

How to Recover From a Failure of Faith

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[0 : 00] As we continue to move through the book of Genesis together, I've told you from the get-go, I don't know how far I'll go. We may go through the whole thing. I'm committed to do whatever the Lord wants here. And you would ask me, well, Jeff, how will you know? Well, God will speak directly to me. No, that's not it. That is not it, is it?

No. I think the Lord leaves that open for our discretion as Greg and I meet together and pray and assess the needs of our congregation and where you are spiritually. If it seems best for us to keep going, we'll keep going in Genesis. If not, we'll turn to a different book and start there and move through.

When you've got a big book like Genesis with 50 different chapters as we know them, it's a lot to cover. But I have to take them in bigger portions. As you'll see this morning, I take all of chapter 13 because it's all one story. And when you're preaching through narrative, you need to be careful to be aware that the story is the point. The story is the point and it's a unit.

So it's not like when Paul writes different letters and you have all of these truths stacked on top of each other that you have to bear out in principle form, line upon line. This is a unit that presents a theme.

And so the theme that we'll deal with this morning from Genesis 13 is this. It's how to recover from a failure of faith. Now, I think there's a lot going on in this chapter, but I do believe that this is a very important theme for what Moses wanted to communicate to the people of Israel as they stood ready to literally invade the promised land, to take it as God's gift to them, to take it as their possession.

[1 : 54] There were things they needed to understand about the heart, the character and the ways of their God as they face this huge challenge to them as a nation, as a people, the land, taking the land.

So I want you to consider that one of the lessons, one of the primary lessons that God is wanting to communicate to the Israelites through Moses, through this situation in the life of their ancestor, Abram, is what it means for Israel to repent, to trust the Lord in a repentant heart.

What happens when we fail the Lord as a people? How do we handle that? And Abram becomes a type for that. He becomes an example of that.

How to recover from a failure of faith. Now, when I say this, I don't mean that our faith fails in a way that our faith is not doing what it's supposed to do as we look to Jesus and trust him.

That's not what I mean. Our faith will always, always persevere by the grace and glory of God. Our brother Greg, Pastor Greg, will be teaching on that Wednesday night if you're interested to hear more about how that works.

[3 : 06] How does it that God preserves the faith of his people so that our faith will endure to the last moment of the last breath that we take so that we can go and meet with the Lord?

God will preserve that in you. What I mean here is simply what we've been talking about this morning. It's times when we fail in terms of exercising that faith in Jesus to trust him for whatever we need.

And so we take our matters into our own hands and we sin. This is what I'm talking. We saw this in Abram, didn't we? Abram sinned in a big way. Well, he's coming off of that. Let me read the passage with you because it's extensive.

It's, what, 17, 18 verses here that we need to navigate. So Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev. And you realize or remember the Negev is that southern part of Israel.

He and his wife, that is Sarai, and all that belonged to him and Lot with him. And then this notation. Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver and in gold.

[4 : 11] 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 Abram made there formally. And there Abram called on the name of the Lord. Calling on the name of the Lord is another way of saying Abram worshiped God.

Now Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents. And the land could not sustain them while dwelling together, for their possessions were so great that they were not able to remain together.

There was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. And now the Canaanite and the Perizzite were dwelling then in the land.

So Abram said to Lot, Please let there be no strife between you and me, nor between my herdsmen and your herdsmen, for we are brothers. We are brothers. Is not the whole land before you?

[5 : 14] Please separate from me. If to the left, then I'll go to the right. If to the right, then I'll go to the left. Well, Lot lifted up his eyes, saw all the valley of the Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere.

This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. Like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt as you go to Zoar. So Lot chose for himself all the valley of the Jordan, and Lot journeyed eastward.

Thus they separated from each other. Well, Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled in the cities of the valley and moved his tents as far as Sodom.

Now the men of Sodom were wicked exceedingly, and sinners against the Lord. The Lord said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward, southward, eastward, and westward, for all the land which you see.

I will give it to you and to your descendants. I hope your Bible says this next word, forever. I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth, so that if anyone can number the dust of the earth, then your descendants can also be numbered.

[6 : 37] Arise, walk about the land through its length and breadth, for I will give it to you. Then Abram moved his tent and came and dwelt by the oaks of Mamre, which are in Hebron.

And there he built an altar to the Lord. Friends, as we dive into this together, I want to say this to you. If you love Jesus, if you've been saved, if you've been born again to new life in Jesus Christ, if you are walking with God under His forgiveness and His grace, His favor on your life, your sin grieves your heart.

It should. Your sin burdens you. Your sin weighs on you. When you sin against your Lord and Savior, it has an impact, a deep impact on you.

It's painful. And that pain is the rub for us when we want to overcome the negative impact sin has on us.

We are not a people who run to pain. We typically want to escape from or stay away from, avoid the things that cause us physical pain, emotional pain, distress in our heart, things that tax us.

[8 : 26] Right? We want to stay away. So when we sin against the Lord and feel a pain in that, we don't necessarily gravitate toward the pain. And the pain becomes an impediment.

Listen, when I ask you, what's the most difficult part of dealing with your sin? You may give a number of different answers if we just did that real quick with the people in this room.

But the most difficult part, I would think, is moving past the sense of guilt, shame, and failure you feel over your sin.

It's hard enough that you've got to deal with the consequences of sin on a physical level. You hurt someone. You said something you shouldn't. The relationship is strained.

Or you've done something that's put you in a bad position that's going to be difficult for you to walk out of. But then there are the consequences of what you feel inside of you, in your heart, on your conscience.

