
The Call, Life and Faith of Abraham Part 5

Faith Growing through Failure

Genesis 15-22

How many of you remember what it was like to ride on a roller coaster? It has been many years since I have been on one but I used to love riding them. One year, when I was at an amusement park in Kansas City, there were not very many people there and the person I was with, when the ride was over we used to run around, get back in line and ride in every spot on the roller coaster. The front, back and in the middle. The front was definitely the most exciting place to ride.

I remember the thrill of reaching the top of the tracks and then the bottom would drop out, plunging you into the depths of the roller coaster with great speed.

While roller coasters are great fun, to go through life like you are riding a roller coaster is not. Great highs and great lows.

Sometimes that's the way it seems to go in life doesn't it? Something great and wonderful happens, maybe you are in tune with God, you hear His voice, feel His presence, see His hand on your life blessing you and then the next stage in life you are plummeting in your faith. You failed yet again. You mis-spoke, got angry, fell into sin and the cycle of obedience, failure, seeking forgiveness, obedience once again only to fail once again.

Will the cycle ever end? Will this journey of faith in God come to the place where failing is less frequent and less severe? The answer is yes and no.

Our Christian walk, our growth in Christ-likeness is kind of like this chart I designed. **Markoe – would you put the attached chart in the PowerPoint please.**

When we start off with Christ we are here, at the bottom of the growth chart on the left. We come into a saving relationship with Christ and we experience some great growth in our understanding, faith and obedience. We don't know much but we are in love with Christ and we are eating up everything we can get our hands on.

Not long after this something comes crashing into your world and you fail miserably. But you seek the Lord, ask forgiveness, learn from your mistake, keep worshipping and seeking the Lord and you still experience growth in your faith and in your relationship with Him.

As you can see from this chart I believe this is the way our Christian growth occurs. I wish I could tell you that we become super Christians real fast but the reality of our walk with the Lord is it is a marathon, not a sprint. It continues on our whole life but if we are staying in tune and worshipping God there will be failures but hopefully they won't be as severe. And our growth is always an upward movement as we grow in the knowledge and faith Jesus and His ways and stay in worship with Him.

This is one of the biggest lessons I have learned from studying the life of Abraham.

1. Our growth in faith and obedience is a journey as we continue in a mode of worship

We see it plainly played out in the life of Abraham.

We pick up our story of Abraham in chapter 15. With God's help he won a great battle and rescued his nephew Lot. He has been blessed by the king of Salem, Melchizedek. He worshipped God by tithing a tenth of all he had.

Let's pick in **Genesis 15:1**, “**After these things the word of the Lord came to Abraham in a vision, saying, ‘Do not fear Abraham, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great.’**”

After all God has done for Abraham, after giving him a great win in battle, after being blessed by a priest of the Most High God, after hearing from God in a vision, Abraham's faith in God has grown some anyway but it hasn't grown to the place where he was no longer questioning God. Look with me.

Genesis 15:2-3, “**Abraham said, ‘O Lord God, what will You give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?’ And Abraham said, ‘Since You have given me no offspring to me, one born in my house (Eliezer) is my heir.’**”

By this time Abraham has been walking with God for six or seven years. Not that long really. But he begins to question God's plan for his life. Since I am still childless let Eliezer, my faithful servant be my heir.

I wonder if this is ever been true of your life? I wonder if you

2. Have you ever **questioned** God's plan for your life?

You don't see anything happening or maybe you question if you have even heard from God. I think like Abraham maybe, as time goes by in our Christian life and nothing big is happening we might begin to wonder if we are on the right path. It is not enough for us to be faithful in our worship, faithful in our tithes and offerings, faithful in growing in love. We lose patience and we might, like Abraham begin to make moves on our own.

Your plan is not working God, let Eliezer my servant be my heir. Or even something even more dramatic. Look at chapter 16.

Genesis 16:1-2, 4 “Now Sarai, *Abraham’s* wife had borne him no children, and she had an Egyptian maid whose name was Hagar. So Sarai said to *Abraham*, ‘now behold, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children. Please go in to my maid; perhaps I will obtain children through her. And *Abraham* listened to the voice of Sarai. He went in to Hagar, and she conceived...”

