

# CONFIDENCE AFTER WE FAIL

Leader pages on pp. 146-149

**THE POINT:**  
TRUST GOD TO  
REDEEM YOUR  
FAILURES.

## GENESIS 16:1-5; 17:1-9

<sup>16:1</sup> Abram's wife, Sarai, had not borne any children for him, but she owned an Egyptian slave named Hagar. <sup>2</sup> Sarai said to Abram, "Since the Lord has prevented me from bearing children, go to my slave; perhaps through her I can build a family." And Abram agreed to what Sarai said. <sup>3</sup> So Abram's wife, Sarai, took Hagar, her Egyptian slave, and gave her to her husband, Abram, as a wife for him. This happened after Abram had lived in the land of Canaan ten years. <sup>4</sup> He slept with Hagar, and she became pregnant. When she saw that she was pregnant, her mistress became contemptible to her. <sup>5</sup> Then Sarai said to Abram, "You are responsible for my suffering! I put my slave in your arms, and when she saw that she was pregnant, I became contemptible to her. May the Lord judge between me and you."

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<sup>17:1</sup> When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him, saying, "I am God Almighty. Live in my presence and be blameless. <sup>2</sup> I will set up my covenant between me and you, and I will multiply you greatly." <sup>3</sup> Then Abram fell facedown and God spoke with him:

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<sup>4</sup> "As for me, here is my covenant with you: You will become the father of many nations. <sup>5</sup> Your name will no longer be Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I will make you the father of many nations. <sup>6</sup> I will make you extremely fruitful and will make nations and kings come from you. <sup>7</sup> I will confirm my covenant that is between me and you and your future offspring throughout their generations. It is a permanent covenant to be your God and the God of your offspring after you. <sup>8</sup> And to you and your future offspring I will give the land where you are residing — all the land of Canaan—as a permanent possession, and I will be their God." <sup>9</sup> God also said to Abraham, "As for you, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations are to keep my covenant."

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### MEMORY VERSE

**Psalm 73:26—My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength[a] of my heart, my portion forever.**

### KEYWORDS

**Covenant (17:2)**—A covenant is an oath-bound agreement between two or more parties. God

enters into covenant relationships with His people.



## WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM FAILURE ABOUT TRUST IN GOD?

Our football team was up 14-13. It was the last two minutes of the game, and we had the ball. It was third down, and we needed five yards to keep the drive alive. The quarterback dropped back to pass, but a blitz was coming. Under extreme pressure, he threw the ball ... but it was picked off. A quick pick-6 ended the game, and our hopes for any post-season play.

I felt the pain of the quarterback as he walked off the field holding his head low. I was not just his assistant coach; I was his dad. My son had actually had a good day on the field, but it didn't matter. In his mind he had failed, and his confidence was shattered.

We all fail at times. When we make mistakes, it's so easy for us to beat ourselves up. Whether our tongue gets the best of us, we drop the ball at work, or we run back to an old addiction, our sins and failures can completely crush our confidence. When that happens, how do we pull ourselves out of the dugout and get our heads back into the game of life? Let's take some coaching tips from the life of Abram.

### Don't Take Over // Genesis 16:1-5

This account out of Abram's life is one of failure and of getting ahead of God. Abram's failure in this account involved three individuals:

**Sarai:** It had been ten years since God had promised that Sarai would bear Abram a son. It would surely not be surprising to know she had been becoming increasingly embarrassed and frustrated by her barrenness. At this point, her patience had run out.

Sarai took matters into her own hands. We are shocked by Sarai's proposal. We see her suggestion as outright disobedience and the encouragement of adultery. But her heart was truly in the right place—she wanted to assist God with His plan to provide an heir for Abram—and the surrounding culture would not have thought twice about it. It was common in the ancient Near East for men to sire children through other wives or female servants. And since Hagar was Sarai's servant, Hagar's children could be considered Sarai's children.

## THE POINT: TRUST GOD TO REDEEM YOUR FAILURES.

### WHY IS IT SO TEMPTING TO TAKE MATTERS INTO OUR OWN HANDS?

**Abram:** Even if we think Sarai made a poor judgment call, let's not lay all the blame on her. After all, Abram went along with the plan. He could've said no, but Sarai's reasoning apparently made perfect sense to Abram. He had faith in God's promise of offspring, but perhaps this was the way he should "put feet to his faith."

**Hagar:** Hagar was an Egyptian maidservant likely acquired during Abram and Sarai's brief sojourn in Egypt (Gen. 12:10-20). Sarai used Hagar for her benefit almost like a modern-day surrogate. Because of her position as a servant, Hagar had no choice but to go along with the plan. As a result, she got pregnant.

Sarai's plan seemed to be working, but then the situation got ugly. As Hagar's stomach grew with her baby, her confidence grew. Hagar's behavior was both disrespectful and threatening. This created tension and animosity between the two women, and Sarai flew off the handle—at Abram! "You are responsible for my suffering!" Sarai forgot her own role in all this, and she called on God to judge between the two of them.

