

Is it possible to be scared to death? ... During the January 17, 1994 Northridge/Los Angeles earthquake... over 100 Californians literally died of fright... according to Robert Kloner (cardiologist at the Good Samaritan Hospital in L.A.)

His research has shown that excessive fear... can cause sudden cardiac death. ... In many cases the terrorized brain triggers the release of a mix of chemicals - so potent... it causes the heart to contract so fiercely... that it never relaxes again.

In a Cleveland study... coroners studied the hearts of 15 assault victims... who died even though their assailants had not wounded them badly enough to fatally injure their internal organs. ... Charles Hirsch... now chief medical officer for New York City... determined that 11 of the 15 had torn fibers and lesions in their hearts... most likely caused by mortal fear.

Several anthropologists have reported that in many primitive cultures a curse from an all-powerful wizard (or medicine man)... was enough to kill someone who believed in their magic powers.

What is attributed to supernatural power... actually has medical explanations. ... Neurologist Martin A. Samuels (of Harvard Medical School in Boston)... who has done research in this area... tells of his cat coming across a field mouse. ... The cat simply put its paw on the mouse's tail and batted it about a bit. ... Within 20 minutes the mouse died despite having no serious injuries. ... "*Animals commonly drop dead under these circumstances,*" says Samuels.

(LISTEN!) Fear is equally dangerous to a person's spiritual life.

That is what makes our passage this morning so important. (I won't actually do this)... But I imagine if I were to survey this audience... by asking for a show of hands... how many of you have some fear about your finances... your health... or personal relationships... we would have nearly every hand go up. Maybe you fear where we are headed as a society... or terrorism here in our own country. ... What is right around the corner for us...? Is there a shoe that is ready to drop...? Maybe you have been waiting for your ship to come in... but it hasn't... and now you face strong disappointment. Life has not turned out... as you expected it.

Fear and disappointment can be very dangerous to our spiritual life. That is why we have such passages in our Bibles that we come to today... in our study through Genesis. We will be seeking to gain some insights on how our faith is to overcome fear and disappointment. ... So (Living Water)...let's dive right in...

Genesis 15:1

Notice... please... the opening three words of this new chapter that we open today... (What are they?) ... "*After these things...*" After what things...? The events that we studied last week in the previous chapter. ... Do you remember last week when we saw Abraham lead a band of 318 of his servants (against all odds)... and overtook (what was... no doubt)... the worlds most powerful army (at that time)...? Chedorloamer and three other nations had swept down... from the North-East and conquered the city states along the Transjordan... which included Sodom... where Abram's nephew (Lot) had been living.

Once he learned of it... Abram and his servant warriors pursued this mighty army and overtook them. King Chedorloamer and his troops scattered and ran. The underdog won! Abram rescued Lot and all the people and possessions that the bad guys had taken. A lot of people from the land of Canaan were suddenly beholding to Abram. But he didn't keep any of the spoils that were rightfully his... according to the rules of war

It was after these things that God appeared to Abram and told him not to be afraid.

Did Abram have a close call...? (Was he almost killed in the attack against the invading army from the east?) Did Abram fear retaliation from the four nations whose army he had defeated? Was Abram questioning (regretting) the unusual decision he had made: not to follow the law of conquest which gave all the spoils to the victor? ...If he had kept the spoils... he could have probably secured the loyalty of the rescued prisoners... mobilized them under his rule... and taken control of the promised land... (at least much of it.) ... He could have possibly become king himself... king of the city-states he had rescued.

Lot (Abram's rescued nephew) had just departed... on his merry way BACK to worldly living in Sodom... probably leaving Abram shaking his head... and wondering whether all his efforts to rescue and restore his backsliding relative... had not been totally in vain.

The king of Sodom had also left... rubbing his hands over the recovery of all his goods... (at no cost to himself and... no doubt... discussing with the secretary of his treasury what particular form of insanity possessed Abram... so that he refused his share of the spoil.)

(The other kings (Aner and Eschol and Mamre) left too... and were (no doubt) congratulating one another on their prowess of war... and gloating over the rich profits they had reaped.

