

Watch a believing husband who loves his wife and you will see many different ways that he shows his love to her. The same can be said about a Christian mother as she cares for her child. It's striking really to see the lengths they will go to make sure the other knows how they feel. And it is a testimony to the blessed relationships that the Lord allows us to have in this life.

But it really ought not surprise us. After all, the believing husband and the Christian mother have the greatest example to follow in our God. Just consider the many ways he shows his love to us. Ponder the different ways he demonstrates that he cares. It's striking, really. And we see his grace on display in striking ways with the words before us today. As we consider them, may we marvel at his love and then apply them to ourselves.

Genesis 18:1-14 The LORD appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he was sitting by the door to his tent during the heat of the day. ²Abraham looked up, and he saw three men standing in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and he bowed down to the ground...He hurried to prepare it [water and a meal]. ⁸He took cheese curds, milk, and the calf that he had prepared and set it before them. He stood beside them under the tree while they ate.

¹⁰One of the men said, “I will certainly return to you when this season comes around next year. Then Sarah your wife will have a son.”

1. Come up with 5 ways that a believing husband or Christian mother shows their love.
2. Come up with at least 5 different ways that God shows his love and care for us.
3. Identify at least three ways God demonstrated his striking grace to Abraham in the words above.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, keep your word always near to our family. Open our hearts to hear and our lips to praise you in family worship. Amen.

We are considering how the Lord came to Abraham to assure him that he would keep his promise. A little context is going to help us as we consider these words. Recall that Abraham is the one that God chose to become the father of a new nation, the nation of Israel. He called him to leave his homeland and go to the land that he would show him. It was then that God gave him this promise: **“I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Genesis 12:2,3).**

There is a lot wrapped up in that promise. But one thing that was essential for many of those promises was for Abraham to have a son. However, many years had passed since the day God first spoke that promises, and Abraham still didn’t have a son. He was getting older and so was his wife Sarah.

But God wanted Abraham to know that he was not going to go back on his promise. So in the chapter right before our words today, God again came to Abraham and repeated the promise. He told him, “You will be the father of many nations and Sarah will have a son.”

Now, if God makes a promise once, that one promise is sufficient to guarantee that it will happen. If he repeats that promise, it’s gravy on top. But what do you call it when he repeats that promise again, and does so by physically visiting the one to whom he makes that promise? That’s over-the-top grace! That’s what makes our lesson so striking, because that’s what God actually did.

1. God dealt with Abraham not primarily in terms of command, but in terms of promise. How does God’s grace come through in each element of God’s promise?
 - a. “I will make you into a great nation.”
 - b. “I will bless you.”
 - c. “I will make your name great.”
 - d. “You will be a blessing.”
 - e. “I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse.”
 - f. “All peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

Prayer: Lord, move us always to trust each of your promises as sure and certain because you have the almighty power to bring them to pass. Amen.

Three visitors come to Abraham. At first it isn't clear as to who they are. But as the lesson continues it is revealed that one is God and the other two are angels. That's right! God himself came and visited Abraham.

What striking grace! He stooped down and ate and spoke with Abraham as a guest. I don't think there is a way that we can even begin to completely comprehend just how gracious this is. And God did this for a man with more than a few faults. Just a few chapters earlier we hear how Abraham doubted God's promise and lied about who Sarah was. If God had not stepped in the plan of salvation would have been ruined. Just a few chapters earlier we hear about how Abraham doubted God's promise and decided to take matters into his own hands and mess things up again. Yet to this man, a man full of sin and doubt and distrust God comes.

God's visit with Abraham reminds us of the time when God visited all men, not to announce the birth of a son, but to come as Savior. God the Son left heaven to come to earth and offer himself for us and for our salvation. It reminds us what Jesus did when he appeared to his doubting disciples after his resurrection. He ate with them to reassure his doubting and fearful disciples that it was really him. He had risen! He was alive!

