

The Call

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[0:00] Think about the history of mankind. Who are some significant individuals! throughout the history of mankind! that have changed the course of history.

Who are those significant people?! Those men and those women.! Who comes to mind first? Gabs, you're laughing. Jalen Brunson.

Jalen Brunson. The bringer homer of the championship after 73, well, since 73. But someone a bit more important, please. Thomas Edison.

Thomas Edison. Why? Tell us why. Electricity. Electricity. Can you imagine, without electricity, where we would remain to be? Good one. Paul, you were having a little chuckle.

I was going to go for Jesus. He was going to go for Jesus. Paul grew up in Sunday school. Well done. Well done, Paul. Thank you. Thank you. Anyone else? Juju, what have you got?

[0:58] Martin Luther King. Martin Luther King. Martin Luther King. There we go. Why? Civil Rights Act. Civil Rights Act. Had a dream, and the dream came to be it.

Though it's still ups and downs right now, but it is a thing. Let me turn to this side. Who we got here? Ethan, who are you thinking? Billy Graham. Billy Graham. Billy Graham.

The one who brought so, so many people to Christ. Actually, a lot of the prominent Christian leaders today, you can probably trace back to some kind of Billy Graham event. Right? So that's a huge one.

Caleb, what have you got? Genghis Khan. Genghis Khan. Tell us why. Just responsible for all of us. Just responsible for all of us, what do you think about it?

Caleb, I don't want to think about it. But thank you. Where's one last one? Well, we said, oh, Martin Luther.

[1:55] Ooh. Tell us why. Because if it wasn't for a guy called Martin Luther, not the king, we wouldn't be here. Why?

He made some complaints. He made some complaints. He made some complaints. Things got changed. And now we're all here. All right.

If anyone wants to look into theology and the history of theology, Martin Luther, Google him. Okay, that's what he's talking about there. It's funny. None of you mentioned Abram. None of you mentioned, or who we now know as Abraham.

Think about the three most maybe significant religions in the history of mankind or Judaism, Islam, Christianity. All of them are agreed on the significance of this guy who left home called Abram.

He's the first patriarch of Judaism. He's the founding father almost of this religion.

[2:59] Actually, even Islam. How many people do you meet who are Muslims who are called Ibrahim? The model Muslim.

And of course, Christianity. Abram. If you look around, if you travel and you're like, well, no, we're in a secular society. We don't get impacted by religion.

That is so not true with respect. There's a book called The Air We Breathe. And if you look at it, you look at the society that we have now, the structures that we have in place, how they've been impacted by Christianity.

The values of the faith. You can see it's everywhere. Now, of course, the world is going up and down constantly, but there is no denying the impact of the religions of the world in the history of mankind.

There is no denying the significance of Abram. So we're going to look at now, because we've spent a long time in Genesis 1 to 11 talking big things, talking about creating the universe, the world.

[3:55] And then we've talked about how that then started the fall. We talked about how sin multiplies and just you've got just constantly just being fruitful and multiplying was the mandate. But

ended up what we do is we end up trying to make a name for ourselves.

And last week, Gabe talked to us about the Tower of Babel, how they wanted to make a name for themselves, build their own tower to reach heaven. And yet they get scattered instead. For the rest of Genesis, we're going to go a teeny, teeny bit faster.

Not that much faster. But we're going to focus on one family. After hearing about so many different people, we're now just going to focus on one family line. And that starts with the story of Abram in Genesis chapter 12.

As we have a reshuffle there, I'm actually going to invite a dear, familiar old brother and friend to come up, Cubon, who's going to come up and he's going to minister us with the word of God. So as per our tradition, can I invite you to stand for the word of God?

The call of Abram. Now, the Lord said to Abram, Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation and I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing.

[5:03] I will bless those who bless you and him who dishonors you. I will curse and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. So Abram went as the Lord had told him and Lot went with him.

Abram was seventy five years old when he departed from Haran. And Abram took Sarah, his wife and Lot, his brother's son and all the possessions that they had acquired and the people that they had acquired in Haran.

And they set out to go to the land of Canaan. When they came to the land of Canaan, Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the Oak of Moreh. At the time, the Canaanites were in the land. Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, To your offspring, I will give this land. So he built there an altar to the Lord who had appeared to him. From there he moved to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and I on the east. There he built an altar to the Lord and he called upon the name of the Lord.

And Abram journeyed on, still going toward the Negev. This is the word of the Lord. Praise be to God. Please take a seat. Thank you, Cuban. In the reading today, we see the one word that is probably the most uncomfortable when we talk about the Christian faith.

[6:07] That word is go. And when you think about Abraham, that's probably what you're thinking about. He's the guy who left. He's the guy who went. Who God told him to do something and he actually went to do it. And today we're going to unpack a little bit of what that actually means.

