

Becoming More like Christ (III): Faithfulness, Gentleness, Self-Control

Passages: As listed in the lesson.

Memory Verse

“Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls.” (Proverbs 25:28)

Knowledge of God’s Will [God’s Word]	Knowledge of God [God’s Divine Nature]	Good Works [Behavior]
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. God is faithful to us, even if we are unfaithful to Him.2. Gentleness is not a weakness, but a strength.3. God is the source of true self-control.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. God is faithful.2. God is gentle.3. God wants His children to lead disciplined lives.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Demonstrate faithfulness to God and to others.2. Be gentle to others.3. Strive to live a self-controlled life with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Overview

Events and Spiritual Teachings

- A. Faithfulness
- B. Gentleness
- C. Self-Control

Life Application: My Action Plan

Memory Verse

Conclusion: With the abidance of the Spirit, we can learn to be faithful to our commitments, to practice gentleness to others, and to exercise self-control in our lives so that we are no longer susceptible to sin.

Introduction: Becoming More like Christ

Today, we'll continue learning how to become more like Christ by studying the next three character traits of the Holy Spirit: faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. They may be difficult to produce, but if we abide in Jesus Christ (Jn 15:5), then the Holy Spirit will help us to bear them. It is important that we are filled with the Spirit in order to allow His attributes to grow within us. But we should also put forth our own effort by making a conscientious decision to seek out these traits. To do so, let's examine these three traits in greater detail.

A. Faithfulness

"Your faithfulness endures to all generations; You established the earth, and it abides." (Ps 119:90)

How would you describe God's faithfulness? What words would you use to explain it? (*Allow students to brainstorm answers. Examples may be: loyal, to never give up, to stay true.*) No one has been more faithful to us than God. He is the best example for us to learn from.

1. He never breaks His promises (Ps 89:1–8)

At the time of this psalm, Israel had already fallen into the hands of the Babylonians, but the psalmist still believed in God's promise to David and praised His faithfulness. The Lord once promised to establish David's throne forever, and although this didn't happen during the psalmist's lifetime, it did happen hundreds of years later, with the birth of Jesus Christ. Although we may continue sinning and disobeying God's commands, He is always faithful. Whether or not we deserve it, He will keep His word, just as He did for David.

2. He always provides our needs (Ex 16; Mk 8:1–13; Mt 6:31–32)

The Israelites repeatedly complained against God during their travels in the wilderness, but the Lord never failed to provide for them, and faithfully sustained them for forty years. In the New Testament, Jesus did likewise, never failing to neglect the needs of the people or of His disciples. We never have to worry about our daily necessities because God will provide everything for us.

3. He shows us compassion and forgiveness (Lam 3:22–23)

Jeremiah witnessed firsthand the steady deterioration of Judah at the hands of its kings, and knew that destruction was imminent. He constantly wept for the people and the land, yet in Lamentations, he also wrote a message of hope. The people were about to be exiled, but he knew God's mercy and compassion would prevail. Today, were it not for God's compassion and forgiveness, none of us would have the chance at salvation. We sin and yet God shows us His love every day, showing an aspect of faithfulness that is hard for many of us to grasp: to be able to look beyond the faults of others and still remain true.

4. He gives us strength and hope every day (Mk 5:21–36)

We easily get discouraged, especially when things don't work out the way we wished. Jairus lost all hope when he was told that his daughter was already dead. But Jesus' words immediately gave him comfort and hope, a ray of light in the depths of his despair. Our hope today lies not only in the healing God offers, but also in the strength that He gives us to live our lives. He answers all of our prayers and gives us hope every day, because He is faithful (Mt 7:7–8).

How Faithful Am I?

Solomon wrote, "Most men will proclaim each his own goodness, but who can find a faithful man?"

(Prov 20:6). Most people only care for themselves. Even if they have made a promise, they don't find it difficult to break when things are tough or don't work out the way they expected. So why should we bother sticking to our words when nobody else seems to care that much?

The Bible teaches us: "He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much" (Lk 16:10). How many times have we failed to keep the secret we promised to keep, to do the homework we said we'd finish days ago, to help our parents when we said we would, or to form the prayer habit we promised to start after SSC? In which case, how can God expect us to be faithful to His work, or to God Himself? While it is normal and easy for others to break their promises or commitments, God wants us to be different. Whatever we promise, and to whomever we made it, God wants us to be faithful to our commitments. When we learn to be faithful in all of these little things, as Proverbs says, "A faithful man will abound with blessings" (Prov 28:20).

