
The Call, Life and Faith of Abraham Part 3

Abraham's Faith Grows through Obedience and Praise

Genesis 13

Have you ever been called out by God? Have you ever been challenged by God to set your thoughts and feelings aside about what is happening in front of you and not make any choices but to allow God to make the choice for you?

I am sure you have. There have probably been many times that God has come along in your life and asked you to step back, don't move, don't say anything but stand there and allow Him to make the choice for you.

How did you do? That is the question isn't it? Did you remain still and quiet before the Lord? If so, this is called faith. You didn't know what the outcome was going to be but you did not manipulate things in your favor. Not only this but you were prepared to handle whatever choice God has for you even if it didn't make sense.

Today we are going to see how Abraham dealt with such an opportunity for His faith in God to be tested and to be stretched.

If you remember, God called Abraham out of the land of his birth. After hesitating for a few years Abraham followed God's call upon his life. We read about this in **Hebrews 11:8, "By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going."**

A couple of the things we have learned over the last couple of weeks is that Abraham heard God's voice and he was obedient to it. This is one of wonderful things that occurs in our life. God speaks and then we have the opportunity to be obedient in what He is calling us to do.

As Christians, sometimes we need to be reminded of the basics, like, sometimes it is hard to hear the voice of God isn't it? Sometimes it is hard to have faith in God. This is true even if we have developed ears to hear God voice. The truth of the matter is the noise of the world is clanging so loud that it drowns out the voice of God. So the question is, now that we have developed ears to hear God how do we stay tuned in?

Abraham's life was a lot different than ours. I doubt that Abraham could read and even if he could read there probably wasn't any written material for him to read. When Abraham heard from God it was directly from God either in a voice he could hear, wouldn't that be cool? Or a vision, dream or some other way. Throughout the story of Abraham we read that God appeared and God spoke. In the Bible we see God communicating to people in a number of different ways don't we?

But we have the great advantage that we can hear from God through His written word. Not only may God speak to us in an audible voice, a vision or dream but **Hebrews 10:17** tells us, “...**faith comes from hearing and hearing from the word of God.**”

As we spend time in God's word our ears are sharpened to His voice and one of the great promises of God is, God's word, oral or written, what comes out of the mouth of God will not return void but it will accomplish what He desires it to do.

1. As we spend time with God in His word then God uses this time to sharpen our ears to His voice

The second thing we have learned through the life of Abraham is that when Abraham was obedient to what God asked him to do, go on a journey with him to somewhere he didn't know, God became more active in his life. And as Abraham saw God working in His life then his faith in God grew.

2. When we are **obedient** to the voice of God, God becomes more active in our lives and our faith in God grows

This morning we will see a situation where Abraham's faith was tested. He was challenged to step back and allow God to do what only God could do. Let's see what happened.

In chapter 12 we read that after building an altar to the Lord. After calling upon the name of the Lord, after hearing the voice of God, Abraham falls greatly. His faith in God is tested in Egypt and he fails.

He fears the Egyptians because of the beauty of his wife Sarah so he tells them that she is his sister. As I said a few weeks ago, at this point Abraham is not thinking about how God will protect him. He is not thinking about the welfare of Sarah. All Abraham can think of is how he can protect himself.

And even in the messiness of this mistake, God in His great grace and mercy, protects Abraham and Sarah. God not only protects them He even moves upon the Pharaoh to give Abraham gifts of sheep, oxen, donkeys and servants. The grace of God seen in this story is truly amazing.

After all of this occurs then God leads Abraham out of Egypt and this is where we pick up this morning. Look with me.

Genesis 13:1-4, "So Abraham went up from Egypt to the Negev, he and his wife and all that belonged to him, and Lot with him. Now Abraham was very rich in livestock, in silver and in gold. He went on his journeys from the Negev as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, to the place of the altar which he had made there formerly; and there Abraham called on the name of the Lord."

Here we read that Abraham shook off the mistake he made. He returned back to the place where he built an altar and he sought out the Lord and I suspect, asked for forgiveness and then moved on in his relationship with God.

This is important for us to understand because guess what? You are going to mess up like Abraham but in your own way. There are going to be times when, in a moment of weakness, all you care about is yourself.

You make a decision to do something and you put God aside, you maybe even put the feelings of someone else aside. In a selfish moment you err, you sin. But it is not the end of the world. Yes, God wants you to be without sin. Yes, God wants you to be obedient but when you aren't thank God, literally thank God, you can claim the blood of Jesus. You can ask for forgiveness, put it behind you and like Abraham move forward.

Paul said in his letter to the **Philippians 3:13**, “...but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind, and reaching forward to what lies ahead...”

Paul knew struggles, he knew what it was like to fall. But he also knew what it was like to be forgiven and to move ahead. Satan would have you stay groveling in your failures and not moving ahead with Christ. But this is not what God wants for you. It is His desire that you pick yourself up, ask for forgiveness by the power of Jesus' blood, learn from your mistake and move forward.

This is what we see Abraham doing. After falling, failing God in Egypt Abraham didn't shy away from God but he went back to the place where he met with God, where he had built an altar and worshipped God, between Bethel and Ai. And there he began to call upon the name of the Lord.

I believe not only was Abraham seeking forgiveness but he was just plain out worshipping God.

