

Genesis 12:1-4¹

Following God's Call

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.

Introduction

A hospital administrator was startled to see a patient fleeing down the hall out of the operating room. He stopped the fleeing patient and asked, "Why are you running away from the operating room?"

The patient looked at him with frightened eyes and said, "It's because of what the nurse said."

The administrator asked with great curiosity, "Oh, what did she say?"

"She said, 'Be brave! An appendectomy is really quite simple,'" replied the patient.

The administrator looked a bit confused and said, "Well, so what's the problem? It is indeed quite simple. I would think that would comfort you."

The patient exclaimed, "Are you kidding? The nurse wasn't talking to me; she was talking to the doctor!"

We often say that God uses His Word to comfort us. But the reality is that we find God's Word disturbing from time to time. Instead of being comforted by what God is saying, we become uncomfortable as He seems to shake us out of our comfort zone with His Word.

In Genesis 12:1-4, we read of someone who was willing to allow his life be disturbed by God as he chose to get out of his comfort zone and follow God's call. This person was Abraham (God changed his name from Abram to Abraham in Gen 17:5). Of course, he was not perfect. Some things he did were not meant for us to imitate. But in Genesis 12:1-4, we look at one point in his life when he did something worthy for us to imitate.

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Abraham's example points us to at least two things that following God's call will entail.

I. To follow God's call entails obeying even without knowing everything (vv. 1, 4).

The Bible honours Abraham as the father of faith (Rom 4:9-12). Why such a high-sounding title for him? It is not that he obeyed God because he saw everything so clearly. That's sight, not faith. Abraham was called the father of faith simply because he obeyed God even though not all things were clear to him.

Abraham was already very much settled in where he was. He was comfortably living in this place called Haran with his father's household.

The testimony of Stephen in Acts 7:2-4 tells us that before Abraham settled in Haran, he was in Mesopotamia where God first said to him, "Leave your country and your people ... and go to the land I will show you." Abraham then moved to Haran. It was in Haran that he became very successful. He had many servants, possessions, and much land.

Just when he thought he could comfortably spend the rest of his life in Haran, God had to come and upset everything by saying, "I know you are very comfortable here. But no, this is not the place I have in mind for you. You need to uproot again. Now, leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you."

This was also at a time after the death of his father Terah. As the eldest son, Abraham was in place to enjoy much of the inheritance and influence over the family clan.

But God had to spoil it all with this ill-timed call—"Leave your country ... and go to the land I will show you". God promised Abraham a land, BUT He did not show him exactly where. He called Abraham to fully comply without full clarity.

Do we find God like that from time to time? In the midst of our enjoyment, comfort, security and certainty, God has to spoil it all, upset everything and call out, "Now, leave/stop all this and follow me. No questions. Just do as I say."

It is very easy to make a confessional statement like "I will follow God's call". But if this following demands that we forsake our enjoyment, comfort, security, certainty, plans and preferences, then these words are indeed difficult to live out. Caught in such a situation, we would probably say, "God, sorry. I would prefer to follow my way rather than to follow your call."

We may even try to justify that by telling ourselves that we are not disobeying God, but merely postponing our decision to follow Him. We say, “God, I want to follow you. But I’ve lots of important things to do at this time. After all, I am young and I have time on my side. Let me first enjoy my fun, my friends and my fantasy.”

Are the friends we hang out with influencing us the right way? What kind of fun and fantasy are we enjoying? Are these healthy for our body, mind and spirit?

God is calling each of us to be a person of faith. To grow in faith, the time to act is not sometime later just because we think we have all the time in the world. To grow in faith, the time to act decisively may be now because to follow God’s call does not mean we must first know everything. To walk a faith journey with God often means obeying Him one step at a time, beginning now.

Our friends may tell us, “Leave your religion and your God till Sunday. Meanwhile, enjoy your fun, friends and fantasy.” But God may be challenging us today, “I want you to leave these and go with me on a journey of faith.”

God may be calling us to make a faith decision for Him. We may know much or little. We plan as best as we can. We seek the best godly counsel we can find. At the end of the day, if we are still left with some unknowns, we take that step of faith with God anyway. We do what we can, and trust God to do what only He can.

When God called Abraham out of his own country, He was calling him to a new journey that would require him to let go of some earthly comfort and gains.

God called Abraham to fully comply without full clarity. And Abraham responded—he “left as the Lord had told him” (v 4).

Abraham’s example teaches us that to follow God’s call entails obeying Him even without knowing everything. God may be calling some of us to leave/stop some things (even good things) that we are now enjoying, to get out of our comfort zone, and to take a new journey of faith with Him.

Abraham’s example also points out to us a second thing that following God’s call will entail.

II. To follow God’s call entails living with a divine mission (vv. 2-3).

Archaeologists tell us that Haran was a very affluent and advanced city when Abraham was there. In fact, people were flocking into that city rather than leaving it. In other words, Abraham was called to leave a place of great promise to somewhere, out there, and only God knew where.

We are told in v 4 that Abraham “left as the Lord had told him”. This Abraham ... not a very smart person, isn’t he? If I have to uproot everything and go somewhere else, I want to make sure that the next place is as good as, if not better than, my present location.

