

**Foundations: Abraham I—THE CALL**  
**Genesis 12:1-8 (AFBC 7/16/17)**

This morning, we continue our look at foundational passages of Scripture as we turn our attention to the Old Testament Patriarchs. We'll begin with Abraham, the man who is often referred to as the "father of our faith."

The word patriarch comes from "patria," the Greek word for family, and "arch," which means "the head." So, a patriarch... is the head or leader of a family.

As we use the term in relation to Scripture, the Patriarchs are those leaders through whom God worked to give birth to His people—the Hebrews--and to their Jewish faith—which has now led to our Christian faith.

Over the next few weeks, we'll consider the lives and ministries of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. We'll spend three or four Sundays hearing each one's story—examining their testimonies—and seeing what we can learn from their witness.

So much of the story of our faith begins with Abraham. And his story begins with God's call--which is our text for today, "The Call of Abraham"—although, at the time when this life-changing encounter with God takes place, he's known simply as "Abram."

If we're to know God and experience the blessings of a close relationship with Him, there must first be a beginning. This relationship has to start somewhere.

Jesus would later talk about this when He said, "You must be born again." Birth is a beginning. Every person of faith has a beginning point in their walk with the Lord. So, how do we begin?

I invite you to travel far back in history—back to the time of Abraham. As I mentioned earlier, Abraham is often referred to as the Father of our Faith. He's called this because he and his family represent a new kind of relationship with God—a new beginning, if you will, in this relationship.

Abraham is introduced to us in Genesis 12. From there, you cannot go much further to the left in the Bible. There are only eleven chapters prior to our introduction to Abraham and his

family—but it’s a story that, in a sense, takes the rest of the Bible to tell. Follow along, please, as I read Genesis 12:1-8:

**12 The LORD had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.**

**<sup>2</sup> “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.**

**<sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you,  
and whoever curses you I will curse;  
and all peoples on earth  
will be blessed through you.”**

**<sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.**

**<sup>6</sup> Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. <sup>7</sup> The LORD appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him.**

**<sup>8</sup> From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD.**

Let’s quickly review how we get to this place in Genesis. God created the heavens and the earth in Genesis 1. God created the man and woman in chapter 2. So far, so good.

In chapter 3, however, we have “the fall of man.” Sin enters the world; and for the next eight chapters we’re told about the consequences of sin. We learn about Cain and Abel, Noah and the great flood, and the Tower of Babel.

So far, we’re dealing with the entire human race. Sure, we hear about some individuals, but the emphasis is on the whole world—

a world created, a world fallen into sin, a world destroyed, a world too confused to understand each other.

Beginning with Abraham, though, the emphasis changes. The focus shifts to one man—who begins a faith journey with God—and to his wife and family and their descendants, all of whom are part of God’s plan to put this broken world back together again.

One of Abraham’s descendants, you see, is Jesus Christ, the Savior. The heavenly Father was already planning to send His Son to the world when, way back in Genesis 12, He issued His call to Abraham. God’s purpose was to redeem the world.

He had to get started somewhere, so He began with Abraham. Let’s consider this Scripture and see what we can learn from Abraham’s experience with God.

**I.** The first thing we see is that **GOD EXTENDS THE CALL.** Not Abraham. Not us. God!

This is how it is in the relationship between people and The Almighty. God is so completely beyond our comprehension--His thoughts and ways far above our own--if anything happens between us, it’s at God’s initiative.

Theologians sometimes refer to God as the “Holy Other.” Some would argue that it’s not even appropriate to speak of God as “existing”--because that’s something that we do. WE exist.

We have a beginning point, and we occupy space and time; but God is beyond all of these categories of existence that are common to us. If this is hard to comprehend, that’s okay.

If the likes of you and me could completely comprehend God, then He would have to be something less than God. Our finite minds can never fully fathom the wonder and mystery, the Holy Other-ness of God.

If there’s to be any relationship between God and us, then He must extend the call. And so, from the “great beyond,” God entered our time and space and said to Abram, ‘I’m calling on you. I want to get this started with you. I want to set the whole Gospel story in motion by beginning with you.

It would be a long time before Israel reached her Promised Land and longer still before God was ready to send to us His one and only Son, but it was time to begin. And Abram got the first call.

He responded to God's call in faith, but it was all the result of God's initiative. And the same is true for us today.

If you're a person of faith, it's because you've answered God's call in your life. The Holy Spirit convicts us of the reality of sin. God's Spirit moves us to confess our sin and turn to the Savior.

Apart from God's call, we're hopeless to enter into a right relationship with Him. "For by grace are you saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8).

We do choose whether to answer God's call—and we're all accountable for our decisions—but the initiative is always His. God—and only God—extends this call to us.

**II.** Notice also here that **GOD SETS THE RULES.** As God begins this relationship with Abram, He tells him: 'You'll have to leave your country and your people and your father's household, Abram, and go to the land that I'm going to show you.'

For Abram, the rules involved getting him away from his familiar turf and putting him out on the frontiers. There God could work with him and grow him into the person of faith He needed.

