

Week of November 11, 2012
From Failure to Direction

Passage Outline:

1. Trust God - Genesis 15:3-6
2. Don't Take Matters into Your Own Hands - Genesis 16:1-5
3. Refocus on God's Plan - Genesis 17:3-6,15-19



What This About?

God has a plan for our lives, but we need to trust Him to work in us and through us to accomplish that plan. We do not need to take shortcuts and take matters into our own hands. Like Abraham, we can learn to trust God's timing.

How Can This Impact Your Life?

It will help you reaffirm your trust in God when you've missed His direction and lost your focus on God's plan.

1. Trust God - Genesis 15:3-6

Genesis 15:3-6

³ And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir." ⁴ Then the word of the LORD came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir." ⁵ He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars--if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." ⁶ Abram believed the LORD, and God credited it to him as righteousness.

- A. The Lord had promised to give Abram an heir, someone who would provide him with descendants for generations to come. But so far, Abram still did not have that heir.
- B. Because he did not have a son of his own, Abram had already resigned himself to the fact that Eliezer, a servant who lived in his house, would receive his promised inheritance.

Read the article "Abraham's Travels" contained in your preparation packet you picked up last Sunday. If you missed it, additional copies are available on the back table.

- C. The LORD came to Abram and addressed his concerns in two ways.
 - i. Eliezer would not be his heir.
 - ii. Abram's heir would be his own flesh and blood..
- D. Abram responded to the Lord's promise by believing in Him. What does "believing" mean?
 - i. Abram considered the Lord to be trustworthy to keep His promises and do what was best for him.
 - ii. By trusting Him, Abram could go from fretting over his future to resting in the calm assurance God would take care of it.
 - iii. Abram believed in the Lord, and his simple trust made him right with the Lord..."was credited to him as righteousness."
 - iv. The Lord's acceptance of Abram's act of faith shows that He didn't expect anyone to be made righteous by working for it. Rather, it resulted simply from taking Him at His word and believing in Him.

The Value of Faith

Abram's response to the Lord's promise offers us a beneficial insight into the value of faith. We are made righteous by placing our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 10:9-10).

Notice that Abram believed the LORD although he didn't have all of the facts about how an heir would be given to him. He based his trust in the Lord on what He had shown him so far. Likewise, we do well to trust the Lord even when we don't know everything about His plan for us. When we take Him at His word and trust Him, we follow the good example of righteousness Abram set.

Do you trust God? But what does that mean? For salvation only? With limits and exclusions? What does it mean when you say you trust God?

2. Don't Take Matters into Your Own Hands - Genesis 16:1-5

Genesis 16:1-5

¹ Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian maidservant named Hagar; ² so she said to Abram, "The LORD has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my maidservant; perhaps I can build a family through her." Abram agreed to what Sarai said. ³ So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian maidservant Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife. ⁴ He slept with Hagar, and she conceived. When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress. ⁵ Then Sarai said to Abram, "You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my servant in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the LORD judge between you and me."

- A. Because Sarai was unable to have any children, she came up with a plan for producing an offspring for Abram.
- B. She posed the possibility that Abram could have a child with Hagar, her Egyptian slave. A child with Hagar would supply the family with an heir to carry on Abram's name into the future (vv. 1-2).
- C. Abram agreed Sarai's suggestion. A more accurate wording would be "Abraham did hand-springs all the way back to his tent."
- D. But by not waiting on the Lord, Abram made a huge mistake. They failed to turn to the Lord for His direction forgot about the Lord and created their own way out of their predicament.
- E. Three life lessons emerge from this portion of the story:
 - i. Getting ahead of the Lord can become a bad habit. Abram had a history of taking matters into his own hands (12:10-20; 20:1-18). In each case, he got into trouble because he acted on his own instead of turning to the Lord. The same outcome awaits us if we follow Abram's example.
 - ii. Waiting on the Lord can put tremendous pressure on us. Like Abram, we often grow more fretful about our unmet need as time passes. If we're not disciplined, we'll give in to the stress and begin to wonder if we need to take action on our own.
 - iii. Getting wise counsel can keep us on track. It can help us to keep on trusting God when circumstances seem to be pushing us to do something on our own. A variety of biblical proverbs affirm the value of getting the Lord's guidance by seeking the counsel of believers who have grown in godly wisdom (Prov. 11:14; 12:15; 15:22).