Because it's important for us to realize this. Actually, we have also, hopefully, have either encountered God or are hoping to encounter God. And often we get surprised or we get shocked when we actually realize what the response is or what the actual necessary appropriate response is when you meet God.

Because more often than not, when you meet God, the default response, the next response is go. When you meet him, then there's a move. You see Moses.

You see Paul. There's an action. There's a change. Of course, there's repentance, which is a complete turn of the heart. But then there's also just an action where actually, the moment you meet God, the moment you invite him into your life, he changes the furniture, he moves things around. And most importantly, sometimes, often, he moves you around. And then we get uncomfortable with that word go. I'm going to try and unpack a little bit of the context here. Okay? So the context here that Gabe told us last week was his dad, Terah, was actually a moon worshiper.

[7:15] He was an idolater. So you think about Abram. He actually grew up in a home where dad actually wasn't a Christian. He did not go to church. He did not grow up in Sunday school. In fact, what you see happen after the Tower of Babel is the nations get scattered.

They all have different languages. And from there, they start worshipping all these different idols that they have. So you've got Abram growing up in this home where dad is actually completely ignoring God and spending time worshipping the moon.

Something else tragic happens in this household is they had three brothers. So Abram actually had two brothers. One of them actually passes away at a fairly young age. And you actually see he leaves behind children.

And so what happens is actually there's grief in the home as well. So you can imagine, for dad's perspective, this is a significant thing that's happening because there were three boys, then there became two.

And now, one of them gets a call from God and they start moving. So they start off in this land called Ur. Okay, from that, they then actually head together as a family. So with dad as well. [8:15] The whole family. Chinese people, I think you get this. I think you understand this because the family values are so strong. The family ties, the duties, the obligations, the commitments are so strong. So as a family together with dad, they leave Ur and they start heading to the land called Canaan.

Now, we don't exactly know why even dad was compelled to go. Because actually, it tells us here at the end of chapter 11, they started going before we hear actually Abraham get the call.

So the whole family goes. Can you imagine? Now, why? Maybe it's because after the grief of the son, dad just wanted to change environment. Just wanted to go somewhere else. And so he says, you know what? I'm done. I'm tired.

I'm actually still grieving. I'm thinking, let's just move. Let's have a new start. Let's have a new change. So the whole family, dad takes and goes and heads to Canaan. But they don't end up in Canaan. So what happens then is, on their way to Canaan, they stop in the place called Haran. How convenient. They stop in the place that is named after the same son who they lost. And instead of carrying on into Canaan, they stop there. Dad decides, you know what?

[9:18] I'm just going to stay here. It makes me think, well, I can kind of see why. You know what? We've left our old place that reminds me of my son, reminds me of all the grief that I've had, reminds me, it gives me all these memories.

We're going to go into a new place. Yes, let's head to the land of Canaan. But we've stopped in Haran. Oh, you know what? It's pretty nice here. It's pretty comfortable. I worship the moon. They've got a really great temple here. They've got a great community in the temple where they can worship the moon. Let's just hang out here. And so then the whole household actually stays in this halfway house in Haran.

It's that moment. It's then when we start into chapter 12, where now we hear the Lord say to Abram, go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you, and I will make of you a great nation.

First quick point here. Every single person who is a Christian has to make a decision to follow God themselves. Some of you have grown up in the church. Some of you have grown up with Christian parents.

[10:17] Some of you have grown up with parents who are Buddhists. Some of you have grown up with parents who are capitalists. Some of you have grown up with parents who are, well, whatever it is. It doesn't matter what household you come from.

At one point or another, everyone has to make that decision to follow God themselves. We all have to make that decision. Just because you have a parent, just because you grew up in a family that follows whatever it is, each person must at some point come to the realization that I have to make this decision for myself.

I actually have to go. It's interesting. He says, hey, you must leave. And part of that is you also must leave your father's house. Now, remember, dad doesn't worship the God that Abraham hears from. We all have to make that decision ourselves. Who grew up in a Christian home here? At some point or another, you will have had to have made a decision by yourself.

You're sat here probably because of that same reason. You're like, actually, I need to not be in the same place as my parents, maybe, because I need to find out my own faith for myself. I have to find my own flame to burn for God.

[11:21] We all have to have that. Joe and I, we grew up in a household where we were Christian. We grew up Christian. But actually, my dad is the only Christian in his family. I mean, he was the youngest of 10.

And he was the only one that became a Christian when he went to Taiwan to study. And as a university student, he made that decision. And if it wasn't for him making that decision to leave his father's house, then I wouldn't be where I was. But that is then no guarantee that Joe and I would then become Christians.

At some point in our childhood, we have to make that decision to go, well, do we want to follow God? This happened for me when I was 17, when dad passed away. And at that moment, the kind of the authority in the house, the person who drives and leads the most, he goes.

And then I'm like, well, he's not here anymore. Do I still stay with the Christian faith or do I actually go where my friends are going and go this way instead? We all have to make that decision by ourselves.

