

Lessons from Abraham

Strive Together

Do You Prefer Being by Yourself Or with a Team?

When I was just starting college, our little church had a softball team. Almost none of us had ever played high school baseball and we just weren't very good. I remember one time I was playing centerfield, and a ball was hit to me. The runner at third tagged up to try and score and in my excitement to throw him out at the plate, I fired the ball with such force that I threw the ball completely over the backstop. We lost every game but after each loss, we went to a root beer stand and got large mugs of ice cold root beer because we just liked being together. Have you ever been a part of a team, whether in school or at your work that made your life better? We are going to take an in-depth look at Abraham and see how he responded to being a part of a team and what we can learn from his experience. Here is our Big Idea. Build bridges rather than erect walls.

What is so fascinating about the Bible in general and the chronicles of Abraham specifically is the brutal honesty with which the biographical accounts are presented. Consider the rift that developed between Abraham and his nephew Lot. Already the two had been through a great deal together. They had walked around 600 miles from Ur to Haran and then when the Lord made it clear Abraham was to relocate to Canaan, they walked another 800 miles there. After making Canaan their home, they left, went to Egypt and then returned together to Canaan. Both had accumulated great wealth, acquiring large herds of livestock and the effort to keep their herds separate and ownership of who had what clear and divided became difficult. In fact they thought it was impossible. **Now Lot, who was moving about with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents. But the land could not support them while they stayed together, for their possessions were so great that they were not able to stay together. And quarreling arose between Abram's herdsmen and the herdsmen of Lot.** (Genesis 13: 5-7a NIV) For some reason, they could not figure out a way to stick together. Abraham's solution was to give Lot the option of where he wanted to settle and Abraham would take his herds and those working with him and move in the opposite direction. **So Abram said to Lot, "Let's not have any quarreling between you and me, or between your herdsmen and mine, for we are brothers. Is not the whole land before you? Let's part company. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left."** (Genesis 13: 8-9 NIV) Lot thought this was a wonderful solution and chose what he believed was the most fertile and well-watered part of the region to move.

We know now how terrible this went for Lot. He lost his herds and fortune and relocated into Sodom which God destroyed because of how wicked the people of the region were. In the end, Lot's wife, whom he met in Sodom died and the nephew of Abraham was left with his two daughters and they wound up living in a cave. It certainly was a disastrous decision Lot made to break off from Abraham. That is clear. Why couldn't the two work out things and stay together? There are hundreds of factors as to why friends, families, marriages, companies, countries and even churches split apart. Here are some Going Separate Ways generators. 1. Greed... Many times it is just the unwillingness to share, whether it is credit, money, success or relationships. It is the "I want it all" syndrome. 2. Go it alone. I want my independence. I don't like being with others and I am happiest by myself. 3. Grudge holding. I cannot forgive you for how you hurt me, and I never will. The shame, bad treatment or lack of respect you have shown me is unforgivable. 4. Guidance rejection. Some people hate being told what to do or being given advice. They run from counselors and anyone in authority. 5. Grumpiness. How many relationships are ruined because one person is just cantankerous? These people are like social porcupines who make others uncomfortable by their humor, critical comments or bitterness. 6. Gossipers. Many relationships have come apart because someone spreads rumors, makes accusations or paints others in a bad light. 7. Gotcha. Some people just don't trust others, either rightfully or wrongfully so. They are constantly looking for evidence that others are out to get them, want to hurt them or can't be trusted. When they finally come upon some sort of evidence that seems to prove them right, they immediately sever the relationship or at least become so disconnected it might as well be over.

The Bible's stance on relationships generally is that we build bridges rather than erect walls. It is odd that Lot never returned to Abraham, even after Lot lost everything. Abraham had already proven his loyalty to Lot earlier when Lot was captured by a marauding coalition of armies that captured Sodom where Lot was living. Abraham, when he heard about Lot's plight, gathered the 318 men of fighting age in his encampment and went and rescued Lot and the others of Sodom from their captivity. Certainly Lot owed Abraham a great debt of gratitude but he remained cut off from

Abraham. Rather than making his way to Abraham and his camp when he and his daughters wound up hiding off in a cave, he chose to remain in poverty without looking to Abraham for help. Perhaps Lot was humiliated by the choices he had made, maybe he was just too depressed to abandon the cave life. Lot is like many who rather than rebuilding bridges, erect walls so they can avoid restoring broken relationships.

The Bible has much to say about staying together. This command is most indicative of the stance of Scripture regarding relationships. **Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.** (Ephesians 4: 3 NIV) To what lengths are Christians to go to in doing this? The verse immediately preceding makes it clear. **Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.** (Ephesians 4: 2 NIV) That is an extreme approach to working together with others, but it is precisely what being Christian is. The book of Romans has a number of "one another" statements that prescribe how Christians are to live. Here are just a few. **Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.** (Romans 12: 10 NIV) To be devoted to one another in brotherly love seems just the opposite of the decision Lot and Abraham made to go their separate ways. Honor one another above yourself is certainly not a normal way of seeing others but that is what God insists you are to do. **Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.** (Romans 12: 16 NIV) How many times has pride split up friendships, families and alliances between nations, let alone destroyed churches and even denominations? **Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another.** (Romans 14: 13a NIV) The idea that we can sit around and criticize one another as if we are deciding on a breakfast cereal is not of God and certainly of the devil. **Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.** (Romans 15: 7 NIV) This perfectly summarizes your approach to every relationship. Just as Christ reacts to you and how He treats you is how you are to be with every believer. There are no exceptions to this rule of life.

I wonder what would have happened if Abraham had made more of an effort to welcome Lot back into his family after he rescued him? And what if Lot had swallowed his pride and brought his daughters with him back to Abraham when Sodom was destroyed? Perhaps his daughters could have had real husbands rather than conceive illegitimate children with their father. And much later, the descendants of those children, who became arch enemies of Abraham's descendants and violent foes, would not have brought such destruction and terror to the people of Israel. Tina Turner had a huge hit song entitled "What's Love Got to Do with It?" It was built on the premise that love is a useless part of relationships. Her personal experience of being physically and emotionally abused by her husband, Ike Turner, fueled Tina Turner's disgust with love. Later Tina Turner did find love and a joy filled marriage that lasted until her death. But the question. "What's love got to do with it?" is the real controlling parameter determining every decision a Christian makes with all relationships. What's love got to do with what I just said? What's love got to do with how I just acted? What's love got to do with how much effort I am putting into this friendship, marriage, work relationship? Here is the final word on how you are to live. **Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.** (1 John 4: 7-8 NIV) The Big Idea today is this. Build bridges rather than erect walls. This week make it your determination to do what you do in such a way that those God puts on your path see the love of Christ in you.