

Have you noticed that people these days aren't quite as good at following through as they used to be? I was talking to a good friend who is single and I asked him what the dating scene is like these days. He said, "Not very good." I said, "What do you mean?" He told me that the last four times he went on a date with a woman, she ghosted him afterward. I had to ask, "What do you mean, they 'ghosted' you?" He explained that's when, after the date, the person simply never communicates with you again—no text, no phone call, nothing. No follow through at all. The lack of follow through goes way beyond the dating scene. We've all seen political leaders not follow through on their promises, we've seen companies not follow through on their promises, we've seen the people we work with or work for not follow through on their promises, parents who have not followed through on their promises, spouses who have not followed through on their promises—the list could go on and on. We've all been impacted by someone not following through, not being reliable, not being faithful. And, if we were to look back at our own actions, there are probably many times when we dropped the ball, when we didn't follow through. The reason we have to sign so many contracts these days is because people do such a poor job of following through. We sign our name 16 times just to confirm, without any loopholes, that we are actually going to do what we say we are going to do.

Even though we as people oftentimes struggle with being unreliable, the Bible tells us that God always follows through, He always keeps His word, He always fulfills his promises. We are in a series called **God is**, and today we get to focus on the reality that **God is faithful**. God's faithfulness is one of His most frequently spoken of attributes throughout the Bible. Listen to some of the passages:

- When God revealed His glory to Moses He said to him, "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness" (Exodus 34:6).
- "Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations" (Deuteronomy 7:9).
- "He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he" (Deuteronomy 32:4).
- "For the word of the Lord is right and true; he is faithful in all he does" (Psalm 33:4).
- "Your love, Lord, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies" (Psalm 36:5).
- "Who is like you, Lord God Almighty? You, Lord, are mighty, and your faithfulness surrounds you" (Psalm 89:8).
- "For the Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations" (Psalm 100:5).

Those are seven verses; I could have read seventy or seven hundred. The entire Bible is a testament to the faithfulness of God. In a world where other people so frequently let us down, where others don't keep their word or their promises, God always does. If you have your Bibles, turn with me to Genesis 15. This is a very important passage in Scripture where God makes a promise to Abraham; He enters into a covenant with Him, and we see that no matter the cost, God is faithful to the promises He makes. Many theologians call this the most important chapter in the entire Old Testament.

For context, in Genesis 12 God called Abraham to leave his hometown and his father's family, pick up his belongings, and set out on a journey to an unknown location. He had no map or GPS to guide him; all he had was the Lord. Everything went smoothly for a while, but then, before long, Abraham began to doubt God. "God, I put it all on the line for You. God, I gave everything I had to follow You and honor You, but now I am beginning to wonder if that was a good decision. Are You really going to come through? Are You really going to keep Your promises? How can I know for sure?"

Right when Abraham was beginning to question if God was really going to be faithful, this is what we read: "After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: 'Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.' But Abram said, 'Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless. . . ? You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir'" (Genesis 15:1-3). God promised Abraham that He would give him countless descendants. He promised to make him into a great nation. God promised that the resulting impact of his offspring would be so significant that the entire world would be blessed through his lineage.

Abraham took God at His word and left everything to follow Him, but he kept looking at his wife's belly and he wasn't seeing any signs. Remember, he was 80 years old and his wife was 70 years old. They were not getting any younger. Every month that went by was another reminder that God hadn't come through the way they had hoped. You can just imagine how crazy everyone told Abraham he was for leaving everything he knew and following God off to a distant land. Now Abraham was beginning to think they were right. "Maybe I was crazy to trust God." Abraham was being honest with his doubts and questions. And I love this about the Lord: God didn't get upset with Abraham for asking a question, He didn't get angry with him for expressing doubt. Instead, God reminded Abraham of both His promise and His faithfulness.

"The Lord took Abraham outside and said, 'Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your offspring be'" (Genesis 15:5). In other words, "Abraham, you really can trust me; I will keep my promises." And then in 15:7 God said, "And look around, I will give your descendants this land as an inheritance."

