

QUALIFIED OR FAITHFUL?
ACTS 13:1-12
SUNDAY, 15 MARCH 2009
2ND STREET COMMUNITY CHURCH
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.PPT 1 ...

This morning we're going to take a short break in our study of *The Gospel of John* to focus on something that is also important to us as a flock –that God is calling us to faithfulness as individuals and as a church –and how our commitment to the church is part of how that faithfulness is born and matures.

Have you ever sensed that God has plans for you that are **bigger** or at least **different** than what you're doing, or not doing right now? Okay. Now what will God need to see happen in you before entrusting you with this new chapter of ministry? Asking these questions and finding answers from God makes all the difference, because without understanding God's **calling** on our lives, we end up committing ourselves to all the wrong things.

ILLUSTRATION ... In 1975, when I was a junior in HS, I went to the *U of O* on a field trip, and took a *vocational test*. I answered a bunch of questions and a computer as big as this room, but probably no more powerful than my iPhone spit out two punch cards that were supposed to tell me what jobs were “just right for me.” And the two jobs I ended up matching with were *bartender* and *belly dancer*. I'm serious. And your response wasn't much different than mine. I chalked it up to “computer error” ... but I'm not kidding, those were the two options I got. So I paid \$12.00 to find out what I already knew –mainly that ***I WAS CONFUSED***.

I just wanted to know where I was supposed to fit in. And if we're honest we'll all admit that at different times and in different ways, we've struggled with our **callings** ... we've struggled with finding out **where** and **how** God wants us to fit into His plans. So what will it take for us to come to the place where God is able to **set us apart** to begin doing the things He's **called** us to do?

I believe the answer to this question begins to come as we start looking past our **qualifications** ... which is what the world always focuses on ... and start looking at what it means to become **faithful** people. Here's what Webster's says about the word **faithful** ...

.PPT 2 ...

FAITHFUL | full of faith, especially in God; steadfast in keeping promises; steady, firm and dependable in allegiance or devotion.
- Merriam Webster's Dictionary

Does that sound like a description of your life, or of you in the ministry commitments you're involved in, or of the priorities you're holding onto? If not, how about the opposites of **faithful** that Webster lists: “**fickle, aloof, insincere, uncommitted, floating instead of anchored.**” I believe God wants to transform us from being “**fickle, aloof and unanchored**” in our faith ... to the place where we're “**steady, firm, dependable and steadfast**”.

So how do we become **faithful** people? We're not born **faithful**. In fact, being **faithful** is the total opposite of everything our sin nature wants for us. But gang, this morning, God is calling you and me to discover in ways deeper and wider what it means to be **faithful** followers of His Son Jesus Christ. And in fact, **faithfulness** is one of the **fruits of the Holy Spirit** the Apostle Paul talks about in **GALATIANS 5:22-23**. It's one of the **spiritual fruits** God wants to see growing and maturing in our lives. Please turn with me in your Bibles to **ACTS 13** where we'll look into a story that opens up God's heart and God's plans for us, for how we can move past **faithlessness**, and become **faithful**.

.PPT 3 ... ACTS 13:1 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

¹ Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

In the previous chapter of **ACTS 12**, we see Barnabas, Paul and John Mark at the church in Antioch. "Paul" is called "Saul" in the opening part of this **ACTS**, but soon he'll be called "Paul" ... and so for the sake of clarity, I'll just refer to him as "Paul" here this morning. Antioch was NE of the Mediterranean –just a few miles from the seashore and about 500 miles NW of Jerusalem. They'd just returned from delivering a gift of money to the Jerusalem church (cf., **ACTS 11:27-30**). And Paul and Barnabas were among the **teachers** and **prophets**, for whom the church at Antioch was home base.

.PPT 4 ... DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PROPHETS AND PASTOR-TEACHERS

A rule of thumb in *The New Testament* was that **prophets** were **ITINERANTS** ... they traveled from church to church ... and they were usually used by God to "**remind people of the spiritual truths they knew, but were not living out.**" **Prophets exhort** and **remind** the flock of Jesus Christ and call them back to their roots.

