

# A Patriarch's First Stumblings of Fear

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[ 0 : 00 ] Now, we come to our Bible reading, and this evening we're reading from Genesis chapter 12, from verse 10 through to 13, verse 1. And I believe there should be a diagram appearing on the screens, which should just help us understand the context of the passage that we're looking at, as verse 10 is the start of the second half of this big section that we have together. So that'll be on the screen, so you can take a look at that. And we'll be preaching on this as he's been doing in Genesis for some time later with us this evening.

So today we'll continue by reading from Genesis chapter 12, beginning at verse 10. Now, there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land. When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to Sarai, his wife, 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. Say that you're my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared for your sake.

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. And for her sake, he dealt well with Abram. And he had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male servants, female servants, female donkeys, and camels. But the Lord afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife. So Pharaoh called Abram and said, 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. And Pharaoh gave men orders concerning him. And they sent him away with his wife and all that he had. So Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had and lot with him into the Negev. Amen. The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of the Lord endures forever.

We'll do turn to Genesis chapter 12 and to the second half of the chapter. Last time, we saw that Abram's story begins with a pagan's first strides of faith, strides out of the darkness of materialism, out of the mumbo jumbo of false religion, and into the certainty, the truth of God's powerful revelation. And let's be very clear. Abram's faith is our faith. It is true Christian faith.

[ 3 : 13 ] That is faith in the promise of God's eternal salvation, which of course is accomplished at last through the seed of Abram, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Don't be mistaken. Don't think that that Old Testament faith is something different. The New Testament tells us plainly that the patriarchs, that all the great saints of old, that they all placed their hope not in an earthly country or mere earthly promises, but in a heavenly one. They sought not the earthly city, but they sought the eternal city of God for their salvation. They knew that on this earth, they were just strangers. They were foreigners. They were exiles. And they were looking forward right from the start to their promised ultimate goal. Now we're told they welcomed it from afar, from a long way off. And of course we now have the great privilege, don't we, of looking back because God has produced something better for us.

That's what Hebrews tells us, that only together with us would they be made perfect. But it's the same story through the fulfillment of these original promises in our Lord Jesus Christ. We're part of the same great story. The pioneer, the perfecter of Abram's faith is the same pioneer and perfecter of our faith. And that is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. And of course that's why this chapter is so relevant for us. In fact, Paul says that this chapter, like all the Old Testament scriptures, was written principally for us in these last days. Because it shows us Abram's God, who is our God and the only God. And it shows us our God's amazing grace and mercy and faithfulness to his people. To those who do stride out with him, taking hold of his promise and following him, living their life for him and with him, come what may. And yet, of course, every single one who does that is still a frail

human being, full of all kinds of flaws, all kinds of weaknesses, and all too prone to stumbling and making a right mess of things.

Is there any Christian believer in this room tonight to whom that does not apply? No. The Apostle James tells us, doesn't he, very plainly in his letter. We all stumble in many ways.

But thankfully, our God grants people like us encouragement and hope in the scriptures, not just by telling us about Abram's great strides of faith, but also by telling us about what every single new believer experiences all too soon. And that is our first stumblings of fear.

[6:12] And that's why the Bible can help real people like you and me in this room. The Bible is so real, it tells us the whole truth, not just part of it. Because God is real and God is realistic.

He wants his people to be realistic also. So in stark contrast to verses 1 to 9, which show us God's command and Abram's faith, here from verse 10, we have Abram's fear followed by God's correction.

So first of all, let's look at verses 10 to 16, where we see Abram's disobedient wobble of fear. It's quite a shock, isn't it, this story, because it comes hard on the heels of the amazing high point that we read about in verses 1 to 9. Because you can't help wondering, can you, when you get to Genesis chapter 12, and we have these momentous words of God's promise in verses 1 to 3 to Abraham, God's extraordinary promise, we wonder whether at last this man is going to be the deliverer. He is going to be the seed of the woman to destroy the serpent and to ultimately reverse that curse on the world. Ever since that promise in Genesis 3.15, as you read through the pages of Genesis, we're looking for him. Was it going to be Adam and Eve's first seed, Cain? Well, no, what a disaster that was. And he removed Abel as well. But what about Seth? Well, apparently not. He died, do you remember?

