

## Net•Work Notes

### Week 5, Day 1: The Calling—Stepping Out in Faith

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; and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you..." (Genesis 12:1-2)

We have seen already that God deals with us in the midst of a stunning Creation and a life-confusing Crisis. We have learned that human beings were created in the image of God in order to enjoy a life with God. We were meant to have a relationship with God in which we enjoyed God's companionship while discovering the wonders of the rest of God's creation. But when humankind gave up God, we lost touch with the good work we were given to do. We have seen how this crisis has worked itself out in the world: broken relationships, murder, human pride, fractured families, spoiled work, and on and on. If the first chapter in God's story is a glorious beginning (Creation), the second chapter is an immense problem (Crisis) for the entire world.

#### **A First Step to Destiny**

After the chaos of the Tower of Babel (in which we see the confusion between all the nations of the world), God begins to focus his attention on one person: Abram (who is renamed Abraham). **Read Genesis 12.** We don't know why God chooses Abram. Like the rest of the world, he is part of a people who have created gods for themselves. Abram lived in Ur of the Chaldees (ancient Sumer which is near the modern Persian Gulf). When Abram left Ur, it was a highly civilized city of white-washed houses, sewers, wealth, schools, politics, and fashion, a people who worshipped the moon god, Nanna.

But here is the good news: God still pursues humankind. God calls Abram, and Abram takes the first step to his (and our!) destiny.

List some of the promises that God made to Abram when he called him?

What do you think may have been some of Abram's fears or concerns when God called him?

Has God ever called you to take a step out in faith? How did this call come to you?

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### Week 5, Day 2: The Calling—The God Who Speaks

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your country...

#### **The God Who Speaks**

One of the first questions that people ask when they talk about religion is "How do we know God?" There seems to be so many different views of God in our world, it is difficult to know where to turn. That is part of the crisis we are in. But in answer to the question "Can I really know God?", the Christian answers with a bold "Yes!" We are convinced that the God who spoke creation into being in the beginning did not remain silent. God continued to speak to us, beginning with Abraham. We can know God, because God wants to be known and chooses to tell us who He is.

#### **The God Who Calls**

When God spoke to Abram, he **called** him. God wanted to start something new in the world so he called Abram to step out into a new life, out on a journey to a place where God would lead him. Maybe you have been told that religion is all about following rules or being perfect. The Bible makes it clear that it is more like a journey where we learn what God is like and what it means to walk with God. When God called Abram to leave his homeland and people to go out into an unknown future, Abram was faced with a decision. Did he listen to God and trust the promises God spoke to him? Or did he stay put? God gave great promises (that God would make his name great, that a great nation would come from him, that he would be blessed and would make him a blessing, that he would be given a land), but obeying

God would cost Abram all the earthly security he had. Faith is a lot like that. Faith is placing our trust in God, even when we don't know what the future will look like. Faith is risking going on a journey with God. Paul, in Romans 4:11ff calls Abram the "father of faith."

What do you think "religion" is all about? List the ways you think the Christian faith is a religion and the ways you think it differs from your idea of religion.

In what ways do you think we can "walk a journey" with God today?

Share in the space below some of your thoughts on what "faith" is.

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### Week 5, Day 3: The Calling—Stepping Out on the Journey

“So Abram went forth as the LORD had spoken to him...” (Genesis 12:4)

#### **Faith in Action**

Now let's notice something right off about what it means to be called by God. When God calls, God calls us into action! Faith involves us in an active response to God. God does not want a shrugging 'Whatever.' What sets Abram apart from the rest of the world was that when God called him to go, Abram got up and starting journeying. He didn't wait until he had all the answers. He probably wasn't certain about all the details. He took the first step and trusted that God would work out God's plans.

Faith is action, but faith is not something I do to earn God's love and get him to respond to me. Notice that it is God who gets the action started with Abram. Faith is the decision to accept God's action, God's gift. Faith is when I say, “Lord, I accept you and I trust your plans for me, that you know what is best for me.”

