

ABRAHAM

THE FATHER OF FAITH

Recently, the Lord led me into a study of the life of Abraham...

It has been a very enlightening study on the man that we affectionately call- The Father of Faith.

The Lord has shown me how his journey of faith is a perfect illustration of a Christian's walk of faith and contains a multitude of practical lessons for us today. So what I believe the Lord has commissioned me to do this month is begin to share some of the lessons contained in the scriptural account of his life in order to encourage us in our walk of faith.

So let's begin in Genesis chapter twelve where his calling into a walk of faith is described...

STUCK IN HARAN

Genesis 12:1 says, "Now the Lord had said to Abram: 'Get out of your country, from your family, and from your father's house, to a land I will show you...'"

This is a very significant verse because if you look back to the end of chapter eleven you will see how Abram and Sarai left Ur of the Chaldeans with Terah (Abram's father) and with Lot (Abram's nephew) even though God specifically said to leave his family and father's house behind (see verse 31).

But someone might be thinking what I once did- "Didn't God speak to Abram *after* he and his father moved to Haran? After all, Genesis chapter twelve does follow chapter eleven!" That is a good point... I'm glad you brought it up! However, in the Book of Genesis, every chapter is not necessarily in chronological order (compare chapters 2&3). It is for this reason (as well as many others) that it is important to interpret the Scriptures in light of other Scriptures. In this case, Acts chapter seven gives us a more accurate description of what actually took place.

In Acts 7:2-4, when Stephen was addressing the high priest concerning the charges being made against him, he gives a very specific commentary on what actually occurred during this time-period of Genesis. Stephen stated that God appeared to and spoke to Abram while they were still in Ur before they moved to Haran. This does not at all contradict what we see in Genesis chapters 11-12 because notice again what Genesis 12:1 said- "Now the Lord had said to Abram..." The word "had" denotes that what God said to Abram was something that took place in the past, and from Stephen's statement, it took place before Abram and his father's house moved to Haran.

So why do I make this point? It is to show that Abram only partially obeyed God's command.

You see, God told Abram to not only leave his country, but also to leave his family and his father's house. But instead of he and Sarai leaving Ur alone, Abram took his father Terah and nephew Lot with them. You see, by not fully obeying what the Lord had told him to do in leaving Ur alone, Abram got off the path that God intended for him to be on and became stuck- living in Haran. I believe it is no coincidence either that when they left for Canaan that they wound up

dwelling in this place called "Haran." Isn't it interesting that the place that they wound up living in had the same name as Abram's deceased brother- Haran?

You see, Abram was obviously very much attached to his family by his evident unwillingness to fully obey God's call to leave his relatives behind in Ur. And then- whether it was motivated by Terah or Abram himself- they ended up dwelling in a place named after the one very near and dear to them that had passed away.

This illustrates the lives of so many believers today...

There are multitudes of Christians who have lost a loved one and have never been able to get back on track with God's purpose for their lives. They live their lives in the memory of the past, and because of this, they fail to move on with God.

If this is you, please listen to me... While death is an unavoidable part of life, it is not the end of our existence! If you have lost a loved one in the Lord, be comforted in knowing that you will see them again. The last thing they would ever want from you is to be stuck in grief and sorrow. They are in the grandstands of heaven rooting for you to get back on track that God still has for you, and run with endurance the race set before you (Hebrews 12:1-2)!

God had to preach this very message to Joshua... After Moses had died- the one that they loved and revered- God spoke to Joshua saying, "Moses My servant is dead. Now therefore, arise, go over this Jordan..." (Joshua 1:2) In other words, God was basically saying to Joshua- "Joshua, it is time for you to stop mourning the death of Moses! It is time for you to arise and fulfill my plan and purpose for your life!" And it is no different for any of us either! We still have purpose! We still have a course set before us! The enemy would love nothing more but for us to live the rest of our lives stuck in the memory of the way things used to be, and to keep us from moving on with God.

Do you remember the time when David lost his child? David's servants questioned the fact that he was not mourning the death of his son and David responded- Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me" (2 Samuel 12:23). You see, there is a tremendous truth in this response by David...

