

## GENESIS 12-22

### LEARNING TO WALK WITH GOD THROUGH ABRAHAM'S EXAMPLE

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*"What does Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness'" (Romans 4:3). Let's begin our study of the life of Abraham by unpacking that verse from the Bible.*

Is this verse saying that simply believing God makes us righteous? No. Let's look at what James 2:19 has to say about that question: *"You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder"*. What Paul meant is that God, by His grace alone, imparted His righteousness to Abraham in response to the man's true faith.

In the same vein, God imparts justification and salvation to us through Christ in response to our faith and repentance. Man cannot, by his own actions, do anything to make himself righteous, holy, justified, or to earn his own salvation. These are gifts of God's mercy when we choose to believe on Jesus Christ whom God sent to us.

Man is perpetually sinful. With the exception of Jesus Christ (who lived a perfect life during His incarnation), even the greatest heroes of the Bible still occasionally fall short of God's standards. Moses lost his temper with the Israelites and disobeyed God's instructions to speak water from a rock, striking the rock instead (Numbers 20). Gideon asked proof that God had chosen him to defeat Midian (Judges 6). He ended up testing God's Word, which is strictly forbidden in the Law of Moses according to Deuteronomy 6. David committed adultery with Bathsheba and then arranged the death of her husband when she consequently became pregnant in 2 Samuel 11-12, yet he is still called a man after God's heart and found forgiveness with the Lord. Before his conversion, Saul who became the apostle Paul persecuted the early Christians and even agreed with the stoning of the apostle Stephen. Peter denied Christ three times before the crucifixion (Luke 22:54-62). The book of Jonah details how the prophet Jonah ran away from God when he was commanded to witness in Nineveh (both out of fear and personal antipathy for the Ninevites).

Guess what? They were human beings, made of flesh and blood and vulnerable to the temptation and lies of the enemy. Guess what? God still claimed them as His own people, forgave their sins, and included them in His redemption plans for mankind. This should give us hope that no matter where we come from, no matter what we've done in our past, no matter how the enemy lies by telling us we are too wicked and wretched to be redeemed (watch out for Satan's lies!), God will still hold open the door of forgiveness, salvation, and citizenship in Christ's eternal kingdom so long as we are alive. The only sin which Christ said could not be forgiven is blasphemy of the Holy Spirit (the sin committed by the Pharisees when they credited the work of the Holy Spirit to demons).

The bad news is that the door of hope closes when we go down into the grave. It is too late to choose Christ and receive salvation at that point. Let us choose Jesus now in the expectant joy that He will call us out of that grave when the time of His Second Advent arrives.

Back to Abraham...

We can gather from all this that the roots of God imparting Abraham run deep. Abraham did believe God...but that was merely the first step of his walk with the Lord.

Abraham also obeyed God in faith.

Abraham submitted his own will to God's will in faith.

Abraham made God his first priority in faith.

Abraham turned from the pagan nation where he had been born and the household of his father where he had been raised to move to new lands as God commanded in faith.

Abraham built altars to worship God wherever he went in faith.

Abraham waited confidently for the fulfillment of all that God had promised him in faith (for the most part).

Because of faith and obedience, Abraham became known as a man of God wherever he travelled.

So, in Abraham's life, we find a model for our own walk with the Lord. His story reveals the foundational elements for growing and maturing in the faith. Let's map them out:

- 1) *Receptivity to God's initial call.* For the new Christian, this means we hear the message of the birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ as our source of justification and salvation. We respond (as much as we understand the good news) by accepting Jesus and endeavoring to learn more about Him.
- 2) *Knowing and Believing God's Word.* The Bible does not specify how God made first contact with Abraham, though the implication of the subsequent stories is that Abraham clearly heard the voice of God. Coming from a pagan land, it is not clear if Abraham even knew of God before the call, but the Word from God was enough for him. Obviously, Abraham did not have Scriptures to study or the Law of Moses that guided the worship and holy living of his descendants. For the modern Christian, it is important to go to the Bible, which is God's special revelation of Himself, His works, His character, and His redemptive intercession on behalf of mankind. It is also crucial to understand our history as a multi-national family of believers so that we can find our place in the chain of history and anticipate the culmination of God's plans for us as the children and residents of the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

The Word of God is also our weapon and defense against the temptations, attacks, and lies of Satan. Jesus quotes Scripture to defeat Satan's temptations. The Word is mentioned in Ephesians 6 as the Sword, part of the full spiritual armor of God that also includes truth, peace, righteousness, faith, and salvation. Without knowledge of God's special revelation through the Word, we cannot grow in understanding or faith and we are vulnerable to the lies and temptations of the enemy.

