Waiting with Faith: The Certainty of God's Promise

Genesis 15 — Promise Maker, Season 3

Would you agree that some prayers are easier to keep praying, because you can see something moving? But other prayers seem to go nowhere. You prayed. You waited. You kept believing. And nothing changed.

I've been there. There are things I have prayed about for years, and I still do not fully understand what God is doing. I don't mean the polished, "I trust the process" version. I mean the kind of waiting that makes you wonder: *did I hear God correctly?*

Some of you have been waiting so long that you've stopped telling people what you're waiting for. You got tired of answering the same questions. Tired of explaining why nothing has changed. Tired of watching people look at you like maybe you did something wrong.

The door you were certain God opened has quietly closed. The prayer you once spoke with confidence is now difficult to say out loud. And you keep watching other people receive what you've been asking God for, while you tell yourself — *my season should have changed by now.*

That kind of waiting can make you question more than the timing. It can make you question the promise.

Genesis 15 opens with Abram standing in that exact tension. What follows are four ways this promise — and every promise God makes — holds, even when we can't see how it will unfold.

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1. Rest in God's Promise — It Doesn't Depend on Your Ability

Genesis 15:1–6

> *"After these events, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: 'Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield; your reward will be very great.'"* — Genesis 15:1 (CSB)

This chapter opens after the war, after the rescue — after Abram glorified God for the victory. You'd expect to hear a continuation of that Abram. Instead, the first thing God says to him is: *do not be afraid.*

Which tells us something. Underneath the victory — underneath all the external success — Abram was still wrestling.

Undoubtedly, some of his fear was warranted. He's in a foreign land. He just made enemies of four kings. But there's an underlying issue Abram is still wrestling through, and God knows it. So He reminds him: *I am your shield. Your reward will be very great.* This is not God merely trying to encourage him. This is God reminding him of the promise He made him — of the reason he can and should trust Him all the more.

> *"But Abram said, 'Lord GOD, what can you give me, since I have no children and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?' Abram continued, 'Look, you have given me no offspring, so a slave born in my house will be my heir.'"* — Genesis 15:2–3 (CSB)

There's no "thank You" for reminding me. No "thank You" for reassuring me and confirming You're my shield, that You have greater things in store for me. What does Abram do? He does what all of us do — he points to the very thing he does not have. As if to say: *God, You're not going to come through, because I don't have a son.*

So what does Abram do? He thinks to himself, *let me help God fulfill the promise. God needs my help.*

Now — before we start judging Abram, understand something. In his culture, it was normal practice for a wealthy man who had no heir to leave his inheritance to a trusted, devoted slave. Abram is simply applying cultural logic to his situation. However — and we've seen this before — Abram is trying to manage his own destiny, letting fear dictate his next steps, just like when he lied about Sarai being his sister to protect his own skin as he entered Egypt.

But watch how God responds.

> *"Now the word of the LORD came to him: 'This one will not be your heir; instead, one who comes from your own body will be your heir.'"* — Genesis 15:4 (CSB)

It's interesting — the Lord doesn't scold him. He doesn't say, "How dare you doubt My ability to bring My plan to completion." He simply says: *this one will not be your heir.*

And then He takes Abram outside and says:

> *"Look at the sky and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then he said to him, "Your offspring will be that numerous."* — Genesis 15:5 (CSB)

He can't. That's the whole point. God is handing him something too big to calculate — on purpose. Abram's problem was never a lack of information. It was never Sarai's ability to conceive. It was that he kept trying to help God fulfill His promise, as if God needs help.

Don't miss this next verse:

> *"Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness."* — Genesis 15:6 (CSB)

This may be the most important statement in the entire book. Abram believed — before there was a child, before there was a covenant ceremony, before there was anything to show for it — and God called that righteousness.

Now watch this carefully, because it matters. God didn't count Abram's faith as righteousness because believing is some kind of good work. If it were, faith would just be a quieter way of earning it. He counted it because Abram's faith was reaching for something he didn't have, and couldn't get on his own.