David knew it was futile to wallow around in grief and self-pity because no matter how much he mourned it was not going to bring his son back to him. David also understood that even though he could not cause his son to return to him, that he would one day go to him. You see, when we truly understand in our hearts that we will indeed reunite with those who have passed through death's door before us, our attitude will be different. That is why the Apostle Paul said that a believer should not sorrow like the world does (1 Thessalonians 4:13). We have this very hope that David also understood... We *will* see our brothers and sisters in Christ again! What a glorious hope!

Therefore, if we will meet them again, why should we allow ourselves to be stuck in Haran- that is, stuck in grief and sorrow? We should remove from ourselves that spirit of heaviness and replace it with the garments of praise! Praise God in knowing that He has made a way for His children to live together forever in eternity! Praise God in knowing that He still has a plan and purpose for your life! Praise God that He loves us intensely and has promised to never leave us or forsake us!

This all can be best summarized in the words that the Holy Spirit said through the Apostle Paul... We must always in every circumstance “forget those things which are behind us and press on for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (see Philippians 3:13-14).

FOLLOW ME!

All of this that we see in the calling and initial steps of Abram should teach every one of us a very important lesson for our Christian walk... **The call to a life of faith is a call to a life of discipleship!**

We see when Jesus called His disciples to a life of faith He just simply said to them– “Follow Me!” This simple call had a variety of implications... It basically implied the same thing as what God said to Abram when He told him to- “Get out of your country, from your family, and from your father’s house!” You see, although God may not have ever called us to forsake the specific things that He told Abram to forsake, all three of these things denote things that we can all relate to.

Number one, to “get out of your country” simply denotes leaving the place that we have been so familiar with...

For example, this might describe moving from our hometown- where we are comfortable, have a steady job, and all our friends & family are at. But getting out of our “country” could also be just simply quitting a job that you know God does not want you at. Can you imagine the resistance Abram must have received when he told the people of Ur how this unknown God had spoken to him and he was leaving?

Number two, to depart “from your family” denotes restructuring your priorities in regards to certain relationships...

Many of us are familiar with the teaching of Jesus on discipleship where He said, “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.” (Luke 14:26) Well, although it might seem harsh on the surface, Jesus was just talking about restructuring our priorities. If you compare Luke’s account with Matthew 10:37 you will find that the word “hate” just simply means to “love less than.” You see, in order to have a disciplined walk of faith, the Lord must be the number one person in your life to where if anyone gets in the way of you following Him wholeheartedly, you will sever that relationship.

And, number three, to depart “from your father’s house” denotes the abandonment of certain securities that we were once dependant on... All of us can remember the reality that sunk in when we moved out of our parent’s house for the first time. Nothing anybody could say to us could prepare us for the revelation to come of how much it costs to fully support ourselves. Well, oftentimes God will call us to leave the “nests” that we have in our lives and climb out on the limb of faith- trusting God with every step of faith.

You see, the Lord will oftentimes call us to do some very difficult things in our walk of faith. Following Him and seeking first His kingdom is not always the easiest decision to make. Sometimes it requires much self-sacrifice and will defy our natural reasoning. But when we act on what He leads us to do- fully trusting Him even though it does not currently make sense- we will always find that His way is the best way! Let me put it this way... **Following the Lord will**

require us to count the costs, but the reward for the walk of faith always pays more than it costs!

THE FOUNDATION OF FAITH

Now let's look at what else God said to Abram in His initial calling to a life of faith...

He went on to say in verse 2-3- "I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Notice that after God gave Abram a commission (vs.1), He gave him several exceedingly great and precious promises. Abram's whole pilgrimage began with a Word of God. It was through these promises made by God Himself that fueled Abram's faith.

You see, what these promises did was they birthed hope in the heart of Abram. He heard what God said He was going to do for him and it fueled His faith because he confidently expected God to perform what He promised. And this is how faith begins with us to...

We see in Hebrews 11:1 that faith is the substance of things hoped for. You see, without hope, we have nothing for our faith to give substance to. This is why Romans 10:17 says that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God... It is because it is impossible to have Bible faith without first hearing what His will is for us. F.F. Bosworth once said, "Faith begins where the will of God is known," and this is so true. You could turn this statement around and see the same truth... "Faith never starts where the will of God is unknown." You see, many have been mistaken in regards to faith... You will hear of many so called faith people that are believing for this and that. The problem is that they are basing their faith on nothing. If you were to ask them- "What is your faith based on?" they couldn't tell you. They are just "believing" for something off a wimb, just simply because they desire it. This is not how faith comes! Faith comes by hearing- either from God or about God. Either way, faith will only begin after we have heard the express will of God, and this is what true faith is based on.

