

Series: **Godly Transitions in Life** – week 1

CDOBC – beginning on 1/8/17

Today's Title: **“Letting go of the Familiar”** (Abraham)

January 8, 2017 ~ Genesis 11:31-12:5

OBJECTIVE: To help the church understand part of change is letting of the familiar things so we can embrace the new things God is doing.

Opening Prayer

It's a common saying that life has two certainties: death and taxes. This is certainly true...but there is a third certainty:

Change. Its undeniable - life is constantly changing.

God brings change and transitions into our life, which are often ***not*** part of our plan.

This is - in part - why so many people resist change. ***It's not part of our plan*** - and it forces us to let go of the familiar things in our life.

Proverbs 3:5

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.”

We all like our routines - the familiar things and practices which fill our days.

But when we resist change, we are often resisting the very thing God wants to use in growing our faith and in accomplishing His work.

The result is often disobedience to the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20). The Great Commission is a mission of change - changing lives and adding new people to the church.

This morning we are starting a new series - “Godly Transitions”. Over these 4 Sundays we will consider how God not only brings many changes in our life, but He uses change in our life to further His work.

Today we officially begin a new series - 4 weeks - “Godly Transitions” - today’s title: “Letting Go of the Familiar”.

The goal of this series is to help you embrace change. To see change as one of the primary ways God will grow your faith, and of the ways God advances His Kingdom here on Earth.

Change is not always bad thing - it’s often a good thing! We often see it as a bad or negative thing, but in reality, we are eager for change in many areas of life.

- We strive for the promotion at work - which means more work - more responsibility
- Marriage - talk about change in how you live each day!
- Moving into your first house - utility costs / yard work / maintenance
- First Child - loss of spontaneity / little sleep / time / don’t know how to parent and take care of an infant

These are things we strive for - ***we pursue*** - yet they increase the difficulty of life. They require an overhaul of the status-quo - the familiar is left behind - they require you to embrace new things and create new habits.

In each of these areas of change we pursue, we leave certain things behind - things which were good, lovely, enjoyable. But the new things - the changes - have great blessing with them - new things which are also good, lovely and enjoyable.

To embrace something new...you must let go of what you're holding onto right now.

Illus. - Swimming - you must let go of the wall!

“Life is a process of becoming, a combination of states we have to go through. Where people fail is that they wish to elect a state and remain in it. This is a kind of death.”

Anais Nin, American Diarist

Think about it...

When you get married... yet try to live as if you're still single, *you'll have problems.*

If you get promoted at work, yet continue to perform the same function you had at your previous position, *you'll have problems.*

When you have a child, and you try to live as if the baby isn't there, *you'll have problems.*

If you're in a new home and there is a leak under the sink - and you call the office of the apartment you used to live in and tell them of the problem...*you'll have bigger problems!*

Change requires a new way of living - a new way of thinking - a new way of approaching each day of life.

Change requires letting go of the familiar - letting go of what you do today - this 'letting go' is one of the biggest obstacles of change.

Failure to let go of the familiar will make the transition from the old to the new impossible.

Turn in your bible to **Genesis 11:31**.

This morning we're going to look at the life of Abraham - a survey of his life - we will highlight the changes and transitions recorded in the biblical record - and we'll see how important it was for Abraham to 'let go of the familiar' in order to obey God, follow God's leading, grow in his faith and be used by God.

24 Changes in Abraham's life (13 yrs pass between chapters 16 & 17)

1. His family left Ur of the Chaldeans and Haran (Read 11:31-12:1)
2. Father (Terah) died in Haran (11:32) Maps - Abraham's travels / modern-day
3. God leads Abram to keep traveling until God tells him to stop - he was 75 yrs. old! (12:1)
4. Famine in the land - Abram goes to Egypt to survive (12:10)
5. Sarai is taken by the Pharaoh into his harem (12:14ff)
6. Abram leaves Egypt and goes back to Canaan (13:1)
7. Lot and Abram separate (13:10ff)
8. War breaks out - Lot is a POW - Abram rescues Lot and many citizens of Sodom (Gen. 14)
9. Abram takes Hagar as his wife and Ishmael is born (16:1-4)

10. Crisis in Abram's family - Sarai is mistreating Hagar - Hagar runs away (16:6-8)
11. Hagar returns - Ishmael is born - Abram has first child at 85 yrs. of age. (16:15)
12. Abram and all males in his household are circumcised - Abram is 99 yrs. old! (17:1)
13. God changes their names - Abram - Abraham (father of many nations) / Sarai - Sarah - (princess) (17:5, 15-16)
14. God visits Abraham and promises a child within 1 year (18:10)
15. Lot's home - Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed (19:1-29)
16. Sarah taken by King Abimelek, later returned without harm (20:2, 14)
17. Isaac is born - Abraham is 100, Sarah 90 (21:5)
18. Conflict returns in Abraham's home - Hagar and Ishmael sent away (21:14)
19. Conflict over water rights with King Abimelek's servants - a treaty is agreed upon (21:31-32)
20. God tests Abraham by commanding him to sacrifice his son Isaac as a burnt offering (22:2)
21. Abraham obeys - but God intercedes at the last moment and provides a ram instead.
22. Sarah dies - she is 127 yrs. old (23:1-2)
23. Isaac finds a wife - Rebekah - they live in Sarah's tent (Gen. 24)

24. Abraham gets remarried and has more children - he was at least 137 yrs. old (25:1)

If nothing else...Abraham's life teaches us, *you can teach an old dog new tricks!*

But...Abraham's life has much more to teach us than that! I want us to consider 3 areas of life Abraham had to let go of the familiar so he would grow in his faith and be used by God. These 3 areas applied to Abraham 4,000 years ago - and they apply to us today.