[9 : 32] And you wear the weight of that. Is this not true? As you face sin. I think that's probably one of the most difficult, if not the most difficult, aspects of dealing with the failure that we feel in sin.

The alternative. Now think of this. The alternative to this is that you would become callous to your sin. That you would learn to rationalize your sin.

Justify your sin. Or worse, to ignore it altogether. To turn your conscience off. So that there's no warning at all.

There's no hitch in your spirit at all. There's no cause for pause at all in your spirit when you sin. That is a very, very dangerous place for your soul to be.

The Lord speaks of that. You never, as a human, want to get to the place where you've so calloused your conscience that you don't feel any sting or warning or cause for pause when you sin against your Savior and your Lord.

[10:37] Boy, you should run to your pastors in a case like that and tell them and let's pray. Let's get on our faces before the Lord and pray against that thing. Folks, as we grow to be more like Jesus in our sanctification, our spiritual growth, as Jesus becomes more precious to us, it hurts us to hurt Him by our sin.

That should increase. Sometimes baby Christians don't understand that process. And they will come back in about six months and say, I feel worse now than I felt before when I would sin about my sin and it seems like I'm sinning more.

And what they're doing is they're becoming more sensitive to it. And so it seems like they're sinning more because now they're aware of the fact that they're sinning. And their conscience in the Lord is wanting them to deal with it.

And we want to help them understand that that is a good thing and it needs to be nurtured but in a correct or biblical way. Alright? Sinful failure is serious business.

So we never at grace, we never walk around here in the midst of knowing that one of our brothers or sisters has sinned, put our arm around them and say, that's okay. It is never okay to sin. Now, we can comfort them in many ways but we never want to say it's okay that they sin.

[12:04] And I don't see that happening here so I'm not worried about it. We just continue to remind each other sin is serious business. It can be debilitating and long-lasting in its effects if you don't handle it biblically.

And even then it's tough, isn't it? Now, what's going on here? Abram is going to help us with all of this this morning. So here's what I'd like to do.

We're going to look at three biblical principles of recovering from our failure to be faithful to the Lord. And along the way, I want to ask you to do this.

Along the way, think of the parallel track of these lessons, these truths, also being for Israel. So as you hear me trying to help us bring this into our spiritual walk with the Lord, don't forget that the primary audience were the Israelites as they stood on the east side of the Jordan River getting ready to go over to the west side and invade the promised land and take it as their possession and gift from the Lord.

It's very interesting where they are right now in light of Genesis 13. This is a pivotal chapter for the people of Israel. Now, the first principle that we want to look at in the major ones that we're going to deal with this morning that deal with this recovery from failure is the obvious one.

[13:31] It's the most obvious one. And it is that of repentance. Repentance. It is a, first of all, and these are four aspects of this or four elements that are involved in repentance that I'm going to give you here.

The first of them is renouncing. In terms of our repentance before the Lord, once we've come to see that we've sinned against the Lord in some way by sinning against other people or whatever it happens to be, we need to renounce.

And we see that in chapter 13, verse 1. Look at this with me. So Abram went up from Egypt, from Egypt, to the Negev, he and his wife and all that belonged to him and lot with him.

Now that may seem a very small thing, but again, nothing's wasted in the Scriptures. We are being given a geographical reference that helps us see a spiritual truth going on here.

Abram is leaving one thing in order to embrace another thing. He's leaving where he failed and he's moving back toward where he had known success in the Lord, blessing in the Lord.

[14:44] In other words, he left the place of his deception as an act of leaving this behind him. Very important. So this is the way of turning away.

This is the way of turning away. Doing a 180 from where you were. God empowered and guided Abram to reject, reject his sinful way.

I could have used the word reject instead of renounce. Same concept. Are you with me in all of that? So Abram turned away from what, Jeff?

He turned away from Egypt. And Egypt represented Abram's trusting in his own sight, his own cleverness, trusting in something other than the Lord.

That's what Egypt represented. And he took all of his family, he took all of his possessions, and as he did when God first led him away from false gods and idol worship, Abram makes a wholehearted effort to obey.

[15:53] All right, everybody, let's pack this thing up. We're going to go back to the beginning. I need a reset. There's another R for you. I need a reset.

And sometimes that's where we are. Once we realize that we've gotten a little ways down the road, this is called the sinful one, and we've taken some steps that have put us in sin's way and in harm's way, and we recognize that, we understand, I don't need to continue in this direction, in this vein.

I need to make a change. And God will direct our conscience to do a 180 and walk away from that and back toward faithfulness because I had strayed from faithfulness.

I strayed from it. It could happen in a second, couldn't it? In a second, or you can see it's a process and things have developed and there's been a sin upon sin and it's compounded on you.

It doesn't matter. Nevertheless, what's needed in either of those scenarios is a 180. And this is what Abram's doing. He's turning away from Egypt and heading back to the beginning.

[17:02] We'll see that in just a minute. So, I can put it up here and kind of say it this way. This is the no. The no. We say to ourselves when sin is crouching at the door.

When we've turned to confess our sins to God, we are confessing to the Lord and saying no to sin. To self.

And we begin by, what does it say? Putting off. So, these are New Testament phrases, terms, for dealing with sin in our lives. We put that sin off.

We, in the words of the Apostle Paul, lay aside that sinful attitude, those sinful actions. The reality is we must stop sinning.

Now, you and I both know that as we say that, we're going to face sinful actions and attitudes again until we go to meet the Lord. This isn't heaven. We're going to do, but we have to come to a place in our heart where we recognize that when we sin, we need to stop that sin.