And the thing is, when you meet God, often the call is to go. Tim Keller says this, and I quite like this quote. But his call, when we hear God's call, it is often an eviction notice to your self-sovereignty.

[12 : 25] When you hear the voice of God, when you hear the call of God, it's often a self-eviction notice of your own control. And that's the hardest thing because you've got to decide for yourself, will I go or will I actually stay?

And so where does he leave? First of all, he leaves his country. He kind of goes down a list in order of decreasing intimacy. So it starts with your country. Leave all the systems that you have behind. Leave the safety that you have behind.

Leave the civilization that you have behind. Leave the national identity that you have behind. You have to go and leave all those things that are familiar with you. Leave the culture that you have behind. Leave the cuisine.

Leave your favorite restaurant. Okay, so I left England. And so when it comes to restaurants, Fonita's already laughing because you know kind of where I'm going with this. Because it is the barren land of food. Well, unless you are extremely wealthy and you can eat Michelin stars. But for the rest of us, my diet mostly consisted of a place called Nando's. More specifically, a very cheeky Nando's. And what it is, it's just chicken wings and it's just fries.

[13 : 22] And when I'm feeling good that day, I move on to KFC. And then after KFC, I go to McDonald's. And after McDonald's, it's time for Nando's again. And if I really don't have time, then I'll go to this place called Greg's.

Which some of you are just laughing just in judgment. And not worth it. You're just laughing tears of sadness. Reminding you that was the childhood that we had. And yet, hey, I'm going back in a couple of weeks.

Guess where I'm ending up? Nando's. Greg's. I'm there. I'm just going to soak in the oil. I'm going to ask the kitchen whether I can just go in and sit there. And just soak up the smells. There's still something about familiarity that is so beautiful.

That is so fun. It's just like, I used to walk these streets. I used to feel this unsafe. It's so fun just to be here. Oh, watch out. There it is. But there is a familiarity.

There is a fondness about going home. So he has to leave his country. He doesn't have to just leave his country. He has to leave his kindred. He has to leave behind his culture. He has to leave behind his people.

[14 : 27] His friends. Think about Noah a couple of weeks ago. He had to also go against a lot. He's been 100 years building this boat in the middle of the land. And his friends, if he had any, by the way, would have had to ridicule him.

So this happened with me growing up, going to university. Hey, what's the most commonly asked question growing up in a university? Maybe in the UK, maybe in the US. I don't know. The commonly asked question when you see someone, you'll be like, oh, what did you do last night? Where did you go? Did you go partying? Did you go clubbing? Where did you go partying? Do you remember how it was? Do you remember how good it was? No, I mean, it's ironic. It's the best night of your life that you always forget. So, but that's always the culture, the people.

They look at you and go, well, you're doing something different. 1 Peter 4 talks about this. It says, actually, when you turn and you follow God, your friends, your existing friends, your old friends will look at you and go, you're weird. Why aren't you following us and doing this thing?

That's what Abraham is being told to do here. He's saying, leave your country. Leave your country. And some will question, but some will ridicule. And can you think of all the things that are going on?

[15 : 32] And probably the hardest one, the most painful one, is leave your father's house. Can you imagine? Now, commentators are a little bit unsure as to whether he left to go to Canaan whilst his dad was still alive or whether he was actually gone.

As I look at this and it says, leave your father's house, it makes me think that actually dad is probably still alive. Otherwise, why would it still be called your father's house? Because by that point, it would have been someone else's house. Can you imagine the conversation with dad? Hey, I know we've had a tough few years as a family. I know we've lost Aaron. I know that we've now settled in this new place. It's pretty nice. But hey, I'm hearing a voice to go somewhere else

and I actually have to leave.

Can you imagine the feeling of that? Actually, Christina and I remember the feeling of when we told our parents who nurtured us, paid for our education.

And when we told them, hey, actually, we're going to leave the jobs that we are in. And we're going to go and study again in seminary. We're going to go study counseling. Christina had to leave her job in the hospital as a cardiac physiologist.

[16:42] To join us in God's call. Actually, she was the one who heard God's voice first about this. And you can ask her about it. Can you imagine the conversation? And again, with parents who don't believe, by the way, who worship the moon.

And then his dad would have been like, well, wait, what do you mean leave? I already lost one son. I can't lose you as well. And then Abram says, no, I get that. Can you imagine the betrayal that dad would have felt?

This could have been a moment where he said, actually, well, from this point on, I don't even have you anymore. I only have one. He then, of course, does take his brother, the deceased brother's son, Lot, with him as well.

But can you imagine the pain of being called away from the father's house? And this is probably the hardest part. He said, leave everything that you've ever known, all the people that you've ever loved, and go.

But I'm not going to tell you where you're going to go. To a place where I will show you. Are you kidding me? When we get called by God, we're like, you know what? God, we would like to go.

