

**Lesson 1 | Stepping out in Faith**

**Genesis 12:1-3**

When people die, their life is sometimes summarized by an epitaph. An epitaph is a brief sentence or phrase, often on a grave, that describes someone’s life. Some epitaphs are humorous, some are thought-provoking.

***Have you heard any funny or thought-provoking epitaphs?***

***What would you want your epitaph to be?***

If Abraham[[1]](#footnote-1) had a tombstone with an epitaph on it, it would probably read something like “Here lies a faith-filled friend of God.” The NT repeatedly holds up Abraham as an example for his faith, and on three occasions Scripture calls Abraham the friend of God (2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8; James 2:23). When you think about the legacies that people leave behind, there is perhaps none greater than to be remembered as the ultimate example of faith, and to be a friend of the God who created all. But this does not have to be the legacy of Abraham alone. Moses spoke face to face with God as with as a friend (Exodus 33:11), and Jesus would later call His disciples His friends (John 14:14-15). Authors like Paul and James use Abraham as an example of faith, not because he is some perfect person you and I could never really be like, but because he’s the kind of person we all can and should strive to be like. The goal in this series will be to see what such faith would look like today and how the faith that Abraham had in his God can serve as a model for all of us. In this opening lesson, we will see that to live a life of faith requires stepping out in faith. We will see God’s call to faith by studying what exactly God expected from Abraham, and what He expects of us. Then we will see the rewards for those who choose to follow God’s leading.

# The Call to Faith (12:1)

God takes the first step by calling to Abram (who would later become Abraham) when Abram and his family were living in Ur and serving idols. Notice that God initiates the relationship. Abram doesn’t go looking for God; God goes looking for Abram. But Abram must respond in faith to that call. Similarly, God reaches out to us through His Word and calls us to faith in Him, but we must respond in faith to that call. So what exactly does God’s call look like?

## God Wants Faith that Leads to Action

James reminds us that faith without works is dead. God’s first word to Abram, the man who would become the model for faith, was “Go.” It was a command that demanded an obedient response. Abram could not have said, “Okay, God. I will trust and have faith in you,” and then kept living in Ur.[[2]](#footnote-2) This is because Abram’s life as an example of faith would not be possible if Abram had not acted on that faith. What we believe about God will show up in the way we live, or it isn’t real faith.

If you heard the title for this Bible study series before you saw it, there is a chance you were unsure about one of the words. “Wait,” someone might say, “Did you say faithful or faith-filled?” Those two expressions sound similar but have different meanings. To be faith-filled means that one is full of faith or trust. To be faithful means that you are loyal to someone. But there is actually pretty significant overlap. People who believe God will be faithful to Him. Faith-filled people will be faithful people. There are many today who say they believe in God, but don’t live lives that line up with that claim. This is nothing new, Jesus calls out this problem during his ministry (Luke 6:46). Faith is trust, and trust leads to obedient action.

***Why do you think many Christians think of faith as nothing more than agreeing to a certain number of facts?***

***What is the danger if we define faith merely in terms of what I think?***

## God Wants Faith When Things Are Hard

After telling Abram to go, God made clear what Abram was leaving behind. We might be tempted to read over this Genesis 12:1 quickly, but packed in this single sentence is one of the toughest assignments in Scripture. In Abram’s culture leaving behind country, family, and father’s home meant leaving behind all that is familiar and all that is safe. If he had stayed, Abram probably would have taken over for his father, would have lived a comfortable life, and would have enjoyed the prestige and ease of being at least a moderately wealthy Chaldean. But God showed up and asked Abram to sacrifice all of that and simply trust God to fulfill what God promised to do for Abram.

God isn’t necessarily calling believers today to give up all that they know and love to obey Him, but He might. In either case, God is still calling on believers to do challenging things. Living a life of faith is never easy, and it is always costly. Sometimes that means making financial sacrifices for the sake of faithfully following God. Sometimes it means mockery, or hatred, or in some cases even martyrdom. Sometimes it means that close relationships must take a hit because we love God more than our dearest friends and family. But no matter who you are, if you want to follow God then you must be willing to sacrifice for Him.

***What are some of the difficult things that God calls on believers to do?***

## God Wants Faith When Things Are Unclear

But Abram’s call was not just a call to action, and it was not just a call to hard action. The call was also to hard action with not a whole lot of explanation. “To a place where I will show you” is pretty vague. God expected Abram to leave everything behind, and it was not until he had left everything behind that God would show him the next step. The author of Hebrews picks up on this little phrase and presses it home as he considers the life of Abram “By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went” (Hebrews 11:8).

***Why wouldn’t God show Abram where He was going, or lay out more clearly what the plan was?***

Such a call required great faith in God from Abram. He had to decide in advance whether God Himself was someone worth trusting, since Abram didn’t even get a chance to look at the plan first. “Obey me and I’ll tell you the plan,” was what God told Abram. In our lives we will often face the same choice. Today we often want to wait until we have all of our ducks in a row. We want to make wise decisions, and rightly so, and wisdom means waiting until we have all the facts. But sometimes, like Abram, God’s will for people involves trusting Him without knowing the full plan. As with Abram, God sometimes calls for us to trust Him, since we don’t get to see the plan in advance and are left with nothing more than confidence in the one who is doing the planning.

