

“Trusting Transition” Abraham
Genesis 12: 1-5
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Text: Genesis 12:1-5 (NIV) ¹ The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. ² "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." ⁴ So Abram left, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran. ⁵ He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.

Last week, Pastor Winans shared a great illustration with us as he played with his blocks. The little wooden tower he built was quite steady until he began to slip one block after another out of it. That reminded us that our stability and our security in life can seem very much in place but events have a way of shaking us up and we can really get quite wobbly. Great illustration. And I think it would be all the more true if we tried to carry the blocks across the room. Just as it is true that when life is in transition...moving forward...we can really feel things shifting. We don't wobble much when sitting still but God, as it turns out, is rarely calling us to sit still. Actually, God is constantly calling us to transition...to move forward...this is true for us as individuals and as a church. God is calling us to be more and more Christlike individually and as a group...and to get there we must be on a transition journey.

As we continue our series on transitions, we find in Abraham a man who was truly puzzling. Like most of us, he was a success and a failure all wrapped up in one. Abram was a man who lived out faith and lived out fear. What a life! We find in Abram, a seventy-five-year-old man who heard the word “Go!” twice. First, he heard it from God who said “Go!” Then, a year or so later he heard from a furious Pharaoh down in Egypt who also told him to “Go!” Let's look at his journey in transition very closely. I suggest we can see **FOUR TRUTHS** at work all in Genesis Chapter Twelve:

- FIRST: God is always calling His people to transition**
- Second: God shows us a great deal about our faith in transition**
- THIRD: God will allow us to suffer in transition when we fail**
- FOURTH: God will bless us in transition even when we really stumble**

First, let us pray.

A recent survey asked people what they think is the greatest invention of the last fifty years. I said, “Absolutely beyond all doubt, in my opinion, it is the GPS in the car!” I say that because

I love that thing! A couple of weeks ago, I presided a funeral in Novi but the cemetery was in Borneo or someplace! Actually, it was almost all the way up by the old Pontiac Silverdome. Getting there required thirty-five turns and six roadblocks and detours and without that little lady and the map on the screen I would still be looking for that cemetery. But... there is one wonderful thing about the GPS screen in the car that we do not often have in life. It is this: if you push the little button it will show you the whole route step by step and where the end point is and relieve you of all your anxiety about the journey. It will even tell you when you will arrive approximately! Imagine if life was like that? If you knew when in transition you would arrive and exactly where? Imagine if we could know where we are and how soon we will arrive at our destination...and where the destination is! Think of it! Imagine if Abram had a GPS unit on his camel! But he did not ... and he had no idea where he was going and where the end point would be and how long the trip would take. Let's consider our ancient friend Abram. We see, in his life, four truths.

FIRST: GOD IS ALWAYS CALLING HIS PEOPLE TO TRANSITION! We read:

Genesis 12:1-20 (NIV) ¹ The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you."

Abram is seventy-five years old! He is a father and a grandfather and he has servants and properties and possessions and he is well-established. Do we want at that age to hear such a call to transition? We know that the older we get the less we enjoy surprises! But God... is filled with surprises! God is always working in our lives even when we stay in one place. Right now, Christian you are in transition even if you do not perceive it. Me too. And that can be very unsettling. But we must remember that as God leads us in transition, He has a great blessing in mind. Actually, the very name of Abram points to it. "Abram" means "Exalted Father." Later, in Genesis Chapter Seventeen, we find that God changes the man's name to Abraham. God says to him:

Genesis 17:5 (NIV) ⁵ No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations.

Abram would become not just a father to his physical family but to all believers in the Messiah Jesus! But for that to happen, Abram had to leave it all and go to a new country. God promised him that in the transition, he...Abram... would be blessed. We read:

² "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

So, we can conclude that when God calls us into the transition that He has planned for us, we will be blessed. That's what Abram decided. We read:

4 So Abram left, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran.

So, it was amazing. Seventy five years old. God said “Go!” and he went. He left with no GPS on his camel. He simply trusted God who had said he would lead him to a land that he would show him. He doesn’t know where he is going. Abram was living out a principle that the Prophet Isaiah would articulate many centuries later when he said:

“I will trust and not be afraid!” (Isaiah 12:2)

