



*Katie Comfort*

I was born into Northwest Yearly Meeting, and found a spiritual home there. Four years ago I packed enough clothes for four seasons of weather and moved from Portland, Oregon, to Chicago, Illinois, to study at North Park University, a small Christian school on the north side of Chicago. It is really fun getting to be a Quaker in a sea of Protestant evangelicals. Sometimes it is comfortable, and sometimes it feels a little odd. Regardless, college has marked the beginning of my understanding of God and deepened my relationship with Christ. While at North Park I stumbled into the lives of Palestinian classmates and professors, and their narratives tugged deeply at my heart. As I began a dual major in Sociology and Conflict Transformation, I also began exploring what it may mean to be called to a place so far and different from my own home. Through all of this, I have learned that the greatest adventure is the one that Christ shares with us.

*BIBLE READING: Genesis 12:1-13*

Last spring I was thanking God for coming through on promises he'd made to me: I was going to Palestine that summer, I had survived a season of pain and loss and come through renewed, and I was loved by a strong community. Everything was good. Except that I was single, which was not exactly what I wanted. "God," I grumbled "haven't you forgotten something?" God replied, "Who said I promised you that?" and I said, "Okay, fine." And that's when it hit me. It is not my place to tell God what I've been promised.

The same thing happened with Abraham. God made a promise. And then Abraham said, "Wait, you forgot something, so I'm just going to pretend Sarai is my sister, because that's foolproof, and you probably didn't think of this anyway." In the same way that Abraham was wrong to lie about his relationship for the sake of protecting himself, it is wrong for me to decide how and when God's promises should be kept. I can receive promises from him, I can see them manifest in unexpected ways, but I cannot control or dictate the terms of God's fulfillment in my life. We can only be sure that the active promises God has made to us (the biblical ones, by which we feel convicted and in which we have confidence) will come true in God's own special and perfect way.

*SONG: Just a Closer Walk with Thee*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Pray that God's promises will be clear and that you will remain faithful to them.*

—Katie Comfort

*BIBLE READING: Genesis 15:1-6*

I go to a school that falls under the umbrella of the Evangelical Covenant Church. Needless to say, we talk about covenants a lot, and while part of me wants to roll my eyes every time the words “this is Christ’s covenant with his church” are mumbled, the significance of being in a covenant relationship with God has become an important concept for me.

Covenants go deeper than promises. They often require more faith. Covenants are God’s promises to us, and our actions reflect an abiding commitment to them. Those covenants are not individual, but serve the purposes of our greater Christian body. As Quakers, we don’t traditionally take physical sacraments or practice the ritual of water baptism. That’s well and fine, but what we often miss is that God has called us into covenant with him where God’s mission will be carried out by our faithfulness. Covenants are God’s hope of restoring us to right relationship with him. And as Quakers we are still called to discern and honor what those covenants are.

Another thing that I love about covenants is that they are communal for the body. They aren’t just a covenant between an individual and God, they go beyond generations. The covenant God made with Abraham is ongoing. The covenant God made with David was finally fulfilled through Christ. And what better way for God to remind us that we are both precious and temporary, than to orchestrate elaborate plans for the future through us.

*SONG: Open Up (The Brilliance)*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Pray that God will reveal how he is using you for his glory in his covenant promises with the church, and that you will be faithful to that.*

—Katie Comfort

*BIBLE READING: Genesis 15:8-11, 17-18*

After I came back from Palestine and started my final year of school, I felt distrustful toward God. I was scared to push into him, and I doubted that he was really able to do through me what I couldn't do myself. As I usually do when doubt turns into darkness, I met with my pastor and we went for a walk.

As we walked, I shared with her my fears, my feelings of distance. "Ask God to show up," she offered. "It's not like you're testing him, you're just asking for assurance of God's presence in your life." Much of this conversation had been inspired by my desire to live into the promises God had made with me, and I felt that I was being challenged to give God control of those promises again.

I started praying every morning that God would make me supremely aware of him. Gently God stepped alongside me, as though he was holding my hand as I teetered on a balance beam.

In today's text, what God did with the carcasses is similar. He performed an action symbolizing his agreement with Abram. Usually this was done between two people; by doing it alone, God signified a promise to Abram that God would follow through with Abram's descendants with no further expectations of Abram. His presence was confirmed, and Abram could continue in good faith in God's promises. We don't need to feel alone when we are going through times of doubt; God has already made a commitment to us, and we need only ask that he show up.

*SONG: Please Be My Strength (Gungor)*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Pray that God will show up in tangible and faith-provoking ways.*

—Katie Comfort

*BIBLE READING: Genesis 17:3-5*

Once Abram was convinced that God's promises and covenants were trustworthy, he was fully able to submit to God. I often think that choosing to submit is a quick, one-time decision. But it literally took Abram a lifetime before he was able to fall on his face before God, a sign of true submission.

