

The Flawed Father

04/14/2013

Scripture:
[Genesis 12:1-20](#)

Series:
[Faith for Fractured Families \(1/4\)](#)

By:
[Colin Smith](#)

Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” (Genesis 1:1-3)



I want to begin today with a picture. If this is your family, you do not need this series! This is an idealized picture of a 1950s family with the father reading a book to attentive children, while his loving and adoring wife looks on.

It is easy to fall into the assumption that other people’s families are like this. You carry in your mind an airbrushed image of other people’s lives. You assume other husbands are enjoying loving intimacy with their wives, other wives are enjoying the engaged support of husbands who understand then deeply. In addition, you may assume that other people’s children love and respect their parents, and seek their counsel as they gladly follow their example.

So I want to say right from the start—there are no picture perfect families. If someone were to try and write a book called: “*Model Families of the Bible*,” it would be a very short book indeed. Which families would you write about?

Jacob was blessed with 12 sons. He probably wished that God had given him daughters instead! The competition between the brothers became jealousy, envy, and at times, downright hatred, and it strained that family to the breaking point.

Moses was a godly man, but look at the problems he had with his brother Aaron. Eli was a godly man, but his two sons Hophni and Phineas turned to the worst kinds of sins. David was a man after God’s own heart, but he found himself in an unreconciled conflict with his son Absalom, who hated him and tried to destroy him. If your son has told you that he hates you, you’re in good company—the king of Israel!

Faith is for fractured families. In this series we are going to look at four scenes from the life of one fractured family: 1. Abraham – the flawed father, 2. Sarah – the perplexed wife, 3. Hagar – the single mother, and 4. Ishmael – the troubled son. All of them were fractured people, and all of them experienced the grace of God.

Abraham the Flawed Father

Abraham was a great man of faith. He was greatly blessed by God. But men at their best are only the raw material in which God can begin a work of grace. The best Christians, including the one sitting next to you, is a sinner in the process of being redeemed. God puts his grace in jars of clay. The Bible makes this very clear in the story of Abraham.

The story begins when God calls Abraham to set out on a journey of faith, “Now the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you’” (Genesis 1:1). God promises to bless him and to make him a blessing, “In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (1:2-3).

A man of faith

“So Abram went...” **Genesis 1:4**

That’s the obedience of faith—he’s doing what God says. God gave the patriarchs an unusually long lifespan. Abraham lived to 175 and Sarah to 127. So at 75 years old, Abraham was half way through his life. Just when he thought he was going to be settled, God uproots him on a new journey of faith.

A man of influence

“Abram took Sarai his wife, and lot his brother’s son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people that they had acquired in Haran...” **Genesis 1:5**

Notice Abraham was a man of some influence. An extended family travels with him, including his nephew, Lot, who comes along. Here was a man with a broad circle of influence. Other people worked for him, folks looked to him and depended, in some sense, on him for their livelihoods. When Abram moves, they all move with him.

A man of prayer

So he built there [Shechem] an altar to the LORD... And there [between Ai and Bethel] he built an altar to the LORD and called up the name of the LORD. **Genesis 1:7-8**

As Abram follows the Lord in faith and obedience, we find him building altars. The altar was a place of worship, a place of prayer. Abram was a man of prayer.

A man of remarkable spiritual experience

Now the LORD said to Abram... The Lord appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him. **Genesis 1:1, 7**

The Lord spoke to Abram. More than that, the Lord took on some physical form and appeared to him too.

Abraham was a remarkable person, a man of faith, and a respected man with wide influence—we would say “leadership.” He was a man of prayer, and a man of remarkable spiritual experience.

What a blessing for Sarah to be married to him, don’t you think? Those of you who know the story aren’t so sure. Seriously, doesn’t this sound like a Christian woman’s wish list! What more could you want in a husband? “Lord, if you would give me a man of faith, who is a spiritual leader, who will take leadership in our home, a man who prays, and who knows you...”

