

Our Shield and Reward

Genesis 15:1, Psalm 84:11, Ephesians 6:16

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It's 3 AM. You lie awake. The house is silent except for the refrigerator's hum. Your mind races despite your exhaustion. Last week's victory feels empty. That promotion brought unexpected pressure.

The relationship you thought would complete you leaves you wondering if that is all there is. Your clean medical test should bring relief. Instead, you worry about what comes next.

These feelings are nothing new. Abraham faced these same feelings 4,000 years ago after he had just won one of history's most significant military victories.

Genesis 14 relates how Abraham led 318 men from his household to defeat four powerful kings in order to rescue his nephew Lot.

After this, kings bowed to him. Wealth was offered to him. He was the hero of the day.

Then night fell and fear crept in. Regardless of what Abraham felt, he wasn't alone. God appeared with words that echo through centuries. Words we should remember in our own times of worry and distress.

Genesis 15:1b, *"Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward."*

Today, we continue our journey through God's "I AM" revelations. The God who met Abraham in his midnight fears meets us in ours. God offers more than protection and provision. He offers Himself.

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Turn in your Bibles to Genesis 15. Notice that Genesis 15:1 begins with the phrase *"After this."*

Genesis 15:1, *"After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: 'Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.'"*

The question is: After what? After Abraham's military victory? After he refused the king of Sodom's offer of wealth? After he received a blessing from Melchizedek?

After all that you'd think Abraham would feel confident. Instead, God tells him, *"Do not be afraid."*

Why would God tell Abraham not to be afraid? Did Abraham fear retaliation from the defeated kings? Did he question his refusal of wealth from Sodom's king?

Abraham's response in Genesis 15:2-3 reveals his deepest fear: *"Sovereign LORD, what do you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus? You have given me no children. A servant in my household will be my heir."*

Abraham was promised to be the father of nations, but he still had no children. The victory parade had ended. He faced the same emptiness as before. His fear went beyond external enemies.

He feared unfulfilled promises, the ticking clock, the gap between what God said and what Abraham saw.

Abraham's experience reflects our humanity. Our greatest fears often come after battle, not during it. As our adrenaline fades and, as we sit alone with our thoughts, vulnerability sets in.

Peter walked on water in Matthew 14. He did the impossible; then he noticed the wind. He was experiencing a miracle, but fear crept in.

Elijah, in 1 Kings 19, fresh off his victory over Baal's prophets on Mount Carmel, ran in fear from Jezebel's threat and asked God to take his life. Victory and vulnerability walk together.

Answered prayers lead to responsibilities we question how to handle. Success frightens as much as failure because both reveal our deep need for someone beyond ourselves.

But God doesn't wait for Abraham to call out. Genesis 15:1a says, *"The word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision."* God took the initiative. He showed up uninvited but not unwelcome, unexpected but perfectly timed.

This pattern runs throughout Scripture. When Adam and Eve hide in fear after their sin, God walked in the garden, calling *"Where are you?"* (Genesis 3:9)

When disciples locked themselves in a room for fear of Jewish leaders, Jesus appears saying *"Peace be with you."* (John 20:19)

When Paul felt discouraged in Corinth, the Lord spoke to him in a night vision: *"Do not be afraid. Keep speaking."* (Acts 18:9)

God shows up in our fear, not because we earned it or asked for it, but because that defines who He is. Psalm 34:18 declares, *"The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."*

God doesn't wait for us to overcome our fears alone, He meets us in the darkness with comfort and revelation of Himself.

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Then, when God told Abraham, *"I am your shield,"* He used language a warrior understood. Abraham had just returned from battle. He knew a shield's value.

It meant the difference between life and death, victory and defeat. God isn't offering Abraham a better military strategy or stronger armor, He's offering Himself.