B. Gentleness

"[Rather] let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God." (1 Pet 3:4)

In society, being gentle may be perceived as a sign of weakness. Gentleness doesn't get us very far in the job market or when making deals. Rather, boldness and assertiveness gain more respect. But the Bible teaches us that gentleness does not contradict strength or boldness in a person. Moses, for example was described as the humblest man on earth, but he was not timid when leading the Israelites. Paul was also considered gentle but was also extremely bold in his speech.

The Lord Jesus said of Himself, "I am gentle and lowly in heart," (Mt 11:29), yet He also made a whip of cords to drive out the merchants doing their business in the temple (Jn 2:15)! The logic of the world says that these two actions are at odds with each other, but the Bible teaches us that gentleness is simply another form of spiritual power and strength.

Gentleness in the Spirit

What exactly is gentleness? *(Allow students to answer.)* Gentleness is not a weakness, but a form of strength. For example, if a gentle person speaks the truth, even if it is painful to hear, the message will be well received. A gentle person can be a source of strength or support for brothers and sisters who are in need of a listening ear. They can also diffuse a heated situation or conflict, or are relied upon for their consideration or willingness to learn. Non-believers should be able to distinguish us by our gentleness. It is an essential trait for all followers of Jesus Christ.

Why is gentleness in the Spirit so different from gentleness as defined by the world? And what makes it a powerful or effective attribute in our spirituality? Let's read Proverbs 15:1. "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." In the heat of the argument, it is easy for us to let our anger carry us into a shouting match. But gentle words have the power to calm both parties and turn away our anger, making gentleness more powerful than aggressive or forceful speech.

Let's read Galatians 6:1. "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted." From this verse, we can see that gentleness is a key element in building up and supporting each other spiritually. Paul once wrote to the Thessalonian church, "But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children" (1 Thess 2:7). Gentleness shows itself when we grow in the Spirit and support each other in faith.

C. Self-Control

Have you ever thought about how disciplined athletes are? It may seem like a glamorous life from the outside looking in, but their kind of lifestyle actually requires a lot of self-control. Many of them make a lot of sacrifices in order to fulfill their dreams. For example, they may have to get up very early for practices, eat the right foods every day, and stick to a very strict exercise regimen. God wants us to lead a life that is spiritually athletic, one that is controlled by the Holy Spirit. A life like that has its limits, but those “limits” are for our own good. Why is it so important to have a life of self-control? Let’s read the following verses:

- 1 Cor 9:24–25 (NIV) – “Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.”
- 2 Tim 1:7 (NIV) – “For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.”
- Tit 1:8–9 – “[Be] hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.”

When we have self-control in our lives, we can see many positive changes occur. We are more able to put off self-gratification in order to bring glory to God instead. We can live a disciplined life, rule over our own actions, and control our boundaries. We are able to choose God’s word over our own desires and say “no” to temptation with the power of the Holy Spirit.

On the other hand, the Bible says that a person who lacks self-control is “[like] a city whose walls are broken through” (Prov 25:28 NIV). A city without walls is unable to defend itself, making it vulnerable to enemy attacks. Let’s read 1 Peter 5:8. “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.” Without self-control, we make it easier for Satan to “devour” us and draw us away from God. Unfortunately, most who lack self-control don’t feel this. They believe that they still have control over their thoughts and behavior when in fact, they are already a city without walls, vulnerable to temptation, sin, and death.

The Importance of Self-Control

“But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.” (1 Cor 9:27)

When we cultivate self-control with the Spirit’s help, we will be able to control our thoughts, emotions, and speech. But when we don’t have any self-control, we submit to temptation, are unable to control our thoughts, and often act or speak impulsively, without forethought. Let’s look at examples of two people who realized their lack of self-control the hard way. As we go over each, consider how their experiences are similar to what we face today.

1. Samson (Jdg 14:1–2; 16:1, 4). How did Samson lack self-control?

Samson was a Nazirite, chosen by God and set aside for His holy purpose. Unfortunately, Samson didn’t care. When he saw a beautiful woman, he went after her. He didn’t recognize his lack of self-control, and it was this very same lack that led to his downfall at Delilah’s hands.