And all his offspring, chapter 5, and he died, and he died, and he died. Well, what about Noah, that great one who walked with God? In a very real way, he was the savior of the world.

But alas, immediately after the flood, well, despite that whole new, washed, clean world that God gave to them, sin hadn't been eradicated forever, had it? And Noah himself ends up in a pickle.

[8:17] Or rather, he pickled himself, didn't he? Poor Noah. So then, there's a fresh start. But then, what about after Babel? What about at last now, after that great judgment? Perhaps this man, Abraham, who strides out obediently in faith with God into that great destiny promised by God to him, perhaps this at last is going to be the savior of the world. Well, alas, no. Again, not in the ultimate sense. The writer will not let us idolize Abraham, will he? His very first account of Abraham's faith here, he shows us how quickly he moves from being the faithful ex-pagan to just being a very fearful expatriate, leaving the land of promise. And very nearly losing everything. Losing his beautiful wife, Sarah, to the king of Egypt, to the Pharaoh of Egypt.

What is it that so drastically happens to alter Abraham's behavior between verse 9 and verse 10 here? Well, it's something, isn't it, that's a very big thing in the life of any new believer.

It's his first real test of faith, real test of trust in the God that he's come to know, that he's come to follow. Look at verse 10. First line there is the hinge point of the whole passage. Now there was a famine in the land. See, here's the question. God has commanded Abraham to go to this land as the place of blessing where his whole future is to be forged, but there's a famine in the land.

So can God be trusted to be good to his word, to provide for Abraham even when there's a famine? I mean, it's easy for us, isn't it, to be a bit smug and to say, well, of course Abraham should have trusted God.

It's easy to see these things when it's not us in the crucible of testing, isn't it? But very often when somebody has perhaps just started to follow Jesus, something very big like this crops up in their life. Perhaps you suddenly lose your job and it's very hard to manage. Or perhaps a number of your friends scorn you and reject you because of your faith, or even members of your family.

[10:56] Perhaps a girlfriend or a boyfriend or even a spouse. All kinds of things can hit us, can't they? And make it seem that all that joy of the first flush of new faith, that it's suddenly not so wonderful anymore.

And maybe there are some folk here tonight who are, like Abraham, quite new believers. And maybe you're still in that first flush of joy about following the Lord Jesus Christ.

And that is wonderful. And let me assure you, I don't want to dampen that joy at all, not one bit. But the Bible does tell us to be real.

And if you read, well, if you read on from the great chapter Hebrews 11, that tells us all about Abraham's faith into chapter 12, you'll see very quickly that the Lord does discipline and he tests all

of those that he loves.

Because he loves them. And that's what's going on right here with Abraham. Now, I have to say to you that some people don't agree.

[12:03] Some scholars reckon that there's really no reason at all that Abraham shouldn't have left the land and gone down to Egypt because he hadn't received the specific command not to do that.

And some people believe that really it was just a sensible thing to do in the circumstances. I can't agree with that. And I'll tell you why for several reasons. First of all, remember who the very first hearers and readers were of this book.

It was the Israelites, wasn't it, under Moses. Now, can you imagine what they thought, the godly Israelites at any rate, when they heard verse 10?

So Abraham went to Egypt. Oh, no, not Egypt. What possible good can come from going into Egypt? That can only spell trouble.

That's where God rescued us from. So that's one big clue. Secondly, of course, it's true. There's no explicit prohibition. But God had clearly said to Abraham, hadn't he, go to the land I will show you.

[13:09] And in verse 7, he appeared to Abraham in the land. Effectively saying to Abraham, here it is. It's this land here. In other words, this is the place that you are to be, Abraham. Not elsewhere.

This place. And actually, if you look on later, don't turn there now, but in Genesis 26, verses 1 to 5, you'll find that God repeats to Abraham's son, Isaac, the words of Genesis 12, 1 to 3.

Almost verbatim, the exact same promise and the exact same terms of the covenant. But with one explicit change. And it's the addition of these words. Do not go down to Egypt.

Dwell in the land I will tell you. Now that's pretty plain, isn't it? He's adding there what the lawyers would say. That's their phrase, isn't it? For the avoidance of doubt, Isaac.

