

A Life of Faithfulness

1 Samuel 7:15-8:1

Good morning everybody! It is so good to see everyone here, and I am more than excited to be with you all today, and to spend some time in God's Word together.

As we enter our time together today, I want us to pause momentarily. I am going to say a series of words and I'm going to pause between each word, and I want you, during these pauses, to reflect on your first internal reaction to this word. These reactions can be a feeling, an experience, or even a person. Are we ready? [wait for reaction from the congregation]. Okay, let's do this:

The first word is rhythm [pause for emphasis]

Devotion [pause for emphasis]

Consistency [pause for emphasis]

Commitment [pause for emphasis]

Okay, now that we have reflected on these words, I would love to share images of what comes to mind upon my first reaction to these words.

First, I think of the Olympics. This past summer we all enjoyed watching the summer olympics in Paris. I thought I was a fan of the Olympics but until I married my wife's family, I realized how very wrong I am. Jane and her family all love the Olympics, especially the swimming events, as they all competed in swimming. One thing that was brought to my attention, was a summer you might know by the name of Michael Phelps. I was well informed that Michael Phelps, for five years straight, would swim seven days a week for 6 hours and up to 80,000 meters a week. This includes birthdays and holidays. No wonder this man was as successful as he was. He was living a life of devotion, consistency, and commitment.

Another image that is brought to my mind, is the typical working American. You can say your job is diverse and have so many activities every day but you still work in the same or similar spaces, with the same people, doing the same job. It is a lifestyle of devotion, consistency, and commitment.

But I want to bring us to another more relatable example. A mother and her children. A mother cares for her children. She cleans for her children. She makes food for the children. She drives the children to where they need to be. She teaches her children. All the seemingly

mundane tasks of day for a mother, are some of the most profound examples of devotion, consistency, and commitment.

These examples of devotion, consistency, devotion, and commitment are powerful but also bring up images of redundancy, tiredness, and, in extreme cases, boredom. The grind of life can make us feel as if our life is being wasted or that life is meaningless. What I want to introduce to you today is a concept that will bring absolute meaning, impact, and transformation to your life and others. What I am talking about is faithfulness.

I am convinced that understanding what faithfulness is and how it plays itself out in our lives, lives that seem redundant or meaningless, can become one of the most powerful agents for God to make a Gospel-sized in a world in desperate need of savior and his restoration.

Today we will be looking at the faithful life of the prophet Samuel. We will be looking to find three profound acts in the story of Samuel's life that can not only provide us with an example of faithfulness but encourage and challenge us into a life of faithfulness.

But before we enter into this story, I want to remind us all that the Bible is not a fictional story with moral instructions, rather the Bible provides a grand story of God's work of redemption and restoration. In this story, God works with real people who are trying to navigate a life of faithfulness to the Lord amid a world full of brokenness and sin. So as we enter into this story let us not distance ourselves from the real people found in our reading, but rather let us draw near to them and realize that their situations, experiences, and relationship with the Lord is not dissimilar to our own.

With that in mind let us enter into the first act of the story: **The Revival**. This first act will address key points we need to understand about the topic of faithfulness and how we **Experience the Faithfulness of God**.

In 1 Samuel chapter 1, we are introduced to three characters: Elkanah, and his two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. And this was not a happy and conflict-free family.

In 1 Samuel 1:3-8, "Now this man used to go up year by year from his city to worship and to sacrifice to the LORD of hosts at Shiloh, where the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were priests of the LORD. On the day when Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to Peninnah his wife and to all her sons and daughters. But to Hannah he gave a double portion, because he loved her, though the LORD had closed her womb. And her rival used to provoke her grievously to irritate her, because the LORD has closed her womb. So it went on year by year. As often as she went up to the house of the LORD, she used to provoke her. Therefore Hannah wept

and would not eat. And Elkanah her husband, said to her, ‘Hannah, why do you weep? And why do you not eat? And why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?’”