Today, it is common for teenagers or young adults to give in to their desires. They decide that it’s more important to enjoy the moment than to restrict themselves. They reason that if God

didn't want us to enjoy ourselves, then why did He even create such enjoyments? Wouldn't God want everyone to enjoy His creations? But when it comes to marital relationships, God intended for it to be part of a sacred and holy union. Ultimately, it is easy for people of the world to try and justify their actions, rather than exert any form of self-control over their sexual desires.

2. Esau (Gen 25:27, 34). How did Esau lack self-control?

It is easy for us to judge Esau for how easily he gave up his birthright. At the moment, though, Esau probably wasn't even considering the importance of what he was giving up. He was too hungry to care, and the effects of a birthright were a far-off dream, too far for him to visualize or to value. He gave in to his desires and lost all perspective on what his impulsive decision would cost him in the future.

When caught up in the moment, we often find it reasonable to trade lasting benefits for immediate pleasures. This is because we lack self-control. We lose trust when we tell someone a secret just for the excitement of sharing something no one else knows. We lose our reputation when we fail to show up at an important event, just because something more exciting came up. In hindsight, is it worth losing our trust or reputation over a moment's pleasure? Like Esau, we don't always see clearly, which is why we need the Holy Spirit to help us.

Paul understood that most people don't have a lot of self-control when it comes to our bodies and minds. We find excuses and make up reasons to give in. Sexual desire is one of the most difficult temptations to resist, which is why Paul instructed that we ought to get married in order to avoid such temptations (1 Cor 7:5). There are many other things that we may succumb to. If we are greedy, then we may succumb to theft. If we are obsessed with a goal, then we may become more aggressive. If proud, then we may succumb to anger or hatred. Let's read Titus 2:11–14:

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.

The grace of God is like a teacher that teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts. Through grace, we have the power to become more like Him. This is why we need to pray for the fullness of the Holy Spirit to assist us in every situation. Let's turn to 2 Peter 1:5–6. From these verses, we can see that in order to grow in godliness and love, we need to have self-control and discipline. It is a long and ongoing process, but one that guarantees us a place in the heavenly kingdom.

Check for Understanding

1. **Name four ways God has demonstrated His faithfulness to us.** He never breaks His promises; He always provides our needs; He shows us compassion and forgiveness; He gives us strength and hope every day.
2. **How would you describe someone who has spiritual gentleness?** They can be a source of strength or support for brothers and sisters. They can diffuse a heated situation or can be relied upon for their consideration or willingness to learn.
3. **Why is self-control so important?** When we cultivate self-control with the Spirit's help, we will be able to control our thoughts, emotions, and speech. But when we don't have any self-control, we

submit to temptation, are unable to control our thoughts, and often act or speak impulsively, without forethought.

4. Explain how Samson and Esau lacked self-control. What can we learn from each of them?

- a. Samson: Allowed his desires to lead him to imprisonment. It is common and easy for people of the world to try and justify their actions, rather than exert any form of self-control over their sexual desires.
- b. Esau: Allowed his immediate physical needs to cloud his judgment regarding matters of the future. When caught up in the moment, we often find it reasonable to trade lasting benefits for immediate pleasures.

Life Application

(Teachers: In addition to the Life Application worksheet, a story, "Table for Two" by Kirsten Burgess, has been added to the end of this lesson. You may want to read this with your students if time permits or print out copies for them to read at home.)

My Action Plan

After learning more about these three characteristics of the Spirit, how would you rate yourself for each? On a scale of 1 to 10 (with 10 being the most), circle where you think you're at on the scale, then explain to the class why you chose that number.

<i>(Have none at all.)</i>					Faithfulness					<i>(Have a lot in my heart!)</i>
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
					Gentleness					
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
					Self-Control					
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

Whether we feel like we have a lot or none of these traits, we can always practice and improve upon them! Let's go over each and see how we can act out each of them in our lives.

1. Faithfulness

It's easy to say that we always keep our word, but if we really had to examine ourselves, how faithful are we really? How faithful do you think you are to God? To your family? To your friends, or your studies? If you were to rank your faithfulness in each, which would be your highest ranking? Consider your level of faithfulness in each area, then discuss the following:

- Do you feel that it's okay to be more faithful to certain people more than others, or should we have the same level of faithfulness no matter who or what we are dealing with?
- Describe a time when you were unfaithful to God, a family member, a friend, or your studies. How did it feel? Did you do anything about it after? If not, what can you do about it after today's lesson?
- Pick the area you are least faithful in and discuss reasons why this is the case. Based on those reasons, is there a way to improve your faithfulness? Ask your classmates to help think of ideas.

