

# The Journey of Faith

Title: Part 3 – Wading into the Mess

Date: April 21, 2024

Transition: Band continues softly.

If you guys would remain standing for a moment as we read our theme text for today. How many of you have ever made a mess? Sometimes those messes are small like kicking over your Stanley full of coffee... but other times our messes are big like ruining a relationship with someone we love and care about because of our actions.

Last week, we explored the concept of sin. Sin is both the most tangibly agreed upon concept of faith—even if you don't believe in God—and at the same time the most controversial. That's what we wrestled with, are we just a mistaker or a sinner?

Today we are going to see how God waded into the mess. David writes in Psalm 32:10:

**The wicked will suffer, but those who TRUST in the Lord are protected by his constant love.**

David tells us from his experience with God and his mess, which was a big one, that the key to experiencing God's surrounding love and protection lies in trusting Him. One of my favorite authors says it like this:

“Trusting in God invites us into a divine dance, where we find confidence in His unwavering character. It's the knowing that He is not just good, but extravagantly loving, fiercely just, and relentlessly faithful. In the rhythms of trust, we embrace the truth that His goodness follows us all the days of our lives.” – John Eldredge

I don't know how you think God views your mess today but let's pray and open our hearts to what He wants to show us.

## [PRAYER TIME]

Hey before you grab a seat why don't you find a few people around you and say “Hi.” Welcome to everyone joining us on our app or social channels. Let us know how we can pray for you or serve you and if this message blesses you, consider sharing it with a friend.

Well today we are in the third part of a collection of messages called “The Journey of Faith” and the premise behind it is simply this:

## **Our faith journey began somewhere.**

Your faith, whatever it is or whatever that looks like for you today, began somewhere! Every journey begins somewhere. Every love story begins somewhere. The journey of your career began somewhere. The journey of you moving to Florida began somewhere (unless you are one of the 25 people actually born here like me). Every journey begins somewhere BUT we don't typically think about faith beginning somewhere.

For some of us, not all of us, but for some, we grew up in a home where somebody handed down some faith to us. They prayed for us, or we saw people praying before a meal, we attended a service, or a church camp, or something where they said, “Here, this is what you should believe.” And there is nothing wrong with that. That's a good thing, a Godly thing.

But for many people we get out on our own and into “real life” and we began to notice a gap. There is a discrepancy between what we were taught as a child and what we experienced as an adult, or what we learned about in college. We had questions and our Sunday school faith just didn't match our adult experience. So, it's not that we chose to abandon our faith. It just sort of got lost in the rear-view mirror of life.

So, here's what we've done in this collection of messages. We asked this question:

## **What if we didn't know anything, where would we begin?**

What if we'd never heard any of those stories, what if we'd never read the Bible, where would we begin? Where would we begin our ADULT faith journey? What would it look like? What questions would we ask?

AND that's exactly what we have been doing. Each week we are stripping it all down and rebuilding piece by piece, which means if you missed part 1 or 2, you really gotta go back and watch them on our app or website because all of this is going to come together at the end.

Today, as we keep moving forward on this journey, here's the next exit I want us to take:

## **The story of faith also began somewhere.**

We don't think much about our faith journey beginning at some point, but very few of us stop and think about the story of faith having a beginning point as well. I mean you're busy raising kids, working a job, going to school, and working a job, trying to get married, dealing with aging parents... You have plenty of things to consume your time, right? But stop and think with me, your faith story has a beginning point, but so did the story of that faith. Every faith tradition, or spin-off of that faith tradition, has some sort of origin story.

And, for most of us, it's OK to admit this, most of us are not very interested in that story. Unless you are a big history buff, the history isn't all that important to you. When it comes to faith, here's our question, not how did it begin, who is the founder, no what we want to know is: I have been praying about this for two weeks now, where's God? I have a test tomorrow and I need a miracle, what prayer am I supposed to pray to get this to work? Is there a verse about getting a girl to like me or getting a place to employ me or getting my kids to listen to me? How much do I have to give in the offering to get God's blessing on my life? What we are interested in, is does our faith work. We are interested in the experience of faith.

