

God's Promise and Your Future

God cares about you

4

How do you feel about the future?

Prepared? Unsure? Confident? Fearful? Hopeful? Confused? Do you feel secure about your own life? Are you concerned about the global problems this planet faces?

The essence of the Bible message is that the future is in the hands of a caring Creator. He offers you an opportunity to share in his promises if you will put your faith in them.

Faith is two-way

To many people, “faith” and “religion” mean the same thing.

However, faith can exist quite apart from religion. There is an element of faith in almost everyone’s life.

As a young child, for example, you placed faith in your family. You never questioned whether they would look after you.

You put faith in people you believe are dependable and honest. You try to be reliable yourself, so others will put faith in you.

Usually you have good reasons for having faith in someone. You may know the person well. He or she may have a past record of being reliable. Your own or others’ experience may convince you. Or—especially in the case of family or good friends— you care about the other person and that person cares about you. You could never let each other down.

This everyday kind of faith is two sided. You give trust and reliance. In turn, you expect the one in whom you put faith to show trustworthiness and reliability.

Faith in God involves a similar two-way bond. God first loved the world and provided a way for human beings to be freed from sin and death:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

John 3, verse 16

You as an individual can acknowledge that love through faith.

Believing without seeing

“Seeing is believing”. You’ve prob-

ably heard the expression many times.

Nevertheless, almost everyone believes in things they cannot or do not see.

You may give money to a good cause. Although you probably will not see the direct benefit of your donation, you believe your money will be used to help that cause.

No one has ever seen electricity. Yet modern society relies heavily on it; when the power goes out major cities shut down. You don’t have to see electricity to know it exists. You see what it can do, and you count on it to help you every day .

The Bible defines faith as believing in the reality of things you cannot physically see.

“Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”

Hebrews 11, verse 1

“Being sure of what we hope for” implies a firm understanding of that hope. Moreover, to be “certain of what we do not see” involves having enough understanding and evidence to “see” the unseen and act accordingly.

Faith helps you look at life from God’s point of view.

You know God is active even though you cannot actually see Him. You weren’t there at Jesus’ death or resurrection but you are confident he offered his life for you.

You understand God’s promises and are convinced of their truth. Your hopes are set beyond the here and now. You look forward to the return of Jesus and the kingdom he will set up on earth. You hope to live forever in that kingdom.

You place trust not in human achievement but in your heavenly father and his son Jesus Christ.

Moreover, your faith is supported by evidence.¹ You accept the Bible as the word of God and you recognize that He is working in Human affairs.

Faith in action

Faith goes beyond believing the Bible message. It means acting on your conviction, choosing to obey and trust God no matter what.

The pages of the Bible are full of the thoughts and actions of men and women who demonstrated true faith in God. One of the more detailed accounts is the life of Abraham, who was called the “friend” of God.

The biography of Abraham takes up about fourteen chapters of the book of Genesis, from chapter 11 to chapter 25.

Abraham had lived most of his life in a comfortable, amazingly modern city, Ur of the Chaldees.

Abraham could have stayed in Ur. It offered an exceptionally high standard of living. But the whole society revolved around a religion he knew was false.

In the midst of this environment Abraham maintained his faith in the one true God.

Then God called on Abraham to make a complete change in his life - to leave Ur. Abraham responded to the challenge, leaving behind his former attachments, trusting that God would protect him and lead him safely to the land He had promised.

All Abraham had to do was to believe God and act on his faith,

1. For example, Bible prophecy has been and is being fulfilled in history and current events. “Is the Bible true?”, another segment in the Discover Your Bible program, deals with evidence for believing the Bible.

confident that God would care for him. And God did care for him. Abraham ended up a prosperous and well respected man in the land which God had promised him.

God's promises to Abraham

God made some specific promises to Abraham²:

1. He would become the father of a great nation.
2. Through this nation - and one descendant in particular - all people on earth would be blessed.
3. Abraham and his descendants would receive a land which they were to have as an "ever lasting possession".

Abraham and his wife Sarah were old. They had long ago given up hope of having their own children. How could Abraham ever father a great nation?

