

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **THE MEANING AND IMPORTANCE OF FAITHFULNESS**

*Many a man proclaims his own loyalty;  
but a faithful man who can find?*

*Proverbs 20:6 (RSV)*

*I will look with favor on the faithful in the land, that they may dwell with me;  
he who walks in the way that is blameless shall minister to me*

*Psalms 101:6 (RSV)*

*<sup>11</sup>'None of the men who came up from Egypt, from twenty years old and upward, shall see the land which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob; for they did not follow Me fully, <sup>12</sup>except Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite and Joshua the son of Nun, for they have followed the LORD fully.'*

*Numbers 32:11-12 (NASB)*

*<sup>7</sup>'You are the LORD God, who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and named him Abraham. <sup>8</sup>You found his heart faithful to you, and you made a covenant with him to give to his descendants the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Jebusites and Girgashites. You have kept your promise because you are righteous.*

*Nehemiah 9:7-8 (NIV)*

#### **What is 'faithfulness'?**

We could define faithfulness as being trustworthy, reliable, dependable and taking one's responsibilities seriously. This applies to every task or duty and to every relationship we are in. If we had to give it a single word definition, we could say it is 'loyalty'. It means sticking to a task and doing the very best you can with it.

Likewise, it means sticking to a person and remaining true to them, no matter how inconvenient that may become. The main person with whom you need to be faithful is God. He is always your first priority. But He also wants you to be faithful in every area of your life and with every other person. Psalm 15 describes the kind of person God is looking for and it is a very demanding set of specifications:

*<sup>1</sup> LORD, who may dwell in your sacred tent?*

*Who may live on your holy mountain?*

*<sup>2</sup> The one whose walk is blameless,*

*who does what is righteous,*

*who speaks the truth from their heart;*

*<sup>3</sup> whose tongue utters no slander,*

*who does no wrong to a neighbor,*

*and casts no slur on others;*

*<sup>4</sup> who despises a vile person*

*but honors those who fear the LORD;*

*who keeps an oath even when it hurts,*

*and does not change their mind;*

*<sup>5</sup> who lends money to the poor without interest;*

*who does not accept a bribe against the innocent.*

*Whoever does these things*

*will never be shaken.*

*Psalm 15:1-5 (NIV)*

**To become faithful is one of God's main aims for us**

Faithfulness is so important to God that it is listed as one of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians chapter five. It is listed there because it is one of the key defining qualities of God's own character. He Himself is totally faithful. He never breaks a promise and He never lets anybody down. God the Father wants you to grow to resemble the character and nature of His Son, Jesus Christ. That's a very ambitious project:

*For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren.*

*Romans 8:29 (RSV)*

Consider the extraordinary faithfulness Jesus showed when He stuck to His plan of going to the cross and allowing Himself to be crucified. He could have called it off or saved Himself from it at any time, but He never did. He voluntarily went through with all of it for our sake. That was faithfulness in its most extreme form. In considering how to grow in faithfulness yourself, please also refer to the chapter in this book on truthfulness. The two qualities are distinct, but closely related.

**The first step in becoming a faithful person is to *want* to be one**

Becoming a consistently faithful person, across every aspect of your life, is a major project. It will take a long time for your character to develop. However, it has to begin somewhere and the best place to begin is by wanting it. You need to set your heart to really seek for this character quality. It needs to be your own aim and your own desire, just as it is God's aim for you.

*<sup>2</sup>I will give heed to the way that is blameless.*

*Oh when wilt thou come to me?*

*I will walk with integrity of heart within my house;*

*<sup>3</sup>I will not set before my eyes anything that is base.*

*I hate the work of those who fall away; it shall not cleave to me.*

*<sup>4</sup>Perverseness of heart shall be far from me;*

*I will know nothing of evil.*

*Psalm 101:2-4 (RSV)*

You need to pray persistently and sincerely that God would build these qualities into your character. Ask Him to help you to put the Bible into practice in your own life, so that His statutes can be made part of you:

*<sup>4</sup>You have ordained Your precepts,*

*That we should keep them diligently.*

*<sup>5</sup>Oh that my ways may be established*

*To keep Your statutes!*

*Psalm 119:4-5 (NASB)*

And ask God to remove every kind of falseness from you:

*<sup>29</sup>Remove the false way from me,*

*And graciously grant me Your law.*

*Psalm 119:29 (NASB)*

Go further and ask God to help you to become a 'blameless' person:

*<sup>80</sup>May my heart be blameless in Your statutes,  
So that I will not be ashamed.  
Psalm 119:80 (NASB)*

Being blameless doesn't mean that we are sinless. Nobody is sinless. It means being sincere, genuine, truthful, godly and committed to obey God's Word to the best of your ability. Some good examples in the Bible of extremely blameless men would be Job, Daniel, Noah and Nathanael. Seek to become like them. However, we do not have to rise to the dizzying heights that they reached in order to be classed as blameless. It is within the reach of ordinary people like us, if we really want it.