On the other hand, **teachers** usually lived in one area, and much of the time, they were also **pastors** (cf., **EPHESIANS 4:11-12**). **Pastor-teachers** are usually used by God to say to the flock, "Okay, let's open up the WORD of God and learn what God's heart is for us so that we can start living it out." **Teachers encourage** and **equip** the flock to pursue and live-out the character of Jesus Christ so they can live out the will of God and move toward maturity in their faith.

It's interesting to see what the names of the men here in **ACTS 12-13** mean. The name "**Saul**" means "**desired**", the name "**Paul**" [which after this passage, is the only name we see used for him in *The New Testament*] means "**little one**" ... and the name "**Barnabas**" means "**son of encouragement.**" In **ACTS 13:5**, we read that **John Mark** (Barnabas's cousin), was also here, and his name means "**beloved defender.**" So this dynamic trio ... the "**DESIRED LITTLE ONE**", the "**SON OF ENCOURAGEMENT**" and the "**BELOVED DEFENDER**" were all together. They sound like comic book superheroes! Seriously.

But what about the other three men mentioned here in **ACTS 13:1**? "**Simeon who was called Niger.**" "**Niger**" means "**black,**" so Simeon was probably a black man in the congregation at Antioch. **Lucius of Cyrene** ... nobody really knows for sure who this chap was. Cyrene was a NW African seaport town in the country now known as Libya, and it was the same town where Simon of Cyrene, the man who stepped in to carry Jesus' cross was

from. Some Bible scholars believe that the **Simeon** here in **ACTS 13:1**, and the cross-carrying, **Simon of Cyrene** were the same man.

Manaen “who was brought up with Herod the Tetrarch”. **Manaen** was Herod's stepbrother. There were several different men named “**Herod**” in *The New Testament*, but this was the one who beheaded John the Baptist and presided over one of Jesus' trials (cf., **LUKE 23:7-12**). And you thought your resume was a tough sell!

.PPT 5 ... ACTS 13:2 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

² While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul [Paul] for the work to which I have called them.” [emphasis added]

The first job of any “**servant of God**” is to use their spiritual gifts to **minister to the Lord**. Yes, we use our gifts and our resources **INSIDE** and **OUTSIDE** the spiritual community called “the church” ... but if we're serving primarily for ourselves, or for other people, we won't last long. And more likely than not we'll end up at one of two extremes ... **DISCOURAGED** by how much work it is, or **PRIDEFUL** about what we're doing. And so it's good to be reminded that as **servants of God**, we're to use our spiritual gifts to **minister to the Lord**. It's because of God that we're alive ... and that the pieces of our lives are being put back together. We're **servicing God**. He is our source, our resource, and the reason we're here.

And as part of their **ministry to the Lord**, the men and women in the Church at Antioch **fasted**. That is, they made the choice to not eat for a specific period of time (a meal, a day, a week) in order to move their minds away from their own physical needs, so they could focus in on what God was saying, doing, and inviting them to join Him in.

And why did they **fast**? When Paul, Barnabas and John Mark showed up, they probably sensed an urgency about something ... a need to seek God in a special way. And judging from the way the Holy Spirit led them; they seemed to be seeking God's direction about how to spread the Gospel to all the earth. No small thing! And so because they really needed to hear from God, **they fasted and they prayed**.

They knew Jesus had commanded them to take the Gospel to “**Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the rest of the world**” so they used the twin disciplines of **fasting** and **prayer** together to seek the inner witness and leading of the Holy Spirit. And it came. Maybe through an actual voice, maybe it was just an inner leading or strong nudge. But however God's voice and leading came, the Holy Spirit said, “**Set apart for Me, Barnabas and Paul for the work to which I have called them.**” And I see a **FAITH LESSON** for us here ...

