

OUR JOURNEY OF FAITH (Genesis 12:1-9)

Let me ask you a question. Is there anyone here who just loves the process of moving, of transferring your treasures and possessions from one residence to another residence? Who loves to do that? I have never met anybody who is head-over-heels in love with the process of moving. You might love the place to which you move, but you probably aren't really crazy about the process. It may make you crazy, but that is different.

Beginning at the age of 25 and for the next almost 30 years, I moved six times.

- The first move was from OKC to Grand Lake. When I made that move, I rented a U-Haul. I think it was the largest U-Haul they had.
- When I moved from Grand Lake to Hinton, the church in Hinton paid for a moving company to move me and my family.
- The same thing happened when I moved from Hinton to Stillwater three years later. The church in Hinton said we'll pay for it if you will just leave. They didn't say that. The church in Stillwater paid for the move.
- When I moved from one house in Stillwater to another, I again rented a U-Haul, and a friend used his horse trailer to help.
- When I moved from Stillwater to Enid, I called Two Guys and a Truck. That was the name of the company. It was the easiest move I ever made.
- Finally, more than six years ago when I moved from Brookside to 1628 S. Jackson St., the men of this church helped me move. We got 'er done on a Sunday afternoon after a church dinner and before evening worship.

Moving is a bit like having a baby. After it is over, you say to yourself, "I don't want to do that again." But then, the pain of it is soon replaced by the joy of what it brings. A few years go by, and you're picking out paint colors for the baby's room.

When I lived in Stillwater, we had a church member who was a retired Army Colonel. His wife was the organist for the church. She said that during their married life, they moved 23 times. It just so happened that her husband's area of expertise in the Army was logistics. He knew how to get material and personnel from one place to another in the most efficient, cost-effective way possible. I imagine their moves went like clock-work. They had it down.

This morning, we are going to look at a man who made a move, a big move. He lived almost 4200 years ago. One source estimated that he was born in 2166 B.C. He is revered by the world's three, great, monotheistic religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. His name was Abraham.

There are three occasions in the Bible, two in the OT and one in the NT, where Abraham is referred to as "the friend of God." I can't think of anything greater to aspire to be than the friend of God. It is marvelous to be a follower of Jesus. It is tremendous to be a child of God. But if God were to call you "friend," that would put you in rare company. As far as I know, there are only two people in the Bible whom God called His

friend—Abraham and Moses.

To be fair, Jesus did refer to His disciples as His friends, and He also said, “You are My friends if you do what I command you” (John 15:14). The essential quality of a friend of Jesus is obedience, obedience to His word and to His will.

Today, and for the next several weeks we are going to explore the life of Abraham, a man who lived in the center of God’s plans and power. It is my hope and prayer, that from Abraham’s example, God will teach us to draw closer to Him by trusting Him and obeying Him more and more.

The story of Abraham really begins in Genesis 12. We are going to look at vv. 1-9. At that time Abraham was known as Abram, and the first thing God called Abram to do was to move. God did not call Abram to move down the street or across town. In fact, God didn’t even tell him the location to which he was to move. God didn’t give Abram a map with an X to mark the spot of his new home. All God was said was, “I’ll show you.”

If you think it is difficult to move now, consider the challenges Abram faced. There were no U-Haul’s. The owners of Two Guys and Truck hadn’t formulated their business plan yet. There were no roadside inns. There were not even any paved roads. There was no GPS or printed maps.

In Genesis 12 we discover that God called Abram to join Him on a journey. It was a journey that required faith. We are going to note five truths concerning our journey of faith. Let’s start by reading just the first verse of Genesis 12.

Our Journey of Faith Begins with God

God is the starting place. The journey begins with Him. Abram didn’t go to God and say, “God, I’ve got a great idea.” Up until Genesis 12:1, Abram didn’t even know God. Abram didn’t go to God; God went to Abram. That is how it was then; that is how it is now. The journey starts with God. Jesus Himself said to his disciples, “You did not choose Me, but I chose you” (John 15:16). On our own, left to ourselves, we will never choose God. He must come to us; He must work within our hearts first. He is always prior.

If all we had was the account in Genesis, it would be a little unclear as to when and where God first called Abram. In the final verses of Genesis 11, we are told that Abram and his extended family left Ur of the Chaldeans and moved to Haran. In Genesis 12:4 we are informed that Abram left Haran when he was 75. That is not the complete picture.

Listen to the beginning of Stephen’s sermon in Acts 7:2-5. God came to Abram twice: first in Ur and then in Haran after his father died. Both times God said, “Leave and go to the place that I will show you.”