Sarai’s patience and belief in God had run out and apparently Abraham’s did as well. Even though by this time God has reassured Abraham that He had a plan, it apparently wasn’t in Abraham’s timing. It just wasn’t happening. So what did they do? They tried to force things to happen didn’t they?

Abraham and Saria were past the time in their life where they could birth children so they had given up waiting upon God. But once they took matters into their own hands, they not only failed God but they brought long lasting consequences into the world. Ismael was born and from him arose Israel’s permanent enemy during biblical times and up to this day. Muslim’s trace their line through Mohammad all the way back to Ismael, the son of Abraham and Sarai’s maid, Hagar.

How about you?

3. Have you ever tried to make things happen that were not of God?

Either you did not consult Him or you did not have the patience for His plan to develop. Both can bring trouble in our lives can’t it?

This is where we fail on our growth chart. We see something we want to happen and instead of asking God about it, instead of waiting on Him for His plan to develop, we try making it happen for ourselves. But it never works out does it?

But here is the deal we can take to heart. Even when we are not faithful God is. Yes, at times our life and spiritual walk may be on a roller coaster ride with its ups and downs but God is faithful. He is consistent in His love for us. He is patient, knowing we will, in this life have trouble because it is tough.

But remember what Paul said about this? **Philippians 1:6, “being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”**

The journey you are on, the journey Abraham was on, was just that, a journey. A journey of growth, of journey of ups and downs, a journey of Faith and trust building on God.

Back to Abraham.

After birthing Ismael, an illegitimate child in God’s eyes, God once again appears to Abraham and reaffirms that Abraham will bear a son with Sarai and this son will be the blessed son and from him a nation will be born.

In the midst of this conversation in chapter 17, Abraham says the following.

Genesis 17:17-18, “Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, ‘Will a child be born to a man one hundred years old? And will Sarah, who is ninety years old bear a child?’ And Abraham said to God, ‘Oh that Ismael might live before You!’”

Abraham is in essence, saying, I have already birthed this child. It is happened, why don’t you bless him. Read God’s response with me.

Verse 19, “But God said, ‘No, but Sarah your wife will bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him.’”

God had a plan and it was not going to change no matter what Abraham was doing.

Two things I see here. First, Abraham came up with his own plan and asked God to bless it. Have you ever done that? I know I have. I see something that needs to be done, or at least I believe it needs to be done. I decide the timing of it, launch it and then ask God to bless my plan. Kind of backwards wouldn't you say?

Second thing I see is that God allowed Abraham to run to the end of himself. Abraham did all he could to fulfill God's plan for his life but he ran out of options. His only choice was for him to wait upon God's timing.

Sometimes I think this is what God allows us to go through. We strive to come up with a solution, we make moves, try different things and then we finally run out of options we turn to God.

What is amazing about this is the patience of God. It is like He is sitting back watching us wiggle and squirm about, making all kinds of moves but to no avail. He is just waiting patiently for us to come to the end of ourselves and turn to Him. And when we do, He doesn't hold any grudge ill will towards, He is just happy that we did finally come to Him to allow Him to serve us.

What an amazing God we serve amen?

Abraham moves on. In the midst of the conversation with God, God gives him the rite of circumcision. An odd thing really but it is a mark of a covenant, binding agreement that God has made with those who avail themselves to it.

Abraham, although he has been a bit of a rebel, agrees and goes through the circumcision himself and all who are in his household, his servants, all who are under him. He is obedient in this way, showing he is growing in his faith in God.

In chapters 18-19 you can read about the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. God interacts with Abraham about it and with his nephew Lot who is living in Sodom. Lot and his family is saved from the destruction although Lot's wife, as they were escaping, she looks back and because of this turns into a pillar of salt. It is an interesting read and I would recommend spending some time reading and contemplating about what occurred.

Read with me now Verses 27-29 of chapter 19.