### **Faithfulness is what you do when nobody is watching**

Another good definition of faithfulness is that it's the way you do a job when nobody is watching. It is the way you go about painting the back of a shed when you know that nobody is ever going to see it or check it. If you were given that job, would you do it properly and diligently, with all the required coats of paint? Or, would you cut corners and lower your standards? Actually, there never is a time when nobody is watching. God sees everything you ever do.

He not only watches, He takes a keen interest. He is continually looking for evidence of you growing in Christlikeness. And He always wants to either reward or correct what you do. He is committed to improving you and seeing you grow to maturity. So, don't ever imagine that God won't notice. He's interested in every part of your life and He wants you to become faithful in everything you do, including your job. There is no aspect of your life or character in which He is content to allow you to remain carnal, worldly or immature.

### **God is reliable but unpredictable; we are unreliable but predictable.**

Being faithful, or reliable, is not the same as being predictable or dull. On the contrary, God is totally reliable and faithful but He can be very unpredictable. He frequently manages to surprise us by going about things in novel, creative, unusual, unexpected ways. By contrast, we tend to be unreliable and unfaithful, yet we are very predictable. We let people down or behave badly in the same old ways, time and time again. When a person lacks faithfulness and cannot be depended on, he becomes a hazard and a disappointment to those around him. Let that never be said of you:

*<sup>19</sup>Like a bad tooth and an unsteady foot  
Is confidence in a faithless man in time of trouble.  
Proverbs 25:19 (NASB)*

### **God is looking for disciples who are truly committed to Him and willing to take a stand**

The main person with whom we need to be faithful is God Himself. That is a major part of what discipleship is all about. Jesus is looking for men and women who are willing to be truly committed to Him:

*<sup>6</sup>My eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land,  
that they may dwell with me;  
He who walks in a blameless way  
is the one who will minister to me.  
Psalm 101:6 (NASB)*

The LORD is continually looking around to find people whose hearts are completely His, not just partly so. That means people who are genuinely devoted to Him and determined to obey His commands:

***<sup>9</sup>"For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His....."***

***2 Chronicles 16:9 (a) (NASB)***

Moreover, God looks around in every generation for men and women upon whom He can rely. He wants people who are willing to take responsibility for their fellow men and to "stand in the gap" to plead for them before God, so that His judgment on them can be averted. However, such faithful, courageous people are so rare that in most generations God struggles to find them. In the days of Ezekiel God couldn't find anybody:

***<sup>29</sup>The people of the land have practiced oppression and committed robbery, and they have wronged the poor and needy and have oppressed the sojourner without justice. <sup>30</sup>I searched for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand in the gap before Me for the land, so that I would not destroy it; but I found no one. <sup>31</sup>Thus I have poured out My indignation on them; I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath; their way I have brought upon their heads," declares the Lord GOD.***

***Ezekiel 22:29-31 (NASB)***

It is essential to remain true and faithful to God and to represent Him accurately, no matter how isolated that may cause us to be. Even if we are surrounded by wicked people, we must remain true to what the Bible says and be loyal to God and to everything that He stands for. Likewise we must be opposed to, and appalled by, everything that God opposes or is appalled by.

Behaving in such ways will certainly cause us to be isolated at times and even persecuted, but it will please God. Moreover, it will actually bring us under His protection and cause Him to ensure, when judgment comes upon those around us, that we are kept out of it, just as faithful Lot was kept from the judgment which came on Sodom.

Consider this very disturbing passage from Ezekiel which serves as a great inducement to us to stay faithful, no matter how much it may cost us. The passage concerns Ezekiel, to whom God reveals that He is sending angels to act as 'executioners' of those who have engaged in idolatry and other abominations.

However, God specified that a mark should be put on the forehead of all those faithful people who had not engaged in such abominations and who had been appalled and grieved about them, as God was. Such faithful people were to be spared and were not to come under the judgment that was about to happen:

***Then he cried in my ears with a loud voice, saying, "Draw near, you executioners of the city, each with his destroying weapon in his hand." <sup>2</sup>And lo, six men came from the direction of the upper gate, which faces north, every man with his weapon for slaughter in his hand, and with them was a man clothed in linen, with a writing case at his side. And they went in and stood beside the bronze altar. <sup>3</sup>Now the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherubim on which it rested to the threshold of the house; and he called to the man clothed in linen, who had the writing case at his side. <sup>4</sup>And the LORD said to him, "Go through the city, through Jerusalem, and put a mark upon the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it."***

***<sup>5</sup>And to the others he said in my hearing, "Pass through the city after him, and smite; your eye shall not spare, and you shall show no pity; <sup>6</sup>slay old men outright, young men and maidens, little children and women, but touch no one upon whom is the mark. And begin at my sanctuary." So they began with the elders who were before the house. <sup>7</sup>Then he said to them, "Defile the house,***

*and fill the courts with the slain. Go forth.” So they went forth, and smote in the city. <sup>8</sup> And while they were smiting, and I was left alone, I fell upon my face, and cried, “Ah Lord GOD! wilt thou destroy all that remains of Israel in the outpouring of thy wrath upon Jerusalem?” <sup>9</sup> Then he said to me, “The guilt of the house of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great; the land is full of blood, and the city full of injustice; for they say, ‘The LORD has forsaken the land, and the LORD does not see.’ <sup>10</sup> As for me, my eye will not spare, nor will I have pity, but I will requite their deeds upon their heads.”*

*Ezekiel 9:1-10 (RSV)*

In the same way judgment is coming upon all people, including those amongst whom we live and work. It may not take the same form, and it may not come today, but God’s judgment will eventually come. Whenever it does come, we need to be counted among that minority who were loyal to God and who were appalled and grieved by the same things as God.

