

The great American author Mark Twain didn't write much about faith, but a quote attributed to him was dead on. He said, "Some people are troubled by the things in the Bible they can't understand. The things that trouble me are the things I can understand."

So let me ask you. Are there passages in the Bible that you understand? Passages that are so simple and so straightforward. Passages that say things like "Go." Things like "leave your former life behind and follow me." Simple commands like "*go, and I will show you what you need to know along the way.*" So simple, so straightforward, yet so uncomfortable for anyone who is willing to feel the tension of trying to grow a faith that pleases God.

This week we begin a summer series called *Abraham: Living by Faith*. We will learn about the life of Abraham. We will be inspired by examples of Abraham's strong faith. We will be challenged by stories of Abraham's flawed faith. And we will learn how his faith story speaks into our own faith stories today.

You who are reading who consider yourself up in years will get a kick out of this. The story of Abraham and his wife, Sarah, began when Abraham was about 75 years old, and Sarah was about 65 years old. So let's not waste time getting older and dive right in. "*The Lord had said to Abram, 'Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you'*" (*Genesis 12:1*).

You are never too old to receive a new calling from God. The man we know as Abraham was born with the name Abram which means "the father is exalted." God changed his name from Abram to Abraham and his wife's name Sarai to Sarah later in our story for reasons we will learn. Abram was a descendant of Noah's son Shem. And he and his family lived in a large bustling city known as Ur of the Chaldeans. It was located in the region of Mesopotamia in modern-day Iraq. We can get the sense that Abram's father Terah had built a life there and the Abram clan were people of means and influence in Ur.

The people of Ur worshipped all variations of mythical gods. All these gods were ruled by the Moon god, who had the name Sin. How ironic. Before the Lord called Abram, he and his family and friends worshipped a god named Sin.

So the Lord over all creation spoke a specific command to Abram. "Get up and go." Notice that Abram didn't initiate this call. He didn't cry out to God or even seek out God for a relationship. God approached him. It was pure grace. God dipped his hand down into the dark hole of Ur to select Abram for His special plan.

The command was straightforward, but let's not minimize it. The command was a big ask. "*Leave your country, your people, and your father's*

household and go." What made this even more difficult was the vagueness of God's command to go to the land "*I will show you.*" Abram would not know his final destination until well into his journey. But I am comforted to know that when the Lord called Abram, he also made Abram some rich promises. And reading ahead, we know that Abram himself wouldn't experience all these promises in full because they will ultimately be fulfilled in the people of God in Israel and in those who become God's church. In verses 2-3, we see the promises and blessings God made to Abram. It's beautifully written. It's poetry.

"*I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you;*" (v. 2a). God promised that Abram's offspring would become a great nation, with wealth, land, government, and a language. And that Abram's nation would be as great as any gentile nation. And speaking of offspring, a huge storyline here is that Abram and Sarai are asked to believe God's promise of descendants even though they were not able to have any children of their own.

"*I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing*" (v. 2b). In Genesis 11, we read about the Tower of Babel. We read that the builders of that tower built it "so they could make a name for themselves." But God shut it down because in God's economy, nations and names are made great when God makes them great. By faith, Abram would receive what only God's grace could give him. And by faith, Sarai would receive what God's grace could give her. That one day, Sarai would be blessed to be called a mother. Not just a mother, but a mother of kings.

Along with the personal blessing of a name, of wealth, of many descendants, The Lord promised that through Abram, the entire world would be blessed. "*I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you*" (v.3).

God's grand plan to redeem the world from sin was to come through the faith of one man Jesus, whose father was Joseph, from the tribe of Judah, who was the son of Jacob, who was the son of Issac, who was the son of Abram. And to help them accomplish this great task, God gave Abram a piece of land, a little land bridge between three continents, nestled between the Arabian Desert and the Mediterranean Sea. Later God said to the nation of Israel through the prophet Isaiah, "*I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth*" (*Isa. 49:6b*).

The Apostle Paul referred to these verses of promise and blessing in his letter to the Galatians.

"Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: 'All nations will be blessed through you.' So