

God's Covenant of Faith

Genesis 15

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Shall we pray, loved ones? Lord Jesus, we would ask you for your word to us. Men are good and their words are useful, but we would ask for your word to each one of us right into our hearts so that we'll go out of here with food in our souls and stronger for this week. We ask this is your name and for your glory. Amen.

Fenelon was that Roman Catholic saint in France in the time of King Louis. He actually worked among the Aristocracy and among the lords and ladies of the court of the French king. It's amazing, but despite that disadvantage you would think Fenelon had great insights into God and into our relationship with him. He said, "We depend on God for everything," and that's pretty obvious. We depend on God to hold the world in mid air with no visible means of support, and we depend on him to hold all its life support systems in position. The life support system for the animals, and the birds, and the plants, and for us human beings. We depend on God to hold the protons and neutrons of our bodies together, otherwise we'd blow apart. Similarly we depend on him to preserve the external pressure of the air so that we don't cave in or we don't explode. We depend on him to hold together everything to enable us to meet here this evening.

So in a real way it's pretty obvious that we depend on God for everything but Fenelon's sentence you remember, ended, "We depend on God for everything, but we count on him in nothing." We count on him in nothing, and we count on him for nothing. I think it's true for probably many of us here this evening, and you might even say most of us, but you would have to decide that for yourselves, that we tend to count on our employers for our jobs, and we count on our jobs for our money, and we count on our money for our food, and our shelter, and our clothing, and we count on our friends for our self esteem, and we count on favorable circumstances for our happiness. We know fine well that all those things come from God, and we know that they're all created by God, and we know that in a strange way he is the one that controls them all.

But still, is it not true that we tend to keep thinking that they are separate from God, and we count on them and don't really think of ourselves as counting on God? So, when the job seems tentative and the salary seems to be losing out, we tend not to count on God at that moment but to count on what we can do to make our employers want to continue to employ us, or to get another job for ourselves. But usually, panic goes through our hearts when those things shake, indicating I think, that though we do actually depend on God for everything in our everyday life we count on him for nothing.

In a strange way we're like that old man in that old-fashion story, walking along the road with that heavy weight of firewood on his back. A younger man comes along with a horse and cart. He stops beside the old man and he says, "Can I give you a ride?" And the old man has a look at the young man's old donkey and he sees he's hardly managing to totter along under the cart, and he says, "No, no. I couldn't put that burden upon you." And the young man says, "No, it's alright. That donkey's stronger than you think. Get up here on the cart with your load of firewood." And the old man gets up and sits beside the young man, but he keeps his load of firewood on his shoulders, on his back, instead of setting it down on the cart beside him. And the young man says, "Look why don't you put your firewood down, and relax a little and enjoy the ride." And the old man says, "Oh no, I

couldn't expect your old donkey to carry my firewood as well." And of course, it was obvious that the old donkey was carrying his firewood, but the old man liked to think that he was actually carrying it himself on his back. I think that's the dilemma we're in.

We really depend on God for everything, and he actually is carrying us, and he actually carries everything in our lives -- but we hold onto this idea that we're really carrying it. We're really running our jobs by our own skill, and our own industry, and we're really supporting our own lives with our own money. So, our relationship with God is really utterly dishonest. That's why we missed that intimate closeness with God -- because we're pretending all the time that we are actually carrying things ourselves. We're not acknowledging to him that we actually depend on him for everything. We lose that intimate sense of oneness with him that comes when you're really honest with God.

Now of course, all of you know that even as we talk about this it's like trying to catch a rainbow, isn't it? Because you kind of feel, "Yeah you're right. You're right brother that is right -- but oh, that faith that you're talking about is so ephemeral. I mean, you're right. That is what's wrong with my attitude to God, but how do I get back into it? I seem to be able to slip out of it so easily. How do I get back into it?" It is hard to pin it down. All we can go by is God's own word that "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God". (Romans 10:17) That's why we're studying the Old Testament chapter-by-chapter on these Sunday evenings, because we believe that somehow you will hear a word from God, maybe that I speak, maybe that I don't speak at all. Maybe you'll hear a word just as you glance at a sentence in the Bible and that will stir up in you and reveal to you some way in which you're not exercising that faith in God, some way in which you're not resting in his trust.