Once we realize the myriad ways we break our faithfulness to others, we can see how easy it is to fail in our faithfulness to God. But understanding where we have failed is the first step. When we see when and where we lack in our faithfulness, we can begin to improve on it. Then, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we can grow in our faithfulness to others and to God and receive "the crown of life" (Rev 2:10).

2. Gentleness

Gentleness is love in action. It means being considerate, meeting the needs of others, allowing time for the other person to talk, and being willing to learn. It is an essential trait for all followers of Jesus Christ. Paul told the Thessalonians, “But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us” (1 Thess 2:7–8). Of the following areas, which do you need to improve upon the most, and why? Is there an activity or task that you can do in order to practice it this week?

- I need to be gentle with my words.
- I need to speak words that build up one another.
- I need to be gentle with the weak.

3. Self-Control

We all struggle with self-control, especially when it comes to things involving the internet or apps on our smartphones. Read the following statements. Which ones apply to you?

- After school, you find that you lose track of time browsing the internet or using your smartphone.
- You stay up late because you’re glued to your screen, even after your parents tell you to sleep.
- When you wake up, the first thing you do is to check your phone.
- Your parents have expressed concerns about the amount of time you spend online.
- You sneak online, with a sense of relief and anticipation, when family members are not at home.

Although this may seem harsh or strict, many of us are in fact more addicted than we think. It’s a seemingly simple matter to convince ourselves that we can stop whenever we want, but realistically, it’s not that easy. Most people also lack self-control when it comes to eating, drinking, social media, shopping, spending money, or gossip. Unsuccessful diets, overspending, passing on rumors, sleeping in, or thinking about things we know we shouldn’t be thinking of, are all signs that we lack self-control.

There are so many things we can’t will ourselves to do, or not to do! This is why God gave us the help of the Holy Spirit. When we draw closer to God, He can help us achieve things we never imagined we could (Phil 4:13). Take a moment to consider and write down one area in your life in which you need more self-control. What can you do from now on to have better self-control in that area?

Memory Verse

“Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls.” (Proverbs 25:28)

Meaning:

If a city’s defensive walls are broken down, its people become vulnerable to attack. Like a city’s walls, self-control seems limiting, but it is necessary for our own protection. If we have no self-control, we leave ourselves open to attacks from Satan, and are more likely to fall into sin and death.

Conclusion

The fruit of the Spirit is called such because the fruit is only possible to bear with God’s help. Our own impulses override our spiritual priorities, making it a struggle for us to follow God’s will. But with the abidance of the Spirit, we can learn to be faithful to our commitments, to practice gentleness towards those around us no matter who they are, and to exercise self-control in our lives so that we are no longer susceptible to sin. With His guidance, we can conquer our desires and impulses.

Lesson 5 Homework Assignment Answer Key

1. Explain the importance of self-control according to the memory verse.
Like a city's walls, self-control seems limiting, but it is necessary for our own protection. If we have no self-control, we leave ourselves open to attacks from Satan, and are more likely to fall into sin and death.
2. "[Rather] let it be the hidden person of the _____, with the _____ beauty of a _____ and _____ spirit, which is very _____ in the sight of God." (1 Peter 3:4)
heart, incorruptible, gentle, quiet, precious.
3. What are four ways God demonstrates His faithfulness to us?
He never breaks His promises; He always provides our needs; He shows us compassion and forgiveness; He gives us strength and hope every day.
4. Why is gentleness in the Spirit so different from gentleness as defined by the world?
Gentle words are more powerful than aggressive or forceful speech and is a key element in building up and supporting each other's faith.
5. What does it mean to live a life that is spiritually athletic? Why is it so important to do?
It means living a life that is disciplined. This lets us rule over our own actions and control our boundaries. We are able to choose God's word over our own desires and say "no" to temptation.
6. In what area of your life do you lack self-control? Write down your action plan for overcoming this weakness of yours. Focus on specific steps you can take, such as asking a family member to help hold you accountable or placing your computer in a common space instead of your own room.
Personal answers.

