

Can We Really Trust God?

Romans 4: 13-25

When Communist forces invaded Vietnam in the 1950s, Hien Pham, like many Vietnamese Christians, was arrested and jailed for his beliefs. After his release from prison, Pham made plans to escape Vietnam. He secretly began building a boat. Fifty-three fellow Vietnamese made plans to escape with him.

One day, four Vietcong soldiers came to Pham's house and confronted him. They heard he was planning an escape. Was it true? Of course, Hien Pham lied to them. If he had told the truth, the Vietcong might have killed him and arrested the other fifty-three participants. But after the soldiers left, Pham felt uneasy. Had God really wanted him to lie? Didn't he trust that God would provide for him under any circumstances? Even though it made no logical sense, Pham believed that God wanted him to tell the truth, even at the risk of his own life. So Pham resolved that if the Vietcong returned, he would confess his escape plans.

What would you do in Pham's place? What happens when our fears collide with our faith? Do we live according to the best that we know or do we settle for something less?

The great novelist Flannery O'Connor has written these words in one of her novels, "**You shall know and do the truth . . . and the truth will make you odd**". We may feel odd in today's world when we live truthfully.

In 1998, for example, 20,000 middle-and high-schoolers were surveyed by the **Josephson Institute of Ethics**--a non-profit organization in Marina Del Rey, Calif., devoted to character education. **92%** of the teenagers admitted having lied to their parents in the previous year, and **73%** characterized themselves as "**serial liars**", meaning they told lies weekly. Despite these admissions, **91%** of all respondents said they were "**satisfied with my own ethics and character**". That's a scary thing--when we knowingly misrepresent the truth and we are "**satisfied with my own ethics and character**".

Today, our Bible passage is about Abraham, one of the early **"fools for God."** Abraham is seventy-five years old when God first calls on him to leave behind his home and extended family to go to a land God has chosen for him. God also gave Abram a promise: if he would obey God, God would make him and his descendants into a great nation.

Here is the first place where doubt could have crept in. The very laws of biology and nature that God put into place seem to work against this promise. Abraham was seventy-five years old--and had no children.

Twenty-four years passed. Twenty-four years of Abram faithfully following God's leading. Twenty-four years of joys and sorrows, peace and turmoil. Twenty-four years of waiting for God to fulfill God's promise.

Comedienne Kathy Buckley says, **"I have learned that faith is having the patience to wait, knowing that all things will be done in God's time. I only wished I owned one of [God's] watches."**

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, God reminded him that he would father a mighty nation. And this time, Abram fell on his face and laughed. Wouldn't you? Abram and Sarai were well past the age of bearing children. The idea of starting a family now sounded more like a pipe dream than a promise.

If we were to go through the Bible and make note of all God's promises to us, we might laugh too.

- Did God really mean that He would never leave us nor forsake us?
- Is God's grace really sufficient to meet ALL our needs?
- Can God really make all things work together for the good of those who love Him?

Like the promise to Abram of a son in his old age, God's promises to us are vast and awesome--beyond our comprehension. For this reason, few who claim to follow Christ really base their lives on God's promises. When we come to a crisis we are more likely to choose the path of least resistance, the way of the crowd. What feels good? What looks right to the neighbors?

What does faith look like today?

- Faith looks like the family who denies themselves a newer car or a bigger house in order to tithe to the Lord's work. They believe in a promise they cannot see, that they are storing up for themselves treasures in Heaven.
- Faith looks like the young man or woman who, in the face of peer pressure and socially-sanctioned promiscuity, chooses to save sex for marriage. They believe in the promise that their body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, and that God can help them resist temptation.
- Faith looks like the businessperson who leaves the office at a reasonable hour to make his or her family a priority, because they believe that godly children are a greater legacy than a plaque on the office door or a stock option.
- Faith looks like the employee who does not pad the expense account or steal clients or take office supplies home, even if "everyone else is doing it". They believe the promise that, ***"The Lord rewards every man for his righteousness and his faithfulness"***. (1 Samuel 26: 23).

We miss out on an abundant life of adventure and peace when we don't choose the way of faith!

Back to Abram and his fit of laughter. Listen to our Bible passage for today:

"Hoping against hope, [Abraham] believed that he would become "the father of many nations' . . . He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. Therefore his faith "was reckoned to him as righteousness." (Romans 4: 13-25). [NIV]

Abraham is a powerful example of this eternal faith principle:

FAITH IS NOT BASED ON OUR EXTERNAL CIRCUMSTANCES. IT IS BASED ON THE NATURE OF GOD.

Look again at verses 19 and 21:

"He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised."

Pastor Peter Lewis makes the point that the Tempter's greatest weapon against believers is the weapon of doubting. No matter how mature our faith may be, we will still be nagged by small doubts.

- Is God real?

- Is God really good?

This question lies at the heart of the believer. A believer may be immune to every other temptation, yet still lie awake nights wrestling with their doubts.

In twenty-four years of waiting, Abraham had plenty of time for doubts. He had hundreds of opportunities to turn his back on God and go his own way. Yet, the Scriptures tell us that not only didn't he waver in his faith, but that his faith actually grew stronger as time went on, as he gave glory to God. Abraham's story is powerful and exciting.

Why did Paul write about FAITH to the Roman church? The church at Rome was a mixture of Jews and Gentiles Christians. The Jews still followed the laws of Moses in addition to the commands and precepts of Christ. This caused a serious rift in the early Roman church. In his letter to the Roman church, Paul was demonstrating that from the beginning of time, our acceptance by God has been through faith, not the law. It was faith that saved Abraham and his descendants, it was faith that made him the father of a great nation, and it is faith that saves us today through Christ Jesus.

In fact, the book of Second Corinthians reveals this amazing truth when it says,

"For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we preached among you . . . was not Yes and No; but in him it is always Yes. For all the promises of God find their Yes in him." (II Corinthians 1: 19-20a).

All the promises of God find their Yes in Jesus. He is the final fulfillment of the promise to the descendants of Abraham, the Jews, and to all of humankind.

- It is faith in Jesus that saves us.
- Faith that he walked in our shoes,
- Faith that he bore the penalty for our sins,
- Faith that he died,
- Faith that he rose to life again,

- Faith that he intercedes on our behalf in heaven, and
- Faith that someday he will return to claim his own.

We never resolved the story of our friend, Hien Pham, did we? Pham finished building his boat, and his friends made the final plans for their daring escape. To their horror, the Vietcong soldiers returned and demanded to know if the escape rumors were true. Hoping against hope, Hien Pham confessed his plans to escape. Imagine Pham's surprise when the soldiers replied, "**Take us with you!**" That evening, Hien Pham, his fifty-three friends, and four Vietcong soldiers made a daring escape under cover of night in a homemade boat. But wait, that's not the end of the story! They sailed straight into a violent storm. Pham reports that they surely would have been lost, if not for the expert sailing skills of ""you guessed it"" the four Vietcong soldiers. The escapees landed safely in Thailand. Eventually, Hien Pham immigrated to the United States, where he made a new life for himself.

Hoping against hope. Being fully convinced that God is able to do what God has promised. Believing and acting against doubt!

What does faith look like? A white-haired old man with a goofy grin on his face as he delights in his squirming baby boy.

What does faith look like? You and I setting aside our own fears and surrendering our lives to a Savior who has promised to remain with us always. I pray that in the defining moments of your life, you will choose the way of faith also. Because GOD IS GOOD ALL THE TIME AND ALL THE TIME...

Pastor Larry Smith

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