

Title: "Living 3D Faith in Community"

Text: Genesis 12:1-9

Turn with me to Genesis chapter 12 today.

- I want to take you back to that first book of the Bible,
- and specifically to the calling of Abraham,
- the first Patriarch of our faith.

When God decided to set his great plan of salvation into motion,

- He chose to do so by working with one particular family, that of Abraham and Sarah.
- They become a model of what a life of faith looks like.
- So let's take a look and see if all the dimensions of a 3D faith life are evident in them,
- and see in what spheres God calls them to live out that 3D faith life with others.

Even as I read that text, did you notice the upward, inward, and outward dimensions of a 3D faith life beginning to unfold?

The whole story begins with the words, "The LORD had said to Abram."

- And there is the "Upward dimension" beginning to flow down into Abram's life.
- God is the One initiating this relationship with Abram.
- God is the One who is working out His plan of redemption.
- And God is the One calling Abram to be both a beneficiary of that plan of redemption himself,
- and to be an agent of that redemption in the life of others.

"I will bless you," God says to Abram, "and you will be a blessing to others... [Ultimately] all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

So there you see also the "inward and the outward" dimensions of a 3D faith life.

- Abram will be blessed and transformed within,
- and those blessings will then flow out of him into the people around him.

This first calling of Abram, which initiates God's whole plan of salvation, has all three dimensions of a 3D faith life evident right from the start.

But here's what I want you to pay special attention to today:

- When God called Abram to leave his country, and his people, and father's household,
 - he was NOT calling Abram to go off by himself into the wilderness to live a monastic existence as a solitary holy man.
 - This was not a call for Abram to escape the world, and escape the stresses of society, and escape the daily details of family life,
 - in order to live a life of supreme self-containment, detached from all worldly concerns.

I think that is what we sometimes believe a life of "true spirituality" ought to look like.

- We think, "If I really had a deep faith in God, I would look like this. (Show slide of Buddha)"
- Peaceful, content, serene, and without need of anyone or anything.
 - But my friends, that is Buddhism.
 - That is not a 3D biblical faith.

When God called Abram to leave his country, and his people, and his father's household to go to a land he knew not of,

- it was not a call to go off and become like that (Buddha).

And when Abram responded to God's calling, it did not look like this (show slide of one man trudging into the wilderness).

- It looked like this (slide of Abram leading a vast group of people and sheep and goats, etc.).

How do I know that?

- Well, just look at what Abram does in this passage in obedience to God's calling.

God says, "Leave your country, your people, and your father's household,"

-And verse 4 says, "So Abram left, as the LORD had told him, ...and he took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan."

And Abram was actually a wealthy man!

-And wealth in those days was determined by how many flocks and herds you had, and how many shepherds and servants you had in your employ.

-So when Abram set out with all the possessions and people he had accumulated in Haran,

-there were a lot of people and animals going along with him.

-And verse 6 tells us that when they got to Canaan, "there were Canaanites living in the land."

So you see, Abram may have left his country, and his people, and his father's household,

-but when he did so, he also took with him his own family, and his own wider network of people, and went to a new country to live among Canaanites.

Abram is not going off for a solo adventure with God.

-Abram is going off for a continued communal adventure with God.

His adventure of faith will be lived out right in the midst of the normal spheres of life.

-The spheres of family life,

-then our wider network of relationships,

-and then the wider world.

That is a 3D faith life, and both then and now, it takes place right here and right now in the midst of these people around us.

For Abram at the beginning of the passage,

-he is found living with his birth family, his father's household.

-And that household is connected to a wider grouping in that community of Haran, which here is called Abram's people.

-This would be Abram's affinity groups: his extended family, his friends, his co-workers, his network of relationships.

- And that local community of Haran was also part of a wider grouping called the nation of Assyria.
- Everyone for miles around Abram were fellow citizens of that same country.
- There were thousands of people Abram didn't know personally, but they all spoke his language, and shared common customs and culture.

My friends, these are the same spheres of people that everyone of us live amongst.

- We are all born into a family.
- Everyone of us have natural affinity groups of extended family, friends, co-workers, golfing buddies.
- And everyone of us live in a specific place: a city or town, in a county and state, in a nation in the world.

And in this passage, it may sound initially like God is calling Abram to leave all of those spheres of people behind -in order to go off on his own to live a Buddha-like life alone with God in the wilderness.

But that is actually NOT what God is calling him to here, -and it is not what Abram does in response to God's call.

