



## **Summer Fruit 7-Part 7**

### **Faithfulness**

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Please take your Bibles and turn to Lamentations, the Old Testament book of Lamentations, Chapter 3. It's good to know that if the whole world is falling apart, we can affirm that God is faithful, more than just a platitude or some nice statement we're just telling ourselves that isn't true. To understand that it is true even in the worst of times because when we feel like our world is falling apart, it's good for us to look back at the biblical characters like Jeremiah, whose world was literally falling apart because the capital city that he loved, the temple where he worshiped, the people that he worked among, they were being taken as slaves. They were being dragged off to Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar's army, and the soldiers dressed in Babylonian regalia were walking through the streets like thugs and policemen. Everything that was familiar and comfortable was now destroyed. It was 586 B.C. and the world was falling apart. The temple had been ransacked. It was bad. And in 2020, when we look at our world and say, man, things are bad and it seems like the hits, you know, they just keep on coming. And we think, well, wow, that makes us feel like there's no hope.

When you're discouraged, remember Lamentations. Lamentations, by the way, if you look that up in the dictionary, it's a good word of a bad feeling. Very descriptive. You'll read this that it is a passionate expression of sorrow. And the book of Lamentations is, it's an acrostic poem in Hebrew, can't see that in English, but this poem is written and in Chapter 3, if you would drop down to verse number 10, it is an expression that is so honest, it's a lot like Job when Job looks at all the bad things that are going on in his life. He says it's like God has made me his target and he's shooting at me. And here is Jeremiah saying that God, the pronoun there "he" is referring to God if you glance up at the context, "is a bear lying in wait for me." It's like God is just attacking me. If you ever ask "what is God doing, why do you hate us or what?" That's how he felt. It's like "a lion in hiding," crouching like those National Geographic videos. Just out to jump on the gazelle and tear it to pieces. "He turned aside my steps and tore me to pieces." I feel like the gazelle after the bloodshed. "He's made me desolate." Speaking of target practice, "He bent his bow and set me as a target for his arrow."

And of all the places, I've read about ancient Near Eastern and ancient Assyrian kidney stones because I have had to experience a couple. Kidney pain was nothing new to the modern era. And he says, man, thinking about an arrow going in somewhere. How bad did it hurt? That arrow, "He drove it into my kidneys the arrows of his quiver." Painful.

Not only that, like the news this week when Compass Bible Church is the laughing stock and the target of the ridicule and mocking of the world, Jeremiah says, I know what that's like. "I've become the laughing stock of all peoples, the object of their taunts all day long." God, "He has filled me with a bitterness; he has sated me with wormwood," with poison. They're trying to bite into a chocolate chip cookie and there are rocks in it. "He made my teeth grind on gravel, and made me cower in ashes." Literal ashes were falling in the streets of Jerusalem because the city was burning. "My soul is bereft," it's torn, "it's bereft of peace." Peace is gone. "I've forgotten what



happiness is." I haven't laughed for I don't know how long. "So I say my endurance has perished." I can't take it anymore. "So has my hope from the Lord," I'm just not feeling it.

Verse 19, "Remember my afflictions and my wanderings, the wormwood and the gall," all the poison, all that terrible taste in my mouth, all the pain of this situation. "My soul continually remembers it." It's the last thing I think about when I go to bed. When I wake up at 2:00 in the morning, it comes to my mind immediately. Everything is painful. My soul is in the fetal position inside of me, "it's bowed down within me."

That first word in our English text in verse 21 comes at such strategic times in the Bible when the picture is painted and it is bad. The Bible doesn't exaggerate, it's bad. You have that contrasting conjunction, "But." It feels terrible, "But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope." You just said he didn't have any hope. No, I have some hope. The demonstrative pronoun "this." You see at the end of this sentence, a colon, right? The colon is pointing forward. The demonstrative pronoun doesn't point back as it often does. That's not the antecedent. It's pointing forward and it's pointing forward to what he's about to say. You have no hope. You have no endurance. You're bereft of peace. You haven't laughed in you don't know how long, you feel like you just can't take it anymore, but...

I'll straighten my mind out here. And when I get this stuff in my mind my hope is revived. What is it? The most famous verses in Lamentations. Here they come. "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases." That steadfast love, we've studied it a lot in our series. We're trying to go through the Fruit of the Spirit, the first one was love, "Agape" the Greek New Testament word and "Hesed," the Old Testament Hebrew word, most often translating "steadfast love" in the ESV, the English Standard Version.

