

Grace Despite Failures in Faith

Grace from the Patriarchs

By Steve Viars

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Bible Text: Genesis 12:10-13:4

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Faith Church

5526 State Road 26 E

Lafayette, IN 47905

Website: <http://www.faithlafayette.org/church>

Online Sermons: <http://www.sermonaudio.com/faithlafayette>

Last week Pastor Viars began a series called "Grace for the Patriarchs" and it's really part of a larger theme that we're thinking about this year entitled "Finding Grace," taken particularly from Hebrews 4:16 which reminds us, "Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." The last time I had the opportunity to speak, I reminded all of us that one of the reasons that God tells us to come boldly, come confidently before the throne of grace is because he wants to give it to us. The answer is "Yes, you just need to ask. It's yes, I'm telling you to come boldly because I want to give this to you. I want you to receive mercy. I want you to find grace to help in your time of need." His dealings, in fact, with people like Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Joseph demonstrate we didn't actually have to go all the way to the book of Hebrews near the end of our Bible to figure this out that, in fact, it starts in the book of Genesis. In fact, that's the reason it starts in the book of Genesis because that's the kind of God we serve. We serve a gracious God.

Pastor Viars also explained that after the fall in Genesis 3, the world was in chaos. Sin was rampant and only growing worse and yet in that climate, God calls a particular person, a man named Abram who we call now Abraham and he promises him land, that is, the specific piece of ground that we now call Israel. He was promised seed or descendants and initially this was the promise of biological children. Then third, he was promised blessing that would ultimately be fulfilled in the coming of Jesus Christ but was also going to be very clearly to him that blessing was going to be on his life. But you know, those promises were not the end of the story. We're going to read about Abraham's journey of faith and that journey includes times of failure. In other words, Abraham does not begin his journey with his act completely all together, instead, what we find is that God is going to grow his faith. He is going to increase his confidence. He is going to increase his determination to follow the Lord and to believe his promises in part through Abraham's failures.

That is actually a theme of the entire Bible. We find failure all over the place. In fact, let me just highlight several of them that really are not small failures. We would have to call every one of these like epic failures, okay? Here's the first one: the fall of man itself. I mean, we have been having to live with the consequences of that ever since Genesis 3. Every aspect of who we are has been impacted by sin. We're reminded that we can never,

none of us can ever, ever be good enough for God on our own. The consequences of this one decision that Adam and Eve make in the garden has huge ramifications for all of us all the way to the second coming of Christ.

Well, in Genesis 11, we find the Tower of Babel. Here they were trying to make a tower that reached all the way to heaven and so they could make a name for themselves. Well, they made a name for themselves alright but it wasn't because they made a tower built to heaven, it was an epic failure along several lines. One, they never got the tower done and 2, we have like a billion languages in our world because of this one moment.

What about this, you just can't leave an epic failure list and go and cap off with that. I mean, Aaron certainly deserves a Darwin award for that one. Do you guys know what the Darwin awards are? They are awards given to people who do incredibly stupid things. One guy got the award for trying to steal the copper from the electrical grid from the city of Phoenix, Arizona and wound up getting electrocuted in the process. Well, Aaron, here's what he does, he makes a golden calf out of the gold they got from Egypt and then proclaims, "This is your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt." I mean, if that's not one of the 10 dumbest things ever to come out of a human being's mouth, I don't know what would. That is an epic failure for sure.

Then, number 4, what about this: refusal to enter the Promised Land. You remember they had been kicked out of Egypt. God has delivered them and they send 12 spies into the Promised Land and 10 of them come back, "No way. I mean, we just can't do it. The people there are like giants. There is no way we can go into the Promised Land." And Joshua and Caleb are like, "Forget that. I mean, let's go!" I was just in Disney World and it just reminded me of Gaston's song. Do you guys know what that song is? When they go to get the beast, it's like, "Sally forth! Tally ho! Grab your sword! Grab your bow! Praise the Lord and here we go! Let's go kill a beast!" I mean, that is exactly how Joshua and Caleb were acting and were like, "Come on guys, get with the program! We are going in for sure!" And everybody else is like whining, like, "No way. We can't do it." And the entire nation spends 40 years in the wilderness. Classic epic failure.

