

Trusting God Absolutely
Genesis 12:10–20

Charles Blondin was a 19th century French tightrope walker and acrobat. He famously crossed the gorge below Niagara Falls on a tightrope 1100 feet long stretched 160 feet above the water.

In fact, he performed the feat numerous times. Each time he would add to the difficulty: crossing while blindfolded, pushing a wheelbarrow, walking on stilts, doing somersaults and backflips, dangling by one hand before completion.

On one occasion he even sat down midway to cook an omelet!

But in perhaps one of his most memorable performances, he carried a man across on his back. The man was Harry Colcord, his manager. Before crossing, Blondin gave his manager these instructions: *“Look up, Harry; you are no longer Colcord, you are Blondin. Until I clear this place, be a part of me, mind, body, and soul. If I sway, sway with me. Do not attempt to do any balancing yourself. If you do, we will both go to our death.”*

Blondin asked Colcord to trust him absolutely. Naturally, as Blondin balanced, Colcord would attempt to preserve his own life. But the way of preservation was surrender and trust in the one who carried him.

The relationship between the Triune God and His people is similar. Even when we set out to walk by faith, we sometimes demonstrate only partial trust. We feel the need to self-preserve, and we fall short of fully trusting God in the face of fear.

And yet we understand that God requires an absolute trust that we do not always have.

But you see, this is why Jesus Christ came into the world: to exhibit absolute trust in God on the behalf of His people - in the place of His people. Jesus fully submitted to God the Father. And so He deserves all of our worship, and our trust.

We must put our hope in what Jesus has done.

And looking to Him, we can then begin to demonstrate absolute trust in God. Of course, it won't be easy. Think about it in terms of Colcord and Blondin: you're putting your life in someone else's hands. But God is trustworthy and able to carry us, and He gives guidance and strength to us along the way.

But what kind of guidance and strength? This episode in Genesis 12 shows us. Notice the outline on page 6 in the WG. God wants us to know three things as He calls us to absolute trust: Schemes are tempting, compromises are dangerous, but He is merciful and gracious.

Now look with me at verse [10] again. It says, *“Now there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land.”* Just before this, we saw Abram obey God’s call to go to Canaan. He arrived in Canaan, but the Canaanites were living in the land, so Abram would have to wait by faith.

Now he faces an even greater need, a food shortage, literally a “hunger” which was severe. So he leaves to survive, but interestingly, he doesn’t go back to Haran. Instead, he goes to Egypt to “sojourn.” Moses is letting us know that Abram did not treat this apparent setback as permanent; he still had faith in God’s promises. So, to be clear, Abram is walking by faith.

But always, faith will be challenged along the way. Faith will be tested. Temptation will be encountered.

I mentioned last week that Abram married his half-sister, Sarai. We learn this later in Genesis. To do so was not uncommon in the ancient world. And as Abram and Sarai approach Egypt, his anxiety about the situation begins to rise. He began with a clear sense that God was leading him to Egypt for a short time, but he was afraid to entirely trust God to protect and preserve him.

So he devises a scheme. Notice verse [11] *“When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to Sarai his wife, ‘I know that you are a woman beautiful in appearance,’* (which, by the way, is a great statement for a husband to make! Great way to start any conversation with your wife.) *I know that you are a woman beautiful in appearance, verse [12] and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, ‘This is his wife.’ Then they will kill me, but they will let you live. [13] Say you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared for your sake.”*

Abram figures that if he presents Sarai as a single woman, the Egyptians will not harm him. Saying she is his sister is not false, but it is only a half-truth. She is his wife.

Now, his fears about the Egyptians were likely valid. But this is an act of self-preservation. The life he hopes to save is his own. Abram was a man of faith, and we shouldn’t take anything away from him in that regard. But here, he clearly fails.

In John Calvin’s commentary on these verses, Calvin is generous and understanding toward Abram; he’s very respectful of the patriarch. But Calvin offers some keen insight. He says, *“Abram had sinned by fearing too much and too soon.” “An unreasonable anxiety caused him to involve himself in another fault.”*

Have you ever worried intensely about something that actually never came to pass? Just the potential of it happening terrifies you, and the promises of God fade from your mind.

Absolute trust is difficult, and so schemes are tempting.

We might ask Abram, *“What about the promises of God? Remember those? Remember God’s call?”* But these things can be hard to recall when fear sets in.

When have you devised some plan to save yourself or to get what you want? When have you set trust in God to the side, deciding instead to handle things yourself? Of course, we have brains and God designed us to make decisions.

But when have you been tempted to go set God's law aside, to set His Word aside, to beyond the boundaries He put in place, for the purpose of your own self-preservation? You should beware; and these next verses show us why.

