



Moving can be one of the less enjoyable undertakings a person or family embarks on in life. If we were to choose a main word to describe a move, it might be “stress.” There’s no set order in how to accomplish a move. You might choose to start with the decision of hiring a moving company or renting a truck. If you choose the moving company the stress is significantly reduced, but maybe the cost is too high, and the next thing you know you’re driving a 26 foot truck down the freeway at 70 miles per hour.

Before you can even drive the truck, you have to find the 50-100 boxes needed to pack up your entire home. Dishes must be wrapped properly and packed safely so they will arrive in one piece. From protecting furniture, disassembling bed frames, and carrying couches, to making sure you have the right dolly, it’s no wonder people loathe the moving process. In this entire conversation we never talked about the stress of finding a new home, signing a lease, and finding a new Target store. If you’re moving across the street or across the country, moving is a huge undertaking. And what happens when you have no input in the move? What if the move is initiated by someone else and you just have to go along with it? And what if the person prompting you to move is God? How do you respond?

Open your Bible to Genesis 12. This is our second week in our journey through the Bible called *The Story*. In the first week of this series we looked at God creating the world, humanity, and their fall into sin. It answers questions like, Who are we? Where did we come from? Why are we here? and What’s wrong with us? Genesis 1-11 crunched 2,000 years of history into just eleven chapters. We saw how God chose one man—Noah—and his family to be spared from a global flood.

Then we come to chapter 12, which is like a hinge on which the Old Testament turns. Starting here, God himself begins to act to reverse the consequences of sin. He does so by zooming in on one man and his descendants. When we first meet him his name is Abram. Later, God calls him Abraham. With Abraham God purposes to provide a solution to humanity’s sinful dilemma and restore them to a place of blessing. God’s program for redemption begins with the story of Abraham, and this will continue in his son, Isaac, and Isaac’s son, Jacob. This section of *The Story* focuses on these three men, called the Patriarchs, but our focus is on Abraham. Abraham lived right around 2,000 B.C. The wonderful thing about Abraham and many other Old Testament saints is they teach us so much about how to walk with God.

At a bird’s eye view of Genesis 12–25 we see these 14 chapters feature the development of one family from which God creates a new people, places them in a new land, and invites them to bless all humanity. God breaks a 300-year period of silence and calls Abram from Harran. The Lord tells Abraham to leave his country, his friends, and his father’s house and go to a land God would show him.

Abraham has a spouse, Sarah, who was unable to have children. She proposes her own way to start the new nation by offering Hagar, her maidservant, to Abraham, and Ishmael is born. God blesses Ishmael, but the new nation doesn’t begin with Ishmael. Abraham and Sarah, at 100 and 90 years old respectively, are promised a child of their own. Sarah laughs at this ridiculous “word of the LORD.” Amazingly a boy is born to them and they name him Isaac, which means “laughter.” God then gives Abraham the ultimate test by commanding him to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice at Mt. Moriah. In Genesis 22, Abraham obediently responds, believing that God could raise his beloved son to life from the dead. Abraham passes the test of faith and his son is spared. More than anything else, what Abraham teaches us is about living a life of faith.

No Small Call

When we pick up our story in Genesis 12, we have little history on Abram (Abraham). His father’s name was Terah and their family lived in Ur of the Chaldeans and later Harran. Both were cities in ancient Babylonia, which is modern day Iraq. Both Ur and Harran were important centers of worship for the moon-god. It is very possible that Abraham and his family participated in this type of worship. This is the man God calls.

The Lord had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.

**“I will make you into a great nation,
and I will bless you;**

**I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.**

**I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;**

and all peoples on earth

will be blessed through you” (Gen. 12:1–3).

The first word God speaks to Abraham is "Go." Other versions of the Bible translate this word "Leave." To me "go" has a more positive sense, where "leave" has a more permanent connotation. There were no moving companies for Abraham to call upon; he can't stop by the U-Haul facility and get pricing on a moving truck. If he chooses to obey God, he will move with cart and beast and with no moving boxes at his disposal. You might have noticed a small detail missing here. There is no address given by the Lord for him to head to; he is simply to go to the land God will show him. Abraham must cut the strongest bond by leaving his family behind and following the call of the Lord.

On the other hand, God gives seven promises to Abraham for his obedience. Notice in the passage how many times God says: "I will." God was the one who took the initiative in Abraham's life. God was sovereignly acting to reverse the tide of human corruption by taking the initiative in one man's life. The first promise given is land. Abraham doesn't know where the land will be, but there will be land. The first one seems feasible; it's the second promise that seems unlikely. The second promise is that God will make Abraham into a great nation. Another way to think about a great nation is to think of a large people group. The doubt in this promise, from a human perspective, comes earlier in Genesis 11:30 where Scripture tells us Sarah was barren. In Abraham's time period, it would've been a shame to not have a son; he would die with no child to carry on his family name. Simplicity asks: "How can God make a man with no children into a nation?"

