

God's Faithfulness: What Does It Mean?

By

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Introduction

The book of Joshua is really the culmination of God's promise to Abraham, as depicted in Genesis 12, 13, 15 and 17. As I read the book recently, one aspect of God's character kept speaking to me: "God is faithful". As I thought about it, I had some questions: Didn't Abraham, to whom God made the Promised Land covenant, die hundreds of years before Joshua and the Israelites entered the Promised Land? Didn't Israel's sin cause them to wander in the desert for 40 years and delay the fulfillment of the promise? Didn't Joshua and the Israelites have to fight for their land once they got there? Why didn't God allow Abraham to enjoy "milk and the honey"?

I realized that my expectation of how God would keep the promise to Abraham was different than the reality of what happened. In fact, my expectation of how God will answer my prayers is usually different than what He does. And I think this point is what causes many Christians to give up their faith in God and doubt Him during troubling times.

This lesson is a study in God's faithfulness and our expectations. The goal is to better understand the character of God so that our faith does not waver during difficult times.

Scriptures Used in This Lesson

Psalms 36:5

Psalms 100:5

Psalms 143:1

Genesis 12: 2 – 3, 6 – 7

Genesis 15: 1 – 21

Genesis 17: 1 - 8, 15 – 22

Romans 8:29

Joshua 24: 1 - 4, 11 – 13

Faithfulness – What Does It Mean?

One of the key attributes of God's character that every Christian must understand is His faithfulness. The Bible clearly and repeatedly declares God's faithfulness. Here are just a few passages:

Psalms 36:5

Thy mercy, O LORD, is in the heavens; and thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds.

(this verse expresses that the extent of God's faithfulness is great)

Psalm 100:5

For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations.

(the word *truth* is the same Hebrew word translated *faithfulness* in Psalm 36:5, 'emuwnah)

Psalm 143:1

Hear my prayer, O LORD, give ear to my supplications: in thy faithfulness answer me, and in thy righteousness.

But what exactly does it mean that God is faithful, especially as it pertains to our daily lives? The Hebrew word used in these passages and others in the Old Testament is 'emuwnah. The word means:

Firmness, fidelity, steadfastness, steadiness

Today, when we use the word “fidelity”, we usually think of “quality”, as in *high fidelity stereo*. But fidelity actually means:

- The quality or state of being faithful
- Accuracy in details: exactness

According to [Webster's Online Dictionary](#), fidelity:

“implies strict and continuing faithfulness to an obligation, trust, or duty”

These definitions are important for us as we enter each new day. God is strict and continually faithful to his Word. By reading how God's faithfulness was revealed in Abraham's life, we can better understand how His faithfulness can be revealed in our lives. Let's read God's promise to Abraham. Read Genesis 12: 2 – 3, 6 – 7, 15: 1 – 21.

The covenant between God and Abraham (and his descendants) is presented in detail in these passages. God spoke to Abram(ham) on several occasions around 2100 BC. In Genesis 15, Abraham's expectation was that Eliezer, his servant, would be his heir, since he and his wife were childless. But God told him “a son coming from your own body will be your heir” (Gen. 15:4). Then God did something interesting to give Abram an idea of the magnitude of the promise. Read verse 15:5.

Have you ever been out camping or out in a rural area on a clear night? The sky is full of stars. Some parts of the sky have so many stars that it looks “cloudy”. As a child, I used to wonder, “Man...where did all these stars come from?” I was overwhelmed by the magnitude of what I saw.

While viewing the sky from inside a city, your vision is obscured by the city lights which surround you. At best, you can see just a handful of only the brightest stars. But out in

the country, without the city lights to interfere with your vision, you see that the sky is full of stars.

Just as the city lights interfere with our vision of the stars in the sky, the daily trails of life can obscure our “vision” of God’s faithfulness. The city lights are analogous to the concerns and activities of daily life. We get so focused on work, school, family, friends, bills, relationships, and life’s daily issues that we lose site of God’s big picture in our lives, as well as His daily, continual blessings. In a sense, we can’t see God’s “bigness”; many times, we can’t see God at all.

Key Point: We are prevented from seeing God and His faithfulness many times because we are consumed with life’s daily issues.

There are several reasons why we get “blinded by the city lights”, i.e., consumed by life’s daily issues. A few of these are listed below:

Emotions: The more emotional we are about a situation or person, the harder it is to see God. Worry, anger, and fear are common. Uncertainty, which is really a lack of confidence in God, can open the door to a number of other emotions, the most powerful of which is fear.

Pride: Many times we think, “I can handle this on my own.”, and bypass God. We ignore the fact that we may not know all the facts or that God may want us to handle the situation in a different manner than which we are inclined. Pride, based on our perceived intellectual abilities, can also “blind us”.

