

# FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

9244 Five Forks Road

Waynesboro, PA 17268-9612

Tel: (717) 762-2991

**SCRIPTURE:** Galatians 5:16-23a

**DATE:** September 4<sup>th</sup>, 2023

**SERMON:** "Much Faithfulness"

---

Good morning everyone! Let's start out with an easy one...all of you have heard of **HD**, right? So tell me what HD stands for? *(PP operator: Don't bring up the answer until I verbally confirm it)*

**High-Definition**, that's right. It was back in 1998 (25 years ago) that high-definition TV's were first introduced and within 10 years analog TV's were pretty much gone and HD TV's were all you could find on the shelves.

Okay, this one's a little more difficult...how many of you have ever heard of **Hi-Fi**? We're going back a ways, before 1998, that's for sure. This is what happens when you have someone old enough to be Shaun's dad step in to bring the message...you get a history lesson on analog TV's and Hi-Fi stereos. So someone tell the rest of us what Hi-Fi stands for? *(PP operator: Don't bring up until I give or confirm the answer)*

**High-Fidelity**, that's right. Here we're not talking about what we see with our eyes, we're talking about what we hear with our ears. This term was used back in the day when phonographs – or what we called record players – was one of the primary ways you listened to music. And those selling record players wanted to assure us, the consumer, that the quality of the sound was excellent. High Fidelity. A recording that would be very faithful to the original.

It made me think of this image – a painting really - called **His Master's Voice**. The painting featured a dog sitting in front of a phonograph looking puzzled because he was sure he was hearing the voice of his master.

A company called RCA began using this painting as part of their advertising campaign, saying that **the fidelity of their sound would be so faithful to the original that it would sound as if the person was singing right there in front of you.** You will not be able to tell the difference between the two.

So why all this talk about fidelity? Well, as we continue our sermon series called **Some Fruit, More Fruit, Much Fruit**, we turn our attention to what is called the Fruit of the Spirit, found in Galatians chapter 5...

**Galatians 5:22-23a ...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.**

Nine character traits that should be increasingly evident in the lives of those of us who follow Jesus. This morning we come to the character trait called **Faithfulness**, and in the original language the word meant...**fidelity**.

Do you see where we're going with this? This is not about the quality of the picture we see when we use *our* eyes...it's not about the quality of the sound we hear when we use *our* ears...it's about *the quality of our lives*, what *others* see when they look at us...what they hear when they listen to us.

And so it's my hope that everyone who follows Jesus will leave here this morning saying: **I want to live a life of such faithfulness to God – such high fidelity – that I will accurately reflect Jesus' life and heart to those around me.** Nobody is going to confuse any of us for Jesus, but when family and friends and even those we don't know see us, we hope there is something in our lives that allows them to see Jesus.

As we go along I'm going to be asking three questions...the first is **How Have We Done?** How faithful has humanity been to God, and reflecting His character to those around them? The second question is **How Are We Doing?** How are you doing, how am I doing when it comes to faithfully living as Jesus lived? Low,

Medium or High Fidelity? The last question is **What Is Your Next Step?** What step or steps do you sense that God is asking you to take in response to what He will be revealing to you this morning?

Okay, let's address the first question, which is...

## 1. HOW HAVE WE DONE?

Let's start at the beginning, with God creating and bringing about order and beauty and a garden full of life. And in the midst of all of this beauty He brings forth...

### A. Humanity

Man and woman...Adam and Eve. And God invites them to enter into a partnership with Him. For example, God creates the animals, and invites Adam to name them. Humanity is being given the privilege of overseeing this world alongside of God, all He asked of them was to be faithful, that is live lives of **fidelity**, trusting Him to guide them.

But as you know, a partnership with God did not interest them, they instead opted to live life on their own terms, determining right and wrong for themselves. And it did not go well. Humanity became suspicious of one another, it led to fractured relationships, injustice, and the taking of lives.

*In spite of this* God remained faithful, committed to His desire to partner with humanity. So He brings forth a small nation called...

### B. Israel

...that will be given another chance to trust Him and remain faithful to Him.

