

Waiting for the Promise  
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Genesis 15:1–7 (ESV)

Can you think of a difficult time in your life when you began to wonder just WHEN God would come through for you? You still believed God would fix your problem, but it felt like it was taking forever. Having lived through that, **what advice would you give to another believer on how to get through such a time?**

There's a term those times when we're waiting on God and all hope seems lost. A 16th century poet named John of the Cross coined the term: "dark night of the soul." History confirms that many of God's most obedient servants have gone through that "dark night of the soul."

Hudson Taylor, the great missionary to China, once said to a friend, "I cannot read; I cannot think; I cannot even pray; but I can trust."<sup>1</sup>

Genesis chapter fifteen reveals a "dark night" in Abram's life. It also shows us how God himself used a dark night to reassure Abram of this truth: It may be dark, but God is still there.

**15** After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great."<sup>2</sup> But Abram said, "O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?"<sup>3</sup> And Abram said, "Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir."<sup>4</sup> And behold, the word of the Lord came to him: "This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir."<sup>5</sup> And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."<sup>6</sup> And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.<sup>7</sup> And he said to him, "I am the Lord who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess."

- Verse one begins with, “After these things.” It begs the question: What has happened to Abram since we left him in chapter twelve?
- It had been about ten years since God first promised the land and an heir.
- Some good things had happened:
  - Abram had experienced God’s blessings in the form of increased wealth, as measured in livestock and land (13:1-18), in the form of military victory over various kings allied against him (14:1-16), and in the form of wisdom in honoring the right king (14:17-24).<sup>2</sup>
- Some troubling things had happened too:
  - In Egypt, he felt the need to protect himself by claiming Sarai was his sister instead of his wife (12:10-20). Though God worked the situation in Abram’s favor, Abram later experienced the capture of Lot and his possessions by marauding kings (14:1-16).<sup>3</sup> Abram rescued Lot after a bloody battle with those kings.
- It had been ten years of ups and downs, but more “wins” than “losses.”
- God has kept Abram and his family safe and even made him rich.
- You would think Abram would be celebrating Thanksgiving. But look at verse one, God speaks to Abram saying: “fear not...I am your shield...your reward will be great” **What do God’s words in verse one tell us about Abram’s emotional state?**
- Verse two: Even though Abram had accumulated wealth and had been protected from harm, what was his fear in verse two?
- The NLT puts it this way: “Lord, what good are all your blessings when I don’t even have a son?”
- **What conclusion had Abram jumped to in verses two and three?**
- Eliezer was Abram’s most trusted servant (Gen. 24.) According to custom if Abram died without a son, his eldest servant would be his heir.<sup>4</sup>
- *“It’s been ten years, Lord. No kids. I guess ole Eliezer gets my stuff.”*
- Abram is really down! **What is he REALLY saying to God?**

- Ever been there? After a long period of waiting on God, instead of trusting God have you ever shifted from what you KNOW to what you THINK?
- Quote from Bryan Loritts to pastors this week: *“When going through difficulties what you KNOW should TRUMP what you THINK.”*
- When God has made us a promise, He WILL keep it. To be clear, he may not keep it in the way we think He should, and it’s rarely on our timetable.

Isaiah 55:9 (ESV)

<sup>9</sup> For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

- Verse four: God reiterated His specific promise: “Your own son.”
- Verse five: God used creation to illustrate the promise of a “great nation.”
- It says God took Abram outside for some stargazing.
- The Lord injects some humor mixed with sarcasm: “Count those stars!”
- **What was the Lord really saying to Abram?**
- Verse six: We could write a whole book about this verse.
- “Abram believed the Lord, and he (God) credited it to him as righteousness.”
- It doesn’t say Abram obeyed so God made him righteous. It doesn’t say Abram was a good man so God made him righteous. It doesn’t say Abram had done everything God told him to do so God made him righteous.
- **Why is it a good thing it wasn’t about what Abram had done?**
- “God credited him righteousness.” **What does that mean?**
- This foundational truth is repeated three times in the New Testament (Rom. 4:3; Gal. 3:6; James 2:23) to show that righteousness is reckoned in return for faith<sup>5</sup>
- We call this the doctrine of justification by grace through faith. Righteousness (salvation) isn’t earned by doing. It’s received by believing.
- Technical point: I personally don’t believe verse six is Abram’s moment of salvation. After reading some good scholars on this,

it seems clear he had believed God before he left on his journey. This appears to be a “rededication” as we call it in the Baptist church.

