



Lesson 3 | Back on Track

Genesis 13:1-18

Have you ever messed up? If you are older than two years old, the odds are the answer to that question is “yes.” Sometimes our mistakes are huge and obvious to others. Sometimes they might seem small to others, but we know that we have failed God in big ways. Failure is never fun. And when we fall, the temptation is to stay down with our heads bowed in shame. It can be all too easy to fail and never try again. Sometimes genuine remorse over sin descends into self-pity and sulking. Responding rightly to failure is, believe it or not, part of a life of faith. God wants us to feel shame over our sin, yes, but he wants us to address that sin biblically through repentance and then to go back to serving Him.

What are some of the ways people naturally respond after failure?

At the end of chapter 12, Abram has made some wrong decisions that have led to some disappointing outcomes. Rather than be a blessing, he brought plagues on everyone in the land. Rather than pointing people to God, he left everyone with a bad experience with Abram and his God. But as we will see in this account, Abram responds by refocusing his attention on God, trusting God with the future, and receiving God’s reassurance of blessing despite his sin. This account is important because it also introduces us to Lot, whose story is very much connected with Abram’s and who will come to play a major role in the following chapters of Genesis.

Abram Leaves Egypt (13:1-4)

We don’t know how long Abram was in Egypt, or what the state of the famine was when he left. Obviously his stay got cut short, and Scripture makes clear that Abram was escorted out of the country with an armed guard. As Abram returns to Canaan, he is faced with the question of what he will do now that he has left the land God promised and returned somewhat embarrassed.

Abram returns to Bethel (13:1-3)

Abram returns to where he had initially set himself up in Canaan. This statement should be taken literally – Abram went back to the same physical location from where he started. But there does seem to be a

sense in the story in which this is true on a spiritual level as well. Beth-el means “House of God” and Abram’s return there shows that he is going back to where he met God previously. His ill-fated trip to Egypt is over, and now he’s going back to the place where he built his first altar. Sometimes in our lives, we need to get back to where we started. We might look back and realize that we’ve drifted far away from God, and what we need is to go back to God. Fortunately for us, we serve a God who will always have us back.

Why do we resist returning to the Lord? How can we overcome this natural resistance?

Perhaps surprisingly for us, even though Abram has behaved so poorly, we read that he walked away from Egypt with a great deal of wealth. We might expect God to punish Abram for his selfish foolishness. After all, Abram allowed his wife to be taken by another man, lied, and caused much suffering for those in Egypt. Shouldn’t he come out of Egypt empty-handed, rather than wealthier than ever? Yet God chose to continue blessing Abram even though Abram was making wrong choices.

Why do you think God chose to bless Abram despite Abram’s disobedience?

What lessons and warnings might we learn from this example?

Abram called out to God (13:4)

We don’t read about any prayer from Abram going to Egypt or once he was there. It is probably going too far to say that Abram had given up on God or abandoned Him, but the way that he was living left God out of the picture. Sometimes when we find ourselves struggling with the consequences of our own decision, it can be hard to go back to God in humility and ask for a fresh start. But God is gracious and, like the father of the prodigal son, waits eagerly for our return.

What are some things that might have kept Abram from calling out to God?

Why do we sometimes excuse ourselves for not returning to God after we’ve messed up?

Abram and Lot Separate (13:5-13)

When we fail to trust God, we can be sure that there is a high chance we will be given another chance to trust Him later if we humbly return. The life of faith is filled with constant opportunities to respond in faith or respond in unbelief. Shortly after the debacle at the end of Genesis 12, Abram is faced with a new challenge that is in many ways very similar to the one he had just faced.

The Strife between Abram and Lot (13:5-7)

In chapter 12 Genesis tells us that Abram left for Egypt because he was suffering from a lack of resources due to a famine in the land. Now a new problem has arisen – there is a lack of resources in the land because he and Lot were overcrowding the area. Not only that, the Canaanites and Perizzites were also in the land (13:7), no doubt making things even more crowded. God had blessed both Abram and Lot so much that

there simply wasn't room for them to keep all their flocks and herds in the same place. This raised the question of what the next step should be, and it is here that Abram makes the right choice.

Abram Makes a Selfless Offer (13:8-9)

Abram had every right as the patriarch of the family to tell Lot where to go. Abram is being very gracious to allow his younger nephew to have the first pick – even going so far as to call him a brother. In doing this Abram not only is being kind, he is also showing faith. What if Lot picked the better land (as we know he will)? What would that mean for Abram if he gave away the best part of the land that God had given him? Would his flocks suffer as a result of that choice? What if his nephew became wealthier than he was? But these issues don't shake Abram. Instead, he chooses to trust God and His promises and instead make the sacrificial choice to let Lot choose.

