

The Life of Faith #4:

Faith-fullness

In the Bible Paul refers to faith as being not only a gift of the Spirit but also as a characteristic of the fruit of the Spirit.

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

Before we discuss what faith as a characteristic of the fruit of the Spirit implies, we will first study what fruit of the Spirit is.

Galatians 5:22-23 (ESV)

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

1. The fruit of the Spirit is a FRUIT.
 - It is organic. The word fruit evokes the idea of organic growth; it cannot be forced. Faithfulness is the natural outflow of genuine faith.
 - It is progressive. You cannot see it when it is happening but instead you see it when it has happened.
2. The fruit of the Spirit is a growth of the SPIRIT.

The fruit of the Spirit depends on the seed. It is the fruit OF the Spirit. The seed that produces faith is the seed of the Spirit. Unless a person has the seed of the Spirit in him, they cannot produce the fruit. The fruit of faith is generated within us by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit induces us to be faithful and discloses Jesus's character through us.

3. The fruit of the Spirit is inclusive.

Although nine virtues or qualities are listed by Paul, he does not refer to them as “fruits” in the plural. Rather, he refers to them collectively as the “fruit” of the Spirit. He teaches that there is a singular fruit of the Spirit, which is characterized by these virtues. Jonathan Edwards (18th century American revivalist pastor) explains this by saying, “There is a concatenation of the spiritual graces.” This means they all are connected and interdependent.

THE FRUIT OF FAITH

The fruit of faith may be described as a steady unwavering trust in the person and character of God that causes the believer to remain faithful no matter what trials may be encountered. Faithfulness is the result of an unshakable confidence that God is still in complete control of every situation.

Everything that was said about the fruit of the Spirit is true about the fruit of faith. Faith is generated within us by the power and outworking of the Spirit in our lives. Not only does the Spirit prompt us to be faithful, He also explains why we should be faithful, and He empowers us to remain faithful.

FAITHFULNESS: REFINED FAITH

1. Trials refine our faith.

God wants us to be not only confident but He wants our faith to be refined—to be pure. Our faith in God forms the backbone of our lives. What we believe, we eventually live out. Therefore, character problems are often faith problems.

1 Peter 1:6-7 (ESV)

In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Faithfulness is necessary when God's ways are hidden from us, when hardships come one after another—that's when we need the Spirit to produce His fruit of faithfulness in us.

2. Testing moves faith through a series of growth stages.

When a person comes to faith, usually the first stage they encounter is a simple kind of faith. This first stage of faith can be described as an acceptance of God as the final authority. Nevertheless, it can still be considered an immature faith. It is often very dualistic and tends to see life through black and white lenses. Many think that this faith is “big,” but this is incorrect. It is a young and bold, yet arrogant and untested faith.

As the person faces trials, and his/her faith is tested, questions and doubts usually arise. This is normal. When the person undergoing a test wrestles with those doubts properly, his faith will come out stronger on the other side and become a more mature version. If the person facing doubts and fears during trials attempts to deny them, either based on spiritual cowardice or fear of disappointing the “community of faith,” this person’s faith will not grow. It will become either cynical or stagnant.

It is important to understand that nobody can stay in the simple faith stage forever. Faith will certainly be tested, but the way we respond will determine the outcome. Mature faith is a faith that has been tested, one that wrestled with doubt and fear, but with every step of obedience grew in confidence with God. Mature faith doesn’t have the arrogance of young faith, or the cynicism of a “practical” faith, but the humility of one who has gone through fire yet remains faithful because he himself has experienced the faithfulness of God.

FAITHFULNESS: ENDURING FAITH

The writer to the Hebrews uses examples of Old Testament heroes of faith to exhort the Hebrew believers to live the life of faith in the face of its challenges.

Hebrews 10:35-39 (ESV)

Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what is promised.

... But My righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him.

But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.

The fruit of faith in the life of the believer can be characterized as steadfast endurance. The letter to the Hebrews gives us some keys to help encourage this endurance.

1. Assess the value.

Biblical faithfulness requires that the believer come to the conclusion that Christ is worth more than anything else.

Philippians 3:8-9 (ESV)

*Indeed, I **count** everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and **count** them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith...*

The word “count” means to calculate. In order to have persevering faith, we need to regard Christ as worth more than any disgrace we may experience for his cause.

Hebrews 11:26 (ESV)

*[Moses] **considered** the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.*

2. Choose Obedience.

If we are faith-full, we believe God; we trust that He always has our best interests at heart. We obey his ways and remain faithful to him, because we trust his ways are better than ours. We believe that He loves us; He is powerful enough to save us; and He is working in us. And we live with the confidence that we will receive God's promised blessings, even if we never see them in this lifetime.

Hebrews 11:24-25 (ESV)

*By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, **choosing** rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.*

Moses didn't look to suffer, but he chose to obey even if it involved suffering.

Every believer will be confronted with the choice to obey or not in circumstances that identify us with Christ, his Kingdom and his values. These circumstances may seem to be inconvenient, difficult, detrimental or even life threatening. It is in those moments when choosing to obey will show our trust in God. As we exercise faithfulness, we will grow in our faith.

3. Behold Christ.

In order to endure and remain faithful, it is necessary to keep our eyes set on Christ. We must discipline ourselves to think of who God is and what he has done for us.

Hebrews 12:1-2 (ESV)

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 11:27 (ESV)

*By faith [Moses] left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as **seeing** him who is invisible.*

Moses reminded himself of who God was. He persevered because he was constantly overwhelmed by the wisdom of God. We know somebody who Moses did not directly know: Jesus.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. The Greek word translated “faith” in Hebrews 11 is *pistis*. *Pistis* is also translated in the New Testament using the English words “trust” and “faithfulness.” How do you see these three aspects of *pistis* interacting in the life of Abraham? (Hebrews 11:8-19)?
2. List at least three tests the men of Hebrews 11 faced. Have you faced something similar? How has your faith been affected by that test?

HOMEWORK

Choose one of the following:

1. Read Hebrews 11 three times this week. After the 3rd time, journal how the reading of this chapter encouraged your faith.
2. Choose one of the following heroes to study their journey of faith: Noah, Abraham, Joseph or Moses. For the character you choose, identify how did he specifically 1) Assess the value; 2) Chose obedience; and 3) Beheld God.