Not too long after that, we find failure to teach the next generation about the Lord so they actually get into the Promised Land and then Judges 2:10 makes this indictment. He said, "There arose a generation after Joshua who did not know the LORD, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel." I mean, classic epic failure for sure. The theme of Judges was "everyone did what was right in their own eyes," rather than "everyone did what the Lord taught."

Now, I could quite frankly go on and on but lest we be too hard on the people of the Bible, I think we could probably name a few failures of our own. In fact, some small failures and maybe even some big ones too. So what should we do when we fail? How should we respond? When failure comes, how do we deal with that? With that in mind, I would like to invite you to turn in your Bibles to the book of Genesis 12. We're going to start in verse 10. Genesis 12, beginning in verse 10. That is on page 8 of the Bible in the chair in front of you. Page 8 of the front section of the Bible under the chair in front of

you. We're going to be thinking this morning about grace despite failures in faith. Grace despite failures in faith. We're going to consider 3 different points that help us see the amazing grace of God despite failure. Now, let's follow along in the text as I read through. Genesis 12, beginning in verse 10

12:10 Now there was a famine in the land; so Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land. 11 It came about when he came near to Egypt, that he said to Sarai his wife, "See now, I know that you are a beautiful woman; 12 and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife'; and they will kill me, but they will let you live. 13 Please say that you are my sister so that it may go well with me because of you, and that I may live on account of you." 14 It came about when Abram came into Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. 15 Pharaoh's officials saw her and praised her to Pharaoh; and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. 16 Therefore he treated Abram well for her sake; and gave him sheep and oxen and donkeys and male and female servants and female donkeys and camels. 17 But the LORD struck Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife. 18 Then 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." 20 Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him; and they escorted him away, with his wife and all that belonged to him.

13:1 So Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev, he and his wife and all that belonged to him, and Lot with him. 2 Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver and in gold. 3 He went on his journeys from the Negev as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, 4 to the place of the altar which he had made there formerly; and there Abram called on the name of the LORD.

Now, I would like us to think about this passage and, you know, it's kind of a challenging text and so I want us to think, first of all, about the extent of Abraham's failures. Let's kind of put ourselves into 2000 BC for just a moment and let's just walk in the shoes right along Abram, Sarai, Pharaoh and others, as we investigate this particular story. You know, the extent of Abraham's failures, you know, it's almost hard to believe that this passage is actually in the Bible. I mean, when we tell stories, don't we leave out the parts that aren't sounding so good and we just tell like the good parts of the story? Well, God has never been like that. I mean, he inspired his word and he doesn't duck challenging issues. It's one of the reasons why we can rely on the Scriptures. In this passage, we certainly can add to our list of epic failures. Let's just think about Abraham's failures in this passage.

The first one: he refuses to acknowledge that Sarai might be part of God's plan. He refuses to acknowledge that Sarai just might be part of God's plan. In verse 10, I don't

tend to think that going to Egypt was a failure on Abram's part. Some commentators believe it was. I tend not to be so convinced about that. But beginning in verse 11, we clearly see failure. "It came about when he came near to Egypt, that he said to Sarai his wife, 'See now, I know that you are a beautiful woman; and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, "This is his wife"; and they will kill me, but they will let you live.'" Please follow the logic here: I think Abraham believes to some extent the promises that God has given him. He believes that God is going to give him land, that God is going to give him children, that God is going to give him blessing in some form or fashion. But according to Genesis 12:4, we find out that Abraham is 75 years old at this point and not only is he 75, but according to Genesis 17:17, we know Sarai is 10 years younger and so she is 65. In chapter 11:30, we're told that Sarai doesn't have any children and so she is called barren. So Abraham has this promise of children and he has a wife who can't have children and she is 65 years old and he's thinking to himself, "Well, you know, if we could have had kids, we probably would have had them by now." So therefore the picture is pretty clear. Sarai is optional. She cannot be, she must not be actually part of God's plan to fulfill his promise. Talk about adding insult to injury, I mean, not only is Sarai barren which she probably would not have been very happy about but now she has her husband who thinks that she is expendable because he can, in fact, come up with a plan to give her a way.

