

## WHEN THE CIRCUS COMES TO TOWN

Genesis 12:10-20

A few years ago Laurie and I got excited when we saw an airline advertisement that trumpeted an absurdly low fare for round trips from San Diego to Maui. It was so low that I thought it had to be the one way fare, but I read the ad carefully and it said clearly it was round trip. We have been able to go to Hawaii using frequent flyer mileage so it costs us essentially nothing to go. But that year we didn't have miles to do that. But this fare was so low we could afford to go. I was sure when I tried to book a trip I would find out there was some catch, but I quickly went on line to the airline website before the deal disappeared in order to book a trip. To my amazement the deal was for real. The tickets were of the "absolutely no refund, no changes allowed" variety, but there were no catches. I bought the tickets and we had our trip all set for a laughably low price we could actually afford.

We were thrilled. The next day my joy lessened a bit. I reviewed the email confirming my purchase, and was horrified. I discovered that I had inadvertently booked us to fly from Maui to San Diego with a return trip from San Diego to Maui. Somehow I had managed to book the trip backwards. We had non-refundable tickets that we couldn't use because we don't live on Maui. I knew Laurie would be thrilled. Not. After her initial shock and the "What were you thinking?" discussion she quickly called the airline. They pointed out the no refund, no changes aspect to the tickets. She appealed to the compassion of the airline agent. "I beg of you to have mercy. You see, my husband has a good heart, he means well and he tries hard, but to put this politely, he's a couple of tacos short of a combination plate, if you know what I mean." In the end the airline people showed us some mercy. They changed the tickets for a charge that was sufficiently high that it turned what would have been an outrageously good price into one that was merely decent. To this day I cannot imagine how I could possibly have made such an idiotic mistake. The purchase process had several steps to guard against mistakes like that. But you know the old saying. Try to make something idiot proof and they'll invent a bigger idiot, like me. I was able to power through all the safeguards without a moment of hesitation. It was embarrassing and costly. It's hard being a walking experiment in artificial stupidity.

Are you like me? If you are, some days you do things that you just can't believe. At times you are dumbfounded at your own denseness. Your inner referee says, "Upon further review, that was beyond stupid." If you've had moments like that, take heart. You are not alone. Today we are going to see Abram, one of the greatest men of faith in history, make some mistakes, and one of them was a Moby Dick-sized flub. Only his mistake didn't just cost money, it was more serious than that. And it didn't merely involve stupidity. It was an inexcusable compromise driven by pure cowardice and

selfishness, and it had some painful consequences. In his error we will find some important lessons and some great hope. Let's look at Genesis 12:10-20 and see what happened to this great man.

#### ABRAM FAILED A TEST OF FAITH

Abram was living in Canaan, the land that God promised to give to his descendants, when a famine struck. This famine was severe. It's not hard for us in Southern California to understand that because we have an arid climate similar to Israel's with minimal rain. When they had a drought, things got grim because the environmentalists had blocked all of the proposed projects to store water and move it to the drier areas. Oh, wait, no, that's California. Their problem was they didn't have any water projects. When it didn't rain, things didn't grow. Take a look at our backyard for evidence.

When things didn't grow there was no food. Abram decided that if he stayed in Canaan he and his family were going to starve so he looked for another alternative. He did some research on the Internet and learned that Egypt was doing just fine because all the agriculture there took place next to the Nile. Since it was fed by sources deeper in Africa it was flowing freely. So there was plenty of food there. Abram decided to go to Egypt.

Some scholars think that was fine, that it was a reasonable and wise choice. No food in Canaan, plenty of food in Egypt, seems like a no brainer. Better to pick up stakes and move to Egypt than starve in Canaan. However others come down hard on Abram for this decision. Because the Bible doesn't criticize him for it we need to be a little careful here. However, it does seem this was a call not made in faith. God had told Abram to go to Canaan. He had promised that would be his home. Furthermore, he promised to bless him. Do you consider starving to be a blessing? I'm going to go on record as saying from my perspective that's a big time "no."

Would Abram's descendants be able to inherit Canaan if Abram and his wife died of starvation? Once again I'd have to say that's a definite "no." All Abram needed to do was to think through those promises of God and he would have been able to figure out that if he stuck it out in Canaan he and his family would be fine. He needed to trust God's promises.

