



I Wish I Had More Faith

Genesis 15-18

Introduction

I frequently hear the words, “I wish I had more faith.” For instance, a woman will tell about her unsaved husband that she has been praying about for years and yet, his belief turns into hardened atheism. She wonders if the problem may be her faith, and thinks, “Perhaps I do not believe that God will ever save him. If I had more faith, maybe He would.”

A man mired in financial problems; in despair over thousands of dollars of debt, wonders, “If I only had enough faith, maybe God would take care of this problem.”

Another common “I wish I had more faith” situation occurs when illness strikes. Well meaning Christians assure the sick person, “If you will just believe, you will be healed.”

The ill person then tries their very best, and yet they are not healed.

Perhaps you have prayed for a sick person to get better and instead, they got worse. What do you think when that happens? You might think the problem is, “I just did not have enough faith.”

As a result, the Christian community is filled with shattered and confused believers thinking that somehow God would have been moved by a larger amount of faith. As a result of that improper theology, such believers leave themselves open for the Accuser.

Think of how often you have prayed over a car that would not start. Have you ever done that? I can remember a time in college when I left the dorm room, pulled the car door open, slid into that jalopy, turned

the key, and nothing happened. The weather was very cold and the battery had obviously frozen to death. So I got out, raised the hood, placed both hands on that battery, looked both ways to make sure no one was looking, and said, “Lord, bring this thing to life.”

I then got back in my car, turned the key, and it did not even sputter. I felt a little foolish! The thought went through my mind, however, “I wonder if I had more faith, if God would start this car.”

Abraham’s progression, as well as failure in faith

Today, we are returning to the story of Abraham in the book of Genesis. We will begin in chapter 14. We are going to discover his progression in faith, as well as his failure. In the process, we will discover principles that will help in understanding proper faith and how to walk by faith.

Between the last part of chapter 14, verse 24, and the first verse of chapter 15, you could write the word, “panic”. In fact, I have written in the word “fear,” because between the end of chapter 14 and the beginning of chapter 15, something has happened to Abraham. He is filled with fear and panic, as we will discover.

Reasons Abraham was fearful

I have tried to climb into the setting to discover why Abraham would be so fearful and I have come up with three reasons. Although I am not certain they are accurate, let me give them to you.

Possible retaliation

1. The first reason is perhaps that Abraham feared possible retaliation.

You may remember that Abraham has just rescued his nephew Lot from pagan kings. He has also rescued the king of Sodom. This is before God destroys Sodom. Abraham is now in a strange, foreign land and has created some bitter enemies. He does not have weapons of warfare, and after having beaten these kings in battle, perhaps he is afraid they will retaliate.

Potential poverty

2. There was also the threat of potential poverty that may have caused Abraham to be fearful.

You may remember as well, that a famine has recently hit the land and Abraham turned down the booty the king of Sodom. The king said, "Thank you, Abram, for saving my life. I want to give you great wealth to help you through the famine."

Abraham, however, turns it down. Perhaps he begins to have second thoughts.

Unpredictable promises of God

3. A third reason for Abraham's fear is perhaps the unpredictable promises of God.

I think this is probably the most accurate reason. The promises of God had said, "Abram, you will be given this land; you will be given seed; you will be given blessing."

None of these promises have yet come true, however. Abraham has been waiting and waiting and waiting.

One idea that we need to clear up in our "fuzzy" theology about faith is that great faith relinquishes the need for patience. We think that if we have enough faith, God will work immediately. That is simply not true. For Abraham, it will be a twenty-five year wait before God fulfills those promises.

The Arrangement of Faith

Notice verse 1a of chapter 15 of Genesis.

After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, . . .

Let me give two points about this arrangement of faith.

Initiated by God

1. First, faith is initiated by God.

God comes to Abram. Abram is shaky and fearful, and God takes the initiative.

Built on a relationship

2. Secondly, faith is built on a relationship.

God then says, in verse 1b,

. . . Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; your reward shall be very great.

In other words, the only way for Abram to ever get over the fear of the future, the fear of retaliation, the fear that is perhaps brought on by famine, the fear of being unable to provide for his own is to develop a relationship with his Lord. The only way we, like Abram, can ever conquer fear is to develop a relationship with our Lord.

Did you notice the solution in verse 1? God says, "Do not fear, Abram, [because] I am a shield to you . . .".

Now ten years elapse and still, there is no child. I can only imagine the embarrassment of Abram. His name means "the father of many," as we previously discussed when studying Hebrews, chapter 11. Hebrew names were always indicative of what the person had. We can only imagine people coming to visit Abram and introducing themselves.

