



Recently, I was reading in a book written by a guy named Paul Tripp, and he was talking about God's sovereignty. Meaning, how God is in control of *everything*. In making application on God's sovereignty, Tripp says that in our lives, we generally function with two circles: the circle of concern and the circle of responsibility. In other words, in the circle of concern are worries and fears and anxieties that we really do not have control of. Yet, it seems we often spend our energies on the worries, fears, and anxieties. And, when we do that, we neglect the circle of responsibility. We neglect doing what God has actually called us to do while we're spinning our wheels on things that is God's responsibility.

This is exactly what we see in Abram. When God called Abram to leave the land and go to a new land, and when God promised to make of him a great nation, Abram simply trusted. Then that resolve seems to dissipate quickly once the famine hits the land. The trial of poverty really tests him. I won't go through the sermon from last week. I'll just say that if you weren't here last week, I think it'd be valuable to go online to see how Abram's weak faith was revealed and also how God's mercy prevailed.

Now, what we see this week is that Abram seems to have learned some things about God through the Egypt episode. Through the previous trial, God removed some impurities which has led to an increase of Abram's trust in the Lord and a decrease trust in himself. Or, to put another way, Abram has learned that his responsibility is much smaller than God's. Abram is therefore free to focus on trusting God and obeying what God explicitly calls him to do.

Before we enter the text today, you may have already picked up on the fact that we read from portions from Psalm 37 again in our service. We did that because the ideas from Psalm 37 are very clear in Abram's life. And I want to remind us again of how God calls his children to live. <sup>3</sup> **Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness.** <sup>4</sup> **Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. . . .** <sup>8</sup> **Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil.**<sup>1</sup>

Can you relate to Abram? Are there areas in your life you try to control that really aren't your responsibility? Has God taught you the freedom of "letting go" and trusting that he is good and right even when things don't make sense? If you can relate to this struggle, then this narrative ought to be comforting and maybe challenging as well.

So, today we will see that Abram is restored to trusting the Lord – and that leads him to act in what I'll say are radical ways of trust and obedience. With all this understanding, let me share with you the main idea today: **Faith rests us in the Lord and not merely on what our eyes can see.** Let's start with the first part of the main idea, and if you have your Bible, go to Genesis 13.

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<sup>1</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 37:3-4, 8.

## 1. Faith rests us in the Lord (vv. 1-4).

Let's read verses 1-4 together: So Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the Negeb. <sup>2</sup>Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold. <sup>3</sup>And he journeyed on from the Negeb as far as Bethel to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, <sup>4</sup>to the place where he had made an altar at the first. And there Abram called upon the name of the Lord.<sup>2</sup>

After the Egypt debacle, and God rescues Sarai; Abram returns to the area of the Promised Land. First in the southland Negev area. The verbiage here is somewhat similar to the language of chapter 12. Meaning, just like Abram left his homeland and Lot went with him; so, we find Abram leaves Egypt and Lot goes with him. I think, from the beginning of chapter 12, we ought to be intrigued by this nephew, Lot. God promises special blessing to Abram. God tells Abram to leave the homeland, and Lot tags along. I think this is an exercise of Lot's faith as well. We're told in the New Testament that Lot was righteous; so, I believe Lot had faith. And even here in verse 1, Lot decides to leave Egypt to go back to famine-laden Canaan. Clearly, Abram, Sarai, and Lot were returning to Canaan with trust in the Lord that he is the Creator and Redeemer who will provide for them.

In verse 2, the focus is solely on Abram. We're told he's rich, but he journeys all the way back to Bethel. Abram sojourned in Bethel and built an altar there before, as recorded in chapter 12. Abram's back in Bethel and what does he do? He doesn't complain to God. He doesn't say, "Why did you let me do that?!" No. Abram "called upon the name of the Lord." And, as I stated a couple of weeks ago, that phrase connects to the idea of faith and worship of God. He's declaring the goodness of God. He's trusting God.

Abram building an altar to the Lord begins and ends this chapter. This indicates that Abram, in the land of Canaan, is full of faith and worship of God. So, I think everything stated in between verse 1 and verse 18 ought to be interpreted as actions of Abram's faith. Actions of faith that were developed by God through the trials of Egypt. By the way, this ought to encourage us as believers. Even when we're disobedient, God doesn't waste those trials. God will remove the impurities and grace us with growth. This is part of our growth in relationship with the Lord! How amazing that he truly does work all things – even Abram's disobedience in Egypt – for Abram's good and God's glory!

