

Trust

Genesis 12-23

Central Idea: Faith in God is a journey of learning who God is and what He does.

Introduction

Some of my friends know very much my aversion to a certain restaurant I met in Missouri named CiCi's Pizza. It's a restaurant based on the buffet model, except with pizza. That's all they did: any kind of pizza you could think of, all out in a buffet so you could eat to your heart's content. So I went there, and my first time with friends, I got food poisoning, was up all night with all kinds of issues. But I'll give anything a second chance. So I went back, this time with our youth group...and then I spent a couple days on the mend again. I've given that restaurant four attempts, and gotten food poisoning three of them.

Repeated actions help to either engender trust in us or to destroy trust. By nature, and because we have been hurt so many times, we don't tend to give things another chance. I'm never going back to CiCi's Pizza again. Scarred me for life. Didn't bother most everyone else I went with, but a select few of us learned to go to another restaurant. It's so bad that there's a place called CC's Pizza here in town, and it's fabulous! But I was afraid to check it out because of the other restaurant. I'm glad I gave it a shot, because it's some of the best food I've had in a long time!

In the same way, as we look at Abraham's life, a man that is called the Father of the Faith in the New Testament, we see a man who is meeting God for the first time, and through repeated interactions, Abraham is learning what kind of God God is. As we look at his life today, I want to show you how God never disappointed Abraham, and Abraham found that he could fully trust in God. While many people let us down when we give them a bit of trust, God never lets us down!

Text – Genesis 17:15-21

¹⁵ And God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. ¹⁶ I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her." ¹⁷ Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, "Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?" ¹⁸ And Abraham said to God, "Oh that Ishmael might live before you!" ¹⁹ God said, "No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him. ²⁰ As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I have blessed

him and will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly. He shall father twelve princes, and I will make him into a great nation. ²¹ But I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this time next year.”

Text – Genesis 18:9-15

⁹ They said to him, “Where is Sarah your wife?” And he said, “She is in the tent.” ¹⁰ The LORD said, “I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son.” And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him. ¹¹ Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years. The way of women had ceased to be with Sarah. ¹² So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, “After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?” ¹³ The LORD said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?’ ¹⁴ Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son.” ¹⁵ But Sarah denied it, saying, “I did not laugh,” for she was afraid. He said, “No, but you did laugh.”

- I. We must trust God to provide for us.
 - A. He will take us to the place He wants us to go (12:1-9).
 - i. When Abraham’s story starts, God commands him to go to a land that He will point out for Abraham. We learn from the summary of Teran’s life, his father, in Genesis 11:31 that they were headed in the general direction of Canaan already, but stopped in Haran and settled there.
 - ii. They started in Ur of the Chaldeans, which is near the area of Babylon. Abraham’s story starts with a bang as God calls Abraham to follow him almost blindly to a land he can call his own.
 - iii. **Illustration:** In a sense, God was asking Abraham to write a blank check. He didn’t explain to Abraham what it would cost him, how many years he would wander or anything else. He just asked for Abraham to sign off on the adventure, and Abraham was willing to do that!
 - iv. Can you imagine what it would have been like, for God to first show up in Abraham’s life, and Abraham is just getting used to God’s person and character, and then God calls him on a journey in which he will have to step out and trust that God will not take him somewhere he doesn’t want to end up?
 - v. And yet, an element of faith is like that, the stepping out and hoping that God knows what he’s doing. In those beginning stages of faith, there’s a lot of doubt that God has our best in mind, knows what we need, or anything else.
 - vi. This is the time in the story of our budding faith where the battle between doubt and faith begins. Rest assured, doubt never leaves us. We will restle

with it in every step that we take. But faith will be our choice over and above doubt!

- vii. **Application:** There is nothing wrong with doubt, especially in the beginning stages of stepping out in obedience. But doubt must not keep us from taking that step toward God's command for our lives! Analyze your doubt. Don't let it rule you.

