

Take the Adventure the Lord Has for You!

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Ott

Genesis 12:1-4

Sermon Series:
Gifts from the Heart
of God

Some of our adventures in life are wonderful fun and some of them pose difficult challenges.

Wow! To think that we have so quickly moved through the wonder of the season of Advent, with the Glorious Sounds of Christmas and all manner of wonderful music and sharing, and now, tomorrow is the last day of 2007. That we are soon to enter into the new chapter of 2008 seems difficult to grasp. What we know is that every one of us will experience adventures in life in 2008, some of which will be delightful and others more challenging.

What were some of your adventures in the last year? You can probably think of a number of them. I remember last summer, my family went para-sailing at the beach. Now that was adventure! Then, just this week, we had a wonderful time with our daughter Lindsay and her husband, Don, in Raleigh, North Carolina, sharing, among other activities, in the adventure of the movie National Treasure 2: Book of Secrets, and an afternoon of Frisbee golf. Some of our adventures in life are wonderful fun and some of them pose difficult challenges. An adventure is an activity or experience in life that may involve some uncertainty and risk. An adventure certainly may have exciting or terrifying or unexpected dimensions to it.

Some years ago, my daughter Shelley and I were in the city of

Paris and I went to see Sacre Coeur (Sacred Heart), a famous church that has a commanding view of the city of Paris. We stepped off their metro to discover an elevator and a spiral staircase. We assumed the elevator was for handicapped access, so we took the stairs. One hundred stairs on a spiral staircase later, five flights up and barely able to walk, we thought differently. For some rejuvenation, we forced ourselves to stop at a sidewalk café for a Coke® and a little espresso. On reaching Sacre Coeur, we discovered the sanctuary was being renovated so there wasn't much to see inside the building. We heard the view from the tower was breathtaking. I bought two tickets and looked around for the elevator. Shelley said, "Look, Dad. The sign says take this staircase!" It was another spiral staircase, wound so tightly two people couldn't fit side-by-side. We went up and up and up, round and round some 334 steps straight up until we were dizzy and I had to think about lifting my thighs to keep moving up (strangely, Shelley had more energy than I did) and wow, there was all of Paris in front of us. What a great adventure!

When you think of your last adventure, you may think of traveling. You might also think of a house project you undertook or some aspect of your employment or golf game or fishing trip or an illness you

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have been coping with or a person in your life who requires your full attention. An adventure is virtually any experience of life that absorbs your energy and captures your mind.

I can think of nothing so soul satisfying as undertaking some great adventure with great vision, great friends by our side and our great Lord with us. We are on a great adventure here at VPC, with great vision and great friends and our great Lord. What is the adventure that you are facing as we begin the New Year? Maybe you are up against something really tough and that's your adventure. Maybe you have some new idea or challenge, some new calling in life. Maybe you have a major problem to solve in your life or some significant project to undertake. What adventure is facing you today?

Our text for this morning, Genesis 12:1-4, describes the beginning of one of the greatest adventures ever recorded, that of Abraham and Sarah, known in that day as Abram and Sarai. They are living in a community known as Ur of the Chaldees. It is the Vienna, Virginia community of their time. Abram and Sarai have a good life. They have no children and enjoy life with their wider family and friends. Abram is seventy-five years old. Retired. Enjoying social security. A member of C.A.R. P.—the Chaldean Association of Retired Persons. He's just minding his own business. Life's been a pleasing adventure.

And then, God speaks to Abram: "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go 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 can just imagine the conversation that ensued between Abram and Sarai! Guess what honey, our Lord wants us to move! Move? Move? You have to be kidding, Abram! Move where? I don't know, Sarai. The Lord said, To the land which I will show you! Whatever Sarai said in return I'm willing to bet it wasn't, Oh, wow, that sounds like a fun adventure. I'm so ready to go where we have no idea where we are going and to move away from this community where we have spent a lifetime and know every one and have a very nice life! Yet, God was asking them to trust him and to leave the known and move into the unknown in pursuit of a vision they did not really understand except that they were being asked to trust God.