God will give Abraham a great name and he will ultimately be a blessing to others. In the ancient Near East names were an important reflection of one's character. If you look in the lineage of Jesus the Messiah, you will see Abraham's name listed there. What better way to fulfill this promise! Promises five and six really work in unison. I don't believe it's God will to curse people but to bless them. I like what P.D. Miller says: "God's command is not intended to bring about curse, only to bless; the curse is subservient to the intent of blessing, included as a promise of protection for Abram." Finally, in the seventh promise, we see that all people on earth will be blessed through Abraham's obedience. When God blesses us it's never just for us, but it's meant so we can be a blessing to others.

It's interesting that no obligations are placed on Abraham to maintain these promises; he only needs to respond to God's command to "go." Before you conclude that this to a simple request, think about it. God was asking Abraham to leave all that was familiar to him and set out for a place he did not know. For Abraham, this included leaving both his financial and physical security as well as the land of his family. Abraham was not some hippie living in a tent when he heard God's voice. He was a very wealthy man, living in a modern city. By leaving his father's household, he was giving up his inheritance and right to the family land. God's call would also mean leaving both his

personal and tribal identity. Land, family and inheritance were three of the most important elements in ancient societies. His family, his traditions, even his old ways of worship were all to be left behind. This was truly an abandonment of his past, leaving all the comforts he knew to follow God.

You might remember at the end of last year that we interviewed a family from our body who answered God's call. Through prayer and counsel they decided to take a huge step of faith and leave everything to follow the call of God to India. Tadashi and Tamiko Gondai left SFO in January with the final destination of Chennai, India. They would work with International Justice Mission, also known as IJM, for a year commitment as Tadashi used his legal background to fight for justice. If you're unfamiliar with the organization, the goal of IJM is to end human trafficking in over 15 countries around the world. I've been following the journey of this family as they work in the one of the most effective offices of IJM, and it's been fantastic! Have they encountered difficult times in India? You bet. When you fight on the side of justice there is bound to be oppression.

Let me be clear here. God's call doesn't always mean we have to leave. Abraham's call wasn't a short-term mission trip, it was to build a new nation that would eventually be the lineage for Jesus the Messiah. Many of us are called right here, to reach the Bay Area for Christ. For some, the call is to leave. For others the call is to leave your lifestyle, stay and worship God. We're going to talk about what this looks like in just a few minutes. In all situations: God calls his people to live by faith through acts of obedience.

Abraham's Obedience

So God has called Abraham, but will he obey? Will he follow God? Let's read his response.

So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran. He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there (verses 4–5).

Abraham left. He left everything he's known to follow God. We're not sure how long it took him to leave and follow the call of God, we don't know all of the details, but we know he responds. Scripture reveals more to help us understand the faith this will require from Abraham. I mentioned it earlier, but here we see the age of Abraham when he leaves. Abraham is 75 years young when God calls him; in other words, he is no spring chicken. Just when he thought he could leisurely enjoy the Pillars ministry at CPC, it was time for him to go! I imagine there must have been lingering thoughts in the back of his mind of how God might use him. The key factor here really comes in the two simple words: "Abram went." A.W. Tozer says this: "The Bible recognizes no faith that does not lead to obedience, nor

does it recognize any obedience that does not spring from faith. The two are at opposite sides of the same coin."

God calls his people to live by faith through acts of obedience. Abraham responded in obedient faith, not blind faith but obedient faith. With the decision to pack his bags and go, Abraham left his past and placed his future in the hands of God.

Abram traveled 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. 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.

From there he went on toward 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.

Then Abram set out and continued toward the Negev (verses 6–9).

Not only were Abraham and Sarah well advanced in years, they were also childless, traveling through the desert to an unknown location. Upon arriving in the land of Canaan, we find out the Canaanites were present; the promised land was currently occupied by a pagan people! Even though the Canaanites occupied the land, Abraham had the faith to believe God would enable his descendants to occupy the land.

What happens in verse 7 is important. Abraham is hundreds of miles away from his home, wandering in the desert, and there is a slight chance discouragement began to set in. I think when God appears to him in Canaan and says, "To your offspring I will give this land," this encouragement gave Abraham the strength he needed to continue. Another way to say it might be, this meeting with God strengthened his faith on the journey.

In response to God's grace, Abraham built altars to the Lord both at Shechem and to the west of Bethel. What is the significance of this action? Altars are sacrificial platforms used for worship by many different religions. Building a new altar signified two things: first, it marked the introduction of the worship of a specific god in a new land. Second, it laid claim to that new land for that specific god. God was not worshipped in Canaan, so by building an altar Abraham introduced the worship of the Lord in a new land and laid claim to the land for his God. God promised to make Abraham's name great, and now Abraham proclaims the name of the Lord in Shechem, which is smack dab in the center of the Promised Land. Abraham then does the same thing at the outer southern edges of the land. Abraham demonstrates his faith by obeying God's word and laying claim to the land that was not yet his. This act of faith was the beginning of the nation of Israel as a worshipping community, a new beginning for God's people.