Lack of Relationship: If we have been lax in our personal relationship with the Lord, then we will have a tendency to respond more “out of the flesh” as opposed to “out of the Spirit”. (You can’t trust whom you don’t know).

Lack of Knowledge: If we don’t know biblical principles, then we don’t know His ways. If we don’t understand His ways, then we will “miss Him” as He works in our lives. (Lack of Knowledge is really related to our relationship with Him).

Disbelief: Belief in God is critical in seeing His hand in your life. If you don’t believe that God will work on your behalf or He is in control, you will miss Him all together.

Disobedience: If you are willfully acting in disobedience to God, His Word, or His Ways, its like putting on sunglasses at night...there is no way you will see the “stars of His faithfulness”.

*Which one of the above has recently “obscured your vision of God”?
Why? What did it take for you to finally see God? Can you think of other things which can “obscure your vision” of God working in your daily issues?*

When Abraham looked up at the sky as God commanded, he saw millions upon millions of stars, and understood that what God had promised him was “big”...very big. And then Abraham did something remarkable that changed his entire life. Read Genesis 15:6.

Abraham believed God...he took God at His Word.

Do you think Abraham understood how God was going to keep His promise? Approximately how old were Abraham and Sarah at the time? Is it common for people that old to have children? What do you think Abraham's belief in God was based upon, i.e., why do you think he believed God?

The last question is an important question for all of us...why did Abraham believe God? And more importantly, what keeps us from believing in God? Think about it...God shows us His glory (things which only He can receive credit) everyday. We experience it in the form of comfort, food, shelter, clothing, family, the air we breathe, the fact that we are still alive today, past miracles, as well as many others – these are the “stars” in our lives, and we don't believe He can handle our present situation.

Abraham had less than we have, as a “believer”. He had the presence of God and the stars in the sky. We have past blessings, His Indwelling Spirit, His Word (the Bible), preachers, and teachers...and we still don't see the stars sometimes.

What keeps us from believing God like Abraham did in Genesis 15:6?

Expectations

Many times we lose faith in a faithful God because He doesn't meet our expectations. During times of trials, we want to get out of our “mess” as quickly as possible. We don't want to feel any pain or discomfort; we want immediate gratification. *So we expect God to move on our behalf quickly.* And herein lies the problem.

Our anticipation of God's movement is, “Now.” We don't want to wait. The longer we wait, the more we have to suffer. We ignore the fact that God, Who is sovereign, may have a bigger purpose in mind. We ignore the fact that He knows the future and we don't. We ignore the fact that He helped us in the past and is more than capable of helping us now. We want deliverance now.

Read Romans 8:29. The Bible says that we are being conformed to the image of Christ. The word “conformed” comes from the Greek word “summorphos” which means “having the same form as another”. This “transformation” from “us” to “Christ-likeness” takes time. Some aspects of our nature transform quickly; other aspects take longer. But the key is to know God is faithful, i.e., He has a strict and continuing faithfulness to an obligation, trust, or duty to us as His children.

Just as our children sometimes have to wait for what is best for them, we sometimes have to wait for God's best for us.

Key Point: Sometimes we have to wait for God's best and/or for Him to fulfill His purpose in our lives.

Why don't children like to wait? Why don't we (adults) like to wait? What can help us be more patient?

Another area where our expectations are not met involves the "object of our faith". We become disappointed with God and miss His faithfulness because the object of our faith is "God acting quickly" as opposed to "God having a strict and continuing faithfulness to an obligation, trust, or duty to us as His children, i.e., "time" verses God's character. And this leads to disappointment.

Key Point: Having faith in anything other than God's character or Word, will lead to disappointment.

Key Point: God moves on our behalf based on His character, purpose, and His love.

I recently came out of a season in my life that consisted of a series of serious trials and tribulations that lasted 11 years. I couldn't not see "the end of the tunnel". I did not know when God would deliver me. I finally came to a point where I had to decide to trust in God's character (and Word) as opposed to my desired timing for deliverance. Everyday turned into a decision to trust God - not a feeling, but a *decision*.

Now I am in a season of blessings and God showed Himself to be faithful...again.

Abraham's descendants finally conquered and settled in the Promised Land under Joshua's leadership (Joshua 24: 1 - 4, 11 - 13). Joshua lived around 1400 BC. God made His promise to Abraham around 2100 BC. So God remained faithful to a promise He made 700 years earlier.

Think about it - Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had all died long before the Israelites settled in the Promised Land. There was no one alive who heard the Promise. But God's nature involves a strict and continuing faithfulness to an obligation, trust, or duty to His children. He remained faithful and kept His promise.

Summary

God loves you. Don't give up on Him during times of trials. Have faith in His character and Word, which never change. Trust in Him, not your timeframe; and one day you will see the goodness of your Heavenly Father revealed in your life.