The Hebrew word used here refers to a small, round shield used in hand-to-hand combat for personal protection. God doesn't promise help from a distance. God says, *"I myself will stand between you and danger."*

David understood this. In Psalm 3:3, written while fleeing from his son Absalom, he declares, *"But you, LORD, are a shield around me, my glory, the One who lifts my head high."*

God provides complete protection, not just front coverage. Scripture shows this truth repeatedly:

- When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were thrown into the fiery furnace, God didn't prevent them from going in, but He was their shield in the flames. (Daniel 3)
- When Daniel was thrown into the lions' den, God didn't keep him out but shut the lions' mouths. (Daniel 6)
- When Paul was shipwrecked, bitten by a snake, imprisoned, and beaten, God was his shield by sustaining him through trials. (2 Corinthians 11:23-28)

God, as our shield, protects us from more than external enemies. He shields us from internal attacks that often do more damage: arrows of doubt, discouragement, and despair.

Paul addressed this in Ephesians 6:16: *"Take up the shield of faith, with which you extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one."*

These flaming arrows aren't only temptations to sin. They're accusations, lies, and doubts:

- "God has forgotten you"
- "You're not forgiven"
- "God won't come through this time"
- "You're on your own"

Abraham knew these arrows. For years, he heard whispers: *"Where's the son God promised? You misunderstood. God changed His mind. You're not good enough for God to keep His word."*

When God said, *"I am your shield,"* He protected Abraham from external threats and internal destruction.

Psalm 84:11 states, *"For the LORD God is a sun and shield. The LORD bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless."*

This shield God provides isn't passive, though. You must take it up, position yourselves behind it, and trust in its protection.

Faith isn't just believing God exists. Faith is entrusting ourselves to Him as our shield.

A soldier in battle needed to raise his shield to protect himself. He knows that its protective power doesn't help if you don't position yourself behind it.

Knowing God is a shield doesn't automatically protect us. We must actively trust Him, deliberately hide ourselves in Him, and consciously choose to believe His promises over our fears.

Abraham faced this choice. When God said *"I am your shield,"* Abraham could continue to focus on his childlessness and vulnerability, or trust in God's protection and promise.

Verse 6 tells us Abraham's response: *"Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness."*

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The second part of God's declaration to Abraham was even more astounding: *"I am... your very great reward."*

Some translations render this as *"your exceedingly great reward."* The Hebrew suggests abundance, overflow, more than enough.

Notice what God doesn't say. He doesn't say, *"I'll give you a great reward."* He says, *"I AM your great reward."*

This is the gospel's heart centuries before the cross: God Himself is our inheritance, our prize, our ultimate satisfaction.

Remember, Abraham had refused great wealth from Sodom's king. In Genesis 14:23, Abraham declared, *"I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the strap of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, 'I made Abram rich.'"*

Because Abraham refused earthly rewards, God responded by offering something infinitely greater: Himself.

This truth runs throughout Scripture. In Psalm 16:5, David exclaims, *"LORD, you alone are my portion and my cup. You make my lot secure."*

The Levites were told in Numbers 18:20, *"You will have no inheritance in their land, nor will you have any share among them. I am your share and your inheritance among the Israelites."*

We live in a world that is constantly telling us what we need in order to be happy: more money, better relationships, greater success, perfect health, or the right experiences.

We often come to God with our wish list, treating Him like a cosmic vending machine: Insert prayer, receive blessing.

What if we have this backwards? What if the blessings we seek are meant to point us to the Blesser?

What if the gifts are designed to lead us to the Giver? What if God knows that what we need, what our souls long for, isn't something from Him but Him?

C.S. Lewis captured this beautifully: *"God does not give us happiness and peace apart from Himself, because there is no such thing."*

Augustine discovered this truth after years of searching, finally declaring, *"You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you."*

Jesus addressed this in the Sermon on the Mount: *"Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."* (Matthew 6:33)

Yes, "things" matter, but they're secondary. The kingdom, God's rule and reign, His presence and person, that's primary.

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Then, when God Himself becomes our reward, our success gets redefined. Success becomes wanting the right everything, not having everything we want.

Success isn't getting all our prayers answered as we hope. Success is discovering that the One we're praying to is the answer we didn't know we needed.