Lesson 5 Life Application Worksheet

My Action Plan

After learning more about these three characteristics of the Spirit, how would you rate yourself for each? On a scale of 1 to 10 (with 10 being the most), circle where you think you're at on the scale, then explain to the class why you chose that number.

<i>(Have none at all.)</i>			Faithfulness				<i>(Have a lot in my heart!)</i>		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Gentleness									
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Self-Control									
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Whether we feel like we have a lot or none of these traits, we can always practice and improve upon them! Let's go over each and see how we can act out each of them in our lives.

1. Faithfulness

It's easy to say that we always keep our word, but if we really had to examine ourselves, how faithful are we really? How faithful do you think you are to God? To your family? To your friends, or your studies? If you were to rank your faithfulness in each, which would be your highest ranking? Consider your level of faithfulness in each area, then discuss the following:

- Do you feel that it's okay to be more faithful to specific people more than others, or should we have the same level of faithfulness no matter who or what we are dealing with?
- Describe a time when you were unfaithful to God, a family member, a friend, or your studies. How did it feel? Did you do anything about it after? If not, what can you do about it after today's lesson?
- Pick the area you are least faithful in and discuss reasons why this is the case. Based on those reasons, is there a way to improve your faithfulness? Ask your classmates to help think of ideas.

Once we realize the myriad ways we break our faithfulness to others, we can see how easy it is to fail in our faithfulness to God. But understanding where we have failed is the first step. When we see when and where we lack in our faithfulness, we can begin to improve on it. Then, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we can grow in our faithfulness to others and to God and receive "the crown of life" (Rev 2:10).

2. Gentleness

Gentleness is love in action. It means being considerate, meeting the needs of others, allowing time for the other person to talk, and being willing to learn. It is an essential trait for all followers of Jesus Christ. Paul told the Thessalonians, "But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us" (1 Thess 2:7-8). Of the

following areas, which do you need to improve upon the most, and why? Is there an activity or task that you can do in order to practice it this week?

- I need to be gentle with my words.
- I need to speak words that build up one another.
- I need to be gentle with the weak.

3. Self-Control

We all struggle with self-control, especially when it comes to things involving the internet or apps on our smartphones. Read the following statements. Which ones apply to you?

- After school, you find that you lose track of time browsing the internet or using your smartphone.
- You stay up late because you're glued to your screen, even after your parents tell you to sleep.
- When you wake up, the first thing you do is to check your phone.
- Your parents have expressed concerns about the amount of time you spend online.
- You sneak online, with a sense of relief and anticipation, when family members are not at home.

Although this may seem harsh or strict, many of us are in fact more addicted than we think. It's a seemingly simple matter to convince ourselves that we can stop whenever we want, but realistically, it's not that easy. Most people also lack self-control when it comes to eating, drinking, social media, shopping, spending money, or gossip. Unsuccessful diets, overspending, passing on rumors, sleeping in, or thinking about things we know we shouldn't be thinking of, are all signs that we lack self-control.

There are so many things we can't will ourselves to do, or not to do! This is why God gave us the help of the Holy Spirit. When we draw closer to God, He can help us achieve things we never imagined we could (Phil 4:13). Take a moment to consider and write down one area in your life in which you need more self-control. What can you do from now on to have better self-control in that area?

TABLE FOR TWO by Kirsten Burgess

He sits by himself at a table for two. The uniformed waiter returns to his side and asks, "Would you like to go ahead and order, sir?" The man has, after all, been waiting since seven o'clock—almost half an hour.

"No, thank you," the man smiles. "I'll wait for her a while longer. How about some more coffee?"

"Certainly, sir."

The man sits, his clear blue eyes gazing straight through the flowered centerpiece. He fingers his napkin, allowing the sounds of light chatter, tinkling silverware, and mellow music to fill his mind. He is dressed in sport coat and tie. His dark brown hair is neatly combed, but one stray lock insists on dropping to his forehead. The scent of his cologne adds to his clean-cut image. He is dressed up enough to make a companion feel important, respected, loved. Yet he is not so formal as to make one uncomfortable. It seems that he has taken every precaution to make others feel at ease with him. Still, he sits alone.

The waiter returns to fill the man's coffee cup. "Is there anything else I can get for you, sir?"

"No, thank you."

The waiter remains standing at the table. Something tugs at his curiosity. "I don't mean to pry, but..." His voice trails off. This line of conversation could jeopardize his tip.

