

Sermon Series: Extraordinary Faith
Sermon Title: Faith in Calling
Sermon Text: Genesis 12
Sermon Presenter: Pastor Larry

Introduction

My hope is built on nothing less, Than Jesus' blood and righteousness
I dare not trust the sweetest frame, But wholly trust in Jesus' name

I don't know about you, but I could never make it in this old world without trusting in Jesus' name! My hope is built on nothing less than His blood and righteousness! Trusting in the Lord and living by faith in the Lord is what we are going to be talking about today and over the coming weeks as we look at the extraordinary faith of a man named Abraham. Let's pray and ask God to open our hearts and minds to the truth we can learn from this man of God. Pray!

Abraham was once called Abram and his wife Sarah was once called Sari. Abraham was actually the very first Hebrew. He was born in the land of Ur a famous city and a gentile city. His father Terah, had actually started to move the family to Canaan, the place we now know God would call Abraham to go, but Terah settled in a place 600 miles from Ur, which he called Haran after his brother who had died. Haran was about 400 miles short of Canaan. Very interesting. The point being, Abraham was originally a gentile by birth, but became a Hebrew by the appointment and calling of God! Something most people don't think about! There's probably not another person in the Bible that so accurately describes our theme for the year: Extraordinary God + Ordinary People = Transformed Lives!

Abraham was truly an ordinary man and we are given great details of his life in the Bible. Dr. Herbert Lockyer put it this way...

"He was a rough, simple, venerable Bedouin-like sheep master. He uttered no prophecy, wrote no book, sang no song, gave no laws. Yet in the long list of Bible saints he alone is spoken of as 'the father of the faithful' and as 'the friend of God' (Isa. 41:8)."

In other words, Extraordinary God + Ordinary People = Transformed Lives!

And here's an amazing thing. Sometimes we see things in Scripture that are foreshadowings, prophecies, or what theologians call type! There are various foreshadowings of Jesus found in the Old Testament. But when it comes to someone being a type or foreshadowing of God, Abraham is the only one in the Old Testament who fits that description! Abraham was the father of a nation. He was a Father who would relate to God in a unique way when it comes to sacrifice. And we'll see that in a few weeks. But Abraham was very much human. And it's so important to know that the Bible is an honest book. It does not overlook or bypass the struggles or the failures of its great men and women. It highlights those things so that the rest of us ordinary people can see that it is only through faith in the grace, mercy and activity of Almighty

God in our lives that we can be overcomers and find the purpose and meaning in life God has for us. I love the way Harrington Lees puts it in a book titled “The Joy of Bible Study...”

“...the lives of men and women who speak to us from the pages of Scripture may be a veritable gold-mine of experience to us if we can remember the fact that they lived similar lives and triumphed—by faith, as the writer to the Hebrews reminds us...”

Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.

Hebrews 11:2 This is what the ancients were commended for.

Ordinary people with extraordinary faith in an extraordinary God! Oh and to be sure, their faith was tested and sometimes wavered, and was even weak at times. However, they held tenaciously onto their faith even when they came to the end of their lives and had not yet seen the fulfillment of everything God had promised them. They knew He would be faithful because He had been faithful in their lives!

Hebrews 11:13 All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth.

Hebrews 11:14 People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own.

Hebrews 11:15 If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return.

Hebrews 11:16 Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

Now, let's look at our man of the hour Abram, later named Abraham. Abraham was around 75 years of age when God spoke to him and asked him to take a big step of faith. Listen as Abraham's retirement plans are about to get radically changed by God and he must decide if he will have faith in God's calling. Two major things we will look at this morning. The Call of God and the Response of Abraham. Our text is Genesis 12.

The Call of God

Genesis 12:1 The LORD had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.

Genesis 12:2 “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.

Genesis 12:3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

There are three major things to understand about The Call: God's Initiative, God's Instructions, and God's Intentions.

God's Initiative

Genesis 12:1 The LORD had said to Abram...