However, it's not hard to imagine how the rationalization would have gone. "Sure, I believe my descendants will gain this land. But that doesn't mean I have to stay here every year of my life, does it? Surely I can leave for a while and come back later, can't I? What's wrong with that?" And I can hear him thinking, "I believe God is going to bless me. I just think he's going to bless me in Egypt for a while." So in a sense Abram

continued to believe God. He just had to tweak things a little using good old common sense. In other words, he had to help God out some using his own common sense and ingenuity.

There is no question about the next thing that happened. Abram's actions once he got to Egypt clearly were a failure. Once he arrives he becomes aware of what he thought was a very real threat. It turns out that Sarai was a *Sports Illustrated* swimwear model. Well, okay, this was before there was a *Sports Illustrated*. Actually, it was before there were models. For that matter it was before there was swimwear, but Sarai was apparently that day's equivalent of a supermodel. Abram thought the Egyptians were a lusty and violent bunch. He convinced himself that when they saw Sarai they'd do anything to have her. When they found out she was married to Abram they would solve that problem by removing him from the equation. They'd happily kill him to get her.

Hold on. That can't be right. Sarai was 65 years old when they went to Egypt. 65! I'm going to go out on a limb here and tell you that I'd be willing to bet my house that no 65-year-old woman has ever made the cover of the *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit issue. Abram must have lost his mind if he thought she was so gorgeous people would kill him to get her. People can be somewhat attractive at that age I guess, but not to die for and certainly not to kill for.

Was Abram so fearful that he wasn't seeing or thinking straight? No, it turns out that he was seeing Sarai just fine. People in Pharaoh's court who spotted Sarai said to the Egyptian king, "Dude, you should see this babe! You've got to have her. And, oh, by the way, if you don't want her I'll take her." They saw her as a first round draft pick and she ended up drafted for Pharaoh's harem. Hard though it seems to us today, apparently Sarai, even at 65, was in fact a Kate Upton-class hottie. We know that people lived longer in Abram's day. Evidently they aged a lot more slowly as well.

Abram, driven by fear, came up with a plan to save himself. He told Sarai to say that she was his sister, not his wife. No need to kill him to get her if he was only her brother. Just buy him off. Sarai may have been related to him, but that was not the whole truth. Whatever else she was, Sarai was his wife. Claiming anything other than that was intended to deceive people. In other words, it was a lie. Abram's fear was driving the bus. It had taken total control of him. He was certainly not acting in faith on God's promises. Abram forgot all about the promises of God, acted as though it was totally up to him to protect himself, and did whatever he thought necessary to save himself.

#### ABRAM'S FAILURE HAD CONSEQUENCES

What was the result of Abram's action? According to verse 15 Sarai was "taken into Pharaoh's palace." She wasn't taken into the palace the way our family was taken into

the White House when we visited Washington D.C. years ago. She was not merely given a cursory tour of the palace. Verse 19 tells us Pharaoh subsequently said to Abram, “Why did you say she is my sister, so that I took her to be my wife?” In his commentary on Genesis, scholar Victor Hamilton wrote, “This is doubtless a case of actual adultery between Pharaoh and Sarai” (p. 382).

Imagine poor Sarai’s predicament. Her brave husband decides that the only thing that matters is saving his own skin. What happens to her is of no consequence, just as long as he is safe. So she ends up having to sleep with another man as his wife. Terrific. What a noble and chivalrous man Abram was. Can’t you imagine how Sarai’s heart must have swelled with pride in her husband and overflowed with love and gratitude toward him? Would you consider Abram to be a good man if he sacrificed his own wife to save himself? This is shameful beyond words. Abram’s fear turned him into, not only a coward, but a selfish jerk. And his wife was left to pay the bill for his cowardice in a most degrading way.

That was not the end of the consequences. His cowardice also had some effects on Pharaoh. Verse 17 says the Lord inflicted serious diseases on not just Pharaoh but his entire household. We don’t know what the diseases were or how Pharaoh connected them with Sarai and Abram, but somehow they found out the truth. Pharaoh was not happy.

