

When God Calls
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- Opening questions:
 - The “comfort zone” has become a popular expression in our culture.
 - Anyone have examples of a time when you really got out of your comfort zone? What was that like and how was God there for you in that time?

The Big Idea of this lesson really consists of some big QUESTIONS:
When God says GO how will you respond? What will you give up? Who will you leave behind? Where will you find your true security? The story of Abraham’s calling can really be summed up in two words: TRUST and OBEY.

Genesis 12:1–9 (ESV) Beginning in verse one:

12 Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you.

- Verse one: God told Abram to go out from three key things in his life. **What were they? Why was leaving these a BIG DEAL to Abram?**
- The phrase **your country (or land)** implies more than just a location on a map. This was where Abram had “put down his roots.” To obey the command to go out from *your land* meant leaving his familiar surroundings, his community.
- When God commanded Abram to go out from his relatives, He was teaching Abram that he could not obey God fully while clinging to the security of his extended family.
- Then there was leaving his “father’s house.” This really meant leaving his identity. Abram’s name and identity came from his father’s house. Leaving that name meant losing his identity.
- In his hometown Abram was SOMEBODY. Obeying God meant going where he was NOBODY. (Illustration: Moving to Atlanta.)
- All people have these three basic needs: security, identity, and community. God told Abram to walk away from all three.
- **Why would God ask Abram to make this difficult choice? Why would he ask you or me to do the same?**

Our Lesson Writer tells us,

When we compare the three things the Lord asked Abram to go out from, we discover the Lord was asking Abram to let go of the very things the citizens of Babel/Babylon had tried to grasp for themselves. (security, community, identity) In order for God to use Abram and his family to bring His redeeming grace to lost humanity, Abram would have to trust the Lord by letting those things go instead of clinging to them.”¹

- Verse one: **What little detail did God leave out of this plan? Why?**
- Has God ever used that one with you? Has He ever said to you: *“Don’t worry about where I’m taking you, just follow me...just trust me!”*
- When God says “Go” He doesn’t always tell us “where.”

Chuck Swindoll calls it “Going and not knowing.” He writes:

“In a nutshell, that’s the life of faith. Going . . . not knowing. Who among us hasn’t stepped out in faith, leaving a sure thing, walking away from everything familiar, staring down a long, dark tunnel with no light at the end? And yet filled with unimaginable excitement. Going . . . yet not knowing. Obeying . . . yet not understanding. Beginning a journey that is unpredictable, risky, and uncharted. One that appears virtually insane to others . . . yet is prompted by none other than the Lord Himself.”²

Pastor Jack Hayford says,

“It’s a more certain proposition to follow the Lord, not knowing where you’re going, than to think you know where you’re going and you’re not following the Lord.”

- Here’s the point: God was saying to Abram, “I want you to leave everything and everyone that makes you feel secure, so you’ll find your security in me.”
- God was also saying, “I have big plans for you, but they can’t be accomplished if you don’t get out of your comfort zone.”
- While the Lord didn’t immediately share the destination, He DID share the plans he had for Abram, and how He would take care of him.

² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

- God made a covenant, with Abram and some promises TO Abram
- Warren Wiersbe said it well: *“We are not saved by making promises to God; we are saved by believing God’s promises to us.”³*
- Verse two: Notice God promised Abram in the new land He would give him the same three things Abram was asked to leave in verse one:
 1. In the place of his land, or community, God would make Abram **into a great nation.**
 2. In place of the security Abram derived from living among his relatives, God would **bless** him, giving him divine security.
 3. Finally, in place of the name, or reputation, Abram received from his father, God would make Abram’s **name great**, establishing a unique identity and reputation.⁴
- God promised to make Abram the father of a “great nation.” **Why was that a farfetched idea?**

- Abram was seventy-five years old (Gen. 12:4), and his wife Sarai was unable to conceive (11:30). Yet God's entire promise rested on the necessity for this couple to bear a child.⁵
- **Why would God call such an unlikely couple for such an important task?** Paul gives you the answer in 1 Corinthians 1:26–31.⁶
- When God calls us often our first reaction is: "I could never do that!" That's an accurate statement...without the power of the Holy Spirit. But, WITH the Spirit nothing is impossible for God.
- Another concern we have when God calls us to step out of our "comfort zone:" What will people say? What if people attack me for this?
- Verses two and three: God promised to handle this.
- To "bless" meant to fill with benefits, either as an end in itself or to make the object blessed a source of further blessing for others.⁷
- God is the source and the "agent" of blessing. People can also give a blessing. Still, blessing a person is really calling on God to bless them.
- In another sense the word [blessing] could mean to "praise," as if filling the object of blessing with honor and good words. Thus individuals might bless God (Exod. 18:10; Ruth 4:14; Pss. 68:19; 103:1), while God also could bless men and women (Gen. 12:3; Num. 23:20; 1 Chron. 4:10; Ps. 109:28; Isa. 61:9). Persons might also bless one another (Gen. 27:33; Deut. 7:14; 1 Sam. 25:33), or they might bless things (Deut. 28:4; 1 Sam. 25:33; Prov. 5:18).⁸
- Words of blessing could also be used as a salutation or greeting, similar to an invocation of "peace" (*shalom*, Gen. 48:20).⁹
- In the NT the word "blessed" often translates *makarios*, meaning "blessed, fortunate, happy." It occurs 50 times in the NT, most familiarly in the "beatitudes" in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:3–11). Thus the NT concept stresses the joy people experience as children of God and citizens of his kingdom of God (Rom. 4:7–8; Rev. 1:3; 14:13).¹⁰
- Then there's cursing. Not "cussing" but cursing!
- Here in verses two and three the text uses two different Hebrew words for *curse*. God promised to curse (*'arar*) anyone cursing (*qalal*) Abram. The first term carries the idea of thwarting someone in their efforts. The second term denotes taking someone lightly— that is, dishonoring or treating the person with contempt.¹¹
- God promised Abram: *"If you're following me in obedience, don't worry about people who come after you. I'll take care of anyone who puts you down for following me."*

