

DEALING WITH DECEPTION

Are you ready to study the Bible and learn more about how God deals with people, how He deals with you and how He deals with me? Get your Bible out and some note paper. Today we are going to study about a man who really walked with God and had a problem with deception. There is no one in the Bible that is perfect except Jesus. When we read about them, God does not hide their faults from us anymore than he shows their strengths. He lets us see that these are real people, they made mistakes, but they kept going toward God. I have always heard people say "Fall forward when you mess up." A lot of times when you mess up, you tend to say, "God didn't help me. I am out of here. I can't do it. I knew I couldn't do it. I have already messed up too many times. I quit." That is not what the Bible is about. The Bible is about people saying "I messed up, Lord. Help me. Get this out of me." God wants to work on your character. He wants to make you a fine person. You might say, "If you only knew my reputation, I have already messed up too much." That is not true. God can take any mess and make it marvelous. Then He can give you a message out of your mess to teach people what God taught you. It says in the New Testament that God comforts us and we are to comfort others with the comfort that God used in comforting us, and you can do that. I have discovered that it is best to be open and transparent. It is best not to have anything to hide. It is best to just be yourself. You may look at other people and think, "I would sure like to be like them" but you cannot, except for maybe their good qualities. You could do that. You are you, good and bad. God wants to use you, He wants to use your life, and He wants to use you to help other people. He would like to make a good example of you as someone who messed up but look at them now. They are doing it right, and you stay with it.

Let's talk about dealing with deception. Where do we see deception in the world today? We see it everywhere. We see it in government, in our leaders, in anything involving finances, and in relationships. With alcoholism, there is a lot of deception, manipulation and lying. It affects the whole family. Anytime you walk in fear, you are going to open yourself up to some of the friends of fear. Deception is a friend of fear, and so is lying and manipulation of other people to protect yourself. It is there, and Abraham was not any different. Look how long ago he lived; he lives thousands and thousands of years ago. I had a high school English teacher that said, "Never forget this; human nature remains the same." That is why we can read the Bible and read stories that were four thousand or six thousand or two thousand years ago. We think, "I know how they felt that way. I know what was going on. I have felt that." It is because human nature remains the same. You could go to another country and you would discover that everyone is the same. I have done it. I have traveled around the world and I have discovered that everyone is the same. They have some customs that are different and they dress differently. They speak different languages. When you get down to families, relationships, and relationship with God, everyone is the same. That is why the Bible is so universal.

Open your Bible to Genesis 11:29. It is talking about how Abraham was over in the area in Iraq. Did you realize how much of the Bible occurred in Iraq? A lot of the people you read about in the Bible were there. God said, "Come on out. I am going to take you to a place." In Hebrews, the Bible says Abraham went out not knowing. What a faith-filled man to go out because God has called you not knowing where you are going. As he was getting ready to go, it says in verse 29, "Meanwhile Abram married his half-sister, Sarai." Then God gave Abraham a promise. Look at your life and see if you notice that God gives you a promise and then you go through something really hard right after that that makes it hard to stay true to God and do the right thing, to stay honest and stay exactly on the path with the attitudes that God wants you to have. It happens, maybe every time. When you read the Bible, you can look back and see the bad thing that is getting ready to happen and then you see that God was trying to tell them, "I am for you, I am going to help you." Then later they just forget it. They do not stand on the promise that God gave them. What was the promise? God promised to Abraham, "Leave your own country behind you and your own people, and go to the land I will guide you to. If you do, I will cause you to become the father of a great nation. I will bless you and I will make your name famous, and you will be a blessing to many others. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you, and the entire world will be blessed because of you." How would you like to get a promise like that from God? That is huge. You would think that he would be able to go the rest of his life on that and do everything right and not make any mistakes. He would make all of the right choices. No, he did not. The first thing he did was take his nephew, Lot, with him. God said for him to leave everyone behind and to leave his family behind, but he took his nephew.

