

November: Be Faithful

Introduction

Faithfulness is another quality that is absolutely essential for human relationships. You may have noticed the theme of relationships has come up quite a few times throughout the Big Year, and there's a good reason for that. It's something that Jesus cared about a lot. When someone asked Jesus what the most important rules were for life, he answered, "Love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and love your neighbour as you love yourself." In other words, it's all about our relationship with God and our relationships with the people around us. And it even looks like Jesus was telling us with this answer that the way we love God is actually by loving others.

Almost all of the Big Year themes are about living well with the people around us, treating people with dignity and respect, even those we don't get along well with. Faithfulness is about valuing all of these relationships over the long term. Staying committed to your friendships, marriage, family, workmates, and church. Even if it gets really difficult, which it sometimes can in relationships. It's saying to each other "I'm committed to this and I will do whatever I can to make sure our relationship lasts the distance. If our relationship ever breaks down, I will do whatever it takes to restore it again." That's faithfulness.

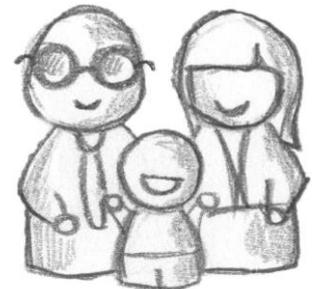
It's not exactly a common quality in our world today. More often these days people will just quit when things get tough. When fights happen, and nasty words are said, we don't always want to forgive the other person. If we're honest, sometimes we'd rather stay angry, hold on to that bitterness, and walk away with our pride intact. It's much easier to just go and look for some new people to hang around with - especially people who'll tell us we were right. It's very difficult to keep valuing a relationship when it gets tough. These days it's pretty common for people to move quickly from one relationship to another, just because something became difficult. And many family relationships, which are harder to avoid, are becoming more and more strained. Faithfulness is tested when times get tough.

Or sometimes the relationship breaks down because we just slowly drift apart. If we don't value a relationship this can happen almost without us even noticing. Maybe we gradually forget to take an interest in the other person, forgetting to catch up, forgetting to talk, forgetting to say encouraging things, forgetting to listen to each other. Maybe more entertaining or interesting or attractive people come into our lives and we just forget about our old relationships. Faithfulness doesn't let that happen. Faithfulness is staying committed to the relationship no matter what, no matter how far apart we live, no matter how different our viewpoints or lifestyles, no matter how irregularly we can actually see each other.

This can happen with other things in our lives too. Many people today are very comfortable moving from one job to another, or one church to another, whenever something difficult comes up, or whenever something doesn't suit us. But groups of humans, in whatever setting, need people who are faithful if they are to grow into healthy, safe and strong communities.

In today's fluid world, where people are starting to avoid commitment even to good things, faithfulness starts to look strange, and revolutionary, and maybe a little old fashioned. But we're not on our own. As with all of these themes, we're imitating God when we practise faithfulness. The story of the Bible is ultimately a grand picture of faithfulness. God made promises to his people on the very first pages; right back at the start, and throughout the whole story, over thousands of years, God never stepped away from them, even though sometimes his people got everything hopelessly wrong. Even when his people disobeyed him, and mistreated him, and insulted him, and hurt him - and even at the very darkest moment when they crucified his son - God didn't give up on them for one second. This kind of faithfulness can be a powerful comfort in our crazy modern world. And this is the kind of people that God calls us to be as well.

This month is about becoming a person like this, faithful like God is. It's about keeping our promises and doing what we said we would. It's about intentionally working on our relationships, even the difficult ones, and working to repair the broken ones. Have a think about the relationships in your life this month. Are there any that need a little more attention? Are there any that could do with an extra boost? Are there any that you've forgotten about? Are there any broken relationships? Maybe there's something that you can do this month to start the journey back towards restoration. Remember, God really cares about our relationships, and his kind of faithfulness endures forever.



FAMILIES



MONK

- Take some time for each family member to write their own year book entry or work reference as a way of considering how people at school or work might describe you when you're not there anymore. Ask God to help you live up to this description.
- Look back over the themes you have been working on during your Big Year and consider your faithfulness in practising the Way of Jesus. You might want to read back over the journal entries or notes you have made during the year. Using the Big Year Wheel picture, map yourself according to how you are going in each area. The stronger you feel you are in this area, the closer in to the centre your line on the map will be. What does your map look like and what do you need to focus on to 'round off' your circle?



CHEERLEADER

- Make a list of all the roles you each play in life (e.g. son, brother, student, boss, team member etc.) Next to each of these roles, write down one or two responsibilities that you have and make sure you fulfil these through the week.



ACTIVIST

- Talk about what you know of the life and teaching of Jesus - how did He treat people and what was important to Him? Make a list of these points and put it up near your Big Year jar. Every morning for one week, choose one that you will all try and work on throughout the day. Discuss how you all went later in the day or over dinner.