Okay, you're calling me?

[17:44] Okay, can you tell me where I'm going? Can you tell me how I'll be provided for? Can you tell me where I'll be living? Can you tell me which spouse you've prepared for me? Okay, whereas God here, when he makes that call, that self-eviction notice of self-sovereignty, is one where it's like, hey, you go, but I'm not going to tell you yet.

I will show you. I think some of us are sat at that crossroad, where we feel God calling us somewhere, but we actually don't know where. And so we're then, well, what do we do?

And often the call always goes back to, trust me. Come to me, and be with me, and I will lead you.

Oswald Chambers in one of my favorite devotionals of all times, called My Upmost for His Highest.

I've read it just on rotation over the years. And one line he says is, faith never knows where it is being led, but it loves and knows the one who is leading. You don't know where he's leading you.

You just know that he's the one who is leading you, and that's all that matters. I remember in my school, my dream always growing up was to be a teacher. What kind of teacher? It kind of evolved over time. At first, I wanted to be a teacher, but then eventually I became a science teacher.

[18:49] Not a very good one, by the way, being a science teacher. And then I was in the school. I went back to the school that I grew up in. I think it was the dream job. And if you knew me, and I've shared this before, I'm someone who just likes to stay and do the same thing every day over and over again.

I don't like adventure. I don't like change. And I just want to keep going in the same way. So I was sat in my own classroom, biology classroom, teaching at the school that I thought I'd retire in.

And then God calls, and I would have never been able to guess the journey that he took us on. To the point where I'm now stood in Hong Kong, speaking to you, with an extra child.

It's mind-blowing to me, especially the last part. Devastating. But yeah, it brings so much joy.

And I'm like, thank goodness I wasn't in control of my own journey. Thank goodness I didn't get to tell God, hey, this is where I want you to lead me. Even though that's not really how being led by God works. But when he says go to a place that I will show you, it's often to a place that we don't know.

[19:59] Now, can we feel the weight of why Abram was such a significant character? And so he goes. Interestingly, I think chapter 12 is after chapter 11 for a reason.

And the reason is because 12 comes after 11. Thanks, Gaps. I saw that. I saw that. But the other reason is because in chapter 11, the Tower of Babel, people wanted to make their name great.

They wanted to make a name for themselves.

They wanted to build a tire so they could go as high as possible. But then God says, no, that doesn't happen. Not on my watch. Chapter 12, God himself comes up and shows up and says, Abram, I'm going to make your name great.

See, when God chooses in his sovereignty to do whatever he wants to do, he will make your name great. And actually, we're going to find out that Abram's not that great a character. But what you see here is when God's in control, he will decide when you go up and when you go down.

I think that encourages some people, especially if you are in the corporate world or in any kind of job that you're in and you're wondering, why am I getting that? Why am I not getting that promotion yet? Why am I not getting that job yet? Why am I not getting the thing that I want yet?

[21:02] The question really is, wait, are you really asking God? Because when God wants to, he will. But if he's calling you to wait, then he's calling you to wait. Of course, today is a significant day in the history of basketball.

The New York Knicks win their first title. And as I've been following this week, I was reminded of something that happened quite a few years ago when there was something that happened in New York called Linsanity. Linsanity was when one Asian kid who managed to get to Harvard, but also really good at bouncing a ball, a guy called Jeremy Lin, ends up kind of having his career just completely catch fire.

And in 2012, he became the most searched person on Google. So literally the most famous person in the world in that year. If you watch some of his interviews and you go back to him talking about this period of time in Linsanity, he will say that there were some very, very specific things that had to happen.

I think he named 17, which were things that have had to have happened that were completely out of his control, that were not planned by him at all, that most of all, most of them were actually rejections from other people that led him to the place where the circumstances were perfect for that season to happen.

Completely out of his control. And he sits there and he says, well, that just shows you my name became what it was, not because of anything that I did, but because God in that moment chose to do it.

[22:27] And God can choose to do anything he wants. And he says to Abram here, I will make of you a great nation and I will bless you and make your name great. It's interesting, isn't it? Chapter 11, they're the ones trying to do it.

Let's make a name for ourselves. And then God's kind of almost responding to that and saying, hey, I will be the one that does it. I will make your name great. And then, and I will bless you. And here's the second part that us Christians don't really like to hear because we like the fact that God blesses us, but then we like it to stop there.

And because what we want to hear is, hey, Alison Cara, I am going to bless you and you're going to enjoy everything that life and this city has to offer. And you're going to have such a wonderful, comfortable, luxurious, happy life, healthy life.

We hope it's a full stop, but it's not a full stop for them. It's not a full stop for me and you. It's not, wasn't a full stop for Abram because what does he say here? So that you will be a blessing. Most of us are here.