It is most definitely true that we walk by faith and not by sight, but this does not mean that faith is blind... This just means that our walk of faith describes the steps we are taking after faith has already come. Our "walk" of faith began when we heard of God or from God, but our "walk" of faith requires nothing more than what we heard in the beginning. It walks completely by faith in what it heard and is not moved by what it sees. **Faith is not based on what it sees; Faith is based on what it has heard.**

What an important lesson this is for us to...

Just as Abram heard from God and then stepped out in unwavering faith based on the promises God made to him, so we need to follow in his footsteps. We need to put the upmost importance on both hearing what God has promised us in His written Word and having what He speaks to us through His Holy Spirit, and then step out in the full assurance of faith, not letting anything or anyone deter us from obtaining those promises. Hearing from God and hearing His will is so vitally important to our walk of faith because just as it was with Abraham, so it will be with us... We will have a lot of opportunities to quit following God, but if we have hope as the anchor of our soul and faith as the rope connecting us to that anchor, we will remain grounded, steadfast, and will not be moved away from the hope of the gospel which we heard (Colossians 1:23)!

THE GOD OF ALL COMFORT

Then in verses 4&5 we are told how Abram, after the death of his father Terah, decided to pull up his stakes and depart from Haran to journey towards Canaan as the Lord had originally spoken to him to do.

And we are specifically told at the end of verse 6 that as he entered into the land of Canaan and passed through it that “the Canaanites were then in the land.” This no doubt would have discouraged Abram from believing that Canaan was possibly the Promised Land because Abram probably believed that the land God promised to show him would have at least been vacant.

You see, I would venture to say that when Abram was passing through the land of Canaan- to the place of Shechem as far as the terebinth trees of Moreh, that he fell in love with it. I just bet as he walked through it that his heart leaped on the inside of him- knowing that this was indeed the land of promise. But picture this... After he was traveling through the land, he came upon an inhabited area and realized that this land already belonged to someone else- the Canaanites!

How discouraging this had to be. I mean, Abram and his people had just traveled around 400 miles from Haran only to find that this land, which he just knew had to be the land God had promised to give him, was already taken by someone else. It was at this point when disappointment and discouragement was at their height that God literally stepped on the scene to offer direction and encouragement...

In verse 7 He appears to Abram and gives him a new promise- “To your descendants I will give this land!” I can imagine how much this blessed Abram! His faith was quickened and his hope was renewed! The thing that he knew in his heart to be true was confirmed to him by the Lord and that “mountain” of the Canaanites dwelling in the land already, just shrunk in the light of what God promised.

We can learn several lessons from this situation... 1. We can expect God to give us future directions when we have obeyed His last directions 2. When we are tempted to worry and become discouraged, He will comfort us through His Word and His Spirit- encouraging us to press on 3. He will periodically speak to us along the way of our walk of faith in order to refuel us for the journey.

BETHEL - THE MOUNTAIN TOP EXPERIENCE

Then notice what Abram did in response to God’s faithfulness...

The second half of verse 7 says, “...and there He built an altar to the Lord who had appeared to him.” The building of an altar in those days described erecting and consecrating a place of communion with God. In other words, an altar represented a place of prayer, praise, and worship.

You see, Abram was in a good place in his walk of faith right now... God had just revealed Himself to him again! He had faithfully led Abram to the Promised Land and then gave Abram His Word that He would give it to his descendants!

Then notice what Abram did in response to this...

The second half of verse 7 says, "...and there He built an altar to the Lord who had appeared to him." The building of an altar in those days described erecting and consecrating a place of communion with God. In other words, an altar represented a place of prayer, praise, and worship.

So what do we see Abram doing right here? Abram is worshipping God! He is praying like a house of fire! Life is good for Abram... His relationship with God is red hot! His fellowship with the Lord is rich! God is manifesting Himself to him and speaking to him. It doesn't get any better than this! Abram was having what we call a "mountaintop experience!"