Again, it's OK to admit this, most of us just aren't that interested in the history. BUT today I want to take us back in time to faith's beginning point because there is something there I believe that will help us as we try to figure out how do you hit the restart button on faith today. I think this is actually one of the reasons we drifted away, no one ever showed us how to factor this into our faith experience.

So, help me out, everyone raise your right hand and repeat after me: I promise... that I will try... with all my might... to not fall asleep... or check Facebook... Instagram... or Tik Tok... ☺

Here we go, maybe you have heard this before, but:

## **The three largest faith traditions all claim the same beginning.**

Did you know that? The three largest faiths: Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, all claim the very same beginning. All three believe that there is a single God that created the heavens and the earth, He goes by different names, and they all see Him differently, but pretty much all three claim the same God.

AND all of three faith traditions believe that the first man on earth was named Adam, I don't know if you knew that. Muhammad believed that Adam was the first Muslim and that he was also the first prophet. In Judaism, we see Adam and Eve and the whole Garden of Eden account. Christians also take the story of Adam seriously. But the reason Christians take it seriously is not because it's in the Book of Genesis, necessarily. The reason Christians have taught that story is because Jesus actually mentions Adam as if he was a real person.

SO, all three faith traditions believe there was a Creator, there was then the first person that God created, AND they all believe that somehow humanity messed up this incredible creation that God gave us. Essentially God created a perfect world, and then human beings messed the whole thing up.

Now, you may not buy into the whole Adam and Eve story, or you may believe that it's an allegory that explains human behavior, but here's what we all agree on, especially if you were here last week. What we all agree on is that we have messed the world up! In fact, last week we learned that we are not just "mistakers," it's worse than that. We might actually be what? Right, sinners! We go, no no no, I make mistakes, we all make mistakes, but I'm no sinner. But what do you call someone who makes the same mistakes over and over again? What do you call someone who makes mistakes on purpose? A habitual premeditated mistaker? NO, call it what it is, we are all sinners. So, somehow the world has gone wrong. God made it good, and we screwed it all up because we are all sinners.

All three of the world's major faith traditions all come together around that. AND they also come together around God's interaction with a single man. All three believe that God began to correct the problems of this world through a man named Abraham:

## [Artwork]

Abraham is where the three traditions come together, and Abraham is also where the three world traditions separate. At Abraham, Judaism goes one direction. Hundreds of years later Christianity rises out of Judaism and goes in a completely different direction. And at Abraham, Islam reaches back into history 2,600 years later and goes in third direction. But Christianity, Judaism, and Islam all look back to Abraham as the father of their faith. They all believe God began to interact with mankind in a strategic way to fix the problem of sin, starting with Abraham.

Here's why I'm bringing this up. The reason we're gonna talk about this is because there is a conversation recorded in the book of Genesis between God and Abraham that, regardless of what you believe about the Bible and regardless of where you are in your faith, this conversation touches on a tension that you have felt. It touches on something that you have wrestled with, and that maybe you're wrestling with even today based on your childhood faith.

The question that we all ask at some point is, "If there is a God, then how are we doing? Where do I stand with God? Can God hear my prayers? Does God even care? Can I ever know for sure?" And in this little conversation we're gonna look at in just a minute, there's a statement. There's a single statement that's so powerful as you think about restarting your faith as an adult. Basically, I want to show you why Abraham, this ancient guy, is important for your personal faith journey today.