Apparently, Abraham is convinced that however God is going to bring about his particular promise, that he can't do so through Sarai and that is going to demonstrate a fundamental flaw at this point in Abraham's journey and that is he has a small view of God at this point in his life. But his failure is by no means complete at this point. Notice the next thing: he creates a half truth in order to preserve his own life. He creates a half truth in order to preserve his own life. Verse 13 says, "Please say that you are my sister so that it may go well with me because of you, and that I may live on account of you." Well, we don't know at this point in the story but because we're readers of the book of Genesis, we actually know that Sarai is, in fact, Abraham's half sister. They have the same father but they do not have the same mother and before we get all wiggled out about, you know, marrying your half sister, remember that the population on the earth was really small and the rules associated with marrying your relatives are not yet in place so it shouldn't be surprising that Abram has a relative who is a wife. But here's where things get a little crazy: the information, how that is communicated, is a failure because it is concerned about Abraham's self-preservation. Not only was there a threat from famine to Abram's preservation but now there is a threat and it comes from Sarai's beauty. I mean, just think about how this is going down. Remember, you're part of the story now. We just walked into Genesis 12. You've heard these conversations.

Now, you might be thinking, "Well, how in the world did he get convinced that she was going to be taken as Pharaoh's wife at 65 years old?" Let's just put some context to this, okay? Sarai lives to be 127 and so 65 is roughly 1/2 of her life so in today's world, we're normally talking about a person who might be between like 35 or 40 and unlike many women her age, Sarai does not have any children and thus her body had not endured the rigors of pregnancy and childbirth and caring for infants. Then, the standards of beauty may have been different. They are, in fact, culture-based and thus the models on the

covers of the magazine in 2000 BC may look differently than they do today. Then, kings and rulers were willing to take other women into their harem at any time, even King David does this, remember with Bathsheba?

Well, regardless of all the reasons, it's clear that Abraham's concerns are actually well-founded. They are actually right. He's right about this, "It came about when Abram came into Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. Pharaoh's officials saw her and praised her to Pharaoh; and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house." Now, I have to admit: there is a part of this story that just cracks me up. I mean, why not take the winner of the Miss Egypt pageant? I mean, amazing or not, as we just step back, Abraham was right about this, that Sarai was so beautiful that Pharaoh would want to take her as his own, that her beauty was going to attract unwanted attention. But here's where his failure comes in: his failure is not only in the lie but he believes that, quite frankly, "It's either her or me and it can't be me. It's got to be her or it's got to be me, but it certainly cannot be me." We have no way of knowing what Sarai said or thought but I can imagine how hurt she must have been or how scared she was or what kind of betrayal she must have felt because here's Abraham who is only concerned about his own needs, his own desires and he is convinced that he has got a plan that is going to work just fine for God and that is: Sarai can go off, be Pharaoh's wife and it's all good.

More importantly than the way he treated his wife was also the reality of how he viewed his God. You see, he didn't believe that God could preserve both Sarai and him at the same time, that that wasn't possible. It had to be one or the other. In his mind, Pharaoh was going to take Sarai, that was a foregone conclusion. The only matter up for debate was what was going to happen to him. Again, Abraham's view is weak. His view of God is weak and it lacks in some substance at this point. His plan, in fact, is so bad that a pagan ruler has to rebuke him. A pagan ruler actually has to take him aside and rebuke him.