B. He will prosper the work of our hands (13:1-18).

- i. We come to a part in the story a bit later where Abraham and Lot are having some trouble. The trouble is what we like to call "good problems." It seems that in their journey of faith, God has prospered both of them.
- ii. So we learn another lesson in our walk of faith from Abraham and Lot. What do you do when things are actually going really well? We seem to be creatures who are uncomfortable in the absence of adversity.
- iii. Lot's herdsmen and Abraham's herdsmen begin to feel the growing pains of success that came with stepping out in faith, and now they are at each other's throats.
- iv. Faith has its ebb and flow, its ups and downs, mountains and valleys. In the times of plenty, success, happiness and victory, it's so easy for us to just coast along.
- v. But we must be prepared for adversity to return, because one way or another, it will find us. In the times of victory, we must not get the idea that we made that happen.
- vi. **Application:** God is always the one to whom we give credit for good times in our walk with Him. When everything's going right, it's not because of what we are doing. It's because of God's power, grace and goodness in our lives. Let us never take credit in the good times or get away from trusting in God. The challenge to faith in the times of victory is to continue to trust in God rather than in our own abilities.

C. He will bless us through His servants (14:17-24; 23:1-20).

- i. Several times in Abraham's life, he is blessed by others. One of those instances is when Melchizadek, an intriguing and mysterious priest of Salem (later Jerusalem) blesses him.
- ii. Abraham has just won a great battle to save Lot from his enemies, has just given out of himself and resources to save his nephew, and then Melchizadek blesses him.
- iii. Abraham continued to act with integrity, taking only his fair share, and allowing others to bless him. He continued to not take more than he knew was his.

- iv. God honors our integrity when others notice, and when they don't. God still sees our integrity and our stewardship. Abraham demonstrates the same principle later in chapter 23 when Sarah dies.
 - v. He wants to bury her in a certain place, and it is owned by another man. The man is more than willing to bless him and simply give it to him, but Abraham is honorable, paying the full amount for the land.
 - vi. **Application:** Abraham seems to have an issue with blessing throughout his life. The fact of the matter is that God uses others to bless us when we are faithful to him. The blessing comes in different forms, but God uses others to bless us from time to time. We must take the blessing in stride, for we did not earn it. It is part of the larger umbrella of God's grace.
- D. He will guide us in our weakness and fear (21:8-21).
- i. While we're spending our time on Abraham, integral to his story is the story of Hagar and Ishmael, for it is from Abraham and Sarah's doubting times that they enter into the discussion.
 - ii. Hagar and Ishmael are the direct result of Abraham and Sarah not trusting in God's promise of an heir through Sarah, and not waiting on God to fulfill His promise in His time. They got ahead of him, and it cost strife in the home.
 - iii. So much strife is caused that Sarah in one place is abusing Hagar, and she runs into the wilderness unprepared to survive, and then God tells her to trust Him to go back into that situation.
 - iv. Another time is this time, in which Abraham is forced by Sarah to let Hagar and Ishmael go into the wilderness alone and cut them off from the family, after Isaac is born. Sarah's jealousy finally gets the best of the situation.
 - v. Abraham, of course, allows her to decide Hagar's fate, instead of stepping up as the leader of his home, and horrible things happen out of Sarah's anger and jealousy.
 - vi. So we find the product of Abraham and Sarah's doubt and unfaithfulness to God's promise still provided for by God Himself. In a moment of fear and weakness in the wilderness, God provides for and encourages Hagar about her son.
 - vii. **Application:** God takes care of all people all the time. Even those whose desperate situations were borne out of the disobedience of others, God still has His eye on every single person, and He has a plan for everyone. He takes our mistakes and moments of doubt, and turns them into something good.
- II. We must trust God to protect us.
- A. He will preserve us from danger (12:10-20; 20:1-18).

- i. A rather curious approach is sometimes taken by Abraham when he feels he is in danger of losing his life, or his beautiful wife. When Abraham enters both Egypt and the land of King Abimelech, he tells them that Sarah is his sister, not his wife.
 - ii. This may seem strange to us today, but it is a way of protecting Abraham's whole family, even though it is a little less than accurate. I say that because Abraham and Sarah are technically siblings, except from a different mother. In essence, his step-sister.
 - iii. This did not have the cultural issues that it has today, for they were not completely siblings. Plus, there were certain desires to marry within either family or native lines to preserve one's cultural heritage.
 - iv. Although this is an acceptable practice, pawning your wife off and telling only a half-truth to save your own skin is less than what God expects from Abraham.
 - v. This tactic would have kept Abraham and Sarah safe since it was very common for rulers to take the most beautiful women of the land for themselves. If Abraham is a husband, he might be murdered for his wife. But if he is her brother, he can stay alive because he is not a threat.
 - vi. The second time Abraham uses this tactic to save his family, God lets Abimelech know what's going on. Even in this situation, we find that Abraham has not fully learned to totally trust God.
 - vii. In these instances, Abraham is relying on his own ability, resources and cunning to protect himself and his family. He should know by now that he can trust God always with every part of his life.
 - viii. **Application:** We do all kinds of stuff to protect ourselves. We keep from becoming vulnerable so others won't crush us. We keep from sharing so that others won't take advantage of us. We have all our little crafty ways to keep ourselves safe, but if we are doing security for ourselves, we take that responsibility away from an almighty God!
- B. He will send others to defend us (14:1-16).
- i. In the case of Lot in this section, we find that Abraham is also a man who stands up for his family and takes care of them when they get in a jam. Lot was still young and did not think all things through.
 - ii. He got captured, and Abraham ran to his rescue. There are times when we get into trouble, and God sends someone to rescue us. The greatest moment that He did this is when He sent Jesus to save us from our sins and into His Kingdom.
 - iii. But there are other times, if you look at it from Abraham's perspective, that God will use us to help others and to defend them. Sometimes we need defending, and other times, God will use us to defend others.

