

Home Improvement Series: Building Healthy Relationships

Part Eight: “Faithful and Steady”

Pastor Dale Campfield - August 15th, 2010

Intro:

Matt 28:19 “Go and make disciples of all nations...”

ECC Process of Discipleship: Making an IMPACT...To Love...To Grow...To Serve

We have 3 priorities – To love...which is expressed in our Sunday morning celebration and connection groups. To grow... which is expressed in our Path to Discipleship. To serve...which is expressed in our daily lives in the places we live, work and play; as well as through the local church. The vision of E.C.C. is to gather together weekly for corporate worship, loving God and each other; then to come together in small Connection Groups for discipleship and fellowship, and are regularly involved in reaching out to others with the love, acceptance, and forgiveness of Jesus Christ through community outreach. To Love...To Grow...To Serve!

This is it. The end of the sermon series entitled, “Home Improvement”. This series has been all about Building Healthy Relationships. I that you have been following along with us in our WARRANTY booklets. The WARRANTY is filled with four scriptures from God’s Word each week for you to memorize. How did you do?

Our two theme texts are...

Philippians 2:2

"Live together in harmony and love, as though you only had one mind and spirit between you."

God's ideal for your relationships, whether you're married or not (even if you're not married I hope that you have gotten a lot out of this series because it's about relationships) is harmony, intimacy (love) and unity (one mind). The reality is that a lot of our relationships are disharmony, conflict and disappointment.

Ephesians 4:3

"Make every to keep the unity of the Spirit."

The title of the message today is: “Faithful and Steady”

Through the course of our lives, in every relationship that we have, it is my desire for you that you will be Faithful and Steady in each of them.

What do you think of when you think of the word “faithful”? Maybe these images come to mind:

- Pic of Old Faithful (the geyser)
- Pic of a dog
- Pic of the North Star
- Pic of the IRS (they are faithful to want their money)
- Pic of an old car....etc, etc, etc.
- What about a picture of you?

QUESTION: Do people think of YOU when they think of the word FAITHFUL?

QUESTION: Do you have a reputation for being FAITHFUL?

If you want to have Healthy Relationships, you've got to be faithful to that relationship. You've got to be faithful and steady. But here's the deal; you can be no more faithful to a healthy relationship with someone else in a Godly way until you are truly sold out and faithful to your relationship with God.

Illus: Show the triangle relationship graph.

The best way to have a healthy relationship with anyone is to have a healthy relationship with God. Faithful to HIM!

The goal at the end our lives: **2 Timothy 4:7**

To be able to say as Paul did, *"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful."*

Look at the word FAITHFUL, it means:

- To be strict or thorough in the performance of duty.
- To be true to one's word.
- To be reliable, trusted, or believed.

Look at the word STEADY, it means:

- To be firmly placed or fixed, stable in position, not distracted.
- To be free from interruption, excitement or agitation.
- To be firm and unfaltering, steadfast or unwavering.

There are many examples in the Bible of those who remained Faithful and Steady, we've heard of the popular ones like Gideon, David, Moses, Paul, James, Joshua, Ruth and Debora.

But what about the ones that get hardly no attention at all.... They didn't get the same press that the others got, but yet they were Faithful and Steady. They made it possible so that others could do what they needed to do to affect the Kingdom of God as they did.

You've heard of Jeremiah (the prophet), but have you have heard of Ebed-Melech?

EBED-MELECH (*Eeebed Melich*) **Jeremiah 38:1-13,39:15-17**

Ebed-Melech (Hebrew: עֶבֶד-מֶלֶךְ, Modern **[[[2]]]** Tiberian **[[[3]]]**; Latin: *Abdemelech*) is mentioned in the Book of Jeremiah as an official at the Palace of King Zedekiah, of Judah during the Siege of Jerusalem. The name is translated as *Servant of the King*, and as such may not be his proper name but a hereditary title. The text relates that he was an Ethiopian and a eunuch who became Patron for the cause of Ethiopianism of his time that was reflected in the fruitful intercession he made with the King on behalf of Jeramiah, the prophet.

Ebed-Melech is notable for rescuing the prophet Jeremiah from the cistern where he was imprisoned. (Jer. 38:7-13). Later, Jeremiah informed him that he would be spared after the fall of the city to the Babylonians (Jer. 39:15-18).