A consequence for Abram was humiliation. I am quite certain that when his dishonesty and cowardice became known it was not one of his better days. It must have been mortifying for him when his obvious failures became public knowledge. The late Ray Stedman, a well-known pastor and author, told a story about himself. When he was young he was given the job by the pastor of his church, a Mr. Hewitt, of selling advertising in a little newspaper their church put out. One of the people he called was a woman who managed a local restaurant. He introduced himself, saying he was calling on behalf of Pastor Hewitt. She misunderstood and thought he was Pastor Hewitt. Her mistake caught him off guard, and being young and a bit uncertain he didn’t correct her. She purchased an ad. The next month he called her to ask her if she wished to renew her ad, and figured he wouldn’t bother with correcting her since that would have been awfully awkward, and besides, the first time it worked so well. She agreed to renew the ad. The third month he called again, but this time her voice grew very cold. She said, “I don’t know who you are, but you are not Mr. Hewitt. As I sit here in my office I can see him and his wife in our restaurant eating lunch. I don’t know what kind of church you run, but if this is your means of getting business don’t bother me anymore.” Then she hung up the phone. Stedman said that years later he could feel the shame and humiliation of that moment as though it had just happened. He had humiliated himself

and he had brought shame on his church and his God. Abram had done the same thing in a much worse way.

There was one other consequence of Abram's action when Abram eventually had a son, Isaac. As an adult Isaac pulled the exact same stunt! Was this in the genes or something? Was Abram so humble that he told his son about his personal failures and that's where Isaac got the idea? I don't know how it happened, but like father like son applied.

My guess is that this incident did not create marital harmony and happiness. How was Sarai supposed to love and respect a husband who did that to her? How was she supposed to trust him? After this impressive display by Abram what do you think she felt if a tense situation ever arose? Did she think she could count on him to come through? I seriously doubt it.

#### ABRAM'S GOD WAS FAITHFUL

Now comes what is to me the most amazing part of the story. Pharaoh was so ecstatic when he got Sarai that he lavished her "brother" with considerable wealth. Verse 16 says he gave him sheep, cattle, donkeys, camels and some servants. When Pharaoh found out that Abram had lied wouldn't the most likely outcome have been to just kill him? He would punish him for lying to Pharaoh and he would get to keep Sarai. But he didn't do that. Surely he asked for his money back then, didn't he? No, he didn't even do that. The last thing I would expect is that he would send Abram and Sarai on their way with all the stuff they'd been given. No refund demanded. But that's just what happened.

In other words, God honored his promise to bless Abram even when Abram was totally undeserving. He did not obey God, he did not trust God's promises, yet God still blessed him in. What Abram deserved was to be scorned and rejected. Yet God blessed him. Don't you find that astounding? And don't you find it comforting? I am a long way from what I wish I were and what God wants me to be. I am most decidedly not deserving of the things God has promised to give me. Yet this little incident reminds me that God is faithful to his promises not because we merit them or earn them or are adequately faithful to him, but because it is his character to be faithful. He keeps his promises, even when it makes no sense. That's because faithfulness is as much a part of his character as is love, holiness, goodness and justice. There's a hugely important principle here. **God's promises depend not on us but on his faithfulness alone.**

Psalm 119:90 says to God, "Your faithfulness endures to all generations." Lamentations 3:23 says, "Great is your faithfulness." Romans 3:3 speaks directly to Abram's situation. "What if some were unfaithful? Will their unfaithfulness nullify God's

faithfulness?” The answer is in verse 4. “Not at all. Let God be found true and every man being a liar.” The Greek of verse 4 is stronger than it sounds. In his paraphrase of verse 4 titled *The Message* Eugene Peterson wrote, “Not on your life. Depend on it: God keeps his word even when the whole world is lying through its teeth.”

## IMPLICATIONS

### TESTS OF FAITH WILL COME

Things started great for Abram. He was called by God, trusting him, being blessed by him, then along comes a famine and Abram’s roll comes to a crashing halt. Isn’t that how life is? How many times have you mentioned how well things are going and then immediately regretted saying it because you were afraid you were going to jinx it? Why do we feel this way? It’s not so much superstition as the fact that experience has told us that life is full of peaks and valleys, and if you’re on a peak, a valley is likely just ahead.

1 Peter 4:12 says, “Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come upon you to test you as though some strange thing were happening to you.” This isn’t strange. It is to be expected in life. 1 Corinthians 10:13 says, “No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind.” This is life as a human. Would you expect to go through a class in school without ever having to take a test? Of course not. Nor should you expect to go through life without being tested. I don’t like this news. I don’t like doing a talk like this because I might have to practice what I preach, but we all know that the tests are going to come.

But why? God could have made sure no famine came after Abram arrived in Canaan. So why did God allow a famine? In our English translations periodically we see the words temptation, trial and test. They all translate the same Greek word. Any trial is both a test and a temptation. It tempts us to quit trusting God. It tests the quality of our faith, our trust. Why does God test us?