Now, I want to emphasize something else special here. The main idea that I wrote says, "Faith rests us. . . ." Why did I word it that way? I could have said, "Faith rests in the Lord." But I wanted us to understand the personal nature of faith. Faith isn't something you can touch and handle. Faith is at the core of us. Faith is our reliance and dependence. Faith is when I rest in the Lord and not in me or other things. Faith, then, rests us in the Lord. When we realize our weaknesses and our inability and our sin and when we realize God's goodness, grace, and power; we lay ourselves before the Lord and then find rest in him. I'm reminded of Jesus' words, **"<sup>28</sup>Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."**<sup>3</sup> This is what Abram is doing once again. He's coming to the Lord. He was laboring in Egypt under the heavy burden of his own fears and anxieties. He was spinning his wheels in the circle of concern and control that wasn't his to take care of. Now, he returns to Bethel and rests in the Lord. He worships and trusts God! Oh, there's nothing like the safety you can know when in the Lord's arms.

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<sup>2</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 13:1–4.

<sup>3</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mt 11:28.

But you might wonder, “Is Abram resting and calm in the Lord?” I absolutely believe so, and I think we see that all the more in the next part of this chapter. We see someone who trusts the Lord, does good, literally dwells in the land, and befriends faithfulness. He doesn’t turn to fear or anger. His trust in the Lord is active.

## 2. Faith rests us. . .not merely in what our eyes can see (vv. 5-18).

Let’s continue reading in verses 5-7: <sup>5</sup>And Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents, <sup>6</sup>so that the land could not support both of them dwelling together; for their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together, <sup>7</sup>and there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram’s livestock and the herdsmen of Lot’s livestock. At that time the Canaanites and the Perizzites were dwelling in the land.<sup>4</sup>

**What we can see: strife (vv. 5-7).** In these verses, we see tensions rising between Abram and Lot’s herdsmen. Intriguing the word that Moses uses to describe the tension is the word translated “strife.” This Hebrew word is used multiple times in Genesis. Later on, this word is used to speak of Israel’s strife with God over the lack of water in the wilderness. We’re told that God tested the Israelites in the wilderness with a lack of water. They were tried with a trial of poverty, and what was their response? Strife. They argue with God instead of trust him. The psalmist in Psalm 95:8-9, we’re challenged with these words of God: <sup>8</sup>**do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,** <sup>9</sup>**when your fathers put me to the test and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.** <sup>5</sup>

How do you think the wandering Israelites understood the scenario between Lot and Abram? In Hebrew, they can hear that there was meribah between Lot’s and Abram’s herdsmen. This is not good. Abram is the one through whom God is going to bring blessing to the world. And Lot’s servants are rejecting God’s blessed promises through this strife. They’re focusing on what they can see and they’re not trusting the One they cannot see.

What they see is that the land can’t keep all this wealth and animals and tents in the same location. Instead of looking to the Lord and asking for his direction, there’s meribah. Right here, instead of having a trial of poverty, we find Lot and Abram facing the trial of prosperity. When you read the Scriptures you find that God reveals people’s impurities through both wealth and poverty – and many people fail the test of prosperity. And we will see Lot fail this test in a few moments. For now, what we know is that the land just can’t tolerate all that they have. They can’t function well in the same location. It’s not just them, it’s the Canaanites and Perizzites who actually have cities and land. They’re trying to fit in between all of this. This is what their eyes can see. But what is going on that our eyes can’t see?

**What we cannot see: God’s promises (12:1-3, 13:15-16).** We do not see God’s promise. But God’s promise is the foundation to all that’s taking place here. Remember God’s words in chapter 12:1? God says, **“Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you.** <sup>2</sup>**And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.** <sup>3</sup>**I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”**<sup>6</sup> God will bless those who bless Abram. God is going to make Abram a great nation, and this land of Canaan – this land of famine and this land where there are other people, and this land where now Lot’s people are causing strife is important land in God’s plan. This is

<sup>4</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 13:5–7.

<sup>5</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 95:8–9.

<sup>6</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 12:1–3.

reiterated in verses 15-16 of this chapter. Look there with me: <sup>15</sup>for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever. <sup>16</sup>I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted. <sup>7</sup>

Ventura, God's promises must always play an active role in our minds and hearts in the midst of our daily living. If we are going to trust the Lord, we have to have God's promises active in us to fight against the anxieties and fears we face in this world where we can see all sorts of problems around us. We need God's Word to remind us what is his responsibility and what is ours! And, if the responsibility is all God's, then we can rest in him. In the midst of what we can see, we can trust that what we cannot see is greater. This is exactly what we see from Abram in the next few verses.

