

“Growing in Faith”

Hebrews 11:8-16

Often God gives us a promise we are not capable of receiving at the time. What He wants to do for us simply requires much more faith than we have. We hear His promise and are delighted by it, but even as we listen we may recognize it will take more faith than we find inside for something so great to happen. Some people become overwhelmed by the thought and try to forget they ever heard a promise. Some wait passively for a period of time and then if nothing happens give up hope. But some believe God anyway, trusting He will somehow work things out. That's the kind of people Abraham and Sarah were—people who responded with whatever faith they had, and then refused to give up on God long enough to allow Him to grow them into different people. You see, He had to change them before He could work that miracle for them. And they gave Him the time to do it, and obeyed step by step as He put them through a series of faith-enlarging tests. So, long after most people would have give up, Abraham and Sarah held their miracle in their arms. Today let's learn from their example.

A. When God speaks a promise to us He's telling us what He wants to do through us if we'll cooperate with Him.

1. He's not announcing destiny, He's announcing intention. We must cooperate with His intention for it to become destiny.
2. In order to receive what He's promised we must (Heb 10:36, 39):
 - Do the will of God
 - Endure
3. So, when God speaks a promise:
 - Some refuse to do the will of God and nothing even begins
 - Some start out but do not endure, so as time passes the process dies
 - Some obey and keep on obeying thus entering a process of growing faith
4. God's will for us will never change, but unless we choose to enter His training process much of His will for us will never be realized.

B. When God speaks a promise to us He also accepts the responsibility to grow our faith until we are capable of fully receiving His will.

1. Faith is a level of trust that grows through testing, obedience and patient waiting.
2. Very few people have the capacity to receive what God has promised at the moment when He first speaks it to them. God knows that but He also knows how to grow our faith.
3. Faith comes to life when we hear God speak to us (Ro 10:17) but it grows stronger when we endure through trials.

C. When God speaks a promise to us He already has in mind a series of preparatory tests that He plans to put us through.

1. If we cooperate, these tests will transform us into people who are able to receive His highest purpose.
2. Sadly, stubbornness and fear cause many to settle for far less. They are left wondering why those promises never arrived.



LIFE LESSONS

WITH DR. STEVE SCHELL

Teaching the Bible
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D. Let's take Abraham and Sarah as an example:

TEST #1: leave home and family

- Acts 7:2-4 — southern Mesopotamia to northern Syria to Canaan
- Genesis 12:1 — I'll give you a national homeland

TEST #2: This is it!

- Genesis 13:14-18

TEST #3: You and Sarah will have a baby who will be the start of an entire nation.

- Genesis 11:30 — Sarah was barren
- Years passed without a child
- Genesis 15:1-6 — Descendants (seed) so numerous they can't be counted
- Genesis 16:1, 2 — Frustration led to rationalizing
 - Hagar, an Egyptian maid
 - Ishmael
 - Troubled family relations
- Names changed: Abram (exalted father) to Abraham (father of many); Sarai (my princess) to Sarah (princess)
- Genesis 17 — circumcision
- Genesis 17:17 — Abraham laughed
- Genesis 18:11-15 — Sarah laughed
- Abraham prayed for Abimelech so that his household bore children (Ge 20:17, 18)
- Genesis 21:1-8 — twenty-five years later Isaac was born. He's named "Isaac" because everyone will laugh when they hear a 100 year old man and a 90 year old woman bore a child.

LESSONS:

1. It took 25 years to prepare them to receive the miracle God wanted to give.
2. God was not a bit upset with them for taking so long. In fact, He knew the appointed time and started working on them early enough so they would be ready.
3. God led them step-by-step through one test after another so they could grow strong in faith.
 - Romans 4:16-22 — "hope upon hope"
 - Hebrews 11:11 — Sarah believed God to transform her internal organs
4. Abraham died without seeing all the promises fulfilled, but God continued on to keep His promises. Faith lights a fire that keeps burning long after you're gone to heaven.

E. God works the same way with us.

1. He gives a promise knowing we are not capable of receiving it.
2. He leads us into a series of tests that will grow our faith.
3. The passage of time is of little concern to Him. He's not angry or disappointed. He's our Father.
4. He repeatedly reminds us of His promises all the way through.
5. Much of what He's promised will not be fulfilled in our lifetime.

F. When God grows our faith we find the process drains ambition and greed out of our hearts until we are left standing in the midst of our blessings longing for heaven.

1. The only thing that really satisfies is God Himself (Heb 11:13-16).

G. Questions

1. Can you name a promise God has made to you that is yet to be fulfilled?
2. Has God ever put you through a series of tests to grow your faith? Tell us how these changed you.
3. Name an area where your faith is larger than it once was. What made it grow?