They would say, "What's your name?"

He would respond, "My name is Abram."

They would then say, "Oh, you must be filled with pride in having many sons."

Abram would probably hang his head and kick the dirt and say, "Well, no, I don't have any kids."

God will come along a little later and change his name from Abram to Abraham, which means "the father of multitudes". So then, it might seem as if he had triplets, but no, there were no kids yet.

The Alternatives to Faith

Abram spent twenty-five years waiting in that situation. I want to give several things that he did wrong during that wait. I am glad the scriptures include them for our account. He lapsed in faith; he went back on trust, and he did several things wrong. Let us look at Genesis, chapter 16.

Receive improper advice

1. The first thing Abram did that was wrong while waiting is to receive improper advice.

In chapter 16, verse 1, we are told,

Now Sarai, . . .

(this is before her name is changed to Sarah by God),

. . . Abram's wife had borne him no children, and she had an Egyptian maid whose name was Hagar.

Abram and Sarai probably acquired Hagar when they were in Egypt and were out of God's will.

Continue to verse 2a.

So Sarai said to Abram, "Now behold, . . ."

(note her next statement),

". . . the Lord has prevented me from bearing children. . . ."

Sarai is involved in what we could call religious rationale. She is obviously blaming everything on the Lord. This makes spiritual sense. So, look at her solution in the next part of verse 2.

". . . Please go in to my maid; perhaps I will obtain children through her." . . .

Then, in last part of the verse, we read,

. . . And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai.

In other words, they are going to institute "Plan B". God has not come through and at this point, I believe, it has been thirteen years. So, Sarai says, "Let's help God out. He has given us the promise but He hasn't given us an explicit statement, so why don't we do this instead."

This is unbiblical advice; it is wrong.

Reject the laws of marriage

2. That leads us to the second thing Abram did that was wrong. He ignores the laws of marriage.

Look at verse 3 of chapter 16.

After Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Abram's wife Sarai took Hagar the Egyptian, her maid, and gave her to her husband Abram as his wife.

This clearly violates Genesis, chapter 2, verse 24, which says one woman and one man. God had never said polygamy was okay. Men of this time were

always away from God's ideal when they had many wives, and this was the practice or custom of Abram's time.

So, Sarai said, "Look, I can't have any children. It must be my fault. So you take the Egyptian maid and go into her and have a child."

Abram, by now, is such a weak leader that he not only accepts wrong advice, he ignores the revelation of God.

Refuse to wait on God

3. Thirdly, Abram refuses to wait on God.

This is obvious. Look at verse 4.

He went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her sight.

The bottom line is that Abram did not wait.

Before we are too hard on him however, remember that it was twenty-five years in the waiting. I have difficulty waiting twenty-five minutes for something. He was waiting twenty-five years for the blessing; the promise; the seed. Finally, Abram scratches his head and says, "Sarai, there is no prospect in the promise of God. I don't see it, and I'm eighty-five years old."

Just before the Civil War, I was reading recently, a wealthy farmer by the name of Worthy Taylor, hired a young man named James, or Jim, as they called him. That summer, Jim cut kindling wood, milked the cows, and slept in the barn in the hayloft. During that summer, this young man fell in love with Taylor's daughter. She obviously loved him too. When the summer ended, as was the custom, Jim went to her father and asked for her hand in marriage. Worthy Taylor, however, looked at him, laughed, and said, "Son, you have no money and you have no prospects. There is no way in the world that you can provide for her."

Jim said, "I can provide. I promise I will make good."

Worthy, however, turned him down.

Thirty-five years went by, and Worthy Taylor prospered. He eventually tore down his barn and in the process of tearing it down, he noticed the rafter that had been above the hayloft where Jim had slept. Jim had carved his entire name in that rafter. James A. Garfield was by then, serving as the President of The United States of America.

In a sense, Abram viewed the promise of God like Worthy viewed James – no prospect. In other words, “There is no prospect, so we’ve got to come to terms with this. He’s promised us seed, but He isn’t coming through. Let’s institute this second plan, which is totally out of God’s will.”

So Abram has a child named Ishmael. That child will be the father of the Arabian nations, which are a constant thorn in the sight of Israel.

Results of violating God’s revelation

Let me give several results that the text gives us that occur as a result of violating God’s revelation.

Jealous rivalry

1. First, a jealous rivalry occurs.

Look at verse 4 again.

He went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her sight.

This is typical; this is to be expected. Sarai cannot have children, but this servant girl can. Now there is a rivalry.