[18:08] We need to arrest the process of attitudinal sins, of behavioral sins, action sins. I use this illustration with people in counseling sometimes.

It's like the bicycle wheel turning in the wrong direction towards sin and this confession and contrition, this 180 turn is like taking a big broom handle and sticking it in the spokes.

And it's an abrupt stop. You've got to stop that. Right? You can't confess to the Lord while sitting there with your arm around your sin. You've got to forsake that thing.

The second element of this repentance we're going to call retaining. You're going to see this in verse 2 of chapter 13.

Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold. What are we saying in this retaining aspect? Well, look. Here's the reality.

[19:07] God's a gracious God. God allowed Abram to keep the spoils given to him by Egypt, by Pharaoh. And that substantially increased Abram's wealth.

God mercifully allowed Abram to maintain an unusually high, high degree of wealth for a nomadic herdsman. And this is simply a mercy of the Lord to remind Abram of his goodness.

Now, as soon as we say that, I want to just do a little footnote, and you'll come down to the bottom of the page, if you will, and read the footnote. And the footnote is this. One of the reasons that Abram and Lot have to separate is because of what Pharaoh did to give Abram all of this extreme wealth, kind of an overnight thing.

And now, all of a sudden, Abram's flocks and herds and everything have been greatly... That was not in the Lord. That was not something that the Lord had purposed for Abram.

And now, all of a sudden, they've got this huge excess. And something's got to be done because now, they can't be sustained in that relationship. And it caused strife.

[20:19] You think that was of God? To cause them to have strife? If they were going to part, let's let it be a parting for some other reasons. You know, God's blessed us and there's been this great increase over time and that kind of thing and they can prepare for it.

I think, I think, that part of this is consequence for Abram's sin. So, there's a kind of a flip side to the blessing of being so wealthy.

Now, he has to deal with all that comes with that additional responsibility that's been heaped on him almost overnight. And, and, it causes trouble for people around him.

And so, Lot's got to deal with the same thing. You see what I'm saying? We need to think about that. We need to consider. Sometimes, even the things, have you ever gone out, for example, and you bought something or you got something because you just had to have it? See? And now you got it. And so, you realize down the road, Lord, this is, this thing is, you know, please forgive me.

[21 : 21] I should have, I should have consulted you. I should have consulted the wisdom of others. I should have been more careful and prayerful. And now I've got this thing and I'm having to rob from Peter to pay Paul to give this thing, you know.

You ever done that? You ever been in that context before? Well, the Lord lets you keep it and now you got to be a responsible steward of it, but you got to figure out how to manage the whole thing. And this is what's happening.

This is the kind of thing that Abram's having to deal with. Nevertheless, by the mercy of God, God allows him to retain the blessings that this can bring into his life.

Then we see this one returning in verse 3. He went on his journeys from, notice where he came from, now from southern Israel, the Negev, as far as Bethel to the place where his tent had been at the beginning.

We're back to the beginning. This is a reset. Now he's between Bethel and Ai. And remember, you'll see this in a little while. I'll show you a couple maps. Bethel and Ai are right in the heart of the country.

[22 : 27] So he's gone back. The point is, he's gone back to the place where his tent had been at the beginning. where he built altars and called on the name of the Lord and worshiped God.

He had walked away from that. He returned to the physical place of his last true communion with God. That's in chapter 12, verse 8. So God providentially led Abram back to the land of promise to a place where God would have Abram face reality.

This is what God always does. God will bring us from that point of failure and he'll turn us full face into truth and reality. And you'll see in just a moment what he's going to do is he's going to help us face ourselves and then move beyond ourself to face the grace of God which is what we need. And then finally, remembering in verse 4, to the place of the altar which he had made there formerly. These words are so important at the beginning formally.

And there Abram called on the name of the Lord. Here's a worshipful heart. Here's a repentant heart. What is God doing? God is graciously stirring Abram's heart with the memories of Abram's weakness and God's strength.

[23 : 55] And so God brings him back to this place not to rub it in, but to help Abram remember. The sweetness of Abram's responses to God's goodness in the very recent past.

God calling him out of paganism. The blessings that God had given to him as he multiplied his wealth as riches. Man. So this was a place of remembering and reflecting.

And folks, look, I don't want to get all mystical on you here. I never want to do that, but I want to tell you there are some times we need to retreat back into places in our life where we remember and reflect on God's past goodness.

So that we say to ourselves, you know, I've got a track record of God being good to me. Let's, for example, say that you just got saved. Let's say you just came to know Christ and you're only days or weeks old in your faith in the Lord.

Well, what can you reflect on when you've only been in the Lord for a few days or a few weeks? You don't have a track record of all that blessing. Oh, but you do. You have the most important beginning of a track record and that is what?

[25 : 03] That God brought you from death to life. That God saved your soul. That He didn't leave you in the deception of believing you were just fine. Causing pain to those around you.

Being selfish and pursuing self. No doubt, Abram remembered the day that he stood on this ground. Not very much before this and decided to turn his face toward Egypt and away from God.

I'm sure he had to deal with that. He had to face this down. Listen, he had to face this down as he stood where God had planted him before his sinful flight to Egypt.

Now, that's a part of it. That's just a part of it. So, here's how we'll say this. As God deals with us in our sinful failure, here's what God does.

This is very important. That's why I put it up here. He exposes the idols of our hearts to us through the trials and challenges. The trials and challenges He brings into our lives become the catalyst that

He uses to squeeze us so that we can see what comes out in those moments.

[26 : 17] our sinful responses reveal our true desires and loyalties. Otherwise, how are you going to know? How are you going to know what's in your own deceitful heart, your own wicked heart, until God in some way exposes what that internal issue is?

