

Most of us can remember when you had to answer the telephone before you knew who was calling! There was no caller I.D. And, it even had a cord attached to it so that you didn't have to spend hours looking for where you laid it down the last time you used it. Now, we can know who is calling and decide whether or not to answer it. Now, we can decide if we want to answer it or not, knowing who the caller is.

This caused me to ask, "How do we know when God is calling?" Does God have caller I.D.?

Abram (not yet Abraham) had followed the call of God. Genesis 12:4 states, "So Abram left, as God had told him." Abram was seventy-five (75) years old when God's first call came. I imagine he was well settled in the land, his father's land, and in his home. There was only one disappointment in his life, he and Sarai had no children. His call had come with a promise, "I will give this land to your children" (12:7). The years had passed and still he and Sarai were childless. There was God's promise but his prayer/question was still, "who will inherit the land?"

Abram reminds God of the promise of his call. Does God need reminding? God's words were that he would have, "...offspring as great as the stars in the sky" (15:5). Yet, Abram and Sarai were growing older with each passing day. The promise was becoming almost impossible in Abram's eyes. God had promised. Abram falls into a deep sleep with "a sense of dread, dark and heavy" (15:12 The Message). This seems to be wrong. The words seem out of place, God had promised, why the anxiety, the dread?

The unknown may bring on us a sense of anxiety and dread. We want superman's x-ray vision. We want to know about the future. The paths we are to take. Many consult psychics, palm readers, fortune tellers or horoscopes trying to discover what tomorrow will bring. We want the answers, we want to know. For Abram, God had promised. It had been years since God's call and still children were a promise. Is that the dark dread of Abram?

Paul, as he writes to the congregation in Philippi, is urging them to keep on pressing on. Like Abram the promise for them was "not yet". In a few verses earlier Paul was urging them to keep their eyes on the goal, the finish line. Paul hadn't reached it. They have not reached it. But Paul urges them forward and prays they don't lose sight of the end. It is easy to get caught up in everyday life and lose sight of the finish line. There are some days when the challenge is just to get through the day. Like Abram we are still waiting for the promise and we don't like waiting. It is not in our genes. We want faster and faster responses. A faster internet. Fast food restaurants. We lose sight of the goal, the finish line — especially if it doesn't come fast enough.

A recent commercial for a wrinkle cream shows a cupboard full of unused wrinkle creams. We are told that they were abandoned because they did not work fast enough. If we use the one they have they guarantee it will work fast. Our motto: Give me patience and give it to me now!

For Paul and Abram faith was and is not a sprint. Faith is a marathon. This is Mike's description of his cancer treatment—a marathon. Almost everyone can do a sprint. We might not be the fastest and we may finish last but we can finish a sprint. We have all seen Special Olympic athletes stopping and helping other athletes to finish with them. For them finishing is more important than winning. It is not so hard, we can see the goal. Now, stop and imagine a football field two miles long. You can't see the goal posts. Or, a marathon that is over twenty-six miles. You cannot see the finish line when you begin. You may have never seen where you will finish. There will be times when you are alone on the course. There are others ahead of you

and others behind but for a few moments you are alone. There is no one cheering you on, encouraging you to go a few more steps.

We grow weary. We grow tired and the finish line is nowhere in sight. It is easy to forget the journey, to sit by the side of the road and mope. We are not even sure there is a finish line. God had promised Abram descendants and now years later there were still none. We have only been told there is a finish line.

I remember our first whale watch. As we neared a reported whale sighting the captain told us to scan the horizon for blow spray. Now, never having seen “blow spray” we were not sure what we were looking for. We strained our eyes looking, searching. Was that one? Then, one was spotted - excitement grew - suddenly others saw it and then we all did. WOW! Now, we knew what to look for.

Paul’s words to the congregation in Philippi and to us is that our journey is a faith marathon. We are called to stand firm even on those nights when there is a dark, dread over our souls. When we wonder about tomorrow. It is not that the promises have become invalid. No, they are still the promises of God. With each passing day Abram wondered how would his descendants become as great as the stars in the sky or the grains sand on the seashore. He still didn’t have one! Where are the thousands? God reaffirms the promises, “To your descendants I will give this land” (Gen 15:8). God’s words are, “I WILL”.

God will. There will still be drama in Abram and Sarai’s lives. It will be awhile before there was even a glimpse of the promise being fulfilled. Paul writes that he has not finished the race — he still presses forward. All God asks is that we keep our eyes on the goal. We stand fast. Hold down the fort. Keep the home fires burning. Whatever image you have — Out there is the finish line, our goal and God has promised. God has called and God will...

---

NIV, New International Bible Society, Zondervan, 1973, 1978, 1985  
NRSV, Division of Christian Education, NCC, 1989