Why do you think Abram had a different response in this test from when there was a famine in chapter 12?

Lot Makes a Selfish Choice (13:10-13)

There are a few interesting details that we read about Lot's choice. First, it says that he "lifted up his eyes." Throughout Scripture we are warned against the danger of living by sight, and not by faith (cf 2 Corinthians 5:7). We repeatedly read in Scripture of those who go wrong because they follow what looks good to them (as did, for example, Eve). Lot's only consideration here appears to be what he can see. The fact that his uncle is his senior and should have the best is not considered. The wickedness of the land is not considered (cf 13:13). The only thing he trusts is what looks best in the moment.

Why is it dangerous to trust our own wisdom and simply go by what we see, or by what looks best to us?

Second, Genesis describes the well-watered plain and the cities there as being like Eden, *and like Egypt*. Apparently, Lot had come to enjoy the beautiful and lush land of Egypt, and the thought of going back there was enticing to him. Sadly, Abram's example of compromise for the sake of prosperity was something Lot picked up on, and rather than learning from his uncle's mistakes he copied them.

How can our decisions set a negative example for those around us?

Finally, the passage in Genesis drops a little hint that gives us some perspective on the choice Lot has made. In verse 13 we read that Sodom and Gomorrah were exceedingly wicked before the Lord. But Lot only saw that they were incredibly prosperous. Lot saw the prosperity, but he didn't see the spiritual danger. Sadly, there are many people today who see the prosperity that the world has to offer, but don't see the spiritual dangers that lurk.

Why do we have an easier time seeing prosperity and not seeing spiritual danger?

God Promises to Bless Abram (13:14-18)

Abram calls out to God and makes the humble, faith-filled choice to let Lot pick and trust the results to God. In response, God comes to Abram and lets him know that the promises He has made to Abram have not been derailed, either by Abram's trip to Egypt or Lot's selfish choice. Instead, God affirms again that Abram will have the entirety of the land.

God Promises to Give the Land to Abram (13:14-15)

Abram had allowed Lot to settle in the best parts of the land God had promised to him, but God reaffirmed to Abram that all the land that he saw would one day belong to his descendants. Abram had trusted God to take care of him, Lot had lifted up his eyes to see what looked best. Now God tells Abram to lift up his eyes and see all that God would give to him. When Abram trusted God to take care of him, God did that and so much more.

Why do we have a hard time trusting God to take care of us? Why do we want to make sure we have things figured out in our own wisdom?

God Promises to Give Abram Many Descendants (13:16)

God had promised Abram that a nation will come from him. Now He clarifies that this nation and Abram's offspring will be as numerous as the dust of the earth. This is in stark contrast to Abram's current situation – a 75-year-old man with no child. God's Word and His promises sometimes seem to stand in stark contrast with what we can see in the moment. We might think that God's promise to Abram that he would have many children would have rung hollow, since Abram was childless. But Abram is being called on to follow God in faith. Faith is what allows us to accept what God has said even if it conflicts with what we think we see around us.

Why would we choose to follow God if God's path seems to be in direct contradiction to what we see around us?

God Called Abram to Live in the Land (13:17-18)

Once again, God commands Abram to go into the land and to walk around in it and see it. By faith Abram is being called to travel throughout the land, believing that he is traveling through his land. And so as Abram does this, as he begins migrating his flocks and herds, he does so in faith. He does so believing that God will do what He has said, even if in the moment Abram looks like a random desert nomad wandering around someone else's land. These small steps of faith – calling out to God, offering Lot the first choice, traveling through the land believing he will one day inherit it – set Abram up for a much bigger demonstration of faith that we will study next week and in the weeks to come.

Abram messed up. But he got back up. He returned to the Lord and resumed living a life of faith. In our lives, we will no doubt have times when we fail God. The question will be how quick we will be to get back up and start serving God again. None of this excuses sin or downplays sin, as if sinning isn't a big deal because after all God will forgive you. There will be consequences from Abram's trip to Egypt, starting with a carnal nephew who is willing to take his family to wicked Sodom because he wants the well-watered plains that remind him of Egypt. But even after we make mistakes, even costly ones, God stands ready to forgive and receive. The question is, "Are we ready to repent and return?"

How do you think Satan attempts to keep us from returning to God?

What Scriptures would you give to a friend who was discouraged and felt like they messed up so bad that God was done with them?