God's calling to Abram is to follow him to a new country and a new people group, -where "he and his extended family will be blessed," -and where he will be a blessing to those other people.

The life God is calling Abram to is one in which each of these spheres of people will be touched and affected -by what God wants to do in and through Abram. -It is not a one dimensional or two dimensional faith life that God is calling Abram to, but a 3 dimensional faith life.

The upward dimension is meant to flow down into Abram's life to bless him, -and it is meant to flow out from Abram's life into those around him: his family,

- and the wider network of people he's in relationship with,
- and ultimately into the wider world around him.

His adventure of faith will be lived out right in the midst of the normal spheres of life.

- In fact, those normal spheres of life will be what we sometimes call the "School of the Spirit.
- Those spheres will be the place where Abram learns to trust and love God.
- And the rest of his story in Genesis bears this out.

It will be in his relationship with his wife Sarah,
-and in their frustration over not being able to get pregnant and have a child of their own,
-that will be where Abram learns to trust God.

It will be in his relationship with his nephew Lot, and the arguments they get into over grazing grounds for their large flocks,
-that will be where Abram learns to trust God.

It will be in his relationship with Eleazar of Damascus, his chief steward,
-one of Abram's extended network of friends and co-workers that Abram learns to trust God and to rely on other people.

It will be in relationship with the Canaanites,
-that Abram learns to be a good neighbor, and to get along with people who don't speak his language,
-and who own all the land he is grazing his flocks in,
-and who control the wells where the water is to be found. He'll learn to trust God.

You see, it's in all these normal spheres of life that Abram grows up and matures as a person, as a husband, as a father and friend, and as a faithful follower of God.

That is a 3D faith life.

- It's about experiencing the upward dimension of the life and love of God, flowing down into our lives right where we live,
-and both transforming our lives personally, inwardly,

-but also flowing out from us to touch the lives of those around us.

Both then and now, this 3D faith life takes place right here and right now in the midst of these people around us.

It doesn't happen off in the wilderness somewhere all by ourselves,

-where no one is around to bug us.

And it doesn't happen in tranquility, when we are all peaceful and serene, and all is well with our soul.

Abram's life, and Sarah's life, and Lot's life were not all peaceful and serene.

-They were full of all the normal stresses and strains of life.

-They were full of joys as well as disappointments.

-They had meals to cook, and disputes to settle, and jobs to do, and tents to put up and take down,

-because they had no settled home to live in.

They were nomadic, and subject to climate, and seasons, and grazing grounds, and the whims of the people groups around them.

They had issues!

-And so did every one of the biblical people in whose lives God was working.

-Their lives were multi-dimensional and complicated.

-Just like your life. Just like my life.

But does God hear the sound of the widow weeping?

-Did he hear the sound of Sarah in her barren-ness crying?

Does he hear the sound of the child ill-treated?

-Did he hear the sound of Hagar and Ishmael in the wilderness abandoned?

Does He hear the sound of the depressed one sinking?

Does He hear the sound of the proud ones laughing?

Does He hear the sound of those in debt and struggling?

Does He hear the sound of the women, and now men, coming forward to testify of ways in which they have been sexually harassed?

Does He hear the sound of corrupt leaders posturing & lying?

Does He hear the sound of the martyrs praying, "Lord have mercy on us? Lord, have mercy on us."

My friends, the Bible is the story of thousands of years of testimony, that the world is broken, but that God does hear.
-And in every generation his generous compassion flows down into the lives of people who call out to Him.

And ultimately He sends His Son, and anoints him to preach good news to the poor,
-and to proclaim freedom for the prisoners,
-and to bind up the broken-hearted,
-and give recovery of sight to the blind
-and release the oppressed,
-and proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

3D faith is about God breaking in to all the spheres of our lives and bringing redemption and forgiveness,
-bringing deliverance and hope,
-bringing life and mercy and compassion.

And the love of God is wide enough, and long enough, and high enough, and deep enough to meet us right where we are,
-wherever we are.

And experiencing that love does not mean we end up looking like this every minute (show Buddha)
-but more that we end up looking like this (show Jesus raising Jairus' daughter.)

We end up bringing the life and mercy and hope and deliverance we have experienced into the lives of others.
-And we bring it right from the midst of our complicated lives into the midst of their complicated lives.

It's about people, you see.
-Not just you and God humming at the center of the universe.
-But God working in and through you to both bless you, and make you a blessing to others.

Let's pray.