



Lessons from Abraham Start Now

Do You Have Something You Need to Do?

Have you ever put off doing something despite how irrational it would be to wait? A couple of years ago I developed a pimple on the right side of my head by my eye. It didn't look great and to be honest, I was a bit surprised at my age to still have acne. I got some acne medication and started treating the pimple. It never diminished though. In fact the spot slowly increased in size. I tried squeezing it to release the liquid in it but the pimple remained puffy and intact. In the back of my mind I knew the pimple might not be acne, but I didn't want to make a doctor's appointment about such a trivial matter. After a couple of years, my primary physician contacted me to have a check-up and when I went to see her, I asked her if she would look at the pimple on the side of my head. That examination led to a meeting with a dermatologist who took a biopsy and discovered I had skin cancer. Looking back, it was of course foolish of me to put off having the blemish examined by a doctor, but like you I sometimes, maybe too often put off what I should do. Our big idea is this. Like Abraham get started rather than wait.

We will be spending several weeks examining Abraham, a man of faith and failure who by what he did and did not do set an example for us of how to live well. In this study, we will look closely at several moments in Abraham's life that are crucial lessons for us, for you. Lesson one is "Start Now". Now, I know the KJV Bible admonishes, **But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength...** (Isaiah 40: 31a KJV) This well known promise of Scripture declares that when you wait upon the Lord, you will be infused with the ability to keep going, to persevere, to make it through what you are facing. The idea though is not that we all are supposed to sit around in recliners and stop doing anything. The promise is built upon a basic tenant of life. Live with God infusing you with His power, His creativity, His determination. Never go it alone, whatever you are doing. Look to God for guidance, for inspiration and for strength. Pray and He will lift you up and give you what you need to rise above whatever you face. With Christ in you, there is not an issue you come upon alone so let God work through you to make you powerful and wise.

You know as well that waiting may be helpful as you connect or reconnect with God and sometimes a pause is needed while you emotionally or spiritually catch your breath. There is however a type of waiting that is unrighteous, that is based on a lack of belief in God and that can wreck you. Abraham, the ancient patriarch who was the father of the Jewish people was born and raised in Ur, which was near the Persian Gulf, southeast of where Babylon and Nineveh were founded. Ur was in the region we now call Iraq. It was the home of moon worship, and a large ziggurat was built there to honor the moon god. In this thriving cultural center something and we don't know what, pulled on the heart of Abraham's father Terah to move. The plan was to travel all the way to Caanan and settle there. Nahor, Abram (as he was known then) Abram's wife Sarai, and Nahor's grandson packed up and began the long 1,400 mile journey to Caanan, but they didn't make it. After traveling approximately 600 miles, they stopped and settled in another pagan city, Haran. We don't know why they gave up on the plan to go to Caanan nor even why Nahor decided in the first place to go there. **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 Haran, they settled there.** (Genesis 11: 31 NIV) There is an added twist to this move. Terah's other married son, Nahor stayed behind with his family. Why would that be? Perhaps the journey with small kids seemed too risky. Maybe he did not feel the sense of destiny his dad and brother had regarding Caanan. The Bible doesn't give us any insight into that monumental decision. Later, Nahor and his family did make it up to Haran, perhaps after Abram and his wife and nephew left for Canaan.

Now something happened that we can only classify as supernatural. The Lord spoke directly to Abram, and we don't know how....by dream, by auditory voice, by vision? We do not know but the words were very specific, and they were put in poetic form when placed in the Bible. God may speak to you any way He chooses, and it can come in one of the forms mentioned or through some other way, a fellow Christian, an event or most importantly, through a careful reading of the Bible. **The Lord had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.** (Genesis 12: 1 NIV) God then goes on to share the many ways He will bless Abram and his family when he gets there. We know now that the land God was going to show him turned out to be the very place Terah planned on them all going to make their new home, but they never got there. It was of course Canaan. Why didn't they go to Caanan in the first place? We can't say. There are lots of reasons why we don't do what we

recognize we should do. 1. We are afraid. That is precisely why the Israelites did not march into the Promised Land when the Lord told them to go. 2. We are settled. We get comfortable where we are. When God was about to destroy Sodom and the angels tried to get Lot and his family to leave the city, the angels literally had to grab them all by the hand to get them to leave. 3. We feel like we have too much to lose. The rich young ruler, rather than embark on a new life of salvation following Christ, refused to sell what he had and give it to the poor because he was so rich and unwilling to let go of it. 4. We don't have a strong belief in God or confidence He is actually leading us to change. The Hebrews who returned to Israel after generations living in exile following the Babylonian conquest settled and built homes and planted crops. However, they did not find the time to rebuild the Temple which remained in ruins. The Lord through the prophet Haggai asked them if they realized why they were not as successful as they expected farming. It was, He told them, because the Israelites had not bothered to get started rebuilding the Temple. God was not a priority for them, perhaps because many had stopped believing in the LORD or at least did not give much thought to Him. 5. We are afraid that if we make needed changes someone will be hurt. Facing a horrific and deadly storm brought on by God's confrontation of Jonah, the crew of the ship knew they could only survive the storm if Jonah was thrown overboard. Jonah himself, who would be the victim in this case was the one who told them this was so. **Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before.** (Jonah 1: 13 NIV)

There are hundreds of reasons why we don't get started doing what we know we should do. Abram and his wife and Lot perhaps did not feel adequately motivated to make the long move to Canaan. Most likely they kept waiting for Nahor, the patriarch to make the call to go ahead and leave Haran as was the original plan but Nahor lacked the commitment to the move, so they remained in limbo. It is fascinating that the verb translated "settled" as in they settled in Haran is in the imperfect tense which means they never really completely made Haran their home. They had one foot in and the other out. Abram and Sarah never seemed to feel Haran was home for them. Perhaps it was the widespread paganism there. Maybe it was the inability to really make a go of it as shepherds. It could have been, and this seems the most likely to me, they had a sense that would not go away, that Nahor had been led by God to move to Canaan, but Nahor had neglected the call out of fatigue or spiritual ambivalence or perhaps health issues. Whatever the case, the small family never seemed to feel at home in Haran and the calling of God to leave confirmed their unease.

There are those who when they know they should do something, they immediately get started. Others put it off, get involved in other projects, argue to themselves they need more time to think about it. It is typically called procrastination but when it comes to God prompting you, it is sin. This past year, I became convinced that God was leading me to begin a new Christmas ministry to impoverished Malaysian children. There are millions of different ministries one can join or start but I knew God wanted me and even our church to begin this new work. Rather than putting it off for a year to get everything in place to do the ministry well, I knew God wanted me to start immediately. As a result I presented the concept to the church and the church embraced the new ministry. Because we did, sixty two people put their faith in Christ the night the children received their presents and children of all ages found out about the goodness of God. We cannot know the cost at the moment of putting off what we know we need to do. Perhaps it will take years or even generations to see fully the effect of waiting but we will eventually know because God will at some point bring everything to light. As we start this new year, you have a choice to make. Will you like Nahor put off what you know you should do or will you like Abram and Sarai make the move you realize God wants made, what you need to make? Our big idea is profound yet as simple as a triangle. Like Abraham, get started. Begin what you know you need to do. End that addiction. Start that project. Clean out that closet. Make that relationship work. Forgive that sin. Settle that debt. Find a way to share the Gospel. Read the Bible. Pray like you have a calling of God to pray. This is a new day; the dawn of a fresh beginning and it is time to get started.