God establishes a **Covenant** with the Israelites. Now this term - Covenant - is a rich word with deep meaning. Whenever I meet couples who are preparing to get

married, I use this word “Covenant” to make clear to them that they are about to enter into a very unique relationship with one another.

In the eyes of the State, marriage is contractual, you get a license, get it signed, mail it in to the courthouse and have it on record. Very clean, very tidy. Except in the eyes of God, this is not a contractual relationship between a man and a woman, it’s a covenant relationship...one with deep meaning, intimacy and faithfulness...a relationship unlike any other.

And so as God continues to look for humanity to trust Him and partner with Him, He first describes Himself to the Israelites, letting them know that He is...

**Exodus 34:6 “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger , abounding in love and faithfulness...”**

Pretty good, right? You expect the Israelite to be all in. And they are...they receive from God a set of laws they will be expected to obey...laws which will not smother them, but will actually help them to live well. If they live lives of high fidelity - faithful to God - they will become a people that will represent God well, and point to the rest of humanity to Him.

So here’s how it unfolded. Moses...

**Exodus 24:7 ...took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, “We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey.”**

But the Israelites, instead of pointing other nations to the compassionate, gracious God who is slow to anger and abounding in love and faithfulness...they committed spiritual adultery and incredibly, began putting their trust in the gods - the lifeless gods - of the nations around them.

And this went on generation after generation, as the Israelites chose to live on their own terms, apart from God.

**II Kings 17:15a They rejected his decrees and the covenant he had made with their fathers and the warnings he had given them. They followed worthless idols and themselves became worthless. They imitated the nations around them although the LORD had ordered them, “Do not do as they do.”**

Then came the consequences of their unfaithfulness. Israel ended up losing their land, many of them losing their lives as they were carried off to live in exile in the country of Babylon. And it all seemed pretty hopeless, except for the fact that God remained faithful, even though the Israelites did not.

You see, generations prior to the exile, God entered into a covenant not with Israel, but with an individual, David, telling him that He would one day bring a descendent from David's line who would offer peace and blessing to all the nations of the world.

Remaining faithful to that promise, after 70 years in exile, God brought the Israelites back to their land and paved the way for Jesus to come and live the life that all of humanity had been unable to live, opening the door for us to enter into a renewed partnership with God.

And so how has...

### **C. The Church**

...been faring over these past 2000 years? Has the church been living a life marked by high fidelity...faithfully reflecting the life of Jesus to those around them?

Well, there were clearly those in the early church who lived faithfully...names like Lydia, Barnabas, Priscilla and Aquila come to mind, those who responded to Jesus' teaching and lived in such a way as to reflect His life to those around them. And the church grew, and for the past 2000 years has continued to grow as followers of Jesus have lived lives of high fidelity....living as He lived.

At the same time, over the past 2000 years the church has been marred by inconsistency, compromise, and corruption. Jesus' brother, James wrote a letter to the early church, confronting them about their lack of faithfulness to God, addressing them as...

### James 4:4 You adulterous people...

He was accusing them of spiritual adultery, unfaithful to God and failing to represent the humility and kindness and life of Jesus to others.

*Yet in spite of the inconsistency, in spite of the compromise, we see that over the course of the past 2000 years and up to the present, God has continued to remain faithful, turning His back on no one, inviting all of humanity into a renewed partnership with Him that comes through Jesus.*

Now that we've looked back at how others have done, the more significant question is...

## 2. HOW ARE WE DOING?

How are you doing, how am I doing as we look to live lives of high fidelity...accurately reflecting Jesus to our family, to our friends, those we work and play alongside of?

I would think that the answer would largely depend upon our level of maturity, that is, how far along are we in our walk with Jesus? I hope that one thing you've picked up on throughout this series is the fact that maturing in Christ is a process...it's why we're using terminology like **Some Fruit, More Fruit, Much Fruit.**

When we first begin following Jesus, we said it may be difficult for some or most of these **nine characteristics** to be evident in our lives. But over time *some* will become *more* and more will become *much*.

