

ABRAHAM'S FAITH How to Face the Impossible

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for,
the conviction of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1).

"Faith enables the believing soul to treat the future as present
and the invisible as seen" (J. Oswald Sanders).

Abraham was a man of faith. When he was 100 years old and his wife Sarah was 90, God promised to give them a son. The story unfolds in the book of Genesis.

Then God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah *shall be* her name. And I will bless her, and indeed I will give you a son by her. Then I will bless her, and she shall be *a mother of nations*; kings of peoples shall come from her." Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, "Will a child be born to a man one hundred years old? And will Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear *a child*?" And Abraham said to God, "Oh that Ishmael might live before Thee!" But God said, "No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him (Genesis 17:15–19 NASB).

The promise is repeated a second time.

Then they said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" And he said, "Behold, in the tent." And he said, "I will surely return to you at this time next year; and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent door, which was behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; Sarah was past childbearing. And Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have become old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?" And the Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I indeed bear *a child*, when I am *so* old?' Is anything too difficult for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son" (Genesis 18:9–14 NASB).

Impossible? Seemingly so. Hard to believe? Yes. But God can do the impossible (cf. Luke 1:37). The apostle Paul tells us more about Abraham's faith at this time.

And without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb; yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief, but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what He had promised, He was able also to perform (Romans 4:19–21 NASB).

[Note: The King James Version says just the opposite: "he considered *not* his own body now dead" (verse 19, italics added). The Textus Receptus (1624) adds the Greek negative *ou* but Sinaiticus (IV), Alexandrinus (V), Vaticanus (IV), and Ephraemi Rescriptus (V) all omit *ou*. The New American Standard Bible follows these older and better manuscripts.]

Now, let's see how Abraham handled what seemed to be an impossible situation. Let's see what a

strong faith consists of.

1. He laughed (Genesis 17:17).

God promised to do something humanly impossible. When Abraham and Sarah heard about it, they laughed: Abraham “fell on his face and laughed” (Genesis 17:17) and Sarah “laughed to herself” (18:12). His reproductive ability was like that of a dead man—gone. And his wife was long past the age of childbearing (Genesis 21:7; Hebrews 11:11). God could keep this promise in only one way—by performing a miracle. Impossible situations demand miracles!

2. He suggested an easier alternative—which God rejected (Genesis 17:18).

3. He believed the promise (Romans 4:18–21).

Abraham believed God could do the impossible. Paul says, “with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief, but grew strong in faith” (Romans 4:20). And Sarah also believed God could do the impossible. “By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised” (Hebrews 11:11). God waited until it was humanly impossible for Abraham and Sarah to have children to demonstrate His great power and to show everyone how great their faith was. *A strong faith believes God can do the impossible!* Now, dear friends, God often waits until everything seems hopeless to show us how strong our faith is. He already knows; we’re the ones who need to know. That’s why God tests our faith—to show us how strong it is.

4. He analyzed his situation carefully (Romans 4:19).

Abraham heard the promise and then took a good look at his body: it was old, worn out, reproductively dead. The more he thought about it the more he realized how impossible it was to have a son. The word “contemplated” (*katanoeo*) means to look carefully at something, to think about it intently, to mull it over and over in the mind, to think of all the possibilities and impossibilities. It’s used, for instance, of looking at a speck in a brother’s eye (Matthew 7:3 = Luke 6:41), of Moses coming closer to inspect the burning bush (Acts 7:31), of Peter looking carefully at the sheet lowered from heaven (Acts 11:6), and of looking at your face in a mirror (James 1:23, 24). Now let’s not miss the application. When you claim a promise, take time to analyze your situation. Think about it, meditate on it, evaluate it, contemplate it as Abraham did. Know everything there is to know about the situation you’re in. Know exactly how difficult it is, how impossible it is, and what kind of miracle is necessary to solve the problem. Why? Because when God decides to act, when He decides to fulfill His promise to you, you’ll know just how great a miracle it is. You need to know how hopeless your circumstances are to appreciate how powerful God is. *A strong faith doesn’t ask us to ignore reality; it asks us to believe in spite of reality.* But be careful! There’s danger in doing this: it’s possible to analyze the situation and decide it’s hopeless—that even God can’t help. Don’t do that. Don’t take your eyes off God while you’re analyzing the situation. Instead, look carefully at the situation and keep your eyes on God at the same time. Never take your eyes off God!

5. He did not allow doubts to linger in his mind as he contemplated his impossible situation (Romans 4:19, 20).

A better translation of “he did not waver in unbelief” (verse 20) is “he did not dispute with himself in unbelief (*ou diekrithe tei apistiai*).” The word for doubts (*diakrino*) means to take issue with something, to argue or dispute with someone over something, or to be at odds with oneself. It’s used,

for instance, of the Jews in Jerusalem who argued with Peter over his ministry to the Gentiles (Acts 11:2–4) and of the archangel Michael’s dispute with Satan over the body of Moses (Jude 9). Doubts are disputing with yourself, arguing silently with yourself in your mind—like a ping-pong ball...back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. One moment in triumph you say, “God will keep His promise!” and the very next moment you lament, “No, He won’t keep His promise! It’s hopeless. It’s too difficult—even for God!” Faith never doubts God’s intent or ability to keep His promises. *A strong faith has no doubts about God’s ability to keep His promises.*

6. His faith grew stronger as he thought about the difficulties involved (Romans 4:19, 20).

7. He gave glory to God before the promise was fulfilled (Romans 4:20).

Abraham gave glory to God before his son was born—before he could see the infant developing in the womb. If you truly believe God is going to keep His promises, if you have no doubts about it, you can give Him the glory before He fulfills them. Why? Because they’re as good as done! God always keeps His word. If God is glorified when you praise Him *after* He fulfills His promises, how much more is He glorified when you praise Him *before* He fulfills His promises? You’re demonstrating your faith to others in advance. It shows your confidence, that you think God is faithful and trustworthy—and that glorifies Him. *A strong faith gives glory to God before He fulfills His promises.*

8. He was fully convinced that God had the ability to keep His promises (Romans 4:21).

Abraham was fully convinced in his mind that God was able to give him a son in his old age. What convinced him? The fact that God doesn’t lie (Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18). The fact that God doesn’t make promises He doesn’t intend to keep. The fact that God is faithful (Hebrews 10:23). The fact that nothing is too difficult for God (Genesis 18:14). The fact that God can do the impossible (Matthew 19:26 = Mark 10:27 = Luke 18:27; Luke 1:37). The fact that nothing can thwart God’s will. These facts removed any doubts Abraham may have had. *A strong faith is fully convinced that God is able to keep all that He has promised.*