

ABRAHAM

An All-In Life

Trusting God

Devotional

Genesis 15

Have you ever had the experience of doing something brave or of making a bold decision which later came back to haunt you? At the time you did it, you were strong. You thought you were acting in faith. But in the aftermath, you were gripped by fear as you thought about the possible repercussions. Sometimes I have taken a strong stand or spoken out boldly on some issue. But later, when criticism hits, I begin to worry and to second-guess my earlier boldness.

Maybe you've gone through something similar. You were challenged to step out in faith and trust God for something. You gave up a choice financial or career opportunity because you wanted to serve the Lord. You gave a large sum of money to the Lord's work. But then a financial crisis hit. You said no to that date with a good-looking non-Christian guy, only to sit home for weeks without any other dates. You started wondering, "Did I do the right thing?"

That's where Abram was after the events of Genesis 14. His wayward nephew Lot, living in Sodom, was taken captive by four kings from the east. In a bold move, Abram led his trained men against these kings and staged a surprise attack by night, routing the army and recovering all the people and spoil. When he returned, he offered a tenth of the spoils to Melchizedek, the king of Salem, but refused to take his rightful share from the king of Sodom, lest that worldly man could boast that he had made Abram rich. Abram had given up fabulous wealth on the principle that God, who had promised to bless him, would meet his needs.

Then fear came knocking. One night as Abram lay awake in his tent, he was thinking about the fact that those kings from the east weren't the sort of guys to take a humiliating defeat passively. Surely, they'd come looking for that puny shepherd who had taken them by surprise, and when they found him, they'd wipe him out. He shouldn't have rescued Lot. Now he couldn't shake his fear.

And not only that, but Abram wondered whether he had done the right thing to refuse the spoils of Sodom. Sarai was complaining that they never had any spending money and she could use a new coat. Besides, that no good nephew Lot got all of his things back, things which rightly could have been Abram's now. Abram lay there in the dark, wondering whether he should have taken the spoil of Sodom for himself, thinking, "I risked everything for that ungrateful, selfish nephew of mine, and what do I have to show for it? Nothing!" Fear and worry!

You've been there, haven't you? You did the right thing, but you didn't prosper. Another person did the wrong thing, and he's having a great time. Meanwhile, you're wondering whether you might get wiped out because you did what was right.

What do you need at a time like that? The answer is, you need to trust in the Lord. The Lord has promised His blessings to those who trust in Him. God's blessings don't always come to us the moment we think they should. Some are delayed for months or years. Some don't even come to us in this life. But He wants us to go on trusting Him. He is faithful to His promises in His time.

You make God's promised blessings yours by trusting Him.¹

¹ Sermon excerpt from Steve Cole entitled "Making God's Promises Yours" found @ <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-30-making-god-s-promises-yours-genesis-151-6>

Open it

1. Describe a time when you were unsure of buying a product or making a decision and after moving forward it turned out to be better than you could have imagined?

Read it

Genesis 15

Explore it

2. How did God appear to Abram and what did He say?
3. How did Abram respond to God?
4. Where did God ask Abram to look to illustrate His promise?
5. What did Abram see in his dream about the future?
6. What was the covenant that God made with Abram?

Apply it

WHAT HAVE I DONE??

Have you ever made a series of decisions that in retrospect seemed to be naive and reckless? I believe this is what happened to Abraham. When he reflected on what had just transpired, he lost his grip. Think for a moment what he may have been thinking.

Potential Retaliation

Abraham, with his small band of trained men, had taken on four kings with their armies of highly trained warriors. They could have retaliated at any time and wiped out Abraham's household, taken his servants into slavery, confiscated all of his herds, his gold, his silver, and whatever else they might find. It certainly would have been reasonable for Abraham in a moment of reflection to ask himself, What have I done? Furthermore, For what purpose? The grave answer would have to be, I've risked my neck and the lives of my whole household for a selfish and ungrateful nephew.

