

Developing a Conversational Relationship with God

God is a conversationalist

I mentioned previously that an overview of Abram's life reveals a four-stage process of faith development that has fundamental applications to each of our lives, and specifically to this interim stage, that we are travelling through as a congregation.

So far, we have journeyed with Abram through Stage 1, Chapters 12-14, involving his call, travel, and settling in Canaan, and five faith lessons God taught him on his travels.

Today, we are looking at the commencement of Abram's second stage, which involves the promise of a son and the formalisation of God's covenant with him. God begins to step up the nature of his relationship with Abram - it is becoming far more personal and interactive.

Gen 15:1-11

After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision:

"Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward." (Gen 15:1)

This is the first recorded time that God addresses Abram using his personal name.

- I am your shield – (Current) I am your Protector } God's promises for
- I am your very great reward – (Coming) I am your Provider } the future!!!

We should not be surprised by this insight into God's heart and nature!

We have already seen this in the creation narratives that we looked at some time ago – the first recorded event that God engaged in having created Adam and Eve in his image was to address them personally in conversation – "...and God said to them" – implying that they could hear, understand, and actively respond to God.

Why do you think God said to Abram, do not be afraid?

Abram's concern becomes evident in his response to God's spoken promises:

² But Abram said, "Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?"³ And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir."

Here, we begin to see a conversation developing between God and Abram:

Faith Lesson 6 – Learning to Speak Up about his Concerns

What we are seeing here is the growth of trust beginning to further develop, and it is evidenced by the conversational relationship that is developing between God and Abram.

(Walk through how this has been developing since Abe was first tapped on the shoulder)

- Abram is beginning to find his voice and reveal his concerns and misunderstandings about what God had previously said to him about his offspring and longer-term descendants.
- This is like Mary's conversation with Gabriel – "How will this be since I am a virgin?" Mary was not doubting who it was who was talking to her, she simply could not understand how it could happen and was asking a genuine question.
- Likewise, Abram has clearly been reflecting on his previous encounters and beginning to do the maths and struggling to comprehend how it will come about because he knows he does not yet have any descendants!!!
- This is the process through which Abram is beginning to learn a whole lot more about the character of God – that he is faithful; he is trustworthy; he is true to his Word!
- So, for us – when people begin to open up about their inner fears and anxieties, that is proof of a growing trust in their relationship with God and each other!!!

Faith Lesson 7 – Trust is Learned by Experiencing God's Trustworthiness

Faith comes by hearing and is strengthened by God confirming his Word again and again!

⁴ Then the word of the LORD came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir."⁵ He took him outside and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

God led Abram outside and gave him a visual image – a very powerful and permanent visual reminder to confirm his Word – the Creator using his creation as a faith-vision to give Abram a fixed reference point to go back to, every night if needed!!! (Remember! He had no Bible!!!)

⁶ Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

This is an amazing insight into the loving heart and character of God – Abram responded in faith, out of the faith that God has birthed in his heart, and God accepted it as 'right relationship' with him. Paul picks up on this fact in both Romans 4 and Galatians 3.

⁷ He also said to him, "I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it." ⁸ But Abram said, "Sovereign LORD, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?"

In other words, your 'night-sky-show' has convinced me, and I believe you, but I still don't fully understand what it's all about, or how it will work???

⁹ So the LORD said to him, "Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon." ¹⁰ Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half. ¹⁸ On

that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants, I give this land, from the River of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates—

A covenant is a binding agreement initiated by God between two parties with agreed-on terms. The nature of God's covenants is that they can be accepted or rejected but not changed. We enter into God's covenant of love and grace on his terms.

In this encounter with Abram, God is further revealing his faith-inspiring, relationship-building, promise-keeping character through this conversation that he is encouraging to go on.

We only have to go back to young Samuel, when God first called him. He thought it was old, blind Eli who was calling him – but no, it was God! Three times God called him, and he heard him every time! Eli finally realised what was happening, and suggested that if Samuel heard the voice again, he should say, Speak Lord, your servant hears you! Which he did!!! My point is that Samuel had no problem hearing the voice of God – his problem was not recognising it *as* God's voice!!!

Early in 2006, at Discovery Church Mt Evelyn, I was in one of the morning services, hands raised worshipping the Lord, and God spoke to me – not an audible voice but as clear as a bell – and he asked me the question, 'Adrian, what would your ideal role be?' Amazed, I dropped my hands and said, 'Say that again?' – 'What would your ideal role be?'

Now, I thought I was in my ideal role. I was Missions Pastor at Discovery Church, a large church that was going very well. My responsibilities included overseeing our huge mission involvement in India and several other countries, plus overseeing our community outreach program, which included a coffee shop outreach in Lilydale, eight work-for-the-dole programs we were running in Lilydale, and massive quarterly makeovers that we were doing in local schools and community houses.

But you know, when God asks you a question, he's not the one needing the information, he was wanting to get me thinking, and that's exactly what he did do! It took another eight or nine months to come clear in my mind, but I finished up at Discovery and commenced my doctoral studies which have totally shifted the direction of my life and ministry.

Our God is a communicating God – he is a speaking God – who has created us in his image for the specific purpose of developing conversations with us in order to draw us into deeper and deeper relationship with himself so as to equip and empower us to collaborate with him in his global mission of faith-development and transformation – within us and within the world.

Question – When was the last time you sensed that God spoke to you, or revealed himself to you in some specific way?

What was your response to that? Have you engaged with what was communicated? Make it a matter of deliberate prayer and seek him for that clarification!!!

Our heavenly Father is a speaking God, who always mediates his word to us through his Son and his Spirit!!!

Like Abram, keep developing a close, faith-inspiring, relationship-building, promise-keeping relationship through the conversations he encourages us to engage in with him daily.