For the avoidance of doubt. This means this land, not Egypt. He's making very explicit what was clearly implicit in what he'd said to Isaac's father Abraham.

[14:10] And Abraham should have understood. But God adds a necessary negative for added clarity there. The third reason, of course, I think it's clear we're to see this as a lapse on Abraham's part, is simply the clear structure of the passage here that you've seen on the screens.

It's so clear, isn't it, that the first line of verse 10 is the hinge point. The whole narrative is constructed to highlight the contrast between the first half of the chapter and the second.

Between Abraham who went, as the Lord told him, and Abraham who went down to Egypt without the Lord telling him. And despite the Lord clearly telling him that Canaan was to be his home and was to be his destination.

And it's all because he actually fails to believe and trust in God's promise to bless him and to provide for him in the land of his calling, come what may.

And when put to the test, when he's confronted with a real obstacle, and it was a very big obstacle, a famine. Well, as Bruce Wolke put it, said, he steps out of the stones of God's will to find bread.

[15:29] Now, friends, this is real life, isn't it? This is very close to home. You can face a famine, perhaps in your business, in your finances.

And God doesn't seem to understand the stresses of modern business and VAT legislation and all the rest of it. Well, who does understand it? And you think, well, goodness, I'm struggling in my business.

I pay enough tax for this rotten government as it is, far too much tax. So I'm just going to massage my VAT returns. And there's no command explicitly in the Bible not to massage your VAT.

In fact, the Bible doesn't even mention VAT. And if it did, I'm sure it would probably agree with me. Or you meet a famine, if you're a woman, of decent Christian men of marriageable potential in the church.

Because God doesn't seem to be able to organize their ratios properly, does he? Well, he certainly doesn't seem to get these men off the starting blocks in anything like the way that young women want them to, or perhaps need them to.

[16:44] That may be true. In fact, it usually is true. Men, are you listening? But then you see, Egypt beckons, doesn't it? Because there are a lot of men in Egypt.

Not believing men, of course. But they seem to be a lot more active and a bit less feeble. And anyway, surely you'll be able to, once you're married, persuade them to start coming to church, won't you?

And become a Christian. Well, I've helped to pick up a number of pieces of Egyptian journeys of that sort, as I'm sure most pastors have.

I could go on, couldn't I? There are so many famines that suddenly face the believer walking with God. Many, many kinds of famines. And we all know that, don't we?

See, if we won't trust God in the face of these famines, we'll never learn what God is really doing in our lives, and with our lives, and what He's preparing us for through our lives.

[ 17 : 54 ] And that's a lesson that we must learn, just as Abraham needed to learn these things. Let me quote William Still. He said, We never find out why God brings us into unhappy circumstances by getting ourselves prematurely out of them.

We must wait in our plight until we see what they are for. This is faith. Anything else, by whatever name designates it, is disobedience.

You see, fear and lack of trust in God leads Abraham to disobedience. And things go from bad to worse.

Until, look at verse 15. He ends up having lost his wife. He ends up losing the key partner in God's entire purpose for Abraham's seed to bring the covenant blessings to this world.

Now, we don't need to dwell on the details of the story or why Abraham acted as he did. Maybe he thought that this ploy would mean that anybody interested in Sarah would have to come and speak to him and be in protracted negotiations with him as her brother.

[ 19 : 07 ] And maybe by that time he thought, Well, by the time it's all sorted out, we'll have gone and left Egypt and all will be well. We don't know. But it's easy, isn't it, to rationalize things.

To think perhaps we've thought through all the possibilities, all the eventualities of our actions. I mean, Abraham clearly did not reckon, did he, on Pharaoh just swooping in and taking his wife anyway.

But Pharaohs tend to just do what they please. And so all of a sudden, Abraham's completely snookered. The very thing he wanted to avoid has happened. And we can forget, can't we, that things are not always in our control.

How does it go? The best laid plans of mice and men gang up a clay. And we also, don't we, in our Christian lives, so often forget something else.

And that is that we have an enemy, don't we? The character who's been stalking the background of this story right since Genesis chapter 3, the serpent himself.

[ 20 : 13 ] And he's always at work, isn't he? Prowling around, seeking whom he may devour. That's how Peter puts it. Because there's an enmity between his seed and the seed of faith.