And He uses trials and circumstances and different people in your life to squeeze you so that what comes out becomes the revealing of what's inside. And you get to see it.

And that's tough. It's very hard. Now, I say in this, notice this last sentence because this is important for you to understand in this process.

This is when you and I face the temptation to hide, to pride, and to fear what God is showing us. Remember I said earlier we don't run toward the pain?

Well, when we start having God show us the pain of our own heart, that's hard. It's hard for us to sit there and take that. It's hard for us to stay in that attitude of prayer and allow the Lord to reveal this through the truth of His Word to show us our heart, to show us how we've hurt the people we love or care about because we were selfish in that moment.

[27 : 37] We were prideful. We were all about me in that moment. And these are things that tend to weigh and crush us down. Folks, we have to do this.

We have to allow the Lord to show us this reality, don't we? And it's very, very hard. And so what we want to do in those moments is we want to stay away from that.

Have you ever stayed away from God in prayer because you didn't want to deal with what you knew He would show you? Have you ever let that chase you away from prayer and keep you away from the Lord?

Lord? And you get down the road a ways and you say, man, you know, I've got to deal with this.

There's stuff starting to happen in my life because I'm not walking close to the Lord and I've got to deal with this.

Now listen, as a father and a mother, you've got young kids. You're just going to let your young kids keep doing the bad things that hurt them and drive them further away from what's right?

[28 : 35] You're just going to do that and say, well, they're their own person. At six or sixteen. As long as you're a parent and you have influence, you're going to try to help them, aren't you?

This is the heart of God multiplied by millions. God's not going to let His children just run off, do whatever. He's going to discipline you and pursue you.

Now look, this is a difficult moment for Abram. Very difficult. Because these are hard lessons. But Abram can't allow sinful fear to grip his heart.

Neither can we. So it's gracious of the Lord to cause Abram to reflect on his failure. Yes. Because it is the truth about himself apart from God.

Whenever Abram tries to step out away from being close to the Lord and walk with the Lord, this is what he's going to get. He's going to replace the Lord with his own self. That's what's going to happen.

[29 : 40] And that's not good. And Abram is having to face down that reality. Don't let sinful fear grip your heart. Don't let it keep you away from God.

It's hard for God to show you these things, but it's necessary. So what's happening here? God is doing what we typically don't like. He's holding Abram accountable.

He's showing Abram there are consequences. Folks, think about it. The man turned his wife over to another man and that could have been adulterous.

He put her in harm's way to do sin with another man and she had no recourse. man, we do things like this to people we love.

We compromise the truth and we compromise the people around us in doing that. As Abram's heavenly father, God is growing Abram's faith. Did you hear that?

[30 : 46] He's growing Abram's faith in God's wisdom, in God's goodness. Abram, I will take care of you. It may not turn out the way you think you want it, but I'll always cause it to turn out the way it needs to turn out.

Jeff, the truth about us can hurt us and when we act sinfully and shamefully against the truth, we should feel the weight of that wrong and we don't do anybody any favors to try to rescue them from it.

They need to deal with it in the Lord. Now, one of the primary reasons the Lord holds us to account like this and why he's holding Abram to account is because Abram needs to be made to feel the

bitter sting of his sinful rebellion, his selfish pride, his ungrateful heart.

Now, the question is why? Why would God bring Abram to a position where Abram has to face the sting and the weight of that pride and selfishness and greed in his life?

Why would the Lord do that? We would tend to think, oh, no, no, no, let's make it better. Let's make it better. So why would God do that? Here it is. I'm putting it up here. Do you see it just come up? Because Abram needs the Lord to teach him to hate his sin.

[31 : 59] Sin is not his friend. Sin is not our friend. When we sin against the Lord, we need God to rebuke our souls back into reality.

Do we not? And God does that because He loves us. And so we can say that having stood face to face with the fresh memory and reality of his own inadequacy, Abram is now in the best position to have the Lord present him with a much greater life-defining memory.

God is going to reconstitute this thing for Abram, and He's going to show him the much better path. Abram, don't walk that path again, and you're going to see not too long from now, He's going to do it again.

This is us, isn't it? And I'm so glad the Bible doesn't hide this from us. You think, oh boy, he's learned his lesson and he's just going to take off. Well, in some ways, yeah, but in others, not so much.

The far greater life-defining, life-giving reality is that of God's faithfulness to Abram. The people of Israel need to see in this patriarch, in their great ancestor Abram, that many of them will brag about, they need to see that this was a man who had feet of clay.

[33 : 20] And when he walked with the Lord, God did mighty things through him. And when he didn't, Abram really, really messed it up. And the consequences were dire. They also need to see that God is a gracious God and pursues us in our sin.

Man. So, revisiting the altar is where he is. God has brought him back to revisit the altar to remind him, hey, this was your heart at one time.

Let's see if we can't see that happen again. So, the altar, hear this now, because this is your life.

The altar is going to be God's tool in cementing God's goodness in Abram's soul.

He's using that altar to remind him and to cement in his heart, Abram, I'm a good and gracious God, and I'm going to take care of you. You didn't have to run to Egypt.

You could have sought me, and I could have taken care of this with you. Don't do that again. That's not a good thing for you. It's not a good thing for your people.

[34 : 27] Look to me, and I'll care for you. Now, here's the thing. Satan wants to use your failures as a tool as well. Does he not? Yes.

And so, I want to help you avoid this trap as the devil attempts to deceive you and keep you in a place of feeling sorry for yourself or whatever it is.