AND to understand the significance of Abraham's story, you first have to understand something of the dilemma that we as humans put God in. It was a little bit like this:

Years ago, when my oldest daughter Sophie was about 3 and half years old, one evening she started complaining that her stomach hurt before she went to bed. I had thrown her dinner out after like 45 minutes of her not eating so I just figured she was just hungry, which was the goal. Don't look at me like that, your parents did it to you and you survived. Anyway, around 10:45 we hear her crying in her room, so we go in

there and she is screaming about her belly. Nothing we did could calm her down so finally I said let's go to the bathroom in case you throw up. And sure enough, she starts coughing and has that look about her, that look that tells you, you better get your kid over the toilet fast. So, I start telling her over and over to get over the toilet, get over the toilet, get over the toilet Sophie but she just stood there flapping her wings. That's what we used to call it when she was little, she would just stand there flapping her arms like this... But no matter how loud I yelled she wouldn't get over the toilet. Then, right as I am about to walk in there she lets it all out all over the floor, the walls, herself! She is basically trapped now on a little clean spot surrounded by a sea of vomit. There was no way for her to come to us and no way for us to get to her. So, I look at her standing there with tears running down her face, I look at the mess she has made, and say, "Well, I told you what to do, you made a mess, good luck getting cleaned up and back into bed." I said, "Come on babe let's go back to bed, she's on her own." And we walked off.

Now, let's stop there and be honest. Some of you, some of you think that's what God is like. Some of you feel like God, every once in a while, stares at you in the middle of a mess of your own making and He goes "Well, there you go. Figure it out. Call me when you get this mess cleaned up."

BUT here's what is so interesting about that, you don't believe for a moment that I left my own daughter standing in her little sea of vomit, do you? Which means you believe that I have more compassion than God. Which is not true! Which means perhaps there's something about God that you don't know. I did what any father would do, I got a rag, wadded into the mess, and started cleaning up.

Now, in a similar way mankind had so polluted the world. We think about injustice in our world today, we cannot even imagine the injustices in the ancient world where there was no law, there was no civil society. It was survival of the fittest and survival of the richest. Where slavery wasn't a second thought. Where kidnapping was common place. Where if you wanted someone you just took them. Where there were no cities, states, nations, or rule of law the way that we think of them now, just a very, very chaotic world where it was unimaginable and would be so offensive to our modern sensibilities. Into that world, God stared and realized that sin had taken hold of humanity. "Do I wade into this mess and try to find a beginning point for cleaning it up? Or do I hang just a big 'Out of Order' sign over the Earth and go do something else, somewhere else?"

All the major faith traditions believe that God decided to wade into the mess of humanity. And that He waded in by choosing a single man, Abraham around 1876 BC.

Abraham was a normal guy though; he wasn't some ultra righteous guy. In fact, he had some real issues. One time Abraham was going through Egypt with his wife Sarah, when she was young and beautiful, and Pharaoh saw her and said, "I want her." That's how it worked. So, they went to Abraham, and they said, "Is this your wife?" Abraham saw it coming and he realized, "Hey, if they think I'm married to her then they are going to kill me to take my wife!" So, Abraham, being the courageous man of God that he was said, "You know, she's not really my wife she's more like a sister. You can have her." And he gave his wife to Pharaoh! Now, you think you have some problems in your relationship, just imagine that. "I'll just get another one." That's Abraham, that's hero of the story. He had all kinds of problems; he had all kinds of issues. But just like a bathroom covered in vomit, God had to start somewhere.

So, God picks imperfect Abraham. And here's what He said to him, this story is found in the book of Genesis (Ch.12, v1). The Lord said to Abraham:

**"Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you."**

In other words, I want you to abandon and leave your old life, I want to isolate you because, Abraham, I'm starting over. I'm doing something new. I'm starting something that's ultimately going to impact the whole world. And I've chosen you as the beginning point.

And then God made Abraham three interesting promises. I'm not asking you to believe that any of this is true yet. Just listen to these three promises that God made Abraham. *{PROMISE + VERSE ON SAME SLIDE}*

## **Promise 1:**

**<sup>2</sup> I will make you into a great nation,**

Now, historically, no one disputes it, this came true. The nation of Israel says, we're that great nation. The Arab countries all say, no, we are the great nation. Christians say people from every nation that put their faith in Jesus, are a part of that great nation. But the one thing nobody argues over is many nations came from this one-man Abraham. This promise by God to Abraham, made almost 4,000 years ago, absolutely came true.