Abraham's Life of Faith

Abraham's life doesn't end in the Negev. The desert is actually just the shaping ground where his faith began to develop. Abraham was a normal guy who followed an extraordinary call from God. His life is marked by faith, but he also had a few failures in his life like many of us. There are probably hundreds of lessons we could learn from his life, but I'd like to focus on three applications we can learn from Abraham's life of faith. To make certain we're clear about faith, the author of Hebrews tells us, "*Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see*" (Hebrews 11:1). Another version of the Bible says: "Faith is being sure of what you hope for and certain of what you do not see." This describes all we've been saying about Abraham.

The first lesson of faith we learn from Abraham is God can call anybody. Abraham may have been the most unlikely candidate for God to call. In the eyes of the world he would have been viewed as an old, hopeless pagan but in the eyes of God he was perfect. Two thousand years after his passing, a young Christ-follower reminded the religious leaders of the faith of Abraham. While being falsely accused of blasphemy, Stephen sat in a Jewish courtroom. When it was his turn to speak, he chose to begin with the faith of Abraham. "*To this he replied: 'Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Harran. "Leave your country and your people," God said, "and go to the land I will show you." So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Harran. After the death of his father, God sent him to this land where you are now living*" (Acts 7:2–4).

Maybe, just maybe, there is someone here today for the first time or you've recently started attending CPC. You don't know much about the Bible. Your life seems meaningless and you've been told it's contrary to the ways of God. There is something deep inside you that wants to follow God, but you're not sure what it would look like. You may feel like you're too far gone or you don't know where to start. Start with accepting the fact that God can call anybody. You too can leave the identity you've made for yourself, your comforts and security to follow the Lord. It sounds crazy, I know; I've done it. You can stop worshipping the idols around you and worship the Lord. He can change your life for his glory. If you don't believe me, just stick around after our 11:15 am service and watch as we baptize people who were far from God and are now following him.

The second lesson we learn from Abraham's life of faith is, Trust in the Lord. Trust is an ongoing action, not just a one-time event. Abraham didn't just trust in the Lord once and then all was good; he continued trusting in the Lord throughout his life. The writer of Hebrews makes mention of his faith 2,000 years later. "*By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going*" (Heb. 11:8). This faith made it

easier to believe when God said he would make his descendants more numerous than all the stars in the sky. Abraham's trust in the Lord directed his life.

You may have recently placed your trust in Christ; over the summer we had a lot of people place their trust in Christ for the first time. Will you continue to place your trust in Christ, and will you trust in Christ on a daily basis? Let's talk about examples what that might look like. The next time you're tempted to trust in your own ability, stop and choose to trust in the Lord. This can be tougher to apply especially if you're having marital issues or problems are beginning to arise with your children. Maybe things aren't going well for you at school and you've been feeling confused about why you're even there. No matter the situation, no matter how tough a spot you find yourself in, you can trust the Lord. You can trust him in the good and bad, the great and the horrible. The great Bible Scholar A.W. Pink said this: "Daily living by faith on Christ is what makes the difference between the sickly and the healthy Christian, between the defeated and the victorious saint."

We've talked about how God can use anybody and we've looked at trusting in the Lord. The last lesson of faith we learn from Abraham's life is this: Act in Obedience. If you truly believe that God can call anybody and you've placed your trust in the Lord, let me ask you a blunt question—What's holding you back? What's holding you back from acting in obedience to this amazing faith journey God is calling you on? Leaving everything sounds crazy; trust me, I've done it. Wandering the desert while having your faith shaped sounds painful, and it is. The point of all of this isn't to make sense; it's to make us holy, to increase our faith as we obediently follow Christ. James, the brother of Jesus, said this

about faith. *"In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead"* (James 2:17).

If I can share honestly with you this morning, this is where I struggle. I don't struggle with the faith part, I struggle with the obedience part. Growing up I was a rebellious child and just like Frank Sinatra, I did it my way. I love taking huge steps of faith and seeing God work in amazing ways, but obedience isn't my greatest strength. I like to break the rules and push the limits in life. I imagine I'm not the only person in here who struggles with this word obedience. The longer I've lived, the more I've realized how important it is to act in obedience to God.

Sometimes God may seem silent. We sit alone and wonder if he has forgotten us, or worse yet, cast us aside altogether. But Genesis 12 is a reminder that God never forgets his people. Abraham's life is a great example of faith, maybe the best one we will ever hear. As much as we love to cheer at Abraham's faith, the reality is, Abraham's faith won't save us. The altars Abraham set up and the sacrifices he made couldn't save him. Abraham was waiting in faith for more and 2,000 years ago God broke into earth with the greatest rescue mission ever conceived. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came to earth as a small baby. This baby grew into a man who would later be nailed to a cross to die for our sins. God calls his people to live by faith through acts of obedience. The greatest step of faith anyone can make is to trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Your story isn't over; there is still time to act in faith and let God be the author.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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