Always. And he loves to enslave. He loves to entrap. Especially, especially where there's new real faith just been born. And very especially where there's been great strides of advance being made in God's work of salvation, in the advance of his kingdom.

That's why any Christian person who has made great strides with the Lord, any Christian church that's making great strides for the Lord and for his kingdom, will stir up opposition.

The Lord Jesus tells us that plainly. Wherever his seed is being sowed, an enemy will come in and sow his. There's nothing fanciful to that. That's just the plain teaching of Jesus.

The plain teaching of Paul in Ephesians 6, for example. We have an enemy today, just as Abraham had an enemy then. That ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, as Revelation 12 calls him.

[ 21 : 30 ] Who even now, we are told, is making war on God's people to deceive them and to lead them astray. Very often through making them fear.

And so making them doubt and distrust God's promises. And that's what we face, friends, all the time, isn't it? When we're realistic in our fight of faith.

That's what Abraham faced as well. And the whole mess here stemmed from that wobble of fear, which was a result, ultimately, of his failure to trust God's good and faithful promise.

God had promised his presence with him to protect him in all circumstances. But what he saw seemed to contradict what God had told him.

And that's the point of this story. No point in us getting tangled up and distracted about arguments about whether it's ever right to lie or deceive, to save your life or others' lives or whatever.

[ 22 : 31 ] Don't let us get bogged down in moralistic stories about specific sins and so on. God wants us to see here the sin behind the sins and behind all sins.

And behind all sins is ultimately a root of disbelief, of distrust, failure to trust God himself in what he said. And the dishonor that we do when we doubt God and his word.

If you say something to me and I say to you, I don't believe you. Well, I'm insulting you, aren't I? I'm calling your honor, your integrity, your truthfulness into question.

That's what we do with God, you see, when we doubt his commands. Obedience to God's word is the visible form of faith.

It's the materialized form of faith. Well, disobedience to God's commands is the visible evidence of unbelief, isn't it? And rejection of God's lordship.

[ 23 : 39 ] And that's what our enemy, the serpent, wants us to do all the time. That's what he's been at since the very, very beginning. And it can be very smooth, very, very deceptive.

So deceptive, we begin to deceive ourselves so easily. Take a look at verse 16. That could really make Abraham think, couldn't it, that all was well, that God's blessing me.

Look at all this. Sheep and oxen and male servants and all the rest of it. He was prospering greatly through his very wise and rational response to the famine.

And sometimes we can seem to be prospering greatly in our wrong reaction to a famine that God might put in front of us. Isn't that so?

Verse 16 looks wonderful. But, but, what does Jesus say? What does it prosper a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?

[ 24 : 45 ] See, according to Jesus, self-preservation is actually the way of disaster. Whoever saves his life will lose it, said Jesus. Whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospels, he's the one who really will save it.

And Abraham had to learn that lesson. But instead here, he wobbled in fear and in the disobedience of unbelief. Oh, look, Rosie.

Verse 16. But, verse 17. The Lord. That's one of the many great but gods of the Bible, isn't it? Into the mess of Abraham's folly, Abraham's disobedience, steps the covenant God with his introversion.

God's gracious work of correction in answer to his erring servant. And that's verses 17 to 20, isn't it? Notice there's no voice from God.

There's nothing direct like before. In fact, Abraham receives his rebuke from the lips of the pagan king in verse 19. What on earth possessed you to behave like this, Abraham?

[ 25 : 59 ] That's what he's saying. It's quite ignominious, isn't it? When a believer's shown up like that by a rank pagan, an unbeliever.

We see it a lot of times in the Bible. It can happen to us as well, can't it? It's very humbling. One writer says, What a disgrace for God's chosen man to be dismissed from Pharaoh with a whole sordid tale of his duplicity, his greed of gain, his cowardly self-regard, and dishonoring of his God, exposed to public view.

Very painful, and yet it is the God of grace at work to save him. And to prove himself utterly faithful to those covenant promises he'd given.

God proves himself true, doesn't he? Abraham's enemies are cursed. And Abraham is blessed despite his folly and despite his unfaithfulness.

Just as God had promised in his covenant. Isn't God extraordinary? Abraham had gone down to Egypt in a lapse of faith, and yet look at verse 1 of chapter 13.

