

FAITHFULNESS
Genesis 15-36
Living God's Word—A Walk Through The Bible
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One of the most important truths spelled out in these first chapters of Genesis is that our God is a faithful God; that our relationship with him is based on faithfulness. One of the key ways this truth is revealed is seen in the “covenant” God made with Abraham.

Now a covenant is “*a means to establish a binding relationship where none existed before, based on faithfulness to a solemn vow.*” In the Old Testament we find references to covenant 285 times. As you read the Old Testament you can’t help but note that God is a God of the covenant; the God of the covenant promise.

The center of God’s covenant is characterized by covenantal love; by what is often referred to as steadfast love. The truth of this message is that our God is the one who makes promises out of the depth of his love. God is the one who always keeps his end of the promises.

It can be very helpful to think of a red line called covenant, of steadfast love that runs through all the history and stories found in the Old & New Testaments. Through all the ups and downs of God’s people, the Children of Israel; through the times they were faithful and unfaithful; through wars, defeats, exiles, times of glory and peace God was faithful.

God never breaks his part of the covenant...his steadfast love endures forever.

So in the account of Abraham found in these first chapters of Genesis we see God’s first covenant promises. This covenant to Abraham was that he would be the father of God’s chosen people, Israel; that his descendants would be as many as the stars in the sky and sand on the seashore. All the people and nations of the world would be blessed through him.

The problem, of course, with this covenant promise was that Abraham had no children in order to begin this process of biological reproduction. Not only that but Abraham was about 100 years old and his wife, Sarah, was 90—far beyond normal child bearing age. Yet the amazing thing about Abraham is that he actually believes this promise of God—it is why he is called the father of our faith.

The Biblical account continues where Abraham and Sarah ultimately conceive (at this late stage in life) and they have a son, Isaac. Needless to say this birth is truly a miracle; a true sign of God’s love and faithfulness. Even when they thought this was impossible; when they were not always patient God remained faithful to them.

As this story continues to unfold we see where God then gives Abraham a very severe test. He commands Abraham to sacrifice his treasured son as a burnt offering to God. This miracle child was to be killed by his own father. Drawing on this faith in God that he had been leaning on

Abraham obeys. Yet at the last second God spares Isaac's life; Abraham's faith was majorly stretched and it grew in leaps and bounds.

The remaining chapters in this part of Genesis explain how Isaac and his wife, Rebekah, gave birth to twin sons, Jacob & Esau. Jacob and Esau, of course, get wrapped up in vying for the family birthright; in Jacob tricking his father, Isaac. Yet even in the midst of this family dysfunction, this brotherly jealousy, the truth comes bursting through that God is faithful.

Finally in this section we encounter Jacob wrestling with God himself in the form of an angel. As morning comes God assures Jacob of his love for him. Not only that, but God gives him a new name. Jacob was now to be named "Israel" which means "he struggles with God."

The message that is the center of these first chapters of Genesis, as well as throughout the whole Bible, is that our God—the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—is a faithful God. He is a God who made a covenant to his people, to you and me and he never, ever breaks his end of that promise. God's love is shown to be steadfast and unfailing.

This faithfulness, my friends, is a central theme and message throughout the whole Bible. If you would open your Bibles to Lamentations 3:22-23, or connect to these verses on your phone/tablet: "*The faithful love of the Lord never ends! His mercies never cease. Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each morning.*"

Then turn to Psalm 89. Let us read together verses 1-5 (also on projection). Then turn to 2 Thessalonians 3. Verse 3 says, "*But the Lord is faithful; he will strengthen you and guard you from the evil one.*"

There is also that great hymn that states, "Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father; Morning by morning new mercies I see. All I have needed thy hand hath provided. Great is thy faithfulness, Lord unto me." Our God is a faithful and loving God.

As we share in worship each week our worship itself, and even our sanctuary, remind us of God's covenant promise of faithfulness. The baptismal font, as well as each time we have the baptism of a child, youth or adult reminds us of God's never failing promises. In baptism, of course, the promises are proclaimed that God loves has chosen us; that he forgives our sins and he calls us to live by faith in him.

His faithfulness is in the singing of hymns and praise songs; in the reading of Scripture; in the message/teaching time; each of these remind over and over again that our God is faithful; that he cares for us. No wonder it is so easy to flounder and forget these promises if we don't worship each week. We can never hear these promises enough.

It is also, of course, in the Lord's Supper, in Holy Communion, where we experience the assurance of God's steadfast love as we touch, taste and hear God's Word that Jesus' body and blood were given and shed for us. The Lord's Supper points us to the Old Testament Passover, to the blood of the sacrificed lamb on the door post and how it saved these people from their slavery.

In the same way Jesus brings the new covenant to you and me by being the pure lamb of God who was slain, and whose blood sets us free from our sins. Communion should always remind us of God's faithful love; how his forgiveness and new life is for all who receive him by faith.

Jesus' cross hanging here, and this cross the altar, should always remind us that our God loves us so much that he was willing to suffer and die so that we might live. Jesus was willing to sacrifice and give his whole life so that you might know how much he loves you; might believe in him and might have eternal life.

We live in a time when so many individuals wonder if God really loves them. Lots of people feel they need to face life all by themselves, that they are all alone in a dark world. Yet the good news of the Bible—of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—is that God is faithful to us. He loves us with an everlasting love.

Over the years a song that has meant a lot to my family and me is, "God is so good." It is a song my father often had people sing in sermons, at celebrations and as a family. I have also used this song many times in hospital rooms, anniversaries and with countless numbers of families as we have stood at the grave and burial of a loved one. We will also be singing it again at my Mother's memorial service on February 1.

A number of years ago now I got a call one evening from some friends from the first church and community I was pastor in. Ann was calling to tell me that their son, Cory, who was then a Senior at Gustavus Adolphus College, had died that afternoon in a car accident. Cory and our oldest son, Zachary, were one year apart in age and Cory had spent many days and hours at our home from the time he was a little boy.

As the shock and sadness consumed me on the phone I said, "Ann, I don't know how a parent can handle something this devastating." She said, "Nathan, it's a strange thing but all that keeps coming back to me is the words of the song you sang with us so many times, "God is so good." She said this message keeps her focused on the faithfulness and hope we have in God.

When they asked if I would preach Cory's funeral sermon it was obvious for me to focus in on this promise, "God is so good." The truth is that in the midst of tragedies and losses of life God always remains good. In the midst of those times of death he remains faithful with his promises of victory over death; and of eternal life for all who believe.

My friends, no matter what you are going through in your life today God is faithful. Whether you are burdened by guilt, have lost your way with him, are consumed by grief or anger or are fearful for the future remember that God is faithful. He will never leave you or forsake you; his lovingkindness is new each day.

Be assured that our God; the God of the covenant; the God who never breaks his end of the promise wants to give you forgiveness, healing, peace and new life. Be assured that God is calling you to live each day by faith, hope and assurance in his never failing love.