Isaiah 54:17 (ESV) promises God's people:

¹⁷ no weapon that is fashioned against you shall succeed,
and you shall refute every tongue that rises against you in judgment.
This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord
and their vindication from me, declares the Lord."

- Verse three: Abram would not just receive God's blessing, he would be God's "conduit" of blessing to the world. As we've said in earlier studies, God was working toward a plan to redeem fallen people.
- How would God bring His redeeming grace to lost, scattered humanity? He would do it through Abram and his descendants. Ultimately this promise was fulfilled in Jesus Christ, God's Son, who took on human flesh as a descendant of Abraham (Matt. 1:1).¹²

⁴ So Abram went, as the Lord had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

- Verse four: The first few words say it so eloquently, "So Abram went, as the Lord had told him..." Every believer could pray that those words would be said of us!
- Before we put "Father Abram" on a pedestal above mere mortals like us, it's true Abram obeyed God, **what else did he also periodically do?**
- Abram obeyed; yet he sometimes messed up; still in James 2:23 we're told he "...was called a friend of God." **Why is that comforting to us?**

Warren Wiersbe has a great word on this:

*Abraham and Sarah were not perfect, but their walk was generally characterized by faith and faithfulness. When they sinned, they suffered for it; and the Lord was always ready to forgive when they repented. "The victorious Christian life," said George Morrison, "is a series of new beginnings."*¹³

- The point: "Abram went, as the Lord had told him." He obeyed.
- Abram didn't go alone. Look at verses five and six:

⁵ And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people that they had acquired in Haran, and they set out to go to the land of Canaan. When they came to the land of Canaan, ⁶ Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land.

- When you read this description of Abram heading out with all his stuff; and his "kin"; and his hired hands. Don't you get a mental image of the Beverly Hillbillies? Can't you just see it all tied on the truck with Sarai in a rocking chair on the top!
- Verse six would imply that Abram wasn't worried about the Canaanites in the land because He knew God would clear them out.
- As God directed their journey, He began to reveal the destination in stages. God also confirmed the plan to Abram each step of the way. And every time God gave him confirmation that he was on the right path, Abram built an altar and worshipped.

⁷ Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him. ⁸ From there he moved to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. And there he built an altar to the Lord and called upon the name of the Lord. ⁹ And Abram journeyed on, still going toward the Negeb.

So, What’s the Takeaway?

- Leaving a place of community, security, and identity is a scary thing!
- It’s also one of the biggest tests of the strength of our faith in God.
- Is God asking you to move out of your comfort zone for Him?
- Maybe you’ve already stepped out and this lesson was just a little reassurance from God that He will meet your needs as you obey His will.
- If you’re not in either situation right now, you either have been or will be.
- The real question is: When God says GO...how will you respond?

¹ Explore the Bible – Lifeway – When God Calls – ACM p. 73

² <http://www.insight.org/resources/articles/gods-will/going-yet-not-knowing.html?l=godswill?referrer=https://www.google.com/#sthash.z0PSc4Ob.dpuf>

³ Wiersbe, W. W. (1991). *Be Obedient* (p. 13). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁴ Explore the Bible – Lifeway – When God Calls – ACM p. 74

⁵ *ibid*

⁶ Wiersbe, W. W. (1991). *Be Obedient* (p. 11). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁷ Clendenen, E. R. (2003). Blessing and Cursing. In C. Brand, C. Draper, A. England, S. Bond, E. R. Clendenen, & T. C. Butler (Eds.), *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (p. 223). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

⁸ Clendenen, E. R. (2003). Blessing and Cursing. In C. Brand, C. Draper, A. England, S. Bond, E. R. Clendenen, & T. C. Butler (Eds.), *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (pp. 223–224). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

⁹ Clendenen, E. R. (2003). Blessing and Cursing. In C. Brand, C. Draper, A. England, S. Bond, E. R. Clendenen, & T. C. Butler (Eds.), *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (p. 224). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

¹⁰ Clendenen, E. R. (2003). Blessing and Cursing. In C. Brand, C. Draper, A. England, S. Bond, E. R. Clendenen, & T. C. Butler (Eds.), *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (p. 224). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

¹¹ Explore the Bible – Lifeway – When God Calls – ACM p. 75

¹² Explore the Bible – Lifeway – When God Calls – ACM p. 76

¹³ Wiersbe, W. W. (1991). *Be Obedient* (p. 13). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.