

## *What kind of people ought we to be?*

*"So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."*  
Galatians 5:16-25

*"These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect. Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith..."*  
Hebrews 11:39-12:3



Human beings are a fickle lot. We are constantly guilty of saying one thing and doing another. We make commitments we never keep. We follow paths that we know will lead us into trouble. We ignore good advice and listen to bad. We are a mess! It really is surprising that God is so very patient with us despite our constant stupidity.

Faithfulness is the opposite of fickle. To define faithfulness we might consider the words of Jesus, *"Simply, let your 'yes' be 'yes' and you 'no' be 'no'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one."* My Dad once told me, "Say what you are going to do, and do what you say." Ultimately then, faithfulness is about following through over and over again with our commitments. And, all of us struggle with this.

Think about how often you have made a commitment to be somewhere or to do something and then you don't show up or don't do what you said you would do. A lot of us are so used to failing to keep our commitments that we no longer even feel bad when we do so. Some of us experience a twinge of guilt when we fail to follow through, but the justification and/or blame arguments we use let us off the hook and soon we don't even hesitate.

Don't get me wrong. There are occasionally things that make it impossible for us to follow through, but not nearly as many as our practice would indicate. In nearly every situation, in nearly every circumstance, it is possible for us to do what we said we would do.

Over and over again in our lives we are faced with this challenge; we have made a commitment, but keeping that commitment becomes hard and/or challenging and we are tempted to not follow through. The faithful choose to follow through.

We commit to finishing school, to going to work, to being married, to raising children, to following Jesus and, things make keeping those commitments hard or challenging. School is boring, work is not rewarding, marriage is really difficult sometimes, raising children can be a real problem,

and following Jesus; oh my that can be tough. Our friends want us to do something else, the world tells us it will be okay to give up, or our own minds tell us the cost is too high and we quit.

The faithful face those same temptations, but they choose not to quit. In the roll call of the faithful in Hebrews 11 the one characteristic that all of those heroes of faith share is that they chose not to quit; they chose to remain faithful. Noah chose to finish the ark even when it took a hundred years to do it. Abraham chose to follow God even when it was into the unknown. Joseph chose to remain faithful even from the dungeon.

Over the centuries the faithful have been marked by this simple choice; when things got tough or challenging or expensive they chose to follow through; they chose as the Apostle Paul wrote, to keep the faith. *"For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award me on the day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing."* (II Timothy 4:6-8)

*Faith*  
makes things possible ... not easy