The same day that my pastor told me to ask God to show up, she lay face down in the middle of our walk together. She showed me what submission looks like and explained why I wasn't ready for it. "You're always going to be lifting your head and making sure God hasn't left." And it's true. Until we are completely convinced that God is really committed to walking with us and guiding us, we have no business saying we submit fully to him. Faith is conviction; submission without conviction is full of distrust and anticipation of letdown.

When the time comes that Abram is able to submit fully to God, God renames him Abraham. There is something in this new-name idea that I value dearly. I love that once God has made a covenant with Abraham, and Abraham has accepted and submitted, God "rebrands" him to reflect their relationship and God's favor. This parallels the idea that we are reborn in Christ, and at the same time highlights the intimacy of our relationships with God.

*SONG: Reason to Sing (All Sons and Daughters)*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Pray that your heart will be fully convinced that God is walking with you so that you can submit to him fully.*

—Katie Comfort

*BIBLE READING: Genesis 22:1-14*

This is one of my favorite stories in the Bible because it parallels Jesus' sacrifice for us. Abraham was told to kill his son to prove his commitment to God. Later, God actually sacrificed his own son to show his commitment to us. That blows my mind.

I have found that the deeper I grow in my faith, the more God requires me to sacrifice. What started with lifestyle choices has escalated to sacrificing parts of my identity to which I cling. Many who know me know that I hope to work in Palestine. As I look toward the possibility of moving there, God has begun to ask me about my willingness to let that go. This conversation makes me want to run away from God for fear I will be asked to let go of something I love deeply.

Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his own son, the heir to the covenant and the fulfillment of God's promise, reminds me that God doesn't easily fit into the "yes or no" binary that I limit him to. By this point in his life Abraham knew better than to look at God and say, "You must be kidding." If I actually think about it, God has never asked me to sacrifice something which caused me infinite pain or loss. Sacrifice which God calls us to is always so we can better reflect and serve him. And with that in mind, it is easier for me to say, "Lead me," when it comes to my own life.

*SONG: Oh God (Citizens and Saints)*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Pray that you will be trusting and open to the ways God asks you to sacrifice for him.*

—Katie Comfort

*BIBLE READING: Genesis 17:19; 18:10-14*

I took Arabic for a year with a boy named Isaac. In both Arabic and Hebrew this name is made up of a combination of letters which makes it sound like a deep laugh, one born of nothing but truth and joy. So when I read stories about Isaac and his name throughout these passages, I laughed a lot.

I'm a flawed person (we all are, you know). Each year of college I seem to fall into a pattern of thinking that I am unworthy or irredeemable. I cannot imagine how God can love someone with so many "terrible names." Isaac (the biblical one, not my classmate) wasn't a perfect character in his story either. He lied about his relationship with his wife, he favored one son over the other, etc. But still, God named him "He Laughs."

I love the idea that God names us; that he knew us in our mother's womb and knit us together. It is incredible that our "flaws" can be used in powerful ways when we give them back to God. When we acknowledge that we are freed from our flaws, we are free in Christ. And such freedom leads us to become what God's name for us calls us to be.

*SONG: Grace Alone (Kings Kaleidoscope)*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Pray that God will whisper his name for you, and that you will find your identity in him.*

—Katie Comfort

*BIBLE READING: Genesis 32:22-32*

I have struggled with God a lot during this time of my life. Through this I have emerged with a deeper knowledge of God, and I am more able to live by his Spirit. Because of these last four years of college, I walk with a distinct “limp.” A limp which I hope makes people wonder what the big deal is. Why keep pushing in when I could just walk away?

For all of us, the times when we have had to wrestle with God—the times when faith feels violent—are the times when we are growing. Abraham’s story is significant to me because it leads to a generational transformation. Mistakes are repeatedly made by Abraham’s offspring. His descendants often get it wrong. But they never stop wrestling. They never throw up their hands and say, “This covenant business isn’t for me anymore.” They know the reward is worth it.

Ultimately, God’s covenant led to Christ’s coming. And because Christ came, God’s promise to Abraham that he would be the father of a great nation expanded to include all who would accept Jesus. God clearly had a bigger plan than just one big family; he wanted salvation and relationship with the whole world. Can you imagine what would have happened if any of the patriarchs, or one of their children, had decided, “Close enough, I’m done”? Why do we consider our call to Christ any less significant? God’s covenant to Abraham is still being fulfilled through us, many generations later.

*SONG: What Can I Do (Tye Tribbett)*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Pray that the depths of your faith will be revealed as you face times of wrestling with God.*

*—Katie Comfort*