Alright? So, here's what I'm going to do. I'll put it up here, and then we'll talk about it a minute. Do not focus on your sins. Forsake them.

Now, I'm going to explain this. God is not making Abram focus on his sins. It may sound that way, but that's not what's happening.

God is leading Abram to truthfully and biblically reflect on his failure, but for the purpose of God leading him in forsaking that failure.

[35 : 23] Again, God hasn't brought him back to rub his nose in the failure. He's got to reflect on the failure, take stock of the failure. God can't just send him on his way and say, well, that's okay, that's a mulligan, that's on me.

What in the world? And so God is saying, no, you're going to have to face this down, Abram. You need to see this for what it is. You need to see what this reveals about your heart.

You'd throw your wife under the Egyptian bus like that and see her do terrible sin in my sight? You'd do that.

Just to save your own skin. Where's your heart for me, Abram? Where's your heart for your wife?

Ladies, if you're Sarai, what are you thinking? How do you get past the sin in your husband's life?

He'd have thrown me under the bus to save his own skin. He'd have pursued his own selfishness and greed and pride and left me over here weeping.

[36 : 24] I don't know what to do with this kind of thing. How does a woman move past that? That'd be another good sermon, wouldn't it? This is what Abram needs to deal with.

Forsake that failure. In other words, I'll put it up here again, in other words, Abram's forsaking his sin involves what we've been talking about, owning, confessing, turning away from, and then, and then, I'll add a fifth little element to this repentance before we move on, replacing the sin with what pleases God.

Yes, forsake, but then replace it with what is good. For us and for Abram to do those things, we have to take stock of what we've done.

We have to see it for what it is. Now, now, look, we can go back to our four actions of biblical repentance and we can add this fifth one to kind of cap it off and here's what it looks like.

So, you renounce, you retain, you return, you remember, and you replace. Now, where are you on the continuum there? Remember, friends, as you look at this list, this is a process.

[37 : 45] Also, remember that God is always working in our lives to get our hearts ready for the next thing that the Lord has purposed for us. God and for Abraham, look, as Abraham physically leaves this place of worship, what does he do?

He takes with him the blessings of God's grace on his life. He reflects on God's forgiveness in his heart. Man, I didn't deserve for the Lord to bring me back and remind me of this and make me look at this so that I could see his grace and his forgiveness, so that I could see that God has promised to love me and bless me.

Does it sometimes make you wonder how it is that God of the universe could directly speak to a human being and then that human being could turn on the heels of that and just go do something crazy?

Now, what if God showed up in your living room and talked to you personally? Do you think that had an effect on you? You know? In some form, your lamp started talking, I am the God of God.

Well, we have the Word. We have the Word and we make light of the fact that God speaks to us through His Word, especially through the life of His Son, making His Word real in our lives.

[39 : 07] Well, it's good to say, rearmed with God's holy perspective on life, I think God's getting Abram ready now to face God's next challenge. See, it's not over. There's another challenge coming.

If you look with me, starting in verse 5, now Lot, who went with Abram, had flocks and herds and tents, the land couldn't sustain them. So, verse 7, there was strife.

So, verse 8, Abram comes to Lot and he's got this answer. What we're going to do is we're going to give you, we're brothers, we're going to give you the option of where you want to settle first.

You get first choice of the best land. So, check it out, let me know where you want to go, I'll go the opposite way. And so, verse 11, Lot chose for himself all the valley of the Jordan, and he journeyed eastward.

And so, they separated, and Abram settled in Canaan, Lot settled in the cities of the valley, and then we have this very ominous verse 13, now the men of Sodom were wicked exceedingly and sinners against the Lord.

[40 : 12] So, look, this situation with Lot is very similar to what Abram faced in his circumstances with his wife, Sarai, and with the famine, and with Pharaoh.

And so, what I'm saying here, I'm setting this up, what I'm saying is, right on the heels of bringing him back to the altar, he turns from that time of worship, and he walks right back into a very similar scenario, with the same kind of temptations that the famine, and Pharaoh and all that presented to him.

Yeah, how about that? That ever happen to you? Where you come off of a failure, you confess to the Lord, you feel good, okay, God, man, I'm ready, and now you face a very similar situation, and you're thinking, well, that's not fair.

Come on, a little breather. But notice what happens. Look at this. Very similar. In what way? Well, Abram's coming off a time of worship with God.

He's dealing with someone close to him. With Pharaoh, it was Sarai, his wife. Here, it's his nephew, Lot. He's in the position of power, and his decision will stand.

[41 : 25] So, a lot of consequence here for what Abram decides to do and the way he goes about it. His decision's going to affect many people for good or bad. This sounds familiar, doesn't it? It's just what he came off of.

And now Abram is faced with a choice of either self-promotion or self-denial. Am I going to deny myself and do what's best for those around me? Or am I going to just revert back to just being

about me?

He's got the same choice we have. And this is so true to life because we face similar situations like this over and over again repeatedly through our week, through our month. And so though the situations have some similarities, Abram's response, to his nephew Lot is very different from how he responded to his wife Sarai.

And here's what I'm going to say. Those differences emphasize the principle of reaping what we sow. The consequences here for Abram are going to be very different than the consequences were when he took matters into his own hands.

And so the second major point we'll deal with is the reaping element. The reaping. Reaping the benefits of submissive repentance. You need to see how he transitions. The first thing we encounter in this section is the difficulty.

[42 : 41] What's the problem facing this man? And it's no surprise that it's relational in nature. Isn't that 99% of all the trouble that we face and temptation we face?