So Abram was left alone... somewhat depressed... and a little fearful (perhaps)... that his unexpected display of military power... might have stirred a hornet's nest. In defeating Chedorlaomer and his allies... Abram had made some bitter and influential foes. It was not likely that they would rest content until the memory of their unexpected defeat had been wiped out with blood. Abram now had enemies from Egypt... to Persia.

Ooops! Maybe I should have kept all that wealth. That way I could build a strong army to defend myself. ... And could it be... that I had missed God's way for me to secure the promised land? After all... I have been in the land of Canaan for over ten years... but I own none of it! and even more disappointing... I have no children. None of God's promises have even begun to be fulfilled.

Was Abram just feeling emotionally and physically drained after the excitement of the battle? ... The strain of duty after a big event always leaves a person emotionally and physically drained. ... At such times... the person often “second-guesses themselves.”

Scripture does not say why Abram feared and felt disappointment. But Abram and God's discussion... in our passage today... will indicate all of these possibilities (probably) played a part in the emotional strain Abram was experiencing.

There is an anxiety condition that I was reading about... which has a lot of today's millennials suffering. It is called FOMA. Have you heard of it...? FOMA stands for the **F**ear **O**f **M**issing **O**ut. Kids are stressing themselves over missing out... on what others have... that they don't (the best cell phone... that new song on their playlist... attending opening night of the latest block-buster movie... social media updates... or whatever the latest craze happens to be)... Apparently... FOMA is a real concern today... because it is such a debilitating phenomenon.

If Abram suffered a form of FOMA... it wasn't because he was in the rat-race of trying to experience what everyone else was experiencing. He would have had the Fear Of Missing Out - on God's best for him. *"Did I misunderstand You... God... and make a wrong turn somewhere...?"*

Have you ever felt such a strain...?

"God... I stepped out in faith... taking on that ministry. ... I was certain You led me to it... but things have not turned out the way that I expected... Did I get it wrong...? ... Lord my friendship with that person was a relationship that I know You wanted me to have... But they turned out to be a person I didn't think they were. They've let me down with some very deep hurt. ... My job, Lord... has been a real let-down. You know what, God...? ... I think that I'm missing out..."

What God tells Abram is just as true for you and I... as it was for Abram. Let me summarize His message and encourage you to keep it front and center to your thinking as we move through this passage.

God never permits His own to lose for honoring Him and seeking His glory. (Let me repeat that... and if you believe that would you just say "amen!") **God never permits His own to lose for honoring Him**

and seeking His glory. Sometimes we need a strong reminder of this truth... because “in the heat of the battle”... (or in its aftermath)... it is easy to lose sight of it. Do you want a faith that overcomes fear and discouragement...? Remind yourself and keep this truth alive in your heart.

God knew that Abram had lost sight of this... and needed to be reminded. God knew Abram's heart... his fears and disappointments. ... He knows yours and mine as well. ... Therefore... in this moment of great fear and disappointment... God acted to help Abram. And notice two things that we see right away... in verse one.

1. God gave Abram a vision and spoke directly to him. Abram's fear and disappointment were so stressful that they caused a real crisis in his life... a crisis so painful that God actually gave him a vision and spoke to him.

Now... I don't mean to suggest that if you are stressed enough... God will give **you** a vision. (He doesn't always work in the same manner.) But He **does** care... and He can bring to you the necessary encouragement... at just the right time. (It often comes through a sermon... like this one... or a friend whose visit is very timely... a song on the radio... or an encouragement through something that you read.

2. God called Abram by name. The tenderness of this act (no doubt) brought Abram prostrate before God... and encouraged him beyond all measure. When God called Abram's name... Abram knew... above all else... that he truly belonged to God. God was looking after him and caring for him.

You may have experienced such intimate times with God... (as I have)... when His encouragement comes at just the right time... through one of His many ways... and you just drop to your knees... and acknowledge His presence... and His goodness.