However much that approach might cause the world around us to scorn or despise us, it will gain us God’s approval. Then an equivalent mark, whether literal or metaphorical, will be placed upon us. I want to receive such a mark and to keep it, no matter what difficulty that creates.

**Sometimes God cannot find even one faithful person in a place or situation. Let that never be so wherever you are**

When sin and rebellion are on the increase in a town, workplace, or organization God looks for people who are remaining faithful. Through such people God can, and does, make a difference. They can be used by God to turn the situation around, to ‘rebuild the wall’ and to stand in the gap while the wall is being rebuilt. Through them God can do great things. Moreover, where He finds such a person, even if they are the only one, God will sometimes turn His anger away from everybody.

Then His judgment on that whole place is delayed, or even avoided, all for the sake of that one person. But there are times when God cannot find even one such faithful believer, whose heart is true and brave and genuinely loyal to Him. In such a case, where there is not even one faithful person, God’s judgment is likely to follow quickly:

*<sup>28</sup> And her prophets have daubed for them with whitewash, seeing false visions and divining lies for them, saying, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD,’ when the LORD has not spoken. <sup>29</sup> The people of the land have practiced extortion and committed robbery; they have oppressed the poor and needy, and have extorted from the sojourner without redress. <sup>30</sup> And I sought for a man among them who should build up the wall and stand in the breach before me for the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found none. <sup>31</sup> Therefore I have poured out my indignation upon them; I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath; their way have I requited upon their heads, says the Lord GOD.”*

*Ezekiel 22:28-31 (RSV)*

In whatever situation or place you may be, you could be that faithful person, perhaps the only one there. If so, your individual faithfulness could cause God’s judgment on all of those around you to be delayed or avoided. That will, at the very least, provide more time for the people you know or work with to repent and turn to God

**Growing as a disciple involves moving continually from one test to the next**

I have slowly learned over the years how to be a manager of staff. In doing so, I have gained many insights into how God operates as a ‘manager’. He has objectives for each of us for growth and development, mainly in character, but also in knowledge, skill and experience. He wants to bring us forward and upward, but also to find out how far we’ve already come.

Therefore He sets lots of little tests for us. You may not even realise that you are going through such tests, but you are. He is watching very closely to see how you handle each of them. He also knows all your thoughts and motives and He is always searching your heart to see what you are really thinking in any situation that you face:

*<sup>9</sup> “As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a whole heart and a willing mind; for the LORD searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will reject you forever.*

*1 Chronicles 28:9(NASB)*

*I know, my God that you test the heart and have pleasure in uprightness.....*

*1 Chronicles 29:17(a) (ESV)*

It may be a test of your honesty. Or it may be a test to see whether you will keep a promise, even when it has become inconvenient or more costly than you expected. Will you still keep your word? Will you paint the back of the shed fully and carefully? Will you apply two coats of paint as you were asked to do, or will you skip the second coat and hope that nobody notices? Will you make the effort and turn up to give the help you promised to give someone?

Those are the kind of things God wants to discover about you. We see an example of this in the life of King Hezekiah. We are told directly that God tested him. God allowed the representatives of the King of Babylon to come to Judah and to threaten King Hezekiah. God wanted to find out how he would handle that exceptionally stressful situation:

*And so in the matter of the envoys of the princes of Babylon, who had been sent to him to inquire about the sign that had been done in the land, God left him to himself, in order to test him and to know all that was in his heart.*

*2 Chronicles 32:31 (ESV)*

Therefore be alert to the fact that life is full of these tests. Start to consider why God puts you through them and what He wants you to learn from them, or what He is trying to find out about you. You are much more likely to pass such tests if you are aware that they exist and understand their purpose. Sadly, most of us don't realise either of those things. It's like being at school and sitting down to answer a series of questions without even realising that you are in an exam. That's hardly the best way to do well in it.

### **There will be no promotion unless you are faithful at your current level**

Until you pass the various tests that God sets for you, He will not allow you to be promoted or to take on any greater responsibility. What boss would be willing to put you in charge of a chain of shops if you can't even be faithful in running one shop? Likewise, God will not allow you to move up in your service to Him until you prove yourself to be faithful at your current level.

Surprisingly, most people never realise that there is any connection between faithfulness and promotion. A few people are aware that employers operate this way, but not many grasp that this is also the way God operates. In particular, they don't recognise the tests as being tests, or at least not while they are happening.