Letting go of familiar things and places

Ur of the Chaldeans and Haran 11:31-12:1

"Go from your country..." 12:1

Abram needed to let go of the past - of the familiar place where he grew up. It's never easy to leave home - to leave the place where you know everyone and you are known - but sometimes God calls you to a different place - a place where He has plans for you.

The best land 13:6-12

He allowed Lot to choose what land he wanted.

Abraham had every right to choose the land he wanted, and Lot would receive what was left.

But Abraham gave up control - and allowed Lot to choose.

Letting go of familiar people / relationships

Family 12:1

Abraham followed God's leading - "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." (12:1)

In ancient times, family was your security net. If something happened which prevented your ability to work, family would be there to help.

When you left your family, there was no way to communicate with them, so your departure carried with it a degree of finality.

Not only was Abram leaving what was familiar, God would lead him to a very unfamiliar place - a place where he was the alien...the foreigner.

He was leaving a culture he knew and was going to a very unfamiliar culture.

Lot 13:11

Abram had to allow Lot to make his own choices.

You get the sense that Abram was a father-figure to Lot. The simple fact that Lot went with Abram in the beginning tells you something of the closeness of their relationship. When Lot chose to leave Abram for the greener land to the east, this was a heart-wrenching event for Abram. Yet... he didn't keep Lot on a short leash. He knew Lot needed to make his

own choices...and Abram needed to trust God - obey God - and let Lot go.

“Faith grows not in the absence of struggle, but in the midst of it.”

(Men of the Bible, A One-Year Devotional Study of Men in Scripture, by: Ann Spangler and Robert Wolgemuth, p. 46)

When God brings change into your life - the change might require you to say ‘good-bye’ to the people and relationships you’ve enjoyed. This is one of the most heart-wrenching realities of change.

When we left Tempe to move here, we had to say ‘good-bye’ to many people. I was the Youth Pastor, and many of the youth struggled with this change - it was a difficult process to accept. But, God was leading and bringing this change into our life, and we needed to let go of the familiar to embrace what was next.

Hagar and Ishmael - 16:4-6; 21:9-14

Change does not always come in orderly fashion. Change often comes as a result of a failure - or a dysfunction - or due to some problem. In the N.T. we see Paul and John-Mark going separate ways due to a sharp disagreement (Acts 15:39).

Here in **Genesis 16 & 21**, there is deep conflict between Sarah and Hagar. When you go outside the God-

given boundaries of marriage, it always brings trouble, and this is a great example. Eventually, the only option was to send Hagar and his first-born son, Ishmael, away. This was a difficult morning. We know it tore Abraham's heart because in 21:11 how this was bothering him, and God consoled him in vs. 12-13 that He would make a great nation from Ishmael.

The death of Sarah 23:1

One of the most difficult things we ever let go of is a loved one. The change and transition brought about by death is bitter.

When a loved one dies, we don't want to let them go - but we must.

We must move forward.

Grieving is not a quick process, nor is there a universal timetable for grief - but we cannot resist the reality of death - and we must let go of the wonderful past and seek God's work and blessing in the present and future.

Letting go of familiar ideas

Having a child at 100/90 years old. 21:5

What person in their right mind would have a child at the century mark?!

This makes no sense. It didn't make sense to Abraham and Sarah either. When God was affirming His promise of a son in their old age, the Bible says they laughed at the idea! Because of this, God told them to name their son "Isaac" - which means *he laughs*. Every time Abraham or Sarah would call out the name "Isaac" it would be a reminder of the unorthodox way God worked in their life - and a reminder that God doesn't always work in ways we expect.

Sacrificing your son 22:2

In chapter 22, we read some of the confusing things in all of Scripture. When you read vs. 2 it makes you wonder if this is the God we worship.

God said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you."

What a troubling command. Many have struggled with chapter 22 - some have dismissed it - but we must not dismiss it because it's difficult or presents some difficult questions.

We must remember God knew the outcome - He knew Isaac would not be sacrificed. God knew the end of the story.

We read in vs. 3 of Abraham's quick obedience.

Vs. 4 tells us their journey took 3 days. Can you imagine the awkward silence and awkward discussion between Abraham and his son - the son of promise - the son of the covenant? Every step of the journey brought him close to something that was awful - something which he didn't understand. Abraham would have been familiar with the pagan, demonic Canaanite practice of sacrificing the first-born son to please the gods (small 'g'). But this was not the kind of God he served...at least he thought.

God had promised descendants too numerous to count - through Isaac. Now, God commanded him to offer Isaac as a burnt offering - a sacrifice which is not only killed on the altar, but it's completely burnt up on the altar.

We really struggle with this in the church - letting go of familiar ideas. We make the familiar sacred.

We are uncomfortable with new things - new ways of doing something - ending a ministry or program because it is no longer effective - or not as effective as it should be.

We cling to the familiar - even when the familiar is no longer helping the mission.

Illus. - Do you know how difficult it has been to change how we do coffee around here?

In staff meetings - we refer to it as '*coffee-gate*'!

Letting go of the familiar is not easy - but it's necessary.

Apply it...

What familiar things do you have to let go of in your personal life to grow in your faith?

Things / places?

People / Relationships?

Ideas / Routines?

What familiar things do you have to let go of in the church's life so the church can be more effective in our mission?

Things / places?

People / Relationships?

Ideas / Routines?

Close in prayer