Miraculously, in their old age, God gave them a son, Isaac. Through this son Abraham and Sarah became the ancestors of the Jews, who over the years have retained their identity as a distinct group of people. Today there are Jewish communities in many parts of the world; and Israel, the small but powerful Jewish nation, is in the forefront of world affairs.

The one special descendant through whom all people would be blessed was Jesus Christ. The first verse of the New Testament, (Matthew 1, verse 1), identifies Jesus as "the son of Abraham".

God also promised Abraham a land, a land which he would have forever. Abraham lived his last days in

this land in peace and prosperity. But he never owned any of it himself. The key word in this promise is "forever". It points to the fact that Abraham will receive this final promise when he is raised from the dead to eternal life and takes his place in the kingdom of God.

Responding to God's care

Abraham lived almost 3800 years ago. What does his experience have to do with you?

Accepting the gospel doesn't mean you literally have to leave you home and set out for the unknown. What is important is that Abraham made a choice, a conscious decision, a change in his life goals. And he had confidence that God would look after his future.

In a sense, Ur stands for a way of life. Following your natural impulses. Conforming to society's standards. In a word - sin. It offers a life that may be easy and pleasant, or full of insecurity and fear. True faith produces a change in your life because you realize that God's viewpoint is right and that, despite your sinful nature, He cares about you.

The Bible has a word for this change: "repentance". Literally, "to repent" means "to change you mind".

It's a big step; few people like to admit they need to change.

Yet this is what it means to repent. Recognize that you are sinful. Accept personal responsibility for your sin. Pray to God for forgiveness, believing that He can and will forgive you. Resolve to change your life for the better, to put your faith into action.

Making the commitment

Baptism is the symbolic act which God has set down, through which the believer demonstrates true faith and repentance.

The word "baptism" comes from and original Greek word which is used for dying a fabric - "bapto".

Have you ever decided to dye something, perhaps an old piece of clothing or a set of curtains? You may simply have wanted to give the item a fresh new look, or you may have had a special purpose in mind for changing the color.

The method you follow is to immerse the fabric completely in the dye solution. When you remove it, it has a different look and you can use it as though it were brand new.

Baptism in the Biblical sense is very much like this process.

1. A purposeful decision is needed. Baptism, is a demonstration of true faith and repentance, is the intelligent choice of a thinking person.

"the pledge of a good conscience toward God."
I Peter 3, verse 21

2. Immersion in water is the prescribed method. Being baptized is like being "buried with Christ", then rising to new life.

"We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."

Romans 6, verse 4

3. The outcome is a major change. When you start a life in Christ through baptism, you initiate a deep commitment to your Creator.

"Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus."

Romans 6, verse 11

4. The former "color" is washed away. Through baptism you ask for— and receive— forgiveness of your sins. You start again with

2. you will find God's promises to Abraham in Genesis 12, verses 1 to 3; Genesis 13, verse 14 to 17; Genesis 17, verses 2 to 8; Genesis 22, verses 16 to 18.

a clean slate.

*“Repent and be baptized,
every one of you, in the
name of Jesus Christ so that
your sins may be forgiven.”*

Acts 2, verse 38

5. You take on a new “color” or status in God’s eyes. You identify yourself with Jesus. You become adopted into God’s family and can truly call Him your Father. You can now share in His promise of eternal life, along with Abraham and the faithful of all times.

*“You are all sons of God
through faith in Christ Jesus,
for all of you who were bap-
tized into Christ have clothed
yourselves with Christ. If you
belong to Christ, then you are
Abraham’s seed, and heirs
according to the promise.”*

Galatians 3,
verses 26, 27, 29

The promise of life

How can you respond to God’s love and share in His promises? The answer is” through faith, repentance and baptism.

When you are baptized God accepts you into His family and gives you a fresh start under His special care.

The Bible offers you life. A new kind of life here and now, in harmony with God’s ways. Resurrection from the dead when Jesus returns to earth. Eternal life in God’s kingdom.

Will you respond in faith?

Recap

Faith is your first step towards sharing in God’s promises - not blind faith, but active faith based on an understanding of His purpose and His care.

Through baptism, God forgives your sins and adopts you into His family.

Recommended Bible Readings

God’s care: Psalm 23 and 103

Faith: Matthew 6 and 7.
Hebrews 11

Baptism and the new life:
Romans 6