- iv. We must be strong in the Lord and in His Word to be able to help others and come to their defense. He may use our years of experience with Him or our knowledge or other skills to help others through us.
 - v. Part of the faith process is helping others in their own trials as well as allowing others to help us from time to time. This does create vulnerability in seeing others help, but we must see this as God taking care of us!
 - vi. **Application:** Maybe God wants to use you to defend and help someone else as He used Abraham. When you are a person of faith and walking with the Lord, there may be times that He uses your expertise to help others in their own journey and life. Don't let it go to your head. Be used and be grateful He considered using you in that situation!
- C. He will use others to intercede for us (18:16-19:29).
- i. Sometimes the shoe is on the other foot. On several occasions, God invites Abraham to intercede for others, even a couple of cities! Specifically, God tells Abraham what he is about to do to Sodom and Gomorrah.
 - ii. Abraham's nephew, Lot, lives in Sodom with his family, and Abraham is worried for his nephew. To this point, Lot is technically an heir for him, although the slave that runs his house is also in the running.
 - iii. This is one of the reasons that Abraham is so nice to Lot and helps him so much. Lot was willing to travel with Abraham, and Abraham is sort of his benefactor until his own heir is born.
 - iv. These events happen right after the birth of Ishmael, and God has just finished reiterating the covenant and promise to Abraham. God leaves room for Abraham to intercede for Lot before He destroys the cities.
 - v. Abraham goes to God to intercede for Lot in prayer, but he finds more out about God in his intercession than ever before. The destruction of a ruthlessly wicked city that his righteous nephew lives in has Abraham asking the question, "How righteous and just is God?"
 - vi. So in this intercession, Abraham begins to ask God how much of a minority of righteous people in a city would stay His judgment. They go from 50 to 10, and Abraham is satisfied that God is just enough to destroy an entire city if there are not 10 righteous people in it.
 - vii. But God goes beyond our own standards of righteousness, for He goes and rescues Lot and his family, numbering less than ten, before he destroys the city!
 - viii. **Application:** Oftentimes, when we are used by God to intercede for others, we find ourselves learning more about God than we thought we ever would. We learn about the God whose grace has been extended to us, and yet see His great grace at work in others as well!
- D. He will give us favor and success in our dealings (21:22-34).

- i. In this part of the story, God has made Abraham a very prosperous man. It is not because Abraham is this great man of faith. This is not about some prosperity gospel or about the Word of Faith ideas.
 - ii. This is about a God who blesses Abraham abundantly so that he can turn around and bless the nations. So God has made Abraham a witness of His goodness and grace to Abimelech.
 - iii. These two who got off on the wrong foot with Abraham's whole wife-sister business now find themselves friends, friends enough to covenant together and make a treaty.
 - iv. Abimelech recognizes God's special grace upon Abraham and acknowledges it. He doesn't want to come down on the wrong side of someone who is on God's side.
 - v. So they make a treaty together and it is a mutually beneficial deal. They make a relationship in which they can negotiate with one another rather than resort to war.
 - vi. **Application:** In our walk of faith, we need God's favor in our daily lives. Without His favor, nothing will go right for us. But when God walks with us and brings these wonderful successes and relationships into our lives, it is to prepare us to be a blessing to others. Consider how you can be a blessing in every relationship that you have!
- III. We must trust God to fulfill His promises.
- A. He will promise the impossible to us (15:1-21).
 - i. This is the second of three times that God reiterates His promise to Abraham that he will have a son by Sarah. And yet, for all of his growing into faith out of doubt, Abraham and Sarah still don't believe it.
 - ii. It's not that these people are unruly, but they have good reason to not believe the promises. For one, they're both getting up there in years. There is a certain age at which childbearing is no longer an option in life.
 - iii. A second good reason to not believe the promise is that Sarah is also barren. She is unable to have children and her womb has been closed her whole life.
 - iv. These are two really good reasons that introduce a little doubt into their lives. But God promises this great hope anyway. The reason is that He has a plan to make Abraham a great nation.
 - v. And He will do it His way, through a supernatural miracle. He doesn't want them to figure it out on their own. He wants them to wait with expectation and hope, and trust that it will happen in His time.
 - vi. In chapter 15, God formally makes the covenant with him. A covenant is important because it puts the onus for the miracle to happen on God, not on Abraham.

