

August 10, 2025

“Working at Faith”

Genesis 15:1-6

**Intro:**

Possibly one of the least helpful or appreciated phrases a person can use is “Just calm down”. Even as I say this, you might remember someone telling you to calm down when, in fact, calming down is the last thing you wanted to do – and you probably let them know!

Another equally unhelpful or unwelcome phrase now-a-days is “You just have to trust me”. We sometimes hear this when a friend wants us to experience something funny or fun (“trust me, you will love this”), and we go along with it because we know the person and they know us and there is a reasonable chance that their statement will be true and we can trust them. But what about when someone we don’t know asks us to trust them? On what grounds could they possibly think we are going to blindly go along with whatever they are doing or asking simply because they said, “Trust me”? The ridiculousness of such a thing is often played out in movies where one of the characters will invite someone to make a great leap of faith and trust with a phrase – “there’s no time to explain, but you have to trust me.” There was lots of time to show a pointless romantic scene, but no time to give a solid reason as to why some stranger is to be trusted... maybe the studio execs are banking on a charming smile to make everything better...

A fun example is in the cartoon version of Disney’s Alladin. Alladin is trying to impress Jasmine and failing miserably, and when she tells him to leave, he simply steps off the balcony, causing her to rush to the edge in concern that he had fallen to his death (at least I assume that would be her concern). Instead, she finds him floating on a magic carpet, which he invites her to join him on. Keep in mind, she has only just met this “Prince Ali”, and now he is holding out his hand for her to climb onto a floating ancient rug with the words “Don’t you trust me?”.

The romantic is thrilled when she says yes and goes with him. The realist wants her to point out the very many reasons why she should in fact **not** trust him.

In the 2003 remake of the movie “The Italian Job”, the character John, played by Donald Sutherland, is asked if he trusts someone and he responds by saying that he trusts everyone... it’s the devil inside them he doesn’t trust.

Where are we going with this? It occurs to me that so much of our faith is tied up in our ability, or inability to trust. It also occurs to me that we are living in a world that is increasingly hard to trust. People let us down. Governments and systems that say “trust us – we know what we are doing” turn out to not have a clue, and let us down. Scammers prey on what little trust we have remaining. Almost every aspect of life that we interact with wants our trust but does very little to earn it or make us want to give it. Gone are the days of a handshake agreement and the legitimacy of our word being our bond. Contracts and lengthy complicated legal documents are drafted in an effort to cover every eventuality that mostly revolves around people not doing what they are supposed to do.

So, when someone says “trust me”, or “have faith” that is almost the last thing we want to do.

And yet, having faith and trust is exactly what God asks of us. Specifically, having faith in God. This is more than a faith system, more than a series of actions or processes in our lives that are based on outcomes we have either observed or had some measure of influence in. It is a confidence that compels us to step forward without any anchoring tether or plan “B” to fall back upon. This is the kind of faith that the author of Hebrews was talking about when he says “Faith is the certainty of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see.” It is exactly the kind of trust that we find so unbelievable in movies, and almost laughable in our everyday life. Faith is how we respond when God says, “Trust me” without providing context or a safety net. It is the faith that Abraham was credited as being righteous for having.

### **Abraham's Example:**

Let's look at good old Abraham. We read from Genesis 15 earlier, which is where we get the conclusion that his was the kind of faith that God is looking for. Verse 6 says "And Abram (which was his name before God changed it to Abraham) believed the Lord, and the Lord counted him as righteous because of his faith." What was the faith of Abram? How did he express it or live it out to earn such a title? Taking a little walk through the faith life of Abram might help to give us an idea not only of how different things were in his day, but also in how he reacted to the "things we cannot see" that Hebrews mentions.

We have to look further back in Genesis to find the start for Abram. The faith journey sort of starts with Abram's father, Terah, who in Genesis 11 uproots the family (which includes Abram and his wife Sarai) from Ur with the intention of heading to Canaan. They don't quite get there, and end up settling in the land of Haran. Nothing is said of Terah's motivation, but later when we find God calling Abram to go to "a land I will show you" (Canaan), it isn't unreasonable to think that Terah's move was prompted by God somehow. Then we move into Genesis 12. Abram is now 75 years old and God tells him to pack everything up and move away from his current country, his father's family, and basically everything that he knows and has worked for to go to an unknown foreign location where God says he will have fame and fortune and will become a great nation. Abram may have interpreted this last bit as some indication of how big an operation he will have of slaves and servants and all that sort of thing. Honestly, there isn't a lot of information from God for Abram to go on. Abram, however, doesn't question any of it. He doesn't look for signs. He doesn't consult with experts or business planners or anything like that to help him to decide what to do. It isn't even established at this point that God was a central part of his family worship. God had spoken to Noah and been present to his family (Abram is descended from Noah's son Shem), but that was many generations and the whole tower of Babel and the confusing of languages ago. There is nothing provided in Scripture at this point to suggest that God and Abram had any depth of relationship.

