

“Father Knows Best”
Genesis 12:1-5
January 18, 2026
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The Woodside Church

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This is God’s word. **The Call of Abram**

The Lord had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. “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” Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from arran. He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.

May God bless this reading of the Word.

In 1975 my father was asked to be on the planning commission for Operation Sail 76’ in the New York City Harbor celebrating the United States Bicentennial. He was on the Public Relations team organizing and scheduling the speakers for the dozens of piers being used for the event. In addition to the overall planning, he was selected to be one of the announcers identifying and sharing details about each of the ships as they sailed past. Early on in the process he asked me to help as he studied and educated himself on each of the 16 majestic tall ships. I remember asking him why he was so concerned about learning to identify each ship by sight, as he was going to have a list of the sailing order of the parade. His response was simple. Things change. People make mistakes. He didn’t want to misidentify a ship based upon a prepared schedule.

In the spring of 1976 he had, what he considered, a great idea. Since I had helped him prepare the tall ship binder being used for the event, and studied the ships so hard, he told me I would be permitted to give him a break during the ceremony and announce one of the ships as it came down the river... I was horrified. Here was a 16-year-old kid, finishing junior year in high school. A couple of years earlier I had taken a speech class, in 9th grade I think. But this? My dad wanted me to not just be a speaker at this historic event, but at a pier filled with VIPs. But I loved my father and respected his opinion. He was a skilled orator and if he thought I wouldn’t embarrass him in front of his colleagues and superiors, I would accept the challenge.

Last week we started the new sermon series, “Cliff Notes on the Bible.” Doug opened with the beginning, the Big Bang. Whoops, wrong one. God’s Big Bang. Unfortunately, this beginning had a rather sudden turn. It has always amazed me how quickly man turned away from God. There are 1189 chapters in the Bible, and the Fall of Man occurs in chapter 3. And then in chapters 4 through 11, Cain kills Abel, man’s wickedness leads to Noah and the great flood, and then our pride led to an attempt to build a tower to the heavens – the tower of Babel. But for some crazy reason, God doesn’t give up on Man. He has a plan for us and from the very

beginning he was putting that plan into action. And as Doug teased in his final sentence last week, this week we are going to discuss God's plan to save the world.

I'll bet most of us in this room have experienced something similar to my story. You're put in a position to do something you don't feel qualified to do. Maybe by a parent, a boss, even a spouse or a friend. But what if God is the one giving you those instructions? Abram found himself in a situation which probably wasn't comfortable. He had a home, a family, possessions, and people who relied on him. And yet,

The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you." Genesis 12:1

No explanation of why God wanted him to go. Abram had no compass and no map. Of course, they wouldn't have helped even if he had them, because God doesn't even tell him where he is going, or how long to plan for.

⁸ By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. Hebrews 11:8

Would it take them a week, a month, a year? Abram has no idea. He also doesn't know what God has planned for him. God does tell him what will happen when he goes.

This chapter of Genesis is known as the Promise, or Blessing chapter. A blessing from God is a divine gift.

² "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you;

Abram is called out by the one true God. He tells him he will be blessed. What does that mean to us? What if you knew God was going to bless you? Me? I'd think God wants me to be with him. He is planning to work through me in some way

I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. Genesis 12:2

But God isn't just telling Abram he will be blessed. He is letting him know he will be a blessing to others. And being a blessing brings responsibility. If God decides to bless you in order to work through you, you probably don't want to be sitting back and waiting for people to serve you. He wants us to become aware of others around us – to lift them up. He wants us to use what he gives us, to help others.

I used to misunderstand the Parable of the Talents.

In the parable the 3 men are each given bags of gold

¹⁵ To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag,^[a] each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. Matthew 25:15

The first two invested their bags and doubled the value .

²⁴ “Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. ²⁵ So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’

²⁶ “His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? ²⁷ Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.

²⁸ “So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. ²⁹ For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. ³⁰ And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ Matthew 25:24-30

I knew a talent in Jesus’ time was a form of money – in fact a staggering amount of money. In the parable though, Jesus is actually talking about the talents God has given us. If you have been given talents, or skills, and you don’t use them to serve God’s kingdom, how happy will that make him.

