

BFFs FOREVER

Studies in the Life of Abraham

Text

Genesis 11:27-12:3

Topic

Abraham sets out for Canaan but hesitates in Haran
for a long while before fully heeding God's call

Title

"The Time to Hesitate is Through"

Introduction

Have you ever been put on hold?

Just mentioning it probably reminds you of a time when you finally hung-up rather than go on waiting.

It was probably on a call to computer giant Dell! In a recent (June 2011) survey, Dell was rated just about the worst company for its response time to waiting customers.

What if I told you it was possible to put God on hold?

It sounds strange, but it *is* all too possible. Obviously I'm not talking about getting a phone call from God. But we do receive "calls," or we might say "callings," in our lives from God, do we not?

Abraham did. According to the commentary of Stephen, the first Christian martyred in the Book of Acts,

Acts 7:2 ... "The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran,
Acts 7:3 and said to him, 'GET OUT OF YOUR COUNTRY AND FROM YOUR RELATIVES, AND COME TO A LAND THAT I WILL SHOW YOU.' "

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Abraham saw the Lord, was saved, and received God's call while in Mesopotamia, in a place called Ur. He immediately set out with his father, Terah, and got as far as Haran. Stephen noted that he “dwelt in Haran.” In fact, Stephen went on to say,

Acts 7:4 ... [Abraham] dwelt in Haran. And from there, when his father was dead, He moved him to this land in which you now dwell.

Abraham set out but stopped short in Haran. If you do the math, Abraham delayed in Haran, short of the Promised Land, for five long years until his dad died.

There can be no doubting that he hesitated in Haran. In essence, **he put God's call upon his life on hold.**

- If Abraham was capable of hesitating, *so are we.*
- Likewise, if Abraham was capable of re-heeding God's call even after years of delay, *so are we!*

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Take The Time To Review The Call Of God Upon Your Life, and #2 Today Is The Time To Revive The Call Of God Upon Your Life.

#1 Take The Time To Review
The Call Of God Upon Your Life
(11:27-32)

There are some remarkable relationships between God and His followers in the Old Testament but only one man was ever called “the friend of God.”

Abraham is called “the friend of God” twice in the Old Testament:

1. In Second Chronicles 20:7 Abraham is called God's “friend forever.”
2. In Isaiah 41:8 God refers to the Israelites as “the descendants of Abraham, My friend.”

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In the New Testament Book of James we read, "'ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS ACCOUNTED TO HIM FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS." And he was called the friend of God" (James 2:23).

Abraham may be the only Old Testament saint so-called, but he is not alone! Jesus Christ looked at His disciples, both then and now, and said, "No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called *you friends*..." (John 15:15).

If we, too, are the friends of God - best friends forever (or BFFs) - then we should learn something about what it means to have a friendship with God from Abraham.

The very first thing we learn is strangely comforting. We learn that even Abraham fell short in his walk, putting the call of God on hold, hesitating.

We are introduced to Abraham as "Abram" some four hundred years after Noah's flood. God is going to change his name in a little while. We'll call him Abraham.

Genesis 11:27 This is the genealogy of Terah: Terah begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran. Haran begot Lot.

Genesis 11:28 And Haran died before his father Terah in his native land, in Ur of the Chaldeans.

Genesis 11:29 Then Abram and Nahor took wives: the name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran the father of Milcah and the father of Iscah.

Genesis 11:30 But Sarai was barren; she had no child.

Genesis 11:31 And Terah took his son Abram and his grandson Lot, the son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, his son Abram's wife, and they went out with them from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to the land of Canaan; and they came to Haran and dwelt there.

Genesis 11:32 So the days of Terah were two hundred and five years, and Terah died in Haran.

We're introduced to some folks who will be important to the life of Abraham. Lot was Abraham's brothers' son, making him his nephew. Perhaps, when Haran died, Abraham became a guardian to Lot.

The marriage of Abraham's brother Nahor is mentioned because he became the grandfather of Laban and Rebekkah, both of whom would later figure prominently in the story of Abraham's grandson, Jacob.

It was in Ur, according to Stephen, that God appeared to Abraham. The departure of the family from Ur for Canaan was in response to that call upon Abraham's life. They only got as far as Haran, though, then settled down there. For five years, until Terah died, Abraham delayed.

God had distinctly said, "Get out of your country, From your family and from your father's house, To a land that I will show you." He had been told to leave his father and the extended family behind. Instead he either convinced them to come along, or he compromised and let them come along.

Abraham's decision to delay in Haran reminds you of the man in Matthew 8:21-22 where we read, "Then another of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." But Jesus said to him, "Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead."

Notice that this man is called a "disciple" but he wishes to delay his call. This disciple wants to "go and bury [his] father."

Jesus' answer seems harsh until you understand the circumstances. *The man's father wasn't dead!* He was asking Jesus if he could delay following him until his elderly parents passed away and were buried. This was a common expression in the Jewish culture to communicate that the son felt he had a responsibility and a reason to stay with his parents.

- The responsibility was to honor his parents.
- The reason was so he wouldn't forfeit his inheritance!

Leaving his family to follow Jesus would make it seem he was choosing Jesus over his family and it would cut him off from receiving any inheritance at the death of his father.

We don't know what happened to this disciple; his decision is not recorded for us. It should be clear enough, however, that believers often offer excuses to delay the call of God.

- The responsibility may be noble, as perhaps it was in this case, to honor parents.
- The reason may be logical, as perhaps it was in this case, to receive the inheritance.