God speaks to Abram! God took the first step as He takes the initiative in all human relationships. We're going to talk about God's call to Abraham, but first I want to give you some very important background to the truth of God's initiative. The story of Abraham is not the first time God had taken the initiative in reaching out to humankind. And it's important to note this: when someone begins searching for God you can be sure that it is in response to a move of God in their heart and life! The Psalmist said this...

Psalm 53:2 God looks down from heaven on all mankind to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God.

Psalm 53:3 Everyone has turned away, all have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.

But here's the good news! God is looking down from heaven and seeking us! He is reaching down to us! He takes the initiative to establish a relationship with us. We see this in His fellowship with Adam and Eve in the garden. He made them in His image and then came to fellowship with them daily. Heartbreak came to God when Adam and Eve decided to no longer trust Him and rebelled by eating the forbidden fruit.

Genesis 3:8 Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

Genesis 3:9 But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"

Genesis 3:10 He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

That was such a sad time for God! He had taken the initiative to establish a relationship with Adam and Eve, but they made other choices. Humanity's bad choices didn't stop with Adam and Eve. In Noah's time...

Gen 6:5 The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.

Gen 6:6 The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain.

Things had gotten so bad with humanity that God was in pain! Yes, God understands pain and suffering more than we could ever know. Some people think because God is perfect and sovereign that He knows nothing of pain, but only love, peace and happiness! God is love but it is that very love which causes Him to know the depths of pain, the depths of suffering, the likes of which we could never fully understand! Parents sometimes have a glimpse of the pain love

can cause! God as Creator, was the Father of humanity and His heart was filled with pain at the horrible sin, injustice, and abuse that was happening amongst His children! People were involved in unspeakable wickedness and some were even sacrificing their children to pagan gods in horrible rituals. I don't fully understand or have all the answers to all the hard questions surrounding the judgment of the flood, but I can say this: I believe God gave the people chance after chance to turn from their wickedness and as for as the innocent children, when they drew their last breath on this earth God gave them their first breath of eternal life in heaven where they would never face those terrible abuses again! Had God not stepped in, this pattern and cycle would have continued unabated, and God had to act. Again, I don't have all the answers, but under the Old Covenant there was the law and there was judgment, however, God had a New Covenant plan that included a powerful solution for breaking patterns and cycles of sinfulness and it was the cross! If you've struggled with patterns and cycles of sin that maybe were handed down to you, Jesus really is your answer. When I want to understand and know the heart of God I look to the Cross where God took on unfathomable pain and showed us His ultimate love for humanity by taking the punishment we deserved. A Japanese theologian wrote these words back in 1958...

"The gospel, that is, the pain of God, infinitely transcends the pain of the world, but why has it come into existence? What is the object of God's pain? It was born to save the pains of the world and to make the pains of the world its purpose."

In other words, God wants to take our pain, our sadness, our troubles, and our brokenness. He wants to carry our burdens. Not because He enjoys pain, but because it hurts Him more to see us hurting! Folks, this is the reason for God's plan of redemption! So we see in Genesis this: rather than give up on His plans for humanity, God once again went to His contingency plan, the plan He had if we rebelled. We must remember, there was no flaw in God's plan. He knew exactly what He was doing when His great love allowed the variable of humankind's free will to be part of His plan as He created us in His image! He is, after all, Sovereign, and it was His choice to give us choice! We chose poorly, and it caused God great pain, but God didn't give up on humanity as He protected Noah and His family in the Ark and rebuilt the human race through them. Listen...

Gen 6:9 This is the account of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God.

As a result God says to Noah...

Gen 6:18 But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark--you and your sons and your wife and your sons' wives with you.

He also made a promise to Noah, to never again flood the whole earth, and gave the rainbow as a sign of His promise! However, it wasn't long before people fell right back into a sinful, rebellious, and very prideful lifestyle! They no longer loved God in worship or gave God glory but pursued their own evil imaginations. We see that in the Tower of Babel story in Genesis 11

right before our text for today. However, God continues to implement His covenant plan after He disperses the people. His love and His pain were working together to make a way for the redemption of humankind! We are going to see this in a powerful way as He continues implementing His plan of salvation through Abraham. He takes the initiative and speaks to Abraham! Remember, there was no written Scripture at this time. The law had yet to be given through Moses. But God takes the first step and is about to give Abraham some instructions and directions for his life.