So that's what I'm praying will happen as we, as we look at these chapters Sunday-by-Sunday. The one we're looking at is really regarded as the most basic chapter in the whole of the Old Testament because it's the chapter when God established a covenant of faith with Abraham. It's Genesis Chapter 15. It would be good to remember in coming weeks that we said this, that this is the most basic chapter -- not the chapter on circumcision -- but this one, this covenant of faith that is outlined in Genesis 15.

So maybe you'll turn to that and see how the Chapter begins, "After these things the word of the Lord came to Abraham in a vision." Now that's interesting in itself -- the word of the Lord came to Abraham. Ever since Jesus, the Holy Spirit has been able to abide in us so that we've been able say, "I say" and "the Holy Spirit says" at the same time. Or, the Apostles were able to say, "It seemed good to us and to the Holy Spirit also." Ever since Jesus rose from the dead and ascended to the Father the Holy Spirit has been able to come and abide in us as a permanent voice of God. But in the Old Testament times, the word of the Lord had to come to people, and that's why that expression is important, "the word of the Lord came to Abram".

Nevertheless, the truth is the same. The method by which the word of the Lord came to people in the Old Testament, the method by which God manifest his thoughts and his will to you and me through the Holy Spirit today, is the same. It is the same conditions that need to be fulfilled. There are conditions that need to be fulfilled. Every time you align your life with God's will in practical everyday life, God is able to manifest his thoughts and his will for your life. That's true. Now you'll see it if you look -- when did the word of the Lord come to Abram? Oh after these things. After what things? After Genesis 14:21. Genesis 14:21, "And the king of Sodom said to Abram, 'Give me the persons, but take the goods for yourself.' But Abram said to the king of Sodom, 'I have

sworn to the Lord God Most High, maker of heaven and earth, that I would not take a thread or a sandal-thong or anything that is yours, lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich.'”

Every time you align your life with faith in God, God is able to manifest his will and his thoughts to you. That's true. Every time you make your outward life line up with what God's will is for you, every time you're willing to say, “No, I know I could get all that money that you're offering me, but no I don't want you to be able to say you've made me rich; I'm trusting my God to make me rich; I wouldn't take a sandal-thong or anything from you” -- every time we do that, every time we express our faith and trust in God in an external practical down to earth way in our lives, God's voice becomes clearer to us.

Jesus taught that very clearly in John 7:17. It's a verse that we've referred to before, but it's such an important verse that I thought we should look it up. It's John 7:17, and it really teaches the same truth that every time you do what God's will is for your life in a practical everyday way, then the truth becomes clear to you. John 7:17, “If any man's will is to do his will, he shall know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority.”

Some of us say, “Oh I'm confused, I'm confused. I don't know what's true or what's right here.” Sometimes we say it about doctrine. Sometimes we say it about what we're going to do in our lives about guidance, but we so often will say that. “I'm confused. I'm bewildered. I don't know which way to turn. I don't know what's true here.” There it is. It's that dead easy. “If any man's will is to do his will he shall know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking in my own authority.” Jesus said, “Do you want to know if what I say is true or not? Then if your will is to do my Father's will in your ordinary everyday life you'll know it. Things will come clear to you.”

Now that's the distinction between false mysticism and Christian mysticism. False mysticism thinks that it will discern what God is saying to you, or it will discern God's will by trying to examine the subjective experience and by trying to introspect into the voices that you think you hear in your head. That's what false mysticism does. Loved ones will get into confusion because they'll say, “Oh I hear voices, but I don't know what is God and what is me. How do you distinguish between what is God and what is me?” That's false mysticism, concentrating on trying to discriminate or discern between the spirits that you sense are inside you. Christian mysticism is a much simpler thing. It's lining up your life with what you know God's will is for you. It's trusting and expressing your trust in practical everyday ways, such as Abram did when he said, “I wouldn't take a sandal-thong that is yours.” It's doing that and then in the light of that, God is able to manifest his will in your thoughts.