I’m guessing Elkanah did not get brownie points for those comments [pause]

I want to clear up something real quick. During this time period, having children was paramount. If you died without children, not only would your family name be lost to history, but all your assets, your land, your business, your finances, would be given up to the nearest bidder. All that your family had worked for, the land that generations of Elkanah’s family had lived would be gone. So it was not uncommon for a man to have multiple wives to make sure that he had a living heir to carry on their name and assets. Also, within this context, a woman who could not have children was often looked down upon because children were considered a blessing from the Lord.

And this is the situation we find Hannah in. She is in distress, everything around her is crumbling. Year after year. Her husband does not understand her. Her husband’s other wife is described as her rival who provokes her grievously. But this provoking doesn’t just happen at home, it happens whenever she goes to be with the Lord to worship and hopefully find peace and comfort in her situation. She is depressed, anxious, and in total decline.

It is during one of her visits to the Tabernacle that Hannah snaps. She can’t handle the pressure, the shame, the sadness. Hannah went into the Tabernacle and it says in **1 Samuel 1:10-11** “She was deeply distressed and prayed to the Lord and wept bitterly. And she vowed a vow and said ‘O LORD of hosts, if you will need look on the affliction of our servant and remember me and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a son, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall touch his head.’”

In her despair, in her fear, and in her hardest time, Hannah took a step of faithfulness to the Lord. Her request was one of opening herself completely to the Lord, recognizing who she is in relation to the Lord, and ultimately committing all she desires to Him.

But this act of outpouring to the Lord was not just noticed by God but by the priest Eli. At first, her broken state, caused him to think she was drunk but after further evaluation of the situation and a conversation with Hannah, he realized her faithfulness. He told her “**Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition that you have made to Him**” (1 Samuel 1:17). Hannah left in peace that can only be understood from feeling truly heard by God. But how did God respond?

In 1 Samuel 1:19-20 it says, “**they rose early in the morning and worshipped before the LORD; then they went back to their house at Ramah. And Elkanah knew Hannah his wife, and**

the LORD remembered her. And in due time Hannah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Samuel, for she said, 'I have asked for him from the LORD'”

It says God remembered her! In her darkest time, and in her moment of complete and utter devotion to the Lord, God remembered her. But what did Hannah do in response?

In 1 Samuel 1:24-27, 2:11, it says “And when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour, and a skin of wine, and she brought him to the house of the LORD at Shiloh. And the child was young. Then they slaughtered the bull, and they brought the child to Eli. And she said, “Oh, my lord! As you live, my lord, I am the woman who was standing in your presence, praying to the LORD. For this child I prayed, and the LORD has granted me my petition that I made to him. Therefore I have lent him to the LORD. As long as he lives, he is lent to the LORD”...Then Elkanah went home to Ramah. And the boy was ministering to the LORD in the presence of Eli the priest.

This is the first point we need to understand about experiencing faithfulness: we experience the faithfulness of God **through relationships with people**.

Hannah fulfills her promise to the Lord, and she gives Samuel to Eli to serve as a priest in God's home. Samuel, through the example of her mother, was given a model of faithfulness and devotion to the Lord. As Samuel grows up in the Tabernacle, he is constantly reminded of this story, he is reminded, every time his mom visits, every time he asks himself “Why I am I here?” Hannah's story of faithfulness is passed down to Samuel for him to carry with him for the rest of his life.

Are there stories of faithfulness in your life? Have there been people whose faithfulness has been displayed to you?

Hannah's story is close to my heart: Before I was born, my mother was in a similar circumstance. She had had my sister but between her birth and my birth, my mother had two miscarriages. When she was pregnant with me, she was deeply distraught. So distraught that after reading the story of Hannah, she came to the Lord, and said “Lord if you give me this boy, I will give him back to you.” And when the Lord answered her prayer, she named Samuel in remembrance of her petition to the Lord. Twenty-three years later, I stand on this stage working in full-time ministry for the Lord as a living testament to my mother's faithfulness.

That is my story, but I wonder if people in this room have similar models of faithfulness in their lives, whose model of faithfulness is lived through you? Whose faithfulness is carried on through the model they provided for you?