- Let’s get back to the context of Abram’s situation in this chapter.
- God had been faithful to Abram in so many ways. But there was still no heir and no promised land. Let’s be fair, we’d be discouraged too!
- Think about a time when we’re waiting on God to fulfill His promises.
- Think about the voice in your head when we get discouraged while waiting on God. **Whose voice is it, God’s or mine?** When I repeat to myself what God has said we call that FAITH. **When I repeat my own thoughts to myself what do we call that?**

Warren Wiersbe has a good commentary on this:

*People with faith are also people with feelings, and feelings must not be discredited or ignored. Many orthodox Christians are prone to emphasize the mind and will and minimize the emotions, but this is a grave error that can lead to an unbalanced life.*

*We are made in the image of God, and this includes our emotions. While it is unwise to trust your emotions and bypass your mind, or let your emotions get out of control, it is also unwise to deny and suppress your emotions and become a religious robot. In the Psalms, David and the other writers told God honestly how they felt about Him, themselves, and their circumstances; and this is a good example for us to follow. Jesus was a real man, and He expressed openly His emotions of joy, sorrow, holy anger, and love.<sup>6</sup>*

Wiersbe continues:

*You certainly ought to “listen to your feelings” and be honest about them. “When a person assumes responsibility for his feelings,” writes psychiatrist David Viscott, “he assumes responsibility for his world.” But don’t stop there: Take time to listen to God, and receive His words of encouragement. This is the first time in the Bible you find the phrase “the word of the Lord came”; it is used more than 100 times in the Old Testament. The faith that conquers fear is faith in the Word, not faith in feelings.<sup>7</sup>*

- When you and I find ourselves discouraged while waiting on God, we need to acknowledge our feelings; share them with Him; then remind ourselves of what He's said in His word and what He's done in our past.
- In the rest of this chapter God not only reassured Abram with words, He sealed his covenant in a very solemn ceremony.
- Then God came to Abram in a dream to show him what was to come.
- This wasn't a storybook happy ending. God gave him both the good news and the bad news. Good news for Abram personally, but 400 years of bad news for his people. Through it all God's promise to deliver them would stand.

Genesis 15:13–16 (NLT)

<sup>13</sup> Then the Lord said to Abram, "You can be sure that your descendants will be strangers in a foreign land, where they will be oppressed as slaves for 400 years. <sup>14</sup> But I will punish the nation that enslaves them, and in the end they will come away with great wealth. <sup>15</sup> (As for you, you will die in peace and be buried at a ripe old age.) <sup>16</sup> After four generations your descendants will return here to this land, for the sins of the Amorites do not yet warrant their destruction."

- Abram could believe and accept the news of enslavement and oppression as God's plan because the Lord was showing him His sovereign control over the course of human history. We too can trust God, knowing He has a sovereign plan even when we do not understand all of its particulars.<sup>8</sup>

So, What's the Takeaway?

- When God seems to be taking a long time to come through, we need to be sure we're operating on FAITH instead of FEELINGS.
- We need to ACKNOWLEDGE our feelings to God...don't stuff 'em down!
- Then we need to go stargazing like Abram to remind ourselves that the God who put all those stars up there will do what He promised.
- Maybe not in the exact way we imagined and rarely on our timetable, but He WILL come through.
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- <sup>1</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1991). *Be Obedient* (p. 40). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.
- <sup>2</sup> Explore the Bible – Lifeway – Waiting for the Promise p. 81
- <sup>3</sup> Explore the Bible – Lifeway – Waiting for the Promise p. 82
- <sup>4</sup> Life Application Study Bible – Genesis 15 – P. 31
- <sup>5</sup> Ross, A. P. (1985). Genesis. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 55). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.
- <sup>6</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1991). *Be Obedient* (p. 43). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.
- <sup>7</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1991). *Be Obedient* (pp. 43–44). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.
- <sup>8</sup> Explore the Bible – Lifeway – Waiting for the Promise p. 88