I'm hoping, I'm praying that you will sit here right now and go, I'm pretty blessed. Everything I have is from God and it's so good. What if I then told you that everything that you have right now was actually supposed to be passed on?

[23:40] You have the blessings that you have right now because you're supposed to be a blessing to someone else. The nations are failing. They're dying. And yet God chooses one family to bless so that that one family ends up blessing the nations again.

We should sit here going, well, we are blessed and we have whatever we have, whatever resources we have. We're supposed to look out and go, well, how can we be a blessing to others? I'll bless those who bless you and him who dishonors you, I will curse.

And in you, all the families of the earth shall be blessed. It's interesting when the favor of God is on you, it doesn't really matter where you go. It doesn't matter how bad your boss is. When the favor of God is with you, then it will continue to go that way.

But when the favor of God is actually telling you to go somewhere else, you're going to find it very, very hard to go where you want to go whilst you're trying to make a name for yourself. And the question really that we all have to ask is, when we pray that prayer that your kingdom come in the Lord's prayer, the question really is, are we actually praying for his kingdom to come or are we actually praying for our kingdom to be built up?

And we have to be so honest with ourselves when we say that, oh, well, I'm not trying to build a kingdom. I'm not trying to rule over people. Well, you're trying to rule over yourself. You're trying to rule over your family. You're trying to get what you want.

[24 : 53] So then in some ways, it is about us. It is about our own kingdoms. That's why Jesus says, your kingdom come, your will be done. An amazing verse four.

So Abram went as the Lord had told him. Just as ridiculous as when Noah got their instructions to build a boat. And all we hear is, and Noah did what he was commanded.

We see the same ridiculousness here when, when someone is told to leave their country, leave their kindred, leave their father's house. And he just says, and scripture just says, so Abram went as the Lord had told him.

See, at this point, we just have to stop again. When you meet God, you are often called to move.

The question is, how do we hear God? How do we actually do what he just did there?

It makes me think actually, maybe we all need practice in this. So just a couple of things from me, as I talk about how I heard from God and how I heard and followed God's call. Often, a lot of it was actually me just waiting.

[25 : 52] We always complain that we don't hear from God, but then I wonder whether we actually even make time to actually spend in quiet, to listen to him. Do you do that? I wish I could hear God's voice. My family and I, we watched the Netflix documentary on dinosaurs yesterday.

And Morgan Freeman's voice, just so, yeah, just so soothing. And I was like, well, his voice is often used to be God, right? I mean, but I was like, if only I could hear God's voice.

And it's in the form of Morgan Freeman. And it's easy. And it's whenever I press the button to do it, then I can hear God tell me what he wants, what I want him to tell me. But it doesn't really work like that.

So often I say I want to hear from God, but then I spend my whole day being busy with other things. And then God's like, well, I'm speaking, but you're not really listening. 1 Kings 19. When God actually speaks, it's not through the earthquake.

It's not through the fire. It's not through the wind. It's through what? A still, small voice. This city, this culture, this world is so noisy.

[26 : 53] How are we expected to hear God's voice when we actually never stop to listen for that still, small voice? Can we stop and wait? But waiting is hard.

There's another quote about waiting that I find is interesting. Because we don't like to wait. We like to make things happen very quickly. And we like to actually go and grab God's voice ourselves. But yeah, Andrew Murray says this. Waiting on God is not laziness.

It's the suspension of self-reliance. It is the decision to do nothing until God has spoken. So that when we move, we move in his strength alone. So often, even though the call is go, until you hear that go, you wait.

And for some people here, God's telling you to wait. Because it's actually very easy and very dramatic to have everyone conclude from today's sermon that we must all go somewhere. So just go.

It doesn't matter where you go. Just go. But that's not what the whole point is. The whole point is we only go when we hear God's voice. And until then, we wait. Noah didn't leave the ark for a year.

[27 : 54] Even though he saw that he could go soon. But he still waited on God's voice. So wait. Second, discern with others. The amount of times I ask, Christina, what are you hearing?

What do you think? When we first got the call to go into ministry, and we just had Ruben at that point, it didn't make sense for us to quit both our jobs to go into ministry. We started talking to the people who knew us. Do you think we're good for this? Do you think this is what God's calling us? And actually, so often, I actually see people who end up in ministry who actually didn't really hear God's voice. And actually, if you ask the people around them, they'd be like, yeah, that person really didn't. That person thought they heard God's voice, but they didn't really.

It's very easy to actually mishear God's call to go into something like ministry. It's very easy to mishear God's call to go into anything, actually. So you need wise counsel. And scripture says, seek wise counsel.

Look at the people who will look at you in the eye and say, I disagree with you. Look at the people who know you well enough, who will sit and go, well, you know what? I think that might be God, but let's just wait for a little bit longer.

[28:53] Why don't I ask him with you as well? Let's do this together. Let's pray and fast together over this time, and let's find out together. So that's something else you can do. Another thing, this all sounds so cliché, but here it is. He speaks often through this book.