So it's lining up your thoughts, your emotions, your will, your outward life with what you know is God's will for you, and then God is able to manifest his will to your spirit, and thence to your thought through your mind. So it's very clear loved ones, if you want to know what God wants you to do in your life, then obey him where he is clearly telling you to obey him. Obey him where you can see. You remember what Moody said, “If we would obey God in the things that we understand he's telling us to do, then we would have much less trouble understanding the other difficult things in the Bible.” The way to understand God's will, or the way to hear his voice in your life is to do what he's telling you to do. You see what that means, not only in regard to sin but in regard to trust, inner trust in your heart, inner trust in his taking control of your life and providing for your life?

Now the opposite is true, actually. The more dependent we are on men for our sense of self-esteem, the more dependent we are on our employers, the more our heart rests on what others can do for us in this world, the murkier God's word becomes to us and the less we hear his voice. It's interesting, the more you steep yourself in dependence on the world, the harder it is to sense God speaking to you. The more you depend on him, the clearer his voice is. You testify to that yourselves. When things have been hardest in your life, you have had no one to depend on but God and his voice has been loud in the land. When you have things going well, and you get uppity and begin to depend on yourself and on other people, his voice becomes scarce in the land and you have difficulty hearing him speak. So loved ones, it's good to see that the word of the Lord came to Abram when? After these things. After what things? After him in outward practical ways expressing his trust in God. I think a lot of us keep our trust mental and that's why we rarely hear God's voice.

Now loved ones, maybe you'd look at it in Genesis 15 again, and let's go on a little further. Genesis 15:1, "After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, 'Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.'" And really, God's word to us is that fresh sweet water that keeps you going. So it's pretty vital to hear God's word. It's pretty vital to hear him speak to you from time-to-time. That's what gives you strength for weeks, and days, and months, and years, when you hear his voice. The word of the Lord came really as a reward for trusting me, that's what he said, "I am your shield, your reward will be very great." "What reward?" "Your reward for trusting me in other situations, and other things." And when did Abram trust him? Genesis 12:1, "Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.'" Verse 4, "So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him." Abram trusted God, and aligned his life with what God told him to do.

Genesis 12:9, again Abram trusting God even though he could have taken the best land for himself. 12:9, "Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left." Every time you express your trust in God and not in man, God gives you a reward of his own voice. Whether it's tithing, you go out on a limb, and you decide, "I'm going to tithe." Or whether it's some other act that shows your trust in God -- maybe it's not worrying, maybe it's stopping being anxious about your job situation -- God rewards you. He rewards you with his voice if you express a little trust in him that comes from your heart.

Then you see Genesis 15:2, "But Abram said, 'O Lord God, what wilt thou give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?' And Abram said, 'Behold, thou hast given me no offspring; and a slave born in my house will be my heir.'" And Abram took God seriously, he took his word seriously, and he took his promises seriously. He didn't just say, "Oh maybe that promise was kind of the way I was feeling after a big super," or, "Maybe it was something I read in a book and I wasn't quite sure, I thought it was from God but maybe it was my own imagination." He didn't do that, he took God seriously. That was God's promise to him in Genesis 13:16, that was the promise he took seriously. Genesis 13:16, God had said to him, "I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your descendants also can be counted."

That was the promise, God had said, "You're going to have thousands of descendants," and Abram took that promise seriously because he was 86 and he hadn't one. And so he took God seriously and he said, "Lord, I am childless. I'm childless, and I don't want a child for my own benefit here, but you promised that I would have children as the sand upon the seashore and as the stars in the sky.

