

Where to Stand When Your Faith is Tested

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Text: Genesis 12:10-20; 1 Peter 1:4:12-13¹

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Series: Genesis (Book of Beginnings)

Introduction: Open your Bible to **Genesis 12**. The title of our message is “Where to Stand When Your Faith is Tested”. We are going to learn tonight that we must not stand in fear which leads us to manipulate and control and lie and scheme. We must stand in confident faith when we are tested. Tonight we read about how Abraham’s faith is tested during a famine in Canaan, and he is forced to go to Canaan, where he is consumed with fear for Pharaoh instead of God.

Have you ever been really afraid of life’s circumstances? What should you do when you’re afraid? Where should you hide? Do you tend to cover yourself with lies or prayer? Do you control the situation or do you surrender it to God.

I know what I’m prone to do. How we need to pray for each other. We have two choices when life squeezes us. Fear or Faith! I’m glad we have Abraham, who was at times frail in his faith, and yet he was a friend of God.

Certain Old Testament people were characterized by special designations. Moses was consistently called “the man of God.” David was called, “a man after God’s own heart”. Abraham, the second most important character the entire Old Testament, is called “the friend of God.”

- Jehoshaphat said in **2 Chronicles 20:7**, “Did you not, our God, drive out the inhabitants of this land before your people Israel, and give it forever to the descendants of Abraham your friend?”
- **Isaiah 41:8**, God refers to Abraham as: “Abraham, my friend”.
- **James 2:23**, “the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”—and he was called a friend of God.”

Any one who has placed faith for their life and destiny in Christ is a friend of God. Faith is foundational to any relationship with God. **Hebrews 11:6**, “without faith it is impossible to please him”.

Are you a friend of God? You know if you are your can expect your faith to be constantly tested. John 15:14, “You are my friends if you do what I command you.” Will you obey God no matter what the pressure is? You know that your faith is going to be constantly tested.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is from the *English Standard Version* of the Bible.

James 1:2-4, “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing”.

Are you living in fear or by faith? God’s purpose is to grow our faith in him. When we are born again, we are babies in the faith. There is still a lot left within us that does not trust God. We can be sure that the rest of our lives on earth, God will continually test our faith. He brings many tests and trials and tribulations. The showers of God’s blessing is not simply goodies that we may enjoy. God does send us those things from time to time. But sometimes God’s blessings come in the form of trials and tests. God has gift wrapped tests for every one of us in all shapes and sizes.

Let me give you three encouragements that will help during the test of your faith.

I. God always **guides** us to what is best for us (vs. 10-16).

A. God **tests** our faith (vs. 1-10).

God says to Abram, Go to Canaan, and “I will bless you” (vs. 1-3). So Abram goes to Canaan, in full obedience to God (vs. 4-9), and he does not see God’s blessing. What a shock. He did not foresee this! Instead he experiences a famine. **Verse 10a**, “Now there was a famine in the land...”

1. There was a **famine**. The clouds vanished. The rain stopped. The grass shriveled. The crops failed. Abraham’s flocks likely grew sick with no pasture and no water. It says in verse 11 that the famine was so “severe in the land” that Abraham was forced to journey to Egypt.

Verse 10b, “So Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land.” Yet this was the very best for Abraham for his faith to grow.

Remember God didn’t just say I’ll give you a successful life. I’ll bless your crops. I’ll give you a child. God’s promise was super abundant beyond anyone’s wildest possible imagination. He didn’t say, “I’ll give you a child.” He said, “I’ll make you a great nation” and through you “all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” So you can imagine the expectation of surrender and faith. He likely expected an immediate fulfillment to the promise.

He was promised a bountiful land and a great nation. What he got was a severe famine. That was part of God’s plan. Not long after his arrival in Canaan, Abraham found himself in a foreign land that could produce no food.

In famines, people are forced to sell all they have just to buy a little food and water to stay alive. Perhaps Abraham should go home, back to Ur. He would

have been tempted to doubt God's promises to him. A nation? A land? A great name? "I can't even find anything to eat." How could Abraham trust God? **Would God take care of Abraham?**

God called Abraham to Canaan, but if he stayed there it seemed he would die. God gives him a taste and then providentially moves him on to Egypt to test his faith.

