

Abraham's Kamikaze Relocation Enjoying the Ride to the Edge

Introduction

Scripture Hebrews 11:8-10

⁸ By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. ⁹ By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; ¹⁰ for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

By faith Abraham went out – not knowing where he was going. I don't know about you but I don't like not knowing where I'm going. There's just something about venturing out into the unknown that develops a tension in me – a reluctance to step out.

Yet my experience with God is that, like Abraham, God frequently calls me places without giving me the complete map. You know the drill:

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet¹

I know we're only supposed to see one step ahead. But frankly – I want to see farther ahead than just one step. I want God to provide a complete Trip-Tik. You know – those maps that AAA provides – it's got all the distances, and detours, the construction sites.

Many of you know that Joseph Lehman and I have a small engineering firm in town. Our business went through a crisis in 2003. We had two stable customers with whom we had developed a long term business arrangement. And although, we knew it was risky to have all of our eggs in two baskets – we felt that God was calling us to continue to invest in these two customers. They accounted for about 97% of our business. In 2003, both of them went through a hostile takeover of sorts which meant the almost immediate demise of our business with them. Both of them – within a few months of each other. It was quite a crisis.

Within the week after the second company announced their plans, I had the opportunity to spend some time seeking God about this. I was open to it being the end of our company. But God had other plans and I had the sense that He was saying that it wasn't the end but a new beginning. He was going to take us to a new place. He didn't tell me where that place was. And then He told me to "Enjoy the ride."

Now honestly - that didn't bring me a lot of comfort. That wasn't what I wanted to hear. If God was encouraging me to "enjoy the ride" I knew what that meant. It meant that in my natural state I wasn't going to enjoy it. He doesn't say things like "fear not" or "don't be anxious" if there aren't things to fear and things to be anxious about. If He's saying "enjoy the

¹ Psalm 119:105

ride” you start thinking – what’s coming down the road that He needs to tell me that. I had a clear sense that the ride was going to require a lot of faith. Kamikaze faith. And, knowing God, it was going to require a lot more faith than I currently had. Remember from our second week – God is on a mission to grow our faith – He’s looking for faith in His people. And I was hoping He was going to look elsewhere.

I want you to take a look at our sermon series picture. If you were sailing that boat and you didn’t see what was ahead – it would be a pretty nice ride. Clear day – nice breeze – beautiful surroundings. But if you could see what was coming – do you think you could enjoy it? Even if you think that there might be imminent danger – it’s hard to enjoy the ride.

How many of you have noticed the dove in this picture? Right over here is a dove and He is providing the wind for the sails. Now, how does the ride feel? Does it feel any better knowing that the boat is being moved by the Holy Spirit? Can you and I enjoy the ride - towards the edge – not knowing where it is going to take us – not knowing how we are going to get over the falls - if we know the Holy Spirit is pushing? Come on be honest. I’ve been walking with God for 36 years – and I have to admit that this is still extremely hard. It is still scary. And then for Him to tell me to enjoy it?



And that’s where a kamikaze heart and kamikaze faith and trust comes in. That's where Abraham comes in. What can we learn from him? Abraham began a life journey with God – not knowing where he was going. Driven by the Holy Spirit. So let’s see what our text has to say about the life of Abraham and see if we can learn what it takes to enjoy the ride that God has called us to.

Let’s Pray.