.PPT 6 ... FAITH LESSON

God had specific things planned for Barnabas and Paul to do with their lives –just as He has specific things planned for us to do with our lives. Here's how the Apostle Paul wrote about this way God works in EPHESIANS 2:10 ...

¹⁰ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would now walk in them. (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

So here's this group of Christians in Antioch –**fasting** and **praying** about the need for the world to hear about Jesus Christ, and God answers their prayer by saying “Tag you're it! I'm sending you.” And isn't this how God so often works? ... by sending the very people who have it on their hearts to **pray** and **fast** about a specific need?

Back in **ACTS 11:9** God told the Jews to look beyond themselves and to see His heart for **the whole world**. Peter was reaching the Jews and now in **ACTS 13**, Barnabas and Paul are about to reach out to the rest of the world as they begin what we refer to today as their **FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY**.

Eighteen years before Paul was killing Christians in Jerusalem. Then on the road to Damascus he was confronted by Jesus Christ Himself and surrendered his life over to God. Then three years later he goes to Jerusalem and the Christians there just couldn't believe that he'd made such a huge turnaround in thirty-six months ... and so he's run out of town, lucky to have his toga in one piece.

And then Paul goes up to Galatia to study in *The School of the Holy Spirit* for thirteen or fourteen years. And it was during this time apart that Paul learned what it meant to stop depending on his **QUALIFICATIONS** and start pursuing a life of **FAITHFULNESS**.

And after this long period of time in *The School of the Holy Spirit* in Galatia, Paul went back to Jerusalem for round two –and this time they accepted him as a true brother in the Lord. And while he was in Jerusalem, Paul, with his **Type-A** personality confidently says, “Peter, you guys get the Jews saved. Don't worry about me, I've got the rest of the world covered.”

Paul may have been **called** on the road to Damascus to take the Gospel to the Gentiles and to whoever else would listen, but during the eighteen years in between his **calling** (past tense) in **ACTS 9** and his being **set apart** (present tense) here in **ACTS 13**, God taught Paul the difference between being **QUALIFIED** to do this ministry or that ministry, and what it means to actually becoming a **FAITHFUL FOLLOWER OF JESUS CHRIST**. Do you see it?

Listen to me ... our **callings** have everything to do with God. But being **set apart** to live out those **callings** has a lot to do with us and with the choices for **faithfulness** we make, or don't make along the way.

.PPT 7 ... OBEDIENCE IS ½ DISCERNMENT AND ½ COURAGE

Prayer, and fasting set our hearts in the direction where we can hear God and receive the courage to obey God's plans for us. **True obedience is always made up of two parts ... one-half discernment, and one-half courage.** The people in the church at Antioch had both. And as the lead pastor-teacher here at 2nd Street, I hope and pray the same can be said of me, and all of you. But you know where we'll see whether this is true or not? In the things we commit our lives to, commit our spiritual gifts to, and commit our resources to. Like Jesus said in **MATTHEW 7:20**, “**by their fruit you will recognize them.**”

.PPT 8 ... ACTS 13:3 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

³ Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

Where's **THE LONG-RANGE PLANNING REPORT**? Where are **THE DEMOGRAPHIC STUDIES**? Where's **THE MARKETING SURVEY**? Barnabas and Paul left Antioch without any of this stuff. Friends, our **callings** are usually **REVEALED** and **CONFIRMED** by being involved in **ministry**, by **fasting**, by **worship**, through **prayer**, and by **spending time in the WORD of God**. And I see another **FAITH LESSON** for us here ...

.PPT 9 ... FAITH LESSON

If you're struggling to hear or follow God's plan for your life, stay on track with God and ask "What roles do ministry, worship, fasting, prayer, and spending time in God's WORD have in my daily life?" Our commitments reveal the soil where the roots of our lives are actually planted and growing from. What do the commitments you've made with your time, your spiritual gifts, and your resources reveal about you?

