

# Dying to Our Fear of God's Will

Genesis 20:1-18

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"Walking by Faith" Series on the Life of Abraham - Lesson 16 of 20

Let me ask you a very personal question: "Have you ever thought you had a weakness in an area of your life under control, only to find out that you didn't?" Let's go one step further: "Have you ever promised God that you would never succumb to that weakness again, but you did?" If you answered "yes" to either of these questions, then let me be the first to welcome you to "Club Abraham." If there were such a club, Abraham would qualify to be in the running to be the president of the club. If anyone should have learned from his previous mistake and avoided ever stumbling in that area again, it should have been Abraham. In spite of the profound experiences Abraham had with God, Genesis 20 looks like a repeat movie of Genesis 12. If you were to make a movie of the events recorded in Genesis 20, you could title it, "Abraham's Misadventures in Egypt – The Sequel."

In Genesis 12, Abraham reacts to the famine that was sweeping across the land of Canaan. Abraham made the decision (it was not God's decision) to go down to Egypt to seek his provision. Abraham gave into his fear and chose to take matters into his own hands. He did indeed find provision in Egypt, but he also found himself in a world of trouble. Abraham was convinced that Pharaoh would find Sarah, his wife, desirable and would want her to become one of his many wives. Abraham devised a plan for his own self-preservation that would put Sarah's honor and well-being at risk. He told her to lie about their relationship and tell Pharaoh that she was his sister. You will remember that Pharaoh found Sarah attractive and took her to be one of his wives but God steps in to redeem Abraham's mess.

Here we go again in Genesis 20. We see that Abraham fell into the same old trap of yielding to his fears and perpetrating a lie in order to protect his own life. Abraham journeys to Gerar in the south. While there, he once again tells Sarah to lie about their relationship in order to preserve his own life. As Abraham suspected, when King Abimelech sees the beauty of Sarah, he wants to take her as one of his wives. Abimelech acted out of innocence as Abraham had told him that Sarah was his sister and then Sarah confirmed it to the king. We would love to point a finger at Abraham and say "shame on you!" We need to take a moment and consider what transpires in this story. If we are honest, we will probably find it to be a little too close for comfort. It is probably a close parallel to our own story.

## An Old Stumbling Stone

God again steps into Abraham's mess! God visits Abimelech in a dream and warns him that he is a dead man if he does not return Sarah to Abraham. He tells Abimelech that Sarah is not Abraham's sister, but that she is his wife. *But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, "Indeed you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man's wife. Now therefore, restore the man's wife; for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you shall live. But if you do not restore her, know that you shall surely die; you and all who are yours"* (Genesis 20:3, 7). What a tremendous motivator this statement must have been for Abimelech to return Sarah to Abraham. Imagine for a moment, that the Lord visited you in the night with such a statement ... "Look, you're a dead man if you don't deal with " \_\_\_\_\_ " and conquer that weakness in your life that you keep promising Me you won't succumb to again." I don't know about you, but I would be highly motivated to quickly take action.

Abimelech pleads that he is ignorant of the circumstances and therefore innocent of taking another man's wife. He reminds the Lord that Abraham told him to move forward with his plans as Sarah was only his sister and Sarah told him the same; *But Abimelech had not come near her; and he said, "Lord, will You slay a righteous nation also? Did he not say to me, 'She is my sister?'" And she, even she herself said, 'He is my brother.'* In the integrity of my heart and innocence of my hands I have done this" (Genesis 20:4-5). Abimelech pleads his case by pointing out the integrity of his heart in the matter. Immediately, Abimelech started the process of restoring Sarah to Abraham; *So Abimelech rose early in the morning, called all his servants, and told all these things in their hearing; and the men were very much afraid* (Genesis 20:8).

Abimelech confronts Abraham and demands an answer for his actions in Genesis 20:9-10, *And Abimelech called Abraham and said to him, "What have you done to us? How have I offended you, that you have brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? You have done deeds to me that ought not to be done."* Then Abimelech said to Abraham, *"What did you have in view, that you have done this thing?"* Again, God telling him that he was a "dead man" motivated him to get to the bottom of the matter at hand. In other words, Abimelech asked Abraham, "What did I ever do to you for you to do such a thing to me?"

## **Taking Matters into Our Own Hands**

One would think that Abraham would have apologized for lying. You would think that he would have admitted that he was without excuse for his actions. But, Abraham immediately defended his actions and offered his reasoning to Abimelech; *And Abraham said, "Because I thought, surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will kill me on account of my wife"* (Genesis 20:11). In other words, Abraham told Abimelech; "Look my friend; I deemed you to be an ungodly man. Therefore, with no fear of God in your heart to temper your desires, I judged that you would act without integrity. I knew that when you laid your eyes on my lovely Sarah, you would find her very attractive and want her to be your wife. You would agree, would you not, that you would have to kill me in order to take her if you knew she was my wife? You seem to be a reasonable man. Therefore, I'm sure you understand my reasoning and subsequent actions." The truth of the matter was that Abraham was afraid for his life and he was willing to lie to protect himself.

Bottom line, Abraham's fear over-ruled his trust in God and he put his wife, King Abimelech, and the citizens of Gerar at risk. We too, will put ourselves and people around us at risk if we act on our fears instead of resting in our trust in God. Before we can enjoy the fulfillment of God's promises and purposes in our lives, we must stop giving into the temptation to take matters into our own hands in order to protect our lives and interests. Consider the words of Jesus on the subject of self-preservation in Matthew 16:25, *"For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it."*

Abraham continues in his attempt to justify himself to Abimelech by further rationalizing his actions in Genesis 20:12-13, *But indeed she is truly my sister. She is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife. And it came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said to her, "This is your kindness that you should do for me: in every place, wherever we go, say of me, 'He is my brother.'"* Isn't it amazing just how proficient our courtroom skills become when we attempt to rationalize our actions that are wrong? ... "Look your honor, I know that what I did was technically wrong, but there were extenuating circumstances that influenced my actions. They must be taken into account before you render your verdict." Abraham pointed out to Abimelech that he "sort of lied," but not really. Abraham told Abimelech that he needed to understand that Sarah was his half-sister on his father's side. Abraham acted like the king should understand that in Abraham's culture it was permissible for him to marry Sarah.