Are you good with children, of any particular ages? We have programs from nursery to high school where we are always looking for help.

Do you have financial skills? There are many people out there struggling to make what little they have stretch out. Perhaps your knowledge can help a single mother keep food on the table, or a senior stretch their money to afford senior living.

Can you smile, and say hello? Join the greeting team. I know we talk about it a lot, but that simple act is one of the things which made me realize Woodside was different when I can back here in 2006.

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. Genesis 12:3

One of the things I have learned in my walk is when I serve, I get back more than I give. I used to feel guilty about that feeling. Doug was a big help there. As I prepared for my 2nd Dominican Republic in 2010 I went to speak with him and shared a guilty feeling I had. I asked him, “Am I going back to the DR because it made me feel so good, or do I feel so good because I am going back to the DR?” He gave me that look, placed his hand on my shoulder and said, “It doesn’t matter. You’re serving God.”

But the more important part of this verse is the “all peoples” on earth will be blessed by you. Why was Abram such an important figure in the bible? Because he heard God. When everybody else was worshipping this, that and another God – Abram was listening to the one and true God! He is the original bridge to help God’s plan. How? His faith was huge! That faith is even more evident from the other Abram story we often discuss – his near sacrifice of his only true son, Isaac.

Abraham Tested 22 Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!” “Here I am,” he replied.

² Then God said, “Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.” Genesis 22:1-2

And Abraham listens. He not only listens, but he obeys. I can't imagine that. As angry as my children have made me at various times over the years, sacrificing them – I don't think so. But Abraham has faith and is obedient.

When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰ Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. Genesis 22:9-10

If we were reading the Two Towers, from Lord of the Rings, this is where Frodo would say, “Shut the book now dad, we don't want to read any more.”
But God had a different ending.

¹¹ But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!” “Here I am,” he replied. ¹² “Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.” Genesis 22:11-12

Sometimes our faith has a cost which comes with it. Abraham was ready to pay that cost. Fortunately, his obedience made it unnecessary.

So, some of you may be asking, “I thought we were discussing Abram. When did Abraham come into this story?” That happened back in chapter 17.

17 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, “I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. ² Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.”

³ Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, ⁴ “As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. ⁵ No longer will you be called Abram^[b]; your name will be Abraham,^[l] for I have made you a father of many nations. ⁶ I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you.

⁷ I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. ⁸ The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.” Genesis 17:1-8

Abram and Sarai both had their names changed at this point and it was a simple, yet important, change. Abram means Exalted Father Abraham means Father of many nations Sarai's change is a little simpler, but just as meaningful Sarai means My Princess Sarah is simply Princess My Princess refers to somebody's Princess, while Princess means the Princess. If there is one thing I've learned over these past 20 years, is the Bible isn't a story to read, and just appreciate

what so many people have gone through so I can have a relationship with God. Whether I am reading about Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, or anybody else in the Bible – there is a message being sent to me. And, to you as well. It isn't simply a story of what people have done before I was born. It is a manual on how I should live, and act.

As I stated before, Abraham was an original bridge to God. Jesus became the final and ultimate for the bridge between us and God. So, is our part done? Let me ask you this – are there people outside these walls who do not know Jesus? Perhaps a family member, a neighbor, schoolmate, colleague or even a stranger. How will they find Jesus if you aren't willing to do something about it. We are all under construction. And we are all a part of that bridge. If we don't answer the call, how will that affect others? How can we help build a bridge to Jesus for others to use.

