

Why are God's promises important?

By Wendy Wood



Second Peter 1:3-4 says, “His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.”

God's word provides all that we need for life and godliness because it reveals knowledge of God Himself. We see His glory and excellence in His word. He specifically granted to us precious and very great promises SO THAT we may become partakers of the divine nature.

God's promises are the motivation for obedience.

John Calvin says, “God stimulates us more powerfully to the performance of duty by promises than by ordering.”

God, at times, uses warnings about what will happen if we disobey, but far more God uses His promises of blessings to motivate us to Christlikeness.

To see how God's promises motivate obedience, let's look at some examples from scripture where disobedience or rebellion occurred as the result of not trusting God's promises.

When the Israelites were in the wilderness, God made promises to them that he would go before and protect them, yet they rebelled because they did not take God at His word.

Deuteronomy 1:29-32 "Then I said to you, 'Do not be in dread or afraid of them. The Lord your God who goes before you will himself fight for you, just as he did for you in Egypt before your eyes, and in the wilderness where you have seen how the Lord your God carried you, as a man carries his son, all the way that you went until you came to this place. Yet in spite of this word you did not believe the Lord your God.'"

Note that scripture does not say "you did not believe IN the Lord your God." The Bible clearly says "they did not believe the Lord". Obedience is about taking God at His word. If what God has said is true, if we believe Him, our lives will demonstrate that in how we respond and act in daily situations.

The Israelites did not trust God's promises. They had unbelief in their hearts. They disobeyed because they did not believe God would fight for them and carry them in the future as He had done for them in the past.

Psalms 78:15, 17, 22 "He split rocks in the wilderness and gave them drink abundantly as from the deep. Yet they sinned still more against him, rebelling against the Most High in the desert.... Because they did not believe in God and did not trust his saving power.

Again we see that disobedience was rooted in unbelief. The Israelites did not trust that God would continue to grant his saving power to them. They saw the provision of God splitting rocks to provide water, but they did not trust he would continue to provide in the future.

Disobedience and rebellion are the result of not trusting God's promise to be God in the future.

Then we see an example of belief in who God is and that that belief leads to obedience.

Psalms 56:3, 4, 12, 13

"When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust, I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me?... I must perform my vows to you, O

God, I will render thank offerings to you. For you have delivered my soul from death, yes my feet from falling, THAT I may walk before God in the light of life.”

David trusted in God and trusted God. He gave thanks for past grace but he saw that as motivation to trust God for more future grace. The “past grace” of God’s protection and provision was what motivated David to walk with God in light or obedience to His truth. David trusted that His faithful God would continue to provide protection and provision, therefore he didn’t need to be afraid, he would rest his soul in God.

Hebrews 11 also demonstrates how trusting in God’s promises encourages us to obey.

Verse 1 says “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen”

Faith is the on-going belief in things not yet accomplished.

Hope is the “realistic expectation and joyful anticipation of the good that is guaranteed to come for all who are in Christ” (Jared Mellinger, Bright Tomorrow pg 35)

We see in Hebrews how people in the Old Testament lived obediently to God because they expected God to keep His word and looked joyfully to the good God would do.

Verses 17, 19 “By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son... He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back”

Abraham acted obediently to God’s command to kill his son Isaac because Abraham had faith that God would keep His promise and give Abraham descendants as numerous as the stars.

Verses 24-26 “By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.”

Moses was looking to the reward. He believed God would be good and reward his obedience. He looked forward to God continuing to provide for his future, just as God had provided for him in his youth in rescuing him from death and placing him in Pharaoh’s household. Moses trusted God’s promise of future reward.

Tim Keller uses an example of two women working the same job. Both women are hired to do a tedious assembly job that is repetitive and boring. They do the same work over and over for 8 hours a day. They are placed in identical rooms with the same lighting, temperature, and ventilation. They have the same number of breaks. Their circumstances are identical except for one difference. One woman has been told that at the end of the year she will be paid thirty thousand dollars, and the other woman has been told she will be paid thirty million dollars. After a few weeks, one woman is going crazy and wants to quit. The other is working joyfully. What makes the difference can be reduced to one factor: the expectation of the future. (taken from Bright Tomorrow)

Tim Keller says, "What we believe about our future completely controls how we are experiencing the present".

If we believe that what God says will surely happen, our experience here on earth will be very different. Believing God's promises is motivation to live joyfully and obediently.

Obedience to God's word is the process of becoming more like Christ. Our goal as counselors is to help our counselees become like Christ. The promises give us all motivation to pursue holiness through putting off sinful responses and putting on God-glorifying responses.