

1. Abraham: The Man of Faith

Abraham's Growing Faith Series

Genesis 12

Warm-up Question: What was leaving home like for you as a young man or woman? Were there any tears or were you joyfully sent on your way?

Read Genesis 12:1-9.

¹The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. ²"I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." ⁴So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran. ⁵He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there. ⁶Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. ⁷The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him. ⁸From 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. ⁹Then Abram set out and continued toward the Negev (Genesis 12:1-9).

Going Where We Do Not Know

We often don't stop to think of what it cost Abram to leave Mesopotamia. Of course, we know the whole story from beginning to end of how God led him and made a great nation from his posterity. In this series, we will follow the story of how God called him and transformed his character to be a man of faith. Abram, however, had to walk this story out step by step. When you are living the story, it is different. Abram did not have the benefit of knowing what the end would be when he was called to take the first step. He was embarking on this journey, leaving behind all he knew, for the unknown. He was called to leave his country, his relatives, his father's house and with it, the inheritance that he would have gained from staying. One would worry about the language barrier that may await him in unfamiliar territory, and what about provisions for such a journey? Would he have enough money for a trip of this magnitude? What if he encountered thieves and robbed on the way? It is essential to understand that God was asking Abram to take a risk. This move was a journey of faith. Faith is spelled R.I.S.K. It is still the same today. Faith is never a comfortable "walk in the park."

In Acts 7:2 we read that the time Moses wrote about Abram's departure in the book of Genesis it was the second time God had told him to leave. The first time God spoke to him happened sometime before he lived in Harran when he was living in Ur, a city in Chaldea:

¹Then the high priest asked Stephen, "Are these charges true?" ²To this he replied:

"Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia **before he lived in Harran**.³ 'Leave your country and your people,' God said, 'and **go to the land I will show you**.'⁴ "So **he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Harran**. After the death of his father, God sent him to this land where you are now living.⁵ He gave him no inheritance here, not even enough ground to set his foot on. But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land, though at that time Abraham had no child. 'God spoke to him in this way: 'For four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated. 'But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves,' God said, 'and afterward they will come out of that country and worship me in this place' (Acts 7:1-7).

Think of what the move was like for Sarai, his wife, to leave all the security of family and friends, and live in a tent. The Scriptures tell us that when Abram and Sarai left, they did not know where they were going:

⁸By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though **he did not know where he was going**.⁹ By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God (Hebrews 11:8-10).

How do you think Abram broke the news to Sarai? Somehow, he had to explain to her that he had heard from God and that they were to uproot from their city and go live in a tent in a different land. Don't you think Sarai asked Abram where they were going? At that point, Abram could not even tell her where they were going! We do not know if Sarai had any resistance to the move. If she wanted to know all the practicalities, and I am sure she did, the impracticality of a move was not a barrier to her. They were merely to uproot themselves and get on the road. God would lead them only as they acted in faith on what God had said.

In the passage above, Hebrews 11:8-10, Scripture tells us that Abram's motivation was a vision of eternal things—the eternal city and God's reward.

Share a time when you had to make a significant change in your life's path. Was there a cost and a reward for it? What battles did you have in your mind when you took that step?

At the age of 27, after walking with the Lord for four years, God called me to leave a very lucrative job working as a commercial fisherman with my father. It was a difficult decision for I knew of nothing else to do. At that point in my life, I had only known the sea. I had no practical knowledge of what I would do. I had never worked a day in an office or even on the shore. I just knew that if I continued spending days at sea on a cold, wet fishing boat, rocking and rolling on the North Sea fishing grounds, I would never fulfil the vision God had called me to. Eternal things had gripped my heart and spending most of my life on a fishing boat was not what I wanted any more. I felt that God wanted me to invest my time in other things like learning the Word of God and investing in people. I had a vision for my life to count for something but was