1. Know Him - Continue to grow your own relationship with Jesus. How can you introduce somebody to Christ if you don't know who he is. It isn't the act of owning a bible, wearing a cross, or even your presence in the Father's house on a weekly basis. There isn't anything wrong with any of those things, unless that is ALL there is.
 - a. Do you read scripture every day? If not, do you try to read a little more each week than the prior week? The bible is an amazing place to hear the Word of God. If you think the bible is a collection of stories over the last 3400 years or so, and nothing more, than you are not reading it. It is a living book and it speaks to us. How else can you explain reading a single passage 20, 30 times and the next time you open it you read something you never saw before?
 - b. How is your prayer life? It's one of my struggles. I pray at times, and I can pray for people I come across who need it. But I should speak with God more often. Be intentional. Get to know him better by telling him how my day is going. When I end my e-mails with, "Say a prayer for somebody today", I am trying to remind myself as much as anybody else.
 - c. Raise your hands if you are in a growth group? Please keep them up for a minute. For those of you not raising your hands, look around the room and find somebody you feel comfortable walking up to and asking about it. Why, when, how, where, whatever. If you think you learn about the bible by reading a passage many times, imagine how much you'll learn while listening to another person's take.
 - d. Come and worship. It's great we can stream and watch at home. And for some people who are travelling, aren't in the area, or ill, taking care of somebody, or a snow day like today – I'm happy you have the opportunity. But it isn't the same as being present. Personally, on those days when I can't get to Woodside and I'm watching online, I'm not usually singing, or clapping – definitely not doing the "Full Burgess". It isn't the same. You also aren't fellowshiping with other brothers and sisters. Come back. We miss you.
 - e. Serve. We are called to make sacrifices. Through those sacrifices, whether in time, with money and/or your talents; you get the opportunity to bless others. And as you bless others, you are blessed as well.

- f. Each of these practices is important to grow, and to build your relationship with God. If you aren't doing them all, you may not be filling up enough with the Holy Spirit – and we all need that. Remember the saying – Filling up with the Holy Spirit is for you. The overflow is what you share with others.
2. Listen to Him
The more we come to know God, the easier it is to hear him. He speaks to us in many ways – through prayer and scripture, sure. But also in the silence of our hearts, and through the words and actions of others. **“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Jeremiah 29:11** He has a plan for us and we need to pay attention to what he is saying to us so we can understand those plans. And if you ever wonder if those ideas you hear are truly coming from God, then consider the words of Pastor and author A.W. Tozer - 'All things as they move toward God are beautiful, and they are ugly as they move away from Him.' God wants us to see the beauty in his world; the enemy tries to convince us otherwise.
 3. Obey Him - He has plans in this life for each one of us. But we also need to act on his commands. It is easy to create excuses on why we shouldn't do something. I'm too busy, I don't have the time. Somebody else can probably do it better. I'll do it when the time is right. Sometimes we think we are still waiting for God to show us what to do and we don't realize the opportunity is right there in front of us, waiting for us to act. The bridge to Jesus for somebody might have a gap in it. You may be the person who God is looking to plug that hole.

It was February of 2017. Our son, Jimmy, had died the October before of an overdose, and our friend and ministry partner Billy Donnelly asked Michelle and me to speak at a women's recovery house in Frankfurt. He wanted the people there who had burned so many bridges in their own lives, understand they probably have family who still love them. We were angry about having lost Jimmy, but we never stopped loving him. We were told to expect about 15 women at the meeting, but by the time we spoke there were probably 45 men and women crammed into that row home. We spoke for about 45 minutes but then stayed around an hour or two after just talking with people. We heard stories of pain, abuse, and hurt. One young lady had taken heroin for the first time at the age of nine – with her mother. As we left Michelle said to me, “It's a shame they don't have any way to get to the Conquering Grounds Coffee house in Bensalem each month. It would be so nice for them to be able to go someplace safe for a night out.” I agreed. Then she said, “We should bring a coffeehouse down here, to them.” I shook my head, but we continued to talk about it on the way home. The next day I called Billy and told him about the crazy idea Michelle had. A couple hours later he called me back, told me he had spoken with a Pastor John at St Mark's in Frankford, and he thought it was a great idea. When did we want to start? We went down and visited him, and 4 months later, our friends, Travis and Allegra Lee, were back in town, and they helped us open the inaugural Recovery Café on June 9, 2017. With the exception of 2020, and a few other cancellations, we have done it every month since, although we moved a year ago to The Philly Dream center in Port Richmond.

Fifty years ago, I accepted my dad's suggestion to step out of my comfort zone, in a big way.. I think about him often and miss talking with him sometimes. But I know my other Father is still convincing me to do things I might not think about or even want to do. I guess it is true – Father does know best!

Please pray with me.