It's related to other people. If other people would just get their act together like I have, things would be fine in the world. Right? Yeah. So come on people.

Try to keep up. No. In verses 5 through 7 what are we singing? Well, it's all spelled out for us. Right there we've already read it.

Due to an overabundance of animal, livestock, all that kind of stuff. Abram and Lot's respective herds, they're too big for the surrounding landscape to sustain them. So what happens? The text adds at the end of verse 7, because really that's a challenge, but the real problem is in verse 7. The land also had to sustain the Canaanite and Perizzite. What a name. A Perizzite herdsman. In other words, it wasn't just Abram's livestock and Lot's livestock.

[43 : 48] Now they've got all the people who have livestock who live there. The people that Israel is now being told to drive out. So all that multiplied has just created all kinds of an issue.

Can you imagine the noise of these animals? We used to have sheep and they're dirty loud animals.

I'll move on from that because it's very traumatic for me to think about that. Look, there's simply not enough natural resources, not enough grazing, not enough water to accommodate them.

So we see this. This is not hard. Navigating family stuff is hard. And Lot's family. And things between Abram's people and Lot's people are escalating.

So Abram has to step in. He takes the initiative. Good man. There's the first thing that we're seeing in the way of his repentance before the Lord. Abram steps in to take the initiative.

[44 : 48] That's good. All right. This is what a godly man does. He selflessly acts to offer Lot a solution which most benefits Lot. That's different.

That's very different. And notice the basis of Abram's appeal to avoid further strife at the end of verse 8. What does the end of verse 8 say in the way of his basis?

For we are what? Why? We're family. We're brothers. For we are brothers. Oh man.

I thought unlike his recent failure with his wife, Abram is putting the premium on the relationship that he has with his nephew. What if he done that with his own wife? See?

How do we understand and explain this transformation in Abram's way of dealing with this difficulty?

Well, look, Abram's godly actions toward Lot are following on his repentance to the Lord.

[45 : 49] Abram is dealing with Lot out of how God graciously has dealt with Abram's heart. And so Abram wants to offer back to others what God has so freely offered to him.

Do you see how that works? We live out of the blessing and the reflection of God's grace on our lives toward other people and give them grace because we've had much grace.

What does it say in the Bible about forgiveness? Even as you have been forgiven, forgive. The more you reflect on the gospel, the more you reflect on being forgiven, being blessed, being given so much in the way of God's goodness to you, the more your heart overflows toward others in that same way.

You can't help it. But you take a bitter, grumpy person, you take a person who's stingy with forgiveness, we'll see. We'll just look at your tracker and we'll see how you do.

And maybe you'll get a cookie at the end of it. Or something like that. Those are people who are not contemplating in their own heart the wonderful grace and forgiveness of God.

[46 : 56] These are people who are locked up. And you can see this, man, and these become red flags that clue you into stuff. People who pick on other people, people who are sharp tongued and

bitter and quick, those are people who are miserable in their own soul with themselves.

With themselves. It's a tell that is so easy to follow once you know what to look for. And so, hopefully, you'll have a merciful heart for them.

It's hard to be around people who are abusive like that. They're constantly driving you down. You can automatically lay it to this. They feel so down on themselves.

They'd never tell you that. We look at them and think you're so prideful. But behind that pride is a great fear of failure in their life. So, what we see Abraham doing here is making an appeal.

He makes an appeal to his nephew. If Abraham had applied this same perspective with Sarai, he'd have gone to her and he'd have said something like this, ladies. Sarai, you and I, we're husband and wife, joined at the soul.

[48 : 04] And so, whatever happens, whatever becomes of us, I just want you to know I'm going to do everything in my power to take care of you. Hon, listen, you're a beautiful woman. We're heading to Egypt. I know these people.

I know how they are. They're going to see your beauty. And what I'm afraid of is they're going to try to take me out and they're going to want to take you and you're going to become part of Pharaoh's deal. And so, all I know to do, hon, is just pray and get ready.

And if that happens, do what you can do to serve the Lord, hon. Whatever situation you find yourself in, just try to be faithful to God, hon. Stay faithful.

Right? Think of how different that could have gone. Now, as I say that, it sounds and seems so obvious, but if you've ever failed to put the best interest of someone ahead of your own interest so that you cared for them, more than you cared for yourself in that moment or situation, if you've ever failed to do that, you understand how blinded we can be by our own pride, our own sense of self.

So, what does he tell him? For we are brothers. We are brothers. That's something that God's impressed on Abram's soul. That relational priority has become so important to Abram now.

[49 : 17] He blew it with his wife, he's not going to blow it again. Not going to do that again with someone. So, he has a critical decision to make at this moment. Where will he put his eyes?

Where will he put his eyes? Trusting God means that he's going to take the high road of selflessness and he's going to leave the unknowns to the Lord. There's a lot of ways he doesn't know what's going to happen. What if Lot picks the best and I end up out in the desert?

What's going to happen then? Which is exactly what did happen. He leaves all that to the Lord. If Abram will look to the Lord to help him interpret and understand the situation, he will find wisdom for life.

And that's where he needs to be. So, here it is. When we are faced with these difficult and emotional issues, particularly as they relate to our marriage and our family, look now, we need to narrow our focus to this single priority.

Here it is. Look only to God for the wisdom to do that which will allow you to be most faithful to God. You want to get out of trying to be a fixer.

[50 : 24] Nobody likes to be followed around by a fixer. We want to be problem solvers. Difference. The difference is where you put your focus. Your focus needs to be on pleasing the Lord.