A **cistern** (Middle English *cisterne*, from Latin *cisterna*, from *cista*, box, from Greek *kisté*, basket) is a waterproof receptacle for holding liquids, usually water. Often cisterns are built to catch and store rainwater. Cisterns are distinguished from wells by their waterproof linings. Modern cisterns range in capacity from a few litres to thousands of cubic metres, effectively forming covered reservoirs.

Jeremiah 38:6-13

6So they took Jeremiah and put him into the cistern of Malkijah, the king's son, which was in the courtyard of the guard. They lowered Jeremiah by ropes into the cistern; it had no water in it, only mud, and Jeremiah sank down into the mud.

7But Ebed-Melech, a Cushite,^c an official^d in the royal palace, heard that they had put Jeremiah into the cistern. While the king was sitting in the Benjamin Gate, **8**Ebed-Melech went out of the palace and said to him, **9**"My lord the king, these men have acted wickedly in all they have done to Jeremiah the prophet. They have thrown him into a cistern, where he will starve to death when there is no longer any bread in the city."

10Then the king commanded Ebed-Melech the Cushite, "Take thirty men from here with you and lift Jeremiah the prophet out of the cistern before he dies."

11So Ebed-Melech took the men with him and went to a room under the treasury in the palace. He took some old rags and worn-out clothes from there and let them down with ropes to Jeremiah in the cistern. **12**Ebed-Melech the Cushite said to Jeremiah, "Put these old rags and worn-out clothes under your arms to pad the ropes." Jeremiah did so, **13**and they pulled him up with the ropes and lifted him out of the cistern. And Jeremiah remained in the courtyard of the guard.

Jeremiah 39:15-18

15While Jeremiah had been confined in the courtyard of the guard, the word of the LORD came to him: **16**"Go and tell Ebed-Melech the Cushite, 'This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: I am about to fulfill my words against this city through disaster, not prosperity. At that time they will be fulfilled before your eyes. **17**But I will rescue you on that day, declares the LORD; you will not be handed over to those you fear. **18**I will save you; you will not fall by the sword but will escape with your life, because you trust in me, declares the LORD.'"

Check this out...

1. Living life is hard! (Job 5:7; 7:1-21; etc.). When life's problems compound and trials seem impossible to overcome, we sink into deep despair (Job 17:15-16). Often during such desperation we feel alone and isolated. We feel as if we have been cast into a deep pit without hope! (1 Ki 19:3-10; Ps 28:1).

During these hopeless times, what helps most to climb out of the pits of despair?

Many faithful Believers have been dumped into pits of despair by the ungodly (Ps 119:85; Pr 28:10).

2. Consider the context of Jeremiah 38-39.

The fall of the Southern Kingdom (Judah) is imminent (it occurs in 39:1-2). Jeremiah has been encouraging Jerusalem's citizens to surrender to Babylon and avoid death. The rebellious citizens scoff at the prophet's words and begin open persecution.

a. Jeremiah 36 – King Jehoiakim commands the arrest of Jeremiah and his scribe Baruch.

b. Jeremiah 37 – The leaders of Jerusalem insist that the prophet be imprisoned.

c. Jeremiah 38 – The spineless Zedekiah tells the people to do whatever they wish with Jeremiah.

Jeremiah found himself mired in a literal pit. He was caught in deep despair. The prophet was the object of hatred because he urged Jerusalem to submit to God's commands. Jeremiah suffered abuse from those who persecuted him – slander, false accusations, beatings, anger, and all other expressions prompted by bitterness and vindictive feelings. Finally the prophet was seized and thrown into an empty cistern. He sank into the mud.

The faithful prophet was surrounded by despair. Emotionally and physically he was exhausted. Spiritually he may have been questioning God (In 1:17-19 God had promised Jeremiah divine protection). Regardless of the emotions, Jeremiah was in the pit of despair. What would he do? The answer is found in the first word of 38:7 – "BUT Ebed-Melech." Here was God's answer to the pit of despair – the kindly services of a fellow servant!

3. Ebed-Melech presents a wonderful lesson on Christian sympathy! In his example we discover a fantastic illustration of Romans 12:9-16. Look at this man with the strange name and contemplate the beauty of Christian sympathy!

4. The TRAITS of Ebed-Melech's sympathy:

a. Ebed-Melech had GREAT HUMANITY.

1) At first glance this trait may not seem to deserve special attention. However this was very unusual in the days of Ebed-Melech. During this time life was cheap and getting cheaper. Babies had been sacrificed on the altars of Moloch; slaves had been kept contrary to the Law. In extreme cases, mothers had eaten their own babies because of the famine's severity!

