

Faithful Followers . . . (Re-cap) – Various Scriptures

This is the last week of our ministry year, and the theme Faithful Follower or Fairweather Fan? That's the question I hope you've considered every single week . . . Whether it was mentioned or not When it comes to Jesus, are you a faithful follower or a fair-weather fan?

B/c Jesus said in **Luke 9:23** – “*If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.*”

If anyone wants to be my *disciple* Jesus is saying, if anyone wants to be a *Faithful Follower* of mine, here's how you do it

Let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

As in, put your interests second to those of God's . . .

Embrace the life and lot to which he's called you . . .

And follow through – walking your talk and living like Jesus*****

That's what I laid out for you at the *start* of this past ministry year . . .

And then went on to cover some of the *issues* involved – some of the characteristics of faithful followers as found in 1 Corinthians

Which I've narrowed down to 6, and want to re-cap with you, for the purpose of evaluating yourself and continuing to grow

Maybe you want rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 10; Or circle the ones that need more attention; However you do it, make an honest assessment of your life; Ps 135:1-3

The first characteristic of a faithful follower, is passionate worship; Faithful followers . .

1. Worship Passionately (Ps 135:1-3)

Ps 135 says – *Praise the Lord! Praise the name of the Lord, give praise, O servants of the Lord, 2 who stand in the house of the Lord, in the courts of the house of our God! 3 Praise the Lord, for the Lord is good; sing to his name, for it is pleasant [beautiful]!*

That's passionate worship – something we try to give you an opportunity to do every single week around here

And something more and more of you are taking advantage of

And not just on weekends, but *during* the week as well

Like at the Student Ministries (**Stage set photo**) kick-off a few weeks back

Their focus was on the light of the world, and set the stage accordingly

Which led to 450 students (**Worship Photo**) engaged in worship; *Passionate* worship

So much so, that **Seth Slay**, our SM Worship Leader, said it was one of the top 10 experiences of his life to this point*****

And you know what I love? That's not just happening with our students

More and more of you are singing loudly, raising your hands, lifting your hearts, exalting Christ, and responding in applause – all biblical forms of worship

And all the more so when done passionately

- Which you know as well as I – starts in your heart, and soul, and home, and car
Passionate worship in the *Lord's* house, begins in *your* house – with a love for the Lord
And the more you love the Lord, the more passionately you'll worship the Lord

Which we have yet another opportunity to do this Friday, at our **Night of Worship**

It's going to be an extended time of worship . . .

And we're going to lift high the name of Jesus in worship, b/c that's what faithful followers do – they worship passionately

It's 7 p.m., this Friday night, right here; And it's not too soon to start preparing your heart*****

Second, faithful followers . . .

2. Study Diligently (Ezra 7:10)

One of the best examples of which is a guy named Ezra, in the OT

He was a scribe skilled in the Law of Moses the Bible says (**Ezra 7:10**) . . .

For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.

He set his heart to *study* the Law of the Lord

Not just read it; Not just gloss over it; Not just let it go in one ear and out the other . . .

But *he* determined to study it and *do* it; Study it *and* do it *****

Consequently, it says that *the good hand of his God was on him* (Ezra 7:9b)

Finding favor upon favor in the eyes of the most powerful king in the world at that time

B/c God blesses a diligence to *study* his Word, and *apply* his Word – both

- Which is why we put so much emphasis on Small Groups around here (**r12 Logo**) as you heard earlier
Groups that are not only committed to the *Scriptures*, but to application and accountability as well
B/c you *can't* apply what you don't know, and you *won't* apply what you don't have to or don't like; You won't; It's not in our nature; It's not our tendency
Our tendency is to only do what we like, and leave the rest by the wayside, is it not?
In which case we end up shaming the God we love, and missing out on his best *****

So get in a Small Group; Or one of the Bible studies in Men's and Women's Ministry, which are small group based – and study diligently

Not just for *information* sake, but application as well

Not just for *education*, but transformation

So that you too, are a faithful follower with the good hand of God upon you, like Ezra

Faithful followers . . .

3. Serve Faithfully (1 Pet 4:10)

What a contradiction that would be if they didn't

If faithful followers didn't serve faithfully, wouldn't they be *unfaithful* followers?