All this adds up to a staggering thought! Abraham and Jesus's disciples and we are to realize that the almighty God wants to share our company as a friend. Let me say that again. The almighty God wants to share our company as a friend. That becomes even more striking when we take a moment to look at ourselves in the mirror.

1. Who were the three 'strangers' who came to visit Abraham?

2. If Abraham's guests were heavenly visitors, why did they eat?

3. Although we aren't reading it in today's devotion, consider the lesson on which our devotions are based – Genesis 18:1-14. A lot of that section highlights Abraham's hospitality to the visitors. Why do you suppose hospitality is so frequently encouraged in the Bible as a fruit of faith?

Prayer: O Holy Spirit, move our hearts to believe in the promises of what Jesus has done for us just as Abraham believed in what God would do. Amen.

Who are we? We are not the friends of the almighty God by nature. Instead, we are his enemies. Like Abraham we have a checkered past and present. We have doubted God. We waver in our faith. We try to go our way. Yet he wanted us to share his company. The only way that could happen was if God came and visited us.

That's what he did in the person of Jesus. God came to earth to eat, sleep, and live with mankind. He took on our nature so that he could take on our sin. That's the only way we could become the friends of God. Our guilt had to be paid for. Our sin had to be covered. Righteousness had to be given. That's what Jesus accomplished with his perfect life and innocent death. What he won is ours by faith.

That's why this account before us is such a striking demonstration of grace. He came to Abraham to assure him that he would fulfill his promise. He went so far as to visit him in person to reassure him. And we want to take this account of Abraham and apply it to ourselves.

You see, sometimes we are like the little boy who looked intently up at his mother. Excitedly he pulled on her dress until she was listening. "Mom, are we really going to go to grandma's house tomorrow as you promised?" "Yes, we are dear," his mother replied. This was all the reassurance the child needed. "Oh goodie," he said, and ran out to play.

Sometimes we need to be reassured or we begin to worry and doubt. So we look at a lesson like this and see that God keeps his promises. It reminds us that God came to us and kept his promise to be our Savior. He reassures us again and again that it is true. In so doing, he puts his seal of certainty on every promise he has ever made to us. That's important, because some of those promises sometimes seem impossible.

1. Today's sermon devotion says that what Jesus won is ours by faith. Does that mean faith is the power that saves?

2. What is the only way we can become the friends of God?

3. In what way is our faith strengthened as we apply this account of Abraham to ourselves and our lives?

Prayer: Lord, teach us to humbly pray as the man who came to you saying, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief." Amen.

Have you ever heard someone make a promise that seemed unrealistic? Perhaps we might feel that way when we listen to political candidates who are running for office. They make lots of promises. And if you are a politician, you have to be careful what you promise. Can you imagine if a presidential candidate would say, “If you elect me, I promise to completely fix the social security system. I will fix all the problems associated with the health care system. I will eliminate terrorism in the world, and eliminate the national debt. I promise to do all these things for you over the next four years.” If a candidate for president made promises like that would you vote for him? Or would you think that he had lost his mind?

Yet, in a way, those are the kinds of promises God likes to make. Such is the situation in the words of our lesson. As God makes this promise, Abraham is 99 years old and Sarah is 89. No wonder Sarah laughed and said, **“After I am worn out, will I have pleasure, since my lord is also old?”** She didn’t believe it. She didn’t think that God could do something like that at their age.

So, what are we supposed to do when we are confronted with a promise made by God that seems like it's not going to work out? When that happens, there is only one thing for us to do – stop asking questions, stop raising doubts, and simply believe. We call that faith. And we are reassured today that is not blind faith. It's faith based on facts. Facts of how he has done the impossible in the past. Facts of how nothing is too hard for the Lord. Faith is believing that nothing is too hard for the Lord. This striking display of grace helps strengthen our faith to see and believe that.

1. What are some promises of God that are hard for you to believe?
2. What should we do when we are confronted with such promises?
3. Why can we say that our faith is not blind faith?

