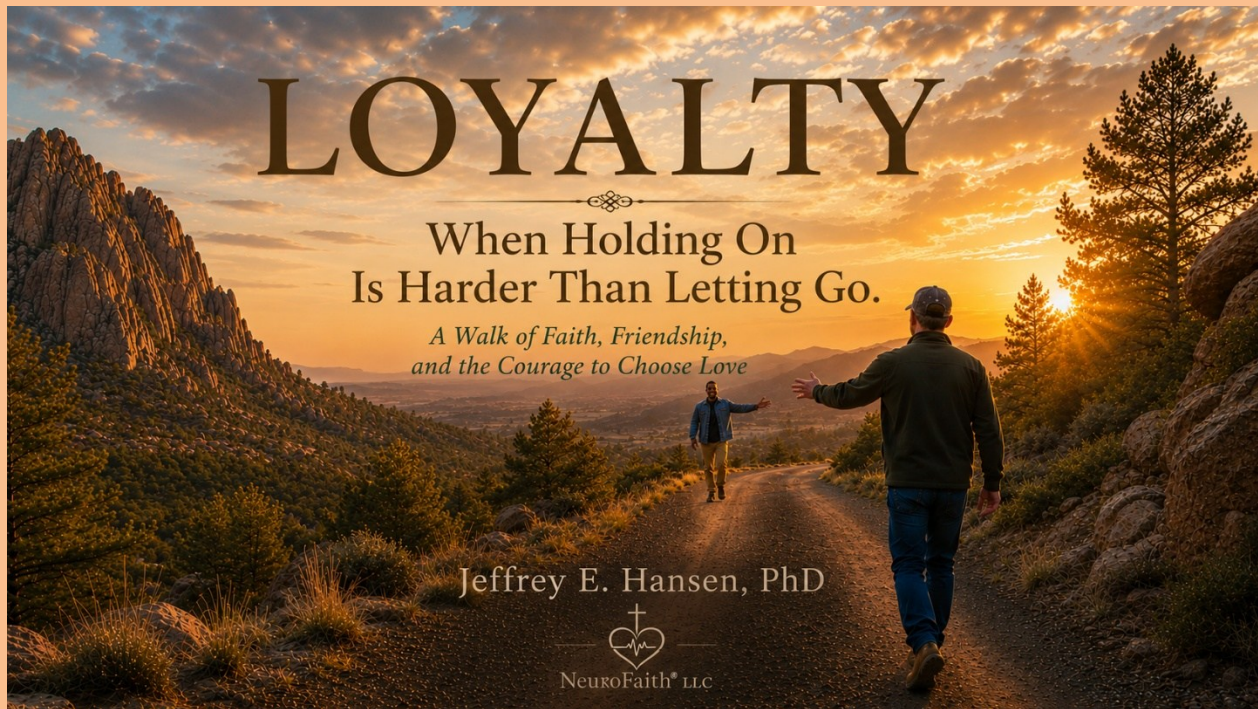




An Early Morning Reflection

As I got up before church this morning, I did what I often do. I get up early. Really early. Four o'clock is pretty normal for me. Five if I've really slept in. Six days a week, that usually means heading to the gym. It's become part of the rhythm of my life. I exercise, I think, I pray, and I reflect.

But Sundays are different.

This morning I decided to take a walk along the Iron King Trail, the beautiful path that winds its way toward the Granite Dells just west of our home. We've been blessed with an unusually active monsoon season this year. Because of El Niño, the mornings have been filled with cool air, magnificent cloud formations, and a peaceful stillness that seems to invite reflection. As I looked toward the eastern sky, I couldn't help but marvel at God's creation. Yesterday those same clouds were painted with brilliant shades of pink as the rising sun illuminated them from behind. This morning they stood quietly against a gray-blue sky, no less magnificent. It felt like I was sitting in God's theater, watching another performance that no human artist could possibly duplicate.

Whenever I find myself in places like that, my mind naturally drifts toward bigger questions. This morning, for reasons I can't entirely explain, one word simply kept bouncing around in my mind.

Loyalty.

What does loyalty really mean?

It's a word we use often. We admire loyal spouses, loyal friends, loyal soldiers, loyal employees, even loyal dogs. We instinctively condemn betrayal because something deep inside us recognizes that loyalty matters. But I wonder whether we've slowly lost sight of what genuine loyalty actually is.

As I continued walking, I found myself thinking not only as a Christian, but also as a psychologist and someone who has spent a lifetime trying to understand people. Why do we struggle so much with loyalty? Why do relationships flourish while they're easy but begin to unravel the moment they require sacrifice? Why are we so quick to disconnect when staying connected becomes costly?

The Faithfulness of God

The Scriptures are filled with remarkable examples of loyalty. Ruth refused to abandon Naomi after unimaginable loss. Naomi had lost her husband and both of her sons. She urged her daughters-in-law to return to their own people and begin life again, yet Ruth refused. *"Where you go I will go, and where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God."* Jonathan remained fiercely loyal to David even though David's future meant Jonathan would never sit upon Israel's throne himself. David, in turn, remained loyal to Saul, refusing to strike down the very man who hunted him through the wilderness and sought his life. Joseph remained faithful to God after being betrayed by his own brothers, sold into slavery, falsely accused, and forgotten in prison. Peter failed spectacularly, denying Christ three times, yet was restored rather than discarded. Then, of course, there is Jesus Himself, who remained faithful to His Father and to us despite betrayal, abandonment, injustice, torture, and ultimately the Cross.

