



Problem or Promise?

You Can Only Look at One

by Chip Ingram

Reptiles have an amazing ability to look at two different objects simultaneously. Their eyes function independently of one another, so they can gaze in opposite directions. That's an impressive feat. I wish I could do it.

But human beings aren't equipped with that kind of vision. We can only look in one direction at a time. (We have other perks, like depth perception and an insect-free diet.)

This limitation applies not only to our physical vision but also to our spiritual focus. When we stand between a problem of circumstances and a promise of God, we can really only focus on one or the other. When we focus on the problem, the result is paralysis, anxiety, and stress. When we focus on the promise, the result is power, faith, the presence of God, and the peace that passes understanding.

Seems like an easy choice, doesn't it? But our tendency is to gaze at problems more than we gaze at God's faithfulness. The consequences of magnifying our circumstances don't seem to deter us. Meanwhile, the God who has the whole world in His hands—whose power to save has been proven again and again, and whose promises cover every situation we find ourselves in—offers to take our burdens off of our shoulders. All He asks is that we trust Him.

Probably all of us in a difficult trial have been advised by a caring friend to "turn it over to God." Most of us have even offered that wisdom to someone else. It's great advice, but how do we

accomplish it? How do we get a burden out of our own hands and put it into God's—and leave it there?

I think the answer is found in Romans 4, where Paul discusses the process Abraham went through to believe in a very unlikely promise. After describing God as the one who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they are, Paul identifies Abraham's focus: "Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed" (v. 18). Abraham considered the fact that he and Sarah were far too old to have children, and he probably had a lot of questions about how God would accomplish His promise. But according to Romans 4, he didn't focus on the questions. According to verses 20-21, he took his eyes off of the problem and gazed at the promise—or, better yet, the Promiser.

The result was that Abraham was considered righteous—and that he received the promise. The timing and the means were entirely in God's hands, but the responsibility for faith was in Abraham's. That's our responsibility too.

For some reason, we assume more responsibility than that. We hold our problems in our hands, sometimes very tightly, stressing over them, advising God of all the ways He might want to resolve them, and strenuously praying without faith until we're exhausted. Usually only when we let go of them does He take them and work out His answers.

Ask yourself these two questions: (1) "What problems are in my hands today?" You can probably think of several pressing issues pretty quickly—things that your mind is drawn to whenever it has some down time; and (2) "What does God hold in His hands today?" The answer, of course, is the whole world. Everything.

Think about that. If you let go of what's in your hands, whose hands will it be in? God's. That ought to make you feel pretty secure. You, along with your issues, are in God's hands. If you let go of the circumstances that worry you, they remain in God's hands. But they don't remain in yours.

That's where faith comes in. The way to focus on the promise rather than the problem is to emulate Abraham in the way he did not waver in unbelief but was fully persuaded that God was able—and willing—to faithfully fulfill His word.

We'll never be fully persuaded when the problem occupies our whole range of vision, and we won't be anxious when God is our entire focus. Unlike reptiles, we have to choose one or the other. Decide whose hands you want your problems to rest in. Then you can rest in His hands yourself.