

Confused By Circumstances

Genesis 12

Intro

Parked on the side of the road, waiting to catch speeding drivers, a police officer sees a car puttering along at 35 km. per hour. Thinking the driver is as dangerous as a speeder, the police turns on his lights and pulls the car over. As he approaches the vehicle, the officer notices there are five elderly ladies inside—two in the front seat and three in the back—wide-eyed and white as ghosts.

The driver, obviously confused, says, "Officer, I don't understand. I was going the exact speed limit. What seems to be the problem?"

The officer, trying to contain a chuckle, explained to her that 35 was the route number—not the speed limit.

A bit embarrassed, the woman grins and thanks the officer for pointing out her error.

"Before you go," the officer says, "I have to ask: Is everyone in this car okay? These women seem awfully shaken." "Oh," she answered, "They'll be all right, sir. We just got off Route 187."

Obliviously the driver was confused by the road signs.

Have you ever been confused by certain things in life besides road signs? Sometimes things happen and we wonder what in the world is going on?

Abraham too experienced moments of confusion and wondered if he was doing God's will.

Genesis 12:5-10

We pick up the story of Abram, or Abraham in Genesis 12.

Imagine how Abraham must have felt when he reached the land of Canaan. God said, "*Leave your land and kindred and go to a land I will show you. And I will make you a great nation*" (Gen. 12:1-2).

Abraham believed God and went, but when he reached Canaan, the "*Canaanites were in the land*" (Gen. 12:6).

Then "*there was a famine in the land*" (Gen. 12:10). Abraham must have been a bit confused and perplexed. Not to mention what his wife and the people with him must have thought and felt. God had promised one thing, but it looked like another had happened.

Abraham's experience is not unique. Seldom does our faith walk unfold as we think it will. If it did, no faith would be required. Faith takes over where sight fails.

2 Corinthians 5:7, "*For we walk by faith, not by sight.*"

Following the will of God may not end as we think it will, we may become perplexed and feelings of uncertainty take over. What do we do during those times?

1. We Worship

First, we worship. This may be at odds with our human nature, but it is good spiritual therapy when we are confused and perplexed. It's the right thing to do. We need to focus our energy on God not the circumstances.

Perhaps, Abrahams' disappointment and confusion grew as life in Canaan unfolded. No doubt, he and his party left Haran with great enthusiasm and excitement. The adverse circumstances they encountered when they arrived in Canaan probably dulled that excitement a bit. However, one of the first things Abraham did when he arrived in the Promised Land was to build an altar and worship.

Genesis 12:8, "*From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord.*"

Abraham camped between the cities of Bethel and Ai. Maybe he expected God to give him one of those prosperous towns. Maybe he was beginning to realize how dense and strong Canaan's population really was. He may have experienced doubt and confusion.

Worship in the midst of life's confusion is rare. People who meet with disappointment frequently drop out of church and stop worshipping. We all have seen people do that. Abraham fell into that trap too especially when famine came; this time he failed to worship. Without divine direction he left Canaan and went to Egypt...a mistake that almost proved disastrous.

North American Christians often tend to believe that the will of God is a bed of roses in which everything is pleasant, cozy and easy. Among Christians the most common reaction to obstacles is to say, 'This must not be the will of God' or 'If this was the will of God, things would work out better.' However according to the experience of God's people in the Bible, hardship may indicate that a person is in the will of God.

Facing obstacles in pursuit of God's will is a common experience. Yet, obstacles often bring confusion. Part of the remedy is worship. We must learn to worship God even when famine is in the land...we need to focus our minds on Him who is bigger than our problems.

Persecuted Nigerian Pastor Praises God

In the Nigerian city of Jos a Nigerian Baptist church was attacked by Muslim extremists who burnt the church building and the house of Pastor Sunday Gomna. On the second Sunday after the violent outbreak, when the people of that Baptist church returned for worship, they gathered in a little mud wall community center not too far from the burnt church.