In **ACTS 13:2**, **fasting** and **prayer REVEALED** God's will for Paul and Barnabas. And in **ACTS 13:3**, **fasting** and **prayer CONFIRMED** God's will for them. I don't know about you, but I want to live in such a way that God's will is both **REVEALED** and **CONFIRMED** to me. Having God's will **REVEALED INFORMS** us. But when God's will is **CONFIRMED** to us, we begin being **FORMED** by it. And gang, I want to do whatever it takes to make this **REVELATION** and **CONFIRMATION** of God's will for my life happen. And I want to stop doing whatever is getting in the way of this happening.

.PPT 10 ... ACTS 13:4 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁴ So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus.

So the Holy Spirit and the believers in the church at Antioch **sent out** Paul and Barnabas, and they went to Seleucia, which was about 10 miles West from Antioch, on the Mediterranean Sea. How awesome that instead of the Early Church just being a group of men and women "**who wanted to run the show**", the Holy Spirit was shaping the priorities they were embracing, and guiding the direction they were heading.

Any group of Christians can **send someone out** –like we **sent out** David and Tricia Howell to Ireland last year –and like we're sending Matt and Gayle Denham out to Rwanda soon – and like we're sending Jeff VandenHoek out to India this coming week –and like we're sending the Get-Away-Give-Away team out to Mexico this week, and the Mexico Work & Witness team out to Mexico this summer. But gang, if the Holy Spirit doesn't **call** people before they're **sent out**, they'll come home with broken spirits instead of joyful hearts.

So again, the Holy Spirit **called** Paul and Barnabas a long time before this day, but now the Holy Spirit has **sent them out**. Remember, it's not our **QUALIFICATIONS** that get us ready to move from being **called** to being **set apart**. It's learning to be **FAITHFUL**. And why does God want to see **FAITHFULNESS** growing and maturing in us?

Because from **GENESIS** to **REVELATION**, we read about **FAITHFULNESS** being a characteristic of God that He wants His followers to take on. Remember the definition of **faithful** in the *Merriam Webster Dictionary*? God wants us to be "**full of faith in Him; steadfast in keeping our promises; and firm and dependable in allegiance or devotion.**" Do Webster's words describe what's on your heart for the **COMMITMENTS** you're making, for the life and ministry you're pressing into?

.PPT 11 ... PROVERBS 20:6 (GOOD NEWS TRANSLATION)

⁶ Everyone talks about how loyal and faithful he is, but just try to find someone who really is!

.PPT 12 ... ACTS 13:5 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁵ When they reached Salamis, they began to proclaim the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews; and they also had John [Mark] as their helper. [emphasis added]

We aren't told why Paul and Barnabas went to Cyprus first, but from **ACTS 4:36** we know that Cyprus was where Barnabas grew up. And when they arrived in Salamis, which is in the NE corner of the Island of Cyprus, the synagogue wasn't "off limits". Evidently the Holy Spirit nudged them to go there and start telling people about the Good News of Jesus Christ. The custom of the "open synagogue" invited any educated man to speak to the congregation on the Sabbath. And so when they got to Salamis, that's what they did.

In **ACTS 13:5** we also see that John was Paul and Barnabas's assistant. This is the same man who was called **John Mark** in **ACTS 12:25**, and the same man who was often just referred to just as **Mark** ... and who would later write the earliest Gospel that bears his name ... the Gospel that's the story of Jesus Christ as seen through the eyes of Peter.

It must have been great for Barnabas and Paul to have John Mark on this first missionary journey. He grew up in Jerusalem. And because he was an eyewitness to the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, he could tell stories about Jesus first person, not only to Barnabas and Paul, but to the people they were ministering with. Let's read **ACTS 13:6-12**.

