

CALL MY PEOPLE TO BE FAITHFUL PT 2

The book of Hosea is one of the most scandalous in the OT. It starts with Hosea the prophet being told by God to marry Gomer. There is big debate about the next bit. Either God told Hosea Gomer would be unfaithful, or she was already someone who was sexually promiscuous. Either way, Hosea enters into this marriage knowing his wife is not going to be faithful. But this is not just a marriage of obedience. While we know nothing of Gomer, it is clear the Hosea genuinely loves her. Maybe he hoped that his love would be such that she would not stray. They have 3 children, and yet within a few years Gomer leaves Hosea. It is not clear if she goes to live with someone else, or enters into prostitution, under a pimp.

Either way, God instructs Hosea to take her back and to love her. Hosea has to buy her back with a gift. Hosea would have been considered crazy by the community for doing this: a fool, still in love with this woman who had so shamed him. But he does it, taking her back and loving her.

God tells Israel this is a picture of their unfaithfulness to himself. But he still loves Israel and wants to take her back. The imagery is of a husband and wife.

Still today, whether in Christian circles or the wider community, an affair is seen as wrong. Jesus says an affair is grounds for divorce. It is not just sex - it is a betrayal of the heart of the marriage. Secular counsellors talk of the devastation an affair has on a marriage. It is possible to rebuild, but it is very challenging. It has profound and deep implications for the relationship. It impacts self-worth, trust, mental health, other relationships.

We understand this at a human level. But we don't actually grasp this in our relationship with God. We don't perceive our actions as an affair when we give our hearts to things other than God. We might say, "I would never have an affair", and yet we have an affair when it comes to our response to God. Somehow God seems more distant, more abstract. We don't perceive our actions as a betrayal.

Today is part 2 of a miniseries that I began last week. It came about from a retreat day I had last month, where I sensed God say: "Call my people to be faithful." So, I scoured the New Testament for references to being faithful. I found 10 areas that the NT calls to be faithful in. We looked at 5 last week: Faithful to the gospel. Faithful in service. Faithful in suffering. Faithful in our marriages. Faithful in obedience.

2 Timothy 2:22 tells us to pursue faithfulness. That means to be active about it. This call to faithfulness has to be held in the context of the faithfulness of God. God is a faithful God. We read about, we sing about it, we can share our own stories of the faithfulness of God. God is a faithful God, even when we are not faithful.

What are the other 5 things that we called to be faithful in?

Faithful in old age 2 Timothy 4:7 I love reading of the kings in the Old Testament. The accounts often give little nuggets of gold as you read of their leadership. They are often categorized as good or bad, they followed the Lord or they did not. Occasionally we read of a bad king who at the end of his life turned to God. Manasseh is one that comes to mind. But many show a different pattern. They were good kings who followed the Lord, but at the end of their life they succumbed to temptation. They drifted away from God. They began to worship idols. They became proud of what they had achieved.

I don't think human nature has changed. There are temptations that come with getting older. We can become proud. Often, we have become financially secure. We have achieved a few things. We have grown up and lose that dependence on God. We can begin to put idols of pleasure and comfort ahead of the kingdom of God. We become more concerned with things other than the kingdom. We feel like we have been there done that with our Christian faith, and drift away from other Christians and church connection.

Paul says as he ends his life. "I have run the race. I have been faithful to the end." Will God be able to say the same about us as we reach the end of our lives: "Well done God and faithful servant". Or will the story of our life if it was recorded in one paragraph, liked the kings of old say something like this. "He faithfully served God all his life. However, in his old age, he followed after other gods, and compromised what he knew to be true, leading others astray."

Faithful in our testimony Revelation 6:9 Faced with physical torture and death, these people had been faithful to God, refusing to say that Caesar was God. We are unlikely to face such a situation, although many Christians do and are right now facing that level of persecution. But are we being faithful in our witness? What does that look like in our society today?

- Not being ashamed of our faith
- Being willing to speak up and share our story.
- Not being willing to compromise our behaviour to conform to those around us.

Faithful with resources Matthew 2:514-30 Luke 16:10-12

In the first parable (Matthew 25) The master gave each servant a different amount of money before he went away. Note that it was not their own money. It was the master's. When he came back, two had invested the money well, and got a return for the master. One has buried it in the ground, and so got no return.