But fear may come and brush right up against trust. Believe me I know. I can relate to this because as one leaving the formal ministry of nearly forty years and twenty-six years here at Cornerstone, I’m really wondering... **what is next?** Here’s a funny story. The other day I was praying for a word from the Lord so I said “Lord, I feel like I’m going to be nowhere after I step down. Please give me a word somehow. I really need to hear from you Lord!” Now, if ever you pray that way, you need to tune in and listen. Ok. So, I got into the car and pulled out on to the road and I had the Beatles station on. And they came on really loud singing **“He’s a real nowhere man!”** I said “Lord Jesus... that was not helpful! Not funny!” Anyway Faith and Fear... the real issue in transition. So... Abram left... he obeyed. Because: **FIRST: GOD IS ALWAYS CALLING HIS PEOPLE TO TRANSITION!** And... we must consider:

SECOND: GOD SHOWS US A GREAT DEAL ABOUT OUR FAITH WHEN WE ARE IN TRANSITION!

Let’s be honest. Transition can be very scary. We can start to begin to speculate about all the things that might go wrong. Even if we are people of strong faith. As Twain said “My life has been filled with endless catastrophes... most of which never happened!” Like that silly joke an out the guy who had a flat tire on a dark country road. Very late. He opened his trunk and realized that he had a spare tire but he had no jack! So, he began to walk. A mile. Two miles. Finally way off in the distance he saw a house with a light on. All the while wondering “What if the man does not have a jack? What if has one but won’t let me use it? What if he has one but it is broken? What if he slams the door in my face?” Got himself into a complete panic. By the time he got to the door he was all worked up! The home owner opened the door and said politely, “Can I help you?” And the man just looked at him and said “Never mind! Keep your stupid jack!”

That was Abram. And he is in a panic. He was in transition and he had to learn that he was more of a worrier than perhaps he ever realized. In transition, he is living out fear not faith. We read:

10 Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to live there for a while because the famine was severe. 11 As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, "I know what a beautiful woman you are. 12 When the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' Then they will kill me but will let you live. 13 Say

you are my sister, so that I will be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you."

Here is one of the great ironies about knowing God. We still want to solve all of our own problems whenever possible. We look around and we assess the situation and we begin to solve the problem because worry is so debilitating that any solution is better than worrying! And it's easier to work on a solution than to trust God. Actually, Abram was right to think about this because his wife was quite beautiful. And the Egyptians had some very puzzling ethical principles. One was that you must never touch another man's wife unless he was dead. And if you can bring about his death then it would be ok. So, Abram was wise to be thinking about this whole matter. But his solution was totally faithless.

Did God not know that he had journeyed into Egypt? Of course, God knew. Did God not know that Sarai was beautiful and that Pharaoh was a man who indulged in many women? Of course, God knew. But what Abram did was fail to trust God! In his transition, he was walking in fear not faith.

We do that when we forget who God is and that he can be trusted. It takes moments like this to show us that we can trust God for our salvation but not for today! Actually, even as believers we want very much to trust in our own wisdom and scheming. Remember that story about the trucker who drove his eighteen-wheeler too fast and he flew right off the road down into a canyon. There he was... hanging in a tree looking down a thousand feet and he shouted out "Is anyone there?" And he hears the voice of God say "I'm here. I'm God. You can trust me!" And the man shouted "Ok. But... is there anyone else there?" We really don't want to trust the God we cannot see. That's why idols were made. Fear quickly overwhelms faith.

What Abram should have done was pray and say something like "Oh God. You know the possible problem here. And since you control everyone's heart, I pray you not will let this Pharaoh go near my wife or harm either of us. I can't solve this riddle but you can!" We learn a lot about ourselves and our faith in God when we are in transition and our set of building blocks begins to shake and rattle. **SECOND: GOD SHOWS US A GREAT DEAL ABOUT OUR FAITH WHEN WE ARE IN TRANSITION!** And consider this...

THIRD: GOD WILL GIVE US PAIN IN TRANSITION WHEN WE FAIL!