Now Lord I'm still childless. Now will you fulfill your promise?" And you see in Verse 4, "And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, 'This man shall not be your heir; your own son shall be your heir.'" Stay with God until you get word from him -- you need to do that. God likes you to take him seriously. Stay with God until you get word from him.

I think half of us don't hear anything from God and don't see any miracles in our lives because we don't stay with God -- we don't pray through to assurance. You remember, that dear man, Cho, pastor of that large church in Korea. You remember, he asked I think for \$5 million to build a new church, and for months he was in kind of heaviness. And then one morning he came down to his wife and said, "I've got it, I've got it!" And she said, "What?" And he said, "I've got \$5 million." And she said, "Where?" And he said, "I've got it in my heart. I've got assurance from God that he has given me that, and it's just a matter of him now manifesting it."

It's important to pray through to an assurance that God has already given this thing to you and that means staying with him. Abram was 86 and had no children, and he remembered that God had promised him that he would have many descendants and so he stayed with God and prayed through until he got assurance on it. And loved ones, that takes time, and only the Holy Spirit is able to bring that to you.

If you look at Romans 4:17, you see the interpretation that the Holy Spirit gives us of that moment in Abram's life. It's Romans 4:17, "As it is written, 'I have made you the father of many nations' — in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.' In hope he believed against hope that he should become the father of many nations as he had been told, 'So shall your descendants be.'" And there the dear Holy Spirit gives us insight into Abram's mind at this very moment in history. And Abram looked up to God, and he saw, "Lord you are the one who gives life to the dead, and you are the one who calls into existence the things that do not exist. So even though I am 86 Lord, I know that you made me out of nothing. I know that you can raise up children from these stones. I know you can do it."

That's where faith comes from. Faith comes from looking at God and reminding yourself of his nature, and seeing him as he really is, and gradually he brings into you a complete assurance that he has done this thing, that's where faith is. Loved ones, that's where you build your faith. Hearing comes by the word of God, not just this written word of God, but his word of God coming home to your heart as you stay before him in the darkness and the loneliness. It's probable that many of us here never get anywhere with God because we can't stand praying through to him in those moments -- that's when you get the assurance. You come out of your room and you say, "I've got it, I've got it." No man and no women can contradict you. That's where faith comes from and that's, of course, the faith that is talked about in this next verse.

Genesis 15:5: "And he brought him outside and said, 'Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your descendants be.'" So Abram got a great assurance that this was it, and then this is the faith that is talked about in this famous verse. Verse 6, "And he believed the Lord; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness." We have a tendency in our Evangelical world of interpretation to say, "Real righteousness is obedience to every one of the Ten Commandments -- but faith? Well, God out of kindness to us rebellious little children, he reckoned FAITH as righteousness."

In other words, we imply to each other that faith is a kind of second-best righteousness. It's a kind of substitute righteousness. I think we get that from the translation of the Greek and the

Hebrew because we know the words so well, “He reckoned it to him for righteousness, and so he will reckon it to us also.” We have the idea that real righteousness is legal righteousness, obedience to every one of the Ten Commandments without any flaw. But because we’re weak-willed and we’re not able to obey the Ten Commandments, God kindly takes faith and he kind of reckons that as righteousness. He says, “Okay, you couldn’t obey the Ten Commandments. Okay, I’ll look at faith as if it was righteousness.”

Now that’s not the meaning of the Hebrew at all. The Hebrew word is “chashab” and it can be interpreted consider, or reckon, but that’s not the inner meaning of the word. The inner meaning of the word is simply “regarded”. God regarded the faith as righteousness. In other words, it’s faith that makes us right with God. Right from the beginning, it always was so. Moses’ laws were given simply to expose the ways in which we don’t trust God so that we’d suddenly see, “Look we’re not living according to God’s law. Why are we not?” And God wanted us to see, “Because you’re not trusting me. That’s why you murder because you don’t trust me with people. That’s why you steal because you don’t trust me to provide what you need. That’s why you committed adultery because you won’t accept my judgment on what I want you to experience.” But faith is the original righteousness.