Now let us return to the story. Samuel grows up in Shiloh as a boy priest. And you would think the house of the Lord is one marked with faithfulness. That could not be farther from the truth. Eli's sons, Hophni and Phineas, were priests at the Tabernacle under their father and they were wicked men. They would abuse the offerings made to the Lord, and were deep in sexual sin with female servants serving at the Tabernacle. The Bible says **“Thus the sin of the young men was very great in the sight of the Lord”** (1 Samuel 2:17). And not only that, they had a passive father in Eli, who would confront his sons but never fully address it, and, as such, the sons would **“not listen to the voice of their father”** (1 Samuel 2:22). This was not a healthy, transformative environment where a little boy priest would survive.

This is the second point we need to understand about faithfulness: we experience the faithfulness of God **through relationship with God.**

Samuel experienced God's faithfulness. It says **“Now the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the LORD and also with man...the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD in the presence of Eli. And the word of the LORD in the presence of Eli. And the word of the LORD was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision”** (1 Samuel 2:26).

As Samuel grew up in this environment, God blessed Samuel. And there is one night, which God's faithfulness to Samuel changed everything.

Samuel was sleeping in the Tabernacle, and God spoke to Samuel, calling out his name. Samuel, in his confusion, thought the priest Eli was calling to him and went to wake him. This continued throughout the night until Eli realized that it was God who calling out to Samuel. He instructed Samuel to respond to God's next call by saying, **“Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening”** (1 Samuel 3:9).

Samuel does just what he was instructed, and God speaks to Samuel! Now we don't just have a boy priest, we have a boy prophet. God is preparing Samuel, he is pouring into him. Samuel has now been modeled faithfulness by his mother but now God is actively working and speaking in Samuel's life. Samuel is experiencing the faithfulness of God!

And it says, **“And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established as a prophet of the LORD. And the LORD appeared again at Shiloh, for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the LORD. And the word of Samuel came to all Israel”** (1 Samuel 3:19-4:1).

Where has God spoken to you in your life? Can you pinpoint a specific moment, time, or experience? If you have received Jesus as your savior, the ruler of your life, and have fully and

willingly given your entire life to Him, God has gifted you with His Holy Spirit. If you have God's Spirit, you can experience God's faithfulness in your life now. God's Spirit instructs you, guides you, and leads you along His transformative plan and purpose for your life just like Samuel experienced.

Speaking of Samuel, the next time we hear of him, we find him speaking to all of Israel. It has been over twenty years since God first spoke to Samuel. A lot has happened since Samuel's boyhood. Eli and his sons have died. The Philistine army defeated Israel and stole the Ark of the Covenant, the Ark of the Covenant was eventually returned to Israel through the power of God, and for 20 years Israel was stuck in a space of lamenting and sorrow for all that had tragically occurred.

This brings to our third point about faithfulness: we experience the faithfulness of God **when God works through you.**

Samuel is now a mature man in his thirties. God has been preparing for this moment. He delivers a message to the people **"If you are returning to the LORD with all your heart, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashteroth from among you and direct your heart to the LORD and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines"** (1 Samuel 3-5). And the people of Israel respond in complete submission and revival. They put away their idols and recommitted themselves to the Lord God.

Faithfulness was modeled to Samuel by his mother, God's faithfulness was experienced by Samuel as he has been preparing him for this moment, and Samuel has an ultimate chance of displaying his own faithfulness to a wayward nation needing direction from the Lord. And the people responded in faith! God used Samuel's faithfulness to lead an entire revival of Israel.

As we look at our lives, how have we taken the opportunities from God to display our faithfulness to a world in need of the Lord? How have we witnessed and modeled for others God's faithfulness? Are there areas in your life, right now, that God is calling you to display faithfulness? It doesn't have to be leading a nationwide revival.

Maybe it is about sharing your faith with someone in your immediate sphere of influence (work, school, neighbor). Maybe it is trusting God in a difficult season that not only will he provide but his will will be done in that trying space. Maybe it is stepping out in faith and choosing to forgive someone and seek out reconciliation to someone that hurt you because God forgives us daily. We are called to be faithful. How can you be faithful to God in your space right now?