The Lord's demand was clear in that Abram knew he would have to go, but it was also vague in that he didn't know exactly where.

Sometimes this is how God works. He reveals part of His will, but not all of it. He tells us what the first step will be, but not the second.

Abram would have liked to have had the whole journey mapped out in front of him; but God sets the rules, and He chose not to reveal the final destination to Abram--not yet.

Perhaps God was teaching Abram how to depend on Him. God was also teaching him that He sets the rules and leaves it to us to obey them.

**III.** Which brings us to a third understanding about this relationship: **GOD DICTATES THE TERMS.** The God who by His power spoke this world into being has every right to do this.

Listen to what God says to Abram: **"I will make you into a great nation,".... "I will bless you... I will make your name great... I will bless those who bless you.... and I will bless others through you."** (Genesis 12:2-3)

Abram, himself, did not cause any of this to happen. He merely allowed God to work through his life according to God's will.

When you and I enter into relationship with God, we need to understand that God has the right to dictate the terms. Not only does He have the right, He also has the wisdom to do this in such a way as to bring about our highest good.

Thomas Boswell wrote a book called How Life Imitates the World Series. He tells a story about Earl Weaver, former manager of the Baltimore Orioles, and how he handled one of his star players, "Mr. October," Reggie Jackson.

Weaver had a rule that no player could steal a base unless given the sign to steal. Jackson did not like the rule. He felt he could read pitchers and catchers as well as the coaches, so he wanted to decide for himself when to steal—and he looked for the right opportunity to prove his point.

In an important game, Jackson carefully studied the pitcher and catcher and decided this was his chance. Without getting a sign from the coach, he took off to second base. He easily beat the throw. He stood up at second, shaking the dust from his uniform, and feeling very satisfied that he had proven his case.

Later, however, Weaver took Jackson aside and explained why he had not given him the steal sign. First, his next batter was Lee May, his best hitter other than Jackson. When Jackson stole second, first base was left open, allowing the opposing team to walk May rather than pitch to him.

The next batter had not been strong against the opposing pitcher, so Weaver had to use a pinch hitter that he would have preferred to have saved until later in the game.

The problem was that Jackson was only looking at the pitcher and catcher. Weaver was watching the dynamics of the whole game, and thus had a very different perspective on what should be done.

Now, this same principle applies to our lives in our relationship with God. Our view of life is very limited. Only God can see the big picture. It's wise for us to live life on His terms.

**IV.** So, Abram left his familiar surroundings, not knowing where he was going, but trusting God to direct his paths. Once we understand that "God issues the call," that "He sets the rules," and that "He dictates the terms," it then becomes obvious that **GOD** also **GETS THE CREDIT** for whatever is accomplished.

Don't miss the fact that Abram was no youngster when God called him to go on this journey. He already qualified for free coffee at the fast food restaurants--free checking, too; and at age seventy-five, he didn't even bother to show his i.d. anymore.

He wouldn't be traveling first class, either. The trip would be long and difficult. Surely the Lord gets the credit for Abram even being able to undertake such a journey.

And this fact was not lost on Abram. In verse 7, we're told that when Abram arrived at Shechem, in the middle of what would soon become the "Promised Land," he built an altar to the Lord. In verse 8, as he neared Bethel, Abram built another altar.

Let me point out something interesting. The Bible does not say anywhere that God ever told Abram "thank you" for his faith or his obedience. Abram built an altar for the purpose of worshipping God and saying "thank you" to Him—because, again, God rightfully gets "all" the credit.

If you teach a Sunday School class or serve as a Deacon, and if you give a tithe and more of your income to the Lord's work, and if you visit and witness and do a hundred other things for the Lord, don't be waiting around for a "thank you." God deserves everything you and I do for Him... and more.

And if anything does get accomplished for Him through our lives, all the credit belongs to Him and not us. In all things, God gets the glory.

**V.** Before we get to feeling sorry for ourselves, though, remember this: **GOD MAKES IT WORTH IT.** If we continue on this journey with God, He'll make it worthwhile. He'll see to it that our relationship with Him is the most precious thing in our lives.

This is why Abram worshipped God—not because he had to, but because he wanted to praise the One who had made his life worth living.

Many people do not experience this in their relationship with God, and I have to think it's because they've never really understood God's call.

We must acknowledge that God does it all because we can't. We have to place ourselves completely in His hands, trusting in the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ, to do for us what we can never do for ourselves.

Only God can forgive us and cleanse us and claim us as His child—which is what He does when we confess our sin, and receive Jesus as our Savior and Lord.

When we do this, we're agreeing to God's rules for this relationship: namely, that 'He sets the rules,' 'He dictates the terms,' and 'He gets all the credit'—because He's God, and Jesus Christ, His Son, is Lord of all--OUR Lord.

This is what it means to answer God's call. It's how we know peace and joy and abundance of life—life that's positive and good, life that has purpose and direction, life as God intends for us to experience it.

But it must be on God's terms, because, friends, He's God! We're not! So, are you ready right now to answer His call in your life?