

“Recalculating”
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(Recalculating commercial] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jnACnahoxiM>)

Life is filled with recalculating moments. That’s what makes this a good commercial. It connects with that reality in a beautiful way. Now, like most commercials, there’s an inherent lie in it. While life is filled with recalculating, a new car can’t help us through those moments. It cannot get us “on the road to love, hope, and happiness,” as the commercial and so many others falsely promise. Nor can it provide freedom, as the song proclaims. Only Jesus saves; new cars just give most folks a \$500 car payment for the next 60-72 months. Where’s the freedom in that? But I still like the commercial, because recalculating is indeed part of life.

Sometimes we make the decision to recalculate, as the commercial illumines. We set our own new course, be it a new career path, or a relationship decision, or a relocation, or choosing to start a family. Recalculating. Sometimes other people’s choices change our life’s course. Decisions made by a boss or by a spouse or parent, or by a political leader for us to recalculate.

Sometimes circumstances beyond anyone’s control change our life’s course. Recalculating often comes to our lives through no decision of our own. In the commercial, a bear pops up in the rear view window. Bears come in many forms. How about a global pandemic? Now THAT’s a serious “recalculating!” Last week, North Carolina faced a hurricane on Monday and an earthquake on Sunday. How’s that for some recalculating?

Sometimes life altering events happen on smaller scales that have much greater personal impact. Something shows up on a routine scan. Recalculating. A nagging cough just won’t go away. Recalculating. Our child’s not tracking developmentally with other kids. Recalculating.

Then there are those moments that arise not from anything in this world, but from the world beyond this world, from the infinite entering into our finite existence. These moments of recalculating are initiated by God. The Bible is filled with them. They can cause things to unravel a bit. The call of Abram and Sarai represents one such moment. This Divine call to recalculate is beyond reason. It makes no sense. You’ll never see them in a car commercial. Can you imagine a couple in their retirement years holding up a positive pregnancy test? And yet again and again in scripture, God calls the faithful to change course, to go to places God alone can show us, and in the going, in the growing, in the following, we are blessed. Recalculating is central to the life of faith.

It was in Haran that God said to Abram and Sarai, “Go to the land I will show you.” Recalculating. Haran is in the northwest of ancient Mesopotamia, today’s Turkey. The word,

“Haran” means “crossroads.”¹ At the crossroads, God’s call to go came, setting in motion a recalculating moment that would change the world, blessing Abram and Sarai that their descendants might bless every family on the planet! Recalculating.

That detour to the blessing God promised took quite a long time. It would be twenty-five more years before Abraham and Sarah welcomed Isaac into the world. Over the course of that quarter of a century, there would be many more moments of “recalculating.” Some brought by God, others by choices they made, others by circumstances beyond their control. They would go to Shechem, then to Bethel, recalculating. Their names would be changed to reflect Yahweh’s claim on their lives. Recalculating. They would flee a famine, through the Negeb and down to Egypt. Recalculating. After Abraham deceived Pharaoh by telling him Sarah was his sister to save his own skin, they got deported from Egypt and journeyed back to Canaan. Recalculating.

Eleven years into their journey, they decided to take matters into their own hands. Sarah told Abraham to take her servant, Hagar, for a wife. Recalculating. Hagar bore him a son, Ishmael. This caused serious problems for Hagar, as Sarah projected her anger and frustration onto Hagar and her son, and they were cast into the wilderness to make their own way. Recalculating.

Finally, twenty-five years after the call to recalculate first came, twenty-five years after the promise was made, when Abraham is 100, and Sarah is 90, when surely their hopes for fulfillment of the promise had withered away along with their bodies, Sarah discovers she’s pregnant. Recalculating. And that journey toward God’s promised tomorrow continued to unfold.

Indeed, life is filled with recalculating moments. That’s true for all of us. It is part of the journey. Faith defines our response. Can we trust in those moments of recalculating—whether they are a product of our own choices, or circumstances beyond our control, or by God’s call in our lives, can we trust that God is with us? Can we trust that no matter how that recalculating might redirect us, no matter where that recalculating may lead us, that God is with us and that God will not forsake us? Can we believe that no matter the course, on the other side of all life’s recalculating, God will bring blessing? Though the route may change, the ultimate destination remains the same, because God is faithful.

We hear that in our New Testament reading. Hebrews 11 is that great litany of faith, naming all the saints who lived toward the assurance of things hoped for, driven by the conviction of things not yet seen. We hear of Abel, and Enoch, and Noah who lived by faith. Then we come to Abraham and Sarah. By faith, they set out for an unknown place, trusting God’s call. By faith, they stayed, waiting for years for the promises of God to come to fruition. By faith, they lived through so many moments of recalculating when the path changed and they had to wonder

¹ *The Torah: A Modern Commentary*, ed. By W. Gunther Plaut, (Union of American Hebrew Congregations: New York, 1981,) p. 90.

what was happening. Then finally by faith, they received power of procreation, even though Abraham was as good as dead—Sarah was barren—because they considered the One who had promised to be faithful. They trusted God was with them through all the recalculating their journey entailed. In the end, God kept God’s promise. Though their journey was filled with many moments of recalculating, the destination remained the same. Blessed, to be a blessing.

If we were to keep reading Hebrews 11, we would see that faith further defines the destination. Continuing in v. 14 we learn, “They confessed they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. ...they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one.” Ultimately, the life of faith will always require a recalculating, because the destination we seek is found in a different world, a different reality, God’s beloved community, and so in this world we are continually recalculating, but the destination remains the same.

This pandemic has brought about more recalculating than we could have ever imagined. Over 767,000 people have died from COVID in the last six months, 168,903 of them here in the United States as of yesterday. Over 22 million people infected, over 5.3 million in our nation. Over 10 million Americans are unemployed. How many businesses have gone under? School for most children has gone virtual. Parents are scrambling to meet the demands of work and family in ways we never imagined would be needed. We are in the midst of a massive and incredibly painful recalculating.

As people of faith, in the midst of this recalculating, we trust God is with us and God will not forsake us. And though this moment is changing many paths in our lives, the destination remains the same. Our destination continues to be that beloved community that is the kingdom of God, that place of justice and kindness, righteousness and mercy, love and life—“our homeland, a better country, that is, a heavenly one.”

For the Church, I wonder if this recalculating is moving us closer to our destination than the roads we were on before the pandemic. The road may be rougher, but perhaps it is more direct. As we have lost the trappings of the institutional church, the new paths we are taking remind us that the destination is a deeper relationship with Christ, a deeper dive into God’s word, the sacred coming into people’s homes as living rooms become sanctuaries and smart phones become prayer guides. Our generosity is increasing in these days. Our COVID 19 fund has received over \$300,000 to bless our neighbors in need—that’s over 50% of our annual Outreach budget in four months. Our blessings are meant to bless every family of the earth. Is it possible that this present recalculating just might be bringing us closer to the destination God wills for us?

Life is indeed filled with recalculating, moments when life takes an unexpected turn and we find ourselves in places we never imagined we would be. Whatever path we find ourselves on, remember, Beloved, God is with us. God will not forsake us. Though the present moment may change our path, the destination remains the same: love, hope, joy, true freedom that is ours in Christ, our true homeland, a better country, that is, a heavenly one. And so on the road,

through every recalculating of life, we pray, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth, as it is, even now, in heaven,” our ultimate destination, home sweet home. Amen.