- vii. **Application:** Do we have the faith to hope in God's promises until they become reality? This requires a trust that God will do as He has promised and it also requires an eager expectation, a living as though the promises will come true. It requires that we place this promise God has made in His hands rather than our own. If we try to make it happen, it wouldn't be by God's power. It wouldn't be supernatural. It would be us reaching for His throne.
- B. He will teach us to trust in His promises rather than our resources (16:1-16).
- i. In Genesis 16, a pretty incredible thing happens. Abraham and Sarah get distracted from the promise and end up causing quite a ruckus in their family, and all because of a lapse in trust.
 - ii. God has promised He will do the work of fulfilling His own promise and covenant, and yet, Sarah sees the present reality and seeks to do something about it.
 - iii. She fully intends to see it come true, that Abraham will have an heir, but she will use her legal ability to make it happen. Instead of waiting for the miracle, Sarah gives her maidservant, Hagar, to Abraham, and Abraham goes along with it!
 - iv. The legal implications of it are simple. Hagar is Sarah's property as her slave, so all that she produces, including children, technically belong to Sarah. So if Hagar can conceive, the child would legally be Sarah's.
 - v. So this is how Sarah seeks to get around the reality of the promise and its implausibility. Notice I said implausibility, not impossibility. Nothing is impossible with God, as the Lord will tell them the next time He talks about the promise with them in chapter 17.
 - vi. But this attempt to fulfill the promise by human rather than divine means brings much strife into the house, for when Sarah's plan works, and Hagar conceives, Sarah becomes jealous and mistreats her.
 - vii. Sarah becomes a tyrant and for that reason, Hagar and Ishmael will end up in the desert twice, once for their own safety, and a second time when Sarah demands they get lost when the promise becomes reality.
 - viii. **Application:** When we try to play God, we always make matters much worse on ourselves. We must come to God first in our faith walk. We must not go to our own abilities and resources when He has promised something. When we try to make it happen on our own or in the flesh, we destroy the beauty of the promise. We bring chaos into God's plan.
- C. He will challenge us to trust Him completely (17:1-18:15).
- i. In chapter 17, after Ishmael is born and problems exist within the family, God visits Abraham and Sarah once more before the promise is fulfilled.

In the representation of three angels, God talks with Abraham, and reaffirms the promise as it stood before Ishmael.

- ii. Abraham actually tries to grandfather Ishmael into the promise, saying, “No but Ishmael will walk before the Lord.” And God rebukes him, saying, “No, but the promised son will walk before me.”
- iii. Abraham has made his own promise happen, but it’s not God’s promise. We can’t use our own method of redemption or promise in place of God’s. God does not reject Ishmael because he is not good enough or any other reason than this: Ishmael is not the promise, but the patch for the promise out of doubt.
- iv. God wants His supernatural promised heir to be the heir, not work with the humans who made the promise happen through their own means. Our salvation that we try to give ourselves is never going to come close to matching God’s complete promise of salvation!
- v. God does not use our own remedies. He makes His own remedy. We can’t come to him on our own terms. We must come to Him on His terms. Abraham learned that God promised, and God’s promise is all that God accepts.
- vi. **Application:** God’s promises never change. No matter how much we think we can bring about His Kingdom or His promises, we can’t. God has to do it, and we have to trust in Him and wait on His timing, for His timing is more perfect than our own.