Now as we move out of the first act of the story, we now move into the second act of the story which describes the hard and true reality of faithfulness. This now moves us into the second act of this story: **The Circuit**. This act describes the important aspect of how to **model the faithfulness of God**.

At this part of the story, we, the readers, are excited because now comes the heroic exploits of Samuel. How Samuel leads the grand revival of a nation in which we have the privilege of watching. But in the last three verses, we see the next 60 years of Samuel's life summed up. "Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. And he went on a circuit year by year to Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah. And he judged Israel in all these places" (1 Samuel 7:15-16).

Wait 60 years up and gone! If you are like me, you are confused right now. What happened to this promising life? Where are the massive movements, revivals, and complete and utter transformation of a nation? Where did the life of Samuel go? Was it a waste?

No, lasting impact comes from repetition.

In a world of immediacy and rising stardom, this truth can hit home. But Samuel understood this. Before his 60 years of service to the nation of Israel, he was faithful for twenty years before God allowed him to lead a revival of Israel. Samuel knew that the key to finishing well and having a lasting impact was to come from repeated ministry with the same people, in the same place, with the same problems. So Samuel chose three cities within a twenty-mile radius, Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah. He went on the circuit every year to these three locations. He lived a life on repeat.

Jeff Manion was my pastor when I grew up in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He has served as the pastor at the same church for over 40 years. During his time there, he has been fascinated by the topic of faithful repetition in the life a believer. He actually wrote a book on this topic called the book "Dream Big, Think Small" and in this book, he actually comments on the story of Samuel as he explains his desire to live a life of faithfulness in the midst of repetitive life.

"I remind myself from time to time that the price tag for transformation is redundancy. My diligent repetition brings life to someone else. If everything has to be new and interesting all the time, I will miss out on my greatest opportunity for impact and influence."

Your greatest impact in life could flow from repetitive faithfulness. Maybe the parts of your life and ministry that seem redundant and mundane can be the greatest opportunity for you to bring impact to your life and the lives of those around you.

As you might already realize, just as the prophet Samuel did, lasting transformation of faithfulness takes real work, and you must **expect opposition and difficulty along the way**.

Samuel knew the people he was working with. These were people who had been a part of a cycle of sin, idol worship, and defiance of the Lord for generations. He knew that a revival was not going to change the entire direction of the nation of Israel. He understood that repeated ministry led by the faithfulness of the Lord would not only stabilize the country but provide a lasting transformation to a nation in need of the Lord.

And it was not easy for Samuel. During his 60 years of faithful ministry, not only would Samuel deal with the generational sins he initially addressed, but he would face extreme hardship. His own sons would take bribes and pervert justice, the nation of Israel would seek to replace him and the Lord with a king after 20 years of faithful service. Samuel would then be replaced by a paranoid king, Saul, who would spend his 40-year reign leading Israel astray. Then Samuel would have to help Israel navigate a regime change from King Saul to King David, as Saul poured out one assassination attempt after another on David to keep the throne.

And do you think during that entire time Samuel was happy with his situation? Do you think he never doubted God and God's plan for this whole mess? Of course he doubted, of course he groveled with the Lord. So how did Samuel remain faithful?

Well, that brings us to the third and final act of the story: **The Altar**. The altar is the space in the story where we are called to **remember the faithfulness of God**.

In Samuel's life, there was a key part of it that I believe rejuvenated and recentered Samuel. At the end of chapter 7, describes how Samuel's yearly circuit would end. It says **"Then he would return to Ramah, for his home was there, and there also he judged Israel. And he built there an altar to the Lord"** (1 Samuel 7:17).

I think during Samuel's circuit, he realized some important points. First, **in order to remember the faithfulness of God, we must be refreshed through time with the Lord**. Amid his travels, Samuel prioritized going home to **Ramah**. His circuit was not a cushy route but rather it could be uncomfortable, draining, and inconvenient. Samuel knew his limits, he knew that faithfulness can only be maintained by seeing one's God-given limits and addressing them. Samuel understood this and went home. He went to be with his family.

