

# Fear and Faltering Faith

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 24 June 2018

Preacher: Andrew Price

[ 0 : 00 ] Well, in life, we can fear all sorts of things, can't we? From spiders, anyone? Spiders? To snakes? Yeah.

To heights? For my brother, it's actually seaweed. It cannot swim in an ocean when there is seaweed there. It's got this irrational fear.

Of course, people also fear things in their own lives that are more serious than those. Things like unemployment, or failure, or missing out.

In fact, the fear of missing out is now officially known as FOMO, F-O-M-O, fear of missing out. And of course, there's also the fear of death that many people have.

And for us as Christians, we can face other fears because of our faith. For a Christian couple I heard of, they fear never being able to be parents. They cannot have children naturally, and when they applied to adopt some children, the agency declined their application because they were Christians.

[ 1 : 04 ] We can also fear the loss of friendship because of our Christian views. Or fear the risk of fractured relationships within family because of our Christian views.

Or we can fear the loss of religious freedom. The Australian government is at the moment considering the Ruddock report on religious freedom. And just last month, the Australian Christian Lobby sent out a video about one university student called Josh, who was kicked out of university because he prayed, offered to pray for someone.

They said yes, but someone else saw, and the university kicked him out. Have a look at this video. I've grown up in a Christian family, and I've been raised with Christian values.

And I was around about three or so when I first made the decision to follow Jesus. Since then, it's just been a continuous journey of discovering more of who Jesus is.

So it all started when I received an email to say that I'd been reported by a few students for student misconduct.

[ 2 : 12 ] And so the instance that had been reported was me just talking to a girl I'd been friends with for the past year and a half. And so we were just talking about work, and she was saying she was really stressed.

I asked if I could pray for her. She said yeah, yeah. Something that she appreciated after she said, like, look, I don't agree with that. I'm an atheist personally, but thank you. I really appreciate the care.

But I was then told that I shouldn't be praying for students on campus, and that it's challenging their beliefs, and that I shouldn't be doing that. I was pretty annoyed, pretty confused as to why that was the reason.

I was like, no way, is that a fair reason to suspend me? I had been told that I needed to attend fortnightly counselling sessions to learn how to appropriately interact with my peers.

I was also told that if I step foot on campus again, that I would be removed by security guards. So I was quite amazed by that, thinking, wow, I've simply spoken to someone, and I'm now, like, a threat to the safety of other students.

[ 3 : 17 ] And on it goes. Now, the Australian Christian lobby helped him get reinstated, but the point is loss of freedom because our faith is a growing fear even here in Australia.

And the temptation for some is to give in to this fear and even let it cause our faith to falter. Yet, as we turn now to our series in Genesis this morning, we'll be encouraged not to fear, nor let our faith falter, for God's promises are unstoppable.

I'll say that again. We'll be encouraged not to fear, nor falter in our faith, because God's promises to us are unstoppable. Now, our passage today picks up where we left off last year, but given most of

us don't remember what we did last week, let alone last year, me included, let me spend some time reminding you about the story so far, which is point one in your outlines.

And so Genesis began with the creation of the world, which you might remember was very good. So on the next slide, we read in chapter one, verse 31, God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.

But then it all went very bad, didn't it? Adam and Eve rejected God's rule and ate from the one tree. They could not eat from. They had hundreds to choose from, but the serpent's temptation proved too great.

[ 4 : 42 ] Of course, we couldn't have done any better. I mean, if we had just one rule that said, don't touch, what do we immediately want to do? Touch, don't we? And because Adam and Eve tried to be God, you know, deciding for themselves what was right and wrong, then sin entered the world.

And with it came curse. So the ground was cursed, you might remember. And so that's why work is hard. And most people would much prefer to have another day off tomorrow than go to work. It's why there's so-called natural disasters, because the ground is cursed.

But also relationships were cursed, which is why people fight with one another and why people rebel against God. But there was a promise that a seed or offspring, a child from Eve, somewhere along the line, would come and crush the serpent who led Adam and Eve to reject God's rule.

And so on the next slide, we read in chapter 3, verse 15, God says to the serpent, And the word offspring there is the word seed.