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for patiently reminding us that you will not change one of your promises. You know how much we need this assurance for our faith. Amen.

If we are honest, there is a little bit of Sarah inside each one of us. As we see the world continue as it always has, do we doubt he will come again? When we are hurt by others do we question his promise to help us forgive? As we see wickedness prevail do we wonder whether he is really in control? When we see the ungodly prosper, do we doubt his promise that it is better to follow the Lord? As the guilt of sin weighs heavily upon us do we question his promise to forgive us? Sometime, we are willing to believe he will forgive us, but then we laugh with doubt at other promises – like his promise to work ALL things for the good of those who love him; or his promise everything will fall into place when we put God first in everything.

It upsets God when we doubt him. In reality, and I know it hurts to hear this but it's true, we are calling God a liar when we doubt him. We're ultimately telling him that he doesn't know what he's talking about. That is sin. Don't beat around the bush. Don't try to explain it away. Don't go making excuses for this or that. Let's call a spade a spade. When we fail to trust God above all things we sin.

That's why the Christian life is one of repentance. And it's why it is so important for us to hear words like our lesson today – for reassurance. You see, God has made another promise - he promises to forgive you. He promised to take your sin and throw it into the depths of the sea. He promised to forget your sin, to remove it from you, as far as the east is from the west. That's what God promises to us sinners. That is what he does.

Just listen to his response to Sarah's doubting laughter. **"Is anything too hard for the Lord?"** What's the answer? The answer is no! It's not too hard for God to make it so that an 89 year old woman would conceive and give birth to a son. Nor is it too hard for God to take your sins away. He did that by sending his Son, who made a sacrifice for you on the cross. So it's not too hard for Jesus to come again and raise people from the dead on Judgment Day. After all, he himself rose from the dead on Easter morning. It's not too hard for him to give you the strength and ability to do what he asks you to do in his word. And it's not too hard from him to turn a car accident, or natural disaster, or whatever else it might be into something for your eternal good. Nothing is too hard for the Lord.

1. What sins does this devotion lead you to confess?
2. For what does this section of the devotion lead you to give thanks?
3. What is the answer to doubt?

*Prayer: Lord, may your word take root in us, so that we bring forth the precious truths of repentant lives.
Amen.*

ANSWER PAGES

PAGE 1

1. Come up with 5 ways that a believing husband or Christian mother shows their love. **Answers will vary**
2. Come up with at least 5 different ways that God shows his love and care for us. **Answers will vary**
3. Identify at least three ways God demonstrated his striking grace to Abraham in the words above. **1) God physically came to Abraham; 2) God was the GUEST of Abraham; 3) God repeated the promise to Abraham**

PAGE 2

1. God dealt with Abraham not primarily in terms of command, but in terms of promise. How does God's grace come through in each element of God's promise?
- a. "I will make you into a great nation." **God spoke these words the first time to Abraham when he was 75 years old and had no children. Yet, he was going to give him large numbers of descendants and divine blessings through them.**
- b. "I will bless you." **God would pour out blessings into Abraham's personal life. He did just that. We know that Abraham was extremely wealthy, and that was the case even though he was a nomad pretty much his entire life.**
- c. "I will make your name great." **Abraham's name did become great, as the nation of Israel came from him. More importantly, the Savior came from his line. Also, consider the names he received from God in the Bible. Abraham is called the "Friend of God" and "Father of Believers."**
- d. "You will be a blessing." **God would use him as a blessing to others. Throughout history, happiness or lack-there-of would flow from the relationship people had with Abraham.**
- e. "I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse." **God was earnest about protecting his servant and spokesman.**
- f. "All peoples on earth will be blessed through you." **In this promise we see most clearly the promise of the Savior.**

