

# Prayer and Promise

by Todd Owen

The old man stood in the cool of the night, stargazing as old men of many generations since have done. He turned the words over and over in his mind as he tried to take in the enormity of it all.

*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." And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness. Genesis 15:5-6, ESV, emphasis mine*

This wasn't the first time Abraham had heard this promise. He'd heard the promise before he'd left Haran with his wife and nephew for parts unknown. He was already 75 years old then. He'd heard the promise again when Lot moved off toward the Jordan Valley and he moved further into Canaan. He heard it now and would hear it again before seeing its fulfillment. The promise came this time with prophetic words about his descendants and with an offering.

Abraham had difficulty in "seeing" how God would bring this promise about. Even so, he had no doubt whatsoever that God would do it. Further, he believed that God had power and will to do even the patently impossible to keep his promise.

*He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness." But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification. Romans 4:19 - 25, ESV*

Both Old and New Testament references to Abraham's faith connect God's promise to Abraham with the coming of Messiah. It also connects the quality of his faith to being counted as righteous before God. Faith, in this context, is not merely mental assent to an idea, but a *relational posture* by which we gain access to God's promised right to become sons and daughters, born of God (cf. John 1:12-13). Our basic posture toward God is that of *functionally believing that God will do what he says. Period*. No prevarication. No looking askance at crazy, impossible sound-

ing schemes. We believe Him. And it is counted to *us* as righteousness.

Abraham-style faith changes how we pray. Paul rightly reminds us that the promise did not come through the law, but through faith "*in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring [that is, you and I if you believe]. . .*" (Romans 4:16)

In prayer, we "confidently draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need." (Hebrews 4:16, ESV) We come looking for grace and mercy to help us in our weakness, **knowing that it will be granted us**. We come to God in prayer, confessing our sins, trusting that when he said that "*He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness,*" that he **will** cleanse us. (1 John 1:9) We come to God for wisdom, knowing that He **will** grant it. We pray for our leaders, for our comrades in the Kingdom, for victory in the heavenly places, that we will stand in the evil day and overcome the enemy of all that is holy. Our prayer life changes when our faith functions not only in the mind (mere lip service?) but in the hands and the feet (obedient action).

When we *act* on the belief that God has the power to do things in any situation, especially that we cannot even imagine, when all looks impossible or lost, we pray differently. We pray according to God's character, not ours. We pray according to God's ability, not ours. We pray according to God's promise, not according merely to our intentions. We pray for transformation, not just to make it through. We climb out of our natural selves, with all its limitations and we dare to pray prayers that can only be fulfilled in the supernatural. **We pray so that God alone, by His mighty power, gains glory for himself while we fade into the background.** We pray in such a way that He increases and we decrease. Our prayer life becomes a genuine testament to Jesus' life (at work in and through us).

If you want to pray prayers that transform first you and then those for whom you pray, adopt a posture of functional belief that God does what he says he will do and then act accordingly.

How can we be confident that we are indeed praying according to His promises and not merely according to our personal aspirations or desires? I will address this question in the next article, entitled *5 Assurances that We Are Praying According to His Promises*.