That's a shame, because if you don't pass these tests that God sets for you, He will simply keep on setting them for you, again and again, until you do. He won't let you skip any test and He won't let you go on until you pass each one. That is why some people never get beyond square one in their Christian life.

This principle, that there is no promotion until you are faithful at your current level, applies to all of us. We see it in operation in the life of King David. He was eventually promoted, by several stages, to be the King of Israel. However, that series of promotions began even before he was 17, when God saw how carefully and diligently the teenage David cared for his father's sheep:

*<sup>70</sup>He chose David his servant,  
and took him from the sheepfolds;  
<sup>71</sup>from tending the ewes that had young  
he brought him to be the shepherd of Jacob his people,  
of Israel his inheritance.  
<sup>72</sup>With upright heart he tended them,  
and guided them with skilful hand.  
Psalm 78:70-72 (RSV)*

### **Why require yourself to retake the same tests repeatedly? Pass them and move on.**

Given that that is God's way of deciding whom He should promote, why not just knuckle down, be faithful, and pass the tests God has set for you? If so, you will become eligible to move on to the next set of tests, at the next level up. Just knowing that your current situation is a test will help you to approach it in a much better way.

You will begin to realise that your current crisis, and others like it, are not just random events. They will suddenly acquire meaning and significance. In fact, you may start to see them as opportunities, which is what they really are. You can then become more focused on this project of being faithful in every task or test that God ever sets for you.

But remember, when God sets tests for us, He usually disguises them. For example, He tends to operate through other people, such as your boss, clients, customers, colleagues, neighbours, friends etc. He especially likes to use those people who make life difficult. Difficult people, and even wicked ones, are some of God's favourite agents for testing you. That is partly because we don't associate such people with God.

Of course, they themselves have no idea of the testing 'project' which they are assisting God with. But you need to learn to recognise when it's the case. A great deal of the testing that God does in our lives is done through such undisclosed agents. It makes no difference at all whether they are Christians or not. God uses the most surprising people, and in the most unexpected situations, as He pursues His development program for you.

### **Above all, we must be faithful to God**

The most important thing of all is our personal commitment to God Himself. If we can get that right then other duties and relationships will also grow stronger. It is entirely possible to be unfaithful to God, to lie to Him and to let Him down, even if we believe in Him. The Jewish people did it, and so do we, quite regularly:

*<sup>35</sup>They remembered that God was their rock,  
the Most High God their redeemer.  
<sup>36</sup>But they flattered him with their mouths;  
they lied to him with their tongues.  
<sup>37</sup>Their heart was not steadfast toward him;  
they were not true to his covenant.  
Psalm 78:35-37 (RSV)*

<sup>53</sup>*He led them in safety,  
so that they were not afraid;  
but the sea overwhelmed their enemies.*  
<sup>54</sup>*And he brought them to his holy land,  
to the mountain which his right hand had won.*  
<sup>55</sup>*He drove out nations before them;  
he apportioned them for a possession  
and settled the tribes of Israel in their tents.*  
<sup>56</sup>*Yet they tested and rebelled against the Most High God,  
and did not observe his testimonies,*  
<sup>57</sup>*but turned away and acted treacherously like their fathers;  
they twisted like a deceitful bow.*  
<sup>58</sup>*For they provoked him to anger with their high places;  
they moved him to jealousy with their graven images.*  
*Psalm 78:53-58 (RSV)*

God is therefore on the lookout for blameless people who are genuinely and wholeheartedly faithful to Him. He wants people He can trust, who will not let Him down. To such people He will show favour. However, He will not allow deceitful people to be in His presence:

<sup>6</sup>*I will look with favour on the faithful in the land,  
that they may dwell with me;  
he who walks in the way that is blameless shall minister to me.*  
<sup>7</sup>*No man who practices deceit shall dwell in my house;  
no man who utters lies shall continue in my presence.*  
*Psalm 101:6-7 (RSV)*

*Moreover, God will respond to unfaithfulness when He sees it. Those who are unfaithful to God, or unfaithful in the tasks or roles that they are given, will be brought down. In one way or another He will remove them, demote them or replace them:*

*For behold, those who are far from you shall perish;  
you put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you.*  
*Psalm 73:27 (ESV)*

King Saul of Israel was unfaithful and disobedient. Therefore he was replaced. God is no respecter of persons. Nobody is above being disciplined and nobody is too senior, or too important, to have to be faithful:

*For God does not show favoritism.*  
*Romans 2:11 (NIV)*

*Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:*  
*Acts 10:34 (KJV)*

<sup>23</sup>*And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, <sup>24</sup>knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ. <sup>25</sup>But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality.*  
*Colossians 3:23-25 (NKJV)*

*Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear.*  
*1 Peter 1:17 (NIV)*



## **We must also be faithful to God's Word, the Bible**

We must obviously be faithful to God personally. However, one of the main ways we are expected to do that is by being faithful to God's Word. He has given us the Bible and it is intended to say what He wants to tell us. It would not be over-stating the position to say that we demonstrate our faithfulness to God most clearly by the attitude we adopt in relation to His written Word.