.PPT 13-14 ... ACTS 13:6-12 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

**⁶ When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they found a magician, a Jewish false prophet whose name was Bar-Jesus,
⁷ who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence. This man summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God.
⁸ But Elymas the magician (for so his name is translated) was opposing them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.
⁹ But Saul, who was also known as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze on him,
¹⁰ and said, "You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord?
¹¹ "Now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and not see the sun for a time." And immediately a mist and a darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking those who would lead him by the hand.
¹² Then the proconsul believed when he saw what had happened, being amazed at the teaching of the Lord.**

So they wrapped things up in Salamis and headed to the Western side of the Island of Cyprus, to the city of Paphos. Paphos was famous for its worship of Venus, the Roman goddess of sexual love. And so presumably, while ministering in Paphos –which wouldn't be unlike going to share the Gospel at a porn convention –they continued their pattern of

going into the synagogues and talking about Jesus Christ to the people they met. And there they met Sergius Paulus, the **representative** (or the **Proconsul**) of the Roman government in Paphos, who, after while, sent word to Barnabas and Paul that he wanted to “**hear the word of God**” firsthand. So he summoned them to join him at his office or his home.

But when Barnabas and Paul showed up, a sorcerer named Elymas confronted them. Ancient rulers often had wizards, magicians, or sorcerers to advise them. Nancy Reagan wasn't the first world-leader to use an astrologer. Elymas's real name was “**Bar-Jesus**” – which means “**son of Jesus**” –but apparently Luke (the author and scribe of **ACTS**) couldn't bear to call him that! And Elymas interferes and tries to frustrate the ministry that was going on between the Holy Spirit, Paul, Barnabas, and Sergius Paulus.

Charles Spurgeon was England's best-known pastor-teacher during the second half of the 19-century. In 1854, just four years after his conversion, 20-year-old Spurgeon became the pastor of London's New Park Street Church, frequently preaching to audiences of more than 10,000. I love what Charles Spurgeon writes about this passage ...

.PPT 15 ... “Wherever there is likely to be great success, the open door and the opposing adversaries will both be found. If there are no *adversaries*, you may fear that there will be no success. A boy cannot get his kite up without wind to drive against his kite.”

In **ACTS 13:9** we read the name **Paul** for the first time, and for most of the rest of *The New Testament* that's what he's called. It was common for people to have names that were similar; yet different according to their language or culture. **Saul** was his Jewish name, after the first king of Israel. But his Roman name was **Paul** ... similar to **Saul**.

So Paul, being “**filled with the Holy Spirit**”, and using spiritual discernment and operating in the gift of faith, begins to rebuke Elymas and pronounces the judgment of God on him – that he'll become blind for a time. When was the last time you heard a preacher do that?!

When Elymas was struck with blindness, I'm sure Paul couldn't help but remember about eighteen years before when his own blinding happened. You can read the whole story in **ACTS 9**. But it wasn't until Paul was blinded **physically** that he began to see **spiritually**. And while Paul was brutally straightforward as he spoke to Elymas, I don't believe for a minute that his prayer was for “God to take him out.” Far from it.

As Paul spoke these hard words, I believe that he was thinking about his own life and remembering how God used blindness to bring him close to His heart. I imagine Paul's prayer for Elymas was for his healing and restoration, not for his destruction. But unfortunately, unlike Paul's story, we never hear of Elymas repenting or seeing again.

ACTS 13:12 says “**the proconsul believed when he saw what had happened.**” So what was it that he **saw**? It couldn't have just been that he saw Elymas struck blind. I believe what he saw **was the courage of Paul**. When he saw a man who had bold convictions, and who was willing to take a stand for what he believed ... when he saw a man who wasn't afraid to have his **COMMITMENTS** become visible, and his affections for God shape the priorities of his life, the words of his mouth, and the actions of his hands, his eyes were opened to the reality of who Jesus Christ was and what it meant to be His follower. Paul was **obedient** –which again, is made **of one-half discernment and one-half courage**.