Abram again complied with Sarai and left the matter in her hands to correct. His statement: "Here, your slave is in your power" (v. 6), was to remind Sarai that she was still the wife and had the primary role. Abram added, "Do whatever you want with her." Unfortunately, Sarai abused her position and treated Hagar so horribly that she fled.

### Do What God Expects // Genesis 17:1-3

Thirteen years passed between Genesis 16 and 17; now God came to Abram again with a word of reassurance. God had not forgotten His promise! At this point in Abram's life, he may have assumed Ishmael, the son born to him through Hagar thirteen years earlier, was the child of God's promise. Frankly, we don't know, but we do know God was about to make it clear that Abram would have another son—the son of the promise (Gen. 17:19-21).

But before God revealed this, He reminded Abram, "I am God Almighty." He is El Shaddai, the all-powerful God. God



### DIGGING DEEPER COVENANT

Covenants are an important biblical concept. The covenants described in the Bible are similar to contracts today. In a contract, two parties make agreements with one another. For example, when you buy a house, you sign a contract with the bank or lender. The bank agrees to loan you the money to buy your house and you agree to make monthly payments. Biblical covenants include the one made with Noah in Genesis 9 where God promised to preserve humanity; the covenant with Abraham in Genesis 12 and 15 to provide land, descendants, and a blessing; the covenant with Moses in Exodus 19 and 24 to provide the Law to govern the people; the covenant with David in 2 Samuel 7 to provide a ruler on his throne forever; and the New Covenant through Jesus in Luke 22.

**How does God's eternal covenant through Jesus Christ impact you?**

was about to tell Abram what He would do through Sarai, and this would be at the hand and will of El-Shaddai, the all-powerful and all-sufficient God. Nothing is beyond His ability, including enabling a ninety-nine-year-old man to father a child!



### WHEN HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED GOD DOING SOMETHING THAT WAS UNEXPECTED?

God had earlier called Abram to “go” (Gen. 12:1) and he obediently went; now God called Abram to obedience again. Abram had gone, and now he was to continue going—to walk with God and live a life that honored Him. We should embrace that call too.

Abram had gotten ahead of God’s plan when he sought a child through Hagar. He probably was not aware of that at that time, but now he was about to learn of God’s greater plan. Abram didn’t hear a rebuke from God, but he did hear a call to live in God’s presence and move forward in obedience.

Note Abram’s response to God’s call to obedience and His reminder of the covenant: “Abram fell facedown.” This is the position of respect a person in that culture showed to one who was superior. It was in this position

of humility that Abram acknowledged God Almighty truly is almighty and expressed his willingness to obey.

## God Can Restore Us

// Genesis 17:4-9

God previously had made promises to Abram related to the land and his descendants, but now He formalized it with a covenant. Abram would, from this point on, carry a sign and remembrance of this covenant: a new name.

Names in the Old Testament carried meaning behind them. For all of his 99 years, Abram’s name meant “exalted father,” but now God changed his name to reflect the covenant and what God was doing in Abram’s life. Abram would now be Abraham. He could still be considered an exalted father, but even more so, he would now be seen as Abraham: “father of many.” At the same time, Sarai’s name also would be changed to Sarah (v. 15). This change was subtle since both names have their root in the word “Princess.” Sarah would be even more of a princess as the wife of the one who was a father of nations!

### WHAT DO THESE VERSES TEACH US ABOUT THE GRACE OF GOD?

What catches our attention is the fact that this covenant does not have an expiration date—it’s a permanent covenant. But God never intended it to be exclusive to Abraham’s physical descendants, the Jews. We understand this as we see the significance of the word offspring in this passage. We might think it’s a reference to Abraham’s son Isaac, but it refers to Jesus. As Paul wrote: “Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say ‘and to seeds,’ as though referring to many, but referring to one, and to your seed, who is Christ” (Gal. 3:16).

## THE POINT: TRUST GOD TO REDEEM YOUR FAILURES.

When Jesus came to earth, He kept the law for us. He died the death our disobedience deserved, and through His death He established a whole new covenant. This covenant is not based on our ability to keep it; it is based solely on all Christ has done for us.