Then, Abraham went to where God told him to be and there was a terrible famine in the land. When real life comes and hits you in the face, it is easy to just toss the Bible out, isn't it. You have to grab hold, hold on tight, and say, "I don't care what it looks like. I know God, I know what God said, and I am not giving up." What did Abraham do? He operated in fear. One of his big issues was fear. He had faith because he believed God and left everything. That is huge faith. He had faith, he knew God had spoken to him personally. But, he had fear issues when he got into a place where he did not think God was. He based his actions on fear. Genesis 12:10 says, "There was at that time a terrible famine in the land, so Abraham went on down to Egypt to live. As he was approaching the borders of Egypt (remember that they were old people by this time, Abraham was at least 75 and Sarah was at least 65), he asked his wife to tell everyone she was his sister." That was a half truth, it was not a lie but it was not the whole truth. It was a cover up. "You are very beautiful, and when the Egyptians see you they will say 'That is his wife, let's kill him and get her and then we can have her.' But, if you say you are my sister, then the Egyptians will treat me well because of you and they will spare my life." He was watching out for himself. He did not seem to care about what happened to his wife, but he was sure watching out for himself. Sure enough, when they arrived in Egypt, everyone spoke of her beauty. I wonder what she must have looked like. The Egyptians were pretty. She probably had really dark hair, because people who live in that area usually have dark hair. "When the palace aids saw her, they praised her to the pharaoh and she was taken into his harem."

The pharaoh gave Abraham many gifts because of her, but the Lord had his own way of correcting it. Even though he was deceptive with pharaoh, and even though he told what amounted to a lie, God intervened anyway. Think about the promise. Why would God intervene like that? Because He had said, "Out of you is going to come this great nation." Abraham was about to mess it up by having his wife sleep with who knows who and ruin that whole promise. Abraham could have messed up the whole promise right there. He was not thinking about that at all. He was just scared and trying to save his own neck. "But the Lord sent a terrible plague upon pharaoh's household on account of her being there. Then pharaoh called Abram in before him and he accused him sharply. 'What is this you have done to me. Why didn't you tell me she was your wife? Why were you willing to let me marry her saying she was your sister? Here, take her and be gone.'" Pharaoh sent them out under an armed escort. He wanted to make sure that they were really gone. If you are not careful, and you allow yourself to tell half truths, at some point God will expose you and embarrass you. It is really embarrassing and you do not want that to happen to you. You would think a bad situation like that would teach you a really good lesson, wouldn't you? You would think Abraham would say, "I am never doing that again. God forgive me and God help me. I am never doing that again." We will find out later he did it again. Then we will find out later that his son did it. It was an iniquity. It would be interesting to know if his father did it. Do you know what an iniquity is? An iniquity is a particular bent toward a sin in your family. It is different from you just going out and sinning. It is like your family has this particular sin, over and over and over. This sin was in Abraham and in his sons. It would be so interesting to find out if it was in his father and his grandfather.

Abraham was really a brave man. As he goes on and lives his life, we see things that were so noble. He is a wonderful man. I do not want to imply that he was not. He was wonderfully. He did something that I think is amazing. God said, "I am going to give you the land," and Abraham went to his nephew, Lot, and said, "You pick the land you want to live in. I will take what you don't want." Lot picked the best. He picked the land in the valley, Sodom and Gomorrah. Of course, we know what happened there. But, it looked like Abraham let him choose and it looked like Lot picked the best. Abraham was a very brave man.

He protected Lot and he fought to get Lot back. He fought kings. He gave ten percent of his income to Melchizedek. Melchizedek is a very puzzling character in the Bible. They do not know where he was born, where he came from or where he went.

If you read in Genesis 15, God gave the promise again. Does that mean something is getting ready to happen and God is making sure you have the promise down? Yes, it does. Look at your life. This might be a Biblical principle. When the promise comes, maybe the test is coming right after that and God is trying to strengthen you with a promise so that you will not weaken. Here God repeats his promise. In Genesis 15:1, He says, "Don't be fearful, Abram, for I will defend you and I will give you great blessings." Abram replied, "Oh Lord Jehovah, what good are all of Your blessings when I have no son? For without a son, some other member of my household will inherit my wealth." Then Jehovah told him, "No, no one else will be your heir for you will have a son to inherit everything you own." Then He took him outside and said, "Abraham, look at all the stars. That is how many descendants you are going to have. Like the sands of the seashore, you can't even count them. That is how many descendants you are going to have." He reminded Abraham of who He was, "I am Jehovah who brought you out of the city of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land." Then God did an amazing thing to confirm it. You can read it in Genesis 15:8-21.