Potential Poverty

Not only had this Old Testament patriarch risked annihilation and/or slavery, but he had also turned down an offer of material possessions that rightfully belonged to him and that he could certainly have used. Lot had chosen the fertile valley of the Jordan and left Abraham in danger of poverty. His mighty herds and flocks would have quickly eaten every blade of grass that was struggling to grow in this rather desolate land that was just recovering from a very severe famine.

A Human Impossibility

God had promised Abraham a land, a large family that would become a nation, and a special blessing that would affect the whole world. At this point in time, Abraham had no sense of security regarding any of these promises. He must have been doubting everything God had said.²

- 7. What concerns or issues in life cause you to worry the most? When have you ever been hesitant to follow God's leading because of fear?**

² Getz, Gene A.. Men of Character: Abraham (Kindle Locations 1436-1451). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

Over the last few weeks, our church has been talking about our ALL-IN For Tomorrow generosity initiative that we hope will give us the ability to meet growing physical needs of our church buildings while also growing us spiritually as we take steps of faith and trust in God.

8. As we journey together in this ALL-IN For Tomorrow generosity initiative, what are some common worries that we might face and how can worry impact this step of giving to God in greater ways?

IT'S A NEW DAY!!

Since the word Genesis means "beginnings" we shouldn't be surprised to discover several important "firsts" in this chapter:

- The first use of the phrase "the word of the Lord came" (v. 1). This phrase is used over 100 times in the Old Testament.
- The first time God said "fear not" to anyone (v. 1).
- The first time God is called a "shield" (v. 1). Frequently used in the Psalms to describe God's protection for his people (see Psalm 3:3, 5:12, 28:7).
- The first time anyone is said to have "believed" in the Lord (v. 6). The New Testament uses the word "believer" as a synonym for "Christian" (see 1 Timothy 4:12).³

9. Abram heard audibly from God. In what ways can we hear from God today? What is necessary for listening to God, no matter the format He uses to speak to us?

³ Sermon excerpt from Ray Pritchard entitled "How To Overcome Fear" found @ <http://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/how-to-overcome-fear/>

"Fear not!" is the most repeated command in the Bible. In fact, it's been said that there are 365 "Fear nots" in the Bible — one "Fear not" for every day of the year! Lloyd Ogilvie in *Facing the Future without Fear* even said there are 366 "Fear nots" in the Bible, one for every day of the year, including Leap Year! God doesn't want us to go a single day without hearing his word of comfort: "Fear not!"⁴

10. The amount of "Fear nots" in the bible reminds us of our propensity as humans to be afraid. What would fearless living look like for Abram? What does fearless living look like for us today as we commit financially to the Lord?

11. God says he will protect Abram all his days like a shield protects a soldier. In what ways have you seen God protect you and your family as you have lived faithfully for him?

Let Me Introduce Myself

God refers to Himself as "Jehovah", "The Self-Existent One." God is merely reminding Abram Who he is dealing with. We have a tendency to forget just who is in control of the events of life. It would do us good to remember that we serve "Jehovah God" He was here before anything and He will be here after everything. And, He controls all things that happen in between. He is a **powerful God**, Job 42:2; Luke 1:37. He is a **present God**, Heb. 13:5; Matt. 20:28. He is a **perceptive God**, Heb. 4:13; Pro. 15:3.⁵

12. As we take a step of faith as a church in the days to come what truths about God can we point to that make the future less worrisome and more exciting?

⁴ <https://www.soulshpherd.org/fear-not-365-days-a-year/>

⁵ Sermon excerpt by Alan Carr entitled "Moving toward Maturity" found @ http://www.sermonnotebook.org/old%20testament/Gen%2015_7-21.htm

13. God promises that Abram will be rewarded greatly at the end of verse 1. Read Hebrews 11:6. How would Abram be rewarded for his faith? In what ways does God reward us when we step out in faith?