And so our author of Genesis begins to trace the descendants, the offspring of Adam and Eve, looking for this seed who would come to crush the serpent's head, remove God's just curse and restore God's desired blessings.

[ 6 : 13 ] And that's why when we read the book of Genesis, we'll notice that the author divides it up in sections using this repeated phrase, which is on the next slide. And sometimes, nope, one back maybe.

Anyway, I'll just tell you. And it usually says, this is the account of so-and-so's family line. Or literally, these are the generations of. Because he's seeking to trace the family line, the generations looking for this promised offspring, this seed, who would crush the serpent's head and bring God's desired blessing.

And we see that in chapter 11, verse 27, where the story of Abraham really begins. So if you've got your Bibles there, just have a quick look at chapter 11, verse 27. This is the account of Terah's, notice, family line.

So again, tracing the descendants. Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran. Haran became the father of Lot. While his father Terah was still alive, Haran died in Ur of the Chaldeans and in the land of his birth.

Abram and Nahor both married. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife was Milcah. She was the daughter of Haran, the father of both Milcah and Iscah. Now, Sarai was childless because she was not able to conceive.

[ 7 : 34 ] Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot, son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, and wife of his son Abram. And together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan.

But when they came to Haran, they settled there. And so here, our author focuses on Terah's family line, verse 27, and his three sons who then quickly become two sons.

And then the focus goes to one son, doesn't it? Abram, who later gets his name changed to Abraham. And then from chapters 12 to 25, our author will focus on Abraham's story, because it is a significant one.

For it's through Abram that God promises to bring blessing. So look at chapter 12, verse 1. The Lord had said to Abram, Go from your country, your people, and your father's household to the land I will show you.

I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you. I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse.

[ 8 : 39 ] And all peoples on earth will be blessed through you. Now, what word gets repeated quite a bit there? Bless. God is going to bring blessing back to his creation after the fall brought curse.

But God is going to bring it through Abram and his descendants, you see. And so God makes four big promises to Abram, which I think we can summarize on a slide with the acronym GLOB.

There we are. So that's the way to remember it. GLOB, great name, land, offspring or nation, and blessing. They're the four promises.

But the Bible focuses mainly on the last three, LOB, because those are the promises that affect future generations. The great name was just for Abraham alone. But also notice in verses 1 to 3 of chapter 12, how God is the one who will do all this.

For there are two other words that happen together that are repeated quite a lot. Have a look there. What are they? I will show you.

[ 9 : 46 ] I will make. I will make. I will bless. God is the one who will achieve his promises. And we'll see that highlighted today in our passage.

But the point here for the moment is that our author now focuses on Abram because it's through Abram that God will send the seed who will crush the serpent's head and bring blessing to all people.

But at this point, how will Abram respond? After all, we've been told in chapter 11, verse 30, that his wife is childless and unable to conceive. And so how can he possibly become a great nation?

You know, have lots of offspring if he can't even have one offspring. What's more, Abram has never seen this land before, which is why God has to show him. And Abram has never been there.

If we're asked to relocate our whole household and life to an unknown place, I mean, we usually jump online and have a look around. Sometimes we'll even fly there or travel there to check it out for ourselves, see what medical facilities there are and schools for the grandkids or kids and so on.

[ 10 : 52 ] Yet he's asked to move without any of that. And on top of all this, Abram doesn't even know God. He's been worshipping other gods instead. And yet, verse 4, so Abram went as the Lord had told him.

And Lot went with him. Abram was 75 years old when he set out from Haran. He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran.

And they set out for the land of Canaan. And they arrived there. Abram travelled through the land as far as the side of the great tree of Moriah at Shechem. And that time the Canaanites were in the land.

The Lord appeared to Abram and said, To your offspring I will give this land. So he built an altar there to the Lord who had appeared to him. And from there he went on towards the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east.

Then he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord. Abram trusts God's promises, doesn't he? And he goes just like that.

[ 11 : 58 ] And so just to put it in context, here's a map. He started off in Ur down the bottom right hand corner. And Acts chapter 7 tells us that that's actually when God first appeared to Abram.