At this point Abraham had heard from God twice. He had built two altars and worshipped God. He had fallen and seen God forgive and protect him, even bless him then deliver him from Egypt and the powers that could have killed him.

Abraham's faith in God is growing and he begins to worship Him. That really is what building an altar is all about. It is kind of like building a church building like this. Building a special place where you can meet God and worship and honor him.

I really, really think at this point Abraham's faith in God is growing. When I say faith in God I mean that Abraham is coming to the place where he can let go and let God. He doesn't need to make decisions about his life. He is able to lay it out before the Lord, step back and let Him make the decisions.

Look with me at what happens in his life next.

Genesis 13:5-11, “⁵ Now Lot, who was moving about with *Abraham*, also had flocks and herds and tents. ⁶ But the land could not support them while they stayed together, for their possessions were so great that they were not able to stay together. ⁷ And quarreling arose between *Abraham*'s herders and Lot's...

⁸ So *Abraham* said to Lot, “Let's not have any quarreling between you and me, or between your herders and mine, for we are close relatives. ⁹ Is not the whole land before you? Let's part company. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left. ¹⁰ Lot looked around and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan toward Zoar was well watered, like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt...”

Do you see what just happened here? Did you see how Abraham handled himself in the midst of temptation? By all rights Abraham could have told his nephew, I will take the right while you take the left and Lot would have anything to argue about. After all, Abraham was the patriarch, the leader of this group and he had God's blessing on him.

Abraham could have justified his right to make the decision that he thought would provide him and his family the best opportunity. He could have gathered people around who would council him to take the better land. After, the decision that Lot would make would have a big impact upon his future and the future of his family.

Now, I'm going to read a bit between the lines here but I believe Abraham left the final decision up to the Lord. I believe that he stepped back, prayed about what to do, set aside his thoughts and feelings about what was happening in front of him and allowed God through Lot to make the choice for him.

So either you know or you can guess what happened.

Genesis 13:10-11, "Lot looked around and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan toward Zoar was well watered, like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt... ¹¹ So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east."

Of course Lot choose for himself the better land. Of course Lot was looking out for number one. I might speak in the future about Lot but for now, let's stay with Abraham and his great character and faith in God.

Once Lot choose the better land and said to his uncle, too bad, you are stuck with the desert, Abraham could have gotten bitter, upset with that young upstart who, when given the opportunity to shine, to make a decision to serve his uncle who had provided for him, protected him and was probably the reason Lot was wealthy.

Once Lot made that choice that was going to possibly negatively affect the future of his family, Abraham could have gotten upset, even bitter towards his nephew but look what happened.

Verse 11, 14...they separated from each other. The Lord said to Abraham after Lot had separated from him, “Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward, southward, eastward and westward; for the land which you see I will give it to your descendants forever.”

My point is, it doesn't matter what plans man makes. It doesn't matter that it seems like things are not going your way at the moment. It doesn't matter that it seems like someone else is in control of your life. All that doesn't matter.

What does matter though is:

- 3. Are you soft and pliable in the hands of the Lord? Are there times when God wants to provide for you way beyond what you can imagine but you keep getting in the way?**

Not only did God provide all the land west of where Abraham and Lot were, God said because of who you are and the blessing I have upon your life, I am going to provide for you all the land. Lot's and yours. Abraham was content with half the land, the worst half, but God stepped in and said, nope, that is not what is going to happen. You are going to get it all.

Now, I don't know how specifically God is going to work this out in your life. I don't know what is going on but I do believe this.

Because Abraham was faithful and obedient to the Lord, because he worshipped God consistently and intentionally by building altars, because Abraham was willing to step back in the situations of life and allow God to make choices for him, God provided.

Ephesians 3:20-21 “²⁰Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.”

God wants to provide for you but all He asks is that you exhibit some faith in His choices for your life.

4. How was Abraham able to exhibit such great faith? I believe it was because he was in a constant state of worshipping God.

In closing look at a passage with me.

Psalm 113:1-3, “Praise the Lord! Praise O Servants of the Lord, Praise the name of the Lord. Blessed be the name of the Lord from this time forth and forever. From the rising of the sun to its setting, the name of the Lord is to be praised.”

For us today, us who live our lives in a world full of noise and confusion, it takes some very intentional and consistent worshipping of God to keep us soft and sensitive to the Lord.

We were talking about this at the men’s breakfast yesterday. How can we, in a world that is busy and noisy, how can we be intentional about worshipping God throughout the day?

Ask God to provide a trigger. Something that prompts you to stop and give Him praise. One of the guys said it was when three numbers in a row appeared. Like 111, or 222, 333 and so on.

For me, one of my life verses in Matthew 6:33, “Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be given to you.”

If you were to follow me around you would be surprised how often the number 633 would pop up. And every time it does I believe it is a hug from God and it reminds me to worship Him.

I believe that:

5. If you ask God for a trigger, the Holy Spirit will provide a special one for you

In fact I know He will because it is His desire to have you worship Him, to have faith in Him and to provide for you beyond what you can ask or imagine. Even if you mess up as Abraham did, God would have you come to Him, ask forgiveness, move on and continue to worship Him.

It is God's great desire that you succeed in growing in your faith in Him.

Let's pray