If you happen to have a map of the OT world in the back of your Bible and were to look at it, you would notice that Ur was located in what is today southern Iraq. Haran was in what is today Syria. Haran was well over 600 miles NW of Ur.

One day God called Abram to leave his hometown, his extended family, and all that was familiar and go to a land that God would show him. Up until this time, we have no evidence that Abram had any relationship with God at all. Archeologists have discovered

the ancient civilization of Ur. All evidence suggests that the people of Ur worshiped the moon god. Very likely, Abram was a pagan idolater, but somehow God made Himself known to Abram.

How did God do that? He didn't use Scripture because at this time there was no Scripture. Moses was the first one to record God's written revelation of Himself to man, and he lived long after Abraham. We are not told of an angel coming to Abram. According to Stephen, God appeared to Abram. Theologians call this a theophany. God appeared to Moses in a burning bush. He appeared to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace as the fourth man in the fire. In one form or another, God appeared to Abram and called Abram to begin a journey with Him.

As I said, God didn't tell Abram where he was going to go. Now, wouldn't you have asked a few questions? "Lord, how long is this journey going to take? Just where am I going anyway? Why don't you just make me into a great nation here?" We have no record of any questions or objections that Abram raised.

Notice also that God didn't give Abram a reason as to why he should go. He gave Abram a promise but not reason. God feels no obligation to justify to you what He wants you to do, what He calls you to do. God knows that if He gives us a reason, we will sit down and ponder that reason in our mind. That is not what we need; so, in His wisdom, God gives our heart a promise, and that promise impels us to trust God and propels us to act. God has given us His sure and certain promises, but He may choose not to give you any reasons because that is not what you and I need.

Remember this, it is not up to you to decide what you want to do for God. The journey of faith begins with God—not you.

Our Journey of Faith Means Sacrifice

When God calls you to go from where you are to where He wants you to be, that means you are going to have to leave something behind. You can't go with God and stay where you are at the same time. Look again at v. 1.

Remember, this is the second time God came to Abram with the same command. Apparently, when God called Abram the first time, Abram went and his extended family chose to go with him. When Abram announced he was leaving, his father's household tagged along. Look at 11:31.

This verse tells me that it is possible for us to allow other people to hijack God's plans for us. God didn't call Abram to settle in Haran. He called Abram to go to the place He would show him. Quite possibly, Abram set out with that intention, but somewhere along the way, he allowed his family to deter him from what he knew God initially called him to do.

Have you ever settled for less than what God had in mind for you? Maybe you have left the land of paganism, but before you entered the Land of Promise, you found a land of comfort and you decided to settle there.

Don't think that if you've started the journey of faith that you have fulfilled all that God wants. God wants you to stay with Him all the way. God doesn't want you to stop

halfway. He wants you to go with Him all the way. To go with God all the way, there will be sacrifice. You may have to give up something you love. You may have to give up someone you love.

The things that God may call us to give up will be different for everyone, but there is one thing that everyone must give up. The one thing that we must all give up is what Bruce Wilkinson calls our Comfort Zone. In his book *The Dream Giver*, he wrote:

A Comfort Zone is our cozy quilt of relationships. It's the padding of routines that make us feel good. It's the security fence of acceptable behavior. It's the steel mesh of our past successes and failures . . .

Inside our Comfort Zone, we feel safe. We're pretty sure we can succeed, look good, and feel happy there. Outside, well, who knows?

Outside everyone's comfort zone lies the great Unknown.

That's why we don't want to go there.

Now, there's nothing wrong with a Comfort Zone. After all, no one likes danger and uncertainty. No one signs up for discomfort.

Yet a Comfort Zone can become a barrier . . . Because our Big Dream always lies outside our Comfort Zone. That means we will have to leave what feels comfortable if we want to achieve our Dream.

What is God calling you to leave behind? Fortunately, God called Abram a second time. He wasn't obligated to do so. If we say "no" to God, we have no assurance that He will come to us again with a second chance. For that reason, say *yes* the first time. By immediately saying *yes* to God, you will save yourself from a great deal of stress and heartache. What we sacrifice to do God's will is so much less than what we gain by doing it.

Our Journey of Faith Ushers Blessings

God made three promises to Abram. First, God promised childless Abram a posterity. Look at the beginning of v. 2. God said, "And I will make of you a great nation." Abram had no children. He was 75, and his wife was 65. Yet, God promised to make of Abram a great nation. There was only one thing more incredible than God's promise. That one thing is that Abram believed God. Amazingly, Abram believed what God told him. That is what God is looking for—someone who will believe Him because once we believe Him, He will do great and mighty things for us and through us. The key that unlocks the power of God on your behalf is belief, faith. Our journey with God is a faith journey. The Bible teaches we are to walk by faith, not by sight.