When we take a test in school what is the purpose? While the theory is that tests are supposed to be educational tools, everybody knows that’s not the real purpose in our school system. The real purpose is to see how much a student knows. It is to test how well students have mastered the material so the teacher can assign that student a grade. It measures performance. That’s where God parts ways with our school system. He does not test our performance. He already knows how much we know and have mastered the material so he doesn’t give us tests to find out. There are 2 reasons for tests.

The first is to strengthen us. For us life’s tests really are educational. There is a whole range of ways tests can help us and make us stronger. When the test comes we might

stand firm and pass the test. In that case a test is like exercise. We all know how we get physically stronger. We have to exercise our muscles, push them beyond their usual abilities. They break down and build up stronger. The same thing happens spiritually. When we exercise our faith it grows stronger. When God comes through in a time of testing our capacity to trust him grows, our faith is strengthened.

We might also fail the test. Even that can teach and strengthen us. When we fail we learn about our own weaknesses and vulnerabilities. It's like failing a test in school. It shows you what you don't know and helps you learn to trust God in such situations.

Admiral William McRaven, a veteran Navy Seal and at the time commander of SOCOM, special operations command, gave a commencement address at the University of Texas last year in which he shared lessons from his grueling Seal training. He said every day during training they were pushed with tests. There were long runs, long swims, long paddles in boats, enduring cold ocean water, obstacle courses, hours of calisthenics, all designed to test the mettle of candidates. Every event had standards one had to meet. If a candidate failed to meet the standards his name was posted on a list, and at the end of the day all those on the list were invited to, what the instructors called, a circus. He says, "A circus was two hours of additional calisthenics designed to wear you down, to force you to quit. No one wanted a circus. A circus meant more fatigue, and more fatigue meant that the following day would be more difficult, and more circuses were likely." He said during Seal training at some point everyone, without exception, made the circus list. But an interesting thing happened to those who were constantly on the list. Over time those students got stronger and stronger. The pain of the circuses built inner strength as well as physical strength and resilience.

The circus is going to come to town for all of us. But God uses the circuses to build our faith and endurance, to make us stronger and wiser in him.

The second reason for tests is that they give us an opportunity to bring glory to God. When God's people stay faithful in the face of great difficulty God is honored. Think of the great heroes of the faith. There were three young Jewish men in captivity in Babylon who were told if they didn't worship an idol they would be burned to death. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are famous because they faced as severe a test as it is possible to encounter and they stood firm. They said, "Our God is able to save us, but even if he doesn't we will never bow down to your idol." Daniel was told not to pray to his God or he would get a free night's lodgings in the lion enclosure at the zoo. He inspires us and he honors God because he trusted God when there was a powerful reason not to do so and he stood firm.

When I was a junior in high school I got my first opportunity to actually play in a high school league baseball game. I'd been to lots of practices and had one chance to play in a non-league game early that year, but that was all. This opportunity happened near the end of the season when it had long become apparent that I had no chance of playing in a game that year unless disaster struck. Well disaster struck and to my total surprise I found myself inserted in the game. My mindset as I stood out there in the field was, "Please God, don't let them hit the ball to me." Everything was happening fast and any confidence I might have had was completely worn away by the coach's obvious certainty that I couldn't play. It's interesting for me to recall my last year of organized baseball when I was a sophomore in college. I was playing a different position, one I was more comfortable with, and I was getting to play a lot. I can recall reveling in having action. I remember thinking, "Let the ball come to me," and feeling confident about having to make a difficult play. I had been tested many times by then, and the tests strengthened me. I was prepared to face more tests in the form of fielding balls hit to me. But I had also learned that I could make a difference in the outcome of the game by making the plays. I wanted the ball to come to me because I wanted to affect the game.

I had more confidence, but I also had learned an important point. If all you do is avoid making plays, you're not going to affect the course of the game. Why even be there? You'd be much more comfortable sitting on the bench or not trying to play at all. The game is about having to make plays. In other words, the game is the fun part is about being tested. You only have an impact when you are tested, both at bat and in the field. And so it is for us. God allows us to go through tests so that we can bring him honor as we trust him. When we do that we are having an impact. We are affecting the game of life.

#### TESTS COME DOWN TO FEAR OR FAITH

Harvard professor Daniel Gilbert made an important point in his book, *Stumbling On Happiness*. He said that the human being is the only animal that thinks about the future. It's true. I never once saw our dog, Luke, worry. His approach to life was eat everything you can get your paws on immediately and let the chips fall where they may tomorrow.