We cannot genuinely say that we love, respect or honour God any more than we love, respect and honour His Word. It is, in a certain sense, a proxy for Him. Our view of it indicates our view of Him. So, we must show our faithfulness to Him by being faithful to the Bible and, in particular, by obeying it:

*<sup>1</sup>Blessed are those whose way is blameless,  
who walk in the law of the LORD!  
<sup>2</sup>Blessed are those who keep his testimonies,  
who seek him with their whole heart,  
<sup>3</sup>who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways!  
<sup>4</sup>Thou hast commanded thy precepts to be kept diligently.  
<sup>5</sup>O that my ways may be steadfast in keeping thy statutes!*  
*Psalm 119:1-5 (RSV)*

Therefore, if you want to become a faithful person, there is no better place to start than by seriously increasing your respect for the Bible and learning it thoroughly. There is no better way of demonstrating your loyalty to God.

## **The faithfulness of the prophet Daniel**

If you are looking for a role model from whom to learn about faithfulness, then the prophet Daniel is one of the very best you will find, anywhere in the Bible. He faced far more pressures and problems than we are ever likely to face. There were also many temptations, and opportunities for him to become proud or corrupt or to compromise, but he never did. He was remarkably faithful to God, to the Kings he worked for, and to everybody he ever met. Therefore not even his enemies could find any fault in him, even though they wanted to:

*<sup>1</sup>It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom a hundred and twenty satraps, to be throughout the whole kingdom; <sup>2</sup>and over them three presidents, of whom Daniel was one, to whom these satraps should give account, so that the king might suffer no loss. <sup>3</sup>Then this Daniel became distinguished above all the other presidents and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. <sup>4</sup>Then the presidents and the satraps sought to find a ground for complaint against Daniel with regard to the kingdom; but they could find no ground for complaint or any fault, because he was faithful, and no error or fault was found in him. <sup>5</sup>Then these men said, "We shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel unless we find it in connection with the law of his God."*

*Daniel 6:1-5 (RSV)*

Daniel is best known for the episode where he ended up in the lions' den because of his refusal to stop praying to God, even when it became illegal to do so. He risked his life over that issue and never wavered in his faithfulness. That was a big test for anybody to face, even Daniel. However, we would be wrong to think that this huge, life or death crisis was the first test Daniel ever faced. That is very rarely the way that God operates.

He does not usually expose us to life or death situations as the very first test we ever face. God is practical and He knows that our faithfulness and courage have to be developed over time, like a muscle. Therefore He starts us off with small tests and builds up to larger ones, stage by stage.

The same was true of Daniel's three friends, who ended up being cast into the fiery furnace because they refused to worship the Nebuchadnezzar's image. That, likewise, was not the first test that they ever faced. The first test that we are told about arose shortly after they all arrived in Babylon, after being taken there as prisoners. All four of these young men, probably in their late teens, faced the test of what to do about the food that was being offered to them.

It did not meet the requirements of the Law of Moses. Today we would say it was not kosher. Instead of compromising by just quietly eating it, they asked to be given vegetables. This stance was less likely to get them into trouble with Nebuchadnezzar than was the case on later occasions. Indeed, there is no indication that he ever even knew of it. So, the risk was less intense.

However, the point is that it was that smaller test which prepared those four teenagers to take and pass the huge tests which they faced many years later. If we are not willing to take a stand on smaller issues and face things such as criticism, disapproval or ridicule, we will never develop the levels of faithfulness that are needed to face up to the threat of martyrdom. We won't even be able to handle the loss of our livelihoods or homes for Jesus' sake.

Many Christians have wondered whether they could be sufficiently faithful to pass the test of martyrdom if they ever had to face it. The real answer to that question is that if you are faithful *now* in the small tests you face at school or work and are willing to be disapproved of, or laughed at, for the sake of Jesus, then God will give you the grace you need to pass the life or death tests that might arise in the future.

So, not only do we learn that habit of faithfulness. It is also that our small acts of courage today qualify us to receive God's help in future when the stakes are much higher. It is God's nature to respond with loyalty to those who are loyal to Him. He also honours those who honour Him. Therefore, if you want to maximize the likelihood of your staying faithful to the end, no matter what, then take care to be faithful now in the small, day to day pressures that you currently face.

The one thing we absolutely must not do is to be presumptuous or over-confident. I say that because I once heard a man say that, if faced with a man pointing a gun at him, he had no doubt that he would "*definitely not deny Jesus.*" Even as he said it, I was reminded of the over-confident bravado of apostle Peter as he 'talked big' on the night Jesus was arrested. He would have done much better if he had simply said: "*Lord, if I am tested today, please give me the grace and courage I need to stay faithful to you*".

Those are the kind of words that real martyrs say. Daniel was like the prophet Samuel, Job, Joseph, Moses, John the Baptist, Apostle Paul and other remarkable figures. They all refused to compromise with sin or to betray God by letting Him down or taking Him for granted. Now let's consider someone who was very different; a man who began well, but ended in failure because of his unfaithfulness.