If you will concentrate in those relational moments on what will most please the Lord, God will lead you into that thing in a way that will honor him and honor the person. You see?

So narrow your focus. Get your mind off of all the what ifs and unknowns. Isn't that what we do?

Well, if I go say this, then they'll say this, and I need to be ready to say this back.

And then you're in the shower, and then I'll say this, and then I'll say this. Right? I read your mail.

No, I'm one of you.

We all face these temptations together. And so what is going to help me respond faithfully to God?

The first response I want to have is a response to God, not a knee-jerk.

[51 : 25] Okay? All right, this truth is critical to how we evaluate Lot's actions, because when we look at Lot, Lot chose with his eyes fixed on the things of this earth, not with eyes fixed on the Lord.

Look at verses 10 through 14 with me. What does it say? He lifted up his eyes, he saw the valley of the Jordan, it was well watered, it was like the garden of the Lord, it was like this wonderful place in Egypt where the Nile River kept it all fertile all the time, and so Lot chose that.

He chose to go toward Sodom. And verse 13 is very foreboding, very threatening, it's pretending evil, that's what that means, it's pretending evil.

Now I want to show you a little bit about what this looks like. As you look at this map, you'll notice geography is very important in the Bible, it's why it speaks so much about it.

If you'll notice right at the top of that map is Shechem, right? You see that? That's where he first settled. You have over to the right the Jordan River and the River Valley.

[52 : 29] That is a very, very fertile area during the time of Abram and Lot, not so much afterward. We're going to see why. Then you see those mountains between Shechem and down below it, Bethel and Ai.

So as you look at this map and north is up, east then is to the right toward what it says there, the land of Ammon and Moab, across the river where the Jabbok River.

You can see it in reference to Jerusalem. Also, you see Jericho there, don't you? Where is the first place that the Israelites are going to invade? What's the first place they're going to attack?

Jericho. So where do you think they're camped? Straight across that river by Abel Shittim. The large encampment all around that area of the river.

And you see it in relation to Bethel and Ai, which is on an elevation. So at Bethel and Ai, you're able to look down toward the valley. That's what Lot did. Lot's standing on the mountain and he looks down toward the valley and he sees this river, both sides this lush, verdant place of green, wonderful meadows and trees.

[53 : 48] And he says, oh yeah, it's a no-brainer. That's where I'm going. But there was a problem with that choice. This is a map that will show you more of the modern day because I'm going to make a point about it in a minute.

You see it in reference to places we know. You see Jerusalem, the Dead Sea, you even see Gaza City there, and you see what's known as the West Bank. Look what is right in the very heart and center of Israel.

Bethel and Ai. And that's exactly where God has Abram right now. He is standing in the heart of that place. And what does God tell him to do? Look north, look south, look east, and look west.

Everywhere your eye sees, I'm going to give every bit of it to you and your descendants. Isn't that something? He put him right in the middle of the place and said, look all around, dude, because this is coming to you.

And then finally, look at this one, Bethel and Ai. You see some of the topography there. Never think of the land of Israel as just flat desert. No way. It is hills and wadis and mountains everywhere.

[54 : 55] So as they stand between Bethel and Ai, you can see this place called Tal El Haman across the river there. Then you see the Dead Sea.

You see Hebron down there in the south where Abram is going to end up at the end of the chapter. But I want you to notice that Tal El Haman because I want to say some things about that.

Now think about this with me. It is no small thing to compare this valley area that Lot chose to the Garden of Eden. Can you believe that? But as Moses reads this to the people, it is no coincidence that they are camped directly across from Bethel and Ai.

And so here in this area, right above where Tal El Haman is, above that area, and then down somewhat, their camp is spread out all over that side of the river getting ready to cross over and deal with Jericho, right?

So they are standing directly across from where Abram and Lot are right now. here is a brief excerpt from an article related to this. Listen to this.

[56 : 07] It is titled, Seeking to Answer the Question, Where is Sodom? Using the biblical geography of Genesis 13 as a guide, the author, Collins, decided to excavate Tal El Haman, an extensive and heavily fortified site located in modern Jordan at the eastern edge of the Kikar, first inhabited during the Calakolic, I think, period.

The site attained its maximum size during the Middle Bronze Age, which would have been about 2000 to 1600 BC. It became one of the largest cities in Canaan.

But unlike the other Canaanite cities that continued to flourish in the Late Bronze Age, Tal, or Tal, I'm used to saying Tal, that's usually how they spell it. Tal El Haman was destroyed by fire at the end of the Middle Bronze Age and remained uninhabited for centuries.

Now look where it is. And remember, there was no Dead Sea stuff and all that during this time. This was all lush, lush place. So what happened?

Well, across Tal El Haman, archaeologists have found widespread evidence of an intense conflagration, great fire, that left the Middle Bronze Age city in ruins.

[57 : 35] They found scorched foundations and floors, listen to this, buried under nearly three feet of dark gray ash, as well as dozens of pottery shards covered with a frothy, melted surface.

The glassy appearance indicates they were briefly exposed to temperatures well in excess of 2,000 degrees Fahrenheit. The approximate heat of volcanic magma, which is absent.

Such evidence suggests the city and its environs were catastrophically destroyed in a sudden and extreme conflagration. That's from Biblical Archaeology magazine online.

Sodom. They think that that site is the site of ancient Sodom. Look where it is. It's directly across from where they're standing. And so Lot, standing on a mountain, looks down in the valley and looks across and sees Sodom.

And the Bible in Genesis 13 tells us he set his eyes to go and live in the region of Sodom. And then the footnote, Sodom was exceedingly wicked.