Since Abram failed to trust God in his transition, he has now caused more problems that he has solved. Here is why I say that: he was afraid so he lied about his wife. Fear is no fun but now he is really afraid! It is not clear from the text, but in the ancient world when a King or sovereign called you in because you violated some law in his land, it was usually to have you executed! It's as if Abram was playing loosey-goosey with his tax return and now he has a formal notice from the IRS calling him in! Now, Abram is praying for sure! He's about to fight the Faith/Fear battle big time! We read:

¹⁴ When Abram came to Egypt, the Egyptians saw that she was a very beautiful woman. ¹⁵ And when Pharaoh's officials saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh, and she was taken into his palace. ¹⁶ He treated Abram well for her sake, and Abram acquired sheep and cattle, male and female donkeys, menservants and maidservants, and camels. ¹⁷ But the LORD inflicted serious diseases on Pharaoh and his household because of Abram's wife Sarai.

This does not mean that he violated Sarai. Men like this kept a harem and she no doubt was being prepared. By now she is thinking who knows what? And the shame that is upon Abram for this foolish strategy is overwhelming him! Count it he is trembling because the Pharaoh is almost in a rage. Pharaoh and his whole household are sick because God sent horrible diseases down upon them. So we read:

¹⁸ So Pharaoh summoned Abram. "What have you done to me?" he said. "Why didn't you tell me she was your wife? ¹⁹ Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her to be my wife?"

The man or woman who knows God should live in such a way as to glorify God at all times. The Psalmist wrote these magnificent words:

Psalm 34:1-2 (NIV) I will extol the LORD at all times; his praise will always be on my lips. ² My soul will boast in the LORD; let the afflicted hear and rejoice.

But what can Abram say to Pharaoh at this point? How could he possibly glorify God? Should he say “Well, Pharaoh here is what happened. The God who made the heavens and the earth is the Almighty God and nothing is too difficult for Him. Anyway...I am on a journey of obedience to serve Him and He is very great but I’m scared silly of you. I mean I’m not even sure if He can manage your lust and keep you away from my wife... so I worked up this half lie...and what can I tell you?” Pharaoh simply stares at Abram and says:

“Now then, here is your wife. Take her and go!”

This was tremendously gracious on the part of this Pharaoh. Really! His attendants must have been surprised that Abram left with his head on his shoulders. And Pharaoh doesn’t even know that a year or so later, Abram will try this same lie when he goes into the land of Abimelech and says again that she is his sister. A half truth but half truths are examples of half faith! Abram is walking in Fear Not Faith.

An important sub-point here: when we are in transition we learn a great deal about God. Be sure that this grace shown by Pharaoh was not because Pharaoh was himself a very nice fellow. No! It was God who was gracious to Abram. God allowed Abram to get a good scare that he richly deserved but God did not allow Pharaoh to take off his head. **THIRD: GOD WILL GIVE US PAIN IN TRANSITION WHEN WE FAIL!**

Now, finally, consider how gracious God really was to our friend Abram.

FOURTH: GOD WILL BLESS US IN TRANSITION EVEN WHEN WE REALLY STUMBLE! We read:

20 Then Pharaoh gave orders about Abram to his men, and they sent him on his way, with his wife and everything he had.

Remember that when Abram had arrived in Egypt, he had plenty of cattle and other assets. But the transition journey was still in progress so God had caused Pharaoh to bless Abram with even more! Earlier we find these words:

Genesis 12:16 (NIV) ¹⁶ He treated Abram well for her sake, and Abram acquired sheep and cattle, male and female donkeys, menservants and maidservants, and camels.

Even though Abram stumbled very badly in transition, by not trusting God, God took care of him. But what one piece of advice might we give to Abram if he were to ask us what we thought? What did he fail to do in his transition? It's really very obvious. He allowed himself to slip from Faith to Fear. This lesson appears and re-appears throughout the Scriptures.

Think of it. Peter and his friends are out on the lake in the dark of night and see a man walking and they are terrified... and it is Jesus! And Peter is about to take a very short trip... a quick transition if you will... we read:

Matthew 14:28-31 (NIV) ²⁸ "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."

Never say that to Jesus unless you've got your faith throttle all revved up because he does things like this... he says:

²⁹ "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.

Yes! Peter is walking in Faith Not Fear! But... now he becomes Abram... Peter takes his eyes off of Jesus and begins to look at the wind and the water...

**³⁰ he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"
³¹ Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"**

God is always calling us to transition... to grow in our faith. To live in FAITH not FEAR. Don't keep your eyes upon the Pharaoh who might harm you or listen to the wind that might overcome you... keep your eyes upon Jesus!

Let us pray.