This is illustrated in the beginning of verse 8 when we are told that he moved from there to the *mountain* east of Bethel. In the Hebrew language "Bethel" literally meant- "the House of God" (which denotes the presence of God). This definition of Bethel was literally shown to be true in the later generations of Abraham's descendents. For example, twice Jacob had an encounter with God in Bethel- once when he was traveling toward Syria to find his bride (see Genesis 28) and again after he had returned to his homeland years later (see Genesis 35). Bethel was also commonly known as a place associated with God's presence and blessing in later generations of the Jewish people as well.

Here we see some practical symbolism for certain seasons we experience in our walk of faith...

Do you ever have those times in your pilgrimage of faith that God is revealing things to you and speaking so clearly to you? Where God's presence is just so evident in your life and you sense His grace and blessing? Sometimes these mountaintop experiences last for a day and sometimes they last for months. I would call these wonderful experiences our days spent in "Bethel."

It is during these times spent in God's presence that we are excited about pursuing God... We build our "altars" and are excited about spending time with God and are hungry for His Word. These are the times that we actually "feel" like seeking Him. What a glorious place this is in our faith walk!

BALANCED BETWEEN BETHEL AND AI

Notice the rest of verse 8... It says, "...and he pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; there he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord." Here we see where Abram camped himself at... It was between "Bethel" and "Ai." Again, the names of these places are significant.

As we have previously noted- "Bethel" literally means "the House of God." "Ai," on the other hand, literally means "a heap of ruins." Notice the contrast between these two... One is the majestic and beautiful house of God and the other is a house completely humbled and devastated.

It is a great place to be to be balanced between these two truths... that, on the other hand, we are the Temple of the Holy Spirit- God's very own workmanship- righteous in God's sight, and sons and daughters of the Most High. And, on the other hand, apart from the Lord, we are simply earthen vessels- needing to remember who we were before God called us by His grace. Isaiah 51:1 says to look to the rock from which you were hewn and from the hole of the pit from which you were dug. This means that we need to always remember where we came from and who we were before the Lord saved us.

But someone might say- “But we are not without Him, Trey! So why should we ever focus on that?”

Let me first of all say before I answer this that I am a firm advocate of us knowing who we are in Christ and focusing on all that God has made us by His grace. This is pertinent to us walking in freedom and victory. But I also believe it is beneficial for us to keep in mind how much we need His grace. Like Abram, we need to pitch our tent in between knowing who we are in Christ and who we were outside of Christ. In other words, our thinking should remain balanced between the truths that we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us (Philippians 4:13) and that apart from Him we can do nothing (John 15:5). Sure we have a glorious and priceless treasure on the inside of us, but we need to remember that it is still contained in an earthen vessel.

If there was ever anyone who pitched their tent between Bethel and Ai it was Jesus...

Jesus knew who He was- The Son of God. He knew God loved Him and He knew that He had the Holy Spirit within Him. But although He was fully persuaded of these things, He lived the life of a servant and in complete humility. Even though He was our Creator and King, He willingly lowered Himself show us how we ought to walk.

Philippians 2:5 said that we are to let this same mentality be in us as was in Him. You see, we are indeed the righteousness of God in Christ and are joint heirs together with Him as children of God, but God has called us to willingly lay down our lives, rights, and privileges in order to imitate His example of being servants of all. I have heard of born again believers who have demanded good service to them in say restaurants because after all, they are the righteousness of God. Friends, that is not at all the will of our Master! Our calling is to have a modest opinion of ourselves and to think soberly, not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think. Sure, we are now seated with Christ in heavenly places but the greatest in God’s kingdom has made him or herself the servant of all.

In regards to this balance between Bethel and Ai, I once had a friend ask me- “Trey, I have heard that we are sons of God and servants of God... Which one are we?” My answer was- “We are both!” The Kingdom of God operates on this principle of love... The moment we begin to focus on what people are to be doing for me, we are not operating in the principle of the kingdom.

SPIRITUAL FAMINES

So again Abram was in a good place... He was on a mountain in God’s presence. He was camped with a sober opinion of himself, and as verse 8 said, he was seeking God’s face. What a glorious place this is in our faith walk.