Obedience, Testing, and Deception

But even Abraham has feet of clay, and the Bible does not hide this from us. Faith is not for airbrushed saints. Faith is for the real world of flawed fathers and fractured families. So, we come to this extraordinary story. Abraham had stretched himself, extended himself in faith, believing God’s promise to bless him, and he moved out in obedience to leave his home for the Promised Land.

Faith tested

When Abraham arrives in the Promised Land, his faith was tested with two massive disappointments:

The land was occupied: “At that time the Canaanites were in the land” (Genesis 1:6). “Lord, I thought you were going to give me the land...”

“I am”

“But it’s occupied. Don’t you think that’s a problem?”

“It’s going to be difficult.”

There was famine in the land: “Now there was a famine in the land” (1:10). Imagine that: A famine in the land of Canaan! “Lord, the land I left had food!”

Some of you know what this is like: “Lord, I’ve extended myself in faith and obedience. I’ve taken on responsibility, leadership. I’ve made sacrifices of time and money for the sake of ministry. I’ve spent myself in doing what I believed you were calling me to do—and now this! How could you allow this to happen when I’m walking in obedience?”

“Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land” (Genesis 1:10). The Bible never suggests that Abraham was doing something wrong here. There was food in Egypt, and there was famine in Canaan. Abraham used his initiative and did the obvious thing to provide for his family. The Bible never, in any way, criticizes him for it.

The plan

As they get near to Egypt, Abraham comes up with a plan. In ancient culture, a single woman lived under the protection of her father, and in the absence of her father, that role went to her brother. This meant that when someone wanted to marry a woman, they had to negotiate with her father or, in his absence, her brother.

If you had your eye on a lady (and this is still a great tip for guys today), rule number one was “get in” with her father or, in his absence, with her brother. Because this is the guy you have to negotiate with. And having a beautiful daughter or a beautiful sister meant you could expect anyone who had a romantic interested in her to treat you really well.

Abraham’s wife Sarah was a strikingly beautiful woman: “When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to Sarai his wife, ‘I know that you are a woman beautiful in appearance’” (Genesis 1:11). That was a good thing to say, guys. Here’s Abraham at his best! But be careful, because he is about to spoil it!

Abraham said: “I know that you are a woman beautiful in appearance, and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, ‘This is his wife.’ Then they will kill me, but they will let you live” (Genesis 1:12). In modern terms, “Sarah, you’re gorgeous, and it’s marvelous having you for a wife, but when other guys see you, they want to kill me!”

Here was his strategy: “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” (Genesis 1:13). This was not the first time that Abraham and Sarah had done this: “When God caused me to wander from my father's house, I said to her, ‘This is the kindness you must do me: at every place to which we come, say of me, he is my brother.’” (Genesis 20:13).

They had pulled off this deception before “at every place,” and as they arrive in Egypt Abraham says, “Let’s do the brother, sister thing here. That way we will both be safe. We’ll get the food we need in Egypt, and then we will get back to Canaan. We’ve done it before. It will be fine—nothing will come of it.”

The plan goes south

“When Abram entered Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. And when the princes of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house” (Genesis 1:14-15).

The King of Egypt doesn’t need to put his profile up on EHarmony™ or on Christian Mingle™. He has a whole team of scouts out looking to find suitable candidates to be his wife! One of the scouts spies Sarah, and the next thing that happened, she is taken into Pharaoh’s house.

I’ve tried to imagine the look between Abraham and Sarah as the scouts march her off. This had never happened before. The plan they have pulled off many times before goes horribly

wrong. Abraham looks at Sarah and thinks, *“What have we done?”* Sarah looks at Abraham and thinks *“This is another fine mess you’ve gotten me into!”*

To make matters worse, Pharaoh, who believes that Abraham is Sarah’s brother, starts sending him gifts—not little gifts, big money gifts. Because he wants to pave the way for a wedding, one that is already in the works.

For Sarah’s sake Pharaoh “dealt well with Abram; and he had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male servants, female servants, female donkeys, and camels” (Genesis 1:16). We’re talking big money. Think two Ferraris™—a red one and a yellow one! Abraham became a rich man as a result of this deception.