And so presumably when they set out for Canaan in chapter 11 verse 31, it was Abram who persuaded his father Terah to go. But then they got to Haran, which is at the top right there.

And presumably Terah, the father said, That's it. I've had enough. We're stopping here. But then Terah died. And Abram was free to keep trusting God's promises, which he did. And so he kept travelling around the top of the desert.

The desert's in the middle there. So that's why they don't go straight across. He was on the top of the mountain, which is the top of the mountain. Around the desert and back down the other side to Canaan on the left, some 1,200 kilometres from his home. And the point is, this is a great act of faith in God's promises, isn't it?

Especially because when he got there, there were other people in the land already. But he still believes God's promise that this land will be given to his offspring. And so he builds an altar and calls on the name of the Lord in worship.

[ 13 : 02 ] You can see while Israel, even today, holds Abraham up as a great hero of the faith. In fact, more than 50% of the world's population claim some sort of link to Abraham.

But then trouble strikes and Abram is faced with the fear of death. Point to in your outline, verse 10 in your Bibles. Here, Abraham fears for his life because of famine.

And so he takes his wife, Sarai, and heads down to Egypt. Now, at first glance, this seems like a reasonable thing to do, doesn't it? After all, the famine is severe.

But did you notice what, or rather who, is missing from verse 10? You know, it's only a couple of verses before where Abraham calls on the name of the Lord.

But in verse 10, there is no Lord. There is no calling on God to provide, is there? There is just fear of famine and leaving of the land.

[14:17] Now, maybe I'm being a bit too hard on poor old Abram. But look at what he does next in verse 11. As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife, Sarai, Look, I know what a beautiful woman you are.

When the Egyptians see you, they will say, this is his wife. Then they will kill me, but will let you live. Say you are my sister, so that I will be treated well for your sake, and my life will be spared because of you.

Abram fears death again, but this time not from famine, but from Egyptians. He might kill Abram for his very beautiful wife. Now, Sarai must have been pretty stunning for Abram to have this fear, and she was.

And she was also, by the way, 65 years old at the time. Now, before we all start to wish we had her genetics, remember in those days, people lived longer. And so 65 wasn't that old back then.

In fact, it's still not old today, I hasten to add. I'm going to move on before I get myself in more trouble. The point is, Abram fears death again, doesn't he?

[15:26] But instead of trusting God to keep him alive and fulfill his promises to him, Abram decides to tell a lie or a half-truth. Because we are told later in chapter 20 that Sarai is actually his half-sister.

They have the same father, Terah, but a different mother. Yet, she is still his wife. And so it's a half-truth. And as you know, a half-truth equals a full lie.

In other words, Abram gives into his fear and so falters in his faith. What's more, when you lie, you often get caught in it, don't you?

And that's what happens next. You see verse 14? When Abram came to Egypt, the Egyptians saw that Sarai was a very beautiful woman. And when Pharaoh's officials saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh.

And she was taken into his palace. He treated Abram well for her sake. And Abram acquired sheep and cattle, male and female donkeys, male and female servants, and camels.

[16:28] Sarai is so stunning that her beauty is reported to Pharaoh. And now Abram's really stuck in his lie, isn't he? And yet, when they come to take her, he doesn't say, Wait, stop, she's actually my wife.

He lets her go and even profits from her. Pharaoh gives him a rich dowry for Sarai's hand in marriage. And so instead of trusting God, Abram effectively sells his wife to save his life.

So much for our hero of faith. In fact, Abram's actions here are actually a reversal of God's promises, did you realize? So instead of staying in the land that God promised of Canaan, he leaves it and goes to Egypt.

Instead of becoming a great nation through his own offspring, he gives his wife to another, who will have offspring with him, presumably. And instead of bringing blessing to others, as God promised, he now brings curse.

Do you see verse 17? But the Lord inflicted serious diseases, or literally plagues, on Pharaoh and his household because of Abram's wife, Sarai.

[17:43] You see, instead of bringing blessing, Abram's actions bring curse, as God is forced to intervene. Now, I take it the diseases or plagues affected everyone except Sarai, which is how they knew it was her.

And then presumably they questioned her and she spilt the beans. Because Pharaoh then summons Abram in verse 18. Do you see there?