There was no respect for the intrinsic value of human life. However Ebed-Melech did not allow this devaluation to infect him. Ebed-Melech knew that people were important; life was valuable. He was sensitive when anyone's life was cheapened and basic dignity was degraded.

2) A basic feature of every Christian ought to be this respect for the value of humanity. We are to be compassionate, sympathetic, and benevolent to everyone (Gal 6:10).

ASK – How did the first century church demonstrate this concern for humanity? No matter the social position, material wealth, or political powers, everyone was reckoned as equal and in need of the Gospel.

1 Peter 3:8 – Peter discusses six virtues which all Christians are to put into practice in their inter-personal relationships. The “sympathy” is the feeling that one has for another (cf Ro 12:15).

b. Ebed-Melech had a GREAT COURAGE.

1) His rescue of Jeremiah would definitely be an unpopular action. Even though he had asked King Zedekiah and persuaded the King's permission, it was still a risky act. Some might possibly even accuse Ebed-Melech of “treason” (38:4). It appears that the Ethiopian refused to let men frighten him.

2) Courage is needed in performing Christian sympathy today. Today's climate applauds those who chastise the steadfast, the devout, the committed. If you are viewed as standing firm for convictions in religious Faith you will quickly accumulate a cadre of opponents. They will use every available means to intimidate you into either silence or compromise. If others rise to your defense, the opponents will quickly turn and bitterly attack your supporters.

Courage is needed to comfort those who are fighting against compromise; who are facing intimidating threats and vicious slander (Josh 1:7). It takes great courage to stand up for one who is attacked because s/he refuses to accept compromise.

Anyone who has ever been thrown into the pits of despair will quickly tell you that such courageous sympathizers bring great comfort. Letters, phone calls, prayers, and visits all help to lighten the despondency that surrounds the one thrown into the dumps because s/he refuses to compromise God's will.

Let us become a modern-day Ebed-Melech and stand courageously with those who refuse to compromise God's clear commands!

c. Ebed-Melech had a GREAT INFLUENCE.

1) His approach, conversation, and persuasion of the King to release Jeremiah indicates his weighty influence. Here was a man whose influence was founded upon his integrity! Many attempt to influence through worldly means – pressures, intrigue, gossip, etc. However Ebed-Melech was not like this. His influence was attributable to his righteous sympathy.

2) This example urges all Christians to develop a good reputation so that when certain ones are thrown into pits of despair, the godly Believer can help rescue them! We must behave so that people will respect our thoughts and suggestions.

ASK – Proper influence with those who are opponents of God’s will and persecutors of God’s faithful, is important. How can Christians develop a position of influence with those in this group? Will it be by compromise? By silence? How does Ephesians 4:25-29 counsel us on this question?

d. Ebed-Melech had a GREAT FAITH.

1) His faith is implied because he befriended Jeremiah and is stated explicitly in 39:18. Ebed-Melech “trusted” the Lord God.

2) If we have a faith similar to Ebed-Melech then we will not hesitate to offer help to those who are persecuted and maligned because of their steadfast courage and convictions. We will “fear” God more than we do men! We will seek God’s commendations more than men’s.

e. Ebed-Melech had a GREAT SERVICE.

1) What greater service is there than rescuing another from the pits of despair? What a wonderful action to practice – lifting another up from the bogs of discouragement!

2) Consider Ebed-Melech’s consideration when he performed this service. He got ropes and old rags. He wanted to help Jeremiah get out of the pit but he did not want to bring greater harm to the prophet in the rescue.

3) Here is a valuable lesson for Christians to ponder – It is not only WHAT we do that is important but HOW we do it! As God’s servants we must rescue the lost and restore the fallen and encourage the fainthearted. However we must be careful that we do so with great sympathy (feeling for their betterment), lest we do more damage than good! (2 Ti 2:24).

5. The REWARDS of Ebed-Melech’s sympathy:

a. He escaped the disaster awaiting the rebellious (39:16-18).

He was not to suffer as those insensitive to God’s commands. He would be delivered because he trusted in God and stood by the accused Jeremiah. How thankful he must have been to hear the words of Jeremiah that announced his salvation!

b. He portrays the rewards awaiting God’s sympathetic followers.

Far too few actually realize the pitiful condition of those who refuse to show sympathy to one standing firm for the will of God. However, there is a far greater reward than that experienced by Ebed-Melech to all who are willing to display sympathy. There is the joyful anticipation of Heaven’s splendor. This ought to be enough to prod us to live godly and sympathetically in today’s world.