Now what does all of this have to do with me? Good question! The very fact that you are listening to this message, here at church or online, this can only mean God has taken the initiative to have a personal relationship with you! Here's a question for you...how closely are you listening? Do you want to know God's will and direction for your life? Are you ready for what God wants to speak to your heart? Let's look at what happens next as God speaks to Abraham...

God's Instructions

Genesis 12:1 The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.

God tells Abraham to go, but didn't tell him where he was going! However, he did tell him what he was to leave behind: His country, his people, and his father's household! In essence he was to leave his land, his kins people, and his inheritance! That was asking a lot! The calling of God can be difficult, but there are reasons God asks us to leave certain things behind. Sometimes it's because of the influence those things have on us! Sometimes it's the dependence we have on those things rather than God! And sometimes it's the distraction those things can be to us.

Abraham was born into a pagan family. We see this in Joshua 24:2...

Joshua 24:2 Joshua said to all the people, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Long ago your ancestors, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the Euphrates River and worshiped other gods.

The people of Ur worshiped the moon as a god named Nanna. So God was calling Abraham away from that influence. This is why it is significant when Abraham would later say this to the king of Sodom...

Genesis 14:22 ... "With raised hand I have sworn an oath to the LORD, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth...

Abraham was called by God to turn away from the false, pagan gods he had been raised to worship. When Abraham said he had sworn an oath to the LORD, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, the heaven he would have been referencing was everything in the night sky, the heavens, the stars and the planets, including the moon. And here's something huge to

understand: since his family worshiped a false god, the moon, there was no personal interaction with their god. There was no living God in their religion, and no Holy Spirit to speak to their hearts. However, we see The True and Living God take the initiative by speaking to Abraham and revealing to him the truth. This interaction with the Extraordinary, Almighty, and Personal God had such a powerful impact on Abraham that it transformed his life!

What is God calling you to leave behind as you follow Him? Have there been idols or false gods in your life, things that are not really gods, but you've treated them as if they were and given your allegiance to them? I know when I decided to follow Jesus there were things in my life that were like idols and I needed a change in culture! I was not in a good place as far as the friends I was allowing to influence me. I knew God wanted me to still care about those friends and to pray for them and to be a good example to them, but I also knew I couldn't continue to be involved in the same things they were involved in and be a good influence. I knew a part of my being able to make a difference in their lives was by no longer participating in the same bad behaviors. I was called to leave that culture and begin a new life! I've had people from my high school, years later, tell me they were thankful for the witness my change of life was to them. That's not a brag on me, that's a brag on how our extraordinary God can take an ordinary and sinful person like me, and transform their life and showcase to the world His awesome power!

But God also calls us to leave certain things behind because of our dependence on those things rather than on God! Abraham was to leave his land and his kin, and his father's house. He was being asked to leave behind his inheritance. Abraham was going to have to learn to depend on God's provision, His presence, His power, and His protection. We are sometimes hesitant because we have become dependent and distracted by the things we are presently holding on to as our security. It's what we know and are comfortable with. God was asking so much from Abraham, and sometimes from us, but we must learn to trust...

God's Intentions

Genesis 12:2 "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.

Genesis 12:3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

God's intentions are seen in His very personal promises to Abraham. Notice, seven times God uses the word you and your! When God calls you it's personal and His call will be personally tailored to you! And when God calls you away from something He's calling you to something else and God's something else is always better than the something you had before! God was calling Abraham to be the father of a nation! He would be the Father of the family line through which the Messiah, the Savior of the world would come! Abraham would have no reason to even think of that because he was 75 years old and his wife Sarah was around 66 years old when God issued the call for them to move and they had no children. So Abraham couldn't even comprehend that part of God's promise. It didn't make any sense to him at the time and Abraham would be 100 and Sarah 90 or 91 when their son Issac was born.