not sure where to start. I didn't want to come to the end of my life and have regrets that I did not follow the path God had for me. Eternal things were before Abram as they are before each of us, too! So, what did I do from that point? I invested my time and energy in a small house church that started in our living room with five people, while I washed windows for a living. I never considered that I would one day be a pastor and write Bible studies. I did not know where my journey would take me, my early goal was just to be used of God to help people know Christ. To go from commercial fishing, a job which I had always known, to cleaning windows was humbling and difficult. It meant going up and down a ladder, day after day, and for far less money, but it gave me more time to do what I was called to do, evangelism and discipling people. During that time, I did some odd jobs but considered house church planting as my primary role. It was a journey, and it still is. The important thing is to know the next step for you, whatever that may be.

Large Picture Vision

When God initially spoke of the step of faith He required of Abram, He gave large brush strokes on the canvas of the vision. The initial call in Ur of the Chaldeans was to get up and leave the area that is now South East Iraq. They traveled northwest following the Euphrates river until they came to Harran, a city in Northwest Mesopotamia, now Iraq. The distance to Harran was about 2000 miles. We don't know how long they stopped in Harran, but this was where Abram's father Terah, died. Abram was seventy-five years old when God spoke to him to leave Harran and go the 800 miles further to the land He would show him. Imagine being seventy-five years old and God talking to you to leave the comfort of Harran to go to Canaan. Most of us want the comforts of home at that age.

It is natural for us to want to know the details of the vision before we take the first step, but that is not the way God leads. If God would show you the end at the beginning, you may not be ready for it, or it may scare you, causing you to drift along the path rather than being propelled by faith. God gives us just enough vision to move us forward. You can never steer a boat when it is drifting. It is only as a boat travels through water that a small rudder can guide the vessel. Begin to step out in faith and allow God to operate the steering mechanism of your life. Remember Psalm 119:

Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path (Psalm 119:105).

Where does the Lord shine His light? He shines the light of revelation, His Word, on where the next step is, at the feet. We don't see far ahead, just the next step. We have to trust Him to take us in His direction.

Only when Abram arrived in Canaan did God give more specifics concerning the future (Genesis 12:7), specifically that to his offspring God would give the land on which Abram was walking. The Lord said that He would make a great nation from Abram's seed and that He would bless him and make his name great, and that those who bless him and his descendants, will be blessed in return. Those who curse his descendants will themselves be cursed of God. We should be careful about our attitude towards the Jewish people group for the Lord says that He, **"has sent me against the nations that have plundered you—for whoever touches you touches the apple of**

his eye” (Zechariah 2:8). We might not agree with all the policies of the government of Israel, but the people of Israel and the seed of Abraham are precious to God. His Word is eternal, and He watches over His Word to perform it (Jeremiah 1:12).

Can you look back and see how God has grown your faith step by step? Share some specific thing you are doing now which you never dreamed of doing in your younger years.

Read Genesis 12:10-20.

¹⁰Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to live there for a while because the famine was severe. ¹¹As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, “I know what a beautiful woman you are. ¹²When the Egyptians see you, they will say, ‘This is his wife.’ Then they will kill me but will let you live. ¹³Say you are my sister, so that I will be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you.” ¹⁴When Abram came to Egypt, the Egyptians saw that Sarai was a very beautiful woman. ¹⁵And when Pharaoh’s officials saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh, and she was taken into his palace. ¹⁶He treated Abram well for her sake, and Abram acquired sheep and cattle, male and female donkeys, male and female servants, and camels. ¹⁷But the LORD inflicted serious diseases on Pharaoh and his household because of Abram’s wife Sarai. ¹⁸So Pharaoh summoned Abram. “What have you done to me?” he said. “Why didn’t you tell me she was your wife? ¹⁹Why did you say, ‘She is my sister,’ so that I took her to be my wife? Now then, here is your wife. Take her and go!” ²⁰Then Pharaoh gave orders about Abram to his men, and they sent him on his way, with his wife and everything he had (Genesis 12:10-20).

