

# God Calls Abraham & Sarah

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Genesis 12:1-5

**Sermon Series:**  
**Calling People to Faith**

*...there is a predilection in some ages to deny greatness. We live in such an age.*

I was rummaging through a sales bin at a Bethany Beach bookstore a few weeks ago when I came across this book for \$6.98. Its title, *A Call to Heroism*, caught my eye. It was written by Peter Gibbons, who is associated with the Harvard University Graduate School of Education. Gibbons has studied extensively on the subject of heroes in American culture.

In a former day, we didn't allow our heroes to be human. We airbrushed their flaws out of the picture, leaving heroes of mythical proportion. Perhaps that explains why there are so few photos of Franklin Delano Roosevelt in his wheelchair or why we never heard about John F. Kennedy's philandering.

The pendulum has now swung in the opposite direction. We define people today by their flaws, not their virtues. Maybe that's why Thomas Jefferson is known these days as the president with a slave mistress.

A British historian, James Froude, writing in the late 1800s, observed there is a predilection in some ages to deny greatness. We live in such an age. We have become jaded and cynical about our leaders as heroes.

With this corresponding loss of heroes, we have witnessed a precipitous rise in celebrity status. Take Paris Hilton. Can anyone tell me,

aside from being heiress to the Hilton Hotel fortune, why Paris Hilton is so famous? She is famous for being famous and well known for being well known.

The 11th chapter of Hebrews is the closest thing to a roll call of biblical heroes. This chapter is a virtual who's who of the faithful. The name "Abraham" is prominent in this biblical hall of fame. He is something of a biblical superstar.

Think about it: Christianity, Judaism and Islam are sometimes classified as Abrahamic religions. Each religion traces its lineage back to this one man. Fourteen million Jews, 1.5 billion Muslims and 2.1 billion Christians worldwide all pay homage to this one biblical hero.

In the Koran, Abraham is regarded as the first person to make a full surrender to Allah. He is venerated as Islam's first believer.

In the Jewish Torah, Abraham is revered as the first great Hebrew patriarch. He is honored as the father of the Hebrew nation.

The Apostle Paul, in his New Testament letters, repeatedly exalts Abraham as a paragon of faith. Paul refers to the followers of Jesus Christ as "children of Abraham" (Romans 4). What is it about Abraham that engenders such devotion?

Abraham's call is enumerated for us in Genesis 12. Prior to this chapter, we know nothing about

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Abraham save his lineage. We learn in chapter 11 that his original name is Abram, his father is Terah, he is married to Sarah, his half-sister, and they live in a land called Ur, located in modern day Iraq. Sarah and Abraham’s infertility is singled out for special consideration (11:30), since childlessness in those days was considered a fate worse than death.

God calls Abraham, in Genesis 12, to leave his country, kindred and father’s house. He is told to forsake his homeland and his inheritance “...for a land I will show you” (12:1). God doesn’t disclose their final destination.

Verses 2-3 are what amounts to a sevenfold blessing: 1. “I will make of you a great nation.” 2. “I will bless you.” 3. “I will make your name great.” 4. “You will be a blessing.” 5. “I will bless those who bless you.” 6. “I will curse those who curse you.” 7. “All the people on earth will be blessed by you.”

So, verse 4, Abraham goes, as he has been told. Hebrews tells us “Abraham set out, not knowing where he is going” (Hebrews 11:8). Some would argue this is typical male behavior! We have no record of any hesitancy or delay on Abraham’s part. We are not told if Abraham asks any questions.

The Bible intrigues me as much for what it doesn’t say as for what it says. I wonder what Abraham and Sarah talked about that night!

“Honey,” Abraham says, “we’re moving.”

“Where,” she asks?

“I don’t exactly know where.”

“When?”

“Now!?”

“Why?”

“God told me so.”

“Really?”

So Abraham and Sarah, with their nephew Lot, gather their possessions and set out for God knows where. They stop their caravan in Egypt. So you will know that Abraham’s feet are made of clay, look at verses 11-20. It is not lost on Abraham that his wife is turning heads in Egypt, so he advises that she pass herself off as his sister, which is, you remember, partly true and partly fabricated. Although this move saves Abraham’s life, it consigns Sarah as one of Pharaoh’s sexual consorts. When Pharaoh learns the truth about their identity as husband and wife, he promptly sends them packing.

