

**JOURNEY TO THE UNKNOWN**  
**Genesis 12:1-20**

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Have you ever had to move? Just pull your family up by the roots. Put all your belongings in boxes. Close the front door of your beloved home for the last time, a home in which your children grew from tots to teens. Perhaps there are teething marks on the chair rail and a resting place for a dog buried in the backyard. To move is to leave it all behind. You arrive in the new city, not knowing anyone or anything. You start filling out all the forms. In case of emergency we are to contact...? And you don't even have a name to put in the blank because you've just arrived in town and know no one.

The percentage of Americans moving each year has dropped from 20% in the 1950s and 1960s, down to about 14 percent before and during the 2000s housing bubble, and then to a low point of 8.4 percent in 2021. The drop in mobility means that Americans are staying in the same house longer between moves: from 5 years, on average, in the 1950s and 1960s, to about 7 years before and during the bubble, and 8.6 years in 2013. ("Americans Are Still Moving Way Less Than They Used to," [www.citylab.com](http://www.citylab.com)) In fact, according to the Pew Research Center survey, a majority of Americans say they have never lived outside of their current state. Nearly 40 percent have never left their home town. People stay, the Pew Survey finds, because of family ties. Because their home towns are good places in which to raise their children. People who hang around their home town have at least a half-dozen members of their extended families living within an hour's drive. People who stay in the same city – the city of their birth – say that is where they find their sense of belonging. (<http://pewsocialtrends.org/pubs/721/movers-and-stayers>)

God didn't give Abraham the luxury of hanging around his home town, the town of his father and family. God calls this moon-worshipping Mesopotamian to get on the move to a new, promised land.

As we look at Abraham's call, we learn:

**I. We're not to find our identity in our family.**

When we put our marriage first, we ask our spouse to be our god.  
When we put our family first, we ask our children to be our idols.

Let's build strong families, but let's not build an idol of our families.

Abraham's family was from Ur, a large city and major center for the worship of the moon-god Sin. Abraham's father, Terah, was not loyal to God, to Yahweh (Joshua 24:2). Terah's family had settled in Haran. The Lord comes to Abraham in a straightforward, direct command and demand.

God doesn't sugar coat or soft-pedal the things that Abraham is asked to give up. In fact, He lists them item by item.

Verse 1

Now the Lord said to Abram,  
"Go forth from your country,  
And from your relatives  
And from your father's house,  
To the land which I will show you.

Notice how He moves from the general to the specific. Leave your country. Leave your relatives. Leave your own father's house. Everything that gave Abraham his personal identity, Abraham was to leave behind.

Even more so in antiquity with a tight-knit family/clan oriented culture, having a people to belong to meant everything. Leaving family meant leaving security, leaving your place of morality, safety, and identity. It was to put your physical and psychological well-being at risk.

In fact, in 12:1, the translation literally is "Go, you." There is only one other time when we have this construction, this direct personal demand, in the entire corpus of the Old Testament. In Genesis 22:2, when God sends Abraham on the trip to "sacrifice "his son, Isaac, God commands Abraham, "Go, you" – a second time when Abraham is asked not to find his identity in his family, not even his son, the heir to the promise.

Instead of finding his identity in his family, God offers Abraham a new nucleus. Abraham is now to be identified by his covenant with Yahweh, his relationship with God.

You can be sure someone in Abraham's family objected to his pulling up roots, packing up the bags, and heading for the Holy Land. Preacher Fred Craddock said God never calls anyone into ministry loud enough for the whole family to hear. Someone usually always objects.

Notice that God says to Abraham, "I will make you a great nation. I will bless you and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Back in our last chapter, Genesis 11, humankind was trying to make a name for themselves? Look at 12:2. Abraham is not trying to make a name for himself. God is going to make his name great. And in him, all the nations of the earth will be blessed as Abraham, himself, forms a great nation.

## **II. Faith is always a journey into the unknown.**

The good news is that you don't always have to know where you are going in order to get there.

Notice what God tells him. "To the land I will show you" (v. 1). God doesn't even tell Abraham where he is going.

