

Abundant Life Lesson 9 - Faithfulness

Introduction

One of the greatest decisions that a person can make is to turn from sin to God. But after you make that decision, then what? We now must learn to live in such a way that we can stay saved. We must continue down the road to heaven until we actually make it in.

Matt 24:13 But the one who endures to the end will be saved. ESV

1 Tim 6:12 Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. ESV

We must be willing to "fight the good fight of faith." We must not stop with the first step of initial salvation from sin, but continue on living for God. All of these duties can be summed up in one scriptural word: FAITHFULNESS!

What is the Next Step?

When people first give their life to the Lord, they often have trouble figuring out what their next goal should be. Usually the "big things" in the kingdom of God attract them and they want to be powerful speakers, great singers, soul winners, prophets, teachers, missionaries, leaders, etc... God certainly wants to use new people in those areas, but what is the first step to being all that God has designed for you? Remember to pray for God's will for *your* life and not to try to force yourself into someone else's ministry.

There is a law of growth and development that God set in motion at creation. Everything in the natural and the spiritual is governed by these laws. The reason that Jesus said being saved was like being "born again" is because you become a "new creature in Christ Jesus." Spiritually, you are like a new-born babe and now you must grow from stage to stage in God's Kingdom:

1 Peter 2:2 Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation ESV

We are to "long for the pure Spiritual milk" of God! Spiritual growth is a process of learning and growing. You will grow the quickest and the fullest if you will give yourself to the study of God's Word. Listen to the preaching and teaching. Read and study areas in which you have questions. Just like the lion does not become a great hunter until after some time and birds do not fly until weeks after they are hatched, you too will begin to grow until you can learn to "walk" in the direction of the Spirit of God.

So what should you focus on during this time of your spiritual life? The small things. The everyday things. Learning to be faithful in the basic things is just like a small child learning to crawl and then walk and then run on his own. Jesus said:

Luke 16:10 "One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who

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is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. ESV

The small things really matter to God, because He knows that He can only trust you with the large callings, blessings and gifts if you have proven faithful with the smaller things in the kingdom of God. If a person has not been faithful with everyday prayer, then how can God trust them with a ministry of prophecy which requires that they be extremely sensitive with His Word? If a person has not been faithful in giving small amounts, then how can God trust them with riches so that they can bless others greatly? God is more concerned with what we do with what we have than how little or much that we think that we have. If you have the Holy Ghost, then you have the greatest treasure on the face of the earth!

1 Cor 4:2 Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy. ESV

1 Cor 4:2 Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. NIV

The God of glory has entrusted us with the riches of heaven, and now we must prove faithful with the precious gift that He has given!

Areas of Faithfulness

So what are some of the "small things" in which we must learn to be faithful so that God can elevate and bless us? There are several specific areas mentioned in scripture in which a Christian must learn to be faithful. Those who learn to be faithful in these areas will mature quickly in God. Those who are not will always struggle spiritually until they learn these things.

1. Faithful In Worship - We must learn to praise and worship God even when times are tough. Our praise will elevate us into the spiritual realm where God can bless us!

Ps 150:6 Let everything that has breath praise the Lord! Praise the Lord! ESV

Ps 32:11 Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart! ESV

Ps 33:1-3 Shout for joy in the Lord, O you righteous! Praise befits the upright. 2 Give thanks to the Lord with the lyre; make melody to him with the harp of ten strings! 3 Sing to him a new song; play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts. ESV

Heb 13:15 Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. ESV

2. Faithful In Prayer - We also must learn to be faithful in prayer. We've already covered prayer in lesson #6, but notice the following scripture:

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1Thes 5:17 Pray without ceasing.

That does not mean that we walk around all day with our eyes half closed muttering to God, but that we must be faithful to prayer even if we do not see instant results. Sometimes God is working behind the scenes to answer our prayer, even though we cannot see Him actively working.

3. *Faithful In Giving* - Money is nothing to God, but it tends to be very important to man, therefore God does care about your attitude toward giving and your finances.

Luke 16:11-12 So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with *true riches*? 12 And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own? NIV

Throughout scripture, God teaches the concept of tithing and offering. The word "tithe" literally means "a tenth" or "ten percent." Abraham paid a tenth of his spoil to the man of God in his life, Melchizedek. The practice of tithing was continued under law and has continued under Grace. To tithe means that you give ten percent of your income to the ministry of the church. Notice the following scriptures:

Mal 3:8-10 Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, 'How have we robbed you?' In your tithes and contributions. 9 You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. 10 Bring the full tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need. ESV

Matt 23:23 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. ESV

Matt 23:23 "Yes, woe upon you, Pharisees, and you other religious leaders-- hypocrites! For you tithe down to the last mint leaf in your garden, but ignore the important things-- justice and mercy and faith. *Yes, you should tithe*, but you shouldn't leave the more important things undone. (TLB)

1 Cor 9:13-14 Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? 14 In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel. ESV

1 Cor 9:14 In the same way the Lord has given orders that those who preach the Gospel should be supported by those who accept it. (TLB)

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Tithing is ten percent of your income and is to support the ministry of the church. Offerings are anything you give beyond your tithing and is to be for the upkeep of the church buildings. In our church we try to follow the scriptural principles and tithing supports the pastor and his family, pays for evangelists and revival speakers, helps augment missionary and sacrificial offering giving, and pays any ministerial staff or dues. The offering pays the mortgage, utilities, cleaning supplies, repairs, etc...