The two servants who used the money well are praised as being faithful with what they had been given. The third is severely chastised for his use – or lack - of the money.

In Luke after a story about money, Jesus says if we are unfaithful in little things, i.e. money, then we will not be faithful with greater responsibilities. Money and our relationship with it, and how we use it, is an acid test of our commitment to following Jesus Christ.

Every resource we have. our money, our house, our ability, our time, is not ours but God's. This idea is also picked up in John's letter (3 John 3)where he commends them for caring for the travelling teachers with food and hospitality. That is less relevant today but the principle is the same; using the resources we have been given for the kingdom.

Are we setting aside money to give to support your church? If you think about this as giving to the church as an institution you will struggle because you will see its flaws and then be able to justify not giving. But if we see the issue as giving to God, then that is a different issue. We can't literally give our money to God. So, it has to be to an organization or people who are helping build the kingdom. But the issue we have to ask is: Am I begin faithful with the resources that God has given me?

Faithful until his return Many have predicted when Christ will return and all have been wrong.

Jesus tells a parable on prayer but ends it with " but when I return, how many will I find with faith" ? Wow. This is sobering. (Luke 18:8) Jesus says in Matthew 24 talking of the days before his return. "Sin will be rampant everywhere and the love of many will grow cold. False prophets will appear and lead many astray."

If you grew up in church circles in the 80s you would know of the strong expectation many had of Christ's return or the rapture depending on what church you were in. Today, it is very rare to hear teaching on Christ's return. Why is that? Partly so many people got their fingers burnt with a bad interpretation of Revelation. They saw Revelation as some kind of future road map, when actually that is not the correct interpretation of the book.

Rather than focus on the date of Jesus return, I think the question is: "Are we ready to give an account of our lives before the Almighty God" ? The question is one of accountability. This is what many of Jesus parables talk about. A master goes away for a long time. Servants think he is gone forever, so start doing their own thing. Then the master returns and brings judgement. Are we going to be faithful until the Lord returns?

Faithful to our word. Matthew 5:33-37 The Jews had a way if they wanted to impress they were telling the truth to make an oath in God's name. Lev 19:12. The vow that indicated the seriousness of what was said – that they would do what they said. The Jews found a loophole in this and started using other things to make vows on, like Jerusalem.

Often this was a way to deceive people and not be kept to one's word. Jesus said. "Let your yes be yes and your no be no." By this he means a person who keeps his word, without having to resort to vows to show that you are honest. This was part of our culture until very recently. If you shook on a deal, then it was a deal. You didn't need fancy contracts to ensure you would keep your word. My Dad did business like this. Now people don't feel any need to keep one's word.

Keeping our word reflects God. Numbers 23:19 tell us that he says he will do, he will do. He is faithful to his promises.

I looked up some non spiritual websites on this matter. They all talked about being a person of one's word as the very foundation of integrity. It means if we say we are going to do something we do it, even if it is painful. It means asking forgiveness if we break our word. We should not assume that people will understand if we don't do something or that they will have forgotten about it, or that it does not really matter.

5 key areas that God is calling us to be faithful in. The Good news is that God continues to reach out in love to us. Jesus is full of faithfulness John 1:13

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REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

1. *What hinders us from seeing our lack of love for God as being like an affair in a marriage? What are the implications of this?*
2. *What do you see as the traps of old age when it comes to faith? How could you avoid them? Who do you know who amplifies finishing well?*
3. *What impact does how badly Christianity is seen by many impacts what you say or do? How many in church do you think would abandon their faith, if they were being actively persecuted for it? Would you be one?*
4. *The use of our money is an acid test of discipleship. "Do you think this is true? Can you support your position from Scripture? Is giving money to church really the same as giving it to God?*
5. *Why is there so little preaching about the Lord's return and judgement today? What is the impact of this? If you knew the date of the Lord's return, let's say 2023, what would you do differently?*
6. *Discuss this: "The first step to being a person of integrity is doing what you say you will do." How has the idea of keeping one's word been diluted over the years?*
7. *Which area of faithfulness do you need to grow in the most? How could others in the group keep you accountable?*
8. *Was there one area of the 5 that God spoke to you about? What do you need to do as a result? How can others in the group help you grow in this area?*



CENTRAL BAPTIST

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