I'd have to admit that when I first made a decision to follow Jesus at the age of 22, for the next five years people would have been hard-pressed to see much difference in the way I was living my life.

I spoke the same, that is, often without thinking...quick to put others down if I didn't like the way they looked or acted...quick to complain...quick to weigh in when I didn't really didn't know what I was talking about.

The one area where you could say that there was evidence of at least some fruit, that is, **Some Faithfulness**, was in my desire to be...

### **A. Faithful to God by Gathering With the Church**

I'm not saying I never missed a service, but during this 5-year period I would find myself *wanting* to be at the church, taking in sermons and lessons and reflecting on the songs that were sung. For the first time in my life, I was hearing and receiving things that got me thinking about God and myself and my life in a way I never had before.

I guess what I would say to those of you who have just started following Jesus...first of all, great decision...second of all, if you don't see much in the way of change or spiritual maturity in your life, don't despair, don't give up. Keep on gathering with us, listen, ask questions, look for ways to put what Jesus teaches into practice and see what happens. If you give Jesus something to work with, He'll help you see *Him* and *yourself* and *your* life in a way you never did before.

Like I said, for myself, there wasn't much fruit visible early on, but by consistently coming to the weekly gatherings, this was laying the groundwork for more fruit - **More Faithfulness** – to become visible in my life. Five years into it, one example would be the desire I had to be...

### **B. Faithful to God by embracing a New Lifestyle**

As I'm attending services as a new Believer....listening, learning, pondering...it became obvious that changes needed to be made in my life. I needed to acknowledge self-destructive behavior and attitudes, look to Jesus to help me change by putting into practice what He taught and what He modeled.

And as I listened to Ray share from his heart last week about generosity, I thought back to my personal struggle when it came to contributing to the work that God was doing in this church. It was a struggle because I remember just how tight money was at that time of my life, and just the thought of putting some of it, any of it in the offering plate was pretty low on my priority list.

I had bills to pay and things I wanted to have and to do. But eventually began growing in this area. Then, I remember an opportunity came along for me to move into a nicer apartment here in town, but the rent was going to be higher and there was no way I was going to be able to afford it...unless I cut back on my giving to the church. And so that's the decision I made.

Wouldn't you know a week later I found myself in the hospital, and came out owing over \$7,000 in hospital bills. I've never believed that God assumed an attitude towards me of, "Oh yeah, well then, take *this!*" But I have come to see that there are consequences to the choices we make, and I hope that as I have matured, I've come to learn the lessons that have come my way.

At any rate, when Ray talked about this last week, it got me thinking back to that time when God came to help me to take a step forward in this area...not just attending church, but partnering with Him and helping to play a part in the work of the church.

I really appreciated and was learning a lot from the messages and the classes I attended here...they were practical, easy to understand and could be applied to my life. I appreciated the desire of this church to reach out into the community and help meet the needs of the hurting. I believed in all that and wanted to be a part of



that. And so I began making some lifestyle changes that enabled me to truly begin partnering with Him.

And I hope that as I became more faithful in embracing this new lifestyle, I was at least starting to reflect the life and heart of Jesus to those in my family, and those that I worked with and played with.

And then, here of late, I'd say in the last 10-15 years, it's become my hope that much fruit - **much faithfulness** – has become visible in my life due to my desire to be...

### **C. Faithful to God and His Word**

Anybody who preaches or teaches the Word of God has a tremendous responsibility to be faithful to what God is actually saying, and not use God's Word in a way that is not faithful to His intent.

Through the years, as my understanding of God's word has grown, I look back and see that there were times as a young, immature disciple of Jesus, that I would be guilty of taking verses from the Bible and without even realizing it, using them out of context.

What I mean is that, when preparing a sermon or a lesson, it would be easy for me to find a verse somewhere in the Bible that would appear to fit well, support and reinforce whatever point I was trying to make. While on the surface it might appear to do just that, as I matured I came to see that the point I was trying to make was at times quite different than the point God was actually making.