Because we are able to think about the future, and we have very little to no control over what will happen, we are able to envision a plethora of possible disasters and ways life might hand us lemons so bitter they aren't even good for making lemonade. People are afraid of getting on an airliner because they're terrified that it will crash even though the odds of dying in an airline crash are one in 11 million, while the odds of dying by falling down some stairs are one in 157,000, much greater. Do you know anyone who has a panic attack because they have to go downstairs? People fear going into the ocean because of sharks. Did you know that sharks on average kill less than 1 person a year in



this country? Here's what you likely don't know. Twenty Americans die from blunt force trauma each year that is inflicted by...wait for it...cows... Just when you thought it was safe to go back in - the pasture. Cue the ominous music, here comes Bessie. You hear that terrifying sound, "Moooo!" You're gonna need a bigger barn. But we can think of being eaten by a shark or being on a plane that crashes so we fear it.

Abram was right there with us. First, he was afraid he was going to starve to death along with his wife. Then he conjured up in his mind the absolute certainty that people were going to kill him in order to get his drop dead gorgeous wife, Sarai. His fear controlled his actions.

There is a theme that runs throughout the book of Genesis, and in fact throughout the Bible. It is the theme that is at the heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ. You heard it here first, America. It is that what God supplies is enough. That is what Abram failed to believe. He didn't think God could supply enough food for him and his family. Then he didn't think God could provide protection from those Egyptians driven mad by lust. Time and time again this is precisely the point at which we will be tested. Do we believe that what God supplies is enough? At the root every test, every trial and every temptation comes down to the question of whether we believe that what God supplies is enough.

Do you know how fear impacts us? Many years ago when I was single I was at my parents' house in Bakersfield one night. This was an unusual house, built for their college ministry. The living quarters was upstairs, and downstairs was dominated by a huge room they used for large meetings. This particular night I was downstairs when the doorbell started ringing and kept ringing. I went to the door saying, "All right, I'm coming." I opened the door but didn't see anyone. But then I looked to my right and lying on the porch was a shocking sight. It was a young college age guy I knew, and he was in bad shape. He had been badly beaten and cut numerous times. He was bleeding profusely. I immediately looked around to see who had done this, in part in fear that I might be next. That shocking moment had immediate physical effects on me. My heart started racing and pounding, and seemed almost like things were happening in slow motion. I found out eventually that the guy had gotten involved with some bad people who had done that to him as a warning.

That night I experienced a small taste of something we've all heard about called the "fight or flight response." That's actually a thing, you know. It could also be called survival instinct. If you were like David, shepherding his sheep 3000 years ago and were suddenly confronted by a hungry lion your body would react in specific ways to enable you to survive. Somehow your system knows what to do. It pumps adrenaline and glucocortoids into your blood, raising your heart beat and your blood pressure. It

channels energy from long-term bodily processes like digestion, growth, sex hormones and repair functions, channeling all your resources into short-term survival.

A strange fact about our bodies is identified by Robert Sapolsky in his book, *Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers*. That is that humans can trigger this stress reaction simply by thinking about something they perceive to be threatening. This is the part about imagining the future. It can create the same response as David facing that lion. Oddly our system somehow cannot differentiate between that immediate, real physical threat, and the long-term imagined threat. The body reacts the same.

The problem is that the stress reaction is designed to save our lives in those sudden crisis type situations. It is supposed to be a very short-term thing. But we can imagine some possible future threat for a long time, thus triggering the stress response over a long period of time. As you can imagine, this has some negative impact on us. It can damage our heart and our arteries, cause ulcers, interrupt sleep, produce sexual dysfunction, depression, even diabetes. Sapolsky's point in his book is the reason zebras don't get ulcers is they can't imagine the future.

The stress reaction causes us to have tunnel vision. It centers our attention on the threat in order to help us deal with it. But it also does this over the long haul. In his book, *Vital Lies, Simple Truths: The Psychology of Self-Deception*, psychologist Daniel Goleman said that fear narrows and focuses our attention on the object of our fear. We've all experienced how, when you are stressing about something, you can't seem to let it go. Saying, "Don't worry about it" does no good at all. In *Blink* Malcolm Gladwell put it this way, "(stress) arousal leaves us mind blind." We don't think right.