Our God is the one that enables us all to sit in these chairs, in these seats. Our God is the one that is holding your body together. Our God is the one that is making your heart beat. Do you know that not even the doctors -- and I think Kevin will even back me on this -- not even the doctors know why the heart beats. They can describe where it starts and how it moves, but they can’t tell why it beats. Our God is the one that keeps you mysteriously alive, and he expects you to trust him for everything. That is what is right in his eyes. That is what is appropriate and he thinks of that as righteousness. That’s all he’s asking you to do, to trust him, to realize that you’re laying in his arms and you’re utterly dependent upon him. That’s righteousness, and that faith is not a second-best righteousness. It’s not a substitute righteousness. That faith is righteousness.

The Father wants to see little children who trust him completely, who immediately, when they’re in trouble, they look up to him and say, “Dad I am in trouble, but I know you have already provided a way for me here. You have already solved this problem.” God wants to see you looking up at him like that. Every time you worry, every time you pop the tranquilizer, every time you get anxious, every time you act in haste, and rashly, you thrust a sword through your Father’s heart. He says, “Wait. Wait my child. If I withdrew my finger for a moment your whole body would fall apart. Now you’re pretending that you can depend on somebody else besides me.” It thrusts a sword through his heart. It spills a barrier between you and your God.

Faith is the original righteousness. And you know, it might help you a wee bit because, so often, we get mixed up in this. So often we think, “Oh your faith is reckoned as righteousness,” and so often we think John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” We think, “Oh faith in that is assent to the truth of that verse. That’s what faith is, and magically, that’s regarded as righteousness. It’s a kind of ‘open sesame’ to heaven.” That’s not faith, that’s assent to a statement in scripture. It’s assent to a belief or a doctrine. Real faith is trust in the loving God who so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son. Real Evangelical faith is a day-by-day trust in your Father. It’s a trust in him for all of the events in your life. It’s a trust that he has, in Jesus, destroyed all the obstacles that will ever come up this coming week. He has solved them all and you walk forward in peace and confidence.

Do you walk in fear and apprehension of what's going to take place this coming week, or do you walk forward in absolute peace and confidence that your dear Father has already gone that route before you and has cleared away all the obstacles in his Son Jesus' death and have left you a smooth road to travel? Which? That's what faith is that justifies and that makes us right with God. It's a whole trust in our Father, a whole trust in what he has done in Jesus. It's not some assent to an Evangelical doctrinal statement in a certain verse of scripture. It's a warm loving trust in our dear Father. It's a rest and a relaxation. It's a forbearance in times of difficulty. Why? Because the Lord is at hand.

It's a trust in that moment when the boss comes down and says, "Why did you do that? This is your last chance." Instead of a rising up in panic and worry, it's a deep trust, "Father I know I'm in your hands. Even if I made an error here, I know I'm in your hands and my job and my future is in your control." That's the faith that God regards as righteous. I think it's old Keil- Delitzsch tries to give some description of it. It comes from the Hebrew word "hamine" and it means to cause to continue or preserve. Here's the way he puts it: "[Faith is] that state of mind which is sure of its object and relies firmly upon it, a firm inward personal self-surrendering reliance upon a personal being, especially upon the source of all being -- not merely an assent to the idea of God's faithfulness, but unconditional trust in the Lord and his word, even where the natural course of events furnishes no ground for hope or expectation." That's what faith is. It's absolute trust in the Father, even when everybody around is saying "Look he's not true. It isn't true. Your life is falling apart." It's a deep trust and confidence at that moment.