Then the test came. They still did not have any children, Sarah was still barren. So Sarah gets the idea of getting her maid to have a baby. She can sleep with Abraham and then they would have a baby. Don't we make the biggest messes in our life when we decide that we are going to help God achieve his promises and help God achieve what He wants to do. That is our biggest mistake. The hardest thing in the world is to back off and let God do it his own way. The problem is, it usually takes so much longer.

You wait so much longer. I feel like I am the queen of waiting. I feel like I have waited so long to do stuff

You wait so much longer. I feel like I am the queen of waiting. I feel like I have waited so long to do what that God wanted to do. I did learn some hard lessons in trying to make it happen, but I finally just relaxed and said, "God you said it, it will happen. I believe you." And it happened.

So Abraham and Sarah had all the mess of having that baby and the servant girl, Hagar, and all the mess that is still going on today. Can you believe a couple trying to have a baby 4,000 years ago came up with this idea that you and I are still watching as a huge struggle in the world today? Amazing isn't it. When Abraham was 99 years old, almost 25 years after being in Egypt, God said, "Obey me and I am going to do it. You will have this child. You will be the father of a multitude of nations." God also said, "I am going to change your name. You are no longer going to be Abram, which means exalted father. You are going to be Abraham, father of nations. For that is what you will be. I have declared it." Think about this again.

God is going to great lengths to say, "Abraham, I am going to do it. You are going to have a son. Trust me. I am God." God changed Sarah's name, too. "Her name is no longer Sarai, but Sarah, which means princess. I will bless her and give you a son from her." She is really getting old now, too. "And Abraham threw himself down in worship." That is a beautiful thing to do when God tells you what he is going to do with you. Throw yourself down and worship. That is exciting. Inside, Abraham was laughing in disbelief.

Do you think God did not know that? Of course, He knew that. Abraham was thinking, "Me, a father. I am 100 years old. Sarah have a baby at 90?" With his mouth, Abraham said, "Oh yes, do bless Ishmael."

God said, "No that is not what I said. Sarah will bear you a son and you are to name him Isaac." Do you know what Isaac means? It means laughter. That was God's way of saying, "I heard you laughing." God said, "As for Ishmael, I will bless him also because you have asked me to. He will be a great nation. But, I want you to have Isaac with your wife." So, great things happened. A big miracle happened. Sarah got pregnant and had the baby.

Then there was the story of what happened with Sodom and Gomorrah, and all of that mess. Then in Genesis 20, here Abraham goes again, practicing deception when he gets afraid. This time, instead of pharaoh who was very ungodly, Abimelech was a king who was not a believer, but he was a good and just man. When Abraham moved to settle near there, he said to this king about Sarah, "She is my sister."

Then the king saw how beautiful she was, still at 95. The king sent for her and had her brought to him at his palace. What a beautiful woman she must have been. Then God intervened again. It is so important that you understand that when God wants to use you and wants to do a big thing with you, do not be afraid and try to protect yourself in some way when a fear comes along. God meant what He said. He is going to do it with you. How did God protect them this time? The first time is from disease. This time is in a dream. God appeared to Abimelech and said, "You are a dead man. That woman you took is married."

