

Journey into Faith

Of all the people on earth . . .
Why Abraham?

Why was it that God called Abraham
To be the pioneer of the faith
The father of God's chosen people?

Was it his special leadership qualifications?

Hardly!

If you read on into the story,
You'll find soon enough,

Abraham was not only impatient and fearful,
He outright lied to save his own skin

Saying Sarah was his sister, not his wife
Not once but twice.

Was it because he was youthful and full of vigor?

Well again . . . hardly!
Abraham was 75-years-old when God called him!

Of course, if everyone lived into their 400s
As these early biblical characters did
75 was probably the age of puberty.

Why Abraham?

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His name was Abram before it became Abraham.
Meaning “exalted father.”

And he enters the biblical scene,
Pretty much out of nowhere.
A descendant from Noah’s son Shem;
A man from Ur of the Chaldeans.

He traveled with his father, Terah,
His nephew Lot, and his wife, Sarai,
From their home in Ur to Haran.

It was there Abram received a call from God.

Gen. 12: 1 . . . ‘Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you.’

We don’t know how Abram received God’s call.

Me? I’d have go home
Talk it over with my wife . . .
Judith doesn’t like surprises.

*Hey Hon . . . guess what . . . God wants us to move
Oh yea, where to?*

*Well, God didn’t exactly say . . .
Just said he’ll show us!*

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Well, that wouldn't go over too well for sure!

The passage tells us they simply went.

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Maybe, here is insight into why God called Abram . . .
Dogged, faithful obedience.

Now this was something Abram possessed

We see this later on, when God commands
Abram to sacrifice his only son, Isaac.

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Abram packs up and leaves Haran for Canaan land.

Actually this was no small feat.

He took his wife, Sarai, his nephew, Lot
All the possessions they had gathered
All their livestock
And get this, all the people they had
acquired.

It was quite the move!

And so, begins their journey of faith into an unknown
future!

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Along with Abram's call to immigrate to parts unknown.
Came a promise, several actually;

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- Descendants (“I will make of you a great nation” -- Genesis 12:2)
- Land (“To your offspring I will give this land” -- Genesis 12:7)
- Blessing (“I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing” – Genesis 12:2)

This is important stuff.

For what we find in these first three verses Of Genesis 12

Is what is called the Abrahamic Covenant.

It is really the beginning point of the Old Testament.

The rest of the OT relates to these covenant promises
Between God and Abraham.

God has chosen Abraham and his descendants
To be his chosen people
And promises them a favored place in
history.

Today the Jews still consider
The covenant of Abraham
The overarching promise to the nation of
Israel

They continue to anticipate its fulfillment
They continue to fight for every square inch
Of what they believe is due them.

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So again I ask, why Abraham?

The author of Hebrews explains it was Abraham's faith.

Abraham and Sarah left their homeland
And immigrated to Canaan

They did so because God had promised to bless them
To be the parents of a new nation.
With a voice from heaven, a call and a promise,
Abraham and Sarah step out in faith,
Into the great unknown.

Abraham, 75-years-old,
His wife, Sarah, beyond childbearing years
An aging couple really

They leave everything near and dear to follow a
promise.

Lewis Smedes, A theologian in the Reformed tradition,
Makes this remark concerning,
Abraham's determined obedience;

*"In his journey into the unknown, Abraham embraced
ignorance, relinquished control, and chose to live with
confidence in God's promise to bless him in a new and
strange place."*

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Faith in God,
Is a journey not unlike Abraham and Sarah's.

Pioneers, who step out into an unknown future
With an Abrahamic style of simple obedience
Confident in God's promises.

R. C. Sproul writes;

*Abram's response indicates that he lived out the principle
Corrie Ten Boom later articulated. . . . that we must "never
be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God."*
We are also pioneers on a journey of faith
Into an unknown future on a prayer and promise.

God has called us, the West Richmond church
To be a Christ-centered presence in the
Richmond area.