God may not be calling you to leave your country, or even your town, but He may be calling you to get involved in some type of ministry to others. It could be as simple as volunteering to help in some ministry, which could be a big step for you, I understand that. It could be a career change or a job change. It could be a lifestyle change and walking away from things you know are not good or healthy or Godly. But never forget when God calls you from something He calls you to something and His something is always better than your something! And you have no idea! I love what Paul says in 1 Corinthians...

1 Corinthians 2:9 However, as it is written: "What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived"— the things God has prepared for those who love him—

He is evidently loosely quoting a verse from Isaiah...

Isaiah 64:4 Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him.

We know the True and Living God has good intentions and plans for those who are willing to love Him, and wait for Him. But, as I've said so many times, God will not force His will or His ways on anyone! We can choose to reject or accept His offer and all that goes along with His offer. And what does go along with His offer? I don't know what that includes for you, but for Abraham God said...

Genesis 12:2 "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.

God was going to not only use him to father a nation, but God was going to bless Abraham and protect him from those who would seek to do him harm, and God was going to bless others through Abraham. In other words, Abraham was going to be a channel, a vessel, an instrument of God's blessing to others. This is actually referring to the fact that God's redemptive plan for the world would come through Abraham's family line. Jesus the Messiah would come from this line! What would Abraham's response be? We're about to find out, but I want you to ponder this question as well...What will be your response to God's call on your life? Okay, as you're thinking about that, let's look at Abraham's response...

The Response

Genesis 12:4 So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran.

Genesis 12:5 He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.

This is such a powerful testimony from an Old Testament Character! Abraham had a trust in the promises of God, and also seemed to understand something of the plan of God. The writer of Hebrews indicates that Abraham was looking forward to the ultimate fulfillment of God's covenant in the Messiah and in the Kingdom of God, rather than just what God was going to do in his earthly life! In other words, Abraham had an eternal, Godly, perspective. However, as we'll see, this didn't mean Abraham's faith was always flawless, but I think we would all agree Abraham's faith was pretty strong. There are three major things to understand about Abraham's response: His Attention, His Action, His Addition

Abraham's Attention - When God spoke, Abraham was listening even though there was not yet written Scripture as we have today, and probably just oral tradition concerning God's Activity with humankind. And even though he had been brought up in a pagan religion, when God spoke to him he heard! As we've already seen, God takes the initiative, but we need to be open to hear! We need to be listening and willing to learn. We need to be teachable. Are you teachable? Are you listening? Are you spiritually aware of God's work in your life? Evidently Abraham was and as a result he heard God speak to him. Many years later, the nation Abraham would father, stopped listening to God and they were exiled and taken into captivity by the Babylonians. While there, they were granted the freedom to buy, sell and own property. When Babylon was defeated by Cyrus, Abraham's descendants had a chance to return to their homeland. But many had become comfortable in their captivity and with the pagan practices of that culture and decided to stay. I'm afraid we may have a similar situation in our nation today. Many have become comfortable with the wickedness of our culture and have embraced it. We are not paying attention or listening when God speaks. What God said to Abraham's descendants in Babylon is what I believe He is saying to us today...

Isaiah 55:1 "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.

Isaiah 55:2 Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare.

Isaiah 55:3 Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David.

So we need to ask ourselves whether or not we are listening for and to the voice of God? And we need to ask ourselves what our response would be if we did hear God speaking to our hearts. Abraham was attentive, heard God speak to his heart and he took action. What was...

Abraham's Action

Genesis 12:4 So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran.

Abraham obeys! Most of us would not think about starting all over again and beginning a brand new career at 75! But Abraham is told to leave his family, and his homeland to go somewhere brand new to him and he doesn't even know yet where that will be. And you've got to remember

back in the Old Testament days, this was not the same as moving from one state to another like people do here in the U.S. To leave one's homeland back in Abraham's day would put someone at great risk in every way, financially, security, and safety wise. Not to mention, there were no planes, trains, or automobiles, so this could mean they would never see their family again.