Over in the New Testament... in Acts 27... when the Apostle Paul (as a Roman prisoner) was being carted off to Rome to stand trial... for his obedience to Christ... a huge storm threatened the lives of everyone onboard the ship they were on. But an angel of the Lord appeared to Paul and encouraged him... saying “*Don’t be afraid Paul... you and everyone onboard will live... you must stand before Caesar...*”

God encourages those who are his! ... And He knows just how to do it. He told Abram that **HE** was Abram’s shield and great reward. ... Those two things must have been the biggest concerns on Abram’s mind. He needed protection from the revenge of his enemies... and he felt ***slighted*** by not being able to keep any of the spoils that he and God agreed were not to be Abram’s... (because an ungodly King like Bera would think he made Abram rich.)

But Abraham didn't have to worry about another battle because the Lord would protect him. And he didn't need to regret losing the wealth offered him by the King of Sodom because God would reward him in far greater ways.

God’s first words (after “*fear not*”) were to remind Abram of Who He is. I AM your shield and your exceedingly great reward. God’s statement of “I AM” is perfect... for the worst kind of discouragement you or I will ever face. ... If you spend all your time looking at ***yourself***... (or your

circumstances)... you will get discouraged... but if you get your eyes off yourself and look to **God**... you will be encouraged. ... God is our shield and our reward... our protection and our provision. Here are two verses that will help you look at God. (Write them down!)

Matthew 6:33 (ESV)

But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Philippians 4:19 (ESV)

And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

Protection and provision are blessings that the world is seeking and the politicians are promising whenever they run for office. Candidates offer voters protection from war and danger on the streets as well as provision for jobs, health care, education, and old age. Some of the promises are kept, but many of them are forgotten. Almighty God is the only One who can offer you protection and provision and keep His promises.

God never permits His own to lose for honoring Him and seeking His glory.

God said to Abram: “*You still have ME!*” And God had proved it by sending Melchizedek (as we saw last week)... to shield Abram from the snare of Sodom’s King that came immediately after Melchizedek’s visit. “*Abram... you are worrying about the military situation...? Are you worrying about the spoils of war that you so nobly refused...? You cannot lose. You have ME!*”

When you fear what lies ahead, remember that God will stay with you through difficult times and that he has promised you great blessings.

Genesis 15:2-3

Abram was unhappy... but he was careful to address God as "Lord God"... which emphasized that God was Master... and he was the servant. Abram would not allow his distress to compromise his respect and reverence for God.

"The heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus..."...? Really...? Your household chief of servants...? One of your hired hands...? What happened to Lot...? He is your nephew. (Lot was married and had children.) ... Abram... you **do** have a close relative... and he is not that far away.

I think that we see a hint (here) of another reason for Abram's discouragement. He must be lamenting the fact that Lot went back to his pleasure-seeking Sodom. He had chosen to live after the world... rather than God. ... *"I rescued you from the filthy mire... but you go right back to it. ... My efforts did not produce the expected results..."* ... Certainly... **something** made Abram **not** think of **Lot** (who Abram treated like a son)... as no longer a relative. Eliezer (a non-family member servant) was more of a close relative than Lot..

Abram is still so discouraged that he seems very confused. The unfulfilled promises of God were straining his thoughts and weighing heavily upon his heart. Note that Abram states the case three times to God.

- *I continue childless* (Genesis 15:2).
- *You have given me no offspring,* (Genesis 15:3).

- *My heir is not my own son, but the steward of my household*
(Genesis 15:3).

Abram and Sarai were getting older... and the longer they go childless... the less the hope they hold... of having a child.

(LISTEN!) ... **God often lets us get to the end of our strength so we will better appreciate His power in our lives.** ... [PAUSE]

One of the basic lessons in "the school of faith" is: *God's will must be fulfilled in God's way and in God's time.* God did not expect Abraham and Sarah to figure out how to have an heir; all He asked was that they be available so He could accomplish His purposes in and through them.

But it is good to share your concerns with the Lord... even if what you say seems to evidence unbelief or impatience in your heart. ... God is not deaf to your questions... or unconcerned about your feelings.