- 3) *Submission to God's Will.* "Submit" is not a four-letter word, brothers and sisters. When we examined the nature of the Holy Trinity, we saw that mutual submission out of mutual love is an inherent and essential quality of the relationship between God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Among the Godhead, mutual submission allows each

personality of the deity to fulfill its specific purpose, which is integral to the purposes of the other two personalities of the deity. It is not about dominance; submission reflects harmony, cooperation, love, and selflessness. In the case of the Christian, we submit our personal ambitions to God's will for our lives knowing that God (in His omniscience) has the vantage point of the whole of history—He has the road map to where we are heading as the church body and knows the best path to lead us there. He knows where the individual believers fit as pieces of the living temple that He is constructing. Submission is our joyful, deliberate choice to walk through the open door as God invites us and take the place He determined for us even before we were born.

- 4) *Faith in God's promises and blessings (CONFIDENT FAITH).* The promises God has made to every believer can be found in the covenants of the Bible and the message of the New Testament as recorded by the apostles of Christ. We have examined some of these promises in our study of the Adamic Covenant: God promised to send a Redeemer from the seed of Eve. That promise was fulfilled at the birth of Jesus Christ the Messiah. God promised that the Messiah would crush the head of the serpent, Satan. Jesus' victory began with His death on the cross and resurrection from the grave, where He demonstrated His power over life and death (eternal life which He will impart one day to His body of believers). The victory will be finalized after the second coming of Christ in the Day of the Lord, the times of judgement as documented in the Book of Revelation. We will learn more foundational promises when we study the Abrahamic Covenant. In fact, the Abrahamic Covenant reveals God's specific plans for our redemption. It's promises will be made complete with the second coming of Christ.

*"God's way is perfect. All the Lord's promises prove true. He is a shield for all who look to Him for protection" (2 Samuel 22:31).*

- 5) *Worship.* We mentioned that Abraham built an altar wherever he pitched his tent for the remainder of his life. God deserves our worship for all that He has done for us, for all the promises He has and will fulfill. We worship because we know our God is the one true God, holy,

righteous, just, merciful, truthful, all-powerful, all-knowing, gracious, and loving. He is the Creator of the universe, nature, and mankind. When Abraham worshipped, he not only honored God, he modeled faith and righteous living for the pagan cultures around him.

- 6) *Making God our first priority.* Be honest—you probably cringed when I used the word “submission” and you probably cringed again when I mentioned that God has to be our first priority. You probably had some involuntary thoughts that went along the lines of *“Of course God is important, but...”*, *“Of course God comes first, but sometimes I have to/need to....”*, *“Of course I love God, but....”* I want to be clear: Making God your first priority does NOT mean that your family is not a priority. I am NOT saying abandon your job, discard any medical treatments you are undergoing, leave your spouse, sell all your belongings and move into a tent, jump on a plane and fly to a foreign land, or any knee-jerk reaction out of zeal for the Lord. As you grow in your faith, the Holy Spirit will begin to urge you in the direction which God wants you to move.

Making God your first priority means that NO MATTER WHAT ELSE IS GOING ON IN YOUR LIFE, SPENDING TIME IN THE WORD AND IN PRAYER AND IN WORSHIP IS AN ESSENTIAL, NON-NEGOTIABLE COMPONENT OF YOUR DAY. EVERY DAY. Somewhere on your calendar is written GOD TIME in bright red ink with a big circle. Making God your first priority means when He finally does ask you to move in a specific direction, His will comes before personal ambitions and desires because you joyfully, willingly want to obey and be part of His purposes. It means that His Way is the foundation for your daily choices, relationships, personal interactions, morality, personal, public, and professional lives. Don't stress too much: Learning to live with God as our first priority comes in stages as we mature spiritually.

Still, this is important. Culture, social media, friends, family, and other influences around us will try to set our priorities and ambitions for us. The desires within us will beckon us to certain goals,

achievements, and rewards. When it comes down to a choice between the ways of the world and the will of the Lord, if His Will conflicts with your wishes or takes you in unexpected directions, are you willing to move as God directs?

