

## **FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT**

### **“Always Faithful”**

Maybe you’ve seen the bumper stickers with the words “Semper Fi” and the Marine Corps logo and colors. It’s short for the Marine Corps motto “Semper Fidelis,” which is Latin for “Always Faithful.” They pride themselves on their unwavering commitment to duty and mission and to one another. Always faithful no matter what is thrown at them; faithful to the end. That is a commendable quality. Would that all Christians believed and lived that way concerning their commitment to Christ – always faithful.

Many Christians wish they had more faith. They think that if only they had more faith their prayers would be answered or they would be better disciples of Jesus. But faith is not something you can gain by trying harder. Faith is a response. If we strive for faith we’ll be disappointed. But when we learn to trust in God’s faithfulness, we will be blessed through our responses to Him. So today I will be talking about another aspect of the Fruit of the Spirit: faithfulness.

### **Wholeness and Faithfulness**

Having more faith, being faithful, is rooted in wholeness ... that is, a life wholly connected to the Source. *“He who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit...”* John 15:5. Yet so quickly do we turn to our man-made systems. In the gospel of John (chapter 9) we are told how Jesus met a blind man; blind from birth (and aren’t we all?). In the old belief, illness or handicap was attributed to sin - it was thought to be punishment of the guilty. (Lest we think that notion so archaic, think of how many times we say, "How could that happen to such a good person?")

Jesus broke the holy rules of Sabbath to cure a blind man and was criticized by the Pharisees for doing so. The blind man cares nothing for Sabbath rules. He just says, "Once I was blind, but now I see." If you read this story you’ll notice how the blind man moved from blindness, his brokenness, to sight, his healing, then to insight, and that’s wholeness. The blind man hears the voice of One whom he cannot see and responds in faith to do the bidding of that Voice, and thereby comes to walk in the light. Don’t you think that we are sometimes called to walk by *hearing* the One who speaks to our souls, more than by seeing?

The first step toward wholeness is when you recognize your brokenness and let Jesus touch you at that point. Until the brokenness is brought to the light I doubt there can be health in your life and mine, and certainly not much in the way of spiritual growth. It’s our brokenness that we bring to church. The broken body of Christ, that’s what we are; like the broken bread. The healing

**begins as we confess our brokenness to His light and pray for one another, sharing His grace. God is faithful and will not turn us away.**

**The Pharisees of Jesus' day trusted in their expectations of how they believed God should act. If they had trusted in God's character, instead of their own notions, they would have seen. None are so blind as those who will not see. How often have we ignored divine guidance because we believe we already know what it is? Or, we simply refuse divine guidance because we think we know better? Or, we don't trust God to take us where we think we ought to go? [Is that how we handle our finances?]**

## **Lessons of Faith**

**The Greek (language of the N. T.) for faithfulness is πίστις, which means "conviction, belief in the truth, veracity, or reality of someone or something; to have confidence in someone or something." Your deepest faithfulness is to those things or people most "real" to you. You give them credit because you believe in them.**

**Is your faith a roller coaster, up one day, down the next? Maybe that's because you base your faith on what you think God does or ought to do, rather than who He *is*. That kind of faith says, "I believe in God as long as He does what I ask." Such "faith" depends on results and walks by sight and brings disappointments and an unsteady trust.**

**On the other hand, basing faith on who God *is* enables one to walk steadfastly with Him. Putting your trust in Him enables you to say, *"Truly he is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will never be shaken,"* Psalm 62:2. One person is healed, while another one is not. God is glorified in the poverty of one, and in the riches of another. Life is constantly changing. Yet God's heart remains the same even when we do not understand what God is doing (Isaiah 55:8-9).**

**Because we can trust God and count on Him to be true, we will be able to obey Him and thereby be found faithful. Our Christian character is dramatically shaped by the measure of our faithfulness and it begins with the faithfulness of our Heavenly Father. *"The Lord is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made"* Psalm 145:13.**