1 Peter 5:7 (ESV)

casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

... Just remember to be like Abram... He would not allow his distress to compromise his respect and reverence for God. (he was careful to address God as "**Lord** God".)

God did not rebuke Abraham. Instead... He gave him the assurances that he needed.

Genesis 15:4-5

Now I can never teach or preach about Genesis 15:5... without mentioning my friend... during my last year of seminary... (Coby Cohen.) I was a graduate assistant for the Greek department and Coby was in the Greek

class that employed me. I also knew Coby... because he got a job with UPS... in the same department where I worked. Coby (a Jewish believer in Christ) had moved to Portland from New York... to attend seminary. One night... after our shift... we walked out to our cars together. Coby looked up at the sky and said. *"I am a Jew from New York. When I first heard that God promised Abram the same number of descendants as there are stars... I looked up and thought 'Big deal... two Jews'...!"*

But Abram didn't have to look through the lights of New York city. So when he looked up... he would have seen at least 40,000 stars... in just one small section of the sky. That would be a very difficult task... to try to count them... because there are so many. I read this week (in one of my commentaries) that there are more stars in all the galaxies... than there are grains of sand on every seashore of planet earth. God's promise to Abram was one to stagger the imagination. Yet it was not impossible. A God who can create galaxies and nebulae and countless worlds can certainly give Abram a countless seed.

Genesis 15:6

This is a great text on justification by faith. ... It declares plainly that you gain righteousness/salvation - not by works - but by faith. ... Abraham was not saved by the law... for the law was not yet given... and he was not saved by circumcision... because that was not yet given, either.

The Apostle Paul... in enforcing this truth (that salvation is not by works)... refers to this verse several times in writing to the Romans (Romans 4:3,21,22)... and to the Galatians (Galatians 3:6).

Abram believed with all his heart that a vast people would come from his own body. And on that silent night... that holy night... he inwardly breathed and... (likely)... voiced an audible "*Amen!*" ("It is so") to God. ... And at that point... God credited his belief to him as righteousness. ... Whatever translation you are reading... whether it says "credited" it... "reckoned" it... "counted" it... or "imputed" it... the meaning is the same. Abram's righteousness was ***all God's doing***.

The righteousness for salvation is bestowed upon us by God. It is not bestowed upon us by baptism... or church membership... or by taking communion. It is bestowed by God in response to faith in the miracle birth son. ... This righteousness is imputed to us by God... not by man. It is God Who does the accounting... the evaluating... the pronouncing about salvation.

Genesis 15:7

Notice how God identified Himself: "I am the LORD (Jehovah, Yahweh), the God of redemption and salvation, the God who establishes a personal relationship with people and enters the covenant of redemption with them. I am the LORD who saved you—called you out of Ur of the Chaldees—for the very purpose of giving you this covenant.

"It makes a difference who is making promises. Abraham is informed that it is Jehovah God Who is speaking. This is not some Canaanite well-wisher or a relative who is making the promise - but God Himself. When He promises - He will fulfill. We can rely on God's promises. (God is not like man... whose promises are often very unreliable.)

God says... *“Keep your eyes on Me... Abram!”* Remember Who I am... what I have already done... and how this works. Obeying Me is always rewarding.

You and I... sure do need this constant reminder: *You are never short changed when you obey God.* (Can I get an “amen!” to that?) *You are never short changed when you obey God.*

Genesis 15:8

Abram is very practical. He wants to know something... and he would like to have something like a contract.

So God will tell Abram... *“Alright... meet Me at the courthouse... We’ll get a notary public. We will make this official. I will draw up a contract (and sign it) that you are going to have a son. Meet Me down there... I will let you read it and watch Me sign on the dotted line.”*

Now... of course... God didn’t say it just like that. If this happened today... it very well might have. You see... in terms of Abram’s day... that is exactly what God did. God performed a contractual agreement with Abram... He went through the most solemn legal procedure of Abram’s time and culture... because Abram asked for such an assurance.

Do you think that God doesn’t want to give assurances to you and I...? No. We can say to Him... *“Lord... help me with my belief...”* And He will use the perfect means to get your focus off sight and onto faith.