Application: God will do what He says He will do and it is the very best for you. If you are in Christ, you are God's precious child. He loves you. He gave His Son for you. He exchanged His Son's life for yours!

2. Abraham had nothing to protect him in his travels. He went there to "sojourn". **Verse 10b**, "So Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land."

He was not there permanently. He had a tent. He didn't have a wooden house to protect him. He had a tent that was not secure at all. This was a test of faith.

Application: If you are in Christ, you can expect that God is going to test and try your faith. Why? Because God is making us like Christ. If we want to know Him we must suffer like Him.

1 Peter 1:4:12-13, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed."

B. God **guides** us in spite of our lack of faith.

1. **Instead of trusting God, Abraham feared man.** He was afraid he would be killed and Sarai would become a permanent part of the Pharaoh's harem. Was it possible in God's plan for Abraham to die? Before you answer remember that would entail God breaking His promises. God cannot do that. Abraham was in no danger. Yet he acted in fear instead of faith. **Verse 11**, "When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to Sarai his wife, 'I know that you are a woman beautiful in appearance, 12 and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' Then they will kill me, but they will let you live. 13 Say you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared for your sake.'"
2. **Abraham was willing to manipulate and lie in order to protect himself.** We are not different than Abraham. We are tempted to lie and manipulate.

Where is your walk with Christ? Do you use control tactics to get your way? Do you huff and puff? Do you threaten. "Well I'll just not talk to you." Are

you willing to break off communication? Are you willing to lie or exaggerate?

Explanation: This is ungodly. Was Sarai Abram's sister? Yes. She was his half-sister. But not telling the whole truth is a complete lie.

Application: This is not a message on lying. Lying is wrong. But lying is one of many things that shows our life is not submitted to Christ.

3. **Abraham seems to prosper in spite of his sin.** I thought sin always brings a harvest of destruction. It does. But it doesn't seem that way in verses 14-16. **Verses 14-16,** "When Abram entered Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. 15 And when the princes of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. 16 And for her sake he dealt well with Abram; and he had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male servants, female servants, female donkeys, and camels."

Explanation: Abraham got a lot of money. It seems that sin prospers him. It seems that if we manipulate and scheme we get what we want.

Application: Do you think Abraham was happy? No! He surely was miserable. He lost his wife and his fellowship with God! What good were all these riches if his wife belonged to another man?

We must learn that we will not enjoy ill gotten gain. God can take it away through disaster in a moment.

II. God **guards** us (vs. 17-19).

- A. God guards us from **ourselves** (vs. 17-19). Who is our worst enemy? It is your own heart. What you are capable ought to keep you close to God. Abraham told Sarai to lie because of irrational and hypothetical fears. He thought his life was in danger so he says in **verse 13**, "Say you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared for your sake."

Was Abraham's life in danger? Not at any time! But he puts his wife's life and God's plan in danger. Obviously God's plan was not actually in danger at any time, but Abraham was willing to risk everything because he was not focused on God.

1. Instead of looking up to God for direction and support, Abraham chose worldly schemes and quick fixes that were not well thought through. He therefore became entangled in many difficulties.²

² Patrick Fairbairn, *Typology of Scripture*, (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1989), 301.

2. Abraham did not think of Sarai. He did not think of God's plan to bless him with children. He only thought of himself. He jeopardized the one who would be the mother of God's nation. That's how sin is. It is selfish. Sin throws faith to the garbage. It does not trust that God is willing and able to rescue us out of all our troubles.
3. We don't know if Abraham cried to the Lord for help, but he did show Abraham that He loved him and Sarai and guarded his wife in spite of his selfish thoughtless actions.

B. God guards us from all **others** (vs. 19).

Verse 17-19, "But the LORD afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife. 18 So Pharaoh called Abram and said, 'What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife?' 19 Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your wife; take her, and go."