Genesis 19:27-29, "Now Abraham arose early in the morning and went to the place where he had stood before the Lord; and he looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the valley, and he saw, and behold, the smoke of the land ascended like the smoke of a furnace. This it came about, when God destroyed the cities of the valley, that God remembered Abraham..."

If you have read this story you know that prior to the destruction of these cities, God said the following. **18:17, "...Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?"**

God told Abraham that the outcry of wickedness was so great that He heard it in heaven so He had dispatched some angels to check it out. Abraham knew what was going to happen when they saw the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah so he pleaded for the lives of the righteous people who lived there. Abraham knew what God was going to do and then saw it happen.

I believe this is important to know because He wanted Abraham to see Him in action. I believe this is true in our lives as well.

4. God wants us to see Him and what He is doing in our lives and in the world

He wants us to see Him and His love, His faithfulness, His patience because He knows if we see these Him in this way it will build our faith to the place where we can fully trust Him.

If we stay in a worshipful mode with God, if we strive to be obedient, if we fail, fall down, ask forgiveness, keep our eyes on the Lord. Keep worshipping Him, in time our falls will be less severe and less frequent. Our faith and trust in God will grow to the place that when God asks us to do even the hardest of things we will be ready.

This is true in Abraham's life and I know it will be true in yours as well.

Abraham did fall once again claiming his wife to be his sister. God not only protected Sarah and Abraham once again from Abraham's failure but even blessed him in the process.

Then comes of the birth of the promised son, Isaac. At one hundred years of age Abraham and Sarah who is ninety, give birth to Isaac.

About 15 years later comes the story we all hear about concerning Abraham. God calls on him to take this promised son and sacrifice him. In story we read Abraham at this point does not hesitate. His faith has grown strong enough in the Lord that he packs up what he needs including Isaac and sets off the place God directs him to.

In a couple of different places we hear Abraham's faith.

22:5, "Abraham said to his your men, 'Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go over there; and we will worship and return to you.'"

Even though he knows what God expects of him, he has heard the promise of God, he trusts God and knows somehow God will work it out that Isaac will remain safe.

Look with me what Paul said about Abraham. **Hebrews 11:17, "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; it was he to whom it was said, 'In Isaac your descendants shall be called.' He (Abraham) considered that God is able to raise people from the dead."**

In Abraham's heart he trusted God. He trusted Him with his son and with the promises God had made him so many years ago. Of course we know that God did not require Abraham to sacrifice Isaac.

After God stayed the hand of Abraham He cried out, now I know what is in your heart. I heard it said that God said this so that it was affirmed in Abrahams heart. God knew and Abraham now knew what was in heart. Talk about a faith builder.

But this faith of Abraham didn't come over night or it didn't come easy did it? There was a lot of stops and starts. A lot of failures and a lot of opportunities when Abraham did the right thing.

The same is true in your life as God develops your faith.

There will be a lot of stops and starts, failures and great victories but keep moving ahead. That is what God wants you to do.

Be obedient, do what is right in front of you. If God gives you a teaching, don't move on until it is in your heart not just your mind. Stay with it until it changes you. Stay worshipful in all the ways that you can. Hang out at church, get involved in a ministry, stay faithful with your tithes and offerings and time in God's word.

I believe that if we do these things, the journey God will take you on will be tremendous. Will there be hills and valleys in your faith walk? You bet. Will you fail, yes but get up, ask forgiveness and get back to the business of worshipping God.

Moses said this to Israel and as his children it is true of us as well.

Deuteronomy 31:8, "The Lord is the one who goes ahead of you; He will be with you. He will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear of be dismayed."

We see this was true in Abraham's life and God is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. He will never leave you or forsake you but will always be at work in you and through you in the good times as well as your failures.

Amen?

One more note to Abraham's life. After Sarah died, Abraham fathered 5 more boys through his concubine.

Blessing upon blessing for Abraham. Did he deserve to be blessed in so many ways? Not at all, it wasn't about what he deserved it was about who God is.

The same is true for your life. Praise God!