- 7) *Prayer*. This is a non-negotiable component for spiritual growth and maturity. Prayer is our communication channel with God. It's true that God already knows everything that goes on in our lives, our heads, and our hearts. He IS omniscient and omnipresent. But, let me put it this way: As a parent, you can be informed of what's going on in your child's day. You can surmise from all sorts of cues how they are feeling and maybe what they're thinking without them having to tell you. Does this eliminate the need for you to communicate with them? Is that a true relationship? Wouldn't you rather they share with you what's on their hearts, their minds, what's going on in their lives even if you already know? If you are aware that they are having difficult circumstances, don't you want them to come to you? Ask your advice? Ask your help? If you know they've royally botched something, isn't it better when they come to you, admit what they've done, ask for advice, even for help if they're truly in over their heads? Do you want them to think they have to go it alone? Do you want them to understand that you are there for them? Well, guess what I'm going to say next: God is our Father. He wants the same thing from us as His children.

Don't know what to pray? It doesn't matter. The Holy Spirit indwelling in us will guide us in what to pray if we just quiet our minds, quiet our hearts, and open ourselves to the Spirit's guidance. Sometimes, our prayers aren't anything more than wordless groans or incoherent sentence fragments, tears (hopefully not too many of those), joyful laughter (wish you lots of that) and gratitude when we recognize God at work. Sometimes we know exactly what we hope God will do in our lives but are afraid to ask. **DON'T BE AFRAID TO ASK**. The Bible urges us to be persistent in our prayers. God may not give us what we're asking, but He will give us what is best for us. Prayer is also how we intercede on behalf of others in need, whether that need is for health, hope, forgiveness (we'll see the heroes of the faith frequently pray. King David's



psalms are basically a collection of prayers made at various moments in his walk with God). Prayer also calls on God to intercede for us when we are in distress, hurt, or heartache. Jesus prayed constantly during His life on earth, and He actually IS God. That's how important it is to pray.

And one other bit of biblical advice about prayer: Praying with someone, praying over someone, in genuine worship and seeking the Lord is good. Praying to show the world how holy you are is not so good. The Pharisees were admonished by Jesus that they prayed to make public spectacle and show their righteousness rather than praying out of a desire to connect with God. Our Lord is the God of Truth; He knows when we pray from faith in Him and when our hearts are empty towards Him. We may pray in the company of our church congregation, naturally, but Jesus advised that we go off privately to pray (as He often did). God will see us there.

Don't know where to start? Jesus gave us this prayer in Matthew 6: *Our Father who art in Heaven. Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*" Some interpretations add: *"For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen!"*

8) *Humility and integrity.* The Lord despises proud and haughty eyes. The Bible tells us that, out of humility, we should think of others as better than ourselves. John the Baptist was praised in the Scripture as one of the most holy men who lived, yet he called himself unworthy to even put the sandals on Jesus' feet. Jesus stripped down, wrapped a towel around His waist, and washed the dirt off His apostles' feet in the middle of a dinner party. Luke 9:48 tells us that the least person among men shall be the greatest. Luke 22:26 tells us that the one among us who would lead should be as the one who serves.

Love lifts others up. God is Love, Mercy, and Grace. He loves us when our sinful condition doesn't deserve love. He loves us so much that He directed the flow of history to the birth of a Redeemer who would fulfill His requirements for our forgiveness and restoration to eternal relationship with He made us in His image. That means when

we look at ourselves and others, we are looking at the face of God. What we do to ourselves and to others, we do to God. When we do harm to another person, we do harm to God. When we abuse His creation, we abuse a gift from our Father. When we do harm to ourselves, we do harm to God. When we demonstrate love, mercy, forgiveness, and grace towards ourselves and others, we are reflecting our Father for the world to see.

