



How many of you have ever made plans to modify a habit or to resolve to do a new thing? How many of you have ever felt very firm in making these resolves, but then in a matter of hours, days, weeks, or months, the resolve goes away? How can we move from feelings of strong resolve to negligence? We can resonate with the apostle Paul when he writes, **“¹⁵ For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.”**¹ Now, of course, some of our plans and resolves aren’t sin issues like what Paul is writing about, but sometimes they are. Maybe you, like me, have had spiritual experiences where you feel like your faith has been strengthened and you’re on a spiritual high. You feel like you can conquer anything, any sin. You then resolve you’ll never do x, y, or z sin. Then, within a day, couple days, or a week you go back. Maybe you gave back in because of fear or because of laziness or because of selfishness. Whatever the reason, you, like me, have probably recalled Jesus’ words to Peter, **“The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. . .”**² Can you resonate with Jesus’ statement? Have you ever felt this way? Maybe you’re feeling like this today.

This morning, we’re entering back into the narrative of Abram, and Abram can completely relate to this. If you were here last week, you saw how Abram responded to the Lord’s promise with faith, obedience, and worship. Abram’s resolve was strong to follow God. He, at 75 years old, packed up his household and left for a land that God would show him. This narrative reveals the amazing grace of God and the beauty of someone who actually takes God at his word and obeys. But that faith, while still resident in Abram, is actually revealed to still be immature and weak. Abram, like us, has a weak flesh even though his spirit is willing.

As we move into the text this morning, I want us to see Abram’s flesh is weak, but I pray that we walk around with a profound sense of awe in God who is faithful and worthy of our trust. The main idea of the sermon today is: **A believer’s faithless fear threatens God’s plans, but God’s faithfulness always thwarts humanity’s schemes.** What we find in this short story is Abram’s resolve move from dependence on God to dependence on self. As, as a result, he risks everything. What’s amazing is that God doesn’t say to Abram, “That’s it! You too?! You’re just like everyone before you. I’ve already kicked Adam and Eve out of the Garden. I’ve flooded the earth. I’ve dispersed people from Babel and confused the languages. And now, you, too?! I’m done.” No. Ever since the garden, God made a promise that he’s going to keep. And that promise continues through Abram, and it’s a promise of everlasting grace. It’s a promise that isn’t dependent on Abram, but on God himself. And while Abram’s faithless fear threatens God’s plan, God’s faithfulness thwarts what could have been if life was dependent on humans.

With this, let’s jump into the first part of the main idea:

1. A believer’s faithless fear threatens God’s plans (vv. 10-16).

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 7:15.

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mt 26:41.

Last week, I stated that in God's call to Abram, the fact that God speaks and Abram acts ought to be noticeable to us. Abram trusts and obeys. He doesn't argue and obey. He doesn't say he trusts, but does his own thing. He trusts and obeys. Yet, when we turn into verse 10, a challenge comes to Abram. And in these verses, God is noticeably silent. And there's no mention of faith or anything like that from Abram in these verses.

Let's look at the beginning of verse 10: Now there was a famine in the land.³ These words serve as a transition from Abram's call to now see Abram's faith being tested. Now, I want to clarify what I mean when I say that Abram was tested. Sometimes we think "testing" means, "We prove to God that we deserve an A." No. Testing in the Scripture often, if not always, is a reference to testing medals and increasing their purity. It always involves removing the bad so that the faith is purified. This is what's happening with Abram here. God is testing Abram. And Abram reveals areas of weakness in his faith that God is going to strengthen.

I find this tremendously encouraging, as I think you should, too, if you are a follower of Jesus. God doesn't test you in order to see how good you are. And when sin is revealed in your life, God is not saying, "See, you're not good enough!" God tested in order to purify. And God is committed to continue to purify your faith. So, if you're going through difficulties and trials right now, know that while your flesh and the devil are using that to try to destroy you; God has a greater design – your purity.

Now, what Abram is going to learn through this scenario is to *not trust his own schemes, but to always trust God*. It's the truth of Proverbs 3:5-6: **⁵Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. ⁶In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.**⁴ So, Abram is faced with a problem. Actually, he's faced with two here, but let's just focus on the first:

Problem #1: Famine in Canaan. God promised to show Abram the land he was going to give him. He was going to bless Abram and make of him a great nation, and that through his seed all the nations of the world will be blessed. But there's a famine! God can't make a nation if Abram and Sarai are dead. So, Abram comes up with a solution.