Genesis 12:18 told us, "Then Pharaoh called Abram and said, 'What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? 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.'" You know, it is not unusual for one person in the Bible to be confronted by another but normally it's like a godly person like a prophet going to talk to a king like Nathan did with King David. No, no, no, not in this case. A pagan king, Pharaoh, rebukes Abraham and more text is given in the Bible to his rebuke than Abraham's plan and you know when you get rebuked by a pagan that you are having a really bad day. I mean, this is the way it is going. Abraham's plan is so bad the pagan ruler calls him out. In fact, he calls him out on several things. He calls him out on 1. he's like, "Abraham, here's the deal. Your failure has resulted in consequences for me. I've had to deal with some plagues because of you. I've had to deal with some issues because of you." Then he says, "And you're a liar. I know you lied. Why did you tell me this? You deceived me. You purposely lied. I'm calling you out." Then, not only does he do that but he actually escorts him out. He says, "I'm going to take you, I'm going to have my servants go take you to the border because I don't want to you part of this land anymore." I mean, that is a stunning, stunning rebuke. And if we were to summarize that, I think we could just say it

this way: Abraham's insufficient view of God results in Sarai being sacrificed and Abraham setting the conditions for how God's promises will be fulfilled. Abraham is the one who is doing that. He thinks that God needs his help apparently in order to get all this done.

Well, now we can ask the question: well, so what? What happens now? Are the promises about ready to be obliterated? And here is where the hero of the Bible steps in. In fact, whenever you're reading the Bible, you need to be thinking, "Where is the hero?" And the hero is always God. God is always the hero. In some way, shape or form, God is always the hero coming in to rescue a bad situation and just as Abraham's failure is massive, epic if you will, so is God's grace. In essence, what we're going to see is Romans 5:20, where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more showing up in living color in Genesis 12.

Let's think, for example, about the extent of God's grace to Abraham. First of all, God intervenes to rescue Sarai from Pharaoh. In other words, Abraham and Sarai and Pharaoh are not the only persons in the narrative. God is alive and well and he's active in every aspect of this whole thing. Verse 17 told us, "But the LORD struck Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife." Now, we don't know how God brought about the plagues. We don't know how the Egyptians figured out that God was the cause of the plagues. We don't know how they ultimately determined that Sarai's presence was actually connected to the plagues but here's what we know: we know that God made it perfectly clear that he was the cause and that Sarai's presence was a connection to that cause.

Again, let's just consider the scene. Let's just walk through Bible land, if you will, and just gather the scene. Here he is, Abraham and Pharaoh and Sarai and their men are meeting and they are meeting because Pharaoh's men have told Pharaoh about Sarai's beauty and they negotiate a deal. The marriage is now over. Their life together is now over and when they parted that day the assumption was there would be no reunion. In some ways, Abraham is a bit relieved because his plan has worked to a T. His plan worked out exactly as he had scripted it. Before they got to Egypt, he said, "Hey, here's how it is going to go down. Pharaoh is going to notice you and he's going to want to take you. Tell him you're my sister so that it goes well with me," and that's exactly what happens. Now, God shows up doing things that only God can do, sending plagues, making it clear to Pharaoh like, "Don't mess with her. That is not your wife." Then Pharaoh and his men come to Abram. They seek him out and bring Sarai with them to give her back. But can you just imagine the awkward moment that would have been? I mean, what do you talk about? "How was the palace? Did they feed you well? You look healthy." I mean, what do you talk about in that moment? I mean, he gave her up for a lie in order to preserve his own life and here's what God does, "Sorry, that plan isn't going to work. I'm bringing her back to you." Abraham's loss of his wife is not permanent because God rescues her and delivers her back. That is grace.

But that's not the only thing God does. God actually refuses to allow human failure to derail his plan. You see, you and I as readers of the book of Genesis know that God is ultimately going to use Abraham and Sarai together to give them a son. In fact, in

Genesis 18, we're told just a few chapters later, "Is there anything too difficult for the Lord? At the appointed time, I will return to you. At this time next year and Sarai will have a son." So we know this plan is in place, right? Well, Abraham was not quite so convinced in chapter 12. I think when he left from her, he figured that was the end. But with Abraham's plan, you can never have Genesis 18. With Abraham's plan, you can't, if you can't get to Genesis 18, then you can't have the birth of Jacob. And if you can't have the birth of Jacob, you can't have the birth of Judah. And if you can't have the birth of Judah, you can't have the birth of David. And if you can't have the birth of David, then you can't have the birth of Jesus. Is it fair to say that Abraham's plan is not going so good? I mean, he is rewriting the entire plan of salvation history. But Abraham's failure does not in any way, shape or form jam God. God just simply solves it, doesn't he? He just simply moves and he creates plagues on Pharaoh so Pharaoh understands, "Alright, I've got to give her back." I mean, that's just the grace of God. He doesn't allow human failure to in any way, shape or form derail the plan that he has in place.

