

Guest Teacher:

Back to Bethel—Handling Failure in Your Christian Walk

BY PASTOR DAMIAN KYLE



How do you handle failure in the Christian life? What do you do when you have made a grievous error? An important lesson for a Christian who desires to please God is contained in the first verses of Genesis 13: Abraham's response after failure.

Then Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot with him, to the South. Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold. And he went on his journey from the South as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, to the place of the altar which he had made there at first. And there Abram called on the name of the LORD.

Genesis 13:1-4

Abraham had failed miserably by going down to Egypt of his own will to escape the famine in Canaan—leaving the land to which God had called him. And the whole experience was a catastrophe. Abram (later renamed Abraham) had taken charge of his life, without prayer and God's direction, in going to Egypt.

While in Egypt, he lied about Sarai (later renamed Sarah) being his wife. He said that she was his sister, a half-truth implying that she was not his wife—making it a lie and a deception. As a result, Sarai was taken into Pharaoh's harem. By doing this, Abraham not only put his wife in danger, but he jeopardized God's plan of salvation for the whole world—to bring the Savior into the world as a descendant of Abram and Sarai. The only thing that kept it from becoming an indescribable disaster—on a physical and spiritual level—is that God supernaturally protected Sarai.

A great deal of damage had been done. It was probably a very quiet ride back to Canaan. Abraham was rightfully rebuked by a pagan—Pharaoh—for his lie and deception.

He had failed miserably in his relationship and responsibility toward his wife. Sarah's faith in her husband had been shaken as well as her ability to trust and respect him. All of his servants and those traveling with him probably wondered about Abraham's character and ability to make good decisions.

Go back to where you were in life the last time you knew you were in the will of God.

So, you have just done a very stupid thing; now what? We are all capable of making such mistakes. The problem is, we can't fix anything that is even one second in our past. How can we salvage the situation?

We must do exactly what Abraham did: Go back to Bethel. Bethel was the last place where Abraham heard from God. That's the first step: Stop walking in your own will, turn around, and go back to where you were in life the last time you knew you were in the will of God—the last place you heard the Lord's voice and knew you were right with Him.

In the New Testament, Jesus tells the church at Ephesus: *“Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent”* (Revelation 2:4-5).

Jesus tells them to *“Remember ... from where you have fallen,”* to *“repent”*—to have a change of heart about where you are in life—and to go back and *“do the first works.”* How do you go back to the first works? Think about your walk when

everything was right between you and God. What place did the Word have in your life—or Christian fellowship? What characterized your walk with God? Do that. Go back to Bethel.

In verse 4, Abraham called on the name of the Lord. He made a fresh consecration of his life to the Lord. He was saying, “Lord, You saw what I did. I wasn't committed to Your will for my life. Now I freshly commit my life to You, to Your purpose and will—even if it means staying in Canaan during a famine; even if it means hardship.”

The greatest place to be is in the middle of God's will. Being right with God is a valuable, priceless position in life. Unless that's in place, nothing else matters. So Abraham worshipped the Lord; I have no doubt that he asked for a fresh start with the Lord. The Lord is eager to meet with us when we come to Him that way.

First John 1:9 says: *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* That's the Christian's bar of soap; we need to wash with it regularly.

After a colossal failure, it's easy to plunge to the depths of condemnation—to get buried in it and never come out. But Abraham turned to God immediately. Nothing is a complete waste if you learn from it. Build safeguards so that you don't fall back into sin again. Confess it, repent, ask for forgiveness, and draw close to Him.

It's important to understand the difference between God's conviction and the enemy's condemnation in our Christian lives. The Holy Spirit always draws us close to God. The enemy seeks to push us away from God. No matter what we have done, we can return to Him. We can go back to Bethel and make a fresh commitment to the Lord. ↩

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