

## **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.

*<sup>14</sup> 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?

**Faith Lesson 5** – The internal process of *learning the discipline of self-differentiation* (PP)

**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)
  - 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)
  - 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**
  - 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
  - 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
  - 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**



<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.*

(Kenneth Wuest's Translation)