

What does it mean to trust God's promises? By Wendy Wood



We saw in the previous blog that not trusting in God's promises is a form of unbelief. It is not trusting God to keep His word. It is not trusting that God will continue to be God.

So, trusting God's promises is believing. How do we grow in that?

To trust God's promises means to take them into your heart, your mind, your emotions, your desires, and think, consider, ponder, and saturate yourself in them until they bring quiet and joy to your soul.

To trust the promises is to seriously and frequently meditate on them.

The promises must be in our thoughts to draw strength from them. The puritans had several really wise ways of describing meditation.

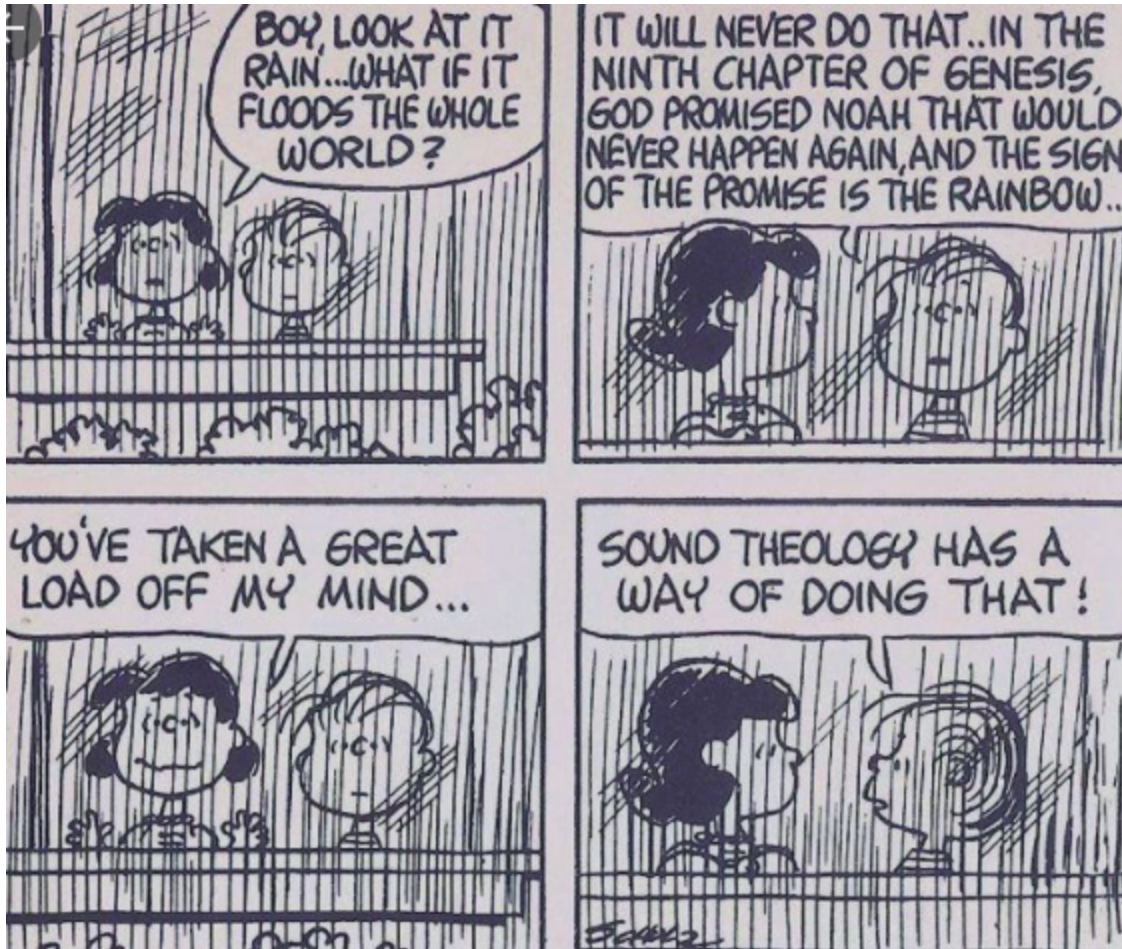
Think about making a cup of tea. God's word is the tea bag and your mind is the hot water. If you dip a tea bag into a hot mug of water and pull it out after a few seconds,

