

## Walk by Faith – Faith Faces the Unknown

7/22/18 – Pastor Randy

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Hebrews 11:8-12;17-19 (NLT)

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. <sup>9</sup> By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. <sup>10</sup> For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. <sup>12</sup> Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, <sup>18</sup> of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." <sup>19</sup> He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.

Except for 2 ½ years when I lived on campus at VFCC in Phoenixville, PA during the school year while preparing for the ministry, my first 23 years of life were spent in one home. I moved out of my parent's home a couple of months before Christine and I were married. During our thirty years of marriage we have lived in 7 different apartments or homes, moving 6 times. But it wasn't until I was 28 that I moved from my homeland, because although I had moved 2x by that time, my moves were only a few miles away, so I was still very much "home". My first real move away from home - all that was familiar to me - was when we moved to Syracuse in March of 1993. We moved in on a Tuesday. Three days after we arrived at our new home the blizzard of the century arrived in Syracuse. Until that time, the greatest snowfall I had ever witnessed was 19". Syracuse's official total snowfall was 43" but we measured 47" at our place. Understand that initially we did not realize this was an extreme snowfall. We were thinking that this was to be expected in Syracuse NY! You know what I was also thinking? God, why did you do this to us!?

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There is both excitement and anxiety accompanying any big move. It takes faith to leave what is familiar and comfortable. The unknown can be scary. This is not just true in relation to geographical transitions. It is true when you transition to a new job, start your own business, decide to get married, enroll in school, start a family, commit to serving in a new ministry, etc.

God has something to say to us about faith from the example of Abraham! God's word TO Abraham is not His word TO us, although God's word to Abraham is a word FOR everyone. Instinctively we know this, but people still often arbitrarily pick those words that they like and read them as if they are God's direct word to them, unless it is a word they don't like. Then they properly take it as a word from which they can derive some important truth about God, God's plan of redemption and salvation, and Christian living. For example, I have seen Christians who are frustrated with their current geographical, professional, or social location in life read Abraham's story and use it as a justification to flee their situation. Not surprisingly, no one directly applies God's word to Abraham about offering Isaac as a sacrifice to himself.

The first and most important thing for us to learn from Abraham's story is not even about Abraham; it is about God. The most important thing about Abraham's story is how it fits into the larger story of God's gospel; His amazing historic drama of redemption which finds its culmination in Christ.

*"And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles [people from every nation] by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." Galatians 3:8*

God's command and promise to Abraham was the initial announcement of the Gospel! Christopher Wright explains that Genesis 12:3 is a pivotal text "in the whole Bible because it does exactly what Paul says – it "announces the gospel in advance". That is, it declares the good news that, in spite of all that we have read in Genesis 1-11, it is God's ultimate plan to bless humanity...And the story of how that

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*blessing for all nations has come about occupies the rest of the Bible, with Christ as the central focus. Indeed, the closing vision...with people of every tribe and nation and language worshipping the living God (Rev 7:9-10), clearly echoes the promise of Genesis 12:3 and binds the whole story together.” (The Mission of God pg.194-95)*

Geneses 12-Rev.22 describes God's mission which is to provide a solution to the problem depicted in Genesis 3-11. So Abraham is not just a man from whom we are supposed to learn lessons about trusting God, his story is foundational to our understanding of God and God's gospel, first announced through Abraham and consummated in Christ. Abraham serves as a representative for God, so much so that in both the old and new testaments being a child of Abraham is synonymous with being a child of God!

Even though the story of Abraham is not primarily a model to teach us how to follow the will of God, that does not mean that we cannot derive principles from this story that are relevant to us. God does have something to say to us about our walk of faith from this story.

### 1. The call to walk by faith requires us to face the unknown.

*Abraham obeyed... And he went out, not knowing where he was going... he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents... For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.*

Abraham went out not knowing where he was going. God called him to go and only revealed to him one step at a time. Walking by faith and not by sight does not mean that trusting God is synonymous with taking a leap in the dark. It requires a stepping into the darkness with our faith in God's word serving as a light in the darkness. Picture driving your car at night on an unlit country road. You turn on your high beams to increase the distance you can see ahead of you but that is still only 350 feet. At 60mph it will take you only 4 seconds to cover that distance. If we are ok driving while only able to see

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what is 4 seconds ahead of us, why can't we trust God to lead us one step at a time.

One of our greatest fears is the fear of the unknown. What gave Abraham courage to venture into the unknown? God's initial call to Abraham was: *"Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father's family, and go to the land that I will show you."* That last phrase – "that I will show you" implies that God is promising to be with Abraham. God didn't send him out, He called him out. You only need to read a few verses before you find God speaking to Abraham again and Abraham calling on the Lord. Abe walked with God!

In Genesis 15:1 God's promise to be present with Abraham is more explicit: *Do not be afraid, Abram, for I will protect you, and your reward will be great."*

Abraham had faith to face the unknown because he was not alone. God wants to encourage you today to face your unknowns because you are not alone! Throughout scripture we are told not to fear...because God is with us!!