That's what faith actually is. The Bible calls it the reality of what we're hoping for — proof of what we can't yet see. You can't hold it in your hand. But it's real nonetheless.

That's the same thing that happens for us. God doesn't credit us righteousness because our faith is strong enough to deserve it. He credits us Christ's own righteousness — through faith. Faith isn't the payment. Faith is empty hands, reaching for what only Christ has. Abram's faith reached for a promise not yet fulfilled. Our faith reaches for a Savior who already fulfilled it.

Intellectually, all of us understand what it means to rest in God's promises. But when it comes to actually living it out — that's where we run into trouble. More precisely, the harder work is letting God's truth reach the promise we've been struggling to rest in. I'm not talking about faith in general. I'm talking about the fear that it may not happen. The delay that has gone on longer than you expected. The promise you keep trying to manage, because waiting on God has started to feel — well — a little risky.

Abram believed God for a nation, a legacy, a future he could not produce himself. But he remained in the dark regarding how it would all come together.

This is where spiritual maturity and humility show up. Maturity is not pretending you have no questions. It's being humble enough to tell God the truth about your doubt, and still taking Him at His word before all your questions are answered. Abram did not wait until the doubt disappeared. He brought the doubt to God, heard the promise again, and chose to believe God while the details were still unresolved.

You don't have to secure the promise. Just rest in it.

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2. Trust God's Confirmation — It Doesn't Depend on Your Worthiness

Genesis 15:7–11

> *"He also said to him, 'I am the LORD who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it.' But he said, 'Lord GOD, how can I know that I will possess it?'"* — Genesis 15:7–8 (CSB)

There's the question again. God gives Abram another promise — this time, about the land — and Abram asks: *how can I know? How can I be certain that this will actually happen? What can I hold on to while I wait?*

Before we accuse Abram of wavering in his faith, remember what God just said in verse six: Abram believed the LORD, and God credited it to him as righteousness. The verdict stands. This is a man who believes God — and still needs reassurance. Those two things are not enemies. You can believe God and still have questions about how His promise will unfold. You can trust His character and still ask Him for something to steady you while you wait.

Which is exactly what He does.

> *"God responded, 'Bring me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.' So he brought all these to him, cut them in half, and laid the pieces opposite each other, but he did not cut the birds in half."* — Genesis 15:9–10 (CSB)

If Abram wanted something tangible, he has it now. Blood. Carcasses. Animals divided and placed across from one another. God is preparing to confirm His promise in a way Abram would understand.

We still understand that instinct today — the need for something official, something you can point to, before you can fully rest in what's been promised. Every person on the national kidney transplant waiting list gets a real, active status the moment they're listed. Not a maybe — an actual place in line. And for most people, it's a three-to-five-year wait before a match is made available. Transplant coordinators say the same thing again and again: the day that actually changes everything for a patient isn't the day of the transplant. It's the day they got listed. Because from that day forward, the promise of a match was already real — already moving.

That's what Abram just got. Not the land yet. But something real enough to stand on while he waits for it.

In the ancient world, this was how a serious covenant could be sealed. The animals were divided. The parties would pass between the pieces and bind themselves to the agreement. The message was severe: *if I break my word, let what happened to these animals happen to me.* This was not a handshake. This was a blood oath.

Now, pay attention to what God is setting up. The promise does not depend on the man receiving it. It depends on the God who made it.

Our assurance is not found in how tightly we can hold on to God's promise. Our assurance is that God Himself is holding the promise together.

> *"Birds of prey came down on the carcasses, and Abram drove them away."* — Genesis 15:11 (CSB)

The vultures come down to tear apart what has been prepared. And Abram drives them away — again and again. Abram is guarding the place where God has promised to meet him. He's protecting what God is preparing to ratify.

That's what you do with something too valuable to leave unguarded. And some of you have been doing the exact same thing with the promise God made you — you just haven't called it that. Be encouraged. Keep guarding the Lord's promise.

