

When I was a teenager and my parents had to go somewhere, they would leave me with a list of things to get done. My list of chores might look something like this: wash the dishes, vacuum the carpet, take out the garbage, and fold the laundry. Like most teenagers, however, I had my own list of very important things I wanted to do. So, there were those occasions when I tried to do my parent's list enough to get by, but to cut enough corners so I could do all that I wanted.

I would wash the dishes, but wouldn't dry and put them away. I would run the vacuum real quickly over the open areas, but didn't clean the edges or move anything. I would take out the kitchen garbage, but not the other trash cans in the house. I'd fold the laundry, but wouldn't put it away.

Now you teenagers and you parents tell me something. Do you think my plan worked? Were my parents satisfied with how I carried out their commands? Of course not. When they got home, I had to finish all that I had left undone, and I got a big lecture about halfway obedience.

Halfway obedience isn't unique to me, or even to teenagers obeying their parents. It's our human condition. It's our sinful nature. In our relationship with God we sometimes do the same thing to Him. Last week we looked at God's call to Abraham. God called him leave his hometown, his people, and his extended family. God was trying to remove him from the moral influences of his old life.

God did this because He was calling Abraham to something new. He wanted to build through Abraham a new people and a new life. He wanted to build a relationship with Abraham He was preparing the way for Jesus. He had a plan and a purpose to save people from our sin, so that we all could have a relationship with Him.

And so God calls Abraham to take a Journey. It's a physical journey. He is supposed to go from Ur to Canaan. But most importantly, it was a journey of faith. He had to learn to trust in God's provision, God's protection, and God's promises. And in this, it's the same journey we are all called by God to make today.

Like Abraham, we are called to leave some things behind. Like Abraham, we are called into the unknown and difficult. Sometimes, we don't want to do all that God wants us to do. We respond to God's call the same way I did to my parent's call. We respond with halfway obedience. We cut corners. We compromise. We avoid going all the way. We hold back.

But if we don't fully obey God's call, there is danger of missing out on His promise. We will see this morning two things in Abraham's life that demonstrate the danger of halfway obedience. Specifically, we will see what happens when we don't go all the way to where God calls us, and what happens when we don't leave all behind. There are consequences when we fail to follow God's call, but

we will also see that we do not have to be done in by our wrong turns in our journey of faith. I want you to see that a flawed faith is not a failed faith.

I. Abraham Didn't Go All the Way to Where God Called Him.

Open your Bibles to Genesis 11:31-32. Now, if you're paying attention, you'll realize we are going backwards in the text. Last week we were in Genesis 12, but this will all make sense in a little bit.

Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Harran, they settled there. Terah lived 205 years, and he died in Harran.

There is something going on here we might miss, if we're not paying close attention. Chapter 11 ends with Abraham living in Harran and chapter 12 begins with the call of God. You get the impression that God did not call Abraham until after he went to Harran. But the first clue that something more is happening comes in the verb tenses in verse 1 of chapter 12, "*The LORD had said to Abram, 'Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you?'*" Is that past tense or present tense?" It's past tense. Sadly, this isn't made clear in all English translations. The ESV puts it in a footnote, but this is past tense. This is something God had already told Abraham. The call came before. Chapter 12:1-4 is just a reminder of what God had already told him.

The call didn't come in Harran. It came while Abraham was still living in Ur. Other passages make this clear. God makes this clear when he makes his covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15:7. God tells him, "*I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it.*" Acts 7:2 the evangelist Stephen is preaching to the people and says this, "*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.*"

God called Abraham in Ur to leave and go to Canaan. At first, it looks like Abraham will fulfill the call. He packs up. He leaves, and he goes, but not to Canaan. Genesis 11:31 says, "*They set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan, BUT when they came to Harran, they settled there.*" They never reached their destination. Abraham's journey of faith sputters and stops in Harran. That's not really a big move. It's like God calls you to Africa, and you make it as far as Virginia. It's the same people, the same culture. The address is different, but everything else is the same. He is still nestled comfortably in the Euphrates river basin. The same restaurants sit on the corner. He goes to a different branch of the same bank. He's still using the same money. There are different temples where the same idols are worshiped. In Harran, he had all the same earthly comforts and temptations he had in Ur.

What is the result? There is a delay, some scholars estimate up to 15 years, in the furtherance of God's plan. For several years, there is no word from heaven. We see nothing of God's plan. There is no hint of God's promise. Nothing happens until Abraham obeys completely.

It was not until Abraham turned his back on the Euphrates River and headed out into the desert wilderness that Abraham left his comfort zone and was pushed beyond his own strength and ability and had to trust in God.

The journey of faith requires that we stretch our trust in God beyond what we are capable of in our own strength and abilities. Too many of us are still living in Harran. We have followed God only to that point where we don't have to leave our comfort zone. We follow only as far as things are still familiar, manageable, and safe. But if we never follow God to where we are thrust beyond our own resources and have to depend on Him, we will never see God do what only God can do.

Good starts are not enough

Let me make a point of application here. It's not enough to make a good start. The roadside of the journey of faith is littered with the broken down wrecks of those who had a good start. They began with the best of intentions. They began in a furious flame of sincerity. They began with a good ministry. They began with a strong faith. They began with a faithful marriage. They began their career with hard work and integrity. They began with character and conviction. But something happened along the way.