And if that goes on for long, you have to wonder whether or not you're really a follower

1 Pet 4:10 says – *As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace*

Use it he says, as *good stewards* – referring to your gift

Which we most often think of as abilities, don't we? And they are

But they're also opportunities

Sometimes the gifts we receive from God, are *opportunities* to serve, and not just abilities to serve

For instance, your entire life is an opportunity to faithfully serve the Lord – and in that sense, is a gift; Your life is a gift
As are the needs of ministry – they’re gifts; And *informal* opportunities to bless others
Gifts are not just abilities, but opportunities

And we need to use them as the verse says – *to serve one another*
Doing so as *good* stewards; Stewards, as in servants with responsibilities
And good ones, good stewards, use what they’re given to accomplish what’s expected – faithfully; They serve, faithfully *****

Not just once in a while, or when they feel like it – but always
And not in the easiest role they can find, but wherever there’s an opportunity, wherever there’s a need; Especially if they’re gifted in that respect

Or to put in LeCrae’s words, a Christian rap artist – faithful followers are “redeemed by faith, to serve a God who’s extremely great, I’m a fanatic”
Take a look (**Fanatic Video**)

The point is – faithful followers are fanatics about serving faithfully

And equally so about their giving; Faithful followers . . .

4. Give Regularly (Prov 3:9)

As in, they tithe; They give a tenth of their income to their local church
They *bring the full tithes into the storehouse*, as God says in Mal 3:10
And not just sometimes, but always
Not just when they feel like it, or when they have it leftover, or they’re not on vacation – but regularly

And they don’t do it reluctantly or grudgingly as if they’re under compulsion, but willingly and joyfully
B/c they know that God *loves* a cheerful giver (2 Cor 9:7) . . .
And that there’s no better way to invest their money, further the work of the kingdom, and lay up treasure in heaven

Prov 3:9 – *Honor the LORD with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce*
That is, honor the Lord by giving back to his work, and do so off the top
Give from your *firstfruits*

IOW *give* every time you get
Every time God blesses you with a pay check or a windfall, give first
Set it aside like Paul instructed the Corinthians (1 Cor 16:2), and then give it regularly so appeals don’t have to be made
That’s what faithful followers do – they give regularly *****

- Which we’re doing *pretty* well at as a church, but we’ve slipped in last few months
After I preached on this last fall, we saw quite an increase in the number and consistency of givers; But it’s dropped off as of late; On both fronts

We’re still above our budgeted need for the year, and our spending is still under budget, but that’s not the point

Those numbers are arbitrary – representing only what we foresee
In no way do they take into account *additional* opportunities, or *unforeseen* needs

The *point*, is not that faithful followers make sure we’re okay with respect to our budget . .
But rather, that God knows what we have as individuals, and holds each of us responsible to *honor* him with it, budget or not
Which is done, by giving regularly, and joyfully, willingly

5. Share Boldly (Eph 6:19-20)

Eph 6:19-20; Having just told the believers in Ephesus to pray for one another . . .
Paul then says – [Pray] *also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.*

Boldness in the Bible, is a Spirit-led, Spirit-enabled conviction to act – or in this case, speak; share the gospel
And here’s Paul, already in prison for sharing boldly, asking for prayer in order to do so all the more – to open his mouth boldly, and declare the *gospel* boldly
B/c that’s how he *ought* to speak he says
And given the fact that we are to imitate him as he imitates Christ, just like we saw in 1 Cor 11:1 – we too ought to share boldly

- One of the best examples of which, is this picture (**Photo of Maddie GG**) of one of our students, sharing the gospel with a guy in New York City this past summer
That’s boldness – tiny GG, sharing with a guy twice my size

And then there’s the prayer booth (**Photo**) that we set up at the Bix race, right here in Davenport – simply making ourselves available and known . . .
As faithful followers of Jesus Christ
Ambassadors who share the Good News of Jesus w/ boldness, every chance we get*****

- But I think we’re often hesitant to put ourselves in those situations
Whether it’s over coffee, in our neighborhood, or at lunch with a co-worker – we’re hesitant to share
And I think there’s 2 main reasons for it – (1) we’re *scared*; and (2) we’re *ignorant*
I don’t mean that in the sense of dumb, but uninformed

We’re *scared* of being rejected; We’re scared of feeling awkward – awkward around someone who didn’t bite and doesn’t really care . . .
And we’re scared of what people might think of us

