

Faithfulness



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No More Excuses

RESOURCES FOR BIBLICAL LIVING

LOU PRIOLO



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Temptation: Applying Radical Amputation to Life's Sinful Patterns

Lou Priolo, series editor

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PERHAPS YOU ARE THINKING, “Why was this booklet recommended to me? After all, I hardly ever miss devotions; I attend church twice a week; I always tell the truth (well, almost always); I even brush my teeth after every meal.” May I suggest that if that is your attitude, you may need to read this booklet more than you realize. I say this because, as a general rule, the more faithful we become, the more we realize how *unfaithful* we have been. This should become more apparent in the pages ahead.

But for now I would like to draw your attention to the fact that this character trait is perhaps the most important quality required of us for Christian service. “Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful” (1 Cor. 4:2 ESV).¹ The development of this particular quality is so vital to ministry that I daresay if one does not seek to possess it, he will limit the number of important assignments given to him by Christian leaders (or by the Lord Himself for that matter). Whatever it is that you want to do for the Lord, be it in your local church (as a pastor, church officer,² missionary, Sunday school teacher, nursery worker, or member of the choir), in your vocation (as a doctor, nurse, CEO of a corporation, salesperson, business

1. The word for *steward* (*oikonomos*) occurs ten times in the New Testament. Nine of the occurrences are in reference to an individual who has authority over subordinates. But in 1 Peter 4:10 (ESV), the word is used more broadly to apply to all believers: “As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good *stewards* of God’s varied grace.”

2. Although *faithfulness* is not specifically listed as a qualification for men who desire to be officers in either of the two New Testament passages that list such qualifications—1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1—the quality is implicit in both of those passages. The aforementioned word for *steward* (*oikonomos*) is used. “For an overseer, as God’s *steward*, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant” (Titus 1:7 ESV). So, in light of 1 Corinthians 4:2, faithfulness may actually be an implicit qualification for elders.

owner, factory worker, home educator, or homemaker), or in your family, to be truly qualified for and successful in your endeavors, you must possess this quality.

So what comes to your mind when you hear the word *faithfulness*? How do you picture this important piece of the fruit of the Spirit?³ This is a word that seems to involve so many things that it's difficult to grasp. But in reality it's quite simple to understand, as I trust you will shortly see.

Now, although it is simple to understand, faithfulness is sometimes difficult to develop—perhaps because it usually takes time to cultivate. So, before we unpack this term, let's take a brief look at the Lord's teaching on forgiveness, found in Luke 17:3–4. It will help to set the stage for our discussion of this character trait by helping us to see that becoming faithful is possible, even though it may seem rather challenging.

Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, "I repent," forgive him.

Jesus gave the disciples a pair of difficult injunctions. First He told them that they should rebuke (convict) those who sin against them. Then He instructed them to forgive their offenders as soon as they verbally expressed repentance over their sin.⁴ He went on to explain that they were to forgive not just one occurrence of a sin but up to *seven occurrences in the same day*.

You may remember how incredulously the apostles responded to these orders. They said, (essentially), "You've got to be kidding!": "The apostles said to the Lord, 'Increase our faith!'" (Luke 17:5). The disciples thought that they needed more faith before they could do what the Lord had told them.

3. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, *faithfulness*, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law" (Gal. 5:22–23).

4. In other words, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, they were to take the offender at his word when he repented.

But Jesus explained to them that it wasn't more faith that they needed—it was more faithful obedience. They needed to do what they were expected to do by their Master regardless of how difficult it seemed, regardless of how they may have felt, regardless of how long it may have taken to accomplish the task.

And the Lord said, “If you had faith like a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and be planted in the sea’; and it would obey you. Which of you, having a slave plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come immediately and sit down to eat’? But will he not say to him, ‘Prepare something for me to eat, and properly clothe yourself and serve me while I eat and drink; and afterward you may eat and drink’? He does not thank the slave because he did the things which were commanded, does he? So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, ‘We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.’” (Luke 17:6–10)

As an old preacher—fishing buddy of mine likes to portray it,⁵ imagine that you are just conversing with a brother (or sister) at church who is a new convert. You are not being provocative at all, just trying to engage him in conversation, when all of a sudden he bops you upside the head!