But, as we can all testify to, with the mountains come the valleys! No, I am not talking about valleys of sickness, disease, poverty, and tragedies like some sincere but sincerely wrong ministers teach. I am talking about the valley experiences of not “feeling” God’s presence, of not “feeling” like getting in the Word, and of not “feeling” like seeking the Lord.

And this is what happened to Abram... In verse 10 we are told- “Now there was a famine in the land...” After Abram dwelt on a mountain in God’s presence, he then finds himself in the middle of a severe spiritual famine! He was in one of those valleys of the faith walk when the showers of God’s presence seem to cease and the living bread that comes through God’s Word is hard to come by. He found himself in a dry desert spiritually!

You know, we all experience this periodically as well. There will be times in our faith walk that we are going to have to use more faith than other times. There will be times in our faith walk that we are going to have to persevere and do what we know is right, not because we necessarily feel like it, but simply because it is the right thing to do. This is what walking by faith is all about!

But how did Abram respond? He did what everyone of us are tempted to do in those spiritual famines- to head south!

TURNING TO THE SOUTH

Verse 10 goes on to say- "...and Abram went down to Egypt to dwell there, for the famine was severe in the land."

This is exactly what our flesh will try and do in these spiritual famines... It will try and bring you down! As long as it is not being satisfied with an emotional touch or an occasional goosebump, it will try and get you to give into something carnal- whether it be as subtle as not seeking the Lord as much or as extreme as giving into a temptation to sin. The key is to continue to do *by faith* what you know is right and not to be moved by your feelings.

But Abram failed to do this like all of us have at some time or another... **He let the circumstances move him instead of what God said!**

This is one of the elementary principles of faith that is so hard on our flesh- to not be moved by what we can see, hear, touch, taste, and feel, but only to be moved by what we believe from the Word of God. We have to make what God said in His Word the only truth in our life, because when difficult circumstances like these kind come up, we will be tempted to be moved by them. God's Word is a sure foundation that will keep us rooted and grounded from being moved.

Unfortunately, Abram did not turn to the Lord during this famine; He turned to Egypt! Abram turned to Egypt to meet his needs instead of turning to God. Now there will be those who will defend Abram's decision by saying that he had no other choice, but all things are possible with God! In Genesis 26 a similar situation happened to Isaac- Abraham's son... A famine arose in the land and Isaac was tempted to do exactly what his daddy did and turn to Egypt, But God intervened this time! He encouraged Isaac to not go into Egypt, but that He would bless him despite the circumstances. And in verse 12 we are told that he sowed in the land and reaped in the same year a hundredfold harvest!

You see, God was just as able to do this for Abram as He was for Isaac. So why did God not intervene in Abram's case? We don't exactly know, but it might be because God wanted to show us what can happen as a result of turning to "Egypt" instead of to Him.

You see, in the Scriptures, Egypt is a type and shadow of the world. So for us to turn to the world to meet our needs is no different than Abram turning to the south during the famine to meet his needs.

You see, because we live in a natural and carnal world, it is easy for our flesh to seek its fulfillment from the world rather than from God. Whatever the crisis may be- whether it be financial, physical, or spiritual- our flesh will always gravitate towards looking to "Egypt" for its answers. Following the Lord will oftentimes take us in an illogical direction. But although

natural logic and reasoning might seem to side with doing things the world's way, doing things the Lord's way is always the best way.

You see, God was just as able to do this for Abram as He was for Isaac. So why did God not intervene in Abram's case? We don't exactly know, but it might be because God wanted to show us what can happen as a result of turning to the world instead of to Him. You see, decision to go to Egypt set in motion a couple of circumstances that were not God's will. For instance, we all know the story of what Abram felt compelled to do with Sarai his wife. Well, he did not go to Egypt trusting the Lord. So, of course, he was not going to trust the Lord to save his neck from the lustful Pharaoh either. You see, the moment we compromise in our walk of faith, a snowball effect of compromise will take place.

THE ROOT & FRUIT OF SIN

Many of us can testify to this... Think back to a time when you succumbed to the temptation to compromise in some area of your life... Did it not become easier to compromise in other areas when you had already compromised in another? This is what they say about divorce... When you divorce one time, the odds skyrocket that your next marriage will fail too.