#### **A Whole Life Response**

Notice that God asks Abram to trust his whole life to God. He steps out leaving all his security behind him. He and Sarai go to a land they do not know, trusting God's leading. From Abram, we learn that faith is *giving all I know of myself to all I know of God*. That is the great challenge. We often hold back some of ourselves—some secret sin we cherish, or a part of life we are proud of, or a relationship we don't want to lose. But when God calls us, we need to act on it. The problem with most Christians, pastor Steve Hayner says, is not that we don't know enough, but that we

don't act on what we know. What about you? What kind of response are you giving to God? Are you holding yourself back? Talk to God about this.

What areas of your life (e.g., school, friends, dating, etc.) do you find easiest to trust to God? What areas are most difficult?

What actions do you think God calls most people to do?

Again, ask whether or not there is a part of your life that you are holding back from God. What part of your life are you most tempted to keep from God? What do you believe God is calling you to do and how do you think God would “bless” your action?

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### Week 5, Day 4: The Calling—Our Heart's Response

"...and there he built an altar to the LORD and called upon the name of the LORD." (Genesis 12:8)

#### **Reread Genesis 12:1-9.**

I do not know of a greater adventure or experience in life than knowing God. I have experienced the wonder of God's creation, of knowing that I am part of a vast, incredible, mysterious world and sensing that God has a significant part for me in that creation. But I have also experienced the crisis of broken relationships and confusion about life and God. I am so glad that God doesn't leave us in confusion, that God calls people to lives of faith, of journeying toward places that God has prepared for us.

I want to live a life of faith. I imagine you would like to as well. I am trying to give all I know of myself to all I know of God. I've learned that this means I have to **practice** trusting God. If we don't practice living with God, it may just become unimportant and fade away. Most people lose their faith, not because they've struggled with doubt, but because they haven't exercised their faith. When we practice our faith, we grow and our faith grows.

#### **Altar-Building**

Notice what happened when Abram entered the land that God had promised him. God appeared to him. Abram trusted God and stepped out and God met him again. I believe that happens to us as well—when we take a step of trust, God meets us again and again. And notice what Abram did next—he built an altar to God. Abram marked that moment in

time with a physical symbol of his response to God. "Altar-building" can be a part of our lives as well. Just the act of setting aside a place and a time to talk with God can be an act of altar-building. We must decide to make this time in our schedules, because it is out of altar-building that we gain strength to continue our journey (Genesis 12:9).

What do you think of the idea that we have to **practice** living in faith with God?

What area of the Christian faith would you most like to see grow? Write this down and share this with someone.

We need physical markers of time and space to practice our faith lives: altar-building time. Ask yourself whether or not you have set this time aside. If not, write down some times in the space below when you can pray.

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### Week 5, Day 5: The Calling: Waiting on God

After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; your reward shall be very great." (Genesis 15:1)

#### God 24/7?

It's easy to read the stories of the Bible and think that it was somehow easier for Abram and the others like him in the Bible. After all, God appeared to Abram and spoke to him. But we need to be careful here. Do you think that they experienced God every moment of every day? Were they in touch with God 24/7? Actually, the Bible makes it clear that they went long periods of time without a direct experience of God.

**Take some time to read Genesis 15 and Genesis 17:1-8.** Notice that just because Abram had known God, this didn't mean that he did not doubt God or ask questions. He questioned whether God could give him a son when he was so old and his wife, Sarai, was so old, too. So, God needed to keep reassuring Abram and reaffirming his promises, and then God renames Abram Abraham so that just hearing his name (Father of nations) would remind him of his God-given destiny.

#### Learning Patience with God's Timing

And look at how long Abraham had to wait. Between the time God promised a son to Abraham and the birth of Isaac, Abraham had to wait twenty-five years!!! Faith is learning to trust God when God seems slow to work in our lives. Living a life with God does not mean that we constantly experience spiritual highs and special closeness with God. There can be long stretches in our lives when we can wonder whether or not God is there at all. This does not mean you are not "holy" enough. Faith is deciding to

continue to trust God in the midst of what feels like the absence of God.

What plans do you think that God may have for you?

What prayers are you waiting for God to answer? Write these in the space below.

God called Abram "Father of Nations". What name do you think God would give you right now?