Solution #1: Sojourn in Egypt. The rest of verse 10 says, "So Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land."⁵ I personally do not believe that this was a wise decision of Abram – especially as I mentioned earlier that all of a sudden God is strangely silent. It appears that Abram is responding in fear of the famine. So, the natural solution is that he's going to try to figure out what to do. He's going to *leave* the land God promised to him. But he says he's just going to sojourn in Egypt. It's interesting verbiage here. He's not planning to stay there. He just wants to be there for a little while so he can have food and live.

In transparency, I get this way of thinking from Abram. However, God made a promise. God didn't tell Abram to go. God didn't call him to sojourn in Egypt. God called him to sojourn until he reached the land God promised him. He was in the land. Is he going to trust God or is he going to trust his own "logic?" He's already trusted the God who brings order from chaos. He's believed that God could bring a child to his wife who was in her 60's and to make a nation from him who was in his 70's. Why not trust that God can remove a famine in the land of promise?

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 12:10.

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Pr 3:5–6.

⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 12:10.

Then, as Abram and his envoy are approaching Egypt, Abram reveals another potential problem.

Problem #2: Pharaoh might want Sarai in his harem. Look at verse 11-12 with me: 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.⁶ Ok, so he’s worried about a famine in the land of Canaan, but now he worries about dying at the hand of Pharaoh because of his wife’s beauty. Seriously, which is better? Do you see how fear is guiding Abram instead of trust in the Lord?

This is why we read the verses from Psalm 37 earlier in the service. Three times in eight verses, we’re told to not worry ourselves about the people in this world. And then in verse 8, we read, **“Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil. . .”**⁷ We’re watching this happen in Abram’s life. Living on the basis of fear of this world leads to more fear. And now Abram is now just trying to minimize consequences. Can you relate to this? Do you have things in your life right now where you are pretty sure you’re just trying to take control and minimize the consequences instead of trusting the Lord? Psalm 37 gives us a greater alternative than to live in fear of the things around us: ³ **Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness. ⁴ Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.**⁸ Trust and obey. Dwell where God has placed you and be faithful to what he’s called you to do. All the while, make God your delight and he will shape your desires! We are to live this way even when trials come. We aren’t to seek to wiggle our way out of things that God has called us into. We are to trust him. He’s worthy of our trust, right? He’s the God who is over the chaos, yes? Yet, Abram seems to forget all of this and comes up with a man-made scheme.

Solution #2: Deceive Pharaoh about their relationship. In verse 13, we read Abram’s plan: 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.”⁹ Deception is so. . .deceptive isn’t it? I mean, Abram isn’t saying to Sarai to *lie*. Sarai was a half-sister because we’re shown later in Genesis that they had different mothers. So, it’s not an outright lie. But I just need to say this to all of us here today. If you’re ever in a situation and you are about to answer a question and you think to yourself, “Well, it’s not a *lie*,” that’s probably your flesh arguing with your conscience and your conscience is saying, “Yes, but it *is* deception.” Remember that is how Satan tempted Adam and Eve. He is the deceiver from the very beginning. And Abram is following the deceiver’s scheme.

All that said, there is evidence in the ancient world that Abram’s fear had at least some legitimate basis. Kings and rulers had power to simply *take* a woman. However, there’s also ancient evidence that rulers would barter for a dowry for a family member. I want to emphasize this because I used to think Abram was just saying here, “Well, I guess if Pharaoh wants you, he can have you. As long as I live, I’ll be fine.” But that’s not what Abram is probably doing. He’s probably saying, “Say you’re my sister so that I’ll have time to figure out what to do. Otherwise, he’ll just take you immediately.” Again, I think we can say we understand what Abram’s trying to do here. He believes God promises a nation and a seed. He needs to be alive for this to happen. Sarai needs to be alive. So, they flee a famine and go to Egypt (but they don’t look to the Lord for direction and provision). Then they enter Egypt and anticipate another problem. In fear, he comes up with a plan that kind of makes sense, but again, he’s not trusting the Lord. To add to this, he’s forgotten part of God’s promise – through him all the nations will be blessed. Is Egypt a nation? Yes. And is Abram working to see how God might bless Egypt? No. He’s just working at trying to

⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 12:11–12.

⁷ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 37:8.

⁸ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 37:3–4.

⁹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 12:13.

save his own skin. He's not trusting the Lord. As a result, his faithlessness, in the midst of his little faith, is working real hard, and then we read verses 14-16 to see how that faithfulness threatened God's plan altogether.

