



STEP 2: WATCH WHERE YOU WALK

Have you ever been on holiday to a place that failed to live up to your expectations? Or bought something, watched something, read something, or tasted something that failed to live up to them?

For some people, the Christian faith can seem that way. How many of us have heard (or even said it ourselves): "I thought God was supposed to look after His people?" "I thought God was supposed to answer all our prayers?" "I thought God was supposed to keep us out of trouble?" The kind of teaching you get from the name-it-and-claim-it, blab-it-and-grab-it brigade (trust me, it's everywhere).

A similar situation happens to Abraham, early in his story. And it leads to him taking a wrong turn on his faith-journey (just think pyramids, or a certain Agatha Christie novel) ...

Genesis 12:10-20

OK, so last week Abram took a step – a massive step, really – of obedience, in response to God's command. This week, he takes another step – of disobedience!

Having arrived in Canaan, set up altars at Shechem and Bethel, and met with God there, Abram's faith is shaken.

By hardship.

A famine hits the land. And Abram, man of faith that he is, decides to head down to the nearest bit of 'green' – the Nile delta. He leaves Canaan, and heads for Egypt.

But that's not all. As they enter the country, Abram has a word with Sarai, who was quite clearly the Michelle Pfeiffer of the ancient world: "Listen: you are a beautiful woman. The minute the men of Egypt clap eyes on you, they'll want you for a wife, and my life will be in danger. So, do this: pretend to be my sister (a kind of half-lie, half-truth) and all will be fine." What a charmer!

So, they arrive in Egypt, and sure enough, the Pharaoh – possibly Pharaoh Khety IV – falls head-over-heels for her. He takes her into his harem, and offers Abram a bride-price in the form of sheep and cattle, male and female servants, donkeys and camels. And naturally, Abram takes the lot. But then Egypt is struck by plagues – either disease, natural disaster, or both. Eventually, Pharaoh gets wind of the fact that Sarai is Abram's wife, demands an explanation, and orders his men to send them packing.

How has Abram gone from being this incredible, faith-filled adventurer at the beginning of Genesis 12, to being somewhat less-than by the end of it? What do you reckon? Is it ...

Doubt? Fear? Disappointment? Self-sufficiency? Immaturity? Deception? Wrong priorities? A bad memory?

The answer is: all of the above! So, *why* is the story here? What is God saying to us? Essentially, it's a warning – that disobedience can do some serious damage to us.

It can damage:

1) Our Relationship With God. Look at Abram's time in Egypt: what's missing here? Prayer is missing; worship is missing; hearing from God (commands / promises) is missing. They're all conspicuous by their absence. Why? Because Abram has wandered from where he's meant to be.

I've lost count of the number of times I've heard people say, "I used to go to church but I don't anymore," or "I used to feel close to God but I don't anymore," or "I used to believe in all that stuff, but I don't anymore." And usually, the reason is this: they've disregarded what God has said.

You can't take God's goodness for granted. As Paul says in Romans 6:1: "Shall we go on sinning, so that grace may increase? *Never!*" If you're serious about your relationship with God, you'll live like it. It won't affect how God feels about *you* – but it might affect how you feel about *Him*.

2) Our Relationship With Others. Abram is supposed to be a spiritual father, a man of greatness, a child of God, and a channel of blessing. Is that the Abram we see here? Not exactly!

Look again at Abram's actions:

- **He lets his wife down** (not only does he lie, he forces Sarai to lie. And he puts her in an adulterous situation!).

- **He lets his family down** (Lot is watching. If you've ever wondered where Lot gets his stupidity from ...).
- **He lets the world down** (Abram should have been a witness to Pharaoh; Pharaoh is a witness to Abram!).

Interestingly, Egyptologists have found instructions from Pharaoh Khety to his son Merykare, in which he describes the desert nomad as "vile", "a thief expelled," and "a crocodile by the riverbank." Way to go, Abram!

God calls us all to walk with Him – a walk with the potential to impact others. If your spouse sees you walking, they'll be more likely to walk. If your kids see you walking, they'll be more likely to walk. If the world sees you walking ...

3) Our Relationship With The Future. Abram very nearly scuppers God's promise of a miraculous son ... because he almost loses Sarai. He also ends up with a hoard of wealth – which at the time might have seemed a bit of a result, but would eventually give him a whole lot of heartache.

When we obey, it has consequences. When we disobey, it has consequences. It's a bit like an enormous domino-run: our decisions, good and bad, can have ramifications for the future. They can have a knock-on effect. We might not be able to see it yet, but they will.

Is it possible to miss out on blessings? Because of sin? It happened to Israel; it can happen to us. As Paul says, "Now these things occurred as examples, to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things, as they did" (1 Corinthians 10:6). I.e. don't just think 'today' - think 'tomorrow'!

Here's My Heart ...

That's the bad news, here's the good: like Abram, God can bring us back from this (13:1). We might have to learn a lesson or two, but He can do it. God's sovereignty makes us neither immune to difficulties, or morally perfect. But it is able to turn us around and get us back on track.

So, what do we do with all this?

- For some, the message is **remain**. Stick with God.
- For others, the message is **repent**. Turn to God.

Most crucially, the message is **remember** - what God has commanded; what God has promised.

Disobedience can do a lot of damage. But God's grace, Jesus' love, and the Spirit's work – combined with our response – can fix it.