***How do we “balance” wisdom and faith? What would it look like for someone to boldly take a step of faith and how is that different from someone foolishly charging ahead without planning?***

# The Promise for Faith (Genesis 12:2-3)

So what if we do what God asks of us? What if we do give it all up and follow after God, then what happens? God makes some pretty big promises to Abram, and we need to be careful as we seek to apply these. First, we need to realize that these promises are the first major step in bringing redemption to Adam’s fallen race. As such, we need to read these promises theologically, realizing that ultimately they point to Jesus. But at the same time we can see how the principles of the way that God works with Abram have some instruction for us as well. Obviously, God hasn’t promised to make us a great nation, or that all the nations will be blessed through us. But as we study the story of Abram, we can make general observations about the ways that God responds to faith, and carefully seek to apply that to our own situation today.

## God Promised to Reward Abram

In these brief verses there are at least 3 key ideas that will be picked up and developed throughout the Abram story. First, there is the promise that a great nation will come from Abram (Genesis 12:2). This implies both many descendants (1) and a territory or land that those descendants would live on (2). After this promise, God says that Abram will be a blessing and that all the nations of the earth will be blessed through Abram (3) (Genesis 12:3). These three key ideas of seed or descendant (1), land (2), and blessing (3) will serve as the general outline for many of the future episodes of Abraham’s life, and for the story of Israel as a whole.

But it’s also important to notice that the land and family blessings are some of the very things Abram was being asked to give up. God promised to reward Abram by giving him what God was asking him to give up. This is true for us as well. Jesus said that those who sacrifice for the kingdom will find that God rewards them richly, both in this life and in the life to come (Matthew 19:27-30).

***What are some of the ways that God rewards those who sacrificially live faith-filled lives obeying Him?***

***Why do we as Christians sometimes shy away from the promise of reward in Scripture? How might we find a balanced way to correct this?***

## God Promised to Work through Abram

Genesis begins with the great and beautiful creation of God (Genesis 1-2) and then tells how man’s sin caused it all to go seriously wrong (Genesis 3). The next few chapters describe man’s descent in their own wickedness (Genesis 4-6), God’s judgment and grace on sinful humanity in the flood (Genesis 6-9), and then man’s continued rebellion against God (Genesis 10-11). By the end of this introduction to the history of the world, the reader is ready for God to break through and do something to fix all that is broken. Rather than make a grand announcement to the king of the most important city on earth at the time, God kicks off His grand plan to save humanity by going to a wealthy idolater and calling for Him to leave everything and follow God. Fortunately for the rest of us, Abram said yes.

God uses people of faith to be the conduits of His blessing to the world. Now of course, God doesn’t need anyone. God didn’t need Abram, but He chose to use Him. God doesn’t need us to accomplish His will, but in His kindness and grace He chooses to use people who believe Him to get incredible things done. Not perfect people, but faith-filled people. People who trust Him and prove that they trust Him by the way they live.

***What are some things that would look different in your life if you truly believed everything that God said about Himself and you?***

***How can God use faith-filled people in the course of their everyday lives to help Him accomplish His grand promise of redemption today?***

But Abraham never saw any of this come to pass. He didn’t see the blessing He would end up being, and the promises God made were still unfulfilled. He had one son of promise, not a nation. He owned a single burial plot, not the land of Canaan. And there was no world-wide blessing through Abraham. So how did Abraham account for this gap? The gap between what God had promised and what he actually saw? The answer, of course, is faith. Once again the author of Hebrews hits this point clearly and powerfully while considering the life of the patriarchs:

*These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city. Hebrews 11:13-16*

***What can we do when we are struggling to believe God because what we see doesn’t seem to line up with what He says?***

We won’t always be able to see how God’s promises are true or could be true. But like Abraham we can look behind those promises to the God who is always faithful and is worth believing. What does such a life look like? How can we have the same success Abraham did? What happens when we falter? And what kind of a difference can we make when we succeed? These are the questions we will explore as we study the life of Abraham together.

1. Abraham’s name begins as Abram and is changed partway through the story. For this reason, we will refer to him as Abraham in the introduction and conclusion since we are talking about the whole overview of his life, but throughout the lesson we will switch to Abram. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Apparently, Genesis 11 and 12 aren’t entirely chronological. Genesis will later make clear that God called Abraham while he was living in Ur to leave his family behind (Genesis 15:7; cf Acts 7:3), but Abram goes with his father and they stop in Haran and live there until his father dies (11:31-32). Chapter 12 then picks up the story of Abram by telling of the initial call that Abram had while living in Ur. We don’t know exactly why Abram’s father came along, or why they stopped partway, but the story seems arranged in such a way as to demonstrate that Abram was completely obedient to God’s initial command. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)