Look at these verses: ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁰

Abram was right. The Egyptians saw this mid-60 year-old woman as beautiful. And when the household of Pharaoh saw her, they told Pharaoh about her. Then she was taken. Wait a second. That's not part of Abram's plan. If they were in another region, in a smaller city-nation, the ruler would negotiate. But not so with Pharaoh. No need. He's Pharaoh. He has so much power, he can just take and assume he can have. Oh no! Here's the moment where I can imagine Abram's heat sank and he felt sick to his stomach. You ever have those moments where it sinks in that you cannot manage the situation any more, and you say to yourself, "What have I done?!" You feel like you've ruined everything and there's no way out. But look at the ironic words of verse 16. We're told that for Sarai's sake Pharaoh "dealt well with Abram. . . ." Abram told Sarai to say she was his sister so that it would be well with him. But I'm confident Abram wasn't saying, "I want sheep, oxen, donkeys, servants, and camels!" He wanted to stay alive because God made a promise. He also, I believe, was trying to figure out how to keep he and Sarai together. But his scheme led to division. What does having sheep, donkeys, camels mean if he loses Sarai?! This reminds me of Jesus' words: ²⁶ **For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?**¹¹ The Pharaoh of Egypt was probably the wealthiest on the planet in those days. He takes Sarai and gives Abram even more wealth. But what does all that wealth mean if Sarai is gone? You see, if it's true that Abram believed that God's promises were looking forward to the seed of the woman who is going to save the world – and I believe that is the case – then Abram is literally gaining the world and losing his soul right here. His schemes are threatening God's promises. If God doesn't intervene, he (and the world) is going to be bound in sin forever!

As I think about this, I wonder how the Israelites in the wilderness would process this narrative. The Israelites at various times trusted in their own schemes instead of trusting the Lord. I think of the time when God called the Israelites to go in battle against certain people. Before going, they send 12 spies into the land to evaluate the scenario. Ten come back saying there are giants and there's no way they could fight and win. The other two call the Israelites to trust the Lord. But the Israelites won't. Then the Lord punishes the Israelites for their faithlessness, and what do they say? They immediately say they'll go and fight! But God tells them no! The point is whether or not they will trust the Lord – not trust themselves. What about you? Are you living in your schemes? You can be a follower of God and trust his *big* promise of salvation, but also be trusting your schemes? Why? What a waste. God is calling you closer and closer to himself. He himself is life and grace. Why resist him when you can know him more and increasingly? But you might say, "If I trust him, things are going to get worse?" Well, if by that you mean there can be more trials, that's true. But from a completely other perspective, remember what trials do. Like fire that purifies gold, trials for the believer purify us. Do you know what God is offering to all of his children? **God offers himself (Life) and purified beauty.** And we can trust him to do this because

2. God's faithfulness always thwarts humanity's schemes (vv. 17-20).

¹⁰ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 12:14–16.

¹¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mt 16:26.

Let's read verses 17-20 now: ¹⁷ 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." ²⁰ And Pharaoh gave men orders concerning him, and they sent him away with his wife and all that he had. ¹²

But the Lord. That phrase. Don't you love it? Abram, even though he had faith, is responding in so much faithlessness and has put himself in a horrific predicament that he cannot get himself out of. But the Lord. . . Here's when God shows up. God afflicts Pharaoh's house in such a way that causes Pharaoh to realize that Sarai is Abram's wife. We don't know what the affliction is, but somehow Pharaoh found out why. So, Pharaoh calls for Abram and confronts him. Pharaoh actually uses similar words that God uses to Adam and Eve after their sin in the garden: What is this you have done. . .? Clearly, God is rebuking Abram through Pharaoh. Why did Abram deceive. If God promised to bless the nations through Abram and bless those who bless him and curse those who curse him, why would Abram feel any need whatsoever to deceive?

But notice in verse 19. Pharaoh states that Abram is the one who deceives. We don't have a record that Sarai does. She may have. But the emphasis is on Abram. Abram is similar to Adam. Like Adam, Abram received the Word from God directly. And like Adam, he doesn't protect the woman. And in the midst of this, God remains faithful. Like with Adam, God is merciful and promises a seed to come to crush the serpent. And with Abram, God is merciful and continues that promise. He's going to rescue Sarai and bring her back to Abram. Pharaoh tells Abram to take her, and gives his men orders to send Abram and all his people and stuff away!