But I am also guessing this was a space of true retreat with the Lord. This space and time, outside of the normal circuit of exhaustion, uncomfortability, inconvenience, was a space and time where he could truly reflect on the command of God:

“Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!” (Psalm 46:10)

In the midst of the daily routine, in the midst of a draining and broken world, is there a space and time through your daily life, where you can step aside and here and obey God’s words: **“Be still, and know that I am God”**

How are you refreshed? Are there spaces where you can go, people you can be with, and activities you can do that can refresh you for your circuit in your life? How can you prepare a space and time in your life to be with your Lord who provides true refreshment?

For me, some of my favorite times with the Lord is when I am with him in silence surrounded by His creation. For me, these times with the Lord can be as simple as visiting a local park or sitting out in a field near this campus reading my Bible in the morning or having a perfect view of a vast forest behind my home.

Sometimes they can be as big as going on long camping trip. I went on a 5-day canoe camping trip this past Spring with some friends. On this trip, it was in the moments of complete silence in nature reading God’s Word when I was sitting by a rushing river, hearing the wind whistle between the leaves in the trees, watching the fire wave at night in the darkness, it was in these moments that I felt God’s peace.

But time in nature with the Lord, might be the way that you connect with him. We are all different people made in the image of God, who connect with him in a vast varieties of ways. That is what makes God’s church so profound and amazing is the intricate ways different people and cultures interact with and spend time with our Lord and savior.

The question I want to ask you all, what are rhythms of refreshment in your time with the Lord that can you be intentional with?

The second point Samuel recognized was that **God’s faithfulness must be remembered**. In that time and age, **altars** would be set up for two reasons, they could be set up for either sacrifice or remembrance. I believe this altar was a place of remembrance dedicated to the LORD. When Samuel would return after his circuit every year he would see this altar. When he left to begin his circuit every year he would see this altar. I think Samuel put this altar there to remind himself every time he returned home depleted, exhausted, and doubtful that God is faithful. And when he left to begin the circuit, knowing full well what lay ahead of him, he would look at this altar and remember that God is faithful. Samuel understood that the key to avoiding burnout, the key to a long life of faith, and the key to serving the Lord in an imperfect world was knowing and accepting that God is faithful!

Where is the altar in your life? Are there altars in your life that you have set up to remember God's faithfulness?

For me, one of the altars of my life was placed when I was a senior in high school when one of my beloved teachers passed away from an unexpected brain tumor. He had been a great mentor in my life during my time in high school, and had greatly encouraged me in my walk with the Lord and my calling into ministry. When he died I was shocked to the core. I remember getting a text at three in the morning from a friend who told me of his death. I remember walking into school feeling weightless and that everything around me wasn't real. I remember walking through our hallways watching teachers and students crying in despair. I remember these moments not just because of the shock of his death but because of some of his last imparting words to us before he went off to surgery: trust in God always. In the sorrow of this great tragedy, I was reminded, through the faith of my teacher, to trust in God.

One of the ways I remember my mentor and God's faithfulness was by this bracelet on my wrist. My school ran a fundraiser to pay for my teacher's medical bills after his death selling these bracelets that my teacher used to make on the side to sell at other fundraisers at our school. I look at this bracelet as a remembrance of a man who trusted God completely and through his death and example, God brought his students into deep repentance of sins and trust in the Lord.

As we have walked through the different acts of Samuel's story (The Revival, The Circuit, the Altar), we now understand that we experience the faithfulness of God through relationships with people and with God, and when God works through you. When we experience the faithfulness of God we are called to model this faithfulness. When we model the faithfulness of God, we must understand that lasting impact comes from repetition, and when we devote ourselves towards this pursuit, we must expect opposition and difficulty along the way. Last, throughout all of this, we must remember the faithfulness of God by spending time with God and establishing reminders of God's faithfulness in our lives.

Through the life and story of Samuel, we see faithfulness in action.

God called him to a life of faithfulness before he was born, how is God calling you to a life of faithfulness right now? As we enter into another year on this earth, how can you be faithful to the Lord our God, in your context, your space, your life? How is God calling you to be faithful?