Often. Sometimes he speaks supernaturally, but often he uses this book. Again, we want to hear God's voice, but we don't really spend time with reading the messages that he wrote us.

So I think that's important as well. And then finally, when you wait, you pray. The prayer isn't, hey, God, can you tell me where to go? The prayer actually is just mold my heart.

How often have we found, those of us who have gone into ministry or have done anything, made any decision in following God. Once you wait and you walk and you talk and you pray, God starts to just mold your heart. So your heart changes within a matter of weeks, and you don't even realize how.

It just happens because you're simply praying that prayer every day. Give me today my daily bread. Your kingdom come, your will be done. And just watch God change your heart, and then it will make it more clear. Interestingly, he goes.

[29:58] God calls, Abram goes. And just when you think he goes into paradise, why? Because it's Canaan, and because God told him to go. So it must be good. Now it's painful because he left his dad and his family, but it must be amazing when he gets there.

It must be paradise. And yet what you see here in verse 6, Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem, to the oak of Morah. At that time, the Canaanites were in the land. So God, you took me to a place that you said you'd give to me, but there's people there.

What are we going to do with the people? So often when we hear God's voice, we expect it to be, to just green pastures.

We have zero resistance. Oh, God called me into this career. God called me into this ministry. God called me to this city. And you think, God, this is so hard. This is probably not it. Well, here's the thing.

God calls Abram to Canaan, and yet the Canaanites are still there. There is resistance immediately. There are people that he has to look at and go, well, how am I going to get rid of those? Just me, my wife, and my nephew, and our goats, and our sheep.

[31:02] How are we going to take over this whole land? It's impossible. So what does he do? As soon as he gets there, verse 6, at that time, the Canaanites were in the land. Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, to your offspring, I will give this land.

So God shows him this land, but there's people there. It's going to be very hard to get rid of those people. But then God says, I will give you this land. So what's his next step? His next step is like, okay, give me a piece of paper.

Let's round up the troops. Let's come up with a strategy. You come from the east. You come from the west. And let's just invade, and let's just destroy this people. No. What does he do? He builds an altar, and he worships.

When God calls you to a place that you aren't even sure how you're going to get to, the default response, the go-to move for you and I is to worship. Just say, you know what?

I actually don't know where you're going to lead me. I actually don't know how I'm going to get there, but I will worship. That's the one thing I can control. And so Abram worships here. So then he builds an altar.

[31:58] Then he moves to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent. And there he builds another altar. So everywhere he goes, he builds an altar, just like Noah did when he came out of the boat. He says, the only reason we're even alive is because of him.

The only reason we're even considering these two jobs is because of him. The only reason we're trying for a child is because of him. The only reason we have the problems that we have is because of him.

So my default response, my go-to move is to worship. That's what Abram does here. And so he worships, and then he stays in Canaan. Just when we think that is great and that is all there is, we sadly then see the downfall.

So very quickly, even though he makes that obedient step of faith, very quickly by verse 10, we see something happens. He goes to this land that God told him to go to. And what happens in verse 10?

Now there was a famine. Again, if I'm him, I'm shocked. God, you brought me here. And now my family is going to die with no food? So what does Abram do?

[33:04] I can judge and I can point my finger right now, but I can also just look and think, I think that's actually what I would do. If I took my family to a place that I think God was taking us, and there is a famine and my children are dying, or at least at risk of dying, I'm going to take matters into my own hand and I'm going to move somewhere else.

And so this is what Abram does. He then goes down to Egypt. So he leaves the plan of God. He walks and goes somewhere else. Wait, that's outrageous.

God's plan was for him to walk to a land that was filled with enemies and also that there would be a famine. This completely bashes out any prosperity gospel, any God is only for our good concept here.

God leads him to a land where there are enemies and there is famine. And so he goes and he goes away to this land. It's interesting. It reminds me of Psalm 23. It's just the most beautiful Psalm.

The Lord is my shepherd. He leads me in green pastures and still waters. He leads me on the right path. It all sounds so beautiful. Verse 1 to 3. And then it's like verse 3 is he leads me on the path of righteousness for his name's sake.

[34:05] And it just sounds, God is the shepherd. I won't need anything. And I'm going to go to this place that's beautiful. And I'm just going to stay there. And boom, verse 4 slaps you around the face. And even though I walked through the valley of the shadow of death.

Wait, God, we just said, we just sang that God is taking us to these green pastures and still waters. But the truth is sometimes he leads us to the valley of the shadow of death. Sometimes he leads us to those tough places.

Why? Because everything is an exercise, an opportunity to grow our faith and trust in him. That's it. You look at any challenge that we have. The challenge, why God has left you that challenge is because he wants you to trust him.