**What we see: radical generosity & the love of the world (vv. 8-11).** Read verses 8-11 with me now:

<sup>8</sup>Then Abram said to Lot, "Let there be no strife between you and me, and between your herdsmen and my herdsmen, for we are kinsmen. <sup>9</sup>Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right, or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left."

<sup>10</sup>And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw that the Jordan Valley was well watered everywhere like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, in the direction of Zoar. (This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.) <sup>11</sup>So Lot chose for himself all the Jordan Valley, and Lot journeyed east. Thus they separated from each other. <sup>8</sup>

What happens when we don't like how things are going and we think we have a better way that makes more sense? Strife rises up inside of us. We start to think that we can take control of the situation and then our strife goes away.

But, let me ask you something: Will you being in control truly and genuinely take away the strife? No. Think of Abram in Egypt. For a while, his planning seemed to work. But then it all came crashing down. Now, I want you to see how different Abram's response is here from the mentality he had in Egypt. I also want you to see how Lot's faith is tested. Between Lot and Abram, we see a contrast. Abram trusts the Lord. Lot leans on his own understanding.

Abram wants the striving gone. Just like God wants the striving gone with the Israelites. This is a good desire. So, Abram says something shocking. He says to Lot, "Is not the whole land before you?" In other words, there's no need for strife, you have the freedom to choose any part of this land!

Wait a second. This is the land God promised to Abram's offspring. Now, Abram is saying Lot can have any of it? Is Abram giving up his inheritance or is Abram here acting by faith? I believe he's acting by faith, based on how worship begins and ends this chapter. Abram is not living in the circle of control. He's living in his responsibility, and what's his responsibility? He's to be a man who brings peace to all people. So, he says to Lot, take whatever land. He doesn't say, "How dare you! You're my nephew! Submit!" He says you can have whatever you want. Now, how opposite is this from Abram in the previous chapter who wanted to ensure that he had food for himself and his household and then went to Egypt? What we see here is Abram trusts that if Lot takes all the land, God will still fulfill his promise to Abram. After all, Canaanites and Perizzites live in the land. God has to take care of all of this. So, Abram isn't worried. One commentator writes of this that an application for us is that **"Christians are to relinquish their rights in order to enrich others, trusting God's promises to provide. Abraham, secure**

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<sup>7</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 13:15–16.

<sup>8</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 13:8–11.

**in God, can give up his land. When we are secure in Christ, we do not have to grasp greedily for possessions”** (Walkte, *Genesis: A Commentary*, p. 224).

But Lot’s faith is tested. His prosperity is used as a test. And Lot wants the best of the best. He seemed to trust the Lord coming back from Egypt. But clearly, he wanted more. After Abram gives Lot the land, we’re told that Lot doesn’t take all of it. He instead looks around from a high top and took the Jordan Valley. Look at how it’s described in verse 10. It’s like “the garden of the Lord.” No. It’s like the land of Egypt. Wait, that sounds like it might be problematic. And, by the way, this was the area before Sodom and Gomorrah was destroyed. Wait. Why is that mentioned? Moses is putting a foreboding message around Lot’s movement to the Jordan Valley. This isn’t good. Lot, instead of saying, “No, Abram, let’s seek the Lord together and ask for his wisdom on what to do,” said, “I’ll leave you,” which is leaving the blessing of God. To bless Abram is to be blessed. Because God so closely associated his blessing with Abram, to leave Abram was to leave the Lord. And this leads us to discover what we cannot see.

**What we cannot see: Lot’s heart (vv. 11-13).** Look at verses 11-13: <sup>11</sup> So Lot chose for himself all the Jordan Valley, and Lot journeyed east. Thus they separated from each other. <sup>12</sup> Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled among the cities of the valley and moved his tent as far as Sodom. <sup>13</sup> Now the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the Lord.<sup>9</sup>

Lot probably thinks he’s just making the wise decision. From a worldly perspective, we’d probably say it’s a wise decision. It’s like the people I’ve known who have made decisions to leave strong communities with strong churches but they move for money or maybe they move for what seems to be a great spiritual reason, but they end up suffering because of it. By the way, I’m not saying that if you move away from an area where you’re really connected, you’re sinning. What I am saying is that if there’s not a strong spiritual community where you’re going, you need to take serious consideration because you do not want to choose the world over spiritual nourishment. You can never justify leaving the presence of the Lord for worldly “wisdom” and what makes sense to us. Just like Adam and Eve look at the tree and saw that it was good for fruit and they thought it could give them what they were missing, so Lot looked at the land and thought similarly. Lot trusted in what his eyes could see. We’re told in these verses that Lot journeyed east. As I’ve mentioned in previous weeks, “east” signifies movement away from the presence of the Lord. Adam and Eve headed east, and rebels head east. His heart is exposed here. But God calls us to live by faith, not merely by sight. And this narrative reveals Abram is correct in continuing to trust the Lord.

