

SERMON NOTES

From *In Touch With Dr. Charles Stanley*



When Faith Gives Way to Fear

KEY PASSAGE: Genesis 12:10-20 | SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES: Genesis 12:1-9

► SUMMARY

Sometimes we believe that God is leading us in a certain direction, but as we continue down that path, we become discouraged and uncertain because it's not working out as we expected.

Maybe it isn't as easy as we thought it would be, or it isn't leading where we want to go. Therefore, we decide to make a course correction, thinking that we have obviously gone the wrong way. Yet once we start down the new path, we soon discover that we've made a terrible mistake. One of the reasons we change routes and disobey God is because our faith gives way to fear.

► SERMON POINTS

Abraham (originally called Abram) is an example of someone whose faith gave way to fear. When the Lord first spoke to him, He gave him clear instructions and unconditional promises, saying, "Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you; and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 12:1-3).

In faith and obedience, Abraham left his home and traveled to Canaan. After arriving, he built altars to worship the Lord and pitched his tent there (vv. 7-8). But before long a situation arose that caused him to doubt the Lord. "There was a famine in the land," and he became fearful (v. 10).

Faith gives way to fear because our focus moves from God to our circumstances.

Abraham had kept his eyes on the Lord throughout his journey and had obediently settled in the land and worshipped Him, thanking Him for His protection and provision. But now his survival looked doubtful. What Abraham saw as unexpected and frightening, God viewed as an opportunity for Abraham to trust Him. Instead of looking around him, Abraham should have remembered God's promises and relied on Him to keep His word. Changing circumstances are no reason to stop trusting the Lord.

Faith gives way to fear when we make decisions based on human reason.

Abraham reasoned that the way to survive was to go to Egypt where there was food. He probably considered this trip to Egypt as only temporary, thinking he'd come back to Canaan when conditions improved. However, as reasonable as his plan seemed, even a temporary journey away from God's will can have disastrous results.

When we forget that God is both our provider and protector, we take matters into our own hands.

Abraham should have dealt with his fear by staying in Canaan and seeking God's protection and provision. The Lord would have been faithful to care for him and fulfill all His promises to him.

We often make the same mistake Abraham made. We look around at the situation, forget that God is our provider and protector, and substitute what He's said in His Word

with our own plan, reasoning that His way won't work. Furthermore, we think God will understand why we had to change direction. But the only plan that will fail is ours because the Lord never supports disobedience but works solely to accomplish His will in our lives.

True obedience is doing what God says, when He says, and how He says to do it. Any alteration is disobedience. When we are tempted to take matters into our own hands, we must remember that God has put us in these circumstances so we'll learn to totally depend on Him and trust in His promises. If we disregard His commands, one wrong step will lead to another until we finally repent and turn back to the Lord.

When we give in to fear, we become willing to sacrifice our most precious possessions in order to gain the favor of others.

Abraham's first wrong step soon led to another one. "It came about when he came near to Egypt, that he said to Sarai, his wife, 'See now, I know that you are a beautiful woman; and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, "This is his wife"; and they will kill me, but they will let you live. Please say that you are my sister so that it may go well with me because of you, and that I may live on account of you'" (vv. 11-13). Fearing what could happen in Egypt, Abraham was willing to give up his wife to preserve his own life, even though God had promised to protect him.

When we forget the unconditional promises of God, we begin to fear man.

The Lord had given Abraham grand and far-reaching promises without any exceptions or qualifications. But in the midst of his circumstances, Abraham became afraid, and contrary to God's will, went to Egypt. But now he had another reason to be fearful. He knew the Pharaoh could kill him to get Sarah, her beauty making her desirable and vulnerable.

In the same way, when we forget God's unconditional promises in His Word, we'll begin to react in fear instead of faith. Then we end up where we shouldn't be, doing something we shouldn't do, feeling what we should not feel, and paying a price we don't want to pay.

When we stop trusting God and start fearing circumstances, we're willing to cause others pain and great harm in order to protect ourselves.

Abraham's plan kept the Egyptians from killing him, but it cost him his wife. Sarah was taken to Pharaoh's house, and in return, Abraham was treated well and given sheep, oxen, donkeys, camels, and servants (v. 16). Although none of this was God's will, He was faithful to Abraham despite his disobedience and "struck Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife" (v. 17). Not only did Abraham's disobedience cause harm to Sarah, but also to Pharaoh and his household as well. She was returned, and Pharaoh had Abraham and all that belonged to him escorted out of Egypt (vv. 19-20). The Lord had intervened to preserve Sarah, and eventually she had a son from whom Jesus Christ descended. It is through Him that "all the families of the earth will be blessed," just as the Lord promised Abraham (v. 3).

Abraham's story teaches us that God always keeps His promises and warns us not to let fear cause us to lose our trust in Him and step out of His good and perfect will.

► RESPONSE

- Have you ever stopped obeying a clear command of God because of fear? What was the situation? What happened as a result?
- Now think about a time when you obeyed the Lord, even though it was difficult. How did He prove Himself faithful to you?

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