[ 27 : 16 ] He goes back to the land, into God's place for his life, with his wife and his family intact, and with great material blessing to boot.

Verse 2 lists all the treasures that he's looted with. And yet surely having gained a far greater treasure, in the lesson learned that at last this God can be trusted, and that he is always true to his word of promise, to those that he's called to be his people and to follow him.

And Abraham needed to learn that, didn't he? So do we, you and I. How much better, though, to learn it through trusting God in the first place? And passing the test that he sets for us.

Not through the disasters that we tend to make for ourselves, through disobedience, taking matters into our own hands. Abraham had to learn that lesson the hard way here, didn't he? And I have to confess, I'm not sure I've ever really learned those lessons from God myself, except for the hard way.

I'm sorry to say. I don't know about you. But we'll see that Abraham does, as we read on, he does learn that lesson, and he does trust God, absolutely.

[ 28 : 39 ] The climax of his story in chapter 22, when he'd come to know he could trust God utterly, even with the apparently incomprehensible command of God to give up the life of his only son, his

beloved son.

Just the generations later, of course, on the same mountain, God's own beloved son trusted himself utterly to his father and said, Father, into your hands I do.

I do entrust my spirit to give life to all those that he came to save. But as we draw to a close, what does this story teach us?

Well, it's hard to miss, I think, what Moses first hearers would discern in this story with so many parallels to their own experience. God's gracious rescue out of Egypt, out of Pharaoh's hands, and God's curses upon Egypt and its Pharaoh, all his own people left, laden with flocks and riches belonging to the Egyptians and so on.

For one thing, it was a sharp warning to those who want to grumble and harbor these sort of fond memories, apparently, of Egypt, wanting to go back there instead of on to Canaan.

[ 29 : 56 ] Don't be fools. This story tells you for sure, doesn't it, Egypt is not your home. And you know that. Your father Abraham certainly found that out here.

So there's a rebuke and a warning. There's also great encouragement, though, isn't there, to unerring people, the foolish, disobedient people, because they too had plentiful examples of unfaithfulness.

And yet they had known, hadn't they, the faithfulness, extraordinary faithfulness of God to his promises all through their history. It's no accident that you read in Deuteronomy chapter 1, on the very brink of the promised land, that Moses says to the people, see, the land is before you.

Go in, take possession of it, of the land the Lord has sworn to your fathers, to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, to give them and their offspring after them. This God is your God too.

Take him seriously. Take heart. That's a great comfort to those people then, wasn't it? And it's a great comfort to us. It's a great comfort to those who are relatively new believers, to those who are very recently ex-pagans.

[ 31 : 14 ] And it's an encouragement to all of us who rejoice at brothers and sisters in Christ who have come to him from that. Because often there can be a lot of mess that surround people's lives in the early days of walking with the Lord.

There's a lot of blunders that people make, a lot of wobbles all the time. Here's William Still again. Some people expect the Christian to grow up at once, with never a stumble.

It's just as unreasonable as expecting him never to grow up. The man of faith makes many blunders before he fully learns that the power of mere faith in God is far stronger than the power of self, even when it's reinforced by the devil's hand.

That's true, isn't it? And sometimes there's a lot that is humbling. There's a lot that is ignominious for us to have to swallow as Christians.

But, verse 17, But the Lord, the Lord, is still the great circumstance that changes everything. And Abraham's God is our God.

[ 32 : 24 ] Doesn't that make you want to shout hallelujah? I know we don't really do that very often, but, you know, every now and again. Yeah, good, thank you. Our God is the God of the stumbling fearful, just as he is the God of the striding faithful.

And I can tell you, I'm very, very glad about that. And his promise and purpose for blessing his whole world is not stopped here, is it, by the failure of this one man, Abraham.

And nor is God's purpose for blessing your life going to be stopped or rendered useless by your many stumblings and your failures. Aren't you glad about that?

What a comfort it is to know that Abraham's God is a God for stumblers, like me. And probably not just me, here tonight.

But it's a challenge, isn't it? God graciously rescues Abraham. He gives him a new start. But, you see, in chapter 13, verse 1, he's really just back to square one.