As all of this was unfolding, God wasn't worried. He didn't have to recalculate his system. He was in control all along. In fact, we also find that God gives Abraham wealth and power even in the midst of his failure. He gives him wealth and power even in the midst of his failure. Let's go back to Genesis 12 again. Verse 16 says, "Therefore he," that is Pharaoh, "treated Abram well for her sake." So here they are, they are gathered together, they negotiate the deal and here's the deal: Sarai goes into the harem of Pharaoh, taken as his wife and here's what Abraham gets, he gets "sheep and oxen and donkeys and male and female servants and female donkeys and camels." That's the deal. That's what he gets out of this negotiation. Then at the end in verse 20, when Pharaoh figures out that by God's grace that this is Abram's wife and you've got to give her back, "Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him; and they escorted him away, with his wife and all that belonged to him."

Now, as you read through this set of verses through the grid of God's grace, just another element jumps to the surface: God allows Pharaoh to give Abraham a massive amount of wealth. Do you know God could have stopped the deal? I mean, if God is able to bring plagues onto Pharaoh in his house so that he recognizes that, "I've got to give Sarai back," then he could have done it while the deal was being negotiated, couldn't he? He could have brought like, "Fireball destroys Captain of Pharaoh's guard." In the Egyptian Daily Herald, there could have been, "Man eating frog ruins deal." I mean, there could have been all sorts of stuff that happened to prevent Sarai from actually being taken into Pharaoh. But that's not what God does. He actually allows the deal to go through and in the process gives Abraham a massive amount of wealth. You know, as you think about all the stuff that he leaves with, where did he get it? He got it from Pharaoh. Why? Because God's grace was upon him and he wanted him to have all of that.

Maybe the part that's most amazing is that God accepts Abraham's return to worship. In chapter 13, beginning in verse 1, it says, "So Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev, he and his wife and all that belonged to him, and Lot with him. Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver and in gold. He went on his journeys from the Negev as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, to the place

of the altar which he had made there formerly; and there Abram called on the name of the LORD." Now, as you read this, you thought to yourself, "Wait a minute, we just read that last week, didn't we? In Genesis 12:7, 8 and 9, we just read that very same thing," and you would be right. You see, here's what happened: as Abraham got into the Promised Land, he built this altar, sacrificed to the Lord and then began journeying south. So here we were between Bethel and Ai and then he begins south. That's where the Negev is. As the famine hit, he goes down further south into Egypt and now in chapter 13, what the Bible tells us is that he went back the same route that he came so he starts heading north, gets into the Negev, goes back to the altar where he had built previously and there he worships the Lord.

Now, think about that for just a second because God accepts his worship. Have you ever rescued someone in their failure? Has there ever been a person in your life who had a major failure and you came to the rescue? I mean, you're tempted to do this, "You owe me. Like, you owe me forever for this. I rescued you in a moment of hardship and difficulty and so therefore just to make it really clear, you owe me like forever." What does God do with Abram? He accepts his worship, demonstrating that they are back in close relationship together. It's beautiful. It's beautiful. Praise God for that. Here he does, in the midst of failure, he doesn't just say, "Okay fine, you have failed too much. You are out of here." Instead he redeems him in the midst of that failure and then accepts his worship.