Nevertheless, Abraham left as the Lord had told him. Not a clever thing to do, right? Wrong! Why? It’s because God did give him a great promise—“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. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Gen 12:2-3).

Of course, this is much more than an earthly blessing of land and descendants. More significantly, it is a promise of spiritual blessing. It points ultimately to Jesus Christ coming from the nation of Israel to bless all peoples on earth as the Messiah, and to give eternal life to those who believe in Him.

So Abraham did not leave Haran without any promise from God. He was given a great spiritual promise. What this implies is that when God called him to leave and go, God did not want him to live merely for earthly promises, but to live with a divine mission.

This divine mission that embodies a great spiritual blessing is also for us today. It is not only for those who are called to be missionaries, pastors or full-time Christian workers, but for all who are children of God. This mission is to point others to Jesus Christ in where we are and make a difference for the Lord.

If God calls one to be a doctor, then be the best Christian doctor one can be, and make a difference for Jesus Christ. If God calls one to be a teacher, then be the best Christian teacher one can be, and make a difference for Jesus Christ. If God calls one to be in full-time Christian vocation, don’t run away like Jonah in the Old Testament but answer it with a sense of divine mission.

This means we are called not merely to live for a career in this life—i.e. doing something chosen by us to achieve our goals in life. Rather, we live with God’s mission for us—i.e. doing something chosen for us by God to achieve His goals for our lives. In other words, we don’t climb the ladder just to be successful and to be at the top—that’s being career-minded. But we climb the ladder so that when we are successful and at the top, we can make a difference and impact for Christ—that’s being mission-minded.

When Abraham left his home country, he was not looking for another man-made city. He left to look for “the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (Hebrews 11:10). He set forth on his faith journey with this heavenly perspective.

The world promises us lots of opportunities to make it good in this life. While taking advantage of these opportunities, we must also be like Abraham—

reminding ourselves that we are not to merely design and build our earthly kingdoms. We need to share Abraham's heavenly perspective as well—i.e. to work for the Kingdom designed and built by God even as we are blessed and making it good in this life.

I certainly don't plan to die young. I pray that I will live as long as the Lord's grace allows me. But really, it is not how long we live that matters, but what we do with the years we have.

I still remember Brother Loh who died many years ago. When he first suffered from cancer, he was still an unbeliever. His wife and two young children were with my church. I remember visiting him with my church members to minister to him in his sickness. I asked him how we could help him. And looking at his wife and two young children, he began to cry uncontrollably. In between sobs, he said in a voice choked with emotions, "There are still so many things I want to do. My wife and my two young children – they still need me. How can I leave them behind?"

I took the opportunity to share with him the love of God in Jesus Christ. I reassured him that God Himself would love and care for his wife and children no matter what happened. I also told him that God too love and care for him at this difficult time, and encouraged him to believe in Jesus Christ. God was indeed working in his heart and he prayed to accept Jesus Christ into his life.

The Lord was good to him. He responded well to treatment and was soon getting back his physical strength. Recognizing the grace of God upon his life, he was hungry to grow in Christ and in the Word. In his simple ways, he was active in serving God and others in church.

About two years later, he had a relapse. Towards the last days of his life, we visited him at home. As we were about to leave, I asked him permission to pray that God's healing grace be upon him. In a calm voice, he said, "No, no need to ask God to heal me." We were rather surprised at his response, and I asked, "Why? Have you lost the will to live on?"

Brother Loh replied, "No, not that. Don't you remember that God has already healed me both physically and spiritually two years ago? By His grace, He has added two years to my life span on earth. By His grace, He has added eternity to my life as I will be with Him in heaven. So, don't pray that God will heal me. He has already done so. But pray that whatever time God has ordained for me—be it one hour, one day, one week, one month or one year—pray that God will empower me to live all for the glory of His name."

I was so overwhelmed by those words that I could not even pray for him. Someone else had to do it. Today, I thank God in memory of that dear brother. Indeed, it is not how long you live that matters, but what you do with the years you have in life.

Our time on earth is only for a while. And to make our time on earth count for eternity, we must not waste our best years just living for fame and fortune; fun and fantasy. Instead, God calls each of us to live as a person of faith with a divine mission—pointing people to Christ and making a difference in His name.

Conclusion

To choose to follow God's call is to obey even without knowing everything. If God is calling you to start a journey of faith with him by burning some bridges; by leaving some fame, fortune, fun and fantasy, would you obey His call?

To choose to follow God's call is to live with a divine mission. God is calling you to a mission of pointing people to Jesus Christ, and making a difference for Him in where He has placed you. Would you obey His call?

Too many people have said these words when time runs out on them—"If only I have done this ... If only I have done that."

I remember someone who died young (only at age 33), yet he finished all that God had for him to do here on earth. He had chosen to follow God's call to the very end with no regrets and no compromise. He completed God's mission for him here on earth, and was able to say with his last breath, "Father, it is finished." That person is none other than our Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

May God also help us follow His call all the days of our lives, so that when time runs out on us, we can confidently say before Him and others—"It is finished" and not "If only I have done this ... If only I have done that."