Abraham also received courage to face the unknown because he had a promise of great blessing at the end of the road. If you read Genesis 12:1-3 you will find that Abraham is told to do two things. Leave his country and be a blessing to those he comes in contact with. But along with 2 things Abraham is to do, God pledges six things that He will do. I like that 3:1 ratio. Calvary, no matter what God calls us to do in faith-inspired faithfulness to Him, it never compares to what He will do for us.

**Abraham had the faith to face the unknown because he had the presence of God and a sure promise from God.**

I am using the phrase "face the unknown" to mean "step into the unknown". The Christian life is a walk by faith, not by sight. We are always walking into the unknown...but always with some knowns that are greater than the unknowns. I don't know WHAT I will go through tomorrow but I do know WHO I will go through it with.

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2. The call to walk by faith in Christ requires us to leave something behind.

While God might not be telling us to relocate like he did Abraham, there is a principle that is applicable to all of God's people: The call to walk by faith always entails leaving something behind. Even if we are not called to leave our geographical location we are called to leave our old idols, our old objects of worship behind.

Abraham was not leaving a location behind as much as he was leaving a lifestyle behind. The people of Ur and Haran worshipped the ancient Babylonian gods, in particular the moon god, Sin. God's promise of a future land was to be a blessing by providing a place for the people that He was calling to live as worshippers of Him. This was made crystal clear when Joshua recounted for the Israelites how God had taken them out of the land of those who worshipped false Gods so they would not do the same:

*"Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'Long ago, your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and they served other gods...Now therefore fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord.'" - Joshua 24:2,14*

The NT describes the Christians relationship to Christ in terms of a marriage. We are the bride of Christ. Like marriage that implies a leaving and cleaving. Binding ourselves to Christ requires an unbinding to our old ways of life. Peter described Christians as those who are "done with sin." He wrote to them, *You have had enough in the past of the evil things that godless people enjoy—their immorality and lust, their feasting and drunkenness and wild parties, and their terrible worship of idols. (1 Peter 4:3)*

Leaving old habits behind can be scary. Sometimes Christians struggle with leaving ungodly relationships and activities behind because it is all they have

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known, even when they know those things are destructive. Sometimes the fear is being rejected by so-called friends. Peter went on to write,

*Of course, your former friends are surprised when you no longer plunge into the flood of wild and destructive things they do. So they slander you.* (1 Peter 4:4)

Hebrews 11 tells us that Abraham, “...went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land...For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.” In Peter’s first letter he picks up this language from the story of Abraham to describe the way Christians are to live in the present world while we wait for our eternal home in the new creation. He wrote, *Dear friends, I warn you as “temporary residents and foreigners” to keep away from worldly desires that wage war against your very souls.* 1 Peter 2:11

We live as foreigners in a world that is unknown because it is not our home.

### 3. Our walk of faith in Jesus is accompanied by God's grace.

Abraham’s faith was not a flawless faith. In fact, Abraham is simultaneously an example of man who acts faith overcoming one’s fear and fear overwhelming one’s faith.

Because of a famine in Canaan Abraham took Sarah to Egypt. When they arrived Abe said to Sarah, “Look, you are a very beautiful woman. When the Egyptians see you, they will say, ‘This is his wife. Let’s kill him; then we can have her!’ So please tell them you are my sister. Then they will spare my life and treat me well because of their interest in you.” In those days the King could have any unmarried woman he wanted to be his wife so Abraham was scared that the king would want Sarah for a wife and kill Abraham so he would not be taking a married woman. That is pretty perverse morally. I can’t commit adultery, but I can murder if I want! So Abraham tells Sarah to join him in lying to the officials, telling them she is his sister. Abraham didn’t even try to disguise his

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selfish motivation. He said, *“Then they will spare MY LIFE and treat ME WELL!”* Good job Abraham, use your wife as a human shield and exploit her for gain.

Should God have been done with Him right there and then! Yes, just like He should have been done with you and me long ago for our sins.

But our God provides grace for us in the midst of our failure if we are humble and repentant. Abraham reacted out of fear and selfishness. Fear can exert a powerful morally corrupting influence in our lives. Faith must counter that.

**4. Our walk of faith in Jesus obeys in the face of impossible circumstances**  
*By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son,<sup>18</sup> of whom it was said, “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.”*

Abraham did not know God well enough to know that God would not allow him to kill his son. Those who try and impugn the character of God by decrying the fact that God told Abraham to kill his only son miss the point! God stopped Abraham from doing such a thing and God later expresses His anger at those nations who offered child sacrifices.

It was hard enough for Abraham to believe that he and Sarah could conceive a child in their old age. That was highly improbable. It is another thing to believe that God could still keep His promise if Abraham was to kill his own son. That wasn't improbable, that was impossible! But Abraham had come to trust God so staunchly that he said to his servants, “Isaac and I are going to worship God, but we will be back.” The author of Hebrews provided insight into Abraham's thinking when he wrote, *He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.*

Sometimes what is unknown to us is what God is going to do, but other times what is unknown is “HOW”. Abraham had a promise that God would make him a father of a great nation through Isaac. Killing Isaac makes that

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impossible. Unless God does the impossible and raises Isaac from the dead!  
Our job is to do the possible - obey; and trust God to do the impossible!!

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