Abraham is outside the palace growing in wealth, but he is ashamed, powerless and alienated from his wife: “I have all this money, but I’m alienated in my marriage.” The man of faith, influence, prayer, and remarkable spiritual experience finds himself desperately in need of the grace of God. Every Christian husband knows what it is like to find himself there.

Sarah is inside the palace living in luxury and misery. She is powerless and vulnerable: “I married a man of faith and influence and prayer and spiritual experience. How in the world did I end up here?” She discovers that she is married to a man that is deeply flawed. Every Christian wife knows what it is to find herself there.

I can’t help reading this story without thinking of the New Testament passage, “While we were still [powerless], at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly” (Romans 5:6).

God’s Grace to Abraham and Sarah

When Abraham failed his wife, God protected her

“But the Lord afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram’s wife...” **Genesis 1:17**

So, Pharaoh calls in Abraham and says to him, “What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? 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” (Genesis 1:18-19).

This was, by any standards, a remarkable intervention of God to save a marriage that was otherwise completely at an end. Whenever there is trouble in a marriage, there are always more than two people involved.

The obvious question is, what had happened to Sarah during her time in the palace? Did Pharaoh consummate a union with her? Was she violated? Some scholars believe so, because Pharaoh speaks about “taking her as his wife” (1:18).

But Kent Hughes points out that Esther was taken into the court of King Ahasuerus a whole year before she was ever brought in to the king. Every mother knows how much work goes into planning a wedding. How long does it take to plan a royal wedding?

Besides, to our surprise, we find that Abraham and Sarah resort to the same “brother-sister deception” later on in Genesis 20. It is hard to imagine that Sarah would have agreed to this, or that Abraham would have suggested it, if Sarah had endured the worst outcome in Egypt.

The fact that they resorted to the old deception again suggests to me that they were thinking, *“We got away with this before. Let’s try it again.”* So, I believe that God protected Sarah and Abraham from the worst outcome of their deception.

Having said that, what happened in Egypt must have placed an enormous strain on their marriage! Can you imagine the emotional fallout? Sarah looks at her husband and feels massive disappointment, “I trusted you! I followed you! I thought you were a godly man. How can I trust you again after this?” She discovered that she’s married to a man who is deeply flawed.

It isn’t easy for Abraham to look his wife in the eye. He’s struggling because he feels that he no longer has a right to her respect. He loses confidence in his own ability to lead. God gave him his wife back, “But where do we go from here? How can this marriage ever be restored?” And the wonderful truth is that it was!

I want to apply what we learn from this story by asking two questions: (1) What does faith mean for Sarah, and (2) What does faith mean for Abraham, as they face up to the fractures in this marriage?

Through the Eyes of Sarah

Give weight to the mystery of sin

Pious people sometimes seem surprised at stories like this in the Bible. Here’s Abraham, the great man of faith, and he is behaving like a fool, falling into sin. And then he did the same thing *again* later! But a mature Christian knows that the problem of sin runs deep in the human personality. It doesn’t go away with a decision to follow Jesus.

There are no picture perfect families. At some point in your marriage, your spouse will disappoint you, your husband or your wife will fall short of your expectations, your children will struggle—they will make some bad choices. That’s why they need a Redeemer, just like you.

Look to God for miracles of grace

Abraham and Sarah’s marriage looked like it was over in Egypt, but for the grace of God, it probably would have been over. Their situation seemed impossible.

What could Abraham do when Sarah was marched off by the princes? Abraham was one man—he did not have the power to storm Pharaoh’s palace. Sarah was one woman—she had no one to protect her and no means of escape. She was powerless. The situation was hopeless, but God stepped in to deliver them.

You might be saying today, “I don’t know what to do. We tried everything. Nothing is working. I messed up, and I don’t know how to put it right. It’s over.” But for the grace of God, it would be over. Look for miracles of God’s grace. That’s what faith does.