And where does Abram head? Back to Canaan. What a u-turn. Yet, in the midst of this trial of famine and test in Egypt, God takes evil and turns it for good. He teaches Abram about himself. He is worthy of greater trust from Abram. Human's cannot stop God's plan. They can't mess up God's plan too much.

The same is true for you, Christian. You might think you've messed your life up too much. If you trust Jesus, he promises that he controls all things and everything will turn for your eternal good. Now, even as I say this, some people might say, "Wow! So I can just sin all I want and God will let me off the hook." What a horrifying response. If you love someone, show them grace, teach them, and then that person says, "Woohoo! I can treat you however I want." What does that say about you? You don't really want that person. There's no relationship. The love and power and mercy and grace of God ought to melt our hearts to trust and not to lean on our own understanding that only further complicates and messes things up.

In addition, Abram does experience certain painful consequences from this scenario. He gains Egyptians servants from Pharaoh. There's going to be a future servant through which more tension comes to Abram and Sarai. Her name is Hagar. Also, because Abram gains so much, there's going to be a separation that comes between he and Lot that leads to scenarios with Sodom and Gomorrah. Now, again, God will work all these things for his glory and Abram's eternal good. But they are painful consequences nonetheless. Sin is never worth it. And grace is never a call to sin more. It's a call to rest in the loving arms of our Lord.

¹² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 12:17–20.

I can only imagine how some Israelites interpreted this narrative when first given to them. You may have already seen this, but there are multiple similarities between this narrative and Israel's fleeing out of the land of Egypt. The following is mentioned in both this scenario and Israel's entrance and exodus from Egypt: **a severe famine, sojourn in Egypt, killing of the male, bondage, great wealth, plagues on Egypt, the summons to "take. . .go," the word "send," and the journey to the Negev.** One man writes of this saying, **"Knowing this history would have been a comfort and encouragement to the people under Moses, for if God, who made the promise to Abram, delivered Abram from Egypt to return to the land, then God, who confirmed the promises to the descendants of Abram, could surely deliver them as well."** And even though Israel excitedly agreed to obey God's commands and then disobeyed, and disobeyed, and disobeyed; God is still faithful to his promise! They cannot thwart God. Will they trust him?

And what about us? Will we live in fear or live by faith? Think of the people on the earth when Jesus came to the earth. Matthew emphasizes that the city of Jerusalem was in fear of Jesus. They were trusting their own schemes. They wanted their ways. But there were some who believed on Jesus. God's promised seed has come. And, over and over again, he proved his deity and humanity. He proved he was the Messiah. And yet, people still wanted to trust their own schemes and so they decided to kill him. Yet, that's precisely been the plan of God all along. The Messiah would take the sins of people like Adam, Abram, Eve, Noah, Sarai, Pharaoh – and us – and the Messiah thwarts the schemes of humanity! In taking the punishment sinners deserve, he offers his righteousness to anyone who turns to him! And through him, all the nations of the world will be blessed. Because of the Messiah Jesus, Isaiah 19:25 says: **Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance."**¹³

Through the offspring of Abram, all nations will be blessed. Do you trust him? And do you know that now, through all who trust Jesus, we are called to bless the nations around us – not just live in fear of the world? Do you realize there are studies done even by the world talking about how much fear and anger is motivating the media in our day and how our sinful self gravitates towards that. But if you know Jesus, you have nothing to ultimately fear. Romans 8 says,¹⁵ **For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!"**¹⁶ **The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,**¹⁷ **and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.**¹⁴ We're not like enslaved Israel. We're not enslaved to fear. We have the Spirit in this broken and fallen world. And while we suffer and endure pain for the glory of God, we know we're heirs of a city whose builder and maker is God. And someday, we will be at home with us. What have we to fear? We shouldn't follow the same logic as the world. We should promote people living in fear of this world. Instead, we all ought to point to the Lord – the One people ought to fear and also in whom they could find their fears relieved! We have the message of life and hope and restoration and forgiveness. And, all the while, even as we are still weak in our faith, he will make us strong. Do you trust him?

Even if the culture is against us and hates us, we have God! And to have God – even if we lose our lives – is to have everything. Because, after all, what does it matter if we gain the whole world and lose our soul? Christian, who are you living for? How are you living your life? God's faithfulness thwarts humanity's schemes. Will you continue to trust the God who is over all the chaos?

¹³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Is 19:25.

¹⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 8:15–17.