

God Is Faithful

Lamentations 3:1-26

Faithful, but Not Predictable

When I was a child, my parents took my siblings and me to see a famous geyser in Yellowstone National Park. About twenty times every day, at intervals of 74 minutes, this boiling-hot cannon sends thousands of gallons of water into the air. Unlike other geysers, this one has been so predictable that they have given it the name “Old Faithful.”

It’s easy for us to assume that God’s faithfulness is a lot like the faithfulness of that geyser—dependable and predictable. The Biblical meaning of faithfulness, however, is far more dynamic than that. In fact, God’s faithfulness is precisely what makes him act in ways that no one could have predicted.

The Meaning of God’s Faithfulness

When Jeremiah declares, “Great is your faithfulness” (Lamentations 3:23), he was using a word that God had used to describe himself hundreds of years earlier—“The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and *faithfulness*” (Exodus 34).¹ In some contexts, this word means “steady,” or “reliable,” as when Joshua and Hur held up Moses’ arms so they wouldn’t tremble and droop (Exodus 17).² It is also the word from which we get the word “Amen!”—so that to say “Amen!” is to say, “That’s reliable! You can count on that to be true!”

But faithfulness is used to describe not just unwobbling arms, but also *persons* in their relationships with each other. The most important metaphor for this person-to-person faithfulness is the marriage relationship of husband and wife. In Hosea 2:19, God says to his people, “I will betroth you to me forever . . . in *faithfulness*.” God’s faithfulness is often combined with another important concept—his “steadfast love” (ESV) or “lovingkindness” (KJV).³ *When we say that God is faithful, we are saying that God can be trusted to treat his people with extravagant love.* But this also means that faithfulness is required of both parties, otherwise the relationship unravels.

The Problem of God’s Faithfulness

This unraveled relationship is exactly the situation of Lamentations 3. God’s people have been like an unfaithful wife, running off with “lovers” who ended up ruining her (Lam. 1:2). How can God show extravagant love to people who reject him? This was what tortured Jeremiah. In the middle of his Lamentations, Jeremiah finally came to this conclusion: if anyone’s faithfulness will solve this problem, it will not be the faithfulness of God’s people, but of God and God alone. “Great is *your* faithfulness!”

Yes, God’s faithfulness—his trustworthiness to treat his people with extravagant love—was *great*. But Jeremiah did not yet grasp how it could be so great. This is why he had to “wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord” (Lam. 3:26).

The Triumph of God’s Faithfulness

When Jesus came to earth, he came as the faithful one (Hebrews 3:2). Every moment of his life, he trusted God completely. He trusted him so completely that he obeyed God even to the point of death on

¹אֱמֶת, *’emet*

²When applied to persons such as judges, faithfulness means that they refuse to let a bribe influence their decisions. In other words, a faithful judge can be trusted to render a fair verdict (Exodus 18:21).

³חֶסֶד, *hesed*

the cross. There Jesus upheld the faithfulness required of both parties—God and man. For there Jesus perfectly trusted and obeyed God, and there God proved that he can be trusted to treat people with extravagant love. Jesus is the embodiment of God’s faithfulness. In 2 Corinthians 1:20, Paul writes that “all the promises of God find their Yes in [Christ]. That is why we utter our Amen to God for his glory.” Because of Jesus and what he has done, we can trust that God will treat us with extravagant love. We can utter our *Amen*—we can count on that to be true!—to God for his glory.

Discussion Questions

A variety of Scripture passages show us how this teaching on God’s faithfulness may be applied to our lives.

1. **God’s faithfulness and temptation/trials.** Read 1 Corinthians 10:13. How does believing that God can be trusted to treat you with extravagant love provide a “way of escape” in temptation?
2. **God’s faithfulness and forgiveness.** Read 1 John 1:9. What does God’s faithfulness have to do with forgiveness and cleansing? How does this motivate us to confess our sins to him?
3. **God’s faithfulness and our faithlessness.** Read 2 Timothy 1:11-13. What does this teach us about the connection between our faithfulness and God’s? How does this provide encouragement when we feel our faith will fail?
4. **God’s faithfulness and our weakness.** Read Hebrews 2:17-18. What is true about Jesus that equips him to be merciful and faithful? How does this change our view of our temptations?
5. Suppose tomorrow you woke up with an unshakable conviction that God really is faithful—that you can trust him to treat you with unending love. How might your outlook on tomorrow change? What might you do that you wouldn’t do otherwise? What might you *not* do that you would otherwise do?