Marital friction

2. The second thing that happens is what we could call marital friction, to say the least.

I love what Sarai says to Abram. Look at verse 5a.

And Sarai said to Abram, “May the wrong done me be upon you. . . .”

This is classic. In other words, “Abram, this is all your fault.”

Abram is probably leaning against the wall saying, “Oh my goodness, this was your idea.”

Sarai continues in the last part of verse 5 to say,

. . . May the Lord judge between you and me.

Now we have real problems in the home.

Further weakness in Abram’s authority

3. The third thing, which I think is probably the worst, is further weakness in Abram’s authority.

Look at verse 6a.

But Abram said to Sarai, “Behold, your maid is in your power; do to her what is good in your sight.” . . .

In other words, Abram just backs off. He says, “I’m staying out of this. Sarai, you take care of her however you want. Leave me out of it.”

Abram should have corrected the problem. And, as we read in the last part of the verse, Sarai deals treacherously with Hagar in kicking her out of the tent.

The Absence of Faith

Well, we have a real problem on our hands, and it is basically because of a lapse in faith, but let us call the next section the absence of faith. Look at Genesis, chapter 17.

It is obvious that faith is missing in this situation, but it is never so clearly shown as in chapter 17 when Abram will explicitly state that he cannot believe God. Let us read the first few verses, beginning with verse 1.

Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before Me, and be blameless.”

That is the first time “El Shaddai” appears in the Hebrew text. It means God, the nourishing God; God, the most powerful God, who is capable of providing, which is specifically related to the promises. He says, in verses 2 through 4,

“I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and I will multiply you exceedingly.” Abram fell on his face, . . .

(probably shocked),

. . . and God talked with him, saying, “As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you will be the father of a multitude of nations.”

Remember it has been a twenty-four year wait at this point. This is the third time God has come to Abram saying, “Abram, you’re going to be the father of a multitude.”

Response to God’s promise

After waiting twenty-four years, Abram is probably saying, “Right, Lord.”

I think we could rephrase Abram and Sarai's response in two ways. These are, by the way, very prevalent in the church today.

“It hasn't happened yet, God.”

1. The first phrase would be, “It hasn't happened yet, God.”

Note verses 15 and 16a of Genesis, chapter 17.

Then God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and indeed I will give you a son by her. . . .”

Sarah is ninety years old, by the way. Continue to verse 16b.

“ . . . Then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her.”

Now in the next verse, verse 17, we see Abraham's absence of faith. He did exactly what we would have done.

Then Abram fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, “Will a child be born to a man one hundred years old? And will Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?”

In other words, “Lord, it hasn't happened yet, and anything that is going to happen in relation to the promises, should have happened by now.”

It is easy to have that attitude. We might think, “Whatever God is going to do for this country, He will have done it already. Whatever God is going to do in this church, He will have done it already. Let's coast into the kingdom.”

I cannot help but think, although I am certainly not blaming him, that his attitude was “whatever will happen should have already happened”.

It is interesting that I recently read in a magazine of man who had this attitude. The man's name was Charles Duell. In 1899, Duell was the director of the United States Patent Office. He wrote these words to President McKinley, “Let's abolish the patent office. Everything that has been invented has been invented. Everything that will be invented has been invented. Let's close down the office. We've reached it. This is it.”

He lost his job. Someone else was placed in that position.

It is interesting that in the next year, the radio was invented. Three years later, the Wright brothers flew the first heavier than air object, which we know as an airplane.

We frequently have the same attitude. We think, “If God is really going to use my life, it really should have happened by now. If I'm going to impact this community, it really should have happened by now.”

So, Abraham thought, “Lord, where are You? You've come to me with a promise and now, as a hundred year old man, I'm going to be the father of a multitude?”

I would laugh too!

“It can't happen now, God.”

2. Now notice the response of Sarah in chapter 18. She laughs as well. God will have the last laugh, by the way. Her response could be phrased this way, “It can't happen now, God.”

Abram says, “It hasn't happened yet, God.” Sarah says, “It can't happen now, God.”

Look at chapter 18, verses 9 through 14a.

Then they said to him, “Where is Sarah your wife?” And he said, “There, in the tent.”

He said, “I will surely return to you at this time next year; and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son.” And Sarah was listening at the tent door, which was behind him.

Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; Sarah was past childbearing.

Sarah laughed to herself, saying, “After I have become old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?”

And the Lord said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh, saying, ‘Shall I indeed bear a child, when I am so old?’

“Is anything too difficult for the Lord?”