Stand firm in the obedience of faith

Sarah lived in a different culture from ours, but if Sarah was living today, I think she would be saying to Abraham, “I am so out of here. I know I made vows to you when we were married, but after what happened in Egypt, we are done. D-O-N-E... DONE! And don’t talk to me about seeing a counselor!”

But that’s not what happens in this story. Sarah walks out of Egypt by Abraham’s side, and presses on in the obedience of faith. You may wonder, “*How could she do that?*” Sarah was faithful to Abraham because she had faith in God. She knew that God had promised to bless “them,” not him and her: “in you all the families of the earth will be blessed” (Genesis 12:3). Her faith in the promise of God sustained her.

And what came out of her faithfulness? Christ did—he was born into the line descended from Abraham and Sarah. Never underestimate what God may bring from your faithfulness in the hardest of circumstances.

Through the Eyes of Abraham

Quit deceptions

It is so easy to drift through life with deceptions and secret sins. If there is any deception in your life, quit it today. They never work. You get away with something that you know is wrong and, then after a while, you convince yourself that you always will. Nothing bad will happen. But something will come of it. Every sin brings its wages.

If you have a secret sin that you have harbored and nobody knows, renounce it today. God, as though he were standing before you today, he is saying to you, “Be done with it, before it brings destruction to you and to others God has placed around you.”

Stop thinking about yourself

This was Abraham’s problem: “Sarah, when they see how beautiful you are, they will kill me!” He was worried about himself, you see. Abraham is so focused on protecting himself that he really hasn’t thought about how what he is doing might affect Sarah. It’s all about him.

“Abraham, stop thinking about yourself and start thinking about your wife!” How much pain could have been avoided if he had done this? How much pain could be avoided, if fathers today would think less about ourselves and more about our wives?

Face your fears with faith

I don't know if anyone in Egypt would have tried to kill Abraham, in order to get Sarah, but clearly he thought that was possible. Fear was at the root of Abraham's folly, and it is so often at the root of so many foolish choices today.

You're afraid of losing face, afraid of not measuring up, and afraid of what might happen. What can you do about that? Face your fears with faith in Christ. Spit it out in prayer. Tell him what you're afraid of. It will do great good for your soul.

Persevere in your calling

When you fail badly, the easiest thing in the world is to give up on your marriage, give up yourself, give up on God, and slink off into wasting the rest of your life. Abraham doesn't do that. God has promised to bless him.

Abraham stepped out in the obedience of faith, and after all the trials and traumas in Egypt, he just keeps going. That's what you need to do, when you feel your failure, and mess up your testimony, and bring pain into the lives of others. You simply press forward in the humility that takes hold of the grace of God, and God will bless you.

Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ

“For her sake he dealt well with Abraham.” **Genesis 1:16**

I've been looking at this story and asking, “Who is like Jesus here?” It's certainly not Abraham. The answer here is Sarah.

Here is Sarah, this beautiful, godly woman who is a gift to her husband. He does not cherish her. Instead, like a fool, he gives her up. But then we read “For her sake, (the king) dealt well with Abraham” (Genesis 1:16). For the sake of the one he should have honored, the king dealt well with Abraham.

God sends his Son into the world, the gift of gifts, Jesus Christ. We should cherish him. But here we are, fools who do not realize the gift that we have been given. Caring more about ourselves than we do about Christ, we give him up. There he is on the cross bearing sin, and for Christ's sake the King will deal well with us.

So, however flawed and fractured your life is today, embrace him, return to him, love him, trust him, and walk with him. He will receive you with grace, and *for his sake*, God will deal well with you.

© Colin S. Smith

Permissions: You have permission and are encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format you choose, as long as you do not alter or change the wording in any way and do not charge a fee (beyond the cost of reproducing these materials). For posting on the web, a link to this document on our website (www.UnlockingtheBible.org) is preferred. Any exceptions to the above must be approved by Unlocking the Bible, 1-866-865-6253.

Please include this statement on every copy distributed:

By Colin S. Smith. © Colin S. Smith. Website: UnlockingtheBible.org