

Monday

It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations.

Deuteronomy 7:7-9

Deuteronomy was written near the end of Moses' life as Israel was about to enter the Promised Land. In Joshua, Israel would conquer the Promised Land and begin to dwell in it. But they faced a great danger once they possessed the land. They faced the danger of thinking that they had gained the land through their own strength and ability, forgetting that God had graciously provided it for them. So over and over again throughout Deuteronomy, Moses exhorted the people to remember the Lord and not forget what He had done for them. Israel was not receiving the land because they were a large and powerful people. In fact, they were actually a small nation compared to many of the other nations. The main seven nations in the Promised Land were all larger and more powerful than Israel (Deuteronomy 7:1). Instead, Israel was receiving the land because God is faithful to His promises. God promised the land to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and now He is fulfilling His promise and keeping His covenant. So Israel's possession of the land did not depend on their own strength, but on the faithfulness of God.

Israel did actually fight against the Canaanites, but God enabled them to be victorious. Without the Lord's help, they would have failed (cf. Numbers 14:39-45). If Israel thought that they received the land by their own strength, then they could become proud and think they didn't need the Lord anymore. But if they remembered what the Lord did in the past, then they could be reminded to trust Him in the future.

1. Looking back in my life, when is a time that I saw God's faithfulness?

2. When I look at my life, do I think I have accomplished good things on my own, or do I acknowledge God's help in my life? How can my remembrance of God's working in the past help me to continue depending on Him both today and in the future?

3. Throughout the Conquest, Israel needed to be faithful to what God said for them to do while depending on God's help. How can I obey and be faithful to what God says while trusting Him and not depending on myself?

Tuesday

One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much.

Luke 16:10

Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Revelation 2:10

The church in Smyrna is one of the only churches in Revelation 2-3 which had nothing negative said about it by Christ. But they were about to face great difficulties, and Christ exhorted them to remain faithful even to death. History records that several faithful Christians in Smyrna were martyred for their faith. One of these martyrs, named Polycarp, was the leader of the church in Smyrna and had been personally disciplined by the apostle John. Not every believer in Smyrna actually faced death for his faith, but Christ called every believer to remain faithful.

Sometimes we may view our circumstances and responsibilities as insignificant. We hear of someone like Polycarp dying for his faith, and we can think that we just don't face those circumstances or have great responsibilities in serving God. But in Luke 16, Christ taught that the question we should ask is whether or not we will be faithful where God has placed us. Whether our circumstances are big or small does not really matter; what does matter is our faithfulness. Perhaps we won't ever face death for our faith. But whether or not we do, every circumstance we face is an opportunity to be faithful to God. Even when it seems small and insignificant, we must be faithful in the place and in the way that God has called us to serve Him.

1. Do I sometimes view my life and responsibilities as mundane and unimportant? Do I look forward to a time where I can serve God faithfully in great things, but neglect the need for faithfulness in the things that seem unimportant?

2. What opportunities do I have to serve God this week? Whether I consider these opportunities to be big or small, how can I faithfully serve Him?

3. What opportunities do I have to serve my family this week? How can I faithfully serve them?

Wednesday

You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.

2 Timothy 2:1-2

In the Great Commission of Matthew 28, Christ commanded His followers to make disciples. A person becomes a disciple (a follower of Christ) when they receive salvation. Christ also commanded that we teach disciples all the things that Christ had commanded, which would include the command of the Great Commission. Every disciple of Christ should be taught to go and fulfill the Great Commission by making more disciples. Paul disciplined Timothy in the Christian life, and Timothy had learned much from both Paul's teaching and Paul's example. Now Paul counseled Timothy to continue making disciples. Following the Great Commission, Timothy should make disciples of others. He should be teaching the same things that Christ commanded, just as Paul had taught him. But Timothy should also be teaching these new disciples to go and make even more disciples, since they are to teach others also.

Teaching disciples requires three particular aspects that must all be in place. Timothy needed to receive Paul's teaching; if he was not taught, then he would have nothing to pass on. Once Timothy received the truth, he needed to hold on to it without giving it up and without distorting it. If he distorted the truth, he would not be passing on the right thing. Finally, Timothy needed to pass it on to others. It would be good to receive the truth and hold the truth throughout his life, but if he never passed it on to anyone else, then he would not be making disciples. Verse 2 emphasizes that Timothy should be teaching faithful men. The entire process of discipleship requires faithfulness. We must be faithful to learn God's truth, faithful to hold to God's truth, and faithful to pass God's truth on to others.

1. We learn the truth from God's Word, but God often uses people in our lives to help us learn that truth (and give us an example of how to live). Timothy learned from Paul in the Christian life. Who can I learn from? How can I grow as a disciple (follower) of Christ?

2. In our world today, we face many competing truth claims. Many will misrepresent the Bible to support their ideas. How can I carefully hold on to the truth of God's Word and discern truth from error?

3. Who can I disciple? How can I faithfully teach them the truth of God's Word?

Thursday

And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, "Master, you delivered to me five talents; here, I have made five talents more." His master said to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master." And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, "Master, you delivered to me two talents; here, I have made two talents more." His master said to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master."

Matthew 25:20-23

In this parable, a man was going to take a trip, so he left money with three of his servants to work with while he was gone. One servant received five talents, one received two talents, and one received one talent. One talent equaled about 20 years wages for a common worker. In today's economy with current household incomes, each talent would equal more than a million dollars. The first two servants were faithful with what they were given, and when their master returned, they had each doubled the money that they were given. But the third servant simply hid the money until his master returned, so he did not earn anything with what he was given.