Praise God, Abimelech had not slept with her yet. He said, "Lord would you slay an innocent man? He told me she was his sister. She said 'He is my brother.' I didn't have the slightest idea I was doing anything wrong." The Lord said, "I know. That is why I held you back from sinning against me." Someday when we get to heaven and we get to see the replay, the DVD of all that happened that we read about in the Bible, it is going to be so exciting. Just think about that sentence, that is why I held you back. It will be interesting to see all of the delays that occurred and what He did to hold Abimelech back from being with Sarah. God said, "That is why I did not let you touch her. Now restore her to her husband and he will pray for you because he is a prophet." If you are a prophet, if you are highly prophetic, it is very important that you keep from deception, lies, deceit, or anything with your mouth because out of your mouth God speaks to people. God said, "You will live, but if you do not, you are doomed to death." Great fear swept through his kingdom, and he called Abraham in and said, "What in the world have you done to me? What have I done to you that deserves this? I didn't do anything to you. You made me sin. I could have sinned.

What made you think of this vile idea?" Interesting isn't it. Abraham is the believer and Abimelech is the non-believer, and the non-believer is saying "This is a vile deed." Abraham said, "There surely is no fear of God in this place." That is what fear does. You do not think God can protect you in a godless place, but he can. He can do it in ways you would never be able to do it. Dreams for instance. "I said, they will want my wife and they will want to kill me to get her, and besides she is my sister." We do that, don't we? We start making excuses and start trying to do the big cover up. We start trying to say "Well, maybe I could say this." It ended so badly. Abimelech said, "I don't know if I can ever trust you again. I need to work with you and I don't know if I can trust you." He had to pray for them to be healed so that they could have children again. All the women had been struck barren. Exaggeration is lying, also. It is deceptive, also.

You are not telling the full truth. You think if I tell the full truth it will not be good enough. If I tell a partial truth, or if I exaggerate, then it makes it sound better.

Another weakness that Abraham had was giving in to the wrong pressure, the pressure to make a baby. I know some of you are barren. I know that God is going to touch you. Somebody that is watching this is going to have a baby. You have waited a long time, way past time, but God is going to do it. But, it does not always happen. God protected Abraham in this time even though he was practicing deception. That is the God we serve. He does not wait until you are so perfect and you never mess up, you just always do it right. I do not think you can do it. Even if you are trying to do it all right, you are still going to mess up some. What does God want you to know? That you can be a good and righteous man and still have areas of your life that have to change. If you do not change them, they are going to hurt you and the

others around you.

Manipulation goes with deceit. "Sarah, tell them you are my sister." He was manipulating her because he was trying to watch out for himself. Lying and deceit cause other people deep pain and great punishment.

How do you correct deception in your life? When you are caught and confronted, tell the truth. Just commit yourself to God in prayer, "God, I am telling the truth. You are going to have to take care of me because I am going to stop this once and for all. I am telling the truth." The next thing is to do is whatever you have to do to make it right. Realize that God loves you so much. He will support you even when you are wrong. He is not going to abandon you at all. Sometimes your best friend will abandon you for things like this and you do not even blame them, but God will not. God is still faithful to you when we are not faithful to Him. God will keep His promises.

Deal with iniquities in your family. Right now, as an adult, you can say, "I break all iniquities in my family line. It will not go down to my children and get out of me." There is a series on my website, www.bettyswann.com, called Walking Free from Your Past. One of them is about dealing with iniquities.

The seed is going to come up anyway, but eventually if you quit sowing the seed of deception and just tell the truth, all of those seeds will finally either die or come up and they are over with. Then only good seeds will come up in your life. Learn to deal with it. Right now just say, "God, I have been a deceiver. I am sorry. I do not want to be a deceiver. I want to be a truthful person. Help me God. Thank you God."

QUIET TIME QUESTIONS

1. What are the types of deception?
2. Why does human nature use deception?
3. What usually happens before deception is used?
4. When we are deceptive, how should we correct the problem?

To watch the video on DEALING WITH DECEPTIONS, Pillar Five, Relational Skills, go to www.bettyswann.com.

Permissions: Feel free to reproduce and distribute any articles written by Betty Swann, in part or in whole, in any format, provided that you do not alter the wording in any way or charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. It is our desire to spread this information, not protect or restrict it. Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: by Betty Swann, Betty Swann Ministries, P.O. Box 8882, Amarillo, TX 79114-8882, Amarillo, TX 79109, phone 806-433-4649, www.bettyswann.com, betty@bettyswann.com