**Jeremiah 29:11 “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”**

Great verse, right? So much good here. I *believe* God has a plan for our lives, it may be broad, but a plan nevertheless. I *know* God has given us a hope and a

future. But I hear this verse quoted quite a bit, and when I do it causes me to wonder if the person quoting it really understands the point that God is making through the prophet Jeremiah.

You see, we tend to make this verse very personal, that is, God is speaking to *me*. The thing about this verse though...when we read the word “you” – and it appears 4 times in this one verse - God isn’t speaking to an individual who is going through a difficult time with circumstances out of their control...He’s not saying, “*Just hold on, I’ve got a plan for you and your life.*”

He’s speaking to a people group, the nation of Israel, and they are not dealing with circumstances beyond their control. I made mention of this just a bit ago, but the Israelites are experiencing the consequences of disobedience, their unfaithfulness to the covenant relationship...they are living in exile in Babylon, and the plans and the hope and the future will not be experienced in the lifetime of many of them.

His promise will culminate in the lives of their children, or their children’s children, as God in His faithfulness will bring *them* back to rebuild and reoccupy Jerusalem and pave the way for the coming of Jesus. God isn’t speaking to an individual, He’s speaking to a nation, many of whom will not live to see this promise fulfilled.

Again, this is not to say that God doesn’t have a plan for our lives that will end well...we have a hope and an incredible future in front of us. But I can find other verses in the Bible where God speaks directly to this, and so it’s become my desire to grow in my faithfulness to God’s Word and use it in its proper context.

While I’ve given you just three, there are many, many examples that we could give when it comes to faithfulness to God...living lives of high-fidelity, reflecting the life and heart of Jesus to those in our family, at work, throughout the community, right?

And so as you consider the growth, the steps that you’ve taken thus far,...

### **3. WHAT IS YOUR NEXT STEP?**

Do you sense that God has spoken something into your heart at some point this morning, and do you sense He is looking for some kind of response?

For some in here or out there watching, He's looking for you to respond by taking ...

#### **A. Your Next Step: Towards Jesus**

I think we all understand the appeal of living life on our own terms, determining by ourselves what is right and what is wrong. What is acceptable and what is not. Very, very appealing.

But if we just look around and see where that's gotten us...what happened in the early days of humanity has continued on to this day...thirst for power, hidden agendas, suspicion, distrust, fractured relationships, injustice, violence. Our world is broken.

But as we've seen, God remains faithful even to those who have shown no interest in Him. So if you've sensed God's presence here this morning and believe that He may be reaching out to you, would you be sure to see me after the service or reach out to me at some point today or tomorrow? Let's explore this together and talk about what that first step towards Jesus looks like for you.

For those of you who have already taken that step and are now following Jesus, one thing we've been saying throughout the course of this series is that these nine characteristics serve as great opportunities for self-evaluation. And this one – Faithfulness – is no exception.

I wonder if for some of you...

#### **B. Your Next Step: Evaluating Your Fidelity**

That is, evaluating your life to see how faithful you are when it comes to reflecting the heart and life of Jesus within your family, among your friends, at the workplace, at the gym or park or wherever you find yourself.

Let's zero in on the word "**imitation**" to help out with our self-evaluation. Remember when I read earlier how the Israelites had rejected God and...

**II Kings 17:15 They imitated the nations around them although the LORD had ordered them, "Do not do as they do."**

Remember that? What you probably don't remember is that the last time I brought a message in this series a little over a month ago we were told to...

**Ephesians 5:2a Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children...**

You know, when it comes to imitating the misguided attitudes and behavior of some of those around us *or* imitating Jesus, there are some things that are pretty black and white.

If we were to imitate the world, we would feel inclined to air all our petty grievances, all the ways we've been offended. If we're imitating Jesus, there will be many offenses we will choose to overlook.

If we were to imitate the world, we would look for opportunities to elevate ourselves. If we're imitating Jesus we'll be looking for opportunities to serve and elevate others.

If we were to imitate the world, we would embrace an "us" vs. "them" mentality. If we're imitating Jesus we'll see everyone as our neighbor, with all of us in continual need of God's mercy and grace.