Why is this? It is because the devil is a master of reasoning. After you have already missed it in one area, he likes to use that as leverage in getting you to sin again. He will say things like- "You already sinned in that other thing. You might as well do this too." Of course, we can resist this kind of temptation, but it is best to never be in this position and to give the enemy a foot hole.

But, you see, Abram's mistake in how he handled this situation with Pharaoh and Sarai, was all a result of not trusting the Lord when the famine came. Jesus made a similar point in John 16:9 when He said that sin is a result of not believing on Him. You see, all sin is result of not believing and trusting the Lord. I know that might seem like an exaggerated statement, but it's true. Romans 14: _ says that whatever is not of faith is sin. Whenever we err in our walk with God it is a result of us not having sufficient faith in that situation because, in choosing to do things our own way, we are not correctly trusting that the Lord's way is best. You see, a common misconception in most Christian circles- today is in regards to faith. We have somehow equated what the Bible calls "faith" with mentally assenting to some truth. In other words, the church today sees faith as just agreeing to some facts in our heads. But this is not what "believing on the Lord Jesus (see Romans 10:9-10) is! True saving faith is believing the truth in your heart which will result in a change of direction and a change of Lord's. Yes, what the Bible terms as "faith" is more of an action than anything else (see all of Hebrews chapter 11)! This is what James was addressing in the second chapter of his epistle (see James 2). So when Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would convict the world of sin because they do not believe on Him, He was saying that their unbelief was the root of all their sins.

But even in the midst of Abram's mistake God was faithful to Abram... He fought for Abram by striking Pharaoh and his house with plagues causing Pharaoh to not touch Sarai and return to Abram. This illustrates the truth found in 2 Timothy 2:13 that says when we are faithful. You see, God is so rich in mercy and grace that even when we fail and fall short, He is willing to cover the multitude of our sins. For love (i.e. God, who is love) covers a multitude of sins.

And, of course, God is even able to work even our mistakes together for good... For Abram accumulated even more wealth during this short stint in the world. But although Abram prospered in Egypt, all of the things that he gained were not good. He also gained one new piece

of property there that would eventually be a stumbling block for him walking into God's perfect plan- the Egyptian slave, Hagar. Need I say more?

You see, while prosperity is good, there are pitfalls that come with it that we must be vigilant of and avoid. Paul said that the love of money is the root of all evil. He did not say that money in and of itself is evil; He said the love of it was the root of all evil. You see, covetousness (i.e. the love of money) is very subtle and deceptive. With increase comes the increase of temptation. Does this mean that we should avoid any prosperity in our lives? Of course not! It just means that we should stay sober and vigilant concerning it so that we do not place our trust in it.

MOVING ON FROM THE SOUTH

But, praise be to God, Abram did not stay in Egypt very long! Genesis 13:3 says that "he went on his journey from the South as far as Bethel..."

After Abram saw what the world had to offer, he "came to himself" like the prodigal son (Luke 15:17)! He pulled up his stakes and headed back to the Father's house (i.e. Bethel). You see, this is what repentance truly is! Repentance is not wallowing around in our mistakes- just feeling sorry for what we've done. No, repentance is a conscious decision to change. It is not an emotion; It is a decision. It is not based on a feeling of guilt; It is based on act of our will. What the enemy will try and do, after he has tempted you to sin in the first place, is to make you feel guilty about it. He will pour on the condemnation saying things like- "What kind of Christian do you think you are? You were not trusting God at all! You're a failure! You might as well hang it up! You're never going to be a person of faith!" It is then that we must ignore those guilt-ridden thoughts and the negative emotions that come with them and do what we are told Abram did at the beginning of verse 3- "he went on."

We must move on and not get stuck in the memory of our mistake. We must realize that the past is, in fact, the past! There is nothing we can do to change it, and it is absolutely futile to entertain even the thought of it. When we miss it- as we are all likely to do- we must forget those things. Why? Because they are behind us! We cannot change our past, but we can change our future! We can make the same decision that Abram made when he "went on" with his journey and move on with God.

You see, Proverbs 24:16 says that a righteous man may fall seven times but he will arise again. God understands that those whom He has freely made righteous by His grace are subject to making mistakes and falling "south," but He, through that same grace, has made provision for us to "rise again" (to get back up, dust ourselves off, and continue on with our journey of faith). Praise the Lord, for His mercy endures forever!

