Praying God's Promises

by J E N N I F E R   K E N N E D Y   D E A N

A PROMISE is only as good as the person who makes it. The character of the promiser is what gives the promise its value.

As we learn to pray God's promises, the starting point is the nature of God. The essence of God's character is in itself a promise. Who He is determines what He will do and how He will act. Through the Scripture, each time God reveals something of His nature, He is promising us that He will be true to that nature in any circumstance. Sometimes the promises of God don't come packaged in declarative statements, but instead are implied in the revelation of His being.

God has always dealt with His people by communicating promises to them. By promising first, then performing what He has promised, He awakens in us the desire and expectation that find their outlet in the prayer of faith. His promises prompt prayer.

I might illustrate that process like this. Recently, I saw an ad in a magazine for noise-cancelling headphones. Until seeing that ad, I had no desire for noise-cancelling headphones. I did not experience the lack of noise-cancelling headphones in my life. But once I knew they were available, I began to desire them. I began to notice how loud the world was and to imagine how it might be if only I had noise-cancelling headphones. Knowing they were available awakened in me the desire to possess them. Knowing where to find them motivated me to seek them out.

God makes promises to us for much the same reason. He is letting us know what He has available if only we will ask. His promises are meant to ignite faith and expectation and desire, and then to point us to Him. His promises act to bind our hearts to His. His promises turn our eyes toward Him.

Many people have been disappointed when they have prayed God's promises and then did not experience what they believed God had promised. Maybe you have had that experience. If so, you are not alone.

Let me suggest some things for you to consider.

First, remember that there is a difference between believing in an outcome and having faith in God. I have discovered in myself the tendency to decide what God should do, then construe a promise so that it matches my expectation. I might pray that promise, with the subtext being my definition of how that promise should impact my situation. Over all the years that the Lord has had me in His school of prayer, a lesson that I have to keep learning at deeper levels is how to let the Word of God speak to me without my preconceived expectations being imposed on it.

For example, suppose that someone felt a strong desire to be married. Certainly there is nothing wrong with that. But let's imagine that person picks out a promise like "Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart" (Ps. 37:4). The person says, "The desire of my heart is a spouse. If the Lord is true to His promises, then He will give me a spouse." Here I believe is the misunderstanding: we tend to mistake the desire of the moment for the desire of the heart. God created the desire of our hearts and He knows it better than we do. In this case, the desire of the heart is for companionship and intimacy. Often, God fills part of that desire with a spouse. However, all married people will agree, if they are honest, that a spouse does not fill that need fully. A spouse is not the desire of that

person's heart. Rather, a spouse is one means for fulfilling that desire. God wants to fulfill the desire of your heart. A person who is seasoned in praying the promises knows to let God fulfill the desire of your heart in His way at His time. If prayer is focused on the subtext we have imposed on the promise, then we might experience disappointment. If, instead, we are focused on God, then we will never be disappointed.