

A Celebration of God's Faithfulness

**Rich Nathan
April 13 & 14, 2019
The Story Continues
1 Corinthians 1:8-9**

When I was a young leader, I used to be incredibly impressed by people's gifting. What an incredible preacher! I wish I could preach like that. He's amazing – what a talented singer. What an extraordinary writer. What a gifted prophet.

I still love gifting. But the longer I've been in ministry, the more I find myself admiring people who simply show up. Faithful people who serve in quiet ways – teaching our kids week in and week out, opening their homes for small group, helping people with their marriages, teaching English as a second language in our Community Center, mentoring children in one of the elementary schools, handing out groceries at our food pantries.

Over the years, I've met dozens and dozens of people who are super-excited about Vineyard Columbus and seem to be everywhere for about six months or a year. And then they are never heard from again.

But people who show up to counsel financially struggling people year in and year out or people at Lane Avenue who have been carrying in chairs and setting up for seven or eight years every Sunday morning or the hundreds of women who are part of a ministry called Baker's Delight who bake cookies and cakes every week for our volunteers and our Monday night service and various other ministries. Those are the people that I respect most in the church.

To some degree, this celebration weekend when I think about the Lord, especially as I look back over the years here at Vineyard Columbus, what I appreciate the most about him is his faithfulness. Of course, I love God's miracles. Of course, I love the Lord's dramatic interventions in someone's life. I love stories of extraordinary breakthroughs. I love seeing healing. But looking back over my 32 years as pastor of Vineyard Columbus, what I think I appreciate most about the Lord is simply his faithfulness.

But before we take time to turn in our commitment cards, I would like to share a brief meditation on the faithfulness of God in a message I've titled "A Celebration of God's Faithfulness". Let's pray.

God's faithfulness is stressed over and over in the Bible. But does it really matter? Does it matter that God is faithful, that he shows up day after day? That he's steadfast? That

he's loyal? That he's committed? That you can count on him? Does God's faithfulness have any real value in the practical details of our lives?

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The importance of God's faithfulness

Does God's faithfulness matter? It matters when your wife is in the ICU because she's suffered a stroke or your husband is undergoing open heart surgery. God's faithfulness matters when your daughter has been hit by a car or your son is shipping out to a war zone in the military. When you are pacing the floor in a hospital waiting room. His faithfulness matters. When you're in a crisis it matters that the universe we live in is not utterly random and chaotic, but is overseen and overruled by a faithful God.

Does God's faithfulness matter? When your marriage is falling apart, when you have no one to blame for your current situation but yourself and your own dumb choices and you have no way humanly to move forward and no tricks left up your sleeve – it matters that God is faithful and you can cast yourself upon him. You may have very little faith left. You may not feel God's presence. The lights in the universe may have gone out for you. But you can always cling to God's faithfulness.

What does God's faithfulness mean?

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The meaning of God's faithfulness

Let me teach you a little Hebrew today. At the end of the service, you can say, "I made a three year pledge to this church. I sacrificed. But at least I've come away fluent in Hebrew."

You're familiar with the word "Amen". We use it all the time when we end a prayer: "in Jesus name Amen." Or if a preacher says something you like, three of you will yell "Amen!"

What does "Amen" mean? "Amen" means "truly". The word expresses our certain affirmation in response to what's been said. Related to the Hebrew word "Amen" is the word:

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Omen = Faithfulness

The picture that's communicated by this word is carrying a baby. The baby is secure, held up by their father's strong arms. The idea of faithfulness is that of support and of intimacy. God is faithful in the sense that he holds us up, he keeps us from falling by drawing us near to himself.

The second very common Hebrew word that communicates the idea of faithfulness is the word “hesed”.

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Hesed

There seems to be no accepted English equivalent for the Hebrew word “hesed”. The New English Bible uses 33 different English words to translate the word “hesed”. The old King James Version used to translate “hesed” as “lovingkindness” or “mercies”. The NIV which we use here at Vineyard tends to use variations on the word “love”. So, in the NIV, we read phrases like “unfailing love” or “faithful love” or “great love”. All told, the NIV uses 25 different variations for translating this one word “hesed”.

As I’ve investigated this Hebrew word “hesed” in various theological dictionaries and lexicons, it has a really broad semantic range. That word is used 245 times in the Hebrew Bible. It includes love words on the one hand, and commitment words on the other. You could translate “hesed” as “loyal love”. It’s love that’s more than a feeling. Hesed is love as a commitment. Hesed is love strengthened by loyalty. Hesed is love strengthened by covenant.

After the flood, God covenanted with Noah. He made him a sacred promise that summer and winter, springtime and harvest (the words we sign in the old hymn “Great is Thy Faithfulness”) would continue to the end of the world. He sealed his promise by putting a rainbow in the sky so that every time you and I see a rainbow, we should say, “That’s a sign of God’s “hesed”, his faithful love, his committed love to us.”

Where, brothers and sisters, have we seen God’s faithfulness in our own lives and in the life of this church?

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The expression of God’s faithfulness

God has been faithful

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In calling us

Here’s what we read:

Slide 1 Corinthians 1:9

⁹ God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

To be a Christian is to be called by God into fellowship with his Son. When we talk about a personal relationship with Jesus, this is what we mean. If somebody asks you, "Do you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ," what they mean is has 1 Corinthians 1:9 become true in your life? Do you enjoy fellowship with the living Christ? Are you so connected with Jesus that you have drawn from him forgiveness, hope, love, eternal life and guidance? And does he draw from you faith, love and obedience?