Understanding this transforms our perspective. When we face financial challenges, we need to remember that our true wealth is in knowing the One who owns the cattle on a thousand hills. (Psalm 50:10)

When relationships disappoint, we need to find comfort in the Friend who sticks closer than a brother. (Proverbs 18:24)

When our health fails, we must cling to the promise of the One who's our eternal life. (John 11:25) When our plans fall apart, we need to rest in the One whose purposes are never thwarted. (Job 42:2)

This doesn't minimize our struggles or invalidate our genuine needs. Abraham still wanted a son, and God would give him one.

But God wanted Abraham to understand that even the promised son wasn't the ultimate prize. God Himself was. Paul discovered this truth through his journey of loss and gain.

In Philippians 3:7-8, he writes, *"Whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, so I gain Christ."*

Standing here in Genesis 15, we see a preview of the gospel. The God who declared Himself to be Abraham's shield and reward would ultimately demonstrate this through His Son.

Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of God's "I AM" declaration to Abraham. Jesus is our shield as He stands between us and the judgment we deserve. (Romans 8:1)

Jesus absorbed the wrath aimed at us. (1 John 2:2) He defeated the enemies we can never conquer: sin, death, and Satan. (1 Corinthians 15:55-57)

Jesus is our reward, because in Him we have every spiritual blessing. (Ephesians 1:3) He's our inheritance that never perishes, spoils, or fades. (1 Peter 1:4) To know Jesus is eternal life. (John 17:3)

When Jesus said in John's Gospel, "*I am the good shepherd*," (John 10:11) "*I am the bread of life*," (John 6:35) and "*I am the way, the truth, and the life*," (John 14:6) He was continuing the revelation that began with Abraham.

God Himself, now incarnate in Christ, is our everything.

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So, the question confronting us today is the same one that confronted Abraham 4,000 years ago:

Is God enough for us... When the test results aren't what you hoped...; When the relationship doesn't work out...; When the job disappears...; When the children rebel...; When the dreams die...; When you've done everything right, and still, things go wrong....

Or flip the question. Is God enough...? When everything goes right...; When you get the promotion...; When the relationship flourishes...; When your health is perfect...; When your kids excel...; or When your dreams come true...

Is God still your most significant reward, or have the blessings become your god? Abraham wrestled with this question in the darkness of his tent.

After years of waiting, he would eventually hold his promised son Isaac. Then God would test him again, asking him to sacrifice Isaac on an altar.

Why? Because God wanted to know, and wanted Abraham to know, whether Isaac had become his reward or whether God remained his ultimate prize.

The beautiful truth: when we hold God as our greatest reward, we hold everything else with open hands.

We enjoy His blessings without being enslaved by them. We endure losses without being destroyed by them.

Our shield and reward isn't something that can be taken away. He is Someone who promises never to leave us or forsake us. (Hebrews 13:5)

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Conclusion

Today, some of you are in your own Genesis 15:1 moment. The victories feel hollow. The fears feel overwhelming. The promises seem distant.

God's word to you is the same as to Abraham: *"Do not be afraid. I am your shield, your very great reward."*

This isn't empty religious talk. This is the living God offering Himself to you. Not His help, but Himself. Not His gifts, but His presence. Not answers to your prayers, but intimacy with the One who hears them.

Don't try harder or overcome your fears through positive thinking or self-help strategies. Believe. Take God at His word. Trust Him as your shield. Receive Him as your reward.

Stop trying to find your security in what you control; find it in the One who controls all things? Stop seeking satisfaction in temporary rewards and find it in the eternal God who offers Himself to you?

In Christ, God has given us Himself. He's our shield who stands between us and death. He's our reward who satisfies our deepest longings.

The God who met Abraham in his midnight fears meets us in ours today. He doesn't offer us a religious system or a self-improvement plan. He offers us Himself.

The testimony of everyone who has truly encountered Him is the same: He is enough. More than enough. Exceedingly, abundantly, infinitely enough.

So, is God enough for you? The answer to that question changes everything.