But again, Abraham wasn't sure. He didn't trust God right away, so he said, "Sovereign Lord, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?" (Genesis 15:8). In other words, "I hear what You are saying, God, and I want to believe You, but it's hard to trust You when all the evidence is pointing in the other direction." Abraham was still in a place of uncertainty. You can imagine how many people had broken their promises to him throughout his life. He wasn't so sure God wasn't going to break this promise. "God, how do I know this isn't all just talk?" God listened to Abraham's question and said, "OK. You want confidence? You want assurance? Alright. Let's make a covenant."

"So the Lord said to him, 'Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon.' Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other" (Genesis 15:9-10). Initially, this seemed like a very strange and extreme thing to do, but in the ancient Near East 4,000 years ago, this was how you entered into an official agreement. In our world, if we want to enter into an official agreement, we draw up a contract and both parties sign on the dotted line. If I want to buy your house, I write out a contract and present you with a formal offer. If we both sign on the dotted line, it's official. Neither of us can get out of that contract without consequences. It's formal and binding.

In the ancient world, instead of signing on the dotted line, they divided animals in two! And the meaning was very clear. The animals would be cut down the middle. One part of each animal would be placed on

one side and the other part would be placed on the other side, and then the people making the covenant would walk through the cut apart animal. It wasn't pretty—the blood, the guts, the smell. It was graphic. It was gruesome. And it was their way of saying to one another, “If I fail to keep my end of the agreement, if I fail to do what I have promised to do, may what has happened to these animals happen to me. If I don't keep my word, may I be torn in two.” No loopholes. No buyout clauses. If you entered into a covenant by walking through those animals, you were willing to back it up with your life. Listen to what we read in Jeremiah 34:18: “Because you have broken the terms of our covenant, I will cut you apart just as you cut apart the calf when you walked between its halves to solemnize your vows.” They took their covenants seriously.

After Abraham cut the animal and “when the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. On that day the Lord made a covenant (*the Hebrew literally says, “the Lord CUT a covenant”*) with Abram and said, “To your descendants I give this land”” (Genesis 15:17-18). This is God's way of saying, “Do you want confidence in my faithfulness? Do you want certainty and assurance? I'll make a covenant with you and put everything on the line—with those animals torn in two, a smoking firepot and a blazing torch passed through the pieces.” We don't know exactly why God chose the emblems of a smoking firepot and a flaming torch, but we do know that those two exact words are used elsewhere in Scripture to describe God's presence on Mount Sinai and God's presence in the pillar that led the Israelites through the wilderness. So the smoking firepot and the blazing torch represent the Lord. God himself passes through the torn apart animals. And as He does, once again, it's a way of saying, “You want some assurance? OK. If I don't keep this covenant, if I don't keep my promises to you, may what has happened to these animals happen to me, may my limitlessness as God suffer limitation, may my immortality as God suffer mortality, though I hold the universe together, may I be undone, may I be torn apart if I don't keep my promises.”

Now it's absolutely incredible that God would make a promise like this, that God would go to such lengths to show His faithfulness and trustworthiness to Abraham like this, but we can't overlook one specific aspect of this covenant: *God passed through the animals all by Himself*. Did you notice that? Abraham did nothing; it was only God who passed through. That was entirely unprecedented in all of history. We have dozens of ancient documents that discuss these sorts of covenants taking place, but in every other covenant it was always the person with lesser power who walked through the torn apart animals and symbolically brought a curse upon themselves if the covenant was broken. It was always the subordinate king who had been conquered who walked through the animals, never the conquering, victorious king. This is the only time in all recorded history, from every ancient witness, where the person in power walks through the torn apart animals *by himself*. And the meaning is unmistakable! Not only is God saying, “If *I* don't keep *my* end of the covenant, I'm willing to be torn apart to make it right,” God is also saying, “If *you* don't keep *your* end of the covenant, *I'm* willing to be torn apart like these animals to make it right.” The all-powerful one was willing to become powerless, the infinite was willing to become finite, the God of all glory was willing to be torn apart, not just if He was unfaithful, but also if His people were unfaithful.