Leaning on Egypt

Egypt is a picture of a man leaning on the arm of flesh rather than the power of God. Egypt was watered not by the rain or dew, but by the pumping up of the water with the foot pump. The River Nile was the main source of water for the Egyptians, but to get the water to the fields required a man to pump it up with their feet. “The land you are entering to take over is not like the land of Egypt, from which you have come, where you planted your seed and irrigated it by foot as in a vegetable garden” (Deuteronomy 11:10). God never spoke to Abram to go down to Egypt. He was just like us; we often resort to the arm of flesh rather than take the time to seek God for His guidance. Fear moves us—the “what if” syndrome. Israel has had a history of turning to Egypt for help instead of going to God.

²who go down to Egypt without consulting me; who look for help to Pharaoh’s protection, to Egypt’s shade for refuge. ³But Pharaoh’s protection will be to your shame, Egypt’s shade will bring you disgrace (Isaiah 30:2-3).

What challenge is there to the faith of Abram? What fear rears its head?

More than likely there was a fear of death for Sarai’s sake. He had seen the looks that men gave to Sarai when they thought Abram wasn’t looking. Perhaps he felt insecure in this new culture of

Egypt. Insecurity will breed actions whereby a man will trust in his resources rather than the provision of God.

There was ten years' difference between Abram and Sarai, so Sarai was sixty-five years old by the time they sought refuge from the famine in Egypt. She must have been quite a beautiful woman. Life expectancy two thousand years before Christ was about double what they are in the 21st century. So it would seem likely that Sarai was in her early thirties. Abram made an agreement with Sarai to call him her brother. Abram is Sarai's half-brother, so it is a deception he relies on, something that is not God's way. Since Sarai's father was no longer around, any suitors to obtain the hand of Sarai's in marriage would have to negotiate with Abram, her brother. The universal custom of the day was for the brother to assume legal guardianship in arranging marriage on Sarai's behalf. This proper protocol would give them time to slip away before Sarai would have to become anyone's wife. Abram's deception and mistakes should encourage us much because we see that even those who have great faith can slip up occasionally, and the Bible never glosses over sins of the flesh by the Lord's heroes. We see Abram not only going to Egypt but also deceiving the people there for his self-protection. On what promise should Abram have rested? God had spoken that he would become a great nation—without his wife, this could not happen. The promises of God require us to hold on in faith and persevere over difficulties.

Have you ever been disillusioned by a man of God? Have you been able to forgive and go on? What was the lesson you gained from experience?

Perhaps Abram did not realize that Pharaoh would pursue Sarai. How it happened, we do not know, but the text tells us that she was taken into Pharaoh's household (Genesis 12:15). Now what, Abram? How are you going to get out of this mess? All of a sudden Abram is inundated with all kinds of financial blessings of the time, sheep, oxen, donkeys, camels, and male and female servants. We don't read of any complaint from Abram at Sarai's entrance into Pharaoh's court. God steps in and afflicts Pharaoh's household with serious diseases. Somehow the secret was out, and Abram was severely scolded and shamed for his faithless act. How embarrassed he must have felt as he was told to leave with his head held low.

This failure to live by faith in God is a reminder of the fact that even when we fail to act in faith, God has a plan. There is never a dead end when we submit our life to the Lord. He will always provide a way for us to respond and act in faith. If you have made mistakes in your life and feel that you have lost your way or made a wrong turn in your life, it is crucial for you to know that God is not finished with your story! Submit your way to the Lord and ask Him to give you the next step in your journey. Are you ready to trust Him?

Prayer: Father, thank you for your grace. It humbles us to know that even great men of God have failed and made mistakes, yet you picked them up, dusted them off, and helped them to start walking again. We are amazed at you, Father. Help us to learn to walk by faith. Amen!

Keith Thomas

Email: keiththomas@groupbiblestudy.com

Website: www.groupbiblestudy.com