Others of you have been acting like you're walking in certainty — a certainty you don't actually possess. You've been afraid to admit you have questions, because you thought your questions would disqualify you. So you say the right words. You smile at the right time. You tell everybody you're trusting God. But underneath your stoicism, your confidence is slowly evaporating.

This text gives you permission to stop pretending. Bring the real question to God. Tell Him where the waiting hurts. Tell Him where the delay has weakened you. Tell Him where you need His word to steady you again.

Mature faith is not faith that never asks, "How can I know?" Mature faith knows where to take the question. It brings the question directly to God. Abram's question did not cancel his faith from verse six — it revealed where that faith still needed strengthening. And God was willing to strengthen it, because the promise was never resting on Abram's worthiness. It was resting on God's faithfulness.

Asking God for assurance is not the opposite of believing Him. It's what believing people do when they refuse to take their questions anywhere else.

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3. Wait with Purpose, on Purpose

Genesis 15:12–16

> *"As the sun was setting, a deep sleep came over Abram, and suddenly a terrifying and great darkness descended on him."* — Genesis 15:12 (CSB)

This is the same kind of sleep God sent on Adam, when He prepared to make Eve.

> *"Then the LORD said to Abram, 'Know for certain that your offspring will be resident aliens for four hundred years in a land that does not belong to them and will be enslaved and oppressed. However, I will judge the nation they serve, and afterward they will go out with many possessions.'"* — Genesis 15:13–14 (CSB)

Four hundred years. Slavery. Oppression. In a land that isn't even theirs yet. God's answer to "how can I know" includes news Abram never asked for.

But look at how specific this is. It's dated. It names the oppressing situation. It names the timeframe — four hundred years. It names exactly how it ends — God judges the oppressor, and Abram's descendants leave

wealthy. It even names why the land isn't given yet: the sin of the people already living there hasn't reached the point that warrants God's judgment.

> *"But you will go to your ancestors in peace and be buried at a good old age."* — Genesis 15:15 (CSB)

Right in the middle of this hard news, God stops and says something specifically for Abram. Abram won't live to see the land. But he gets a different promise — long life and eternal peace.

> *"In the fourth generation your offspring will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."* — Genesis 15:16 (CSB)

And this makes the delay crystal clear. The land is being withheld because the people currently living there have not yet reached the full measure of their sin. God will judge them — but He will not judge them before His predetermined time. The promise is sure. It's just not in Abram's lifetime.

That's a strange kind of certainty to live inside — knowing something is true, and still not knowing when "true" turns into "finished."

Oncologists will tell you: it takes five full years of clean scans before a patient is officially called cancer free. Which means for years after treatment ends, people are living under a verdict that says *not yet, but on track* — a timeline they didn't choose, and cannot speed up.

Likewise, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 didn't arrive as a single moment. It followed decades of organizing and unresolved injustice — injustice that many of the people doing the work never lived to see resolved.

What I'm getting at is this. It's one thing to affirm "God's timing is perfect" as a phrase. It's another thing to sit inside a delay that has already cost you years, and still believe it.

This text doesn't offer comfort by explaining away the pain. It names four hundred years of real slavery and oppression as part of the promise's path — not a detour from it. So you're left with two things that feel like they can't both be true: the wait was hard, and the wait was purposeful. Maturity doesn't mean picking one. It means holding both at once. The wait was genuinely hard. And the wait was genuinely purposeful.

Hard and purposeful are not at odds. They're simultaneously true through your wait. Ask God to help you live in that tension.

But we know God is not only a Keeper of His Word. He is also the One who makes promises possible.

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4. Stand on God's Promise — It's Built on His Commitment, Not Ours

Genesis 15:17–21

> *"When the sun had set and it was dark, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch appeared, passing between the divided animals."* — Genesis 15:17 (CSB)

The author is bringing us back to the ceremony — where Abram split the animals in half and laid them on the ground. In Abram's day, both parties would normally walk between the pieces together. Both would take the oath. Both would carry the risk.