So if you fall again, realize that God is not through with you! You can arise again and draw back near to Him! And the promise we have in James 4:8 is that when we draw near to Him, He will draw near to us! In other words, when we make the steadfast decision to change directions and move on with God, He will meet us on that road and provide us with all the grace we need to help us on our journey, just like the father of the prodigal son did for him.

RETURNING TO YOUR ALTARS

But notice specifically where Abram went and what he did as he arose from the South and came back to Bethel (i.e. the Father's house)...

We are told that he went “to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, to the place of the altar which he had made there at first. And there Abram called on the name of the Lord.” (Genesis 13:3-4) This is extremely significant because after Abram got off his path of faith, he went back to the last place God had spoken to Him and the last place he experienced God. This is always a good move...

You see, sometimes when our walk of faith goes “south” it is because we failed to do what He last spoke to us. Notice I didn’t say we failed to *hear* what He last spoke to us; I said we failed to *do* (i.e. apply) what He last spoke to us. It is one thing to hear the Word of God; It is a whole other thing to do the Word of God. It is not only hearing what He said that keeps our life from falling; It is in doing what He said that keeps us grounded and steadfast on the rock (see Matthew 7:24:27).

So whenever we see our walk digressing or our faith failing we should revisit the last things that we know God has spoken to us and then ask ourselves- **Am I doing what He last told me to do?** More times than not we will find that the mess we are currently in is a direct result of not doing what He previously told us to do.

And Abram did not just go back to the general place that God had spoken to him, he specifically went back to the altar which he built in that place. Now, again, these altars represented the places where communion with God was enjoyed- where man went to pray and worship God. So the fact that Abram returned to this place where he enjoyed God’s manifest presence to call on the name of the Lord gives us some practical wisdom to live by ourselves...

You see, sometimes when we are in those good places of God’s manifest presence it is directly a result of good decisions that we have made. In Abram’s case, when he built this altar, he was actively seeking God.

It has been wisely said that we are as close to God right now as we want to be. What does that mean? It means that our experience with God, that is, our partaking of the riches of His glory, is based on the level of our hunger for Him, not on His hunger to manifest Himself to us. No, I can assure you that if we are not experiencing God on a daily basis, He is not the variable; We are!

So another question we can ask ourselves whenever we conclude that our faith-walk is not where it once was is- **What (if anything) was I doing different when I was in a better place spiritually?** More times than not we will find that we were more focused on the Lord than than we currently are...

Either we were consistently spending more time in fellowship with God through prayer and/or the Word or we were consistently spending more time in fellowship with other faith-filled believers. It is then that it is wise to do what Abram did... We should go back to that place where we last remember enjoying the fullness and contentment of His presence. For some of us that might be as simple as returning to our “altar.” In other words, making time once again for God in our daily routine by spending some quality time with Him through prayer and the Word. For others, this might be restoring a severed relationship with another believer or returning to a body of believers that you know in your heart you should have never left.

FAITH IS A PEACEMAKER

Then in Genesis 13:5-18 we begin to see where another unnecessary difficult situation came up in Abram’s wal of faith...

As Abram began to prosper, so did Lot... They both began to experience such increase in their lives that the land could not support them any longer. Things became so cramped that strife actually arose between Lot's herdsmen and Abram's herdsmen. A separation was imminent. But, you see, Lot should have never been with Abram in the first place.

I remind you that God told Abram to leave his relatives behind in Ur, but he allowed Lot to tag along anyways. If Abram would have perfectly obeyed God then, then his herdsmen would have had plenty of room and there would have been an absence of strife.

But, nonetheless, Abram found himself in this position. So what do you do in this kind of situation? Of course, Abram had done so much for Lot by taking him in when his father died... He had provided himself as a father figure in his life and had given him a good spiritual example. We are not sure exactly all that Abram had done for Lot, but judging by Abram's character, I would venture to say that it was quite a lot. So, having helped Lot in so many ways and just by being the authority in that relationship, Abram should decide to take the better land and tell Lot to take what's left over, right? Wrong!

Abram did the Godly thing, and even though he had every right to have the best land, he gave preference to Lot and let him choose which land he wanted first. Abram demonstrated a Godly characteristic called HONOR (see Romans 12:10)! You see, this is what faith does...