*"He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8)*

- 9) *Growing the Kingdom.* We have seen in the stories of Adam and Eve, Noah and the Ark, and the Tower of Babel that God's priority is for man to multiply and fill the earth with His image (and we are that image when we live in faith and obedience to Him). We have seen that the Kingdom of God is engaged in spiritual warfare with Satan's kingdom of darkness, which constantly works to undermine and thwart God's purposes in this kingdom. Jesus commissioned His church to go out into the world and spread the Gospel message of His life, death, and resurrection so that others can believe in Him and receive salvation. **THIS COMMISSION IS A MATTER OF ETERNAL LIFE OR ETERNAL SEPARATION FROM GOD.** As I mentioned, God holds open the door to salvation...but He is the Lord of Justice and Righteousness. He is long-suffering, patiently biding time that as many souls as possible might receive the salvation of Jesus Christ and be saved to eternal life. **BUT THE LORD WILL NOT DELAY HIS JUDGEMENT FOREVER.** We saw God enact His justice in the narrative of the Great Flood. The Book of Revelation gives us the insight to how His judgement will come in the Day of the Lord at the second advent of Christ.

*It is not God's will that anyone go into the grave to be forever lost. The Son came in the flesh that we could be saved. He commands that the Gospel be preached that every man has the chance to hear the Gospel and be saved. The Church is meant to share that Gospel message. To that end, there is one more step in the walk with God that must be mentioned:*



10) *Fellowship, ministry and service.* We do not mature spiritually without the fellowship of other believers. Believers begin as disciples, learning through the help of pastors, teachers, and spiritual mentors to understand God's Word. The church congregation is meant to be a source of encouragement, support, correction (it's not a bad thing as long as it comes from a place of support, love, and the intention to build up rather than tear down and discourage the new believer), and fellowship. We discover what it means to be adopted into Christ's family and what He expects of us as "the image of God" in a sinful world. Within the congregation, with the help of fellow believers, we discover the gifts that have been imparted to us by the Holy Spirit for the good of Christ's kingdom. Regardless of the denomination, Christian believers are called one body—the Body of Christ—each of us with a special place and purpose in God's plan, much as each specific part of the human body serves a purpose even as it is part of the whole person. *"For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another"* (Romans 12:4-5).

As we mature in the spirit, we move from a position of discipleship to spiritual maturity. God brings us into the body for a purpose that serves to grow His kingdom and bring others to salvation. This is the point where we begin to work as part of the body to minister and serve not just others of the faith but to the unchurched (those who have lost faith) and the unbelievers (those who have never received Christ). Christ is described as the Good Shepherd of the body of believers in John 10:14, and it is not His will that a single one of His sheep should be lost. As we heard the Word, received Christ, and were saved, we should (in gratitude and joy) desire that others be saved and know the same peace, love, and joy of relationship with the Lord. Paul writes in Romans 10:14: *"But how can they (the unbelievers) call on Him to save them unless they believe Him? And how can they believe in Him if they have never heard about Him? And how can they hear about Him unless someone tells them?"* Such service is meant to bring glory to GOD, not to the believer. This is why the Bible teaches us to do our charity anonymously, to use our blessings (material blessings and spiritual gifts) for the growth of the kingdom, and to dedicate our service that they

shine the light of God for others to see that they come to know His love and righteousness and are drawn to salvation.

Relax, though. Your walk with God takes a lifetime, and He does not expect a perfect walk from you. It is, as the saying goes, a marathon not a sprint. I know that when I began to study the Bible, I had a genuine zeal to absorb all that I could and share it with others. However, even the Apostle Paul (after his conversion) had to spend several years absorbing all the Christ had to teach him before beginning his ministry. And, if we were even capable of a perfect walk with the Lord, it would not have been necessary for Christ to die on the cross for our sins. This is why I mentioned that the greatest heroes of the Bible made missteps.

That's a lot to process, I know. Full disclosure: How many times did you do that inward cringe or think "that's all well and good, but...." As you read through that list?

As we dive into the study of the life of Abraham, we're going to see him model all these spiritual steps. He demonstrates belief, submission, and obedience to God's Word from the first time we read about him in Genesis 12. God commands Abraham to leave his father's household and go to the Promised Land, and Abraham immediately obeys. All plans that Abraham had made for his life are at that moment set aside, submitted to God's will for his life without question or delay. He made God's will his first priority. When God promises that Abraham will be the father of a multitude of descendants in Genesis 12, 13, 15, and 22, Abraham believes Him with confident faith. Each land where Abraham dwells, he builds an altar as surely as he pitches a tent in which to dwell. The tent marks him as set apart for the service of the Lord; the altar is Abraham's place of worshipping God (right there in front of the unbelievers of the pagan nations, shining the light of the Lord). Abraham's dealings with Melchizedek after God gives him victory over the five kings and his allowing Lot first choice of pastureland in Genesis 13 and 14 underscore Abraham's humility and integrity. Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his long-awaited son, Isaac, at God's command demonstrates extraordinary faith, trust, and obedience to God. The Lord even instructs Abimelech to ask Abraham to pray on the man's behalf (God uses the word "prophet" for the first time in reference to Abraham) in

Genesis 20. Abraham ministers and serves his three heavenly visitors in Genesis 18.