The more I reflected, the more it struck me that the entire biblical story is really the story of God's steadfast loyalty toward people who repeatedly wandered away from Him. He disciplines. He corrects. He calls us to repentance. Yet He never abandons His covenant. His love remains steadfast. His faithfulness does not depend upon ours.

If loyalty matters that much to God, why shouldn't it matter that much to us?

Aristotle Was Right

My thoughts then drifted to Aristotle. More than two thousand years ago he observed that most friendships never become truly virtuous. Instead, they remain relationships based upon utility or pleasure. We stay connected because someone is useful to us or because they're enjoyable to be around. There is nothing inherently wrong with either kind of friendship, but both are fragile. The moment the usefulness fades or the fun disappears; the relationship often fades with it.

Virtuous friendships are different. They seek the good of the other person. They endure hardship. They speak truth even when truth is uncomfortable. They forgive. They remain committed when commitment becomes costly. In other words, virtue requires loyalty.

I wonder if Aristotle understood something we've largely forgotten. Relationships that are built only upon convenience seldom survive inconvenience.

Why We Disconnect

As I thought about that, another psychologist came to mind. Murray Bowen described what he called emotional cutoff. When anxiety rises within a relationship, many of us instinctively distance ourselves. We withdraw. We stop calling. We avoid difficult conversations. Sometimes there are legitimate reasons

Loyalty: When Holding On Would Be Harder Than Letting Go
-Jeffrey E. Hansen, Ph.D.

to separate from unhealthy or abusive relationships. Wisdom certainly requires healthy boundaries. But I also wonder if many of us have become too quick to disconnect. Rather than working through disappointment, misunderstanding, or hurt, we simply cut bait and move on. Bowen understood that emotional distance often relieves anxiety temporarily, but it rarely produces genuine healing.

From a NeuroFaith perspective, that makes perfect sense. God designed us for secure attachment. Our nervous systems flourish when we know someone is dependable, someone who will remain present while also speaking truth. Loyalty isn't simply a moral virtue. It is one of the foundations upon which trust, resilience, and healthy relationships are built. Betrayal wounds us so deeply because it strikes at one of our most fundamental needs, the need to know that someone will remain committed to our ultimate good even when life becomes difficult.

Ultimately, that's what NeuroFaith has always been about. It is the journey back from disconnection. Disconnection from our God-given identity. Disconnection from ourselves. Disconnection from one another. Disconnection from God Himself. Healing always moves us back toward connection.

My Own Battle

As I continued my walk, I realized this wasn't merely a theological reflection or a psychological observation. It was deeply personal.

I wish I could tell you that I've always lived this way. I haven't.

I fight hard for loyalty, but I am by no means perfect. I get hurt. As I jokingly tell friends, I get a little "butt hurt." I can find myself stacking up wrongs in my own mind, quietly building a case for why it's time to jettison the relationship and move on. If I'm honest, I suspect all of us have a little of that tendency within us. We see the faults of another person more clearly than we see our own. We allow disappointment to overshadow years of faithfulness, and before long we're tempted to disconnect.

But God calls us to something higher.

He calls us to something far more beautiful than simply protecting our pride. He calls us to restore what the enemy is constantly trying to destroy.

The enemy has never been a fan of loyalty. He delights in betrayal, division, suspicion, resentment, and disconnection. He not only amplifies our inner critic, constantly reminding us of our failures, but he also fuels the outer critic, encouraging us to project our disappointments and frustrations onto those around us. "They're not meeting your needs. They've hurt you. They're not worth the effort anymore. Be done with them."

The examples throughout Scripture point us in another direction. Ruth stayed with Naomi when it would have been easier to leave. David refused to destroy Saul when he had every opportunity to do so. Time and again God pursued people who had wandered from Him. And ultimately Christ remained faithful to us when every reason, from a purely human perspective, would have justified turning away.

Choosing Loyalty

I've experienced relationships that couldn't be restored. In some, I carried part of the blame. In others, I did not. I think of my first business partner, Jim. I reached back out because I wanted to make things right. He graciously told me he simply didn't have the time or emotional energy. I respected that, but I also walked away knowing I had at least tried.

Perhaps part of my conviction comes from watching my identical twin brother, Gregg, slowly disconnect from so many people who loved him. I still miss him every single day. His life continually reminds me that isolation rarely heals us. More often, it quietly deepens our wounds. Connection has always been one of God's greatest gifts.

This is why I believe the battle for loyalty is so important. It is a psychological battle. It is a physiological battle involving our nervous systems and our deepest attachment needs. But even beyond that, it is a spiritual battle.

I write these words not only to you, my dear reader. I write them to myself.

Even in the Garden of Gethsemane there was wrestling. *"Father, if You are willing, take this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done."* The struggle was real, but love proved greater than fear. Thank God for that. His willingness to remain faithful changed history forever.

Perhaps that's our calling as well. To die a little to our pride. To die a little to our ego. To die a little to our insistence on always being right. And instead, whenever wisdom and safety allow, to choose loyalty. To choose truth. To choose grace. To choose connection.

Maybe that's my challenge for all of us today. The next time you're tempted to walk away, pause. Pray. Ask yourself whether God is calling you to protect yourself, or whether He may be inviting you to take one more step toward reconciliation.

Our world has enough betrayal.

Perhaps what it needs now is a little more loyalty.