Genesis 15:9-21

Israel... in it's entire history... has never possessed the territory that is described here. But it will. During the Millennium... when Christ returns and establishes His Kingdom... which He postponed because of Israel's rejection of Him... this will be Israel's borders. Jesus will enjoy a special relationship with the Jews... who will occupy all of this land. So much of the Old Testament concerns itself with this special Kingdom and Christ's relationship with them.

But let's get back to our present passage...

Abram gets everything ready... and while he is waiting for the Lord... buzzards and/or crows tried to come down upon the carcasses. Abram is there shooing them away... If you had been there... knowing the custom of the day... and seeing this long delay... you might have said, "*Well, brother Abram, apparently the one you're making a contract with hasn't shown up. I guess he's a 'no-show'!*"

God did not immediately come and pass between the pieces of the carcasses. Abraham had to wait a while for God to come and pass through the carcasses.

Waiting tests our dedication as much as anything. ... Abraham...

however... waited till God came. ... He kept the birds away and stayed put till God verified the covenant.

If you want blessing from God... you must wait on God's time.

Eventually God did come... and before signing this contract with Abram... God went over the terms of it.

Item #1. Before this land is yours... your descendants will need to suffer for a while. They will be afflicted as slaves (down in Egypt for 400 years.)
Difficult times will come before delightful times.

Item #2. I will judge the nation that will mistreat your descendants... and they will come out with many riches. They will be very wealthy.

Item #3. Your descendants will go through a horror that you will not have to experience. I will spare you... (Abram)... from all of that hardship. You will die in peace.

Item #4. Then your descendants will come back here and own this land. I am giving the current residents 400 years to repent. It will not be an **injustice** for me to remove the land's current residents and give it to you. (No one will be able to deny My great patience toward them.)

And we see that God did have His witnesses in the land... from Melchizedek (Who was a priest of the Most High God) to Jethro (Moses' father-in-law, when the Jews came out of Egypt... Jethro was also a priest of the Most High God.) So we see Biblical evidence that God had His servants in Canaan... for those 400 years... with their unheeded calls for the Canaanites to repent.

God is always fair! He does not judge on mere whim... or anger. He allows every opportunity for repentance. ... But individuals and nations must remember that with every moment of opportunity one has to repent... it is also an opportunity to become hardened.

After reading the terms of the contract... God signed it. He did this by walking between the split carcasses... in the representation of a torch. That is how contracts were signed in those days. Both signers would walk

hand-in-hand between slaughtered animals as a statement: If either one of us breaks the agreement... may the fate of these animals be our fate (may we ourselves be slaughtered.)

But notice that God alone signed the covenant. Only God passed through the animals. Abram had no part in the signing. (You see)... God alone was making promises to Abram and assuring the covenant with Abram. ... Abram was not making promises to God... nor making a covenant with God. ... He — just like all other people — could never keep his promise and covenant with God... Therefore... if the covenant of the promised seed and the promised land was to ever be established and fulfilled... it had to be established by God and by God alone. ... The covenant had to be by grace and by grace alone. ...This is so critical to understand!

Suppose that God had said to Abram, "*Abram if you will just promise to say your prayers every night, I am going to do this for you.*" And suppose Abram forgot to pray one night. The contract is shot -- it's broken -- and therefore God does not need to make His part good.

But God said that He would do His part... and He is asking man to do just one thing: to say amen to Him -- that is... to believe Him. ... You are to believe God and believe what He has done. My friend... to believe God is salvation. ... Believe that God the Father so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. And the Son agreed to come to the earth and die for the sins of the world -- your sin and mine -- that whosoever would believe in Him (simply accept His gift) might not perish but have everlasting life.

Start by believing this: Jesus died as the punishment for all your sins. You can be made perfectly clean and righteous before God... simply by believing it.

Then consider yourself forever in His debt and serve Him faithfully... while growing stronger and stronger in your belief that: **God never permits His own to lose for honoring Him and seeking His glory.**

Hasn't that been the whole point of our passage today...?