Apparently Sarai agreed to Abram's plan. And as expected, the Egyptians recognize her beauty. However, she is so striking that these high-ranking government officials, (these "princes" whom they meet) decide to tell Pharaoh about her. They report her beauty to the highest power in the land.

These princes likely had their own gain in mind. It would benefit them to say, "*Pharaoh, one of the most beautiful women you've ever seen is here in Egypt, and she's unmarried.*"

And so verse 15 says, "*the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house.*" Pharaohs had many wives, and this one decides to add Sarai. There's no indication that Abram anticipated this in any way. There's no sign that he expected the Pharaoh to know about or pay any attention to them. But Pharaoh does, and now, it really is out of Abram's hands.

You see, compromising the truth of God - the moral law of God - is dangerous. You cannot foresee every possible outcome. You must understand that when you act out of a lack of trust in God, when you take matters into your hands such that you are out of sync with God's moral law, you only open yourself up to many additional problems.

Walking by faith will not be easy. No one is saying that it will be. You may be treated unjustly, you may be taken advantage of, you may potentially not get what you want, but upholding God's truth and trusting Him absolutely is the best way to go. Absolute trust is the way to get to where you need to be.

You've all heard about the proverbial "fork in the road." Two choices, two different paths to take. Life is a series of those. Each day you face them. You can trust in God, or in yourself. You can wait on God by faith, or rush forward by sight. You can live according to the truth, or dream up false ideas and call them "*your truth.*" Walking by sight only seems to offer a more sure thing.

In reality, you don't know what further dangers might await you. It's better to trust God.

So Abram deceives for self-preservation, he doesn't trust in God to make a way, and now he's in a real mess. Can you relate? Have you ever compromised your integrity and then suffered even worse circumstances than you originally feared? Well, that's where Abram finds himself. But he gets an outcome that is undeserved, for sure.

It's kind of confusing, really. Not because it isn't right or good, but because it is so unmerited. Verse [16] tells us that Pharaoh gave a ton of wealth to Abram in exchange for Sarai. Abram has all this property, but he lost his wife. However, notice verse [17], *But the LORD* (note the covenant name of God is used - Yahweh) *afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife.*"

Abram unintentionally traded his wife for all this stuff. But God saves her. God sends plagues upon the Pharaoh. Abram had forfeited his ability to protect his wife. His scheme for self-preservation has done this. But Sarai was part of God's plan as well. She was to be the mother of a miracle child, a child of the covenant.

And God clearly rescues her before Pharaoh can defile her in any way. If God was going to save her, it makes sense that He would do so before she married Pharaoh. So this king confronts this husband, verse [18] *"Pharaoh called Abram and said, 'What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? [19] Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your wife; take her, and go.'*" Somehow, Pharaoh deduced that the presence of Sarai was the cause of the plagues. And so he sends them out of Egypt with more wealth than they had before.

How do we make sense of this? It doesn't seem like an effective way to scare people into doing the right thing. But it makes sense in light of God's plans and His purposes.

Psalms 103 in the OT sheds some light on this. In Psalm 103, the great Israelite king David writes about the purpose and the heart of the covenant God of Israel. He states, *"The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. [9] He will not always scold, nor will he keep his anger forever. [10] He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. [11] For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; [12] as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. [13] As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust."*

God knows what we are made of; He made us. He understands that we are tempted and that we are weak. And according to His covenant love, He is both merciful, not giving us the punishment we deserve, and also gracious, rewarding us with blessings we do not deserve.

God made covenant promises to Abram. In the coming chapters of Genesis, we will see how far God goes to reassure Abram and how far God will go to fulfill His Word and His plans.

We have to keep in mind that Moses wrote these things first for the Israelites. They were learning about their covenant God. They were learning about His mercy and grace. They were learning about His ways; in fact, they were delivered from bondage in Egypt

in the same way as Abram and Sarai – by plagues. God is ever the same, and so often he works in the same ways over and over again in the lives of His people.

You must understand: what God promised to Abram He decreed from eternity past. It had to come to be. And it would take God's grace toward Abram to get it done. There was no other way for God to accomplish these things in Abram's life. It was the same with the Israelites, and it is the same with our lives today.

Yes, at times there will be disappointing consequences for our lack of trust in God. But even then, He is merciful and gracious towards us. He brings us to the cross, to repentance and faith, and He comforts us with His love.

How can we begin to trust God absolutely, especially in this mad world in which we live? What help does God give?

Well, look to the Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ. In John 5, Jesus said, *"I seek not my own will but the will of Him who sent me."* Jesus made no schemes. Jesus made no compromises. He trusted absolutely in order to fulfill all righteousness on behalf of His people.

As we go to the table today, we see an emblem of Jesus' perfect obedience, and God's mercy and grace towards us. We must give ourselves not to schemes today, not to our fears and our compromises, but to Jesus. Admit your sin, turn from it, and trust God absolutely.

Let's bow in prayer.