your tea will be weak, you will have no flavor, and the health benefits or caffeine desired will be ineffective. The same is true if we read one of God's promises, close our bibles and go on with our day. The promise has no effect on our life. But, if we dip the tea bag in the hot water, let it steep for several minutes, swirl it around the cup and maybe even push it against the side of the mug for extra dispensing of the flavor, the tea will be rich and provide all the benefits of a cup of tea. We need to sit and steep in God's promises. We need to turn them over in our minds, consider, ponder, think deeply about the promise made and the God who promised it. The Holy Spirit works that truth and faith into our hearts so that we become more like Christ. But we do the thinking, considering and pondering.

William Spurstowe (as quoted from *Living by God's Promises*) says, "One promise thoroughly ruminated and mediated upon is like a morsel of meat well chewed and digested, which distributes more nourishment and strength to the body than great quantities taken down whole."

We must encourage our counselees to slow down and think deeply. (You can look on the website to find more specific teaching on meditation.)

Every promise of God should relieve our doubts and ease our worry. Sound theology is given to us to make a difference in the way we live.



Lucy knows what God has promised and believes God will keep His word. She has no reason to be fearful. God's promises change the way we look at the world and should change how we respond to our circumstances.

We need to store up promises in our heart so we can use them at the right time.

The Holy Spirit will apply these truths to our hearts, but we are responsible to use the means of grace to grow our faith.

Take time to reason through the promises of God. God typically gives the statement, with reason we can trust behind it!

Promises like Isaiah 41:10 "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

Why should we "fear not"? Because God is with us.

Why should we not be "dismayed"? Because God is our God.

And, because God gives strength, help and upholds!

We must teach our counselees to look at scripture and the reasoning God provides. This is part of meditation.

Philippians 4:19 “My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”

Why should we believe every need is met? Because God gave us His Son!

Maybe you have a counselee who tends to think “but I have needs that aren’t met” - the promise says that every true need - life in relationship with God through faith granted by grace - is your greatest and only true need. You already have that in Christ!

Psalm 84:11 “The Lord is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly.”

As your counselee stores this up in their heart, encourage them to think about the sun. What does the sun provide? What does a shield do?

How does God bestow favor on His children? Honor?

God withholds “no good thing” from those in Christ. Our counselees need to take this heart. If they don’t have something, it is because God has determined it’s not best for them to have. God gives what is good - for our sanctification and His glory. Spending time considering and pondering God’s definition of “good” is important.

These general promises can be stored up now for future reflecting on.

Trusting God’s promises means choosing to believe even when you don’t see God at work.

It is an act of the will to choose to trust God. God has revealed himself in His word. God has revealed Himself in creation. God has revealed himself in His Son. Because God’s promises are rooted in His very nature, we can choose to trust God even when you don’t see how the promises are working for us.

So when doubt or unbelief comes - in the form of anxiety, loneliness, lust, depression, bitterness, or in situations like parenting, aging, or illness - we choose to go to the promises of God and take God at His word. The Holy Spirit then applies it to our heart for transformational change.

John Piper uses this analogy in Future Grace (page 53)

“Suppose you are in a car race and your enemy, who doesn’t want you to finish the race, throws mud on your windshield. The fact that you temporarily lose sight of your goal and start to swerve does not mean that you are going to quit the race. And it certainly doesn’t mean that you are on the wrong racetrack. Otherwise the enemy wouldn’t bother you at all. What it means is that you should turn on your windshield wipers and use your windshield washer.

“When anxiety [or doubt or unbelief] strikes and blurs our vision of God’s glory and the greatness of the future that he plans for us, this does not mean that we are faithless, or that we will not make it to heaven. It means our faith is being attacked. At first blow, our belief in God’s promises may sputter and swerve. But whether we stay on track and make it to the finish line depends on whether, by grace, we set in motion a process of resistance - whether we fight back against the unbelief of anxiety. Will we turn on the windshield wipers and will we use our windshield washer?