PAGE 3

1. Who were the three 'strangers' who came to visit Abraham? **One was the Lord, and the other two were angels**
2. If Abraham's guests were heavenly visitors, why did they eat? **Love! Love! Love! They ate because of God's love for his people and how he delights to be with his people. It is evidence that he wants to share our company as a friend. Because of Jesus, there is no barrier blocking fellowship with God. This was meant to reassure Abraham that the promise is true and the promise would be kept.**
3. Although we aren't reading it in today's devotion, consider the lesson on which our devotions are based – Genesis 18:1-14. A lot of that section highlights Abraham's hospitality to the visitors. Why do you suppose hospitality is so frequently encouraged in the Bible as a fruit of faith? **Finally, we want to be gracious and hospitable simply because we want to carry out God's will. We want to do that because he loved us first. But couldn't we also say that it is so frequently encouraged, because our God is so generous, we should be too. If we are not, what does that say about our God or about what we think about our God?**

PAGE 4

1. Today's sermon devotion says that what Jesus won is ours by faith. Does that mean faith is the power that saves? **No, faith has no power in itself. In other words, faith is not such a noble or good human effort that it moves God to love the one who has faith. Instead, faith simply trusts what God has already done. The "power" of faith is in that which it trusts (its object) and not in itself.**
For instance, children have faith that their mothers and fathers will provide food, clothing, and shelter. The children live every day with this absolute faith. When they arrive at home for dinner, the meal is on the table ready to eat. Their faith has not provided the meal. Instead, the parents have provided it by buying the food and preparing it. It is not the faith but the object of that faith. Of course, the faith of a child is

valuable and important, but it has no power to put food on the table. The power of faith is in that to which it clings – not in the faith itself. We don't have faith in faith. We have faith in Jesus Christ.

Of course, sometimes our faith is weak and we are filled with doubts. God assures us of his love and forgiveness, but sometimes we wonder if it's true. It is very important to understand that the blessings God has promised do not depend on how strong our faith is. In fact, because of our stubborn sinful nature with its doubts, the hardest thing for a believer to believe is that he or she believes! That is why it is so comforting to be directed not to our faith but to our Savior. As our eyes are lifted to his cross and the depth of his saving love – the object of our faith – our faith is strengthened. We so frequently must join our voices to say the simple prayer of a man who once came to Jesus: "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24)

2. What is the only way we can become the friends of God? The only way we can become friends with God is if our enemy status is removed. Since we have nothing to offer God that can remove that which serves as the wedge between him and us, we needed him to do all the work to restore a right relationship. That's what happened in Jesus. Jesus removed the barrier of sin. He carried our guilt. He provides the righteousness we need. Only through faith in Jesus can we become the friends of God. But that is what we are through Jesus!
3. In what way is our faith strengthened as we apply this account of Abraham to ourselves and our lives? It is strengthened as we are reminded that God kept his promise to be our Savior. And, as we see his promise to Abraham kept, and his promise to be our Savior kept, our faith is strengthened in the fact that we are reassured that every single one of his promises then will be kept.

PAGE 5

1. What are some promises of God that are hard for you to believe? **Answers will vary**
2. What should we do when we are confronted with such promises? **Go to the Word.** See again how every promise that God ever made he has kept. Let the Spirit work in you so that your faith is strengthened in his promises.
3. Why can we say that our faith is not blind faith? **Because these things recorded for us in the Bible are facts.** Abraham did have a son in his old age. The nation of Israel is his descendants. God did send his Son. Jesus did rise from the dead. Over 500 eye and ear witnesses saw this. These are facts, thus our faith is based on fact.

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1. What sins does this devotion lead you to confess? **Answers will vary**
2. For what does this section of the devotion lead you to give thanks? **Answers will vary, but certainly we will want to include the forgiveness of sins**
3. What is the answer to doubt? **This is similar to a question from yesterday, but we need the reminder.** Jesus reminded Martha that Mary chose the one thing needful - the Word of God. That word is the answer to doubt. When doubting, we don't look inside ourselves to "find faith," but look to Jesus.