**What we can(not) see: the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abram (vv. 14-18).** God makes his promise tangible to Abram. He shows Abram that he was right in how he responded to Lot. And then he takes Abram around the perimeter of the land that God was promising to him. This was symbolic. In the ancient world, kings would travel around the land or city they ruled to signify their reign. God is tangibly showing Abram this. God is reminding Abram that he is faithful and encouraging Abram in his restful obedience that was willing to sacrifice himself so there would be no strife in Lot’s heart. Abram could walk and see the land. And at the same time, he didn’t see all of its fulfillment.

**How does this point to Jesus?** As I think about this narrative, I also recognize that we are still awaiting the full fulfillment of this promise, too. We await a city whose builder and maker is God. And, in Galatians, we’re told that we are Abraham’s offspring because we are united with Jesus, *the* offspring!

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<sup>9</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 13:11–13.

So, what does this mean? Well, in greater ways than Abram, Jesus humbled himself by coming to this earth, didn't he? He, the Offspring of God, the Messiah, is the King of the Jews, and the land belonged to him! He himself said he could have 10,000 angels come and destroy the rebels and take it all for himself. But he doesn't do it. Instead, we're told that he entrusted himself to a faithful Creator while doing good. He trusted and did good. Doesn't that kind of sound like Psalm 37? Trust the Lord. Do good. Dwell in the land. Befriend faithfulness. Refrain from anger. Forsake wrath. Fret not. . . it tends only to evil.

Jesus trusts. And in trusting, he sacrifices himself to the point of death. He takes the striving of people on himself! Our sins, our rebellion, our faithlessness – Jesus takes the sin on himself and takes the punishment for it so that we can be reconciled to God and set free. This is such a different way of thinking, isn't it? We think that if we want glory, we have to fight for it. We have to look at what we can see. We trust our sight. We don't trust God. Yet, if you have trusted Jesus, we're told in Philippians 2: **<sup>5</sup> Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant. . . .<sup>10</sup>** If you are a follower of Jesus, you are to embrace the same mindset as Jesus. Don't grasp for control. Don't engage in the strife of this world. Instead, humble yourself like Jesus did.

In some ways you could say, "That sounds awful! I don't want to be a doormat!" Oh, but like Abram and like Jesus, there's so much freedom when we live in dependence on the Spirit and not live in the fears of this world. As I think about all of this, I'm reminded of the message that the early church teaches us. In one season of immense persecution from the Roman Government, a Christian named Ignatius (a church leader), who was on his way to be sentenced, wrote to Christians on how to live in this world. He was taken on a several-month journey to Rome where he would be sentenced and executed. He more than likely died by being fed to wildcats in the Colosseum. Is this awful? Yes. But was he living in fear? I don't think so. I think he took to heart Jesus' call that we don't have to fear people who simply take our lives. While on his journey to Rome, Ignatius wrote this to Christians in the city of Ephesus: **Pray continually for the rest of humankind as well, that they may find God, for there is in them hope of repentance. Therefore allow them to be instructed by you, at least by your deeds. In response to their anger, be gentle; in response to their boasts, be humble; in response to their slander, offer prayers; in response to their errors, be steadfast in the faith; in response to their cruelty, be civilised; do not be eager to imitate them. . . .let us be eager to be imitators of the Lord"** (Dickson, *Bullies and Saints*, pp. 50-51).

One historian I read recently, who shared this story, said that there is no logical reason as to how the early church not only survived but also thrived in these horrifying early centuries. The persecution was so great at times that it would make sense if the church ceased to exist. Yet, because God is over all, he fulfilled his promises! The Christians saw persecution. Worldly wisdom would say, "react back with slander and cruelty! Let's imitate them." But our Lord Jesus says, "Here's my mind. Just as I humbled myself and myriads of people have been saved, so God will draw people to me through you! Humble yourself."

**Real freedom is being able to trust the Lord and simply live out your God-given responsibilities. True freedom is trusting the Lord, doing good, dwelling in the land and befriending faithfulness. Abram's radical generosity and trust point us to the Savior who is eternally generous and sacrificial. Lot's wandering warns us to not merely trust in what our eyes see. Truly, Faith rests us in the Lord and not merely on what our eyes can see.**

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<sup>10</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Php 2:5–7.