

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

²“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.

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

⁴So 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. ⁵He 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.

⁶Abram 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. ⁷The 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.

⁸From 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.

⁹Then Abram set out and continued toward the Negev.

TANGIBLE FAITH FOR BEGINNERS

Exactly what I need. We started that list last Sunday and first on that list was: champion. Whether I believe it or not, I need a champion. Whether I believe it or not, my sin, my original sin, inherited from my parents, is a problem I can’t fix. And whether I believe it or not, there is a champion who has defeated Satan and sin and has earned the righteousness needed not only for me but for all the people of the world. A champion is exactly what I need and that box has been checked by Jesus. Whoever believes in Jesus and his saving work will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And so, faith is exactly what I need next, and faith is exactly what you need too, and spirit-willing we will check that box off today with the help of God.

Abram, often called the “father of faith”, and his first interactions with the Lord is a great place for us to start learning about faith. Faith has been defined as being sure of what we hope for and certain about what we do not see (He 11:1), but it sure does help when we are able to see this definition in action. And in the first book of the Bible, Genesis chapter 12, the Call of Abram, helps us see faith in tangible ways.

Tangible faith starts with your feet, not your heart.

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*²“I will make you into a great nation,
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*³I will bless those who bless you,
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“So,” as our text reads, “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. ⁵ 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.”

I appreciate how this text only shares the facts. There are no feelings in this text. We can surmise how Abram might have felt about moving all his possessions at the age of 75, but we don't know for sure how Abram felt about moving all his stuff at the age of 75. Neither are we told about Abram's faith. In future texts we will be told, *“Abram believed and it was credited to him as righteousness”* (Gen 15:6), but not in this text. In this text we are told, *“Abram went, as the Lord had told him.”*

Tangible faith for beginners starts with your feet, not your heart. We see this truth in the Gospel today. Where were the feet of Nicodemus? His feet were with Jesus! Both feet? Yes, both feet. What about his heart? Was his heart with Jesus? His whole heart? What about your heart?

Is your heart fully persuaded God has you on the right path that leads to eternal life? Or is your heart playing “half-sies”? “I do believe I am on the right track to eternal life, but Lord help me overcome my unbelief.” Or maybe your heart is skeptical? “Can anything good come out of Jesus' suffering and death and out of my suffering and death?” I have no evidence, but the possibility exists that someone in here is only posing as a believer, putting on a show of faith, but has no faith. There is a little Judas Iscariot who lives in me. Every sinful nature has a little hypocrite in his heart.

But the good news for me and the good news for you is our feet are here, walking in God's Word and listening God's Word. And God's Word is always good for your heart health. Have you ever tried to take care of your physical heart through diet or exercise? Your physical heart hates the very thought of putting on tennis shoes and exercising, but if you just put on your shoes and start walking, maybe just maybe your physical heart will catch up to your feet even if that catching up only happens after you stop walking.

Walk in the way of the Lord. The way of the Lord is to listen to what he says and then to do what he says. No, maybe you won't, at least, initially, rejoice with those who said to you, “Let us go to the house of the Lord.” Maybe your heart, initially, won't be burning as the hearts of the disciples did on their walk to Emmaus. But faith does come from hearing the message. Jesus says, “my sheep listen to my voice, I know them, and they follow me.” Listen to what Jesus tells you to do. Listen to his promises. And do what he says. Have your feet in the right places and maybe, just maybe, your heart will catch up.

Publicly displays affection because of a promise.

It did for Abram. Listen to what happened next. *“⁶ 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. ⁷ The Lord appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring^[a] I will give this land.” So he built an altar there to the Lord, who had appeared to him. ⁸ 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. ⁹ Then Abram set out and continued toward the Negev.”*

Sorry, not sorry, for all the PDA here. Abram public displayed affection for the Lord by building an altar twice and by calling on his name. We don't know if the Canaanites or other people saw and heard these public displays of affection, but we don't know if the Canaanites or other people didn't see or hear these public displays of affection either.

I was watching the school drop off as I normally do and I was wondering what an equivalent for building an altar to the Lord would look like. And then I saw something I don't remember ever seeing at student drop off. I saw a sixth grade boy before he got out of the car, turn to his mother and give her a kiss and I thought that is what building an altar looks like but I would never single out sixth grade boy in a sermon, but I am drawing attention to two sixth grade boys because another front-seat passenger reached for his mother and gave a big hug before he got out of the car.

In what ways do you, metaphorically speaking, build an altar to the Lord? How do you publicly display your affection for him? Did you bring a financial offering for him? Ten years ago I could be sitting high up the pews and if there wasn't anything in the offering plate, I would be concerned. Now I look at an empty offering plate and rejoice because God's people are giving online. You have more money to love the Lord in your phone than you do in your wallet or purse. One day our ushers will bring empty offering plates to the altar, but not if our envelope givers have something to say about it and they do. I pray all of our generous givers would live long and live well and publicly display affection to the Lord of a long time. Cash and coin giving is not as good, but it still works. If you have two paper bills in your wallet or purse, please love the Lord with the higher dollar amount or even better the Lord with both bills or go crazy for Jesus and put in three. Love the Lord with your treasures.

And love the Lord with your time. Let this hour of worship and the hour of Sunday school or Bible class during the week be every week "givens" to the Lord. And then if possible give another hour of more to the Lord in service. Last Sunday we had a voters meeting in the sanctuary because a family had reserved the fellowship hall and were celebrating a birthday, but there were members of that family who delayed their birthday celebration so they could be a part of our congregational meeting. And when I asked a couple of those family members what they were doing at the meeting, they said they wanted to be at the meeting. At that moment, you would have thought I had better take the sleeve of my suitcoat and whip a slobbery smooch off the side of my cheek.

No, those boys were not making sure I was looking at their public displays of affection, but neither were they hiding it either. And so may we with our treasures and time and with our talk display affection to our Lord like Abraham did, but our final question is why. Why did Abram build these altars and call on God's name. What did Abraham tangibly receive from this long walk? Abram didn't get anything tangible or material from this long walk, only a promise that would apply to his offspring.

What are you receiving from the Lord today? At times, a worshipper at Grace might walk back to their car and wonder what they got out of worship that day. A worshipper might reflect on how he didn't get anything tangible out of church, only promises. Some promises that will only be realized when Jesus returns. Today, like every worship day, I am getting what I need and I pray God the Holy Spirit is checking the box for what you need today and every day. Amen.