The only solution to which, is perfect love
1 John 4:18 says – *There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.*
If you *love* your neighbor, or co-worker, or friend – enough . . .
Your fears won’t matter; In fact, your fears will dissipate out of concern for their soul

And that perfect love, springs directly from your relationship with God
As you abide in him, and he in you – your love for others will grow
Your passion for their soul will increase; Especially as you pray for them
Leading you to share boldly, *despite* your fear *****

We're hesitant b/c we're scared, and we're hesitant b/c we're *ignorant* – ignorant of the gospel that is

We're confident in our *own* salvation maybe, but when it comes to explaining it to someone else, or leading *them* to the Lord – we feel woefully inadequate
Made all the worse by our fear of not being able to answer all their questions
So we don't even try; We don't share at all

- Much of which is easily cured, if you'll just become familiar with the basics – the basics of the *gospel*, the gospel you embraced
That God became flesh, dwelt among us, died for our sins, rose again for our life, and is coming again to receive his own and condemn the rest
Which you face, unless you *admit* that you're a sinner separated from God . . .
Believe that when he died, he did so in your place, paying the penalty for your sins . . .
And *receive* him into your life as Lord and Savior

That's the gospel, and it can be articulated in a whole bunch of ways
3 of which you can find on our website under **How To Know God**
These are 3 different digital tracts, that communicate the good news of Jesus Christ, and how to respond

The first is called **The Story** that summarizes God's story of redemption from creation to the cross
The second is called **How to Know Jesus** based on John 3:16 and a series of videos
And the third is called **2 Ways To Live**, highlighting the consequences of living for yourself, versus living for God (**How To Know God**)

- 3 different ways to communicate the gospel
The key, is familiarizing yourself w/ at least one of them, so that you're no longer ignorant, and able to share boldly****
- Which you have a perfect opportunity to do this week, by inviting someone to our Kick-Off services (**NMTE slide**)
Oh, you may not get to share the plan of salvation with them, but you can invite them to hear it here; Just hand them an invitation and tell them you'd love for them to come
Or send it in the mail with a note
And while you're at it, pick up some door hangers for your neighborhood
It's a perfect opportunity to overcome your fear, and share boldly*****

Faithful followers (re-cap) . . .

6. Pray Fervently (1 Thess 5:17)

Or passionately, diligently, faithfully, regularly, boldly – I could have used *all* of those words with respect to prayer
But I chose *fervently*, b/c that's how Elijah prayed the Bible says (James 5:17)
Commending the same to us by pointing out the fact that he was a man with a nature just like ours; IOW we too should pray fervently

But I tell you what, this characteristic more than any other, separates faithful followers from the fair-weather fans
Show me somebody who prays intensely, feverishly, zealously, fervently – and I'll show you a faithful follower

- Part of which is making Jesus the constant companion of your thoughts
Or as Paul says it in **1 Thess 5:17** – *Pray without ceasing*
As in start, and don't stop just b/c you get off your knees
And make the time in between concerted prayer, shorter and shorter
Fervent prayer is unceasing prayer *****

And when you put it together with righteousness . . .
When you put fervent, unceasing prayer together with fervent, unceasing godliness – there's great power in it
James 5:16 says – *The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.*

- Becky and I were convicted of this when we got away recently for a little do-it-yourself marriage retreat *****
Neither of us pray as much as we'd like, and both of us drop the ball from time to time, especially when it comes to praying together
So one of the things to which we recommitted ourselves, was prayer

And if you're in the same boat, this is a good week to get back on track
B/c there's nothing like praying together as a church, to fuel your prayers on your own

I'm referring of course to our **Week of Prayer**
Just 3 days this week – Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday evenings . . .
From 6:30-7:30 right here at the church

It's something we do twice a year at key times . . .
In order to knit our hearts together, commit ourselves to the work ahead, and ask for God's blessing on our church

So if you're a faithful follower, this is a great opportunity to pray, and pray fervently
If you're not, this a great opportunity to start (**Summary**)

B/c now more than ever – we need to be people who deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Jesus faithfully

Pray – Rid our lives of the status quo, and find us to be fanatics who worship, study, serve, give, share, and pray faithfully
Give us one pure and holy passion; Give us one magnificent obsession; Give us one glorious ambition for our life – to know and follow hard after you

Worship – One Pure and Holy Passion

Close – Week of Prayer, Night of Worship, Kick-off Services; Door hangers, Labor Day