

## **Growing in Faith on the Journey (1)**

### **We make the road by walking it!**

We have been looking at *God's Global Mission of Transformation* as an overall theme, and now particularly at Abraham as a model of faith development, and what the transforming power of faith can do!!! Like Abraham, we all share the need of the transforming power of faith for the whole of life's journey, and specifically to this interim period of time that we as a congregation are currently working our way through.

Abram has given us some helpful insights into how God instigated faith within his life and the basic lessons around God's faithfulness toward his personal promises that God had revealed to Abram along the way through the very things he experienced on the journey – so, the next weeks will reveal Abram *Growing in Faith on the Journey* – We make the road by walking it!!!

Remember, Abram had no Bible to refer to in order to gain some insights into the character of God or even the expectations that God had of him other than simply doing what God had told him to do out of the faith he had engendered within him!!!

Abram's story runs from Genesis 12–25 and encompasses four developmental growth stages of faith, each commencing with a major revelatory encounter with God, which initiated a new level of growth and understanding of God and his relationship with God.

Stage 1: Chapters 12-14: involves his call, travel, and initial settling in Canaan.

Stage 2: Chapters 15-16: the promise of a son and the formalisation of the covenant.

Stage 3: Chapters 17-21: the covenant is confirmed and the name change to Abraham.

Stage 4: Chapters 22-25: the final test of faith in surrendering Isaac to God's grace and mercy, and then securing the right partner for Isaac, and ultimately the Messiah.

### **Arrival in Canaan**

He has now arrived in Canaan, and God, true to his promise, appeared to him again giving him another promise, indicating that this was where God had intended to bring him.

*<sup>6</sup>Abram travelled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. <sup>7</sup>The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring, I will give this land. So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him."*

(Gen 12:6-7)

### **Five Primary Faith Lessons in Stage One –**

Here we are beginning to look at his first developmental stage beyond having received initiating faith, which is contained in chapters 12 – 14. There are five primary faith lessons that Abram must learn while journeying through this developmental stage. We will see growth and development in Abram in understanding more of who God is and how he works.

Today, we will look at the first two of those five faith lessons. We must remember that Abram did not have a Bible to refer to – the Torah had not been written yet – so he had nothing to go by in terms of how his relationship with God should work.

### **Faith Lesson 1 – Develop your Personal Relationship with God**

Gen 12:4-9

Abram's response to this announcement was to build an altar to the Lord.

In those times, an altar was a marker – a milestone – that represented the significant event of a personal encounter with God, and from then on acted as a reminder of God's loving involvement in life, in the same way that sharing communion together does for us.

I imagine that within Abram's thinking is the growing awareness that this God can actually be trusted to do what he said he would do. But, he wanted to get to know this God more intentionally on his part. He travelled further south within Canaan and built another altar to the Lord.

*<sup>8</sup> From there he went on towards the hills east of Bethel and 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.* (Gen 12:8)

This is the first instance where he is not just waiting for God to speak; he is now actively seeking a conversational relationship with God himself – *he called on the name of the Lord.*

Because we have been created in the image of a personal and conversational God, once the relationship has been initiated, we can learn to approach him with confidence.

*<sup>16</sup> Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*  
(Heb 4:16)

The O.T. prophet Jeremiah discovered this reality while in prison: <sup>3</sup> *"Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know."* (Jer 33:3)

### **Faith Lesson 2 – A necessary diversion into Egypt**

*<sup>10</sup> Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to live there for a while because the famine was severe.* (Gen 12:10)

Famine in Canaan – we all face practical realities in our fallen world

- We have no control over many things in life - accept and respond appropriately
- Do whatever you need to do as the circumstance requires  
While I work two days/week at Chelsea, I also do casual work for Bethel Funerals.

Recount the experiences I had in India while teaching at Pastors' Seminars -

Acts 18:1-5 –

Paul supported himself in Corinth until Silas and Timothy arrived, then Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching and teaching – tell the story.

### **Applications in Our Own Lives**

The picture we see presented in Abram's life is the same as what God expects 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.

- We all need to be building our personal relationship with God – building our prayer altars
- We all have to learn to be flexible and adaptable when faced with those issues over which we have no control

This is simply part of our growth and discipleship as Christians.

The Apostle Peter makes this very clear from the get-go in his pastoral letter:

### **2Pet 1:5-9**

*<sup>5</sup>For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; <sup>6</sup>and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; <sup>7</sup>and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. <sup>8</sup>For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup>But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins.*

And closing with this challenge:

### **2Pet 3:18**

*<sup>18</sup>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.*

(Ken Wuest's

Translation)