Growing in Faith on the Journey (3)

Learning the Discipline of Self-Differentiation

Over the last few weeks, we have been looking at Abram's story and particularly at the faith lessons God was wanting Abram to learn. Today we are looking at the fifth lesson he needed to learn in this first stage of his learning journey, which has huge relevance to our journey.

In fact, what we see taking place in Abram's life is exactly the same as what God wants to see in every one of our lives - growth and development into the fullness of God's image in both our understanding of who God is, and how we are to express that knowledge in our lives.

So far, we have looked at the first four of Abram's five Faith Lessons of Stage 1:

- 1. Building a personal devotional life remembering he had nothing to go by; all on the run
- 2. A necessary diversion into Egypt be flexible as you face life's practicalities!!!
- 3. Honesty in one's marriage relationship marriage is God's second transforming gift!!!
- 4. Handling conflict in broader relationships deal with conflict before it deals with you

The fifth faith lesson that Abram needed to learn:

(Put up PP)

The scene that Chapter 14 gives us is a regional conflict that ends up indirectly involving Abram in order to rescue his nephew Lot.

¹⁴ When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he called out the 318 trained men born in his household and went in pursuit as far as Dan. Gen 14:14. (Hold PP)

The back story:

Four kings rose up against five other kings – these kings each ruled over a local city and its environs. Lot became indirectly involved because he was living in Sodom, which was one of the cities that was defeated, and Lot and all his entourage were captured and taken away.

Abram was living now at Hebron, and was informed of his nephew's situation - What is going on in Abram's mind at the moment – how is he reacting internally????

Possibilities:

- Oh, man!!! I thought I had finished with Lot!
- Well, that's where he wanted to go he made his bed, he can sleep in it!!!
- Seriously! What are they expecting me to do about that????
- For the sake of my dead brother Haran, maybe I should do something?
- He is my nephew, after all I will try to rescue him!

We have all experienced relational situations that provoke all these sorts of thoughts and feelings! The challenge always is – how do we handle them? What can we do with them?

Self-Differentiation is the learned ability to separate *our thinking* from *our feelings* – or to distinguish our *thoughts* from our *emotions* – it can be described as thinking about what we are thinking about.

The issue: *Thoughts* and *feelings* are processed in different parts of our brain. This idea of self-differentiation involves a number of important and distinct elements:

Developing a realistic sense of my own limits

- Knowing what I can control, and what I cannot control! (i.e., other's reactions)
- o Understanding what I'm responsible for, and what I am not responsible for!
- What can I rightly make my own, and what do others need to rightly make their own!

Identifying what I believe

- What are my core values? My basic convictions? (This takes time to discover)
- o Developing well-thought-out beliefs that are rooted in God's Word and character
- Having clarity in what I believe helps me know where I begin and end, and where others begin and end

Taking a stand on what I believe

- o Being willing to take 'I' positions, and make 'I' statements (based on our core values)
- Viewing the world through your own eyes, not the eyes of another
- o Allowing God to define who you are rather than allowing others define who you are

Developing the capacity to stay on course

- Building spiritual, mental, and emotional stamina (habit-building on to core values)
- Developing and maintaining clear personal goals
- o Developing the capacity to self-regulate through God's enabling grace within you

Staying connected

- Developing the ability to stay in relationship with people you disagree with
- Learning to become a less-anxious presence within highly emotional situations
- Becoming willing to agree to disagree where necessary

In summary, Self-differentiation involves the capacity to hold in tension the twin needs for *separateness* and *closeness* - in short, to truly be ourselves but also able to maintain close relationships. It creates the ability to be both *a part of*, and *apart from* significant relationships, by becoming a less reactive presence within our relationships, so important for a healthy interpersonal relationship, particularly healthy marriage relationships.

So, back to Abram and his Lesson 5: Learning Self-Differentiation

Through self-differentiation, Abram learned the need for clarity on his personal identity and calling without diminishing the validity of Lot's identity and calling.

God's call and promise to Abram did not include Lot, but that need not stop him from reaching out to help his nephew and fellow human being – different calling but still family.

- Abram was empowered to respond to Lot's predicament because of his relationship.
 Gen 14:14
 - This required Abram to put aside any rankles he may have had toward Lot, which in turn, required Abram to develop the capacity for self-differentiation
 - o Genuine self-differentiation empowers true ministry to others Gen 14:14-16
- Abram encounters the mysterious Melchizedek -

he submits to and receives another man's ministry

Gen 14:18-20

- Melchizedek lit. 'My king is right' Heb 7:2 says 'king of righteousness'
- o He is also King of Salem Salem meaning 'peace' and the original site of Jerusalem
- o Mel prepares a meal to share with Abram bread and wine (akin to communion)
- o Also a priest of God Most High, prior to the Mosaic priesthood, and blesses Abram
- o Abram paid a tithe to Melchizedek in honour of God's blessing through him
- o In so doing he receives a fuller revelation of who God is
- Abram is now sufficiently self-differentiated to respond in a healthy manner to the King of Sodom
 Gen 14:21-24
 - Free to respond on the basis of his own convictions and commitment to God not purely based on cultural or social protocols.

Applications for Us!

Be aware of the reactions that take place within yourself – they are tell-tale signals on the dashboard of your life!!!

More often than not it is our emotional reactions to events that alert us to the need to self-differentiate - learning to distinguish between our convictions and our reactions and plotting a less-anxious course of godly wisdom within the white-water of our daily relationships.

These are issues that we all struggle with from time to time!!!

Ask God every day to highlight blind spots in your understanding of yourself, and pray honestly and daily, for his help in the areas you struggle with in your life – and he will!!!

2Pet 3:18

¹⁸ But be constantly growing in the sphere of grace and an experiential knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and to the day of eternity.

(Kenneth Wuest's Translation)