We are also going to see examples of how believers can stumble on their walk when we examine the life of Abraham. While Abraham and Sarah believe God's promise to give them their miracle child, Isaac, they are not patient in waiting on God's timing and attempt to facilitate Isaac's birth through human means. This leads to Abraham taking a second wife, who bears a son names Ishmael. The conflict between the descendants of Isaac and the descendants of Ishmael continues to this day. When there is a famine in the land of Canaan where God has sent Abraham, rather than trust in God's provision, Abraham leaves Canaan briefly to settle in Egypt. He compounds that error by having his wife, Sarah, pretend to be his sister. The Pharaoh takes Sarah with the intention of making her his own wife, forcing God to intercede. Forcing God to rescue us due to our own disobedience is putting God to the test, a sin forbidden in the Bible. The Lord is also the God of Truth; believers do not model the Lord when they perpetrate deception. The results are suffering for Pharaoh's household and for Sarah. Abraham repeats this mistake in the land of Gerar, bringing suffering not only on its king but on the whole land until God intercedes.

We can be reassured by the fact, despite these missteps, that God never revokes His covenant with Abraham, never fails to send His grace on Abraham or fulfill His promises to Abraham. What God promises, He will bring to fulfillment. God is unchanging; His Word is unchanging. When He promises that we are forgiven through Christ and accepted into the eternal kingdom so long as we believe and obey His Word and repent of our sins, He **MEANS** it. *"Neither height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Romans 8:39).

So we need to be careful when our response to God is: "That's all good, but..." or "I'd do what the Lord says if only..." or "I'd believe God if He would just..." or "If God is real, why doesn't He..."

In the study of Adam and Eve, we learned that compromise is a favorite weapon used by Satan to cause us to stumble from the path of God into sin, and that's a hard truth that we have to accept: The enemy will set snares and traps along the path of our walk with God. We learn God's Word and His Ways so that we are better able to spot and avoid the lies and tricks and temptations

of Satan. We are humans, just like Abraham, and we are vulnerable to the same fears, doubts, and earthly temptations that he encountered. We must respond with the same obedience, faith, and submission. The enemy can use people, life circumstances, material temptations, fleshly desires, and our innermost fears and insecurities to deceive us **UNLESS WE ARE FIRMLY ROOTED IN GOD'S TRUTH AND CONFIDENT IN HIS LOVE FOR US.**

Jesus teaches us (Luke 11:24) that when we believe, our bodies become a residence of the Holy Spirit—which drives out the presence of the enemy (the Spirit and the demonic cannot co-exist in the same vessel because the Lord does not compromise with Satan). Jesus cautions that the enemy is eager to return to us, stronger than ever. God has given us His Word, His Spirit, and the salvation of His Son, all that we need to guard our hearts **WHEN WE ARE FIRMLY ROOTED IN CHRIST.**

It sounds overwhelming, but it comes down to this: Jesus promises that His yoke is easy and His burden is light (Matthew 11:28-30). He will come alongside us as we walk, providing all that we need to avoid temptations, overcome trials sent our way just as Abraham did, and strengthening us when we feel vulnerable, weary, or discouraged. We do not walk by our own strength, but rather by the strength of the Holy Spirit that God puts within us when we receive Christ as our Savior.

1 Corinthians 10:13 promises that the Lord will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear.

Exodus 14:14 assures us that the Lord will fight for us.

Proverbs 3:26 tells us that the Lord will be our confidence.

Proverbs 16:9 tells us that the Lord will direct our steps as we walk with Him.

In Genesis 22, the Lord is referred to as Jehovah-Jireh, which means "The Lord will provide". As He provided for Abraham, He will provide and make a way for every one of His children.

Lastly (my personal favorite), Joshua 1:9 gives us this hope:

*"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go".*