The last point I'd like to mention in God's grace in this passage is that God has used the famine and the failure to bless Abraham physically but more importantly, to mature his faith spiritually. You see, this passage most certainly describes one of Abraham's greatest failures. There is no doubt about that. In a moment of pressure from famine as well as the beauty of his wife, he caves. He believes that God is going to make a promise, he's going to keep it but he convinces himself that he needs, God needs a little bit of help. In the midst of that failure, God's grace has been showing up in all sorts of ways. God restores Sarai. He ensures that his plan is going to be followed. He grants Abraham material wealth. He accepts true worship. And finally what he does is he uses all this to grow Abraham's faith. You see, Abraham's journey of faith will culminate in his willingness to sacrifice Isaac and we know from the Bible that he actually believes that if he killed his son that God would raise him from the dead. That's how strong, that's how confident he was in God's promises in Genesis 22.

But, you know, he didn't get there overnight. You see, part of the pathway to that was his faith was molded and strengthened in the crucible of testing and failure. And I think when Abraham saw God work, it gave him some confidence. It gave him some courage. I believe when Abraham gave up Sarai and believed that that was going to be the last time that he saw her and yet watched God deliver her back and say, "This is your wife," he was like, "Wow. God is able to do that? Wow, I can't believe that." When Abraham watched God bless him and allowed him to leave Egypt with more than what he came with, I mean, do you think as they were journeying along, he wasn't at least reminded, "Oh my goodness, like, all this stuff came from Pharaoh, over a plan that was wrong that I created." He would have just marveled at God's grace. And as he did that, as he watched

and he watched and he watched, it gave him more confidence and he became more resolute in believing the promises of God. That is an act of grace.

Well, the question becomes: alright great, we have journeyed into Bible land, we have walked in Abraham's shoes and we have thought about how all of it played together. Now, how does it relate to you and I? Where are some lessons for us concerning our failures because we have to be cautious. When we read a narrative like this, we shouldn't say, for example, that if you give up your wife in a moment of failure that God will miraculously bring her back to you. That's not what the passage teaches. And we shouldn't also say that failure will result in material blessing so go and fail as much as possible so you can get rich like Abraham. That also would not be an accurate reflection of the word but it does teach us some very important things about who God is and about who we are that are meaningful and they are significant and there is a plan associated with salvation history of which this passage is a part.

Let's think for example first: that epic failures like the one we see in Abraham are what Christ came to redeem. Epic failures are what Christ came to redeem. I think it's possible that we can beat ourselves up pretty good for all the ways in which we fail and there is a sense in which we see things like Abraham and we're like, "Man, I mean, if Abraham failed, then I'm in big trouble." So can I encourage you that this is one of the reasons that Christ came to redeem us? Maybe you're here this morning and you've heard about being a Christian and maybe even thought of yourself as a Christian but you're still haunted by the laundry list of failures in your life, it may be that the right response is to actually realize that you can never be good enough for God. There is not going to be a time when those failures just go away. It is instead an opportunity for you to see that if Abraham couldn't be good enough, then neither will you. But also to realize that your inability to be good enough for God is the reason that we have the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ in the first place. So maybe the Lord's plan for you right now in your life is that you would stop trying to please him in your own strength, instead, you would admit your failures. You would admit your sin. And you would say that that sin before God has been offensive and therefore it needed to be punished in one way or another. It's either going to be punished through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ or it's going to be punished on me suffering the wrath of God forever.

So therefore, what you're going to do because you can't get to God on your own is you're going to put your faith, you're going to put your trust, you're going to put your hope on the promises of God just like Abraham did and you're going to say, "Well God, if you promised that you sent your Son to die to be buried and to rise again, then I'm going to believe that. I am going to trust in that. I am going to have no other answer than that one for my salvation." And I want to encourage you, if that's not something that you have done, you can do that today. You can pray and ask the Lord to forgive you of your sin, to recognize your failures and to put your faith and trust in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Well, it's also true that epic failures are the pathway to growth rather than guilt. You know, Abraham's failures ultimately resulted in powerful growth in confidence in his life

and the same can be true of us too. In 1 Peter 1:6-7, Peter was writing to a group of people who were suffering in a lot of ways and he said this, "You greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." You see, failures can be used by God to strengthen our faith, to prove to us that our faith is really genuine, to prepare us for the next test and to encourage us as our faith continues to grow so we can rejoice that our failures, whatever they might be, small or large, result in growth, result in confidence, result in strength for the future.