Like Hymenaeus and Alexander in 1 Timothy 1, they shipwrecked their faith. Like the church in Laodicea, they have lost their first love. They did not move on from the elementary teachings, from the milk to the meat of the word as in Hebrews 5 and 6. There is compromise. There is stagnation.

A good start doesn't mean a good finish. A good test for this is to tell the story of your spiritual journey. Where do the compelling parts of your story end? Do they continue right up to your present life, or does your story end 10 years ago, 15 years ago, 20 years, or more? God hasn't really done much in your life since then. How have you responded to God's call recently? How have you experienced God's protection and provision recently? How has God stretched your faith recently? Make sure in your spiritual journey that you haven't stopped off at a rest stop, and have never left.

When we put down stakes in our journey, settle in and grow comfortable with where we are spiritually, our faith weakens, loses its edge, and stops trusting in God. We are to be spiritual pilgrims, always on the go, moving ahead, not permanent residents. When we become residents, our faith becomes stagnant, our churches become stagnant.

Have that mentality Paul spoke of in Philippians 3:12-14:

¹²*Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.* ¹³*Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead,* ¹⁴*I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

II. Abraham Didn't Leave Everything He Was Called to Leave Behind

The second thing is this— Abraham didn't leave everything he was called to leave behind. Look at 12:1 again. What was Abraham supposed to leave? His country, his people, and his father's household? I would think father's household would include the father, don't you? Look at who left Ur in 11:31, "*Terah (that is Abraham's dad) took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and together they set out from Ur.*" Was that full obedience to God's call? No it was not.

I believe Abraham's father, Terah, was the main reason why Abraham made it only as far as Harran. Genesis 11:31 said it was Terah who took Abraham to Harran, even though it was Abraham that God called. It should have been Abraham going on his own, and dad shouldn't have been along for the ride.

We can only imagine how that conversation went, "Say that again, Abe. Who told you to go where? Well, that's just nuts! That's clear across the desert. We have no idea what's over there. We have no idea what the people are like? We'd be starting over from scratch. I'll tell you what. I'll make you a deal. We'll all go together. We'll go as far as Harran. That's where the caravans turn west to head across the desert. You have to go the Harran anyway. Let's just go that far and see how it goes."

Abraham never set one foot closer to the Promised Land until his father died. Abraham's failure to follow God fully led to much delay in God's plan and promise. When we don't leave behind all that he's called us to leave behind. When we don't go all the way he's called us, there will always be problems.

Some of us here this morning are bringing some stuff along in our spiritual journey we shouldn't be bringing with us. We're bringing some relationships we should break off or change dramatically. We're bringing some attitudes that we won't let the Holy Spirit do His thing on. We use excuses like, 'that's just the way I am. You'll have to get used to it.' Some of us are bringing along some dreams, hopes and expectations that belong to our old lives, not the new life to which God has called us. We will not experience the new hopes and the new dreams God has for us, until we leave the old ones behind.

Some of us stopped moving spiritually a long time ago. For you, it isn't a journey of faith anymore, it's been a really long pit stop, and you've never left. You're afraid to leave your comfort zone.

You're afraid of what God might call you to do, so you stay put. I understand that fear. I've been there. I once tried to bargain with God. "God, I'll do anything you want me to do, but I don't want to be a preacher." You can see who won that argument. But here's the thing, I never realized God's plan and promise in my life, until I left the comfortable place I was and went to where God called me to be. I've had habits I didn't want to leave behind. I've had attitudes I didn't want to leave behind. I've had sin I didn't leave behind, but I couldn't be where God wanted me to be, until I trusted him and left those things.

My encouragement to you is don't give up and don't quit. I told you earlier that a flawed faith is not a failed faith. I'm glad God put Abraham's full story in here, warts and all. It's one of the things that assures me that the Christian faith is authentic and real. Islam won't say anything bad about Muhammad, but Christianity is quite upfront about how its heroes of the faith have blown it big time. Noah had a problem with Alcohol. Jacob deceived his father. David was an adulterer and murderer. Peter denied Jesus. James and John had problems controlling their temper. Genesis doesn't give us a highly-polished, airbrushed view of Abraham. It shows us his flaws in high-definition detail. And I'm glad it does, because I have flaws and mistakes.

Abraham was the first to make the journey of faith, but it wasn't a perfect journey. I want you to notice God's grace and patience here. Although Abraham did not go all the way and did not leave all behind, God still worked with him. He could have written Abraham off, but he didn't. Know that God is understanding of our personal struggles and weaknesses. Just as he was with Abraham, God waits with us, endures our mistakes, yet still works His plan. He lets us learn some lessons the hard way, and He uses them to further His plan and His glory.

We also see here that God disciplines those he loves. There were consequences and difficulties Abraham faced because he didn't follow God fully. We will see those clearly when it comes to the story of Lot. Lot was his nephew. He came along when dad took them all to Harran. He was a part of his father's household. Abraham was supposed to leave him behind, but he didn't and it causes all sort of problems.

God is a God of grace. He is patient and gentle with us, but He is not an enabling heavenly father. He doesn't make excuses for our sin. He doesn't pretend they don't matter, and he lets us face the consequences for the stupid things we do.

That being said, I must finish with this: It is never too late to start following God fully. Even if you've ignored his call for years, you can answer today. God can still use you. I'll be honest with you. God has built his church with a bunch of losers.