The author of Hebrews remembers Abraham this way (11:8)

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.

Here is Abraham, with a barren wife, going out to be a great nation without a clear destination and without an heir. “Abraham, just follow My voice, and I’ll show you where to go.”

An African impala can jump to a height of over ten feet and cover a distance of greater than 30 feet. Yet, these magnificent creatures can be kept in an enclosure in any zoo with a three-foot tall solid wall. Why? The animals will not jump if they cannot see where their feet will fall.

God asked Abraham to jump – even though he can’t see where he is going to land.

God calls Abraham, God calls us, to leave our family to go to the unknown, to get out of our comfort zone. Perhaps God will call you into the unknown.

We really do like the comfort zone, don’t we? A steady income. A thermostat between 68 and 72. We want to eat at the same restaurants with the same friends – and even prefer the same waiter. We want a religion that is helpful, but not too bothersome or demanding. You know, just enough so that we can be considered in the camp of Christ. We don’t really want to alter our lives or take any risk.

There is a real way in which those of us born into the faith are greatly disadvantaged. Oh, of course I wouldn’t have it any other way. But those of us who are born into Christian families become so comfortable with the love of God we think His forgiveness a birthright and heaven the natural outcome of being a member of our “good family.” Some of us have never walked on the other side of life. We don’t realize the emptiness that comes from being spiritually starved. We have a banquet set before us each Sunday – all you care to eat – but some of us have small appetites, mostly majoring in spiritual desserts.

Somewhere down the line, someone in our family was like Abraham. Someone stepped out and proclaimed Jesus as Lord. They surrendered themselves radically to His call.

But we, somehow, inherited our religion. By the time it was passed down to us it was warmed over, having lost its original zest and freshness – like mashed potatoes that have set overnight in the cupboard. There is a pathetic familiarity about the gospel. We don’t really know what it feels like to be without a Savior. We can’t imagine ever living without the hope that comes from the long shadow cast by the cross. We don’t know life without the empty tomb, life without the promise of eternal existence. We, in some way, avoided the radical choice to surrender our lives to Christ because it was just the natural and expected thing to do. We eased into our faith, much like the cautious swimmer goes rung by rung down the pool ladder.

Have you ever met someone who did not have the “advantage” of growing up in a “Christian” home? Have you ever seen the excitement of the faith of someone whose conversion causes them to have a radically different life?

They know what it feels like to think of death as the end. They know the loneliness of never being able to bask in the forgiveness of God. They know the pitiful results that come upon a family when Christ is rejected, when the church is ignored, when there is no family of faith to surround them. And they don't ever want to go back to that. No! No! They run as fast as they can away from any hint of life without a Savior. They have made a radical choice. They have made Jesus their Savior. They have come to realize that He died for them, in their place, and they will never forget that. Unlike some of us who have always considered ourselves "pretty good," they know the depth and power of the grip of sin and they will have nothing to do with it.

They want to serve, to be active. Like a kid in the candy store, they volunteer for more positions of service in the church than any one person could ever do. They don't want to be left out. They want to be part of everything good, everything that will spread the good news of God's love through Christ. They are willing to risk, to do things they would have never imagined themselves able to do, because they have made themselves available to God and His service. They let go and let God. They are called to leave the land of their fathers.

Some of us are so accustomed to the gospel story that we have forgotten – or never really realized – its radical, risky message. It calls us to a journey of faith.

We're like the man whose house is located beside the airport, who sleeps at night never hearing the jets as they shake the walls of his house with their sonic boom.

We're like the lady who lives next door to the bakery. We live in the aroma, yet we are so accustomed to it that we hardly smell it until someone else makes mention of it.

We're like the laborer who mans the jackhammer. We are numbed by the persistent pounding pulse.

It's a very dangerous state to be in, especially when it is the call of Christ and His bride, the church, to which you have become so accustomed.

But Abraham was a courageous follower of God. God was new to Abraham, the moon-worshipping Mesopotamian. God asked him to follow in faith. He asked him to risk on numerous occasions. First, He asked him to leave a good life behind, a life filled with comfort and wealth and family. God asked him to move from the known to the unknown. He asked him to find his reward in what he could not see – a great nation, in what he would impart – a blessing. Abraham's decision to follow a God he did not really know was a radical decision.