But instead of winding down, God is about to kick start things for Abraham in a big way! And talk about trusting God! "Go to the land I will show you!" Pack up your household and go where I tell you. I would be inclined to say, "Tell me where I'm going first, please." I don't know about you, but sometimes I have trouble just trusting that God is going to work out little things in my life. I have a tendency to worry about every little thing! Abraham had some of these issues also, but, as we will see, he obeyed. In fact the writer of Hebrews mentions Abraham by name and says...

Hebrews 11:8 By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.

Hebrews 11:9 By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise.

Hebrews 11:10 For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

The question for us today, just like it was for Abraham back in the book of Genesis, is this: Will we trust the plan and promise of God? Abraham obeyed and took a huge step of faith. The writer of Hebrews says something very important about faith...

Hebrews 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

Abraham had come to believe in the One True, Almighty, Creator God of heaven and earth! You've heard me say this before, "who you put your faith in is more important than how gargantuan your faith is!" A mustard seed can move a mountain, but if you have no faith it becomes impossible to have a personal relationship with God and what would please God more than for you to have a personal relationship with Him? Nothing!!!

Here are some words of wisdom from a Baptist Evangelist, Manley Beasley, who I had the privilege of hearing teach on the topic of faith from a book he had written on faith when I was a teenager. It was called the Faith Workbook. It has been republished as Adventures in Faith. And I quote:

Faith is a reason at rest with God.

Faith grows exceedingly fast not by a glimpse, not by a look, but by a gaze upon Him.

Faith is dependency upon God, and this God-dependency begins only when self dependency ends.

Faith does not always take you out of the storm; faith calms you in the storm.

Faith bids eternal truth to become present fact.

Continually revise your relationship to God until the only certainty you have is the certainty that God is faithful; not you.

Beasley, Manley. ADVENTURES IN FAITH (Kindle Locations 56-99). Unknown. Kindle Edition.

Without faith we will never be obedient to the voice or will of God. Abraham had faith, was attentive to God's voice and his actions pointed to this faith. Paul put it this way in Galatians...

Galatians 3:6 So also Abraham "believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

Galatians 3:7 Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham.

Galatians 3:8 Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you."

Galatians 3:9 So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

Now some of you are thinking, yeah, but I'm not perfect like Abraham and I don't have nearly as big a faith like Abraham! Abraham was far from perfect and his faith was not perfect. Again, the Bible is very honest about its greatest leaders! Abraham was an ordinary guy like you and me and guess what he does? He decides to adjust God's instructions, you know, just tweak them a little bit. Maybe bend God's plans to suit his own. Let me show you what I mean as we look at this last thing about Abraham's response...

Abraham's Addition

Genesis 12:5 He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.

Abraham obviously trusted God because he obeyed! But Abraham's obedience was not 100%! He had only partially fulfilled the instructions because he makes an addition to God's instructions! We are not being completely obedient if we leave out some of the details or if we add some details to the original instructions! God had told Abraham: go from your country, your people and your father's household, but Abraham takes some of his father's family with him. The fact that he took his nephew Lot seems like a minor detail, but it was not. It may seem like a nice gesture for him to take his nephew Lot and his family, but that was not in the instructions. Lot had his own family, flocks, herds and tents, and things got complicated! It was decided they would have to split up. Lot chose the best land towards the east so Abraham went west. Long story short, Lot would later get caught up in a regional conflict between nine kingdoms. Five kings against four other kings. The four kings won and when they were taking captives and the spoils of war, Lot and his things were taken as well. Abraham jumps into action and takes 318 of his men and goes to war because of Lot. He defeats the four kings and rescues Lot and his things, but wow, what a distraction for Abraham. When it comes to following God's will for our lives, we need to pay attention to the details and trust God's plan. If we're not careful we can complicate things for ourselves. Are you paying attention to God's voice, are you willing to act on His call, and are you willing to trust His plans alone without adding your own tweaks? It's a

matter of extraordinary faith in an extraordinary God who takes the initiative, gives us instructions, and always has the most pure of intentions! Will you have faith in God's calling for your life? Let's pray!