This is exactly what happened to poor Abram in Egypt. He couldn't think of anything except the fear that somebody was going to kill him in order to get Sarai. Everything else flew out the window. He seemed to forget that God promised to bless him. He forgot that God promised him he would have children and his descendants would be blessed. He completely lost sight of how lying about their marriage would affect Sarai. In short, he utterly did not believe that what God would supply in that situation was enough.

I have been assailed by many fears in my life and I have watched friends, brothers in sisters in Christ, attacked by all kinds. What if I lose my job? What if I can't find a job? What if I never find the right person and never get married? What if we can't have children? What if I am sued? What if I lose this law suit? What if my child gets sick with a terrible disease? What if I do what is right and people reject me because of it? What if my child makes really bad choices in life? What if I can't pay for college for my kids? What if this pain I feel is cancer? What if I don't have enough money when

I'm too old to work anymore or I'm tired and would just like to retire? What if the economy never really rebounds? I could go on infinitely, for there is literally no end of things that we might fear.

When fear takes over we get tunnel vision and forget the truth that brings us peace. We need to remember that what God supplies is enough. Do you realize that the most hopeless situation, the most desperate lost cause in the history of humanity, was you and me, irretrievably guilty and lost before God? Has God provided sufficiently in that dark situation? Yes, through his Son, Jesus Christ, God has provided abundantly. He has brought us out of darkness into his marvelous light. What God supplied was enough. Philippians 4:19 says, "My God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus." God will supply enough. That, in the end, is the answer to every fear we will ever have, both large and small.

## CONCLUSION

### RECOGNIZE THE TEST

When we have a test in school we are always aware of it. Not once did I come to the end of a class and suddenly think, "Hey, we just had a test! I didn't notice that." I always knew before that a test was coming, but even when it was a pop quiz that I didn't expect while taking the test I knew exactly what was happening.

Life majors in pop quizzes. No one hands us a course syllabus for life with the exam dates listed. No one tells us, "Tomorrow is the mid-term." As we have seen, the tests will come and they will come as a surprise most of the time. One of the most important things we can do is see them for what they are. That means we need to understand that we are being tested. We need to say, "Oh, I see what's happening here. I'm being tested."

### RESPOND CALMLY

The worst thing you can do when you take a test is panic. When the fear takes over you cannot think clearly. When I was a senior in high school I took the SAT, like most of you. One of the colleges I applied to required that I also take three of the SAT's subject specific exams. One of them was in a foreign language, which, for me was German. I did not take German my senior year, so the little I had learned was at best rusty and at worst forgotten. I remember that rush of panic when I got the test and read through the questions, because I didn't think I knew the answers to any of them. The fears began cascading over me. I'm going to get a zero on this and it's going to mean I get rejected. Even if, by some miracle, I get into a college on the basis of this I'll have to start all over with language. For several minutes my mind whirled, I was almost paralyzed. Finally I calmed down and said, "Okay, let's just think this through and go one question

at a time.” I eliminated answers I knew to be wrong, I guessed on quite a few. I don’t know what my score was, but I got into college and they even placed me in an advanced German class, so I must have passed. My first step in getting through the test was just to calm down. That’s where Abram failed. He never did that. He just let the fear win.

In thinking it through we always need to ask two questions. First, will God supply what I need? Posing the question pits our head against our hearts. Our hearts are driven by the fear, our heads know the promise of God that he will supply what we need. At that point the battle is joined. The battle is on between fear and faith, and the only win comes when we choose faith.

The second question that it helps us to ask is, “What will happen if I choose fear?” Instead of letting faith in God’s provision calm our souls, and direct our choices, we can let fear have the upper hand. We’ve seen what happens. We will make choices that have bad consequences for ourselves and for others. We will experience what fear does to us, all of its negative impact.

#### REMEMBER GOD’S FAITHFULNESS

I’d love to think we’ll all do the right thing in every test, but I know that’s just not reality. Let’s remember that Abram, the man the Bible holds up as the model of faith, fell flat on his face in this test. He fouled up about as badly as it is possible to do. And yet God used him to be one of the most important people in the history of his plan to rescue humanity. His failure was not the end of the story. In fact, God actually used his failure to bring blessing into his life!

Yes, we will fail. But the message of the gospel of Jesus is that God’s love and his blessing in our lives is not dependent upon our ability to succeed and pass every test. Jesus died on the cross to rescue us because there was no other way. He knew we fail. So yes, we will fail, probably on more occasions than we’d like to admit. But God will still be faithful and he will continue to bless us despite our failings. And that in a nutshell is the hope of the gospel.