If you look back at your life, could you say, friend, "God was faithful in calling me. That's what made me a Christian – his faithfulness. God broke through my resistance to himself. In faithfulness, God opened my blind eyes so I could see Jesus. In faithfulness, God captured my heart. Faithful God won me over to his side. He drew me to himself. He empowered me to surrender to him."

God has been faithful here at Vineyard Columbus in calling thousands and thousands of people over the years into fellowship with Jesus Christ. And God has been faithful:

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In keeping us

Here's what we read:

Slide 1 Corinthians 1:8

⁸ He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In other words, God will make you firm, he'll make you stable in your faith. The idea is not that we can be assured of being saved even if we stop believing. Paul is saying that faithful God will keep you believing. Faithful God will sustain you in your faith. Faithful God will make your faith stable to the end. He who faithfully calls you will faithfully sustain your faith. So many people hesitate in making a commitment to Jesus because they say, "I don't know if I have it in me to keep going." We look at ourselves and say, "I am so unfaithful. I make promises and then break them. I don't know if I can keep this Christian thing going in my life."

Paul says, "Take your eyes off yourself. Lift them up to God." He who calls you is faithful and he will keep you going. Having started you down the road of faith, he will bring you to the end of the road in the Kingdom of God. God is faithful.

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- In calling us
- In keeping us

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In fighting for us

When you get older, when you get a terrible diagnosis, when you get a call in the middle of the night – as Marlene and I have – that someone close to you has died, you realize again how fragile life is. Tomorrow is not guaranteed to us. Everything that we have in this world can be taken away in an instant. We try so hard to come up with a way to control our futures. Our only hope is that God will fight for us regardless of whatever bad news comes our way.

When Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, Pharaoh came after him with all of his army. The Israelites were trapped against the shore of the Red Sea. They screamed out in fear, “We’re all going to die!” Moses said,

Slide Exodus 14:13-14

¹³ Moses answered the people, “Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. ¹⁴ The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still.”

Friend, have you ever had faithful God fight for you? You certainly have, though you may be unaware of it. As I looked back at the history of Vineyard Columbus, I know the reason why this church continues. It’s because faithful God has fought for us. In the darkest days of this church, when we had one of our key leaders betray everything that he said he believed, everything that he taught, when his unfaithfulness was splashed all over the newspapers and we had TV cameras out in our parking lot painting the church’s leadership in the darkest shades, faithful God fought for us!

Immediately following that, we were protested by some right-wing militia groups for over year. Week after week, people held up signs in front of our church telling people to not go to church here. As I look back at the history of Vineyard Columbus, I know as surely as I stand here today the reason why the Story Continues is because faithful God has fought for us against evil, seen and unseen.

And I look forward to new stories of God’s faithfulness. It’s great to tell the old stories. But the next generations need their own stories of God’s faithfulness to them in their day. That’s what this giving campaign is about. It’s about giving the next generations the opportunity to experience God’s faithfulness to them.

How has God’s faithfulness been expressed to us?

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In blessing us

Every week, our pastors gather on Tuesday morning to pray. Every other week, the whole staff joins us in praying. Every week, 52 weeks a year for decades, we start our time by sharing stories of the faithfulness of God. The question we always ask each

other on Tuesday morning when we gather for prayer is, “What have you seen God do over this last week or two?” Every week, we hear stories of God’s faithfulness in blessing someone.

A homeless man who some Vineyard Columbus members have befriended over the last five or six years came to the Lord. He’s now gotten a job. He’s got an apartment. He’s being supported by a community of folks that meet on Monday night at one of our food pantries. This homeless man’s life has been utterly transformed by the faithfulness of God and God’s people.

A man who was involved in the occult had a radical power encounter. He came to Christ in the last few months through the witness of this church and the faithfulness of God.

A child living in an apartment next to our church building on Cooper Road walked across the parking lot. He made his way into our children’s ministry. He came to Christ. That little boy is a testimony to the faithfulness of God.

A woman who struggled for years with her finances attended one of our financial counseling classes. Her life has been revolutionized. From financial chaos in her life, she’s now been able to buy a house and she’s living on a budget. The faithfulness of God.

A woman who was recently baptized, struggled with infertility. The Lord healed her and she’s now pregnant. The faithfulness of God.

A man who attended a wedding at Vineyard several years ago heard one of our pastors speaking about Christ-centered marriage. He told the pastor recently that those words about a Christ-centered marriage haunted him for years. He recently gave his life to Jesus. The faithfulness of God.

All of these blessings that I’m sharing with you have happened in the last few months. God is so faithful in transforming people’s lives through the prayers and witness of this church. So, what should our response be to God’s faithfulness?

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Our response to God’s faithfulness

In light of God’s faithfulness, God in the Scriptures calls his people to a response of faithfulness. What God wants from us, more than anything, is faithfulness. He wants loyal love. He wants committed love. In a world where every message we get is “Take the path of least resistance. Don’t sacrifice. Think about your short-term happiness.” God says, “What I want most from you is “hesed”, faithful love.” God wants us to show up! Brothers and sisters, we have an opportunity today to demonstrate our commitment, our faithfulness in response to God’s infinite faithfulness to us by making

a generous and sacrificial three-year pledge. Show up in this offering! I ask you to give generously. I ask you to give sacrificially. I ask you to give faithfully in response to the faithfulness of God. God has been faithful. Let's pray.

A Celebration of God's Faithfulness

Rich Nathan
April 13 & 14, 2019
The Story Continues
Psalm 100

- I. The importance of God's faithfulness
- II. The meaning of God's faithfulness
- III. The expression of God's faithfulness
 - a. In calling us
 - b. In keeping us
 - c. In fighting for us
 - d. In blessing us
- IV. Our response to God's faithfulness