“The windshield wipers are the promises of God that clear away the mud of unbelief, and the windshield washer fluid is the help of the Holy Spirit. The battle to be free from sin is “by the Spirit”. The work of the Spirit and the word of truth - especially the foundation and central truth of the gospel that guarantees all the promise of God. These are the great faith-builders.”

We trust God’s promises by waiting patiently.

God does not set a specific time for his promises to be fulfilled. There may be times when we do not perceive God at work and do not see how or when He will fulfill his promise to us. Yet, God’s timing is always all-wise and all-good. God is never late in fulfilling a promise. God does much of his good work in our periods of waiting.

William Spurstowe says we often act like sick people who conclude that medicine is unhelpful if it does not immediately remove our pain, when all the while the medicine is working to prevent the sickness from taking greater hold on our bodies. We do the same thing when we don’t feel immediate relief of pain or circumstances from God’s promises. We often grow impatient and conclude God is not good, capable, or some other rebellious doubt against God.

Joel Beeke says, “Sometimes the promises fall like spring showers in the middle of the day, and at other times they light upon us as imperceptibly as the dew during the night hours. In the latter case, the virtue of their activity is as real as in the former.”

God does not set a date and time for the completion of His promises, but the timing is up to Him! We are called to trust and submit to His plan, and be content because He is God and He is perfect in every way, including his timing!

Isaiah 55:10-11 is encouragement to keep waiting and trusting.

“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven
and do not return there but water the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”

God will accomplish His purpose. Not a single word will fail. We must choose to believe that.

Trusting God's promises means looking for sustaining grace as well as delivering grace.

Delivering grace is ultimately salvation - freedom from sin and eternal death. But we also refer to delivering grace by seeking freedom from a type of suffering. In 2 Corinthians 11 Paul lists many sufferings that God removed from him. Paul was adrift at sea, and God had him land at some point. Paul was in danger from robbers, and escaped. He was in danger in the wilderness, and God delivered him to safety. There are times when we can pray for God to remove suffering, and He does. But that is not the only way God answers prayers and not the only form of grace in providing His promises.

There is also sustaining grace! We see this in 2 Corinthians 12 where Paul asks God to remove the thorn from his side. Paul pleads three times that God would remove the suffering, deliver him from pain and uncomfortableness, but God says no. God denied the delivering grace. God instead gives sustaining grace. “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness”

Sustaining grace is God providing the strength to endure a trial or suffering well. We

see Paul then boasting in God's power to sustain him. God got the glory and Paul was becoming more like Christ in submitting to God's will, being patient and loving even with the thorn in His side.

A couple of years ago I had to have surgery on my leg. I had been praying that the surgery would go well, that it would accomplish what needed to be accomplished and heal quickly so I could get back to my normal routines of walking, hiking, running, and just keeping up with household stuff. I was praying for delivering grace. But, in God's perfect wisdom, He gave sustaining grace. My surgical incision got infected and I had difficulty reaching the doctor. I place many phone calls, talked to many different doctor on-call doctors who didn't know my situation, and had to take four rounds of antibiotics. This set my recovery back by at least a couple of months. I had to wait. I had to change my focus from wanting a quick healing to being content with God providing grace every day to help me deal with the pain and be content with sitting.

I could look at this and say "God didn't keep his word". "No good thing does God withhold from those who walk uprightly." God let something bad happen to me." That would be rebellious unbelief.

God fulfilled his promise to me by giving me the good of growing in patience and learning to content in not being able to do my favorite things. God was with me. God gave me extra time to be in His word and to encourage my family as I sat on the couch and they came and went from the living room. I could have missed out on many of these conversations if I had been up and doing my normal routine.

We trust God's promises when we look for His provision of sustaining grace, even while we may pray for delivering grace.