### **King Saul was not faithful. Therefore he was removed from being King**

Saul was the first King of Israel. He began well and showed great promise at the start. However, in the end, he was removed from power. God regretted making Saul King. That wasn't because he failed, made mistakes or lost battles. He could have failed and made mistakes repeatedly, and still have kept God's approval. The reason King Saul had his position as King taken away from him was because God was not satisfied with his level of personal faithfulness.

That was the issue, not his level of success. When he was under pressure he let God down and became disobedient and unfaithful. The prophet Samuel, who was a priest at the Temple, had told King Saul to wait for him and that he would meet him at Gilgal. At that time Samuel would have offered sacrifices and prayed for God's help in the battle against the Philistines.

However, Saul became impatient in waiting for Samuel to come. Therefore, he usurped Samuel's priestly role and gave the offerings himself, even though he was not a priest and had no right or authority to offer the sacrifices. King Saul acted impetuously and went beyond his proper authority. He did what he knew to be wrong because he was in a highly stressful situation and felt he could not wait any longer for Samuel. When Samuel arrived, immediately afterwards, and saw what Saul had done, he announced God's judgment on Saul for his disobedience and lack of faithfulness:

<sup>5</sup> *And the Philistines mustered to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots, and six thousand horsemen, and troops like the sand on the seashore in multitude; they came up and encamped in Michmash, to the east of Beth-a'ven. <sup>6</sup> When the men of Israel saw that they were in straits (for the people were hard pressed), the people hid themselves in caves and in holes and in rocks and in tombs and in cisterns, <sup>7</sup> or crossed the fords of the Jordan<sup>a</sup> to the land of Gad and Gilead. Saul was still at Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling. <sup>8</sup> He waited seven days, the time appointed by Samuel; but Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and the people were scattering from him. <sup>9</sup> So Saul said, "Bring the burnt offering here to me, and the peace offerings." And he offered the burnt offering. <sup>10</sup> As soon as he had finished offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him and salute him. <sup>11</sup> Samuel said, "What have you done?" And Saul said, "When I saw that the people were scattering from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines had mustered at Michmash, <sup>12</sup> I said, 'Now the Philistines will come down upon me at Gilgal, and I have not entreated the favor of the LORD'; so I forced myself, and offered the burnt offering." <sup>13</sup> And Samuel said to Saul, "You have done foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which he commanded you; for now the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. <sup>14</sup> But now your kingdom shall not continue; the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart; and the LORD has appointed him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you."*

*1 Samuel 13:5-14 (RSV)*

<sup>10</sup> *The word of the LORD came to Samuel: <sup>11</sup> "I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments." And Samuel was angry, and he cried to the LORD all night.*

*1 Samuel 15:10-11 (ESV)*

God was displeased by Saul's ongoing unfaithfulness and disobedience. Things reached a head when Saul disobeyed God's commands in relation to how he was to deal with the Amalekites. God then decided to remove the kingship from Saul. God did so even though Saul attempted, belatedly, to repent.

The problem was that Saul's repentance came too late, even assuming that it was genuine. Note also that Saul's disobedience arose because he feared the opinions of his people and tried to please them rather than please God. That was a fatal error. Nobody can be faithful to God if they also aim to please people. You can please one, or the other, but not both:

<sup>22</sup> *And Samuel said,  
"Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices,  
as in obeying the voice of the LORD?  
Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,  
and to listen than the fat of rams.*

<sup>23</sup> *For rebellion is as the sin of divination,  
and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry.  
Because you have rejected the word of the LORD,  
he has also rejected you from being king."*

<sup>24</sup> *Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice. <sup>25</sup> Now therefore, please pardon my sin and return with me that I may bow before the LORD." <sup>26</sup> And Samuel said to Saul, "I will not return with you. For you have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you from*

*being king over Israel.”<sup>27</sup> As Samuel turned to go away, Saul seized the skirt of his robe, and it tore.<sup>28</sup> And Samuel said to him, “The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you.*

*1 Samuel 15:22-28 (ESV)*

Even worse, Saul also consulted a medium, (the witch at Endor) rather than seek God's guidance. God was not willing to tolerate that unfaithfulness. Therefore God took away not only Saul's throne, but also his life:

*<sup>13</sup>So Saul died for his unfaithfulness; he was unfaithful to the LORD in that he did not keep the command of the LORD, and also consulted a medium, seeking guidance,<sup>14</sup> and did not seek guidance from the LORD. Therefore the LORD slew him, and turned the kingdom over to David the son of Jesse.*

*1 Chronicles 10:13-14 (RSV)*

Saul could have continued as King if he had operated differently. He didn't need more skill or more cleverness. He just needed more faithfulness. In particular, he needed to repent quickly when he did wrong, instead of hiding or denying his sins. The next King, David, probably made just as many mistakes as Saul did. He also committed some major sins. The difference was that he knew how to repent and how to restore his intimacy and fellowship with God. That is why God thought so highly of David.