"Abraham, I want you to go to a land I will show you."

Have you ever noticed that God's calls are always open-ended?

In Mark's Gospel, Mark 1:16,

Jesus is going along by the Sea of Galilee. He saw Simon and Andrew, the brother of Andrew, casting a net in the sea; for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men." And they immediately left the nets and followed Him.

It's an open-ended call. He didn't even tell them where they were going. Little did they know they'd end up in Jerusalem with a crucified Savior.

Peter says in Mark 10:28, "Behold, we have left everything and followed You."

Like Abraham, like Peter, the only way to follow God – to begin the journey of faith – is to leave everything. Leave Haran. Leave the fishing boat and family.

God's call to the journey of faith is always open-ended. So much so is the call of faith seen as a journey that the early Christians were called followers of "the way" (Acts 9:2; 17:17). They followed the way of Jesus, the way of the cross, the way of suffering, the way to Jerusalem.

### **III. A call from God is always a commission from God.**

What is good for the well-being of Abraham and his future nation, Israel, is also good for all nations – the nations listed in Genesis 10. He tells him, "By you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." It's programmatically repeated in 18:18, 22:18, 26:4, and 28:14. Listen to what Paul says about this passage in Galatians 3:8. "And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying 'All the nations shall be blessed in you.'" Paul says the idea that Abraham will bless all peoples everywhere is the gospel beforehand.

In Acts 3:25, Peter uses the same passage. Peter, preaching, says that God made a deal with their forefathers, with Abraham, saying, "And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed." And then he refers to the resurrected Christ.

You can be sure God didn't call Abraham just to be the recipient of a blessing, but also a bestower of a blessing. You can be sure hasn't called you just to be the recipient of a blessing. He also wants you to be the bestower of the blessing.

### **IV. Even the father of faith can falter.**

Let me just tell you how the story goes in the rest of this chapter.

A famine comes to the land. A familiar story in Genesis, to be sure. So Abraham has to go down to Egypt – soon to be an even more familiar response to a famine. Egypt was, of course, the bread basket of the ancient world with the Nile River. Abraham says, "Sarah, you're a beautiful woman." Now ladies, you need to know she's at least 65 years of age. She is – in those days – middle aged. "When the Egyptians see you, they are going to kill me that one of them may take you as his wife. Let's just tell them you're my sister." According to Genesis 20:12, this a half truth, for she is also the daughter of his father.

Pharaoh finds Sarah irresistible. She claims to be Abraham's sister. Pharaoh's takes Sarah into his harem to be yet another wife. He gives Abraham sheep, oxen, donkeys, camels, and servants. But remember what God said. "I will bless those who bless you, and I'll curse the ones who curse

you.” The Lord struck Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because he had taken Sarah, Abraham’s wife, into the royal harem. God protects God’s divine plan for Abraham and Sarah.

Pharaoh figures it out. In fact, he has more integrity than the patriarch of Israel. “Why have you done this to me? Why didn’t you tell me this was your wife? Why did you say she was your sister and leave me so vulnerable? Now take you wife and go.”

Isn’t this what you like about the Bible – this wonderful word about Abraham who leaves his father’s family and goes to an unknown land, begins a journey of faith, only to falter at the very first. Makes Abraham real. Makes those who have faltered along the journey of faith know that we can also find our place.

Even great men and great women of faith will sometimes falter.

The same courage that Abraham showed in leaving his father’s family is the courage he should have shown in going to Egypt. Instead of thinking about his own skin, he should have thought about the integrity of his wife and the purity of the divine blessing to make a great nation from Sarah, his wife.

How about you? Will you answer God’s radical call? Will you leave it all behind to follow Him? Do you have the faith to find your very identity in following Jesus? And what about your commission? Have you understood that God’s call to you is a commission to bless others with His good news? And if you have faltered on the faith journey, will you get up and go again to a land He will show you?