It so much has put its trust in God that it does not claim all its natural rights. It willingly will give preference to others- even those that are treating you wrong- because it believes God can give it better.

You see, Romans chapter 12 goes on to teach us to not overcome evil with evil, but with good. When we truly believe that God is our Avenger, we will not feel the need to defend ourselves by claiming our rights and fighting back. Faith will not open its mouth in self-defense when it is being unjustly accused of something. Faith will turn the other cheek. Faith trusts God to take care of it. Therefore, faith is a peacemaker!

You see, Abram wanted to avoid strife so much that he offered Lot his choice of land. You know, this is the attitude we should have towards strife too... We should have zero tolerance for it in our lives! And if contention arises between us and another person (especially our brethren as Lot was to Abram) we should do whatever it takes to regain peace in that relationship- even if it means letting them wrong you as Lot did Abram. It indeed takes faith to do this and is harder to do than to preach, but it is true nonetheless.

Faith loves at all times, is humble, and seeks peace. Strife loves itself, is proud, and seeks its own. To have one is to not have the other. Abram chose faith over strife and notice the result...

Verses 14-17 says, "And the Lord said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him: "Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are—northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever. And I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if a man could number the dust of the earth, then your descendants also could be numbered. Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you."

TO BE CONTINUED...

Faith is a giver and not taker!

In Genesis chapter 12 the story of Abram begins... In verse one the Lord said to Abram, "Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house..." Basically what the Lord was saying to Abram was, "I want you to leave all that you are familiar with- first, your comfortable environment, second, your relatives, and lastly, your immediate family members." What a difficult thing this had to be for Abram! The Lord just reveals Himself to this pagan man and says to him- "What I want you to do is leave the only land you have ever know, all your relatives, and immediate family members."

And then the next part just put the cherry on top. The Lord said, "To a land that I will show you." God didn't even tell him where he was going! He just told him to "Go!" and then He would show him where. This just proves to us what a great man of faith that Abram was! How many of us would just choke if the Lord would tell us to do that?

I remember when the Lord showed me these Scriptures and personalized them to me. My Wife and I were on our honeymoon and were planning on leaving for Colorado Springs to go to Bible College a month later. He was in affect telling Shannon and I to leave Georgia- the only place we had ever lived- to a distant place that neither of us were familiar with. It was difficult to leave our families as well. We were both so close to our families that this was not the easiest thing to do. But we did, and He did ☺ He did what? Exactly what He promised Abram He would do in verse 2...

In this verse He said, "I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing." The Lord gave Abram these awesome promises... First, He promised him that He was going to make a nation out of the small clan that he was to take with him. Then God promised that He would bless him. You know, we have this same promise. When we seek first the kingdom of God- that is, lay aside our lives and live first for God's plan and purposes like Abram did- God said that He would add things unto us too(Matthew 6:33). But let me skip ahead to the part where God told him the purpose of the blessing that He would place on his life. He said, "...and you shall be a blessing." The purpose of our prosperity is to be abundantly supplied to support other good works (see 2 Corinthians 9:8). In other words, to be a blessing. You see, God wants us to prosper so that He can establish His covenant in all the earth (see...), not so that we can establish our covenant. We are blessed to be blessings! And God also inserted that He would make Abram's name great. This means that He would make him more influential and popular. Did you know that if you would commit your life to knowing your God and walking pleasing to Him that you too would do great and be great?

❖ The Father of Faith (part one & two)

1. How Faith Comes

- ✓ God gave Abraham the promise that as the sand and the stars are innumerable, so shall his seed be. These were two natural examples that Abraham came in contact with *day* and *night*. In Romans chapter 4 Paul shows us what Abraham did to be so strong in faith... He did not consider the circumstances. What did he do? He considered the promise-*day* and *night*! This is what David and Joshua meant when they said- "Meditate on His Word *day* and *night*..."

2. How Faith Acts

- ✓ When you really believe something in your heart it will come out of your mouth. So you could say that faith *speaks*. What God did with Abram- according to Romans 4:17-18- was He changed His name to Abraham. He did this because God calls those things that be not as though they were. Faith says what it believes, not what it sees, hears, tastes, and feels.

❖ The Friend of God

❖ The Blessing of God