

Pause: Learning To Wait on God Abraham

Good morning, Colonies family! This morning we continue our Pause series. Each week we are looking at the life of those in Scripture whose life does not go as smoothly as they would like. It is a study about hope. Though I have not read the passage yet, the concept for the series comes from the words of Paul in the New Testament.

And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:2–8, NIV)

Hope, perseverance, and character are produced in the crucible of waiting. Even without the crisis of a world pandemic we are still a waiting people.

It is said of one of the famous composers that he had a rebellious son who used to come in late at night after his father and mother had gone to bed. And before going to his own room, he would go to his father's piano and slowly, as well as loudly, play a simple scale, all but the final note. Then leaving the scale uncompleted, he would retire to his room. Meanwhile the father, hearing the scale minus the final note, would writhe on his bed, his mind unable to relax because the scale was unresolved. Finally, in consternation, he would stumble down the stairs and hit the previously un-struck note. Only then would his mind surrender to sleep once again.

We have received the promise of God through Jesus, while we were still powerless, and we are waiting for the fulfillment of that promise. We are waiting for the un-struck note to be played that will ultimately bring us peace. Dealing with frustration of waiting we ask lots of “Why?” and “When?” questions. Questions of purpose.

The Bible is full of men and women from whom we can learn who have walked with God before us. So far we have learned **from Joseph that your purpose is not for you. Your purpose is to serve God's purpose.** Last week, through two widow women, Naomi and Ruth, **we discovered our purpose is as an image bearer.** We are to represent God through daily acts of *hesed*. Today, we turn to Abraham, or Abram as he is known when we are introduced to him.

Abram's journey begins by striking a strong chord of faith.

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.” So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran. (Genesis 12:1–4, NIV)

Often we cry out for return to normalcy, but often trusting God in the present means leaving the past behind. God clearly called Abram from the familiar to the unknown.

The lack of detail in God's instruction for Abram to go "to the land that I will show you" indicates Abram's faith: He packed up and left in response to the call, blindly trusting God to lead him.

Like Queen Elsa, Abram sets off "into the unknown" with nothing but a few family members and a promise. Abraham didn't know the details of how these events would unfold, but he believed the promise and obeyed God.

His story teaches us something profound: that **the life of faith is a journey made up of a series of "first steps."** While each of these steps brings us closer to the fulfillment of God's promises, they don't necessarily lead us farther away from the challenges and struggles involved with moving ahead.

The first challenge Abram faced was caused by a famine. Because of the Nile river and the fertile land Egypt was less prone to the famines that were common in the area. Abram takes his wife, nephew, and their servants to Egypt to live.

As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, "I know what a beautiful woman you are. When the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' Then they will kill me but will let you live. Say you are my sister, so that I will be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you." (Genesis 12:11–13, NIV)

Self-preservation, motivated by fear, prompts Abram to step off the path of faith. Self interest is a powerful deterrent to doing the right thing and puts others at risk. When you stumble while walking, instincts propel your arms outward to grab onto anything to prevent your fall. Sometimes our survival instincts lead us to take others down with us.

Perhaps, if we were to talk to Abram he would have argued the decision was one of faith. He believed God's promise and was trying to live into the promise by staying alive. Several years later, Abram will face a similar crisis and make the same deal with Sarai. Each time Abram wrestles with the promise from God, blessings that will include sons, and the fear caused by a shortage of food. How can he have children if he is dead? How can he be a blessing if he does not survive the end of the day?

Abram's fear brings a curse on Pharaoh and Abimelech the two rulers that unknowingly take Sarai as their wife. Faith and fear are not individual realities, they have real world consequences on those around us. People of faith are good for those around them whether they share the same faith or not.

The call of Abram was to be a blessing to all people on the earth. God says,

"For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him." (Genesis 18:19, NIV)

His purpose was to engage in acts of righteousness and justice. God has given the same purpose to all his people.

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:8, NIV)

In the words of Jesus,

Jesus replied, “The most important commandment is this: ‘Listen, O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only Lord. And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.’ The second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ No other commandment is greater than these.” (Mark 12:29–31, NLT)

You discover your purpose in serving people. Living in response to God’s call requires that we continually purge ourselves of self-centeredness—or “self-preservation,” as in Abram’s case.

There are times when he does this beautifully. When Lot, his nephew, is taken captive along with the city of Sodom. Abram risks his life and the lives of three hundred and eighteen men servants,

He recovered all the goods and brought back his relative Lot and his possessions, together with the women and the other people. (Genesis 14:16, NIV)

When God set out to destroy the wicked city of Sodom, Abram speaks up on their behalf risking angering God himself.

But God had listened to Abraham’s request and kept Lot safe, removing him from the disaster that engulfed the cities on the plain. (Genesis 19:29, NLT)

There is no beauty quite like the beauty of men and women leaning into their purpose by serving others. So, how can we serve others during this time? Are we just to leave the serving to the medical professionals?

Many view the wearing of masks and following social distancing as a way of serving. Some are checking on neighbors to see if they have any needs or prayer concerns. I know of some who have hired individuals who have lost jobs to do some work around their house. We have a couple in our congregation that has taken a significant financial hit in recent months. But instead of holding tighter to what they have, they are actively serving others. They have provided gift cards, gas cards, and food for families who have lost jobs. This couple has sought them out, just to be a blessing.

While most are arguing about their freedoms and rights, which may be constitutionally accurate, this couple has adopted the Philippians 2 mindset.

Don’t be selfish; don’t try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don’t look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. (Philippians 2:3–5, NLT)

That mindset is not easy. I am not there yet. That is why I need the story of Abraham. He, more than most biblical characters, shows that following God’s promise—accepting God’s word and trusting Him in all circumstances—involves real human struggle. Abraham serves as a profound model of faith for us not because he was perfect, but because he was persistent.

Jesus told a parable about a widow that was persistent ending with these words,

And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:7-8, NIV)

Sometimes I feel like God is putting me off. You may feel like that now. Maybe, you need the words of Jesus "he will see that you get justice."

Keep taking those "first steps" of faith. If you would like someone to pray with you or to talk about your next steps of faith, you can go to our website, thecolonies.org and click prayer requests.

For those of you that are prepared to take communion. Let me encourage you to do that now as we acknowledge that we are not perfect, but he is. Allow this table to move you into finding your purpose serving others.