And how do we grow in trust is when we face resistance. And that's how we flex that muscle of faith. And so he goes to this land where the Canaanites are there, where there is a famine. But yet he, right here, the father of the faith, loses faith.

And he heads down to Egypt. And then a really unique situation happens. So it happens that he's married to a very beautiful lady. Who at this point is actually 65. But I used AI to help me calculate what a guesstimate for a modern day would be.

[35:08] It would probably, maybe a lady in the early 30s. So he goes and he gets worried because he knows that Sarai is so beautiful that when he goes to Egypt to get food, that actually they'll look at her and they'll want to take her.

Maybe even more significantly, they'll not only take her, they'll also kill him. So he's scared. So he leaves the land God tells him to go to, to try and find somewhere else, which kind of is understandable because you and I would all do that.

So let's not point fingers. But then he goes and then he's scared for his own life because of his beautiful wife. So then he tells Sarai, hey, can you tell them that you're actually my sister? Which actually is a half-truth.

He actually, she actually was his half-sister. How many of us deal with half-truths? How many of us sometimes we look at something, it's not going well, and we start to come up with excuses. We start coming up with reasons why we're not going to do it the way God wants us to do it.

So we start coming up with half-truths and we then justify it in our own minds that that's what we're doing. Again, you need wise counsel to look at you and say, you are dealing with half-truths. You need to stick to the absolute truth and nothing but the truth.

[36:11] So anyway, he tells her this. And this is where the founding father of the faith, the first patriarch, you're like, what on earth are you doing? Because he doesn't just, it's not just the white lie. It's not just him saying, hey, can you tell them that you're my sister and then we'll all be okay.

The moment they find out that actually she's just his sister, they take her. Pharaoh takes her into his harem. So he actually sacrifices his own wife into Pharaoh's harem.

And actually, she stays there. We don't know how long, but it's likely months to a few years.

Imagine. If any of us decided we're so scared we're going to give up.

How would you look at me? If Christina and I went to somewhere, I said, Christina, tell people that you're my sister. So they will go well with me. And then Christina actually gets sacrificed. How

would you look at me?

People, that's the founding father of the faith. And so we've got a problem. This guy is dealing with half-truths. He doesn't trust God to stay in Canaan.

[37:11] So he leaves. And then Sarai actually has to go to be with Pharaoh for that time. But of course, the Lord sees. The Lord sees. And what happens here? Plagues start to happen.

Isn't this an interesting thing? Isn't this an interesting precursor to when the Israelites actually end up as slaves in Egypt and the plagues that come? So the plagues come.

Pharaoh, we don't know how, realizes that actually Sarai is actually Abram's wife. Maybe it's through a dream. Maybe God actually speaks to Pharaoh himself and tells him, actually, you should not be with this woman.

This woman belongs to Abram. Anyway, for whatever reason it is, he finds out. And then he goes straight to Abram and said, why didn't you tell me? Why did you lie and say that she was your sister? Now I'm in trouble. Now my people are in trouble.

Interestingly, again, this first patriarch is just the same as Adam. He stays completely silent. He doesn't say anything. He's made of the weak stuff.

[38:09] And so actually, interestingly, he was afraid that Pharaoh was going to kill him. But instead, Pharaoh ends up being a much better man than him. And I says, you know what? Go. Take your wife and take all the things that you've had in this land of Egypt and go.

So interestingly, Abram does this just douche move. But he actually leaves Egypt a much more wealthy man than when he first went in. He sacrifices his wife, which now tells us who he is. And he comes about with all the, you know, you see verse 16. And for her sake, he dwelt well with Abram. And he had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male servants, female servants, female donkeys and camels. Can you imagine Sarai trapped in Pharaoh's harem, seeing husband outside with all this land now, all these animals and all these servants?

It gets exposed. She gets taken, given back to Abram. And then they leave together with all that stuff. That would have been the most awkward car ride home ever. And so we sit here and go, okay, God, if you look at scripture, if you look at the New Testament, I'm nearly finishing here, so stay with me.

If you look at scripture, what you'll see here is Abram, or soon we'll know him as Abraham. He becomes this guy. Actually, if you look at Hebrews 11, the hall of fame, of faith, he gets the most, he gets the most verses.

[39:30] He has the most talked about him. And I'm going to finish this. I'm going to go there now. And feel free to go there with me. Hebrews chapter 11. You see, actually, a lot that is said about Abraham. From basically verse 9 to 12, it's talking about him.

But how can, and actually, and the book of James talks about it. The book of Galatians talks about it. The book of Romans talks about it. Which is this. And it always says that Abraham was counted as righteous. And I'm like, I struggle to believe someone who's willing to give up his wife for his own personal gain.

And says nothing when confronted. How can that person be counted as righteous? It makes no sense. I don't really have that much respect for Abraham. But then why?

