

The Story (2): Abraham: The Call of Abraham

(Genesis 12:1-3)

I. Introduction

- A. Some people are unimpressive when you first see them—you tend to sell them short
1. These celebrities are more impressive than the pigeon-holes we may put them in
 - a. Shock-rocker Alice Cooper has a 4 handicap in golf... and teaches Sunday School
 - b. Sorrell Booke (Boss Hogg) had degrees from Columbia/Yale and spoke 5 languages
 - c. Natalie Portman speaks 6 languages; has lectured on counterterrorism at Columbia
 - d. Actor/comedian Ken Yeong (Dr. Ken on TV) played a doctor and is medical doctor!
 - e. Brian May, (guitar, *Queen*), Ph.D. in astrophysics; Chancellor @ John Moores Univ
 2. First impressions fool you. First impression of one choses to build God's OT family?
 - a. Abraham and Sarah, 75 yr-old childless couple. *Is that who we'd have picked?*
 - b. But God saw something in Abraham that He could work with... so *He called*
 - c. Abraham answered the call, and he became the father of all who believe.
- B. As we continue looking at "The Story," we come to the Call of Abraham in **Genesis 12**
1. The NT points to Abraham as an example of the kind of faith that pleases God—
 - a. Paul's message of salvation by grace is illustrated by Abraham's faith (**Rom 4:1-3**)
 - b. James says that Abraham shows we need to put faith into action (**James 2:21-22**)
 - c. Hebrew writer includes four Abraham stories in Hebrews 11, the "Hall of Faith"
 2. Want to please God? All you need is to have the faith of Abraham! *Why stop there?*
 - a. Why not strong as Samson? Or sing like Silas? Or drop-dead gorgeous like Esther?
 - b. We have to have the faith of Abraham? *Let's survey part of the Abraham story*

II. Answering the Call: Abraham

- A. We meet Abraham as he receives God's call to leave his home (**Reading: Genesis 12:1-3**)
1. He had already left home once WITH his family; now he's called to leave his family
 - a. God will show him his destination, so Abraham has no idea where he's going
 - 1) Not the last man to be in that predicament; maybe he's the last man to admit it
 - 2) You know whine from back seat, "*Are we there yet?*" Abraham has no idea!
 - b. That's not a problem; Abraham didn't have any kids to whine along the way!
 - 1) That really was a problem! Abraham's story is driven by fact he has no kids!
 - 2) Will Abraham believe God's promises despite this continuing obvious issue?

2. In the initial call, promised to bless Abraham and to curse his enemies (**Gen 12:3**)
 - a. How long will Abraham trust God? Eight verses and he's sweating bullets!
 - b. Famine drives him south; he finds it dangerous to walk like an Egyptian (**12:11-13**)
 - 1) Sarah really was his half-sister, so this was a half-truth... so this is a half-truth
 - 2) But it's a full-failure! He has more faith in his plan than in God's promise!
 3. God said he'd take care of Abraham, so why didn't Abraham trust God to do that
 - a. His faith was strong enough to get him moving with God and toward God
 - b. When tested, he fell back on his own plan; maybe we do have the faith of Abraham!
- B. In **Genesis 15**, God repeats His call to Abraham— a condensed version of it (**Gen 15:1**)
1. **Problem:** His promise hinged on Abraham having many descendants (**15:2-3**)
 - a. **Notice:** His legal heir is his servant Eliezer; he has an inheritance plan in place!
 - b. Does he have doubts that God will come through? Or is he just a businessman?
 - 1) He is at least wondering if God's promises will be fulfilled through Eliezer?
 - 2) *"I'll adopt Eliezer. At least I don't have to pay for braces or for college"*
 2. Well, the Eliezer plan was a plan all right, but it wasn't God's plan (**Gen 15:4-5**)
 - a. Will Abraham see God is faithful? Will he accept that God keeps promises?
 - b. Will he believe that God will do what he says, though improbable/implausible?
 - c. This what Paul and James quote making Abraham father of faith (**Gen 15:6**)
 - 1) What had changed? Abraham has nothing here except the promise of God
 - 2) There is no sight, there is only faith. And his faith is credited as righteousness
 - d. This what Paul and James point to when they say to have the faith of Abraham.
- C. In **Genesis 16**, Sarah comes up with her plan for an heir that seemed to be perfect
1. God told Abraham (**Gen 15**) heir will come from his flesh; Sarah can work with that
 - a. She suggests that Abraham take her servant as his concubine, his slave wife (**16:3**)
 - 1) Concubine doesn't have the legal standing and protections than a full wife has
 - 2) More to the point, concubine's sons do not generally have standing as heir
 - b. But son could be adopted and made the heir— like Abraham's plan with Eliezer
 2. So Ishmael would be both a biological son and an heir! *Surely this is a perfect plan!*
 - a. No... *and don't call me Shirley*. What we think is perfect usually causes problems
 - b. When we trust in our plans rather than wait for the Lord, it seldom turns out well
 - c. God **SOMETIMES** does things the hard way; He **ALWAYS** does things His way!