So Pharaoh summoned Abram. What have you done to me? He said, why didn't you tell me she was your wife? Why did you say she is my sister? So that I took her to be my wife.

Now then, here is your wife. Take her and go. So then Pharaoh gave orders about Abram to his men and they sent him on his way with his wife and everything he had.

Notice here that Pharaoh is morally outraged at what Abram has done. He's obviously furious at being tricked. It's almost committing adultery.

[18:45] While Abram, on the other hand, is completely silent, isn't he? He doesn't say a word. Why? Because he knows he's guilty. He has no words to defend himself. Unless we think God was too harsh on Pharaoh.

Notice that Pharaoh himself is not upset with God. Pharaoh doesn't blame God, does he? Who does he blame? Abram. For lying to him which caused the plagues.

And so not even Pharaoh thinks God was too harsh here. In fact, the diseases not only got Pharaoh's attention, but probably prevented him from actually consummating the marriage and committing adultery.

Either way, Abram's fear causes his faith to falter and almost reverse God's promises. Not only by leaving the land and jeopardizing offspring, but also by bringing curse instead of blessing and making his own name one of contempt rather than great.

For Pharaoh basically tells Abram to get lost. In fact, Abram's faltering faith would have succeeded in reversing God's promises except for verse 17.

[ 19 : 58 ] Notice the first three words of verse 17. But the Lord. What does all this mean for us then?

Which is point three. Well, we need to ask why the author includes this account. What is his purpose? After all, it's a pretty unheroic event of our great hero, isn't it?

But I take it that's the author's purpose. To show us that even when the great man of faith falters, God will not. That even when the hero of the story acts to reverse the promises, God will intervene to keep them.

It's as though the author gives us an example to prove what God said repeatedly at the beginning of chapter 12. That I will keep the promises.

In other words, our author wants us to see that God's promises are unstoppable. For even when faith falters, God does not.

[ 21 : 17 ] In fact, what happens here to Abram actually foreshadows what will happen to Israel. For do you remember, Israel actually ends up in Egypt because of a famine.

Story of Joseph. And in Egypt, another pharaoh takes them, not to be his wife, but to be his slaves. And then God sends more plagues, the 10 plagues, if you remember, that pharaoh might release them and bring them back to the promised land.

And when they leave Egypt, they leave with Egypt's riches, just as Abram does here. And what's more, Abram's faith here sadly foreshadows Israel's too.

For Israel will time and time again falter in their faith. From the 40 years in the desert to the book of Judges where they sin and get punished and God raises up another judge.

To the book of Kings where each king does evil in the eyes of the Lord. Not everyone, but most of them. Time and time again frail human flesh will fail.

[ 22 : 22 ] But time and time again in history we'll see God intervene to keep his promises. Until finally he intervenes with his only son.

Who is the seed that crushes the serpent's head. So on the next slide in Galatians chapter 3 we read. The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed.

Scripture does not say enter seeds meaning many people. But enter your seed meaning one person. Notice who is Christ. See God intervenes with his son.

The promised offspring or seed descended from Abraham. And Christ came to crush Satan's head. To reverse the curse and bring God's blessing. And he did that at the cross.

For Jesus' faith in his father did not falter. Instead he willingly went to the cross to pay for our sins. And in doing so he defeated Satan. So no longer can Satan accuse us of deserving death.

[ 23 : 25 ] Because Jesus has paid for our sins. Our slates are wiped clean. He's got nothing left to accuse us of. And no longer are we powerless to resist Satan's temptations.

For through Christ we have God's spirit. Who is stronger. And prompts us to resist. And no longer do we need to fear any spiritual curse. Like God's judgment. Instead through Christ we have every spiritual blessing.

Now. And the assurance of every physical blessing. Later. In the new creation. But only if we trust in Christ.

The promised seed. And so do you. Do you trust in Christ. It's only in him. That the effects of the curse will be reversed.

Spiritually now. And physically later. And for us who do trust. Then we have to remember that while people falter. God does not. His promises are unstoppable.

[ 24 : 26 ] For he has and will keep them. And that ought to encourage us. To bank on his promises. And keep our faith. Even in the face of fear.