Some time ago, Ben Johnson, then Professor of Spirituality at Columbia Theological Seminary in Atlanta, also ran a modest publishing company by the name of CTS Press. They published materials on Christian spirituality and congregational vitality. Ben called me one day to say, "Stan, I am retiring and I am going to sell CTS Press and I am going to sell it to you." I said, "What if I don't want it?" He replied, "You heard me. I am selling the press to you." I thought to myself, "What?" I said, "Ben, I have spent my working life as a pastor. I don't know a thing about publishing, marketing,

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shipping and so on. I've got to pray about this." He said, "Fine, pray about it, but I am selling it to you." Morning after morning I awoke at 5 a.m. in a cold sweat. Could I do it? Should I do it? After six weeks of that, I was lying awake one morning thinking, if I keep waking up with this much anxiety, can this be the will of God, when as clearly and forcefully as if the Lord spoke the words to me came the thought, Take the adventure the Lord has for you.

Now, I knew instantly that those words were a quote from the wonderful adventure stories of C. S. Lewis's, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, stories that I know Pete James loves as well. Whenever the young heroes and heroines on the world known as Narnia were given a task, a difficult, even a life-threatening task, they would say to one another, "Let us take the adventure Aslan has for us." For in Narnia, Aslan the Lion is the same as our Lord Jesus. And they would move out trusting the Lion to be with them.

So, for example, in the book *The Silver Chair*, C. S. Lewis has Prince Rilian about to make a break for freedom out of a terrible prison. Prince Rilian is given a sign of his Lord to remind him of the Lord's constant presence, and Prince Rilian says, "This [sign] signifies that Aslan will be our good lord, whether he means us to live or die. ... now we shall all kneel and kiss his likeness and then all shake hands with one another, as true friends that may be

shortly parted. And then, let us descend into the City and take the adventure that is sent to us." A great adventure has great vision with great friends and our great Lord with us. So while lying in bed at five in the morning when the words "take the adventure the Lord has for you" came to mind, I realized that the adventure being given me was clear and that my fears about the decision had more to do with my own spirit than my dependence upon the Holy Spirit to be with me. So I said, "Yes Lord!" And though that opportunity did present some major challenges, we also saw our Lord bear much fruit through it.

The Book of Genesis doesn't say what went through Abram's mind when God asked him to leave his country and his family and his father's household, doesn't say what Sarai thought, doesn't indicate how complex the preparations for travel were, but we can imagine them. They may well have been awake at five in the morning in a cold sweat. If Abram had read *The Chronicles of Narnia*, I wouldn't be surprised to learn he awoke early one morning with the single thought planted in his brain, "Abram, take the adventure the Lord has for you." Abram and Sarai took their adventure and the world was turned upside down.

The truth is, whatever your adventure may be, the apostle Paul puts it in perspective with one of my very favorite texts from Romans 14, "7 For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. 8 If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we

What adventure does God have for you?

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belong to the Lord. ⁹ For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.” The greatest adventure is the interior adventure of the soul: Trusting God and following Jesus Christ. There is no adventure with a greater vision or a greater Friend.

What does it mean to “take the adventure”? To take it is to seize it, grab it and grip it. Take it on, bring it on, whatever it is. Because whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s, so “Lord, whatever this adventure is going to be on the exterior, what ever joys and whatever heartache may challenge the interior of my soul, I am going to trust and follow you. So we read, “So Abram left, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran” (Genesis 12:1-4). He took the adventure.

What adventure does God have for you? A job to do, an illness to cope with, a relationship to heal, a trip to make, a friendship to continue? Think about how that adventure gives you the opportunity for the still greater interior adventure of the soul, learning to trust God with every detail of your life, every moment of your life.

Last week, I spoke about the wonderful word in the Gospel of John, “...but as many as did receive Jesus – receive him into their lives to follow him – to them he gave the power to become children of God.” When we open our lives to the living Jesus, we know the reality of his forgiveness

and his love and commit ourselves to trusting Jesus and following Jesus, and we begin the great adventure for which God created us, the adventure of trusting God in every moment of our lives. Robert Schuller tells of, “Corrie ten Boom [who] was a courageous Dutch woman, who was imprisoned in a Nazi prison camp during World War II because her family helped to hide Jewish people from the Gestapo. During her imprisonment, Corrie endured some of the worst degradation a person can experience. Her sister, Betsy, died in the camps. But through all her suffering, Corrie never lost her faith in God. In fact, Corrie like to define faith as [F-A-I-T-H]: Fantastic Adventuring In Trusting Him.¹ Corrie ten Boom took the adventure the Lord had for her. Take the adventure the Lord has for you! So, whether the circumstances of the adventure of your life are exciting or irritating or even devastating, your real adventure is the interior adventure of the soul, trusting God in the midst of every moment and detail of your life.