[ 33 : 34 ] The Lord's abundantly gracious. He restores him from folly and from disobedience. But we must never think that that's all God wants from us. Just getting back to first base.

Now, he wants us to go on. He wants us to go up. God called Abraham to the land to a destiny, to be a blessing to the world. So far, well, he's been quite the reverse.

What's he left in his wake? In Egypt. Plagues. Disenchantment with him. Disenchantment, very likely, with his God. And all through this passage, there are no words from God to Abraham, are there?

Or no words from Abraham to God. No appearances of God. No progress. No growth. No fruitfulness from God's call on Abraham's life.

It all has to begin all over again. Now he has to begin to face the test that God wants him to face. And all the things that will forge him into being a willing servant that God has called him to be.

[ 34 : 43 ] And that's often the way with us, isn't it? Jesus said to his first followers, you did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide.

And he wants for all of us who follow him to go on to maturity in our walk with him. But sometimes that does mean at first there has to be painful humbling to get us back to square one because we often find ourselves regressing way back beyond first base.

To bring us back to the right path, the path of obedience. And it's from there alone, isn't it, that God can lead us on to the real destiny that he has called us to.

Now I don't know that may be an important word for somebody here tonight especially because you may know that you've botched it through disobedience in some area of your life. And you know that underneath that really it's a failure to believe God, to believe his call, to believe what his true gospel is really all about.

That it's about a future inheritance, it's about an eternal city, it's not about the treasures of this world. Maybe you have been led or have led yourself out of the stones of God's will to seek the easier bread of this life.

[ 36 : 17 ] Whether it is in possessions or in influence or in a relationship or whatever it might be. But God, you see, in his grace, in his mercy has not let you go.

He's convicted you. He's brought you back. Maybe in a very humbling way, I don't know. And that is wonderful and that is a great, great comfort.

Praise God if that's the case. But it's also a challenge because he's done that not so that you just will drift again. But so that you will learn from this to trust his promises, to obey his commands for your life, for your discipleship.

So that you will fulfill your destiny. So that you will be as a seed of Abraham, a blessing to the world. That you'll bear fruit for Jesus Christ. Fruit that will truly last forever.

Is that an impossible thing for you, do you think? Can you do it? How could Abraham do that? Well, let me tell you, friends, not because of who he was and what he was, but because of his God and who he was and who he is.

[ 37 : 29 ] He's the God of promise and he's the God of power. Abraham believed and Abraham became a blessing not because he was God's promise deliverer. No, he wasn't. But because God's promise was true that through his seed at last the Lord Jesus Christ would come.

The true seed. the true man of faith who was utterly faithful, who was utterly obedient, who didn't turn the stones into bread when he faced a famine in the path of his service.

Who didn't turn away to save himself when he hung on that cross in our place, but rather he gained the victory for us, his beloved ones, his saints.

Like Abraham. And like you and me, all who in Christ are the true seed of Abraham. We were heirs according to that same promise.

That's how God could rescue Abraham and put him on a path to fruitfulness in abundance for his own glory as he did. And that's how he can do that and will do that for you and me.

[ 38 : 43 ] If we'll throw ourselves on him truly as Abraham did. Through the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ which is for us not just not just in his death for our sins and our failures but also for our lives because his life through his own Holy Spirit is in us and his faithfulness in us will draw us on day by day forever and ever and he will never leave us or forsake us.

There's an old hymn that sums it up perfectly I'm going to finish with this yield not to temptation for yielding is sin each victory will help you some other to win fight manfully onward dark passions subdue look ever to Jesus he will carry you through ask the Savior to help you to comfort and strengthen and keep you he is willing to aid you he will carry you through do that ask him look to him and he will carry you through friends that is the message of the gospel another command full of promise amen let's pray heavenly father how we thank you that you are the God not only of the striding faithful but of our stumblings of our follies of our failures it seems so often that that is the God we need most of all but we ask that by looking to your son our Lord Jesus Christ his wonderful pardon and grace and his powerful spirit and his promise that you would help us to be those who

are brought out of our stumblings that we might be a people striding on with you in real faith humbly having learned not to trust ourselves and our sight more than you and your word but putting our hand in yours and trusting you always to lead our way help us we pray and help us to help one another as we walk with you in the way everlasting for Jesus sake amen ■