God sought a covenant relationship with Abraham, and He desires a covenant relationship with us also. Even as He told Abram, “Live in my presence and be blameless” (Gen. 17:1), He calls us to do the same. We can live in His presence because of Christ, and we can be blameless because Christ has forgiven us and made us blameless. When we see all that God has done in Christ to make this covenant relationship with Him possible, let’s respond as Abram did, falling facedown before Him in humility and thankfulness. Our sin and all the times we took the place of God in our own lives are forgiven in Christ. The certainty of failure has been replaced with the certainty of forgiveness. He redeems our failures and puts us back on the path of following Christ to live in His presence with confidence even after we fail.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Anthony Flynn was born in Memphis, Tennessee to a mom in poverty. They later moved, but then, when Anthony was five years old, his father came home and had a major fight with his mom. Anthony and his mom were put on a bus and sent back to Memphis. Anthony had a rough childhood. He says, “When you look at the path of my life, it purely represents the pain that I felt that day when my mom and I were put on that bus.” He thought, there has to be a way out of this. My pain will be resolved by my success. At 24, he was working at a Fortune 100 company. But he desired to do more, so he left that company and jumped into non-profit work. He’s now a mentor with Mentoring Kings and serves youth in Atlanta, Georgia through Project Success. He desires to help young men break the cycles of poverty, under-achievement, and violence so they can reach their highest potential.

**How has God redeemed failures in your own life?**

## LIVE IT

### What helps you trust God to redeem your failures?

We all fail at times. When we make mistakes, it’s easy for us to beat ourselves up. Giving up in defeat doesn’t resolve anything. Resting confidently in God’s forgiveness, we can move forward in obedience. Regardless of what we’ve done, we’re never beyond the love and grace of God. When we turn to God and trust Him, He brings us into an incredible relationship with Him. Seek redemption by doing the following:

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- **Give up control.** When have you tried to take matters into your own hands recently? Repent to the Lord of your desire for control.
- **Check your influences.** Who influences you? Who do you have influence over? Spend time in prayer, asking God to show you which connections are healthy and which aren’t.
- **Seek guidance.** Take the bold step this week to talk with a spiritual leader about a recent failure in your life: How can you experience victory over it now?



# DAILY READINGS

## 1. THAT WAS A BAD DECISION // GENESIS 16:1-5

Have you ever made a decision and later regretted it? Sure you have; we all have. Sarai tried to “help” God with His plan for Abram to have numerous descendants. However, her actions (along with Abram’s) created the Ishmaelites who would become (and continue to be) the enemies of the Israelites. One small, seemingly insignificant decision had long-term consequences for Sarai and Abram as well as the nation of Israel. The take-away is we should not take God’s matters into your own hands. He will fulfill all He has said He will do. It’s a matter of trust, plus a little patience to wait on God.

**Confess your tendency to take matters into your own hands. God is the God of second chances.**

## 2. CALLED TO HOLINESS // 1 PETER 1:15-16

Just as God called Abram to live in His presence and to be blameless, all believers are called to do the same thing. Because God is holy, He expects His children to live holy, blameless, devoted lives that honor Him. Holy means “set apart, devoted to, and consecrated for God.” The Greek word, *haggios*, can be translated as sacred, pure, and worthy. Our responsibility, as believers, is to live our lives the way God expects us to. That means we should not be like the world in our actions, words, and thoughts. Even the clothes we wear should also glorify and give honor to God. Your life can be a witness for Him.

**Examine your life for signs of holy living.**

## 3. LIVING AS COVENANT KEEPERS // GENESIS 17:9

God changed Abram’s name to Abraham and renewed His covenant with him. A covenant is a conditional promise with each party having a responsibility to keep. Abraham and his descendants, including us today, were to keep God’s law and remain faithful to God. In response,

God promised His protection, guidance, and presence for His people. God desires a covenant relationship with you, not just a one-day-per-week relationship. He wants you to walk with Him everyday, throughout the day.

**Evaluate how well you are keeping God’s Word and remaining faithful to Him.**

## 4. BIBLICAL THANKSGIVING // 1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-18

Every year when the Thanksgiving holiday rolls around, we stop whatever we are doing to be with family and friends, celebrate, and eat lots of savory foods and desserts. Many of us will take time to state specific things for which we are thankful that happened during the year. Have you ever stopped to consider that thanksgiving is biblical—not the holiday but the actual act of giving thanks? There are many things for which we should be thankful, the air we breathe, our health, our homes, our families, and the list goes on. The apostle Paul challenged believers to give thanks to God in every circumstance, not just one day per year.

**As you reflect on the past year, what are some circumstances—both good and bad—for which you can thank God?**

## 5. PRAISE THE NAME OF GOD // 1 CHRONICLES 29:10-13

As King David neared the end of his life, he led the people in prayer to God before the building of the temple. The entire prayer is a glorious realization and proclamation of the greatness, power, splendor, and majesty of God. Verse 13 encourages the people to give thanks to God and to praise His name. These verses would make a great addition to a pre-meal prayer on Thanksgiving as you lead your family in thanks to God for another year. God is certainly worthy of our praise and so much more. David recognized this, and we should too.

**As you prepare for Thanksgiving this year, reflect on some specific things God has done for which you are thankful.**



## *My Notes*

**Name**

**Email**

**Session Number**

**Answer 4 Questions**

**What did You learn?**

**What Is God saying to you?**

**What are you gonna do about it?**

**Do you have any questions  
about the reading?**





# *My Notes*

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