Pastor Gomna stood up and offered some beautiful words of praise. He said, 'First, I am grateful that no one in my church killed anyone.' Apparently, during the chaos of the attacks, Pastor Gomna had gone around the community and some of the Muslim people said, 'Pastor, thank you for the way you taught your people. 'Your people helped to protect us.'" So Pastor Gomna was proud that his people did not kill any Muslims.

"Second," he said, "I am grateful that they did not burn my church." Everyone looked at the Pastor with disbelief. After all, everyone was meeting in a small, uncomfortable mud hut. But Pastor Gomna continued: "Inasmuch as no church member died during this crisis, they did not burn our church. They only burned the building. We can rebuild the building but we could not bring back to life any of our members. So I am grateful that they did not burn my church."

He continued, "Third, I am grateful that they burned my house as well. If they had burned your house and not my house, how would I have known how to serve you as pastor? However, because they burned my house and all my possessions, I know what you are experiencing and I will be able to be a better pastor to you. So I am grateful that they burned my house as well."

(Source: Mark Meynell, "What to say when they burn down your house and church," David Smith, The Kindness of God. InterVarsity Press, 2013).

Just as Pastor Gomna focused on praising and worshipping God in the midst of problems so we need to give our time and energy to worship God. Worship Him in the midst of your challenges and problems.

2. We Wait

For most of us, waiting goes against the grain. We want to act impulsively without waiting on the Lord. Abraham just did that. Genesis 12:10 states, "*Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to live there for a while because the famine was severe.*"

This was one of the few times when Abraham seems to have acted without consulting God. The famine was ‘the straw that broke the camel’s back.’ So he took matters into his own hands and went to Egypt.

Some interesting things happened: Abraham became afraid. We have no mention that he was afraid before. He and Sarah agreed not to tell the truth about their relationship. Consequently, Sarah was taken into Pharaoh’s harem.

When Abraham and Sarah were forced to leave Egypt, Sarah’s Egyptian slave girl Hagar went along. She became the mother of Abraham’s first child, Ishmael. So much discord erupted in the family that Hagar and Ishmael were forced to leave. Ishmael’s descendants became perpetual rivals to Abraham’s family. All of that pain might have been avoided if Abraham had waited on God instead of running to Egypt.

Rescuers who search for lost people in the mountains say hikers should stay put if they become confused or lost. Yet 99 percent of hikers who get lost begin to run. The more confused they become, the faster they run. When we become confused or disappointed, the best strategy is to wait until God clearly tells you to move. Abraham didn’t wait on the Lord and he paid the price.

Someone has wisely said, “Don’t question in the dark what God has shown you in the light.”

Living by faith is never as easy as it sounds. Confusion and disappointment may come. The antidote to these experiences is clear, wait and worship. They are the only appropriate course of action.

3. We Trust

Genesis 22:1 says, “*After these things God tested Abraham.*” What things? All the things that have occurred in his life as a result of his obedience to God’s call to go out to a land he would show him. If we consider all these things, it would seem that God already had tested his faith. But however there was a final test.

God asked Abraham to take Isaac his only son to a far away mountain and sacrifice him. Isaac’s death would mean the end of everything God had promised Abraham.

At the beginning of Genesis 12, God asked Abraham to give up his past and to give up his future. Through those previous trials, he had developed an unshakable faith in God. When this final and most challenging test in life came, he never wavered.

Look at Genesis 22:5, *Abraham said to his servants, “I and the lad will go over there and worship and come again to you.”* In Genesis 22:8 it states that Abraham said to his son, “*God will provide himself the lamb for the burnt offering.*”

In his commentary on this episode, the writer of Hebrews wrote: *Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death.* (Hebrews 11:19).

Abraham had learned that God keeps His promises. When life’s circumstances bring confusion, remember that God’s perfect plan for us is never confused.

When everything appears to be perplexing, believers can turn to God:

1. We Worship Him.
2. We Wait in prayer for God to lead and direct us.
3. We Trust in the Lord.

Play song: “*Already There*” by Casting Crowns.