God sees the mess, He picks a man, and He says, "One day, you're gonna be a nation, and through this nation I'm going to do something significant in the world." Listen to what else God promises.

**Promise 2:** He says...

**and I will bless you; I will make your name great,**

Quick survey: How many of you knew about Abraham before today, raise your hands up... Isn't that amazing? Well, what about this guy?

## **[Artwork]**

This is Chedorlaomer (Ked-da-lay-ohmer), anybody here know who Chedorlaomer is? He was actually a famous king. He was the king of Elam. AND everybody in Abraham's day knew who he was. He was one of the most powerful men alive. But you've never heard of him, and you have heard of a nobody named Abraham. Isn't that interesting?

So, God says to a nobody, "I'm gonna make your name great," and he says to King (Ked-da-lay-ohmer), "Sorry."

**Promise 3:** God tells Abraham this:

**and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."**

All the earth's people groups are somehow going to be blessed, or literally, they're going to be better off because of you.

And, because I am a Christian, when I read this, my first thought is God is talking about Jesus. The world is better off because of Jesus. I know we are not there yet, but both Jews and Muslims would all have some take on this. Some way they have been better off because of Abraham. Again, next to Jesus, there's no one that even comes close to touching our world the way that Abraham does.

That's the history part, now for the personal part. This is the amazing part as you consider restarting your faith with adult understanding.

Abraham's getting older and God says, "I'm gonna make you into a nation, the whole world's gonna be blessed through you!" But he's an old man and his wife Sarah is an old woman, like in her 90's old. Abraham has no children, and he realizes that if he dies that his inheritance doesn't go to a relative. It goes to Eleazar, another guy you haven't heard of. Eleazar was his chief servant. And he's going, "OK, God. You've

promised you're gonna make me a nation. And everybody on the Earth is gonna know my name, so far there's about twelve people that know me... You said that everybody's gonna be blessed through me. But God, I don't even have a son. I don't even care about being a nation. I just want a son. I don't want to leave everything to my servant." And so, he's praying one night, like many of us pray, in desperation. And here's what the writer of Genesis says God said to Abraham (Gen 15):

**<sup>4</sup> Then the word of the LORD came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir."** [In other words, "Abraham. Don't worry. I will give you a child of your own." Then God did this] **<sup>5</sup> He took him outside and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them."**

We have so much light pollution here in the Bay Area that this is pretty meaningless for us. You look up at night and go, "There's five. Ah, one of them is a jet. There's four! Oh, that's Venus. We're down to three. I can't see any stars!" But in this huge Middle Eastern sky free from any obstructions or lights, everywhere he can look its white with stars. God says, "See all those stars? Count them if you can!" Then God says to Abraham:

**Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."**

I know you don't have a son. I know you don't have an heir. But Abraham, I want you to trust me with something you're gonna have a hard time trusting me with.

THEN something amazing happens. This is the personal part for you and for me. You still with me? The writer of Genesis makes a statement that's so powerful, and so personal. It has such incredibly profound implications because in this statement God, for the very first time in recorded history, states the nature of the relationship between God and man.

In this next statement, God defines the terms of the relationship between God and man, a question that you've asked in your own way many times; where do I stand with God? What does He really think of me? Can anyone know? You used to think you could know when you were a child, and then some things happened as an adult, and you decided you can't know. And then secretly in your heart you wonder, "Can you know? Can I know where I stand with God?"

This statement is so powerful, this is where Christians and Muslims and Jews all go in three different directions, because it's so unbelievable and it's so unbelievably simple. It seems too good to be true.