Why is he in scripture? That he is counted as righteous. What did he do? Well, the truth is he didn't do anything. The few words before that, when he's counted as righteous, it says when he believed. So what did he believe in? Well, it wasn't what he believed in. It was who he believed in. What we see in Abraham is the only way to be counted as righteous is in who you believe in.

[40:40] You see through his actions that he was not a perfect man by any, by any stretch of the imagination. And yet somehow he's still counted as righteous. Because this, by Hebrews 11 verse 8.

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. He went out not knowing where he was going. Great. What a huge step of faith that maybe we should all ask God where he wants us to go.

By faith he went to live in the land of promise as in a foreign land. Living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. It's interesting. I think I've got a clue here as to why Abraham ends up being such a famous, significant man in the history of mankind.

It's because he had faith in God. God called him to go to Canaan. And he goes there. But actually, the reason why we can have hope that if Abraham can be counted as righteous, so can we, is that

we have to look to who he was looking towards.

Who he had faith in. It's interesting. It says here, he went out not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise. He went to live in the land of promise, but then he pitched a tent.

[41:45] If you go to live in the land of promise, it wouldn't just be a tent. If I did it, I would try and set up my whole life. I would start building things so that this is the place that my family and I will stay forever.

Yeah, what does he do? He only keeps living in tents. Why? And we see later in Hebrews, it says this. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

You see, when you look at the Hall of Fame in Hebrews 11, these people were promised something by God, but ultimately their eyes were not focused on the things that they were going to get. Their eyes were focused on something much bigger.

So even though he was actually sat in the land of Canaan, he still decided, you know what, I'm going to live here as a soldier and I want to live here in a tent. And I'm not going to settle my family here. Why? Because my eyes are actually on something further.

On verse 10, he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. He was looking further. The reason why we can believe and be counted as righteous is if we believe in the designer and the builder.

[42:51] God himself. Interestingly, he sacrifices his wife, who ends up carrying the seed of the one who actually does rescue mankind. Trapped in Pharaoh's harem, eventually released.

And if you carry on going down the line of Abraham and Sarah, you end up with a man named Jesus. Who actually, he himself left his father's house.

To usher in a new kingdom. A new city. A new garden city where man would once again be able to walk with God. Our goal, our job, is to keep our eyes focused on him.

To cling on to him, Hebrews 12 carries on. Therefore, since we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely. Look to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith.

The only way that Abraham gets counted as righteous is because he's believing in God. The only way we are counted as righteous is if we look and believe in God. And remember what Jesus did for us.

[43:57] Ultimately, he left his father's house so that we could go in to the father's house. A.W. Tozer says this, The true disciple is a resident alien in the world. If you find your soul completely comfortable in the current cultural landscape, you have likely stopped following the pioneer who walked out of it.

Let me read that one more time. The true disciple is a resident alien in the world. If you find your soul completely comfortable in the current cultural landscape, you have likely stopped following the pioneer who walked out of it.

Caleb and I had breakfast a few days ago and we were talking about what is home. Maybe you would not call Hong Kong home. Maybe you would call somewhere else home. Maybe there's a yearning to go home.

Maybe there's a moment. and yet as a believer there is only really one home the city whose foundations are built by God and actually until we get there nowhere not even sitting in a cheeky Nandos is will make me feel completely at home and at peace but if I look if I look further I'll see someone who left his father's house Abraham left his father's house not knowing where he was going to go but Jesus left his father's house and knew exactly where he was going to go and he was going to end up on the cross for me for you and in that one act of love we all now have a space in his father's house isn't that incredible so we go final quote we are not called to settle down in the world and make ourselves comfortable we are called to be a mobile radical tent dwelling people loose to the things of this earth anchored only to the city whose architect and builder is God Elizabeth Elliot here's the thing I shared about how Christina and I were called to go one day you should ask Aaron and Rebecca about their call to go but so often in church we think okay some people are called to go specific people to be pastors to be missionaries Pastor Gabe has a very specific call to go you forget that actually Pastor Gabe is a normal human being who worked as a trader in Jane Street and then felt God call him to go can you imagine if each of us went home today and said God what are you calling me to do to go or to stay what is it imagine if we actually

listened imagine if we actually heard imagine if we actually did it I truly believe he is speaking let's just spend just a final moment now as I wrap up in a prayer our response today maybe is just to sit and to wait on that still small voice

[47 : 11] Thank you.

Lord Jesus, you call us out of our comfort zones, our systems, our safety net, our identity, our culture, our people, our cuisines, our accomplishments, our duties, and you call us out to a place that is unknown.

To a place that you will show us. Our prayer today is, would you first let us hear your voice? And two, then give us the strength to actually follow.

We're not happy with just staying with the status quo. We're not happy in staying in our comfort zones. We want you.

We don't want to make excuses. We don't want to take matters into our own hands. We don't want to deal with half-truths. We want you. The way, the truth, and the life.

[48 : 56] In your name we pray.

Amen.