And that is, of course, the very thing that took place. God fulfilled His promise to Abraham and gave him a son, who had many sons, who themselves had many sons. Within a few hundred years, there were literally millions of people who traced their lineage back to Abraham. (Over the course of human history, there would be hundreds and hundreds of millions who would do so.) And within a few hundred years of making this promise, God would give that land, the promised land, to the Israelites as their inheritance. That is what the book of Joshua recounts. God kept His end of the bargain. But no matter how faithful God was, His people were faithless. They rejected God's commands, they worshipped idols, they mistreated the poor. God's people sinned again and again. They broke the covenant. And someone had to pay the price. According to the agreement, someone's body had to be broken, someone's blood had to be

shed. And God is so faithful that He Himself paid the price. God came to us in the person of Jesus Christ and He bore our shame, became our sin, received our lashes, carried our cross, and died our death. We broke the covenant and He was torn in two. That is how faithful our God is!

Several times throughout the Bible, when people witnessed the faithfulness of God, they set up markers to commemorate His faithfulness. In the book of Joshua, when God parted the Jordan river for the entire community to walk through, God told them to pick up twelve large stones from the bed of the river and take the stones with them and keep them as a sign, so that anytime they begin to doubt the faithfulness of God in the future they could look back and say, “Remember that time He cut off the flow of the largest river in the entire region. Oh yeah. God is faithful. He’s always kept his promises in the past, He’ll keep them again today.”

Another time, in the book of 1 Samuel, God’s people were in the midst of a very long war with the Philistines. God provided a decisive victory, and after He did, “Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, saying, ‘Thus far the Lord has helped us’” (1 Samuel 7:12). He set up a stone as a reminder. Whenever we look back on our lives, we can see that God was there, that God has been faithful. He has kept every promise He’s ever made. And as we are reminded of the faithfulness of God in the past, we should find strength and confidence that God will be faithful again today, and tomorrow, and the day after that. 2 Timothy 2:13 puts it this way: “If we are faithless, God remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself.” He cannot but be faithful. That’s part of what it means to be God—He always comes through; He always keeps his promises.

That’s part of the beauty of the object lesson God gave the people through Hosea. Do you remember his story? God came to him and said, “You need to marry a harlot. Seriously, you need to go find a prostitute and marry her. She will have been unfaithful to you before your marriage, and she’ll be unfaithful to you during your marriage. While you’re together, she’ll conceive and give birth to three children. None of them will be yours. Though she cheats again and again, you are to love her! She may be faithless, but you are to remain faithful. And your faithfulness in the midst of her adultery is what will win her back, purify her heart, and cause her to be yours and yours alone from this point forward for the rest of your life.”

God didn’t give Hosea that assignment to punish him maliciously. It was all a sign. He told Hosea, “Your love for her will be a sign to all of my people of my love for them. They are unfaithful to me again and again, but I love them, I will never leave them.” In fact, listen to what the Lord says in Hosea 2:19-20: “I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the Lord.” In all that God does, no matter the cost, He is faithful!

How does God’s faithfulness express itself in our lives? What does His faithfulness mean to me on a daily basis? I began the message with seven verses about the faithfulness of God; let me give you seven more.

- God is faithful to protect you from the evil one. “But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one” (2 Thessalonians 3:3).
- God is faithful to deliver you from temptation. “No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it” (1 Corinthians 10:13).
- God is faithful to forgive your sins. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).
- God is faithful to protect you. “He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart” (Psalm 91:4).

- God is faithful to fulfill His promises to you. “The Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments” (Deuteronomy 7:9).
- God is faithful to bring you into His presence. “Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings . . . for he who promised is faithful” (Hebrews 10:22-23).
- God is faithful to save you. “May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it” (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24).

No matter what you might need today, know this: God is faithful. In Revelation, instead of calling Jesus “Jesus,” they call Him faithful and true. That is who our God is. And I pray that as you continue to get to know God better through this series, that would be your testimony, that God is not only faithful in general, but that you will be able to see how faithful He has been to you. And I pray that you would be able to say the words we read in the book of Lamentations: “Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness” (3:22-23).