ACTS 13:12 says that Sergius Paulus was “**amazed at the teachings of the LORD**”. Just a reminder that as we come to church each week and as we hear the WORD of the LORD being taught it’s so not about me or Tom Stanwyck, or Bill Rogers, or any other person I ask to teach on Sunday morning. Sunday to Sunday ... it’s about “**the teachings of the LORD.**”

Remember in **JOHN 11**, when Lazarus was raised from the dead? What a great miracle that would have been to see with our own eyes! But afterwards, we read in **JOHN 11:45-46** that while “**many believed, some didn’t.**” That’s the way it was then, and it’s the way it is now. People hear the Truth, and some even see miracles ... and in the end some make the choice to step over the line of faith, and others make the choice to stay on the side of the line that keeps them out of relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

I have no doubt that Paul, Barnabas and John Mark came across other people on Cyprus before they got to Paphos. But God sent them to somebody with a hungry heart. And I see another **FAITH LESSON** for us here ...

.PPT 16 ... FAITH LESSON

When God stirs us and “nudges” us to share the message of Jesus Christ with someone, we can rest assured that He’s also been stirring that person to hear and respond to the Truth that we’re being faithful to share.

.PPT 17 ... FIRST TIMOTHY 1:12 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

¹² I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service,

Notice, Paul says here that what brought him to the place of effective ministry was **faithfulness**. He says that when he was **faithful**, he was “**put into**” Christ’s service. It wasn’t **faithfulness** that brought about Paul’s **calling** as an apostle. It was **faithfulness** that **set Paul apart** to begin living out his **calling**.

And likewise, in our vocations ... in our homes ... with our money ... in our relationships ... in our church ... at school, in all of our **COMMITMENTS**, what ways are we showing ourselves to be **faithful**?

Listen to me ... when we kick open doors **we’re responsible** for what happens when we walk through those doors. But when God opens doors and we walk through them at His leading, when we’re doing what God has **called** us to do, **then God is responsible for what happens** as we walk through those doors.

.PPT 18 ... PROVERBS 28:20 (NEW ENGLISH TRANSLATION)

²⁰ A faithful person will have an abundance of blessings.

I know this verse is true. In 1980 I began Seminary full-time. And I also worked with a pastor named Don Green at Reedwood Friends Church in Portland. And he let me try my hand all kinds of ministries. I found out what I was good at and what I wasn’t good at. And I found out what I could learn to be good at if I worked at it hard enough. And I also worked with Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship at Reed College the first two years ... and I also drove a school bus every weekday morning and afternoon ... and every Friday and

Saturday night I also sold tickets at the old Gladstone Theater. It was an insane schedule, but I loved it.

While working at Reedwood Church (which is right across the street from the Reed College campus), I mowed the lawn, I typed the bulletin when the secretary was sick, I stapled the church newsletter, I worked in the soup kitchen, I set up chairs, I took down chairs, I helped with the sound system, I ran errands, I taught fifth-grade Sunday School. And during my fourth year there I led a Thursday evening worship service for people who couldn't make it on Sunday mornings.

King David learned **FAITHFULNESS** as he waited for God to **set him apart** to become the King of Israel. Elisha learned **FAITHFULNESS** as he ministered alongside Elijah for nearly 10 years. And it was during these four years of my life that I was learning to be **FAITHFUL**.

But the closer I got to graduation the harder things got. Friends of mine had churches asking them to come be their pastor. Big churches, small churches ... it didn't matter. They had a ministry to go to –doors were opening up for them. But what did I have? There didn't seem to be any doors opening up for me.

And then a small group of people in Klamath Falls, OR called and asked me if I'd consider being their pastor. Klamath Falls? I wasn't even sure where it was. I was a city boy and Klamath Falls was the kind of place where most people in town knew how many bales of hay their car would hold! And more than half of them, in a pinch, could use the cattle brand on their belt-buckle for ID when cashing a check at the grocery store.

In the **NATURAL** it seemed crazy. But in the **SPIRITUAL** it was God's "**good, pleasing and perfect will**" (cf., **ROMANS 12:2**). And so at the end of June, 1984, Teresa and I and our 7-week old, firstborn son, Ryan, packed up and moved to Klamath Falls and it became our home for seven years. The first three years I worked with Young Life **and** the church –and the last four years I focused just on the church.