See loved ones, do you understand that that's the only thing that will carry us through death? Do you see that? I mean I agree with you all that there is a gracious immunization that takes place against the pain of death. I agree with you that there is a compensating grace that is given that takes care, to some extent, of the pain the cancer or the agony of the trying to breathe and all that kind of thing. So there is some compensation for the physical agony, but the actual moment of death is a going out into darkness. Now it is, you know, there's a moment when you close your eyes and there is darkness there. Now there's a moment after that when there's brightness of heaven all around you and Jesus is welcoming you in. But there is a second there, when only deep trust in the Father, "Even if you slay me Lord I will still bless you" -- there's that moment when deep trust in faith that has built in over the years of experience is what enables us to hold through with God. So that's the faith that is righteousness. It's good to be clear on that. It isn't just an intellectual belief.

Now then, "resting faith" like that enables God to continue to speak to you. It's in that resting faith that God speaks to you and you see that in Genesis 15:7, "And He said to him, 'I am the Lord who brought you from Ur of the Chalde'ans, to give you this land to possess.'" And so God continued to speak to Abram and to tell him more things he was going to give him. He promised him posterity first, and then he came through to him and said, "I'm going to give you this land because this is what I promised to you." And you remember, God had promised Abram that back in Genesis 13:14: "The Lord said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, 'Lift up your eyes, and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land which you see I will give to you and your descendants for ever.'"

Now this was the promise that God was repeating to Abram and he said to him, "I am the Lord who brought Ur of the Chalde'ans, to give you this land to possess." But he said, "Oh Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" It's legitimate to say to God, "Now Lord, how will I know that

this is true?" There was a brother came up to me this morning and asked me about guidance. I shared with him that God doesn't leave you in doubt. If you're not sure, it's fair to wait and say, "Lord, I'm not absolutely sure here. Now, could you make this clearer?" That's the Holy Spirit's task. So don't feel you have to go out in doubt. You can say to God, "Lord, I'm not reluctant to go this way, but would you make it clear to me?" And the Father understands that. And yet, it's important too to see that this is a good way to go. But he says, "Oh Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" Then in verses 9-10, "He said to him, 'Bring me a heifer three years old, a she-goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.' And he brought him all these, cut them in two, and laid each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. And when the birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away."

In other words, that's a sure way of guidance. God gives you a sense, "I'm going to give you this land." You say, "How shall I know?" He tells you something to do. Take that little step. Take that little step and then see if God confirms the way. God's way is a sure way. You can afford to do that. Be prepared to take a little step forward, see if God confirms it, and then take another little step forward. I would testify that God has lead me that way through the years. I've found it a plain way. The wayfaring man cannot miss it. You just hear God giving a guidance. You take a little step forward, just easy, just a little step he usually tells you. But you do have to take that step. I think that's sometimes where we miss it.

I think you often get an impression in your mind or your heart, and you dismiss it. You think, "Oh, it was just my own thoughts." No, don't. That's not faith. If you're walking in fellowship with God day-by-day, then the thoughts that occur to you should be the thoughts that come from him. You can afford to go out on one of those and say, "Lord, I believe this is from you. I'm going to take a little step forward and see if you confirm it." Where we get into real trouble is, we say, "I heard that back then. I heard that and I don't care what's happening now. I'm going through with this." Well that's where you get off-balance on guidance, because it is true. The idea could have been from the enemy. The idea could have been one of your own ideas in your mind. It's legitimate that if you're in fellowship with God, it's legitimate to believe that it's probably from God. The sure way of finding out is to take a step forward. Obey him in actual down-to-earth practical ways.

Loved ones, I would say that's the biggest cause of the vagueness in our lives individually and our lives together as a body -- I would. Both in the leaders, those of who are leaders, and all of us, we're not doing what we say we will do. We're not putting into actual practice the things that we believe God wants us to do. Maybe family group leaders are not being faithful. They're not on time for their family groups or they're not praying for their loved ones, or they're not talking with those who miss family group. Or you, in your case, you're not saying to people at work the things that God has prompted you to say to them. We're receiving all of these things into our hearts. We're storing them all up and we're not doing anything with them. We're growing full of indigestion and we're exploding with all kinds of revelations. Then, the word of God ceases in the land and we wonder why. Well, it ceases because we're not obeying God. We're not expressing the thing in outward everyday life.

