

A Fresh Perspective on Faithfulness

In all my years of travelling, I've often asked my audience's what their definition of faithfulness is. The common responses I've received have been loyal, committed, consistent, reliable, and steadfast. All these are accurate definitions . . . but there's a word Jesus associates with faithfulness that I rarely hear.

Multiplication.

For more clarity, let's recall the parable of the talents (see Matthew 25). The master entrusts three different servants with unique gifts, each according to their ability. Two of them went out and multiplied what was given to them, and, as a result, they're called *faithful*. This is a very important point we must not miss: The master says, "You have been faithful." You can look at it whichever way you like, but there's nothing else – neither action, virtue, nor result – highlighted other than multiplication. So Jesus directly attributes being faithful to a person's ability to multiply.

Now, the third servant was afraid and buried his talents. His master called him "Wicked and lazy!" This is definitely an attention-grabber. Jesus is not talking about salvation, but rather the judgment of how we handle our gifts—either being rewarded or suffering loss for our labor.

Let's look at the word "lazy" for a moment. The Greek word for *lazy* is *oknēros*. This word is defined as, "to delay, slow, tardy, slothful, lazy." Another lexicon defines it as, "pertaining to shrinking from or hesitating to engage in something worthwhile, possibly implying lack of ambition."

If you're fearful, hesitant, or lack ambition, you'll refrain from engaging in an activity that should or could be done. Have you ever felt the urge to do something—you just couldn't shake it, especially when in prayer—but you faltered too long because you feared failing? Then you watched someone else do it? Afterward you thought to yourself, *I had that idea and should've acted on it.*

This is Jesus's point regarding this servant. He hesitated, not just once or twice, but he hesitated the entire period of his stewardship. Listen, it's acceptable a time or two, since we usually grow from these situations. But if we flirt with hesitation long enough, then we'll frustrate what God wants to accomplish through us.

When the Lord first asked me to write, I hesitated for ten months. I was afraid of writing. If I'm honest, my hesitation stemmed from a history of past failures—I had failed time and time again in writing. I had terrible SAT and ACT scores in writing and reading comprehension, numerous teachers' negative critiques, poor grades, and a critical classmate. As you can see, history wasn't on my side! On top of all that, Lisa and I had just birthed our ministry, and to write a book would require a lot more of my time and energy, which already seemed maxed out.

But fast-forward a couple decades, and now the books are national and international best sellers, in over one hundred languages, and number in the tens of millions. As I look back, I often wonder: *What if I had hesitated too long and didn't obey? Where would I be today? Would I have ended up being called "lazy" before the judgment seat?* I shudder to think of the extent of my lost opportunity and the lives I would've failed to impact!

At the time, I didn't realize my destiny was wrapped up in writing! If you had said to me during my twenties, "John, God will send you to the nations of the world through your books," I would have laughed at you and said, "You've lost your mind! I can't even write a three-page paper!"

With all that said, you're probably feeling a little uncomfortable. I don't blame you! But, here's the fabulous news, you're not asked to multiply in your own strength. God's grace will empower you to go beyond your natural ability and limitations. Your inadequacy is an opportunity to depend on His grace - empowerment. When you do this, you will enter into true rest—ceasing in your own efforts, no longer striving to produce results. What is this rest? It is to cooperate with God's ability to accomplish your mission. When you enter rest, God will lead you to multiply!

In over forty years of ministry, I've realized that you'll never be truly satisfied in life until you take your unique God-given gifts and multiply them for the benefit of others. As I close, pay attention to Paul's exhortation to keep our gifts dusted and active: "fan into a flame and rekindle the fire of the spiritual gift God imparted to you . . . For God will never give you the spirit of fear, but the Holy Spirit who gives you mighty power, love, and self-control" (2 Tim. 1:6—7 TPT).

No true follower of Jesus wants to be identified as lazy. I certainly don't, and I'm sure you don't either!