### **The faithfulness of King David - a man after God's own heart**

God rejected King Saul, as we have seen, and looked for a man He could rely on to be faithful and who would be “a man after (God's) own heart”:

*<sup>13</sup> And Samuel said to Saul, "You have done foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which he commanded you; for now the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever.<sup>14</sup> But now your kingdom shall not continue; the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart; and the LORD has appointed him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you."*

*1 Samuel 13:13-14 (RSV)*

God commanded the prophet Samuel, to appoint a new King to replace Saul and He told Samuel where to find him:

*<sup>1</sup>The LORD said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul, seeing I have rejected him from being king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons."*

*1 Samuel 16:1 (RSV)*

Jesse had eight sons. All of them were impressive men, especially the older ones. However, the one God had chosen was the youngest, David. He was still only a teenager, probably about 16 or 17. God made it clear to Samuel that He was looking for a man with the right kind of heart, as opposed to talent, ability or strength. That is because faithfulness is an attitude of the heart, not a skill or ability:

*<sup>6</sup>When they came, he looked on Eli'ab and thought, "Surely the LORD'S anointed is before him."<sup>7</sup> But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the LORD sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart."<sup>8</sup> Then Jesse called Abin'adab, and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one."<sup>9</sup> Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one."<sup>10</sup> And Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. And Samuel said to Jesse, "The LORD has not chosen these."*

***<sup>11</sup>And Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but behold, he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and fetch him; for we will not sit down till he comes here."***

***1 Samuel 16:6-11 (RSV)***

So, David was chosen and then secretly anointed by Samuel to be the next King of Israel. Saul was not told about it because he would have killed David if he had known. David then ended up making a name for himself when he volunteered to fight a giant called Goliath in one to one combat.

Goliath was a Philistine soldier who had been challenging Israel's army to select a man to fight him. He was also mocking the Israelite army, because nobody volunteered. Nobody but David was brave enough, or had enough faith, to fight him. He therefore told King Saul that he wanted to fight Goliath, despite being only about 17 years old:

***<sup>32</sup>And David said to Saul, "Let no man's heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine."***

***1 Samuel 17:32 (RSV)***

The duel took place and, contrary to what some people imagine, David went into it fully expecting to win. He trusted God and believed He would help him. David also felt outraged at the way that the heathen Goliath had been defying God and insulting His chosen people, Israel. His heart was so intensely loyal to God that he could not bear to hear such things. He wanted to vindicate God and to uphold His honour. He was therefore willing to face Goliath and to stop him:

***<sup>41</sup>And the Philistine came on and drew near to David, with his shield-bearer in front of him. <sup>42</sup>And when the Philistine looked, and saw David, he disdained him; for he was but a youth, ruddy and comely in appearance. <sup>43</sup>And the Philistine said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. <sup>44</sup>The Philistine said to David, "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the beasts of the field."***

***1 Samuel 17:41-44 (RSV)***

Goliath had been insulting God's people, Israel. Now he was insulting David personally and making very intimidating threats. However, David's loyalty to God made him willing to take this great risk for the sake of God's Name. David showed great courage that day. That is true of all people who are faithful to God.

Faithfulness will inevitably lead us into situations of danger, where we have to put at risk our reputation, finances, status, or even our own lives. The courage we show at such times is a key indicator of our faithfulness. Look how much courage David showed, and with such boldness:

***<sup>45</sup>Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin; but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. <sup>46</sup>This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down, and cut off your head; and I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, <sup>47</sup>and that all this assembly may know that the LORD saves not with sword and spear; for the battle is the LORD'S and he will give you into our hand." <sup>48</sup>When the Philistine arose and came and drew near to meet David, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. <sup>49</sup>And David put his hand in his bag and took out a stone, and slung it, and struck the Philistine on his forehead; the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell on his face to the ground.***

***1 Samuel 17:45-49 (RSV)***

Once David had become famous, following his spectacular victory over Goliath, King Saul began to envy him. He became suspicious and paranoid. He saw David as a threat and tried to kill him. He sent men to hunt David down and so he had to go on the run for several years, hiding in the

wilderness to get away from Saul's men. Nevertheless, even during this period on the run, David never did anything to undermine King Saul. He recognised that Saul was still the legitimate King of Israel and that, although Samuel had already anointed him, his own time as King had not yet begun.