Of course in order to bank on God's promises. We need to know what they are. Don't we? So many Christians I meet. Seem to be confused about what God does. And does not promise us. For example.

Many Christians think. That God promises us health. And wealth. I don't know what world they're living in. But clearly God doesn't promise that. But he does promise us.

A whole stack of other things. I've listed just some promises. And only from the New Testament. On the back of your outline. It filled the page so quickly. There's oodles more.

And when we face different fears. We had to bank on these promises. So that our faith might not falter. So take the first slide. If we ever fear not making it to heaven. Then hear God's first set of promises.

[ 25 : 22 ] That I will complete the good work I began in you. Philippians chapter 1 verse 6. Or I will keep you firm to the end.

1 Corinthians 1. And so let not your faith falter. Bank on those promises. Or when we face fear of failure in life. Then hear God's next promise.

That nothing in all creation will be able to separate us. From the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Including failure at work or in life. And what's more.

See what great love the Father has lavished on us. That we should be called the children of God. And so our worth is not based on our earthly success. But on being God's dearly loved child.

Or when we face the fear of unemployment. Then hear God's next set of promises. That I will never leave you. Nor forsake you. And they're not to worry. Because God will provide for our needs.

[ 26 : 24 ] From Matthew chapter 6. I know a number of men at our church. Who are banking on those promises right now. Who are faced with unemployment.

And some already unemployed. And yet they have not given in to their fear. That this is the end for them. Nor have they let their faith falter.

Because they know God's unstoppable promises like these. That he will provide for their needs. Of course they like us. Wish that God would hurry up about it. But nonetheless they have not given in to that fear.

Nor let their faith falter. Or when we face the fear of death. Hear Christ's next promise. I will come back and take you to be with me. I will raise them up on the last day.

And I will transform your lowly body. To be like my glorious body. I conducted a funeral just last Friday. For Margaret's mother.

[ 27 : 25 ] Who was 103 years old. And I was so encouraged. To hear that some of her final words were. Heaven is waiting for me. She did not give in to the fear of death.

Nor let her faith falter. For she knew God's promises like these were unstoppable. So she banked on them. When we fear the fear suffering.

Or loneliness. Or missing out on things in this life. Then hear God's next set of promises. That I will work in all things for your good. According to my purpose.

Which is to make you conform to the image of my son. Or let you approach my throne of grace with confidence. So that you may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Or your light and momentary troubles are achieving for you an eternal glory. That far outweighs them all. A friend of ours.

[ 28 : 24 ] One of my best friends actually. His wife. Is in her mid-30s. And just last month was diagnosed with leukemia. Blood cancer. And while she's.

And we are all very much praying that the treatment will work. And she would very, very much prefer not to leave her husband and her three young sons. But to see them grow up and get married and so on.

She is not given in to that fear of possibly missing out on time with them. Because she knows God's unstoppable promise to bring her to glory. That will far outweigh any time she misses out on.

And a glory where she will see them again. See we bank on God's unstoppable promises. Which helps us not to give in to fear. Nor let our faith falter.

Or finally when we face the fear of persecution. Or losing our religious freedom. Or being kicked out of university like Josh was on the video. Than hear God's declaration in the last set.

[ 29 : 25 ] That he has made Jesus Christ both Lord and King. And Jesus himself said I will build my church. And not even the gates of Hades will stop it.

And so as we heard in our second reading. Do not fear their threats. Do not be frightened. But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. You see in this passage in Genesis this morning. We're reminded of God's declaration. I will. For even when the hero of faith falters. God does not. Instead he intervenes to keep his promises.

And if he has and will do that. Then whatever fear we face in life. We can bank on his unstoppable promises. And keep our faith. Let's pray.

Our gracious Heavenly Father. We do thank you for this reminder this morning. That when faith falters. You do not. That you will keep your promises.

[ 30 : 28 ] And so they are unstoppable. Help us we pray. That when we face fears of different kinds. In our lives. That we would not give in to fear. Nor let our faith falter.

But to remember your unstoppable promises. And keep our faith. For we ask it in Jesus name. Amen.