A call from God is something overruling, overriding, every other responsibility and reason. It's a stop-whatever-you're-doing and follow the Lord situation.

It might be good to stop and talk about exactly what I mean by God's "call." We can see God's call illustrated very simply by Abraham. It had two distinct parts.

The first part was a call to salvation and the second part was a call to service.

We read that God "appeared" to Abraham. We don't know exactly what that means. I think it was probably in the form of what the Old Testament calls "the Angel of the Lord." It was an Old Testament appearance of Jesus Christ prior to His coming in the first century in human flesh as the God-Man.

Regarding this appearance of the Lord, we read in James that "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness" (James 2:23). The apostle Paul makes much of this appearance of the Lord in the Book of Romans where he explains how sinful men are saved by a holy God without God violating His nature. He establishes that Abraham simply believed God and God then could declare him righteous.

Everyone is saved just that same way. You believe God and He declares you righteous.

He can do that because Jesus Christ died on the Cross for your sins. There, on the Cross, Jesus paid the penalty for your sin, once-for-all satisfying the holiness of God. As a result God can extend to those who believe in Jesus His grace to save them.

Have you answered the call to salvation? If not, *don't delay any longer!* It's one call you definitely do not want to leave on hold.

God is gracious. He will wait. You have your entire lifetime to respond. God will honor even last second, deathbed conversions. The problem, of course, is that you don't know when **you** will breathe your last.

Besides, waiting is a waste of your life. You were created to know God and every moment you don't know Him is a moment wasted on some other meaningless pursuit - no matter how successful you may be in the world's estimation.

Abraham had a life in Ur, then in Haran, as a successful shepherd. Is that why he was created? To taste the successes of this world? No, he had a hunger for the next 'world,' as does every human being. And he gave his life to the Lord to satisfy it.

Abraham also received a second, separate call to serve God. He was called to get out of Ur and get into the Promised Land. It was here, in this call, or we might say "calling," that Abraham hesitated and put God on hold.

You and I have been called to serve the Lord. We tend to think of that in terms of one big, sweeping responsibility to follow the Lord. While that is true, our following Him is made up of many components, each of which can be seen as a 'calling' in its own right.

For example, if you are married, being a husband or a wife is a calling. It is something that, when done for the Lord, costs you something and requires sacrifice. God says, "Get out of your old way of thinking about what it means to be a husband and instead love your wife the way Jesus loves you." God says, "Get out of your old way of thinking about what it means to

be a wife and instead submit to your husband as his helper as unto the Lord.”

The same is true for any and all the various callings in your life: parent, employer, employee, church member, etc., etc. The Gospel of Jesus Christ touches every one of these with its unique perspective, making them each a calling that involves cost and sacrifice.

We can therefore be walking with the Lord, pressing forward in one or many areas, but hesitating in one or many areas, too. I'll use pastors as my example. It's not uncommon for someone in the ministry to devote so much time and energy to their calling as a pastor that they hesitate, they delay, they neglect, their other callings - especially in the home.

It's also true that a Christian who we might categorize as 'laity' devotes so much time to their calling as an employer or employee that they don't serve the Lord in His church on the earth.

All that we've said so far, then, leads us to this point, that we must constantly review our callings. It's not good to delay or hesitate or neglect **ANY** of the things God has called us to.

Chances are God has called you to something that you have put on hold. You are waiting for just the right time, when you have just the right resources, and then (so you think) you will fulfill your calling.

It doesn't work that way! It didn't work that way for Abraham. It didn't work that way for the disciple in Matthew's Gospel. It won't work that way for us.

Let's say you review your callings and find one or more in which you've hesitated. You'll be glad for the kind of friend you have in Jesus!

#2 Today Is The Time To Revive
The Call Of God Upon Your Life
(12:1-3)

For five years Abraham waited. He heard nothing from the Lord. Was the Lord angry?

No, the Lord was being patient with His friend!

Genesis 12:1 Now the Lord had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you.

Genesis 12:2 I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing.

Genesis 12:3 I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

This is what the Lord "had said" five years earlier. **And this was what the Lord still was saying!**

Sometimes we can feel as though God is silent; as though He is not speaking to us. Well, just maybe it is because He has already spoken to us and until we act there is nothing more He needs to say.

God waited patiently for Abraham to obey his calling and serve Him. He didn't withdraw His calling.

Does God's patience with Abraham cause you to think, "That's great! I'll just wait until I'm ready to serve the Lord, and God will just pick right up with me where we left off"?

If it does then I'd say **you're not much of a friend to God**. You're taking advantage of Him and that's not a characteristic of a true friend.

Perhaps that's why when Jesus said He was calling us His friends He prefaced it by saying (in John 15:14), "You are My friends if you do whatever I command you."

Abraham gives that verse a depth I've not understood before. *We are* Jesus' friends who have callings to serve Him. But we're not very good friends if we're taking advantage of Him and waiting to serve Him when it's best for us, when it's comfortable and convenient for us.

He goes on being our friend, waiting. We're the ones who lose out. And we are taking advantage of Him - something no friend ought to do.

The truth is, you CAN go on hesitating... delaying... neglecting God's call. You can settle down in Haran and you can live there until you die or the Lord raptures you.

God patiently waited for Abraham. For His part, God was a good friend.

If He has been waiting for you... Maybe it's been five months, or five years, or five decades that some calling, some area of service, has been neglected.

Isn't **today** the best time to revive whatever calling you've put on hold?

No matter where you've settled short of God's calling you can get up from there, get out of there, and get into the place the Lord has for you, the place of living by His promises.