The Scripture

The opening words of our text say

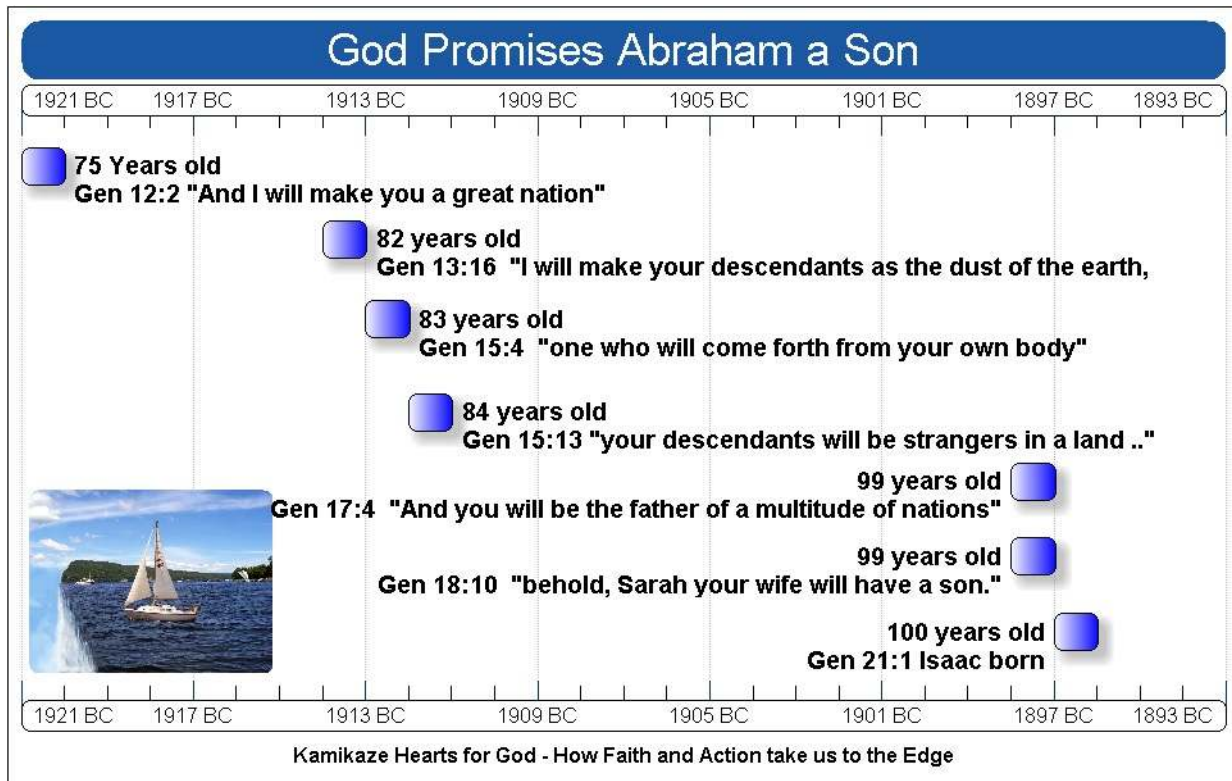
By faith, Abraham, when he was called, obeyed

I have heard a lot of sermons about Abraham's faith in sacrificing his only son Isaac - and I am amazed at such faith. But that wasn’t his first act of faith. That kind of faith is grown over years of hearing God’s word – obeying God’s word – and acting on God’s word. Faith grows in small steps - as we take small steps of obedience - learning to hear God and then taking little steps.

Abraham did that – as we study his life - we see many small steps – many more amazing than the first. Over time Abraham grew his faith muscle. And it all started with hearing God's call to go

Not knowing where we are going.

Our text tells us more about this journey. Once he got there, even then he wasn't settled. He was an alien and a stranger in the land of promise. He was living in tents. I'm not sure it was what he expected. God calls you on a journey – I think we'd expect better accommodations.



Not only that, Abraham heard from God 6 different times in his life about the fact that he was going to have descendents / an heir / a son. Abraham heard from God about having descendents for 25 years without any evidence of the fact that it was going to happen. In his case, each year made it more difficult for it to be fulfilled. He even tried to take matters into his own hands and fulfill the promise himself. But for 25 years God was saying the same thing to him. Imagine that in your life. In one of the last times Gen 17

17:17-18 Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, "Will a child be born to a man one hundred years old? And will Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?" And Abraham said to God, "Oh that Ishmael might live before You!"

Abraham's laugh wasn't the laughter of joy. This was the laughter of a scoffer or of derision. That's part of Abraham's honesty with God. He had had it.