[58 : 48] But he chose it anyway. He chose it anyway. The question comes then, did Lot know this? It was very foolish of him.

Did he know it? I believe he did. I believe he knew the reality of Sodom before he chose. I further believe that Lot disregarded the truth of verse 13. He didn't seek the Lord. He did what was wise in his own eyes.

He made a bad choice and you know the consequences, don't you? What's going to happen to Lot and his family? They're going to be spared save one. Which one of his family?

He's got a wife and two daughters. Which one's not going to make it? That's right. And we'll get there. This was terrible consequences, folks. Finally, I'll do this hastily, restoration.

Restoration. This is where Abram picks up in verse 14. Lot goes to Sodom in the area of the valley and God comes and speaks to Abram and says, I got you right in the heart of this place that I'm going to give to you.

[59 : 50] Look around. It's all going to come to you and your descendants. Notice at the end of verse 15 in the New American Standard, forever. Forever. This is amazing.

Verse 14 is a powerful contrast between Abram and Lot. While Lot's fixed his eyes towards Sodom, God instructs Abram, look at the land. Yes, look at the land. But only so that he can recognize what the land means in God's promise to him.

It's God's pledge to bless him and his descendants above and beyond all the other nations. Israel needs to hear this. Israel, this is how you got your start. I chose you out of all the other nations, not because you're a great people, but because I love you.

This is how you got started. Look to me. So God led Abram to stand in the literal center of the promised land. Look around. I'm going to give it to you forever.

Now we believe, we believe here at Grace and teach that Israel, as a people, is special to God's plan and purposes. In other words, we do not teach or preach here at Grace that the New Testament church is the new Israel.

[61 : 02] We do not teach that and we do not believe it. The New Testament church is not taking over for Israel so that Israel is no more. They are temporarily set aside.

This is another sermon or two or three. I realize that, but I'm making a statement right now so that you know this is where we stand. We do not go around telling people we're the new Israel as the church.

We believe that Israel has a special, unique place in the plans and purposes of God. Some of them fulfilled, some of them yet to be fulfilled. So the Jewish nation overall doesn't confess Jesus as Messiah, but, but, one day in the future, Israel will lead the world to come to Jesus Christ as Savior. Many, many, many people will come to know Christ through Israel's witness of Jesus Christ. What a moment. So, this is future. What we're seeing here in Abram's life, this is future restoration.

It's being promised to Abram and his descendants and it's based on this. It's based on the promises of God. It bears the gracious riches of God. It boasts the goodness of God and it brings about the worship of God.

[62 : 16] This is what we need to see in these final verses of chapter 13. And this is how God deals with us. We could say the same thing about the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, couldn't we?

The cross is based on the promises of God. The cross bears the gracious riches of God. The cross boasts of the goodness of God and the cross brings about the worship of God.

Amen? Amen? That's right. This is how God works. Use your imagination. Read again. Look, verse 15 through 17 and think about how these words must have been received by the Hebrews as they

prepare to take the promised land.

Abram, I'm going to look around. I'm going to give you all of it and your descendants. Well, they're the descendants, folks. They're the descendants. descendants. This is like a Calvary bugle for charge.

Right? All right, Israel, go get them. I told you. It's all yours. Forever. It should inspire a strong sense of stewardship about all of this.

[63 : 21] So, it ends with Abram responding to God's goodness. He builds an altar for the occasion again. Maybe he rebuilt the one that he had. I don't know. But then he ends up in this grove of what really amounts to terebinth trees.

I want to show you this. That's a terebinth tree. Can you imagine a grove of those puppies? Now, think about where they are. Think about the land around them. It's going to get more and more rare for them to see trees, much less a grove of trees.

Just to give you some perspective, here's one with some people under it. And they get bigger than that. So, a whole grove of these is where he has gone to settle.

And he used, God used Abram's altar at Bethel as his tool to cement in Abram's soul his faithfulness to Abram forever. The chapter ends, then Abram moved his tent and came and dwelt by the oaks of Mamre, which are in Hebron, south.

And there he built an altar to the Lord. Another one. He's overcome with the grace of God in his life. Folks, listen, we're going to be unsteady.

[64 : 34] We're going to falter. We're going to fail. Just as Abram did. But, but, in the moments of our unsteadiness, we are made stable again by worshiping the rock of our salvation, the Lord Jesus, right?

And what is the tool that God uses to cement that perspective of God in our own souls? It's the twin reality of the bloodstained cross and the empty tomb of Jesus.

Those become the symbols of our faith, do they not? An empty tomb and a bloodstained cross. We don't have depictions of Jesus. You notice this is not a Catholic rendering.

It's because He's not on the cross anymore. He's raised. He's alive. And we serve a risen Savior.

Thank you for kindly listening as we walk through an entire chapter.

You didn't think I could do it? Oh, ye of little faith. It took me a little while, but thank you for your kind attention. May we bow together and pray and just thank God for His goodness.

[65 : 39] Father, we want to reflect now on the simple fact that you are a good and gracious God. We can come to you when we sin and when we fail and when we falter.

And we can be reminded that as we walk closely with you, seeking to please you and deny self, to take up our cross and follow you, you will be faithful to help us persevere in a faithfulness ourselves as we respond to you.

So God, please help your people this week to think carefully about that reality. The one thing they need to hold in their hearts is they face these trials, circumstances, relational difficulties.

What will most please the Lord? What will be the most faithful response to God that I can make? Let me make it no matter how much it humbles me or where it leaves me and let me trust myself to God.

Father, thank you for the goodness of your heart and for the way that you work in our hearts. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.