**Acts 27 and 28 report the account of Paul's voyage as a prisoner on the way to Rome. The ship went through a terrible storm and was shipwrecked on the island of Malta. Paul, the crew, and the soldiers guarding Paul were welcomed by the people of the island. Throughout the whole ordeal Paul prayed and listened for God's guidance. He trusted God. Here's some truths we can learn from Paul's shipwreck experience:**

**1. Feelings or perceptions cannot be the basis of faith even in the most Spirit-filled life. Many people feel disappointed in God because they treat their feelings as fact.**

**2. Faith comes from listening.** Paul did not assume that every promise ever made by God throughout history would be applied to him in his moment of need. God's word is true, he keeps His promises, but reserves the right to apply His word as he sees fit. Despite seeing disaster, Paul chose faith in God.

**3. God's Deliverance does not always mean the easy way out.** For Paul, God's deliverance came through the ship running aground! Heavy seas and winds in life may mean you're on the right course. Sometimes God calms the storm and sometimes God calms His child in the midst of the storm. Deliverance from a traumatic past can be painful.

**4. God always has a destination in mind when he delivers.** God will lead you to a place of kindness after you have been faithful to who He is. Running aground sometimes is what it takes to bring you to a better place.<sup>1</sup>

Paul knew that God's faithfulness culminates in Jesus Christ, who fulfilled all the O.T. prophecies.<sup>2</sup> *"But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not 'Yes' and 'No.' For the Son of God, Jesus Christ ... was not 'Yes' and 'No,' but in him it has always been 'Yes.' For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ,"* 2 Cor. 1:18-20. God expressed his faithfulness to us in Christ. Christ expressed his faithfulness to us in the H.S. Through the power of the Holy Spirit we can express our faithfulness to God.

## **Walk By Faith**

2 Cor. 5:7 says, *"For we walk by faith, not by sight."* Today is what we call "All Saints Sunday" - the Sunday closest to All Saints Day (Nov. 1) when we remember and honor the believers who walked by faith. We often think of saints as those who gave their lives for their faith in Christ - martyrs. That word comes from the Greek word μαρτυς meaning one who has information or knowledge that brings something to light or confirms something. A μαρτυς is one who testifies. The saints testified to God's faithfulness and goodness by giving of themselves: their resources and in some cases their very lives. They lived in a manner that heeded Paul's advice *"Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is,"* Ephesians 5:15-17. In a world of rapid changes, in a world that sometimes seems out of control, holding onto God is the foundation we need.

Our purpose here isn't just to preach words of hope for a future life in heaven. We're also here to learn how to trust Him. The fastest way to learn to trust God is to learn to be generous. It will teach you to have faith that God will provide. God was so faithful to His promises, that he gave his only Son for us. Trust Him. Give and it will be given to you.

Not many of us may be called upon to give our lives as martyrs for the faith. But every time the offering plate is passed in church we have an opportunity to give a bit of ourselves - our money represents our labor. It is an opportunity

**respond to God's faithfulness with the faithfulness which the Spirit is growing in us. *Semper Fidelis* – always faithful. Isn't that how you want to be remembered?**

***“For great is his love toward us, and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever. Praise the LORD!” Psalm 117:2.***

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<sup>1</sup>Beth Moore, *Living Beyond Yourself*, (Nashville, TN: Life-Way Press, 1998), 156-158.

<sup>2</sup> 61 of those prophecies were fulfilled in Jesus' earthly lifetime, (Micah 5:2 – Matt. 2:1; Psalm 78:2 – Matt. 13:34; Zech. 9:9 – Luke 19:35-37; Zech. 11:12 – Matt. 26:15; Psalm 22:16 – Luke 23:33 & John 20:25, 27; Psalm 22:18 – John 19:23-24; Psalm 34:20 – John 19:23; Amos 8:9-10 – Matt. 27:45). The chances of all the prophecies being fulfilled are mathematically astronomical.