Abraham and Sarah are remembered in the annals of scripture for being extraordinary people of faith. In Hebrews 11 we are told, “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance” (11:8). “By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised...” (11:9). “By faith he received the power of procreation even though he was too old and Sarah herself was barren...” (11:11).

The key to Abraham’s faith is what we’re told in verse 11: “Because he considered him faithful who had promised.” Abraham

***“There is no calling without a Caller.”***

- Os Guinness

trusted in the One who is able to do what he has promised (Romans 4:21).

Faith trusts God. Faith is not merely saying this chair will hold me. It is entrusting myself to actually sit in it. I didn't observe any of you, when you entered this sanctuary this morning, examine the pew before you took your seat. You automatically committed yourself to sitting there. You did it on faith that the pew would hold you. You came to worship by car this morning. Most of you don't have a clue to how cars run, but that didn't stop you from putting the key in the ignition and applying your foot to the gas pedal to get here. You came on faith!

The last time you went to the doctor, you received a prescription that you probably couldn't read. You took it to a pharmacist, who disappeared behind the counter, only to re-emerge later with a bottle of pills. Take these pills three times a day. Even though you don't exactly know what's in those pills, you take them anyway. Faith is trust. We trust pews and cars and pharmacists. The Bible invites us to trust God, because He is abundantly able to do what He has promised.

In the early days of the American frontier, a weary traveler came to the banks of the mighty Mississippi River for the first time. There was no bridge. Since it was early winter, the river was covered with ice. Would the ice hold him?

Since night was falling and there was a settlement on the other side, the man decided to cross the

ice. He got down on his hands and knees to creep cautiously over the surface of the ice. He was careful to distribute his weight as evenly as possible to keep the ice from breaking beneath him.

Halfway across the river, he heard singing behind him. Out of the dusk, there appeared a man riding on a sleigh pulling a load of coal with a team of horses, upheld by the same ice on which this man was creeping.

Some of us, like this man, have learned only to creep on the promises of God. God is able to do what He has promised. Trust Him! Lean all your weight on Him. We can take Him at His Word.

We are focusing this fall on God's call, the first part of our church's call, equip, send mission. Last Sunday, we examined God's call to Adam and Eve. "Where are you?" God asks. Are you near or far away?

Today, we are considering God's call to Abraham and Sarah. When God calls them to go, they go. They trust God at His word. They believe in the One who is able to do what He has promised.

Os Guinness, in his book titled *The Call*, speaks in terms of God's primary and secondary calls. First and foremost, he says, we are called to someone rather than to something or somewhere. We are called to someone (God) rather than to something (like the practice of law or politics or parenthood) or somewhere (like the inner city or Outer Mongolia). We are not called to do something or go some-where. "There is no calling without a

***The call, first and foremost, is to someone rather than to do something.***

Caller,” Guinness writes. Our primary calling is to enter into a relationship with God, who is known to people through Jesus Christ. It is as a consequence of this primary calling that we are called, secondarily, to our life’s work and vocation.

I’ve been thinking this past week about God’s call in my own life. I initially experienced God’s call as an invitation to enter into a relationship with God. I had been raised in the church. Somehow I thought Christianity was conformity to certain rules such as the Ten Commandments. But what I discovered is that God was calling me to enter into relationship, so I opened my life to Jesus Christ. I acknowledged Jesus to be my Savior from sin and endeavored to follow him as Lord of my life.

This decision turned my life upside down. God’s call influenced my relationship with family and friends as well as my career direction. I was in college at the time, an economics major, determined to join the family business.

There was a time, trust me, when I could never have imagined myself in this place, doing what I’m doing now.

How is God calling you today? Are you being called through this scripture and sermon to enter into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ? The call, first and foremost, is to someone rather than to do something.

If you have answered this call, God may be summoning you to do something or go somewhere today. This call, as I mentioned last Sun-

day, is not only for so-called full-time, religious professionals. God calls every one of us to full-time ministry. Your ministry involves your life as a student or parent, your life’s work in your retirement or career. Your sphere of ministry is among the family and friends God has already placed in your life.

***How is God calling you today?***