It means that it's a kind of love that is loyal, it's committed, it's promise, it's going to be there. It continues on, it's tenacious, "the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases." Now wait a minute. Everything is going wrong. I'm kind of thinking where is God's love in all this. And yet he says, I know that, "I'm going to call this to mind." He is a God who loves us. "His mercies..." You know what the word mercy means, right? Mercy. That means we deserve a whole lot worse. You know that old phrase that got popular when someone asks you, how are you doing? And a lot of these people say with a smile on their face, "better than I deserve." Right? I haven't heard as much of that in 2020 as I used to hear. But it's true. Even when there's a pandemic. Even when there's chaos in the streets. Even when there are problems at your church. Even when your neighbors are mocking your fellowship. The mercies of God, they're there, they're expressions of his love. You're not in outer darkness where there's weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth to hear eternally "depart from me. I never knew you." We're not there. There is mercy. And that mercy doesn't come to an end. Matter of fact, if I looked for them, I could find them, verse 23, "They are new every morning." Why? Because if we talk about steadfast love, hesed, then you better talk about this word, "great is your faithfulness." Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness.



That's the thing we're dealing with today in the Fruit of the Spirit. I only have a couple of minutes to talk about it, but, man, we need to know what faithfulness is. If you're taking notes, you know the first point, cause it's almost the same every week. And that is that you need to "Be a Faithful Student of Faithfulness," God's faithfulness. Not faithfulness from a human perspective, not faithfulness measured by human faithfulness. But God is faithful. He is a faithful God whose love is tenacious and enduring and if you can get there, verse 24, then you can say, "The Lord is my portion." I may be eating ashes. I may be in the fetal position. I may not have laughed for weeks, but the Lord is my portion. I can feed on that. "My soul can say, 'Therefore, I will hope in him,'" I will hope in him.

Because I know this: the Lord is good. It doesn't feel like it now when the ashes are falling from the fire in the temple as the Babylonian troops take people like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah off across the desert to Babylon as prisoners. But if you wait, "If you wait for him, the Lord is good and the soul who seeks him," they know that. "It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord."

Can you look again at verse 22? "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end." Jeremiah wrote that in this poem when he wasn't feeling it. I want you to be a student of God's faithfulness, a faithful student. That means you need to regularly think about God's faithfulness. If you've never done the discussion questions that are provided on our website, in the sermon, you have the sermon notes, you have the sermon questions. Those five questions, if you've never done them, today is a day for you to download those and to work on that tomorrow morning or Tuesday morning or tonight, because we need to do that to affirm the fact that God is faithful. And do the next thing, verse 23, to itemize them. He's saying I could look every day and find some more. I could see examples of his steadfast, tenacious love and his mercy. I could see them because God is faithful and his faithfulness, his kindness somehow shown even through the silver lining of some dark, horrible storm in our lives.

Verse 22, you need to affirm it, verse 23, you need to itemize it, verse 24, you need to rely on it. "'The Lord is my portion,' says my soul, 'therefore I will hope in him.'" I'm not going to stop hoping. I'm not going to stop waiting. I'm not going to stop relying on a God who's promised that all things work together for good. The burning of Jerusalem "works together for good for those that love him and are called according to his purpose." Problems on staff at your church work together for good to those that love him and are called according to his purpose." Accusations against our church that everyone believes, in our church, work together for good. God is a God who says I am going to work these things together for good. God is faithful. The mercy, even in the midst of the worst of times, remind us of his tenacious love, which basically is a reminder that he is faithful.

Once we study, faithfully study the faithfulness of God, then you can work at this. Number two, if you're taking notes, I need you to reflect that in your life. The whole point of the Fruit of the Spirit is God working that out. I put it this way, "Be a Faithful Christian." Let's start there. Be a faithful Christian. When I was a kid in public school, we'd start in the mornings with "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America." Do they still do that? Well, listen. Somebody in a



school board or a president or someone in Congress or someone at the local level or some teacher decided that would be good for our students to get up every morning, go to school, sit there, look at the flag and to pledge their allegiance to the flag and the country.

You know, that would be a good thing for you to pledge your allegiance every morning, to pledge your allegiance to God. Allegiance means I will be faithful. You want to reflect the faithfulness of God, let's start with God being faithful to himself, as Paul told Timothy, and you being faithful to God. Do you want to reflect the faithfulness of God? God is faithful to himself and his own character and his own standards. You and I need to be faithful to God and his standards. I need to be a faithful Christian.