For those who follow Jesus, these things are pretty black and white. The difficulty comes in the gray areas. The things we watch, read, and listen to, the places we

go, the entertainment we prefer, the way we dress, the way we define a simple lifestyle. Pretty gray.

If we were to try to make these things black and white, we can fall into legalism where we attempt to make our line everyone else's line. Or we can go to the other end of the spectrum where we say that everyone is free to define what it looks like to follow Jesus on their own terms, without regard for others, without seeking the wisdom of others. In other words, "You do you."

As you take time this week to evaluate the level of your fidelity...low, medium, high...I would encourage you to ask: ***"Does my behavior and my attitude in this particular example reflect the life of Jesus, or does it more closely resemble the misguided behavior and attitudes assumed by many in this world?"***

And may we all take seriously our commitment to Jesus, as we look to grow and mature in any area where we find ourselves imitating the world rather than imitating Him.

Finally, the next step for some would be to...

### **C. Your Next Step: Reflect On God's Faithfulness to You**

I love the great hymns of the church: *Amazing Grace...How Great Thou Art...*how about this one...*Great Is Thy Faithfulness*, especially the third verse which really gets to the heart of it in a very personal way:

***Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,  
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide.  
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow;  
Blessings all mine with 10,000 besides.  
Great is Thy faithfulness...Lord unto me.***

Great examples of God's faithfulness, and the first example – **Pardon for sin** – we all get that. Whether it's our first day following Jesus or whether we've grown and matured, we all are grateful for the fact that God has pardoned our sin.

But it's the ones that follow that we only come to experience as we grow and mature, and this is why we keep putting such a strong emphasis on maturing in Christ.

Have you matured to the point where – even in the midst of health, financial or relationship concerns, you know what it is to experience God faithfulness in the **peace** that He provides? He is faithful in providing that.

Do you experience God's faithfulness to you in the form of His **presence** throughout your day? Do you recognize and experience His **guidance**? As a staff, the pastors can testify to the guidance that God has provided us over these past few years. From time to time we are faced with some very difficult decisions, but we've looked to God to guide us and show us the direction we're to take, and time after time He has proven Himself faithful.

Have you come to recognize and experience God's faithfulness in the form of His **strength** that is needed as you go about your day. From time to time people ask me if I still get nervous when I walk up here to bring the message...and I say, yes, but it's good...it causes me to depend on Him and His strength and not on my own.

Reminds me of a story I heard a while back, about a preacher who was returning to his hometown to bring a sermon one Sunday morning. He was looking forward to showing some old friends what he had become, how he had grown as a preacher. He sat in the front pew until it came time for him to preach, and when that time came, he bounded up the steps and stood tall in the pulpit, but not too far into it began to struggle...he stumbled over his words and on several occasions lost his train of thought. When he was finished he slowly returned to his seat wondering how everything had gone so wrong.

He meekly greeted the people as they exited the church, but he took notice of one elderly woman who remained behind, standing off at a distance. Eventually they met up, and she looked at him and simply said, *“Sonny, if you had gone up the same way you came down...you’ve have come down the same way you went up.”*

I always want to keep in mind that God is inviting me to enter into a partnership with Him, and with anything I do, I’m completely dependent on Him and His strength.

As we mature, we come to personally experience God’s faithfulness to us in all of these ways, and it reinforces the **hope** that we have for all of our tomorrows. Our hope for the future becomes more real and grows more visible...and these  **blessings**  that are mentioned in this great hymn just begin to scratch the surface when it comes to God’s faithfulness to you and to me.

So back at the beginning I said this was my hope...that everyone in here and out there who follows Jesus will say:  **I want to live a life of such faithfulness to God – such high fidelity – that I will accurately reflect Jesus’ life and heart to those around me.**

And so take a step towards Jesus if you’ve never done so.

If you have done so, take time this week to evaluate how faithful you’ve been in reflecting His life and His heart to those around you. Ask Him to guide you in making hard but necessary and in the end, helpful changes.

And also take time this week to recognize and reflect on the greatness of God’s faithfulness to you.

PRAYER