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The key to overcoming the pause or the patient waiting is in that last verse. God brought Abraham

and Sarah past the childbearing age so they could not take even a sliver of credit for the inception of the Jewish nation. It was as if God wanted to make it very clear that whatever was going to happen in that nation would be at His hand and by His power, not theirs. He wanted to bring them to the place where they recognized that with God, nothing is impossible.

This is a tremendous application spiritually. Perhaps you have been barren spiritually. Perhaps you have never produced fruit. Perhaps you have never had the opportunity to share Christ; to see someone come alive. Perhaps you feel that God is not at work in your life; that He is not using you. John, chapter 15, verse 5, says basically the same thing when Jesus Christ says,

I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.

Ladies and gentlemen, a solution to barrenness spiritually is not Christ *and* me, it is Christ *in* and *through* me, using me for His glory.

Perhaps you have thought, or maybe you have even been told, that you will never amount to anything for the cause of Christ. You may even think that it is too late in the game. Perhaps you think you do not have the training. You may be wondering, "What can God use me for?"

I recently watched a video tape of Howard Hendricks relating the story of an educator's conference that he participated in at Moody Bible Institute. There were hundreds of people in attendance at this conference.

One day, during the conference, he and another teacher went down the street for lunch. There was also an eighty year old lady who was attending the conference in line. They invited her to join them. Hendricks relates the story of their conversation as they sat down to eat.

They asked, "What are you doing at the conference?"

She replied, "Well, this is the first time you've been close enough that I could come. And I traveled all night on the Greyhound bus to get here."

They asked, "Why did you come?"

She said, "Well, I teach sixth grade boys, and I want to learn to be a better teacher."

Hendricks said they nearly fell off their chairs in awe of this woman. When you would expect her to be

reaching for the rocking chair, she is trying to develop skill in teaching.

It was fascinating, as they talked to her and she shared with them, they discovered that she had been teaching for years, and eighty-four men who had come through her class are serving the Lord full time.

One of the problems in churches today is that we are violating chapter 2, verse 4 of Titus. Do you remember what this verse tells older women to do? They are to teach younger women how to love their husbands and their children.

The word "love" in that Titus verse, interestingly, is the word that we get our "phileo" or "family affection" from. This is not the word "agape," but "phileo," which is the word that talks about being affectionate. You would think that wives would know how to be affectionate to husbands and children, but the apostle is telling the older women, "You've raised your children. Now that you're sixty, seventy, or eighty years of age, don't go for the rocking chair, get involved in the lives of younger women. Teach the young women, by your life, how to live; how to love."

A church today is terribly disabled if they do not have that ministry.

Go with me below the deck of a galley slave ship to see a man who is already in his mid-forties. He is chained to an oar with all of the other criminals. He is pulling and sweating at that oar. When you look inside that rank place, you might think, "Could anything good come out of here?"

Yet, God would work through one of those criminals, his name being John Knox, to literally turn Scotland upside down for the cause of God. And Knox did not even get started until he was in his forties.

What if Jesus Christ had gone to Jerusalem and put an announcement in the "Jerusalem Gazette": "Needed: Twelve men to introduce the kingdom of God on earth." Who do you think would have applied? All of the qualified people, all of the capable people, all of the learned or scholarly people, all of the religious and pious people would have applied, thinking, "I'm just what He needs to introduce the kingdom of God."

Yet, who did Jesus Christ choose to work through? Simon, the zealot, who would just as soon put a dagger in a Roman than to lead him to Christ. A greedy little tax collector named Matthew, who was so greedy that he would not even hire another person to

help him collect the taxes. Fishermen, who were unlearned. And these men, by the grace of God, learned that apart from Jesus, they could do nothing; that nothing was accomplished unless Jesus was at work in and through them. These men turned the world upside down.

Application – Misconceptions of Faith

Perhaps we have seen from Abraham and Sarah, at this point in time, that God could use anyone who is shaky in or lacking in faith. Sarah, at ninety years old, thought God's promise could not happen, and Abraham, at one hundred years old, thought of the fact that it had not happened yet. However, Genesis, chapter 15, verse 6, tells us,

*Then he [Abraham] believed in the Lord;
and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.*

This leads us to some of the popular misconceptions of faith that we have today. God uses Abraham; God uses Sarah, so we put them up on a high pedestal. We then think, "God could never use me."

The major problem is our misconceptions concerning faith. Let me give three of them.

Misconception #1 – Faith is evidenced by an amount

1. The first misconception of faith is that faith is evidenced by an amount.

We have the thought, "If only I had more faith, that car would have started." or, "If only I had more faith, my friend would have gotten better and lived, instead of gotten worse and died."