In that passage that I quoted as Paul is telling the overseers to care for the flock, leading into that he said, the reason I'm giving you these coaching moments in the locker room before I go is because I got to go to Jerusalem and then to Rome. And he said, "I know this, the Spirit has made it clear I'm going to face afflictions and hardships in every city." But he says, you know what? It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter what it costs me. He says "I'll account my life as worth nothing to myself. Only that I can finish the course," only that I can be faithful. Discharge the duties, in this case, of testifying to the grace of God. He's a missionary. I'm going to do my job. I'm going to be faithful. I'm going to be faithful to God no matter what it costs.

Just this one down, Revelation Chapter 2, verse 10. Revelation 2:10. God calls all of us. I mean, it's directed to the Church of Smyrna, but he says to us, "Be faithful, even unto death." Another thing I'd love for you to do in the discussion questions this week is to even crack a book or a Web site open from a reliable source, if you can find one, to try and answer the question that on the surface you may not have an answer to. And the question is this: what are some of the martyrs in church history who inspire you to be faithful? People who have given the ultimate price. And you might say, "Well, I don't know, I don't really know any." Well do the homework between the two sentences in that one question. Before you get to answering the question, maybe you should expand your view a little bit. Because when my daughter faces hard times and I say to her this week, "Hey, remember Felicity or remember Perpetua." Well, if you don't know who these people are, that's not going to give you much encouragement to endure.

But if you know something about a teenage mother who was thrown to the lions and was torn to pieces, as she said, "I'm not going to recount Christ, I'm going to do what is right." Maybe we can get through our trials and our struggles and our pain. Because there are people who have been faithful unto death. I want you to think about those who have. And maybe some of us need to get into some books about the martyrs of the Church and the most obvious book that most Christians know is the third bestselling book in American in early colonial America, The Foxe's Book of Martyrs. Somewhere, sometime we need to go and learn about people. Even like Paul, he said, follow my example and anyone else you see the pattern of my life and he says this: I'm ready to go and to die for the sake of Christ. And he did. He was a martyr.

I think we can get through our trials, don't you? By recognizing that I can pledge my allegiance every morning to God and say I will be a faithful Christian. Because God is trustworthy. He's

worth our faithfulness. He's faithful to himself. I want to be faithful to him. And then I can get to what most of us, I think, think about when someone says, "Hey, you need to be faithful." When you hear that phrase, God's fruit in your life is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness. Oh, yeah, and you think about faithfulness on a relational, horizontal human perspective. That's fine. If you're taking notes, not only should you be a faithful student and a faithful Christian, but I'd like you, number three, to be what you might normally have thought of when you read that verse. I want you to "Be a Faithful Friend." You should be a faithful friend.

But before you even start to define that, can I give you a couple of proverbs that might help? Let's start with this one, Proverbs Chapter 27 verse 6. Proverbs Chapter 27 verse 6 talks about faithfulness in relationships. Here's what it says: "Faithful are the wounds of a friend." If you thought through that passage, some of you have and you've quoted that passage. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend," and here's the next line, "but profuse are the kisses of an enemy." The guy who flatters you, the gal who always tells you what you want to hear. People that just adapt. They're the chameleon and they think that they're being loving and you think they're being loving and you think they're being faithful because a faithful friend always agrees with me. Do you know that's not love? That's hatred. The Bible says that's your enemy.

Faithfulness is expressed by you getting this order right. I'm a faithful Christian first and then I'm a faithful friend next. I never reverse the order. I have to be faithful to God and in my faithfulness to God sometimes like Nathan, who wanted to be a friend to David when David said, "I'd like to build a temple for God" and Nathan goes, "For sure." It's much like kindness and love. If we think it's just adaptability, agreeability, I'm just going to go on your side. Believe what you say. Do what you want. I'm just going to agree with you. And we think, well, that's what it is to be a faithful friend. That is not a faithful friend.

Matter fact, God would have just the opposite antithetical description of that. What's faithful in terms of godly friendship is that you say I'm faithful to God first. Sometimes what I say may feel like it's wounding you, but I'm going to be a faithful Christian and express that in my relationship by being faithful in my words to you as your friend in my actions. So I guess I could put it this way, as I did in my notes, I need to faithfully point people to God. I need to faithfully point people to Scripture. Nathan had to go back and eat his words. He came back in and said, "David, you know what? I spoke too soon. You shouldn't be building the temple." Which, by the way, was a good warm-up for Nathan to be used in an even greater way by telling David some things he didn't want to hear because Nathan was going to be faithful as a prophet to God before he tried to define his faithfulness to David.

Be a faithful friend by faithfully pointing people to God and number two, which by the way, I would say this is probably one of the most frequent usages of the word faithfulness, both in Old and New Testament. There are about five or six Hebrew words that translate into our English word "faithfulness." But often it is related to our words. We said that God is faithful and we are to be faithful because of the things I speak are faithful. An unfaithful witness, he tells lies. He pours forth lies. He is always saying things, but he doesn't do what he says. He's saying things and you can't trust those things. Faithfulness is that you can trust my words. So when I say I want to be a





faithful friend, I want to first of all, be faithfully pointing people to God, and secondarily, I want to be faithful in my words.