I think this passage also directs us in another fashion and that is: epic failures remind us of our need for continual dependence. You know, Abraham later on is going to express regular and constant dependence on God. In chapter 12, he doesn't do that. He thinks that God needs a little bit of help working out his plan and, you know, the same can be true for us. At times, we can function as if we really don't need God very much. I occasionally remind my adult Bible Fellowships, I teach the sunrise class at 8 and the young couples class normally now at 9:30, that all of us can become a bit self-sufficient if we're not careful. Our Mondays are often like a lot of other Mondays. Our Tuesdays are like a lot of other Tuesdays. And if we get into that mode, then we really don't need God for our Monday because we know what to do. Our last Monday is just like this next one and the one after that is going to be just like the one we just had and now it's going to be like the other ones we've had and we can easily slip into this mode of self-sufficiency. "I really don't need God for my Monday or my Tuesday."

You see, Abraham failed in part because he had not developed a very big view of God. He had put God in a small box and that he had to handle the rest on his own. He had to figure out how to eat because of the famine. He had to figure out how to survive because Sarai was going to attract unwanted attention. But in the end, he had to learn that God was the one in control and it was God who was orchestrating his plans. Abraham needed to believe and be dependent and that's true for us. It's true for us on our Mondays. It's true for us on our Tuesdays. On our Thursdays. And it's true for us for redeeming the summer for Christ. In the next couple of weeks, we're going to have vacation Bible school and some people who serve at vacation Bible school have done it for a long time and the temptation is, "I know how to run the third grade class. I've done it for years. I know how to handle those little sixth graders. I've done it for years." Yet here's the reality: if we don't live dependent on the Lord, we are in prime position for failure. Or what about the community picnic? "Oh, I've been on a million picnics." Okay, great, but does that mean we're going to get anything accomplished for the Lord if we're not being dependent on him? You see, I want to suggest to you that this passage has relationship to everyday life. It has relationship to every day ministry.

Then, we also see that epic failures demonstrate the faithfulness of God. In other words, one of the lessons that I have from Scripture is that when my failures are greatest, I see God's faithfulness the most. Abraham blows it. There is no doubt about that but God remains faithful to each and every promise that he made. The only box that God fits in is

the box that he makes for himself and so when God says, "You're adopted," then you really are adopted. He's not going to change his mind about that. When God says, "You are loved," then you really are loved. He's not going to say, "Well, you were loved yesterday but not so much today because of your failure." Or, "You are not alone." That means he's really there whether we're having a glorious moment or whether we're in the valley of the shadow of death. Or, "You have an inheritance," then you really do have an inheritance. If that's a promise that God has made, then you really have it.

You see, when we fail it allows us to appreciate all the more the faithful character of God and I think if we were honest, we would all say that we have failures at different levels: some small, some big. But we can take encouragement that if grace can be found in the epic failures of Abraham's life, then they certainly can be found in ours too. You see, this theme of "Finding Grace" this year encompasses every area of life including how we process our failures.

Let's pray.

Father, thank you so much for a passage like Genesis 12 which on the surface is actually a little bit hard to get your head around and to understand its implications for our lives and yet we also see now the beauty of it, that in the midst of great failure there was also great grace. And in the midst of that great grace was a pattern, a picture of who you are that helps us understand how to deal with our own failures. Lord, we are asking that you would help us not to sit and sulk and get all depressed about our failures but instead, Lord, that you would use them to grow us, to help us to have confidence, to strengthen our faith so that we are more emboldened for the next test that comes. Lord, we're asking that you would please help us to do that on a daily basis whether it's our Monday jobs or Tuesday work or whether it's our seeking to redeem the summer for Christ by serving in vacation Bible school or participating in the community picnic, inviting friends and encouraging others to be here to rub shoulders with the community and encourage them to see the love that is available in Christ Jesus. So we ask, Lord, for your help in Jesus' name. Amen.