

Fruits of the Holy Spirit – Session 8

Faithfulness

Galatians 5

Timing: 30-45 minutes, then leading into ministry

Buzz groups: Suggestions are boxed, pairs or groups of 3-4 will work best

Illustrations: Suggestions are noted, but your own ideas and stories are preferable

Focus: Major on the one or two points most relevant to your group

Icebreaker: In pairs each person is to tell the other person one true statement about themselves and one lie. Try to guess which of them is a lie.

Introduction

Key Point: Our lives get better and better as we give our lives over to the Holy Spirit

Key Verse: “*The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control*” (Galatians 5: 22-23).

Introduce this week on *faithfulness*

Key Point: God is always faithful, irrespective of whether we are.

Key Verse: Exodus 34:6 – the Lord’s description of Himself.

→ our faithfulness is a response to His faithfulness (Romans 3:3)

→ He enables us to be faithful to Him (1 Cor 1:8-9)

In order to grow in faithfulness, we therefore need to grow in our understanding of what Jesus has done for us by bringing us into fellowship with Him, and to go on receiving the Holy Spirit.

How do you define faithfulness and what is the opposite of faithfulness? Why do you think that faithfulness is important? How have you experienced God’s faithfulness in your group?

Get feedback, possibly writing responses on to a flipchart. In the Bible the quality of faithfulness is often paired alongside another great quality. There are three that are particularly prevalent.

1. Faithfulness and loving kindness

The Point: Faithfulness is often attached to, and seen in, another quality – “love”, “kindness”, “loving kindness”, “salvation”

→ it’s possible to remain faithful to the wrong value set over time – to be consistently angry, bitter, cynical, insecure, envious over time.

→ faithfulness only a good quality if it’s linked to God’s values (hence the fruits that precede it)

How do we change?

→ we behave out of what we believe, so the first thing is to restore right belief.

→ that always starts with repentance. (*Joshua 24:14*)

Illustration: Give a personal example of when you said sorry and committed to stop certain behaviours and thought patterns and embracing new ones. Highlight the need to take practical action to forgive ourselves or others – to give stolen stuff back as it were – to start walking a new road.

Application: Share some of the practical ways you continue to maintain and reset your beliefs and values. Highlight the importance of regularly reading scripture and praying. But also mention how you allow these to really change you, not just wash over you.

Individual exercise as takeaway / for ministry

Hand out postcard-sized paper notes or post-its. Invite people on one side to write down values they exhibit when they're at their best. Then on the other side, what values they exhibit when they're at their worst. Mention we'll pray into these later. Share your own to demonstrate the exercise but say it is an individual exercise really.

2. Faithfulness in the face of temptation

The Point: God provides a way out for us when we're tempted

Lessons from the Book of Hosea:

- Hosea's family life reflected the "adulterous" relationship which Israel had pursued with other gods. Hosea allowed his marriage to symbolize the relationship between God and Israel.
- Hosea's wife left him to go with other men; Israel left the Lord to go with other gods.
- Hosea searched for his wife, found her and brought her back; God would not abandon Israel and brought them back even though they had forsaken him.
- But just as Hosea's bride is unfaithful to him, so Israel (us – God's people) is unfaithful to God.

This is the story of God's people and tragically it's often the same for us – we are God's people (Israel) now.

→ The buying back of Gomer is analogous to how of Jesus wins / buys us back from our slavery and shame, through His great sacrifice on the cross.

→ Hosea is often seen as a "prophet of doom", but underneath his message of destruction is a promise of restoration.

How do we stay faithful to God in the face of temptation? The Bible promises us that God will always provide a way through it for us – and that it's God's quality of faithfulness (1 Cor 10:13).

Share a real-life situation where you've faced temptation and how you resisted it. Be brave, real and positive – it will really help others.

In pairs, think of a temptation you're facing right now in life that you can share with someone else! The other person has to think off the top of their head about what God says or thinks about that and encourage the other person with it – no empty flattery please!

3. Remaining faithful in the long term

How do we keep going in long run?

The Point: God's faithfulness makes all the difference to our lives

Key verse: Romans 5:3-5

- As persevere we develop character, and God pours his hope into us

But why must we persevere?

- Why: it's our response to His love which benefits us by deepening our relationship with Him and helps us remain faithful (Romans 5:9-10)

And how do we persevere?

- We've experienced His help before: recall / reflect on prophecies given to us, and obey.
- We believe He will help again: pray - we don't battle people but unseen powers
- Hold on: we need the encouragement and support of others

Ideas for Ministry

- Thank God for His faithfulness to you in the past, praise him for his presence in your life and ask him to help you grow in faithfulness to him and others.
- Turn the "when we're at our worst" values into prayer of repentance, then ask God to strengthen us in our attempts to live out more and more the "when we're at our best"
- 2s/3s – encouraging words for one another re values we want / temptation / long term