A second promise God made to Abram is found in v. 7. In addition to a posterity, God promised Abram land. God said, "To your offspring I will give this land." Abram went to the promised land, but the only land Abram ever owned was a field that had a cave at the far end of the field. He bought that from the Hittites so that he could bury his wife and those of his household that died. That is the only part of the Promised Land that Abraham ever owned.

Many centuries would pass before Abraham's family occupied the land God had promised. It finally became theirs when Joshua led the children of God in the Promised Land, and the people took it from those who lived there.

In addition to the promise of a posterity and the promise of land, God gave Abram one more promise. He promised to bless Abram. Five times the words *bless* and *blessing* are used in Genesis 12:2-3.

Saying *yes* to God brings two kinds of blessings. First, we receive personal blessings. Second, others receive blessings because of what we do. Look once again at vv. 2-3. God promised Abram, "You will receive a blessing, and you will be a blessing." Obedience always brings blessings, first to ourselves and then to others.

Because Abram was willing to say *yes* to God, he has literally been a blessing to the whole world. It was through his lineage that Jesus came to the world as the Savior.

Likewise, God wants us to be a blessing to the whole world. Through our lives and through our voices, God wants to bring the news of that Savior to the whole world.

In their book *On Mission with God*, Avery Willis and Henry Blackaby wrote:

God's purpose in choosing Abraham wasn't merely to bless him but to make him a blessing to all nations. When God comes to you, He has a much bigger picture than your personal salvation in mind. He has chosen you to be involved in His worldwide kingdom for the rest of your life . . .

. . . with every blessing comes a responsibility. If you experience only the blessing you're only halfway there! For every top-line blessing a bottom-line responsibility exists. How has God blessed you, and in what ways is He using you to bless others?

Our Journey of Faith Involves Others

When you say *yes* to God's call upon your life, it will affect others. In fact, your obedience will have a dramatic effect upon those who are the closest to you. That was the case in Abram's life. Look at vv. 4-5. When Abram began following God that meant that his household had to leave all that was familiar to them, as well.

Whenever you obey God there is a price to pay, and that price will not be paid by you alone. My wife pays a price for me to be a pastor. When it is rainy or the weather is blah or we get home late on a Saturday evening, we never decide to sleep in on Sunday morning. We never make a snap decision to go away for the weekend. I rarely sit with her on Sunday, unless we have a guest speaker. We never come to church together. Those are minor things.

I have met many people whose dads were pastors. Some had good experiences. Many did not. For some, their dad was at fault. He showed more concern to everyone else than he did to them. For others, the church was at fault.

Just keep in mind, if you obey God, others close to you will end up paying a price for your obedience. We also need to remember that there is a price for disobedience. Sin will also have a negative affect upon your family. Keep in mind that the price of disobedience

is much higher than obedience.

Our Journey of Faith Lasts a Lifetime

Look at v. 9. “And Abram journeyed on.” For Abram, there was no point of final arrival.

The same is true for us. As long as we are in these yet-to-be resurrected bodies, there is no point at which we can say, “I’ve arrived.” We will not have made it until we make it to heaven.

Abram was 75 years old when he left Haran to follow God’s call. Look at Genesis 25:7-8. He followed God for at least 100 years. There were ups and downs. There were successes and failures, but three times in Scripture Abraham is referred to as the friend of God. What a wonderful title!

It takes time to become someone’s friend. This is certainly true of being a friend of God. We start out as His enemy. When we confess Christ as Savior and Lord, we immediately become His child. We become His friend, however, by walking with Him day after day.

Have you begun the journey of faith? Have you gotten side-tracked along the way?

Not long before his death, Henri Nouwen wrote a book called *Sabbatical Journeys*. He told about some friends of his who were trapeze artists. They were known as the Flying Roudella’s.

They told Nouwen that there is a special relationship between the flyer and the catcher on the trapeze. The flyer is the one that lets go, and the catcher, obviously, is the one who catches. As the flyer swings high above the crowd on the trapeze, the moment comes when he must let go. He arcs out into the air. His job is to remain as still as possible and wait for the strong hands of the catcher to pluck him from the air.

One of the Flying Roudella’s told Nouwen, “The flyer must never try to catch the catcher.” The flyer must wait in absolute trust. The catcher will catch him, but he must wait.

In our relationship with God, we are the flyer, and God is the catcher. Our job is to let go and allow God to catch us. Don’t grasp for Him. Trust Him. He will catch you. He will not let you fall. You may fall farther and longer than you wish, but He will catch you. Of that you can be certain.

Are you willing to trust Him? Are you willing to journey with Him? I invite you to begin or to continue your journey of faith with God.