Look God – I'm tired of this – it's not going to happen. I've already taken care of it. You called me to leave my home and didn't tell me where I was going. When I got there it wasn't

what I expected. I'm living as a stranger and an alien in tents in the land that you promised. And you keep telling me that I'm going to have a son through Sarah. Can't you just accept Ishmael?

Do you ever get real honest with God? I was talking with one of you a couple of weeks ago and you described how you reacted when you received some bad news concerning your family. "God I'm not going to go to church anymore – I've had it. You didn't answer my prayer." This is what Abraham was doing – being real honest with God.

You want to know what's amazing about this – Romans 4:19-21 Paul says about Abraham that:

Verse 19 - He didn't becoming weak in faith

Verse 20 – He did not waver in unbelief

Verse 20 – Grew strong in faith he

Verse 21 – Was fully assured that God was able to perform what He had promised

When you are pushing back with God as Abraham was doing here – that's not lack of faith – Faith is believing that God is and that he rewards those who seek Him. Your believing in Him – you're just not liking what He's doing.

Let me share a trait about God that has helped me immensely on the ride with Him. Paul spends a lot of time in his letter to the Romans talking about Abraham. And in Romans 4:17 he gives us an insight into the way God worked with Abraham and the way He works with us. God

calls things that are not as though they were.

Let's repeat that together. Now if we did that, our friends would try to send us to a spa. But God has a history of this:

He tells Noah to build an ark as though there was water

He tells Moses to cross the Red Seas as though there was no water

He tells Moses to deliver His people as though there was no Pharaoh

He tells David that he's the new king as though was no Saul

Why does He do this? There aren't many why questions about God that I dare answer – but this is one of them – because He's looking for faith. And He wants to grow our faith.

So if that's the way God works – and it is – we need to learn how to deal with this. For the long haul. God is on a mission to build our faith – and that affects our journey with Him. We're called to walk this walk for years. Like Abraham. How do we do this? How can we endure this – let alone enjoy it.

Believing the Journey is God-birthed / God-directed / God-destined

Look at the last part of our text – because that gives us the clue. Abraham practiced kamikaze faith for the duration of his life

¹⁰**for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.**

The word used for looking is not the word we use when we are looking for our keys – but rather the word we use when we are looking for our daughter to come home from her first date. Looking – waiting – expecting - believing. So Abraham was looking / waiting expectantly – believing for a city – a community / a fellowship.

Notice that this was not fulfilled for Abraham – he was still waiting for it. In fact our Scripture says a little later that all of the saints – Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham – died in faith

Without receiving the promises (Hebrews 11:13)

Now wait a minute. Abraham

Got to the promised land / given it by God / lived in it / prospered

Given the promised son

Got the son back figuratively from the dead as promised

How did he die without receiving the promises? What are the promises anyway?

That's where we go wrong. The promises are not about lands and sons and in my case business success. It's not about those things that are seen. It's about a community that God has prepared for us – where He is right in the center. The architect – the builder. In this life, Abraham reached the promise land – but not the promised full communion / full community / fellowship with the One who called him.

To enjoy the ride means we are invited to learn to enjoy Him. I keep looking at the results. Is our income exceeding our expenses – are my employees happy with what they are doing – are we salt and light with our customers – If those things are happening – I think I will enjoy the ride. But that's not the promise – the promise is deep / intimate / community with God. That's what Abraham was looking for.

Application - Build in Times for Remembrance and the Giving of Thanks

What's one practical thing we can do to help us do this. Let me share the one thing that has helped me the most to walk with this God who speaks about things that are not – as though they are – who calls me places without telling me where I'm going. And when I get there is not really what I expected. That has helped me learn to enjoy Him. And I draw this from the life of Abraham.

We see a pattern in the life of Abraham as he is traveling on this journey. Six times interspersed with Abraham's story, the Holy Spirit inserts into the text.²

and there he built an altar to the LORD and called upon the name of the LORD.