Many "Christians" today balk at the idea of paying regular tithing and offerings. Some have even tried to say that it was not a scriptural principle for us today but ended with Moses' law. We believe that tithing and offerings are required under Grace because:

1. Tithing and Offerings precede Law and thus did not end with the ending of Law.
 2. If we are children of Abraham's, then we will do the works of Abraham and he paid tithes (Genesis 14:20; John 8:39; Hebrews 7:2-6).
 3. Jesus commanded that we are to give God that which is due to Him (Matthew 22:21).
 4. Jesus said that we "ought" to pay tithes (Matthew 23:23).
 5. Paul told the Corinthian church that in the same manner of the priests of old received payment for their services so should the ministers of the gospel (I Corinthians 9:14).
 6. God said that failure to pay tithes was robbery and we know that under Grace no thieves shall enter into eternal life. (Malachi 3:8-10 with I Corinthians 6:9-10)
4. *Faithful In Attendance* - Equally important is attending services and fellowships with your local church family.

Hebrews 10:25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. ESV

Hebrews 10:25 Let us not neglect our church meetings, as some people do, but encourage and warn each other, especially now that the day of his coming back again is drawing near. TLB

We should be more faithful to the house of God as we get nearer to the return of Jesus Christ. Missing a service is in the spirit like missing a meal in the natural. It will affect your spiritual walk. The Early Apostolic church was faithful in church attendance AND in fellowship with one another (Acts 2:46).

5. *Faithful In Holy Living* - "holiness" means "as is pleasing to God."

Ps 96:9 Worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness; tremble before him, all the earth! ESV

1 Peter 1:15-16 but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." ESV

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Rom 12:1-2 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. **2** Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. **ESV**

Rom 12:1-2 And so, dear brothers, I plead with you to give your bodies to God. Let them be a living sacrifice, holy-- the kind he can accept. When you think of what he has done for you, is this too much to ask? **2** Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but be a new and different person with a fresh newness in all you do and think. Then you will learn from your own experience how his ways will really satisfy you. **(TLB)**

We should be a new creature in our actions, appearance, speech, and over all lifestyle after we come to God! To be faithful in holiness is to live as God wants in everyday life. When we do, we will find that His way is definitely a better way to live!

6. Faithful to the Ministry - God has placed the ministry over you to help you and to instruct you. Listen to the preaching and teaching of the pastor, he often speaks about issues that are important within your life. We will talk about spiritual leadership more thoroughly in lesson #11, but, for now, notice the following scripture:

Heb 13:7 Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. **ESV**

Heb 13:7 Remember your leaders who have taught you the Word of God. Think of all the good that has come from their lives, and try to trust the Lord as they do. **(TLB)**

Faithful Even When Times Are Tough

The Apostle Paul is perhaps the greatest example of faithfulness in the scriptures. He absolutely refused to allow anything to discourage him or cause him to sway from living for God. Because of his faithfulness, God rewarded him with a ministry that forever changed the world! Listen to what Paul went through for Jesus:

2 Cor 11:23-30 Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. **24** Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. **25** Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, **26** I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. **27** I have labored and toiled and have often gone

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without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. 28 Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. 29 Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn? 30 If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. (NIV)

And yet at the end of his life, Paul still had this testimony:

2 Tim 4:6-8 For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing ESV

How could Paul stay so faithful to the things of God? Because he was completely convinced that God would not fail him, and that nothing could cause him to lose out with God!

Rom 8:35-39 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? 36 As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (NIV)

Six Little Words

The greatest lesson on the importance of faithfulness in scripture is found in six little words that we want to hear Jesus Christ say about us at the end of this life.

Matt 25:21 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.' ESV

"Well done, good and faithful servant!" That's what you want to hear at the end of your life, because it is those of whom these words are spoken who will enter into eternal life! Faithfulness is the bottom line in living for God. God is not going to commend you on how many people you prayed for to be healed, or how many hours you interceded for your city, or how many hot meals that you gave away to the poor, and all of those things are important. But, in the end, we will make heaven because we were faithful. Those six little words should resound in your mind as a goal. I want to hear Jesus say "well done, good and faithful servant." Above all else, I must be faithful.