6. Ebed-Melech was an obscure servant but he was a powerful character! His sympathetic character, absolute trust in God, and wonderful reward bring us to understand a powerful lesson! Ebed-Melech illustrates a very simple fact – Those who strive to follow God’s absolute will are going to find opposition; they will be thrown into the pits of despair. However, there are sympathetic Believers who will come along and rescue us from the mire of despondency. Their lives are a blessing to the godly.

What should we do about Ebed-Melech?

- a) REMEMBER his wonderful life of sympathy, trust, and courage!
- b) RESOLVE that you will become as he was!
- c) REFLECT his sympathy to all brethren who are struggling against Satan's forces to remain steadfast in their obedience!
- d) REFORM if you have not demonstrated the trust and courage to uphold the steadfast and rebuke the faithless!

If you want to be known as FAITHFUL and STEADY....

#1. Stay in His Gaze

The fact is, God's always watching you, whether you're living a life of purity or sin, He's always watching you. If you're always running from God, knowing He's watching, or trying to hide from Him, you'll feel the shame and disgrace the entire time. It's when you've got nothing to hide that you want him to see you.

He's watching. So stay in the light with the desire to be in His gaze. With a desire to make sure He's got His eye on you.

Illus: Pee Wee Baseball – grandma watching me.

I can remember as a kid, my grandmother would come to every one of my pee wee baseball games. I use to strike out every time; and would be embarrassed. I usually would just stand there and watch the ball go by, not even swinging. Then my grandmother told me she'd give me a quarter for every time I just swung the bat! So swing away I did – but I would always look over to make sure she was watching. I knew she was proud of me. And.... I made a lot of money too.

Do you want God to proud of you? Of course you do! So, stay in His gaze, with a desire for God to watch you!

#2. Stay in His Praise

This means, to make God proud. Do things, say things, be the way He intended for you to be and make Him proud. The goal is to hear Him say at the end of this whole thing.... "ahhhh, well done my good and faithful servant." Make Him proud!

The last thing you want to do is bring embarrassment to the Kingdom of God. That's one of the reason faithfulness is so important, because people are watching you. Your family, friends, etc, are watching to see how you will handle certain situations. Notice when you're at work, they watch to see if you really are who you say you are. Our job is to make God look good. Being faithful is not so that we'll look; but so that God will look good. Stay in His praise. Make God proud of you!

How do you do that....

#3. Stay in His Ways

We've got to do it God's way. Our motto should be, "It's His way or no way." We've got to start doing things God's way. And the amazing thing is, God's way doesn't always make sense. You look at Gideon's army, it didn't make sense the way he fought the enemies with so few people. Joshua's battle against Jericho, didn't make sense in the natural. Putting mud on a man's blind eyes didn't make sense when Jesus did it in the Bible – but all of these worked!

God's ways are not always the conventional neat and tidy way of doing things; in fact usually they are not. They often times seem foolish. But the key is our obedience to do them. It's not what we do that brings the blessings of God, it's why and how we do them. It's our obedience to do what He asks and with the right attitude. What we do, is up to God, we just walk in obedience to what He's saying to us.

#4. Stay in His Phase

Have you ever noticed how God does things in seasons? He even created the seasons of the weather that we have. He also provides seasons of our lives within the journey of our lives. Each season is for a reason, and can't be skipped. We'd love to skip the bad and hard season's, but we can't. We have to go through them. We've got to stick it out during the difficult seasons of life – the hard phases of life. But the good news is, the next season of life is coming up soon.

3 years ago we entered into a new season as a church. We went through some difficult and not so fun times before that. The pressure was on, but we grew in the Lord. The Lord was with us during those stressful times. It was three years ago that we found ourselves in Washington State on the beach with my family trying to figure out what we were going to do the rest of our lives. It was a hard season; but God knew what He was doing. Now, we look at the fruit of those difficult times and can now see the fruit of what God was doing then!

Don't try to skip the current phase of life that you are in. God has a purpose for it. Stay in there, stay in His Phase. He knows what He's doing.

Conclusion:

It is my prayer that you will be found Faithful and Steady in your relationship with God, then others will find you to be Faithful and Steady in their relationship with you. I pray that through the course of this Home Improvement Series, that you have been challenged in the Word of the Lord in how have healthy relationships.

Keep moving forward. Keep doing your part. Remain Faithful and True and then...

You watch... you wait... you'll see!