- F. This was not a snap decision of Abram and Sari. They had moved to a new land and waited 10 years to have a child before they decided to handle their predicament themselves.
- G. When Hagar became pregnant, the women were filled with mutual contempt for each other. Sarai did not hold back her anger, and her contempt toward Abram.
- H. She blamed Abram for the plan that had led to Hagar's pregnancy. She went on to assassinate Hagar's character in Abram's eyes. Then she inflicted the crowning blow by invoking the Lord's judgment on her husband.

The Challenges We Face As We Wait on the Lord

The sad outcome of Abram and Sarai's plan demonstrates three key realities to keep in mind as we face the challenge of waiting on the Lord to keep His promises.

1. We dare not rely on our own ideas when it comes to doing the Lord's work. Left to our own judgments, we certainly will make mistakes as we try to solve our problems without the Lord's involvement.
2. We must resist the temptation to blame each other when we carry out our own plans only to see them fail. By contrast, we reflect wisdom when we turn to the Lord in repentance and obedience.
3. We should not devise our own plans then expect the Lord to make them work. When we live out God's plan, we can expect Him to bless it. However, when we depend on the Lord to bless plans we've devised without His input, we make a grave mistake.

Which one of those key realities has become your downfall? What do you need to bring to God in prayer to correct this downfall? Write out your plan on what you will do differently next time. Make sure you include God in those plans!

3. Refocus on God's Plan - Genesis 17:3-6,15-19

Genesis 17:3-22

³ Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, ⁴ "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. ⁵ No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. ⁶ I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you..... ¹⁵ God also said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. ¹⁶ I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her." ¹⁷ Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, "Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?" ... ¹⁹ Then God said, "Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him.

- A. Abram was 86 years old when Hagar gave birth to Ishmael.
- B. Thirteen years later, when Abram was 99 years old, the Lord reappeared to him.
- C. By falling facedown, Abram assumed a posture that reflected his sense of awe and reverence in God's presence.

- D. As we come into God's presence, we too are to have a submissive spirit and a heart eager to worship. Worshiping Him in such an humble and sincere way enables us:
- i. Confessing our failures and receiving God's forgiveness brings a sense of peace that comes with a fresh start in our walk with God. That's also when we begin to look forward to reading God's Word and praying.
 - ii. Spending time with God, hearing God's Word read, explained in the message and communicating with God in prayer, starts to make a huge difference in our daily lives.
- E. God's covenant served as an agreement between two parties. In the Bible there are two difference kinds of covenants:
- i. Covenant of Divine Commitment: This type of covenant God takes the initiative and completely upholds this agreement, without any expectation of the other party.
 - ii. Covenant of Human Obligation: This type of covenant is made with both parties having responsibility of maintaining the agreement. Should either party not uphold their side of the agreement, the agreement would be declared null and void.
- F. So Abram would never forget this promise, God changed his name, from Abram (meaning "great father") to Abraham (meaning "father of multitudes"). The name Abraham would be a constant reminder of God's promise, which would include two things:
- i. Sarai's name would be changed to Sarah, meaning princess.
 - ii. She would give birth to a son who would be the fulfillment of God's promise of an heir, and would give birth to nations and have kings come from her.
- G. As Abraham listened to God, he laughed ... to himself. This was not disrespect for God had said, but a reaction to the preposterous notion that Sarah, at 90 years old, would have a baby and Abraham, at 100 years old, would become a father.
- H. But God would get the last laugh. One year from the day, Abraham and Sarah did have a son, and named him Isaac, which means laughter.
- I. Every time Abraham would mention his son's name, he would be reminded he served a God who fulfilled His promise, even when it appeared laughable at first.

Read the articles "Isaac" and "Ishmael" contained in your preparation packet you picked up last Sunday. If you missed it, additional copies are available on the back table.

Have You Lost Patience with the Lord?

Have you lost patience with the Lord along the way and jumped ahead of His plan for you? Perhaps like Abraham and Sarah, you made a big mistake, your plan failed, and you have drawn the conclusion God won't use you because you ignored His counsel. Use the story you have studied to reassure you that the Lord can help you rise above your mistakes. He wants you to turn to Him and learn to wait on Him so He can accomplish the plan He has for you. Turn to Him by reaffirming your trust in Him and listening to Him so He can direct your path.