D. He will make His promises come true (21:1-7).

- i. Finally in chapter 21, we find that Isaac is born. What I love about Isaac is that his name means laughter. Both Abraham and Sarah had laughed at the sheer impossibility of God’s promise.
- ii. But when the promise came, Sarah laughed with joy at what God had done in her, and so the boy’s name is a constant reminder that no matter how crazy God’s promises seem to us, no matter how much we laugh at their implausibility, we will laugh with deep joy at their fulfillment in His time!
- iii. God brings about what He had promised for so many years in His own time, and it makes waves when baby Isaac arrives. It makes Sarah both joyful and dangerous.
- iv. Sarah wants to get rid of their mistake in not waiting for the promise earlier. She wants to shaft Hagar and Ishmael, because in her eyes, they are no longer needed or family.
- v. We cannot cover up our mistakes. When we doubt God’s promise, there may be a remnant of that doubt to remind us that we did not trust when we should have.

- vi. Nonetheless, the birth of Isaac is the death knell to the possibility of Ishmael getting anywhere with Abraham and Sarah, and Hagar and Ishmael are tossed into the wilderness as an afterthought by the very people who came to them and suggested this whole scheme!
 - vii. But God takes care of them too. He takes care of everyone. Isaac's birth reaffirms that God can do the impossible and that He is amazing in His promises. God comes through for them!
 - viii. **Application:** When God promises something, He will make it happen. There's no if's and's or but's about it. We need to acknowledge God's power in our lives, His sheer ability to do what He promises. When we can't see how He'll do it, we should double down on trusting Him rather than trying our own way. God's promises are always true and always happen. You can count on God! He's never failed us, though we've failed to trust in Him countless times!
- E. He will test our trust in His sovereignty (22:1-24).
- i. In chapter 22, which happens probably in the young life of Isaac, perhaps in his preteen to even early teen years, God challenges Abraham's faith and tests it.
 - ii. God does something a little out of character. He commands Abraham to offer Isaac, his promised son, up as a sacrifice before the Lord. Now the Lord is not like the other gods that Abraham has known. The Lord does not do child sacrifices.
 - iii. Abraham willingly accepts the charge, and takes his boy and a couple of servants. They go to a mountain three days away, and there, Abraham is obedient to the Lord. He lays Isaac on the altar and raises a knife, but the Lord stays his hand and then provides a ram in the thicket.
 - iv. This is a pretty crazy story if we didn't have verse one that explains why God would command Abraham to do that. God does this as a test. You see, all those years of the promise, and Abraham had tried to fulfill it on his own with Ishmael.
 - v. God was testing Abraham to see what he would do if God took the son, Isaac, the vehicle of the promise, away. Would Abraham try to get out of it? Would Abraham go searching for Ishmael if Isaac was dead?
 - vi. There are times when we need to realize that God's promises will stand despite circumstances. If He can bring the boy into the world through a miracle, then He can protect the boy through a miracle.
 - vii. But does Abraham have the kind of faith to finally trust God's promise no matter what the reality of the situation is? The answer is finally yes after all the mistakes and years of floundering between faith and doubt.

- viii. **Application:** We too are called to remember that God's promises cannot be owned by us. They are His. He grants them as He wishes and He owns them. We cannot do anything to change them. So we should not even try. We must trust not just that the promise will happen, but that nothing will deter it!

Conclusion

Abraham learns a lot of faith lessons as he walks with God. God teaches a lot about Himself to Abraham. He promises, challenges, exhorts, reinforces the promise, takes care of Abraham's mistakes in His way, and then brings the promise to fulfillment. If God's promised something to you today, He will make it happen despite what it looks like right now. There are two wonderful promises the New Testament talks about besides this promise. The first is salvation itself, that Jesus died for us and will raise us to life even after physical death. That is the promise that we hope in. The second is called in Acts the promise of the Father, which is the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. Maybe you've been asking God for the baptism or for some other promise for years and you're about to give up. Don't ever give up on God! He never gives up on us. Stay the course and trust that His promises will be fulfilled in your life! When doubt creeps in, choose to trust instead!

Action Points

- Deep trust in God calls us to a hope in His impossible promises, a hope that eagerly expects them to become reality. We can't do it ourselves. God must do it, for it's His promise to us, not our promise.
- Doubt is not against faith as much as it prods faith to become strong. It is the adversity that pushes the muscle of faith into action. When you feel doubt, it is to make your faith stronger!