Now, as a brief aside, I must say that at times we have a way of casting our eyes on other people’s adventures thinking, Why not me? Why don’t I have that person’s job or home or health or car or husband or wife or freedom or youth or money? In those times, the Spirit of the Lord whispers in our ears, “That is not the adventure I have for you.” Sometimes we are tempted by an adventure that we know is wrong—something that is sin. The Lord says, “That is not the adventure I have for

...God is saying, "If you take that adventure, it will take you! I want you to take the adventure I have for you. Trust me. As you take my adventure, I will be your vision and your soul's great friend."

you." I find myself thinking of this adventure or that adventure in life that appeals to me and realizing that God is saying, "If you take that adventure, it will take you! I want you to take the adventure I have for you. Trust me. As you take my adventure, I will be your vision and your soul's great friend." "Let not your hearts be troubled. Trust God and trust also in me"(John 14:1).

Some years ago, a man by the name of Ben Patterson and three of his friends climbed Mount Lyell, the highest peak in Yosemite National Park. Ben says, "Our base camp was less than 2,000 feet from the peak, but the climb to the top and back was to take the better part of a day, due in large part to the difficulty of the glacier we had to cross to get to the top. The morning of the climb we started out chattering and cracking jokes.

"As the hours passed, the two more experienced mountaineers opened up a wide gap between me and my less-experienced companion. Being competitive by nature, I began to look for shortcuts to beat them to the top. I thought I saw one to the right of an outcropping of rock – so I went, deaf to the protests of my companion. Perhaps it was the effect of the high altitude, but the significance of the two experienced climbers not choosing this path did not register in my consciousness. It should have, for thirty minutes later I was trapped on top of the Lyell Glacier. I was only about ten feet from the safety of a rock, but one little slip and I wouldn't stop sliding until I

landed in the valley floor some fifty miles away! It was nearly noon, and the warm sun had the glacier glistening with slippery ice. I was stuck, and I was scared.

"It took an hour for my experienced climbing friends to find me. Standing on the rock I wanted to reach, one of them leaned out and used an ice ax to chip two little footsteps in the glacier. Then he gave me the following instructions: 'Ben, you must step out from where you are and put your foot where the first foothold is. When your foot touches it, without a moment's hesitation swing your other foot across and land it on the next step. When you do that, reach out and I will take your hand and pull you to safety.'

"That sounded real good to me. It was the next thing he said that made me more frightened than ever. 'But listen carefully: As you step across, do not lean into the mountain! If anything, lean out a bit. Otherwise, your feet may fly out from under you, and you will start sliding down.'

Ben said, "I don't like cliffs. When I am on the edge of a cliff, my instincts are to lie down and hug the mountain, to become one with it, not to lean away from it! But that was what my good friend was telling me to do." Now at that point, there were two voices in Ben's head. His own voice saying, "Lean into the mountain, become one with it," and the voice of his friend, "Lean out from the mountain. Otherwise your feet may fly out from under you." When we hear two voices, the voice of our Lord saying, "Take the adventure I have for you," and some other voice,

***Can we trust
God?
Absolutely!***

could even be our own voice, saying out of fear or some other motivation, “No, take my adventure instead,” we have a critical decision to make in life. Whom are you going to follow?

Ben said, “For a moment, based solely on what I believed to be the good will and good sense of my friend, I decide to say no to what I felt, to stifle my impulse to cling to the security of the mountain, to lean out, step out, and traverse the ice to safety. It took less than two seconds to find out if my faith was well founded.”²

No matter what you and I face in life, it is good to remember our Lord is loving and faithful. Can we trust God? Absolutely! No matter what adventure comes your way, remember the words of Jesus, “Let not your hearts be troubled. Trust God, trust also in me,” and you will know the presence and reality of the loving God of the universe from the beginning of the adventure to its end. Take the adventure the Lord has for you!

¹ Robert H. Schuller, Prayer: My Soul’s Adventure with God (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1995) p. 28.

² Ben Patterson, Waiting.

All five pages:
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