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Negotiating Conflict Situations

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It came about when Abram came into Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. Pharaoh's officials saw her and praised her to Pharaoh; and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house (Genesis 12:14-15).

Abram was responsible for a large group of people and huge herds of livestock (in Genesis 14:14 we learn that there were 318 *trained men born in his house*). Since *the famine was severe in the land*, it would not help to go back up north into Canaan. He knew the Nile provided Egypt with the fertile Goshen Delta, irrigated crops, and therefore, food. So he went down to Egypt. We could say he should have just stayed in the land, but he already tried that, and his people and cattle were starving.

It's true that God told Abram to go *to the land which I will show you; And I will make you a great nation (12:1b-2a)*. Therefore, logically there was no way he [Abram] would die before he had children. So we could conclude that he should have trusted God. But the accusation that he didn't trust God goes to motive. And we should not try to judge motives (Proverbs 16:2; 1 Corinthians 4:5).

PT: Just because I make a self-preservation decision (like going to the doctor when I am sick or putting smoke detectors in my home) does not necessarily mean I'm not trusting God. How do we know Abram was thinking about or even understood God's covenant at all when he went to Egypt? It doesn't seem like he understood it later when he told God, *the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus (Genesis 15:2)*.

But going to Egypt created another problem, one that faced Abram anytime he encountered a group of people more numerous or more powerful than his. He had a stunningly beautiful wife. Ungodly people would very likely want to kidnap her, and kill him.

Also notice in the case of Pharaoh, Abram's plan did not put Sarah in jeopardy. If they faced that threat, she faced the same jeopardy either way. If pagans came and took her, the only difference would be whether they would kill Abram to get her. If Abram was killed, he could not negotiate for Sarah's wellbeing. Lot and the servants would be killed or taken as slaves. **But Abram's plan kept their options for the future open.** And Abram might have some bargaining room because they would likely negotiate with him for her. This would give him some time and leverage. Worst-case scenario, they would both still be alive.

Some say that Abram's idea put Sarah in danger of adultery. But, as we just demonstrated, that is not true because she was kidnapped and that is what put her in danger of adultery, and more that, it was not his intent to do that.

PT: If I slam on my brakes in traffic, I put the people behind me in a situation where they have to slam on their brakes. But my intent is to stop in time, not to put the people behind me in a dangerous situation. Even though I know that's what will happen, my intent is good not bad. But when Satan, or our sin nature, tempts us to sin, the intent is to get us to sin. The intent is bad not good. Abram's stated intent was good (*that I many live*) not bad.

It seems, therefore, that a good general ethical principle would be: **In conflict situations, choose the options that will result in good, as defined by God.**

Even though we cannot always know our motives, we can know what they should be. And our motives should always be to look at the situation and make the decision that, as far as we can tell, will result in the best good. And not what's "good" for me, or my family, but what's "good" according to the character of God, as revealed in the Word of God. God is good – all the time.

If you condemn Abram for what he did, keep in mind that God never did, at least Moses never said He did. In itself that's not all that significant because, although there is much judgment in Genesis, there are many patriarch sins recorded without comment from God. But Abram went away with a lot more stuff. It is too much to say he was rewarded, but he was certainly not punished for his decision.