From our comfortable vantage point, looking back through history, we struggle to understand Abram's fragile confidence. But Abram didn't have the advantage of hindsight. He was an old man with a wife well past menopause, and both of them wondered how they were supposed to produce a son. Here's what Abram said to God:

O Sovereign LORD, what good are all your blessings when I don't even have a son? Since you've given me no children, Eliezer of Damascus, a servant in my household, will inherit all my wealth. You have given me no descendants of my own, so one of my servants will be my heir. GENESIS 15:2-3

The phrase O Sovereign Lord is unusual because it brings together two of God's names: Adonai and Yahweh— Master and Lord. This helps soften Abram's challenging yet reasonable question. He says to God, in so many words, "You keep promising blessings, but I'm closer to death than ever before, and I have no blood heir to receive Your covenant promises. Sarai can't get pregnant now, so exactly what reward do You mean?"

Abram, trying to make sense of the Lord's promise, theorizes that perhaps his chief of staff, Eliezer, might be the heir God had in mind. That would have been the custom of his culture. If you could read the Lord's response in the Hebrew language, His denial would blow your hair back. Genesis 15:4 records that he began with an extremely emphatic no. He then stressed that Abram's heir would come from his body. In today's terms, He might have said, "Your heir will come from your DNA." Then, to drive the point home, the Lord "took" Abram outside. The verb is active, almost forceful, as though He bodily picked up the man and set him in a clearing under the night sky. "Look up into the sky and count the stars if you can. That's how many descendants you will have!" (verse 5).⁶

14. Abram vacillates between faith and doubt regarding God's promises for him, What can we learn from Abram's interaction with God when we like Abram are paralyzed by current circumstances?

⁶ Swindoll, Charles R.. *Abraham: One Nomad's Amazing Journey of Faith* (Kindle Locations 920-929). Tyndale House Publishers, Inc..

15. Abram assumes he knows God's plan for providing an heir. What dangers come from assuming that we know what God has in store for us?

16. God wants to alleviate the fears of Abram and build his faith. How does pointing him to the stars give confidence? What is God showing you in recent days that builds your confidence?

THIS ONE IS ON ME

The detailed symbolism in this covenant has been lost to history, but archaeology helps explain some of the mystery. Normally this ceremony would have been witnessed by each participant's community. The covenant between the two parties and the terms of their agreement would live in the collective memories of their family members and friends. Who could forget the image of large animals cut in half and laid on either side of a walkway? (This custom gave rise to the Hebrew expression "cut a covenant.") In the ancient Near East, people swearing an oath would call down curses upon themselves should they breach such a significant contract. Walking this sacrificial path may have been a symbolic way of saying, "May the same happen to me if I should fail to hold up my end of the agreement." As an act of pure grace, God walked the sacrificial pathway, obligating Himself to fulfill His unconditional covenant with Abram.⁷

17. God upholds both ends of the covenant which would enable Abram the freedom to focus on what things? What does His finished and fulfilled work allow us to focus on as recipients of the New Covenant in Christ?

⁷ *ibid* (Kindle Locations 992-994).

When God makes a promise he keeps it. I would venture to say that the continued existence of the Jewish race after four thousand years is one of the strongest proofs of the truth of the Bible. The Jews are here because God promised Abraham that he would make of him a great nation. Abraham never lived to see the fulfillment of that promise. Indeed, in this very passage God declared that he would live to a ripe old age and then his descendants would spend 400 years in Egypt. Only then would they return and possess the land.⁸

18. It seems like God is telling Abram “I know the future and you can trust me?” And, while the future would be rocky at times, God’s plans would come to fruition. Knowing this about God what things do you need to release to him that are keeping you from stepping out in faith?

19. Read Romans 4:18-21. Abram started the chapter wavering but Paul says that after experiencing God he was “fully convinced.” Take a moment to consider the level of faith you have in God and in His plans for your future. What does a life that is “fully convinced” look like and what needs to change so you can become more like Abram?

20. Your church leaders have launched our ALL-IN for Tomorrow initiative because they are fully convinced that God is moving our church into a new chapter of ministry and effectiveness that will have an impact for the future. But, this requires big steps of faith in the present - both individually and organizationally. How does this passage give you a renewed confidence that while the future is still unknown that our best days are yet to come in your own life? What about in the life of the church?

⁸ Sermon excerpt from Ray Pritchard entitled “How To Overcome Fear” found @ <http://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/how-to-overcome-fear/>