That's our call isn't it?

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It may be true West Richmond is a remnant of what she
once was.

It may be true She has seen a decline of attendance over
the years.

It may be true She has become an "aging congregation"
Not unlike Abraham and Sarah

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It just may be true She is among many small churches struggling.

Our district, our denomination are struggling too.

As a result, I believe,
Brethren struggle with sense of identity.

We are no longer confident of who we are.

We are no longer assured of God's call upon our lives.

Several reasons it seems to me that we feel this way:

1. The decline in membership and subsequent closing of congregations
2. The controversies dividing our denomination
3. The rise of the nondenominational Megachurch.

Each of these contribute to an overall feeling
That we should be something other than we are.

But my point today is that if God can call Abram
To get up and leave obscure Ur to parts unknown
And end up the father of three great
religions

There *just ain't no telling* what God can do with us!

We need to affirm God's continued call upon us.

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Lewis Smedes; *What really matters is not whether Abraham is good or bad or cowardly or heroic, but that God pursues His design for the welfare of the human family with people like that – in other words, people like us.*

Brothers and sisters there is nothing wrong
With being a small church!

I am convinced God's call is still with West Richmond.
And the Church of the Brethren.

Let us claim God's call with confidence!

Jill Southern-Jones writes

God does not always call the qualified but always qualifies the called.

God doesn't always call the most likely or the most humanly gifted people. The anointing from God, which is needed to fulfill our call, will be there for us.

Remain faithful to God and to the call He has placed on your life and you will be fruitful. What he calls us to do He also enables us to do.

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Let's go back to verse 2,
And carefully read the promise from God to
Abraham:

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² And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great SO THAT you will be a blessing.

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There is an important lesson here for all of us.

Simply put, the lesson is

We are blessed . . . to be a blessing.

Blessings are meant to be shared.

According to Rick Warren,

Pastor of the Saddleback Church in CA,

“This is the first law of blessing: it must flow outwardly. . . . God promises that if we will concentrate on blessing others, he’ll take care of our needs.”

The business of the church,

The responsibility of the blessed,

Is to be a blessing!

We will be a blessing when we live out our calling.

Carey Nieuwhof, Christian blogger

Lists some things a church can do

To reclaim God’s call upon their life.

Think big.

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Don't hunker down in conservation mode.

Think big not as in striving to be a megachurch
But big as in vision . . .

Nieuwhof writes: *Too many churches die of small thinking.*

Small thinking says: We don't have enough; it can't happen here; that's plenty for now; who will pay for it; we've never done it that way.

Secondly, believe that God can do anything.

Henry Ford once said, *Whether you believe you can or whether you believe you can't . . . you're right.*

Believe that God is in the process!

Thirdly, see abundance not scarcity.

Sometimes a struggling church becomes anxious
And begins to conserve their resources.

Once we enter into that kind of attitude
It's like the circling of the covered wagons
There's no journeying forward!

Fourthly, think vision before resources.

Envision who we are and where God is leading

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Before we begin to calculate how much it will cost.

Fifthly, believe the work of the church is larger
Than keeping our own church doors open
Larger than our own survival.

Keep the focus on the ultimate goal
Knowing Christ and making Christ known
Simply, peacefully, and together . . .

And lastly, break rules!

Not Biblical rules but the unspoken rules
That we can't do something
Because it's never been done that way
before.

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Abraham and Sarah, pioneers of a new faith,
Responded to the call of God.

Let us, too, step out in faith into an unknown future
Guided by the God known in Christ Jesus
Blessed to be a blessing!

The world awaits the fulfillment of the Abrahamic
Covenant
Now made possible through the good news of
Jesus.

This is the call of God on all our lives:

WRCoB
9.16.18

Genesis 12:1-4;
Hebrews 11:8-12

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That through us, the church of Jesus Christ
All of earth will be blessed.

May it be so!

Amen.