This is a misinterpretation of Jesus' words in Matthew, chapter 17, verse 20b, when He says,

. . . if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, "Move from here to there," and it will move . . .

People today, interpret that as saying that we have to drum up enough faith, even though it is small, and if we get that much, we can move mountains. However, that is not the issue. Jesus Christ is teaching that, "If you have your faith *in Me*, you only need a little grain of it to accomplish My work."

It is not the amount of faith, ladies and gentlemen, it is the object of that faith that is the issue. Even with

a little sliver of faith, if the object is Christ, He can work in and through you.

Misconception #2 – Faith is established by emotion

2. The second misconception is that faith is established by emotion.

This is a real problem today. It is the thought that faith is a feeling, an incredible feeling, and because you have it, God is going to do something great.

Have you ever felt that way and then, it did not happen? Talk about the air being let out of your sails! Because we feel that faith is somehow an emotion, when something does not happen, our expectations hit the dirt. We get some verse out of scripture and claim it, and we wait for the heavenly zap, but when it does not happen, we become confused.

I think of the martyr John Huss, who was in his prison cell awaiting his execution by being burned at the stake the following day. He was sitting in his cell, knowing he would be burned to death the following morning, peering into his candle and watching the flicker of the flame. His records reveal that he reached out his trembling hand and placed it over the flame and then, he pulled it back as he flinched in pain. He wrote, "If I cannot stand the pain of a little candle, how could I stand the flame at the stake?"

John Huss had no feeling that God would be able to pull him through that death experience, and yet he believed God and did not recant the following morning.

Would you accuse Paul of having a lack of faith because he prayed three times for the same thing?

Misconception #3 – Faith is exercised by self-confidence

3. That leads me to the third misconception that faith is exercised by self-confidence.

In other words, you have to believe God will do something or He will not do it; you have to be really sure that God is going to come through, because if you are not sure, He will not come through.

Faith then, becomes the sense of self-confidence, and we try to drum it up. We think, "Oh, there's a thought of doubt. I've got to get rid of it. I can't have any doubt. God, You will do it."

We drum up the faith and then what we ask may not happen, or worse yet, it happens and we think it was a result of our self-confidence.

My friend, your assurance that God is involved in your life and hearing your prayer is not related to how you feel or how self-confident you are. It is related to *who God is*. God is eternal; He is unchanging; He is involved in your life.

Hebrews, chapter 6, verse 12b, tells us,

. . . you . . . [be] imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Did you note the combination there? We are told to imitate those who through “faith and patience” received the promises. Verse 15 tells us that,

And so, having patiently waited, he [Abraham] obtained the promise.

Even though we know he faltered, Abraham having patiently waited, obtained the promise.

Let me read something that I recently found. A man by the name of Mark Little, recalls a childhood event. He writes the following powerful words.

As a child, I loved to curl up in the back of our car as we drove through the night. I felt so safe cocked back there with dad in the driver’s seat. But sometimes my grandmother would go with us, and she would sit on the edge of her seat barking instructions about every car that came our way. “Watch the side of the roads there. Be careful with that guy next to us. Don’t go so fast.”

I don’t think she ever enjoyed the ride. Why? Because she simply didn’t trust my father. She couldn’t rest in his care. Grandmother and I both reached our destination, but one got there with frazzled nerves, while the other one arrived happy and rested. I was learning to rest in my father’s care.

Men and women, faith is not a feeling; faith is not an amount; faith is not a sense of self-confidence. Faith is assurance in who the person of God really is. Even though our prayer may seemingly to us, go

unanswered, He is sovereign; He can be trusted; He is worthy of our commitment.

Turn in your Bible to Genesis, chapter 21, and notice the glad day when the cry of a newborn boy pierced the ear. Look at verses 1 through 7.

Then the Lord took note of Sarah as He had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as He had promised.

So Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, . . .

(note this),

. . . at the appointed time of which God had spoken to him.

Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore to him, Isaac.

(which means, by the way, “laughter”),

Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him.

Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.

Sarah said, “God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me.”

And she said, “Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.”

Most of us are surprised when we get to chapter 21 and discover that God was right on time. Twenty-five years before, when He made the promise, He already knew, in His all-knowing mind, the due date of Isaac; He already had it mapped out. Abraham and Sarah only had to learn to rest.

Do you know what Abraham and Sarah learned about faith? They learned the same thing we need to learn today. Faith is like curling up in the back seat of a car and allowing God the Father to do the driving. The road He takes us on may be painful, but it will always be productive; it will always be perfect.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 12/18/1988 by Stephen Davey.

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