Somehow, Pharaoh was told, probably by the Lord why he was being inflicted with all these awful diseases. He found out that Sarai was actually Abraham's wife. God protected Sarai. God is in control over all. He uses His omnipotent power to lovingly protect us and guard us.

Abraham was forgetting the plan God gave him just shortly before the famine. God's plans are unstoppable for us! If He says He's going to redeem us, He most surely will, no matter if the whole world is against us.

Isaiah 14:24, "The LORD of hosts has sworn: 'As I have planned, so shall it be, and as I have purposed, so shall it stand'".

Romans 8:31, "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?"

Though Abraham's faith wavered, God was still for him! Though your faith wavers, God is still for you!

So the Pharaoh said Abraham could leave. "Take your wife and go!" (vs. 19), said Pharaoh. Was this really true? Could Abraham and Sarai really just leave? Yes, but that's not all.

III. God **gives** to us what we don't deserve (vs. 20).

Verse 20, "And Pharaoh gave men orders concerning him, and they sent him away with his wife and all that he had."

A. What God gives to **Abraham**.

1. God gave Abraham his **precious bride**.
2. God gave Abraham his **posterity**. In Sarai was the nation of Israel.
3. God gave Abraham **protection**. "**Pharaoh gave men orders concerning him**" (vs. 20).
4. God gave Abraham many **possessions**.
 - Remember **verse 16**, "And for her sake he dealt well with Abram; and he had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male servants, female servants, female donkeys, and camels."
 - **Verse 20**, "And Pharaoh gave men orders concerning him, and they sent him away with his wife and all that he had."

So Abraham left the land of Egypt and returned to Canaan with large flocks of sheep and hers of cows, and caravans of camels and donkeys carrying loads and loads of gold and silver. At the end of the famine, Abraham was not poor like everyone else. Instead he was a very, very wealthy man. How gracious is the Lord. He does it for His name's sake.

This prosperity and favor God gives Abraham is NOT because of Abraham, but in spite of him. Yet he loved Abraham and called him His friend. And God loves us no less than Abraham. He has already lavished upon us all that we could ever dream of.

Ephesians 1:7-8, "In him [Christ] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, 8 which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight 9 making known to us the mystery of his will".

God saves us in spite of us. This is about Christ. God is demonstrating His grace to unworthy sinners. None of us deserves what we are given. **Romans 5:8**, "but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

In **Ezekiel 36:22**, before Ezekiel explains the new birth and the new heart he says, "Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came."

It's not about us. It's all about Him. Hallelujah! What a Savior.

B. What God gives to **us**.

1. God gives us "**all things**" in Christ. We are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. We are complete in him. Do you need help with fear, your marriage, your thoughts, your family, your job? Don't look to make your life better. Look to surrender all in trust to Christ. What we need is Christ. All good things flow from Him. Anything apart from him is chaff in the wind. It's worthless.

2. God gives us forgiveness. Our sin will break our fellowship with God. He will not speak and give us that tenderness of heart. We must repent and turn to him for forgiveness and restoration.

1 John 1:9, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

3. God gives us complete protection in Christ. **Isaiah 54:17**, “no weapon that is fashioned against you shall succeed...” It must be remembered that courage is born of conviction based in faith. We must believe that God is guiding all things for our good. We must not fear man. We must not fear circumstances. We must fear displeasing God. We must fear getting out of fellowship with God.

John Wesley said, “Give me a hundred men who love God with all their hearts and fear nothing but sin, and I will move the world.” We ought not fear anything but that which puts us out of fellowship with God.

Franklin D. Roosevelt once famously said, “the only thing we have to fear is fear itself”. I disagree with that statement. What we ought to fear is a loss of fellowship with God and what it might do to hurt us and those around us.

Conclusion: Are you a friend of God? You are if you have been born again. All who know Christ will be learning to walk in **faith** and not in **fear**. God’s friends walk by faith.

If walking with God were easy, you wouldn’t need faith. Faith is the confidence of conviction of things unseen—that all God’s promises are true. Are you living in such a way or are you struggling with manipulation and control? If so, you need to repent and trust Christ anew and afresh. Trust in the Almighty unstoppable power of God. If you are in Christ, He is on your side.