"Go ahead," the man encourages. His voice is strong, yet sensitive, inviting conversation.

"Why do you bother waiting for her?" the waiter finally blurts out. This man has been at the restaurant other evenings, always patiently alone.

The man says quietly, "Because she needs me."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"Well, sir, no offense, but assuming that she needs you, she sure isn't acting much like it. She's stood you up three times just this week."

The man winces and looks down at the table. "Yes, I know."

"Then why do you still come here and wait?"

"Cassie said that she would be here."

"She's said that before," the waiter protests. "I wouldn't put up with it. Why do you?"

Now the man looks up, smiles at the waiter, and says simply, "Because I love her."

The waiter walks away, wondering how one could love a girl who stands him up three times a week. The man must be crazy, he decides. Across the room, he turns to look at the man again. The man slowly pours cream into his coffee. He twirls his spoon between his fingers a few times before stirring sweetener into his cup. After staring for a moment into the liquid, the man brings the cup to his mouth and sips, silently watching those around him. He doesn't look crazy, the waiter admits. Maybe the girl has qualities that I don't know about. Or maybe the man's love is stronger than most. The waiter shakes himself out of his musings to take an order from a party of five.

The man watches the waiter, wonders if he's ever been stood up. The man has, many times. But he still can't get used to it. Each time, it hurts. He's looked forward to this evening all day. He has many things, exciting things, to tell Cassie. But, more importantly, he wants to hear Cassie's voice. He wants her to tell him all about her day, her triumphs, her defeats....anything, really. He has tried so many times

to show Cassie how much he loves her. He'd just like to know that she cares for him, too. He sips sporadically at the coffee, and loses himself in thought, knowing that Cassie is late, but still hoping that she will arrive.

The clock says nine-thirty when the waiter returns to the man's table. "Is there anything I can get for you?"

The still empty chair stabs at the man. "No, I think that will be all for tonight. May I have the check please?"

"Yes, sir." When the waiter leaves, the man picks up the check. He pulls out his wallet and signs. He has enough money to have given Cassie a feast. But he takes out only enough to pay for his five cups of coffee and the tip. *Why do you do this, Cassie?* His mind cries as he gets up from the table.

"Good-bye," the waiter says, as the man walks towards the door.

"Good night. Thank you for your service."

"You're welcome, sir," says the waiter softly, for he sees the hurt in the man's eyes that his smile doesn't hide. The man passes a laughing young couple on his way out, and his eyes glisten as he thinks of the good time he and Cassie could have had. He stops at the front and makes reservations for tomorrow. Maybe Cassie will be able to make it, he thinks.

"Seven o'clock tomorrow for party of two?" the hostess confirms.

"That's right," the man replies.

"Do you think she'll come?" Asks the hostess. She doesn't mean to be rude, but she has watched the man many times alone at his table for two.

"Someday, yes. And I will be waiting for her." The man buttons his overcoat and walks out of the restaurant, alone. His shoulders are hunched, but through the windows the hostess can only guess whether they are hunched against the wind or against the man's hurt.

As the man turns toward home, Cassie turns into bed. She is tired after an evening out with friends. As she reaches toward her nightstand to set the alarm, she sees the note that she scribbled to herself last night. *7:00, it says. Spend some time in prayer.* Darn, she thinks. She forgot again.

She feels a twinge of guilt, but quickly pushes it aside. She needed that time with her friends. And now she needs her sleep. She can pray tomorrow night. Jesus will forgive her. And she's sure he doesn't mind.

Food for Thought

We have all been like Cassie, making promises to God and not keeping them. We say we will spend time with Him and we don't follow through. It demonstrates how unfaithful we really are. We would like to think that we are more loyal than Cassie but in fact, we make many excuses just like her to push aside our guilt. And it's not just with God. We make promises to our family and friends or to people at work. But we don't hesitate to break our commitments because it's the way things are in the world.

God has never done that. He is always faithful. He remains faithful to His people, despite our lack of faithfulness. He cares for us, forgives us, and gives us hope. He wants us to learn from Him and be just as faithful, to learn to forgive others whether they deserve it or not, to keep our commitments no matter what. It's hard when we live in world where faithfulness isn't a big deal. The only way is through the power of the Holy Spirit. Let's pray that He will fill with Holy Spirit and help us reach that goal.