“Ouch! What are you doing?!” you ask.

He says to you, “Oh, I am so sorry! I don't know what just came over me, but something you said made me angry—anyway, I am *really* sorry for hurting you. Will you please forgive me?”

“Okay, I forgive you. But I don't feel like talking to you right now. In fact, I would appreciate it if you would stay away from me until my head stops throbbing.”⁶

5. The unadulterated version of this illustration, as well as the inspiration for other material throughout this section, can be found in Jay E. Adams, *From Forgiven to Forgiving: Learning to Forgive One Another God's Way* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press, 1994), 19–20.

6. Jesus says you have to forgive him; He didn't say you have to trust him.

Then five minutes later he sneaks up behind you, twirls you around, and hits you on the other side of your head.

“Ouch!!! I can’t believe you did that again! You said you were sorry! Why did you hit me again?”

“Oh, I can’t believe I did it either! I don’t know what came over me. . . . Yes, I do—I was just thinking again about what you said, and my temper got the best of me and charged off to confront you before I realized what I was doing. I’m sooo sorry! If you will forgive me, I won’t do it again and I will stay away from you. I promise!”

So you forgive him a second time. But suppose that before the day is over he manages to do it not just once, not twice, but seven times! Now after the second or third time you are going to begin to question his sincerity, right? But you know that there is not enough time to change bad habits in one day—especially, let’s say, for a baby Christian. So according to Jesus you are going to have to take him at his word (preferring to believe the best rather than the worst)⁷ if he says he is repentant, and you will have to grant him forgiveness. You will have to do (and, fortunately, you can *learn* to do) what Jesus said, even though it may seem hard or humanly impossible.

Who Can Find a Faithful Man?

Solomon asked in Proverbs 20:6, “Many a man proclaims his own loyalty, but who can find a trustworthy man?” Faithfulness has always been valued in biblical leaders. Old Testament saints like Moses (Heb. 3:5), Abraham (Neh. 9:8), David (1 Sam. 22:14), and Daniel (Dan. 6:4) were all said to be faithful. Nehemiah identified several of his workers as faithful (Neh. 7:2; 13:13). In the New Testament, the apostle Paul would identify some of his friends in the ministry as faithful. There was Timothy (1 Cor. 4:7), Epaphras (Col. 1:7), Tychicus (Eph. 6:21; Col. 4:7),

7. See 1 Corinthians 13:7.



Cultivating the Mustard Seed

You probably already know a little about faithfulness—it's obviously an important character trait in the Bible. But, while simple to understand, being a faithful friend, family member, or disciple can be a lot harder to develop. It not only requires time in the present to cultivate, but also affects the shape of our future—because the faithfulness that we show now determines the opportunities we'll receive to show faithfulness later.

Faithfulness is a critical pursuit for the Christian—but it often gets lost in the shuffle. We ask God to give us certain qualities and to change the way we *are* . . . but faithfulness is concerned with what we *do!* So how do we know whether we are faithful?

Lou Priolo defines three key elements of faithfulness, then goes on both to outline three tests for measuring faithfulness and to pinpoint the greatest obstacles to faithfulness. Learn how to leave excuses behind and do what God has entrusted you to do!

The Resources for Biblical Living booklet series addresses a wide range of practical life issues in a straightforward, down-to-earth, and most of all, biblical manner.

“The people who make the greatest impact for Christ always have one thing in common. They've learned to be faithful. If you want to live all out for Christ, Lou Priolo will help you to see the importance of faithfulness, give you a clear explanation of what faithfulness looks like, motivate you to pursue faithfulness, and help you to know how to become more a faithful and fruitful person in your day-to-day life.”

—**Joshua Mack**, Pastor-teacher of Living Hope Church, Pretoria, South Africa

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