If you are going to wrestle with one theological concept, this is it! If you desire a relationship with God, if you are interested in knowing where you stand with God, you have to factor this in! This is before the Ten Commandments, 2,000 years before Jesus, 2,700 years before Islam, the writer of Genesis tells us this:

**<sup>6</sup> Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.**

**{CUE SOUND}**

Abraham believed the Lord, "I have no children and I'm going to have as many descendants as the stars in the sky? OK, I trust you." And in that moment, in that expression of faith, God gave Abraham a right standing with Himself. In this one single, solitary moment of faith, God gave Abraham the gift of a right standing relationship with Himself.

"That little incident in Egypt, with your wife or was it your sister, I'm confused, Hey Abraham, I'm not holding that against you. That whole thing to come, with your wife's servant and having sex with her in order to have a child... Hey Abraham, I accept you because you trusted me right here, right now." This was something new.

Another way of saying it is:

## **Trusting God resulted in a right standing with God.**

This is the first implication in history that a human being can have a right standing with God. And how did it happen? Faith. Trust.

And here's the interesting thing, and I'm not trying to be critical, I'm just trying to take us all on a journey together. Years would go by, and the Jews would come along, and they would miss this. They would say, "No, no, no. The way you have a right standing with God, is by being Jewish, we are God's chosen people, we are God's called people." In fact, by the time Jesus showed up, a couple thousand years later, the Jews said to Jesus, "Hey, we don't need you, we are Abraham's sons, we are Abraham's daughters it's enough."

Then 700 years *after* Jesus, Mohammad would come along and say, "No, the way that you have a right standing with God, is that you must believe in the one, true God and you must believe in his prophets, and you must do works and acts of righteousness. And at end of your life, your good works will be measured against your bad, and Allah will determine if you have a righteous standing. If God wills it you will make it in, BUT you won't know till the end." It's what you do that counts.

Even Jesus followers, about 30 minutes after Jesus left the earth, they started arguing about this. And right on through the Reformation, the Church has been split over this issue of how do you have a right standing with God? How do you know when God says, "You're approved"? How do you know when God says, "I love you, you're fine?" How do you know when you've done enough, when you've believed enough? How do you know, and can you know? Is it birth? Is it behavior? Is it belief? Is it a combination of two or three of those?

God revealed to Abraham, the secret. And it's almost impossible to comprehend that the most high God, would make the standard so simple. That the most high God, would put the bottom rung on the ladder, so low. That the most high God, who saw each of us in a mess of our own making, would wade into our mess and say, "Do you trust Me?" It's simple. "Will you trust me? Will you trust that what I say is true and that I'll do what I promised I would do?"

God made it so simple. So, here's the question and we're gonna stop for this leg of the journey:

## **What if the beginning of a relationship with God is trust?**

What if what we saw with Abraham, God deciding as a loving Heavenly Father, to wade into a sea of vomit, and decided I've got to start somewhere. I'm gonna pick one unrighteous man and I'm gonna connect with him in a personal way, and all I require is that he say God, "I trust you." What if that's it? What if the journey of faith begins as a simple act of trust?

Now, here's what I want you to do. For all of you with lots of "Yeah, but what abouts? But what abouts?" I don't want to convince you, honestly, this isn't about convincing you yet. We're just having a conversation where I'm the only one with a microphone. But here is your homework question. Here's what I want everybody to talk about on the ride home, over lunch, during dinner one night this week, here is the question. Ready? *{FIT ON ONE SLIDE}*

## Which of the following best reflects your view? Why?

1. God accepts me based on my birth.

I'm connected somehow, relationally and that's enough.

2. God accepts me based on my behavior.

3. God accepts me based on what I believe. -OR-

4. Some combination of the above.

I want you to have that conversation. And I don't want you to try to convince yourself of something. Just think about this on an emotional level. Is it easy for me to embrace the idea that maybe it simply is trust in God?

Which faith system did you grow up with? Which system feels most comfortable? Which system have you sort of been, intentionally or unintentionally leaning in to? Have that conversation with yourself or with some friends and family.

Next week, we'll come back, and we'll pick up the discussion, right there. Let me pray for you.