² Gen 12:7, 12:8 13:4, 13:18, 15 9-17, 21.33

One of the keys to learning to enjoy God and thereby the journey, is to take time out – to regularly give thanks – to offer to God of what we have – to call upon him – and to listen to Him. Make time to take time. For years, I thought that calling on God was a one way street – but calling on God in faith expects Him to answer.

An absolutely essential part of enjoying the ride is that we take the time to step back, reflect on where we have come, to give thanks for the way God has provided for us, and to entrust the future unknowns to Him. But we have to take time out – to insert some space into our journey.

How many can read this sentence?

THISSENTENCEISALMOSTIMPOSSIBLETOUNDERSTANDWITHOUTSPACES ANDPUNCTUATION.

Or how about this one?

You see, in the same way that space and punctuation helps us to understand a sentence, building in space - times of remembrance, reflection and giving thanks - gives us the opportunity to get to know the builder. God doesn't provide us with a Trip-tik in advance of the journey – but as we take the time to reflect on the journey – to call upon the name of the Lord – expecting Him to answer – I have found that He brings perspective that I didn't previously have. And most often He does that by bringing Himself – by revealing Himself. And that was central in Abraham's life and the growth of his faith.



But there are two other things about the altar. Building an altar takes more than just a few minutes out of your day – it takes a significant amount of time to build an altar. And the altar had a permanence to it - a place where Abraham could come back to remember – and the scripture records that he did just that. We need to find ways to take significant chunks of time to add some “spaces and punctuation” to our life and then regularly go back to those places.

And one of the ways that I have found to do that is to begin creating a journal of your journey with God. Your journal can be your place of remembrance. A place to record your thoughts – your prayers – your struggles – on the journey. A place to get to know and enjoy the one who is behind the journey.

Last week I told the story about a young woman in our midst who was writing about her journey in her journal – journaling about Noah. That record will be priceless as she goes on with God. She'll have it to come back to many times as she continues on her journey. This won't be the last time that God is going to call her to do something that will affect her reputation.

I know a lot of you journal – but I suspect a lot more of you do not. Especially you men. We are so action oriented were no earthly good. Think about that. So involved in the doing – we never take time for the being. I have been journaling for almost 20 years and let me just give you a few practical things about it:

1. Get a separate book or place where the journal can be kept. Don't just journal on sheets of paper. The key – is to record it in a special place that you can go back to. Like Abraham did.
2. Be honest with God – one of the things we learn from Abraham – is that he spoke to God about what was on his heart. If Abraham didn't like something God was doing he pushed back.
3. Keep it private – Abraham was alone when he took these times.
4. Go back to it often – this is the place where the real growth comes. Going back to see where God spoke – where you obeyed – how He rewarded you. Or as often happens with me – where you didn't obey – or just simply forgot – “Oh yah – God I forgot about that.” The journal helps keep me on track.

Conclusion

As He did with Abraham, God frequently calls us to re-locate - maybe not physically – but he wants to take us to a different place in our life – and often He does it without telling us where we are going. He doesn't provide a TripTik. He often speaks of things in our lives that are not as though they are. And we have a hard time with it. Yet God has given us a sure promise. He is the Alpha and Omega – the beginning and the end of the journey and everything in-between – and as we learn to enjoy Him, we can learn to enjoy the ride – Let's take some time for confession and reflection as we close.

Confession and Reflection

The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. Confession is a time to be honest with God – about the ways that we aren't glorifying Him – we aren't enjoying Him- where we have fallen short of the glory of God – of God's best for us.

In these moments of silence – let's invite the Holy Spirit to move [silence]

[Prayer to close] To learn from Abraham and to wait open-endedly is a kamikaze attitude toward life. So is to trust that something will happen to us that is far beyond what we can imagine. So, too, is giving up control over our future and letting God define our life, trusting that God molds us according to His love and not according to our fear.³

People of God – God speaks of things that are not as though they were – He speaks that way about your righteousness – On the basis of the Cross of Christ you are not only completely forgiven – but all of the righteousness of God has been attributed to you. Let us go out rejoicing. Amen

³ Henri Nouwen