But that's not what happens in Abram's case. Only a smoking firepot and a blazing torch pass between the halves. Abram doesn't walk. God alone takes the oath. God alone is responsible for fulfilling the promise. If things go sideways, God alone will be held accountable.

But God is not only the Keeper of His Word. He is the One who makes the promise possible in the first place.

This is where the stakes stop being about Abram's family, and start being about something much bigger. Someone more important. This is exactly the shape of what happens at the cross. In a normal covenant like this, both parties walk between the pieces. Both take on the risk. But God doesn't ask us to walk between the pieces and prove we can hold up our end of the bargain. He walks through them by Himself. The curse that comes from a broken covenant — the curse that should have landed on us — lands on Him instead.

Galatians 3:13 puts it plainly: *Christ became a curse for us.*

From the very beginning, God wanted a people wholly sold out for Him and His glory alone. And because that was His will, He was going to do whatever it took to bring it to pass. This image — God alone walking through the halves — is no different than the image of Jesus Christ walking alone to the cross. Being nailed to the cross. Staying there for the sins of humanity, until the weight of mankind's sin was fully upon Him. And then He hung His head, and He died — signifying that God's wrath for our sins was satisfied.

Jesus did that alone, so He could have a people wholly sold out for God's glory, and His glory alone. I need you to see that. I need you to feel that. I need you to be moved by that.

> *"On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, 'I give this land to your offspring, from the brook of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates River — the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaim, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites, and Jebusites.'"* — Genesis 15:18–21 (CSB)

Whenever the Lord makes a promise, He is the One who makes sure it reaches its full, intended purpose. He did it with Abram. He did it with Jesus. And He is still doing it today.

For some of you, this may be the most impactful portion of this whole passage. If you've lived for years assuming your standing with God is a two-way contract — that He keeps His promises as long as you keep performing — verse seventeen says that was never part of the deal. Abram doesn't walk through the pieces. He's unconscious for the entire ceremony. The obligation is entirely on God. If you've been quietly exhausted trying to hold up your side of the covenant, hear this: God doesn't need you to cosign. God didn't ask you to cosign. He can pay His promise in full without you.

For others — you already believe this doctrine. The test is whether you actually live unburdened by it. Watch for the subtle ways you still treat God's faithfulness as conditional on your consistency — the guilt that shows up after a bad week, the quiet fear that you've used up all your allotted grace. Genesis 15 says the promise survived four hundred years of slavery, a golden calf, a divided kingdom, and exile — and it wasn't because anyone's faith stayed strong the whole time. It was because God alone kept the promise alive.

The promise doesn't run on your consistency — only God's.

The Certainty You Can Stand On

Every promise in this chapter — the son, the land, the four hundred years, the fire — comes down to the same question we opened with: can you tell God the promise isn't enough yet, and still be right with Him?

Genesis 15 says yes. Not because Abram figured out how to stop doubting. Because the promise was never resting on whether he did.

Your doubt was real. God's promise never needed you to be certain.

That's not a loophole in the text. That's the whole argument of the text.

We stood at that fire together a few minutes ago. Only God walked through it. Only God signed it. And at the cross, He didn't stop until the promise was paid in full — for you.

If you've never actually put your trust in that — if you've spent your whole life assuming God's love for you is a two-way contract — hear this: you don't have to arrive at certainty before you come to Him. You don't have to resolve every doubt first. The invitation isn't "get sure, then come." It's "come, and be made sure."

For those of you who have put your faith in Jesus, here's what I want you to do this week. Write down the one promise from God you've been managing instead of resting in — the one you keep checking on, keep running the math on, keep quietly trying to hold together yourself. Write it down. Then write today's date next to it. Not as the day it arrives. As the day you stopped trying to secure it, and started letting God be the One who holds it.

You're not waiting on a promise that might still come through. You're standing on one that's already signed, sealed, and made certain by God.

He was in that field with Abram. He's in whatever you're still waiting on today.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Bless the Lord. The Lord's name be praised. **— Romans 15:13**