As dad used to say, and I assume your dad said it too, "say what you mean and mean what you say." That would be a good place for all of us to be in all of our relationships. I want to say what I mean and I want to mean what I say. So that someone could say, you know, they said it. Like the olden days, "My word is my bond." Right? "I'm as good as my word." "We can do it on a handshake." Well, those days are gone. Right? If I buy a car, it takes me 18 hours to sign all the papers. It's just like, "I will pay I promise. I will pay every month." We need to get back to being people that when they look at your life, they say, here's the Fruit of the Spirit, faithfulness. If you say something, I believe it, I trust it. You're not embellishing. You're not exaggerating. You're not twisting the facts. You're not saying one thing to me and a different thing to someone else behind their back. You are faithful in your words. That's what a faithful friend does.

How about this one, jot this one down, Proverbs 17:17. Faithfulness is my ability to say to you, I want to be in this relationship through the thick and thin. Proverbs, 17:17 says, "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity." Just like our relationship with Christ. It's easy to follow Christ when it's easy. But it's hard to follow Christ when it's hard. It's easy for me to be your friend when everything's cool. It's hard when we're going through hard times. I want to be able to say, like Jonathan and David said to each other, we're in this thing. How many people have broken your heart by walking out simply because the going got tough? We need to be faithful friends who, as I put it, are faithful through the hard times.

The Scripture talks about our reliability and a friend in hard times when it's not there, it's like twisting your ankle or it's like breaking a tooth. I don't know if you ever had a molar break in your mouth. Right? You're so used to putting pressure on those teeth. They seem to break everything you put in there. Chop, chop, chop. But then one day you're eating something and, you know, it's time for a crown or whatever it is. You just busted that tooth out. I expect my teeth to be able to hang in there with a little bit of pressure. I expect to step off of a step in a curb and to have my ankle and my foot hold me up. But like twisting your ankle, like a weak ankle, like when your leg falls asleep, you can't rely on your own feet or your teeth, he says so it is with a person who is in it for themselves, a treacherous man. It's like a bad tooth or a foot that slips. May we be faithful friends, faithfully pointing people to God. Faithfully speaking truthful words and faithfully enduring through the hard times. You don't need a ceremony that says for better, for worse, for richer or poorer. Although reading about David and Jonathan, you start to see that may not be completely out of place. But what we need is faithfulness.

I was watching an interview of a guy who's a manly man, big guy, strong guy. And yet as he's talking, I started to notice how much jewelry he was wearing. I thought, oh, this is weird. It's not that odd these days. I mean, I'm used to, you know, gals and their jewelry, which gets a bad rap in the misunderstanding and the misapplication of a New Testament passage. We're going to passages like the Song of Solomon, of course, adorning yourself with jewelry. I mean, as long as that's not what you're relying on for your reputation and your adornment. I mean, there's nothing wrong with that. But it's kind of hard for me to look at a guy and see all these chains and



all these bracelets and these rings and these big earrings. I've just not used to that. I'm just thinking that ain't me. I'm not shopping for an earring this week.

And yet, there is a necklace that I need to be wearing. Jot this one down, last passage, Proverbs 3:3. There's a necklace that all of us should be wearing, it's the kind of necklace that once you crimp it on God says crimp it on and never take it off. You know, work out with it, you're going to shower with it, you're going to sleep with it. You're going to wear this necklace all the time. It's a necklace with a pendant that has two jewels on it. They're named love and faithfulness. What kind of love? A steadfast love. Those go hand-in-hand. I'm committed to your well-being and I'm going to be faithful. Faithful first to be a student of God's faithfulness, faithful next to the God who redeemed me and then faithful to you.

So that people can look at us and say, I've noticed the jewelry. I've noticed what adorns your life. I've noticed that you are a faithful person. As imperfect as we are and as tempted as we are at times to stumble in ways where we say something and don't carry through with it or have a season or a period or an act of unfaithfulness, I'm always reminded of God's grace when he says when we are faithless, we can be assured of this: that God remains faithful because he cannot deny himself. And one of his faithful words to us is, if you confess your sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive your sins and cleanse you from all unrighteousness. So let's think of our Christian life wiping the slate clean and saying today I'm committed to being faithful and loving, understanding those things biblically, that God might look at us and see our people, the people of God adorned with those virtues.

Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness. Let it be true of us this week.