You see, the **FAITHFULNESS** I was learning during my four years in seminary and while ministering at Reedwood, and at Reed College –the **FAITHFULNESS** I learned while driving school bus in Oregon City –God used all of that to open the door to the ministry that He then entrusted me with and **set me apart to live into for Him** in Klamath Falls.

And the **FAITHFULNESS** I learned during those years in Klamath Falls, working with the church and with Young Life, opened the door to the fourteen years of ministry I spent as the campus pastor at George Fox University, and the ministry that I'm now involved in here at 2nd Street.

Gang, who knows what ministry doors will be opened up even now, this morning, as you and I covenant with God to pursue lives of **FAITHFULNESS**. You know who knows? God knows. Yes God cares about our **QUALIFICATIONS**, about our **SPIRITUAL GIFTS**, about how you're wired to this ministry or that ministry. But I guarantee you that He'll put more emphasis on your **FAITHFULNESS** than on your **QUALIFICATIONS** every time.

We can't be **FAITHFUL** and live in the future. **FAITHFULNESS** is a present-tense thing. We can't sit still today because of what **might happen tomorrow**. We can't say, "God, You know, I'd love to be **FAITHFUL** to You today, but I think that this other door of life and ministry might open up for me tomorrow, so I can't really commit to anything right now. You get that, right?" No, God doesn't get that. **FAITHFULNESS** is a "now" thing.

.PPT 19 ... ZECHARIAH 4:10 (PARAPHRASE)

¹⁰ Do not despise small beginnings, because the LORD loves to see the work begin, no matter how small the first step is.

Let me ask you this: If God can't find you or me **FAITHFUL** today, why in the world would He open up new doors of ministry for us to walk through tomorrow? Who is it that will hear God say, "**Well done, good and faithful servant**"? (**MATTHEW 25:21**) People who say "yes" to God and are **FAITHFUL** and **CONSISTENT** in the places they've been **called** to be. God is looking for **FAITHFUL** people, so **FAITHFULNESS** has to be the foundation of everything we do as His follower, and as people who are called to minister in His name.

.PPT 20 ... JOHN 15:5; PHILIPPIANS 4:13 (NEW LIVING TRANSLATION)

FAITHFULNESS comes first. **QUALIFICATION** comes second. When you and I set our hearts, our minds, and our faces in the direction of being **FAITHFUL** people, we soon realize what Jesus meant when He said in **JOHN 15:5**, "**Apart from Me you can do nothing!**" that's of any lasting significance. And we begin to understand what the Apostle Paul meant when he wrote in **PHILIPPIANS 4:13**, "**I can do everything through Him [that is, through Jesus Christ] who gives me strength.**"

ILLUSTRATION: THE CONNIE STORY ...

I don't know what God is **calling** you to do. I don't know what God wants to **separate you unto**. I do know that it's highly unlikely that He wants you to be either a Bartender or a Belly Dancer. So you can go ahead and take those two jobs off your list. But I do know that God is **FAITHFUL** and He can teach you and me to be **FAITHFUL**.

I do know that God hasn't given us what we have in terms of our gifts and our **callings** just because we're good at them ... but because we've shown ourselves to be **FAITHFUL** to Him and to His purposes for our lives. So let's stop parading around our **QUALIFICATIONS**, hoping that when we do God will open us up and pour in some **FAITHFULNESS**. It won't happen. It won't happen. It won't happen.

No one can steal the **callings** God has placed within our hearts. But **WE CAN FORSAKE THEM** by seeking our own glory instead of God's. We can keep from being **set apart** to live out those **callings** when we pursue our own renown instead of His, or as we advertise our **QUALIFICATIONS** instead of pursuing **FAITHFULNESS**.

God wants above all else to **set us apart** to live out the **callings** and the **commitments** He's pouring into our hearts. And it will happen when we choose, like Paul, like Barnabas and like John Mark, to become **FAITHFUL** followers of our Lord Jesus Christ.

.PPT 21 ... COMMITMENT OF BELONGING

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