What was Abram's response? "OK". He packs up the family, including his nephew Lot and head off to parts unknown and to an equally unsure future. No second-guessing.

After Abram packed things up and headed to this unknown country, God gives him a little more information on things. He promises that the land they are going to will belong to Abram and his descendants. Great promise, but now we have a problem. Abram and Sarai are both old, and Sarai is not able to have children. Abram's response to all this? "Ok" – and he sets up a few altars along the way to mark his growing worship of God. No questions, no concern over the fact of their lack of children. In chapter 13, He repeats the same thing once Abram is actually in the land.

Then we come to chapter 15. Time has passed. Abram is settled and business is presumably going well. However, he is still just squatter on the land, along with all the people involved in his household and ranching business. They are nomads. Abram is wealthy, yes, but not because he possesses real estate. Abram has been blessed. Life is good, from a financial point of view. But the reality that he lacks an heir to what he has is beginning to creep into Abram's thoughts. God sees what is happening and reinforces his promise to bless Abram. He gets Abram to count the stars, if he can, and compares that vast number to the vast number of people that will be descended from him. Abram's response to this outlandish "Trust me" statement from God? "Ok".

Notice that it is at this point that Abram is counted as righteous because of his faith. He has taken God entirely at his word. He does not see the end, but he knows there is something there. He is all in. There is no going back for Abram, only going forward. With that foundation of faith and trust established, Abram allows himself to ask God for a little proof. This doesn't mean Abram's faith is wavering, it means that it is strong enough to handle whatever answer might be given.

Often our faith struggles and suffers because we ask for proof before we are ready to handle the answer we are given. It was the case with the rich young ruler that Jesus spoke with. There was a man who would have been counted as being a person of great faith – obedient to everything the religious law required. But he asked for answers that he wasn't ready for. When Jesus said he had to sell everything he owned and give it to the poor, he went away sad because he was very rich. His faith was tied to that wealth, and it couldn't hold up against the absolute trust that God asked of him.

Abram's faith was different, so he could ask for some clearer commitment from God. It was at this point that God did make a covenant with Abram. The end of Genesis 15 details how that went.

### **Conclusion:**

The point for us here is that Abram believed before he had the commitment in writing, as it were, from God. That is the kind of faith we need to work at building in our own lives. So often we wait until we can see all the angles and get as much information as possible. We want to know all the risks up front. We want to be able to weigh the cost to see if it is worth the blessing. That is not faith. It does shine a light on our challenge with trust in this world and how it affects our relationship with God.

God has promised us life, everlasting. He has shown himself, through his Word, to be faithful and trustworthy in the promises He makes. He has been, and is, consistently present in the lives of His people. There is no reason for us not to respond with "Ok" when he says, "trust me". So, what holds you back from doing so? Ponder this question as you leave today. Let it rumble around in your mind and your spirit. As you do so, ask God to open your eyes to the things that get in the way of truly living in faith. As He reveals those to you, release each one over to God and ask Him to show you a better way.

This is a risky thing. When we ask God to work changes in our lives, He often does so by providing opportunities to put into practice those very changes. The risk is

worth it though. At the end is blessing. Not blessings of material wealth or worldly matters, but the blessing of a “heavenly homeland”, as Hebrews 11:16 tells us.

Let me leave you with this thought: God is impressed with faith that is not just focused on salvation, even though that is a good place to start, but it is faith that, as OT scholar John Walton puts it, is “faith that God is who he says he is – faith in his attributes, faith that he can and will do what he says he will do, faith that he cares, faith that he is sovereign, faith that he is good. Stake your life on it. Don’t just believe; live in faith. Go beyond *carpe diem* (which means seize the day) to *carpe Deum* (embrace God).”<sup>1</sup>

Let’s pray.

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<sup>1</sup> John H. Walton, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2011). Pg 441.