Often when we think of this parable, we see the contrast between the two good servants and the one bad servant. But consider the two good servants. They were not given the same amount in the beginning, and although they each doubled what they were given, the final amounts were not equal. But they still received the exact same commendation from their master. The master commended them both for being good and faithful. In our spiritual lives, we don't all have the same spiritual gifts or opportunities, so we will not all see the exact same fruit. But God still wants us to serve Him and be faithful with the opportunities that He has given us.

1. Am I sometimes jealous of those who seem to be more gifted or have more opportunities than I do? If so, do I sometimes use that as an excuse or allow that to distract me from serving God faithfully with what He has given me? How can I avoid that distraction and jealousy in order to be faithful with what God has given me?

2. Several New Testament passages speak about the spiritual gifts of believers. How has God gifted me for serving Him? How can I use this gift to serve Him faithfully in His church?

3. The faithful servants needed to look ahead to their master's return in order to be faithful. How can I look forward to God's promises in eternity? How can those promises motivate me to remain faithful today?

Friday

Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works.

Hebrews 10:22-24

Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians who were facing opposition for their faith and were tempted to turn back to Judaism in order to relieve their oppression. The first nine and a half chapters of Hebrews build the case for the supremacy of Christ. Christ is supreme over angels, Moses, and the Old Testament sacrifices. The Jewish Christians who are tempted to turn back to Judaism are looking to turn back to something that is inferior. The second half of Hebrews 10 moves into application and encouragement for these Christians. Knowing the supremacy of Christ, they should hold fast and remain faithful to God, even in the face of persecution. The reason they can hold fast without wavering is that God is faithful. Since God is faithful, He will fulfill His promises and His covenant, and they could be confident in the supremacy of Christ.

We as believers can live with this same confidence. Christ is our High Priest who secured our salvation with His sacrifice of Himself. This confidence changes how we look at the world around us and what we do in our lives. So we can confidently draw near to God through Christ. In the Old Testament, only the high priest could go through the veil into the Holiest Place of the temple. He could only go in once a year, and he needed to take a sacrifice with him. But Hebrews says that we can come to God the Father through Christ, a privilege that most in the Old Testament did not have (Hebrews 10:19-20). We can hold on to our faith and hope without wavering, because God's promise is sure. We also can stir each other up to remain faithful to God. We should be looking for the opportunities that God gives to us to encourage and disciple one another in following Christ.

1. We have a great privilege in being able to draw near to God. We can come before the God of the universe with our needs and our cares. How faithfully do I come to God and seek His help in my life? How can I be more faithful in seeking Him?

2. Sometimes we might waver and have doubts in our lives, but God is faithful to His promises. When I face doubts, how can I find confidence in God's faithfulness? How can I focus on the truth of God's promises instead of focusing on the difficulties of life?

3. God has designed for believers to build each other up in the faith. How can I graciously and lovingly stir up and motivate others to follow God faithfully and live out the good works that He has designed for them? Who can I disciple in this way?

Saturday

Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

1 Peter 4:19

Peter wrote to Christians who were suffering, and much of 1 Peter addresses how to respond to that suffering. The Christian life is difficult, and we will face trials in life. But those difficult times are far less than the eternal punishment believers once faced apart from God, and that unbelievers do still face. Because we know that any refining trial we go through pales by far in comparison to God's punishment of unbelievers, we should commit ourselves to Him and continue doing right. So when we come across the trials and problems of life, we must stay faithful to God. We give ourselves over to God and trust Him with the results. We rely on Him to care for us, and because He is faithful, He does care for us. Because He is our Creator and made us, He knows *how* to take care of us. We do face trials in life, sometimes at the hands of unbelievers. But in the end, their judgment does not matter. How they judge us, and how they even stand against us, doesn't affect our eternal standing before God. God's judgment is what matters, and as a Christian, we must commit ourselves to Him and depend on Him. As we commit to Him, we must continue to do good. The opposition of others does not give us an excuse to treat them poorly in response. Instead, we must follow God faithfully, knowing that He is faithful.

In entrusting ourselves to God, we are really following the example of Christ. 1 Peter repeatedly makes the point that Christ is the ultimate example of unjust suffering. Luke 23 shows Christ on the cross, the greatest injustice the world has ever seen; the only truly righteous person paying the punishment for the unrighteous. Luke 23:46 says, "Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!' And having said this he breathed his last." When Christ faced the greatest point of unjust suffering, what did He do? He committed Himself to God the Father. The word "commit" in Luke 23:46 is the same Greek word that's translated "entrust" in 1 Peter 4:19. When we face suffering, even if it is unjust, we should follow Christ's example and commit ourselves to our faithful Creator while doing good.

1. When someone mistreats me or criticizes me unjustly, am I usually more concerned with that person's opinion of me or God's view of me? How can I entrust myself to God and focus on Him instead of being concerned with the opinions of others?

2. The word for "entrust" is a banking term. In Biblical times, when a person was going on a trip, he would "entrust" his business and money to someone (like in the parable of the talents), and the other person had authority over the business and money. Knowing God is faithful, am I willing to trust God with my life? In what areas of life do I struggle with wanting to keep control?

3. Even in the face of difficulty, how can I do good? How can I faithfully follow God right now?