The way of life with God is a very plain simple way. He tells you to do something, you do it. He tells you another thing to do, you do it. If he tells you to do something, you don't do it, then his voice grows fainter and you lapse into false mysticism. So it's a very easy way. You just do what he tells you to do. So that's what Abram did, "And when the birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away." And then Genesis 15:12 describes one of those dark and lonely

and desolate times compared with that going out into the sky and looking at the stars. How wonderful and bright that was. Then there comes this dark, lonely, desolate vision. Verse 12, “As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram; and lo, a dread and great darkness fell upon him.”

Oh I wouldn't be afraid of those moments. I think loved ones, unless you come to places in your life where the sheer lonely desolation of the world, and the hopelessness and despair of its provision for your needs comes upon you and its oppressive sin comes in upon you, I don't know that you'll ever really turn to God. I don't know that we turn to God of our own volition. Seems to me it's in those times when a dread and great darkness comes upon us, that we yearn our way through to the Father of lights. I don't know that we should resent those times. I think we should treasure those times. The best times with God are the worst times. Those are the best times. Certainly I think a number of us have found it recently in our businesses. The best times with God are the hardest times. We need to see that we should not run away from these dread times. “A great darkness fell upon him”, and I remember many moments in my life -- the one big moment for me was when my dad died. He was the rising star to me. I remember other moments when all of life seemed to fall apart. It seems to me those are the good moments in life and we should not dread them.

Even though they are – there is a great dread in darkness that falls upon you and we should be prepared to stay with God through those moments – no, “Zipitty doo dah, zippity day” whistle and the darkness will go away. Don't! Don't run from it. Don't flee from it. Don't fly away and say, “Oh I want to be healthy-minded and happy.” Stay with God, burrow through and pray. Burrow through at those moments. Stay with him until the sun rises from the Father of lights.

Genesis 15:13-16, “Then the Lord said to Abram, ‘Know of a surety your descendants will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs, and will be slaves there, and they will be oppressed for four hundred years.’” And so it was deep sad tidings that God was giving him about his descendants. “But I will bring judgment on the nation which they serve,” the Egyptians, “And afterward they shall come out with great possessions. As for yourself, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. And they shall come back here in the fourth generation; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.” Of course, that was part of the meaning of the birds of prey. Those were the other nations that were soaked down upon Israel, and especially Egyptians. So God was telling him dark and deep things but telling him things about his own life. You'll never have anything real from God unless you're prepared to stay with him through those moments in prayer. You have to get that from God.

God is the only one who knows the way your life will go, but he will tell you. Really, I think back to that – those great times when I sat in an apartment in North Minneapolis with the boxes containing our possessions around us, and I had about a week's money left. My wife was in England trying to earn her money. It seemed that life was coming to pretty much of a conclusion and I ought to head back to Ireland because there was nowhere to go. And then I think of the things that came in that darkness, and the very name “Campus Church” and all the vision that God gave in that time.

Now, you will have that too. You may not have the same thing to do as I had to do, but it doesn't matter. Mine is no bigger than yours. Yours is just as big because it's God's vision for your life, but you have to stay with him to get that -- otherwise, you'll be forever going to the vocational guidance counselors. You'll be listening to every Tom, Dick, and Harry who wants to tell you what you should do with your life. 20 years hence you'll still not know what to do with your life -- but if you get it from God, if you get down to it with the Father and get it from him, then

take the little steps forward and allow him to confirm it. Then, there's certainty in your life and there's assurance. That's what Abram got here.

Genesis 15:17, "When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces." It was God himself -- the smoking fire pot and the flaming torch passing between these pieces that represented Israel, and bringing them together, bringing the covenant together. That's what God was doing, passing between these pieces and bringing the two parties in the covenant, God and Abram, together. "On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, 'To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites.'" God made that sure covenant which of course, governed the history of Israel for thousands of years. God has that same confident guidance for us, if we will begin to trust him in our everyday life.