Thus David refused to seize the throne, either by force or manipulation. He was sorely tested on one occasion when he was hiding in a cave from Saul's men and Saul came in to relieve himself. David had the perfect chance to kill Saul. His men urged him to do so, saying that it was obviously a God-given opportunity. But David refused. He stayed faithful to King Saul and chose, instead, to wait until God made him King, rather than grab power for himself:

*<sup>1</sup>When Saul returned from following the Philistines, he was told, "Behold, David is in the wilderness of En-ge'di." <sup>2</sup>Then Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel, and went to seek David and his men in front of the Wildgoats' Rocks. <sup>3</sup>And he came to the sheepfolds by the way, where there was a cave; and Saul went in to relieve himself. Now David and his men were sitting in the innermost parts of the cave. <sup>4</sup>And the men of David said to him, "Here is the day of which the LORD said to you, 'Behold, I will give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it shall seem good to you.'" Then David arose and stealthily cut off the skirt of Saul's robe. <sup>5</sup>And afterward David's heart smote him, because he had cut off Saul's skirt. <sup>6</sup>He said to his men, "The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my lord, the LORD'S anointed, to put forth my hand against him, seeing he is the LORD'S anointed." <sup>7</sup>So David persuaded his men with these words, and did not permit them to attack Saul. And Saul rose up and left the cave, and went upon his way.*

*1 Samuel 24:1-7 (RSV)*

What a difficult test that was for David. We are unlikely ever to face one as severe as that. But note his extreme faithfulness to God, and also to King Saul himself, who was still the rightful King. David felt that as God had appointed Saul, he had a solemn duty to be loyal to the King, even though Saul was seeking to have him killed. David came out of the cave afterwards and shouted to Saul so that he could realise what had happened and that David had done him no harm:

*<sup>8</sup>Afterward David also arose, and went out of the cave, and called after Saul, "My lord the king!" And when Saul looked behind him, David bowed with his face to the earth, and did obeisance. <sup>9</sup>And David said to Saul, "Why do you listen to the words of men who say, 'Behold, David seeks your hurt'? <sup>10</sup>Lo, this day your eyes have seen how the LORD gave you today into my hand in the cave; and some bade me kill you, but I spared you. I said, 'I will not put forth my hand against my lord; for he is the LORD'S anointed.' <sup>11</sup>See, my father, see the skirt of your robe in my hand; for by the fact that I cut off the skirt of your robe, and did not kill you, you may know and see that there is no wrong or treason in my hands. I have not sinned against you, though you hunt my life to take it. <sup>12</sup>May the LORD judge between me and you, may the LORD avenge me upon you; but my hand shall not be against you.*

*1 Samuel 24:8-12 (RSV)*

When Saul heard this he was convicted, He knew that he was acting wrongly and that David was a much more faithful man than himself:

*<sup>16</sup>When David had finished speaking these words to Saul, Saul said, "Is this your voice, my son David?" And Saul lifted up his voice and wept. <sup>17</sup>He said to David, "You are more righteous than I; for you have repaid me good, whereas I have repaid you evil. <sup>18</sup>And you have declared this day how you have dealt well with me, in that you did not kill me when the LORD put me into your hands. <sup>19</sup>For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him go away safe? So may the LORD reward you with good for what you have done to me this day. <sup>20</sup>And now, behold, I know that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand. <sup>21</sup>Swear to me therefore by the LORD that you will not cut off my descendants after me, and that you will not destroy my name out of my father's house." <sup>22</sup>And David swore this to Saul. Then Saul went home; but David and his men went up to the stronghold.*

***1 Samuel 24:16-22 (RSV)***

However, although Saul really was convicted, and knew he was sinning, he still did not repent. He continued, even after this, to pursue David, and to attempt to kill him. Thus, he was still seeking to do to David something which he had asked David to swear not to do to him. Saul was thus unfaithful to David, and to God and he was also a hypocrite.

By contrast, David was remarkably faithful, both to Saul and to God. Therefore his strength gradually rose. More and more men came to join David in the wilderness and became his followers. In the end, the whole kingdom became his and he reigned over it all with justice and equity:

***<sup>15</sup>So David reigned over all Israel; and David administered justice and equity to all his people.***  
***2 Samuel 8:15 (RSV)***

One of the main reasons why David's reign was so successful was that he had entered into it well. He refused to grab the throne, which is what probably 99.9% of other men would have done. Instead, he waited many years to be given Saul's place as King. He was also totally faithful to his predecessor, despite grievous ongoing provocation. Thus he reaped a good harvest from that faithfulness. The 'law of sowing and reaping' was at work in David's life.

However, the main reason for his success was that he was so faithful to God, to his people, and to the men who served under him. There were a few spectacular exceptions when David sinned badly, but he always repented for those. Overall, he was unusually faithful, and God viewed him as "*a man after my (own) heart, who will do all my will*":

***<sup>21</sup> Then they asked for a king; and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. <sup>22</sup>And when he had removed him, he raised up David to be their king; of whom he testified and said, 'I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will.'***

***Acts 13:21-22 (RSV)***

Consequently, God viewed David as the best King that Israel ever had. God also set out His assessment of the other Kings of both Israel and Judah. The Bible records each reign, whether good or bad. When it does, it focuses not on the abilities or successes of each King, but on the degree to which they were faithful. That was always the crucial thing in God's eyes, not their achievements.

That is where God's view of things is so very different to ours. We tend to assess other people on all the wrong criteria, such as their looks, fame, wealth, power and achievements, but God's view is very unlike ours. He considers to be successful a lot of men and women whom the world regards as failures. He also regards as failures many people whom most of us would admire as great successes.