D. In **Genesis 17**, God will once again repeat his promises to Abraham

1. But now God is ready to flesh out for him some of the details of the plan (**17:15-16**)
 - a. When this child is finally born, they name him “Isaac” which means “Laughter”
 - b. When Sarah overhears this in the next chapter, will quietly laugh to herself
 - c. Abraham does more than just laugh; he falls down laughing (**Gen 17:17-18**)
2. Abraham is now 99— he knows a thing or two because he’s seen a thing or two
 - a. He thinks he’s got life well in hand; he thinks he has the plan all figured out
 - b. Sarah having a baby shower and him passing out baby cigars isn’t part of plan!
 - c. He tries to change God mind and accept the “Plan B” and accept Ishmael!

E. **Summary:** Abraham was called by God, and he embraced that call and followed God

1. And his life of faith was marked by great victories and sometimes spectacular failures
 - a. He left Haran to follow God’s call... *but he trusted his own plan in Egypt!*
 - b. He accepted that Eliezer was NOT his heir... *but trusted his Plan B with Ishmael*
 - c. He accepted God’s final plan in Isaac... *but not before laughing in God’s face!*
2. We know how the faith of Abraham will end—by offering Isaac on Mt. Moriah
 - a. We have a hard time imagining anyone having that kind of a faith, right?
 - b. He’d have never gotten there without fits-and-starts, flaws-and-flops along the way
 - 1) Abraham was not always right on the button in his obedience to God’s plan
 - 2) Sometimes when things got tough, he would revert to his own strategies/plans
 - 3) He kept thinking he knew what God was up to... and he often turned out wrong
3. So maybe we **CAN** have faith of Abraham—maybe that’s what it means to have faith

III. Conclusion

- A. What we see in Abraham is that faith grows-and-fails, waxes-and-wanes, ebbs-and-flows
1. Abraham’s faith wasn’t perfect, but it was a faith that never gave up. That’s the point
 2. Lynn Anderson suggests reasons why our faith sometimes feels like doubt—
 - a. **Basic Temperament:** Some just find faith harder; they are “*congenital doubters*”
 - b. **Ups-and-Downs:** Lifecycles caused by illness, fatigue, relationships, life stress
 - c. **Past Baggage:** Some struggle with the pain and trauma of the past that won’t let go
 - d. **Present Crisis:** Sometimes emergency events overwhelm both us and faith
 - e. **Pace of Life:** Sometimes we are so busy with life that faith is overwhelmed
 3. These external aspects of life overwhelm us, and they feel very much like doubt

B. But that's just it; these things speak to how we FEEL and not to who we ARE

1. The faith of Abraham is a basic commitment to keep moving toward God
 - a. Even as he struggled and even as he failed, he kept moving toward God
 - b. There are times we will live our faith even when we don't feel particularly faithful.
2. Anderson suggests the power of the faith of Abraham was that he just kept moving
Faith is, at its heart, a commitment of the will. It is a choice made in favor of God, a decision of will to keep moving in a Godward direction. It is perseverance in spite of the obstacles that doubt may throw in the way.
 - a. Abraham was faithful because he put one foot in front of other, moving toward God
 - b. On one occasion, Martin Luther King rallied his volunteers with these words—
"If you can't fly— run. If you can't run— walk. If you can't walk— crawl, but by all means keep on moving!"
 - c. Ultimately, is what faith must be, it is the decision to keep moving toward God.
 - 1) Faith doesn't mean we have all the answers (*or even understand questions*).
 - 2) Faith is that we're down with every doctrine or down pat with every practice
 - 3) Faith doesn't mean we understand with what God is doing in our lives
 - d. Faith is getting up each day and putting one foot in front of the other deciding

C. That's the lesson of Abraham; that's what it means to have the faith of Abraham

1. Every morning, he took down his tent and moved in the direction of God
 - a. Every night, he pitched his tent in the faith that God would keep His word
 - b. Every day, he put one foot in front of the other as he moved (**Heb 11:9-10**, NLT)
2. Having the faith of Abraham is when we decide that we will do the same thing
 - a. Faith doesn't mean that we will never have doubts or that we never make mistakes!
 - b. We see doubts and mistakes in Abraham; should we be shocked to find them in us?
 - c. Having the faith of Abraham means that we never stop moving in direction of God
3. We must keep moving; we must never, ever give up. Listen to Paul (**2 Cor 4:16-18**)