One of the most remarkable pictures of God's forgiving grace and mercy is found in the closing verses of Genesis 20. God had closed the wombs of the women of Gerar, including the womb of Abimelech's wife. This was God's judgment against Abimelech for his actions against Abraham and Sarah. Even though Abraham was carrying the guilt of his own failure and fears, he prays for Abimelech and God answers his prayers! Herein lies a great truth for us today ... our failure does not have to stop the flow of God in our lives if we will repent and then proceed to do the right thing.

The moment of Abraham's repentance before the Lord is not recorded; however, it is implied. At some point, Abraham must have humbled himself before the Lord and repented of his actions. Even though his failure was a repeat of a past mistake, God was ever gracious to forgive him and use him again. How do we respond to our past and present failures?

**WE ARE THE ONES** who write ourselves out of God's grace based on our past failures and propensity to repeat our mistakes.

**WE ARE THE ONES** who struggle to believe that given our weaknesses, God would hear our prayers or take our repentance seriously.

**WE ARE THE ONES** who are convinced there is no longer a place for us in the work of God because we have had to pray one too many times; "Lord, it's me again. I did it again."

**WE ARE THE ONES** who make the assumption that God will never be able to use us again because He can't trust us to get our act together.

Perhaps this is how you are feeling as you are reading this article.

Let me tell you straight up ...

**YOUR FEELINGS ARE WRONG!**

Our God is a God full of forgiving grace and mercy. If we will humble ourselves before Him in repentance, He will faithfully cleanse our hearts again. Regardless of what we have done, or how many times we have done it, God will use us if we repent and make ourselves available. We struggle to believe that this is true of our God. Our struggle probably comes from the fact that we know in our heart that if we were God, it would probably not be true of us. We usually give people a couple of chances to get their act together; however, we terminate the relationship if it appears that they are going to keep messing up. This is especially true in the church. We are too quick to write someone out of God's grace and deem them to be unworthy of service.

I am not suggesting for a moment that we lower the high standards for ministry. I am also not purporting that one who has failed should not be held accountable and submit to a restoration process. However, I am suggesting that we heed the words of the Apostle Paul in writing to the church at Galatia regarding one who has fallen; *Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted* (Galatians 6:1). If the Lord is willing to forgive, then we should be willing to forgive.

## **Yesterday's Grace is not Enough for Today's Journey**

Yesterday's grace is not enough to preempt the potential for today's failure. Our past spiritual victories do not prevent future failures. Consider the story of Samson. He was raised a Nazirite with a full understanding of the Nazirite vow: "Do not touch the dead; do not drink alcohol; do not cut your hair."

We may assume that Samson's downfall was in letting Delilah cut his hair ... that is not the case. By the time Delilah cut Samson's hair, he had already broken his Nazirite vow. Judges 14 records the story of how he tore a lion apart and then continued on to his destination. Later, he returned and scooped honey from the bee hive in the lion's carcass; thus, Samson violated his vow not to touch the dead. The place where the lion was torn apart was the scene of a great victory. However, Samson opened the door for his ultimate defeat at the exact place of his previous great victory.

Abraham's story is similar to Samson's. God had previously delivered Abraham and cleaned up his mess in Egypt. However, Abraham stumbles again over the same issue of his fear. We need to understand that when God gives us a victory over our enemy in a particular area of our lives, our responsibility is to stand in the delivering power of God's strength. It is never permissible for us to try to maintain our victory by returning to the confidence of our own flesh! Consider the words of the Apostle Paul in his admonition to the church at Galatia in Galatians 5:1, *Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.*

In order for us to become a devoted follower of Jesus, we must be willing to daily die to our fleshly natures. Jesus said in Matthew 16:24, *If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.* Our fleshly natures will **always rebel** against our desire to spiritually die to our flesh. The reason for the rebellion of our flesh is simple ... what becomes true of us spiritually will eventually become true of us physically. Once we choose to die to our fleshly natures, our flesh will not have the authority to over-rule our spirit's pursuit of God and His righteousness.

Pursuing God's will always bring a challenge in four areas of our fleshly nature and fears:

- Our Fear of the Opinion of Others
- Our Dependency on Material Things
- Our Belief that We are Our Own Source of Supply
- Our Unwillingness to Believe Beyond What We Can See and Intellectually Understand

### **God Never Gives Up on Us**

Let me share with you some really great news ... God will never give up on a heart that is set on pursuing His will. Even though we may stumble and fail along the way, God is always ready to extend His forgiving grace and mercy! God knows and understands our make-up. God, alone, knows how to lead us into all that He has purposed for us to have and what He has purposed for us to become. The only thing required from us is that we let the Lord lead us in all things. The Psalmist drives home the point of the Lord's fatherly compassion towards us in Psalm 103:13-14, *The LORD is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who fear him. For he understands how weak we are; He knows we are only dust.*

God wants to set us free from our fears! He wants to bring us to the place of being able to totally trust Him and surrender our will to His will. After we have done all we know to do to fight the good fight of faith, we need to humble ourselves before the Lord and honestly say:

***"Lord, I'm Yours!"***  
***"Do With Me as it Pleases You!"***