

# JOHNS CREEK UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

## Faith Enough to Follow

Genesis 12:1-3

Sunday, June 19, 2022

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On this Father's Day I believe it is appropriate to preach about the Father of all of us – Abraham. I remember first learning about Abraham in Sunday school as a kid. We would sing songs about him. I would get up in worship with my class and sing, "Father Abraham has many sons..." As a kid, I knew he was important somehow. He had many kids, and those kids were somehow related to me.

But I didn't realize how important Abraham was until I got older. In fact, the story of Abraham became very important to me when I felt God calling me into ordained ministry. I was just 16 years old. I had zits on my face and I had a crush on a girl. I was really into tennis and sports...and then I began to sense this call to preach. I was clueless. I didn't know what to do. Me, a preacher? Where do I go? How do I go about doing this? What if I fail?

I recall speaking to a sweet lady in our church who was a youth counselor. And I told her about my call and the anxious feelings about it. And she said, "Remember Abraham? Yeah, of course I do! Go reread his story again. I think it will help you." Well, I did go back and reread the story of Abraham and he came alive for me. And I will tell you the story of Abraham encouraged me and empowered me to take the next step and follow God's call into ministry.

That's how important the story of Abraham is to me. And I believe his story can be just as important to you. There is a reason why the entire biblical story is rooted in the story of Abraham and his descendants. The lessons Abraham's life teaches us about our faith are foundational. For Abraham teaches us how to please God and find the meaning of our lives. Most importantly, Abraham's story empowers us to trust God completely with our lives.

Have you ever struggled with trusting God? I think most of us have. Have you ever felt led by God in a certain way but you were terrified and didn't know where it would take you? Maybe that's where you are today. You feel led by God to do the right thing but you are concerned where that will take you. You feel led by God to make some kind of change in your life

but you are terrified of change and you don't know what that change might look like. Perhaps you are barely hanging on today. Life has torn you apart. Prayers have not been answered. And you are ready to give up on your prayers and give up on God. And maybe you feel like you just can't bring yourself to trust God anymore.

Well, hold on. Take a breath. And allow yourself to hear the lessons of Abraham. They just might be a game changer for you. They just might be exactly what you needed to take that next step, make that change, and revitalize your faith in God.

So, here is what I want you to do. If you are taking notes, just write these letters down horizontally: **F, T, O, B.** I got these nifty letters and what they represent from Adam Hamilton. One of his messages on this text was helpful as I prepared this sermon. These letters will reveal the powerful lessons of Abraham's life that just might make all the difference to you today. You ready?

F signifies a key lesson for us in when seeking the courage to trust in God. Just consider this. At the beginning of Abraham's life he worshipped many gods. That was the world and culture he grew up in. They had a god for everything. But Abraham had an epiphany one day and came to the place where he realized there is only one God. Only one creator. Only one Lord of this universe. This was a very radical idea at the time. No one had even considered that. This is why Abraham is called the Father of Monotheism (the belief in one God). It all started with Abraham!

But I will tell you what is even more radical. Not only did Abraham discover there was only one God. He also came to know and understand the character of this God that created everything. And Abraham came to know and experience this God not as a distant God, not as an angry God, but a God who was knowable and loving and a God who desired to be close to us, to be in relationship with us. Abraham's experience of this knowable, loving, intimate God was revolutionary.

In fact, in the Bible Abraham is given the greatest compliment. I don't think there is a higher compliment. **In 2nd Chronicles 20:7 and Isaiah 41:8 Abraham is called "A Friend of God."** I want that on my tombstone! He was God's friend. A friend to God! **So the F stands for "Friend of God."**

Have you ever had one of those friendships where you do all the giving? You do favors for them but they never do you favors. You call them but they never call you. You listen to them but they never really listen to you. You are a friend to them but they are never really a friend to you. I think most of us have had or have those kinds of relationships. And you come to accept it. That's just the way it is.

How often our relationship with God is one sided like that. God is a friend to us. He does all the listening, all the giving, all the loving, all the blessing. We ask and he gives...But do we ever consider being a friend to God? Do we ever consider doing things for God? I'll tell you, the Bible tells me that God has a need for us to reciprocate his love, to love him back. After all, why do you think he created us? God has a need for companionship.

I don't know about you, but I want to be a friend to God. I want to say, "Lord, thank you for being a friend to me. You have done so much for me. You have loved and saved me. I want to be your friend. You are already my Lord and Savior, and now I want to be your friend. I want to think more of you than I do myself."

This was Abraham's heart. This is who Abraham was, a friend of God. This is why God chose Abraham to be the Father of Monotheism and the foundation of the Bible and the Hebrew people. It wasn't because he was sophisticated or rich or powerful or notable in anyway. Heck, when God got a hold of Abraham he was at the back end of his life, 75 years old. He had no offspring. He worshipped many gods. He had terrible theology. He lied. He was deceptive. He was divorced from Hagar. And God chose him!

God has a habit of choosing people like this, the most unlikely people! Moses was a stutterer, David was young and rowdy, God chose disciples who couldn't read or write. Jesus hung out with prostitutes and sinners and often made them the heroes. God picks those most unlikely people like Abraham because they are available and they are willing to be God's friend.

F – Friendship with God, friend to God.

Now T. So as you consider T, the next important lesson in Abraham's story, I want to lift up a pivotal moment in his story. It appears in Genesis 12:1-3:

**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. 2 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 the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."**

So here is Abraham minding his own business. And God tells him to call the UHaul company, pack up the trailer leave his home. "Ah, God, where do you want me to go? I'll show you. Can you show me now? I will tell you when you need to know. In order to convince my wife Sarah it would be helpful to know where I am going."

Now, can you imagine Abraham coming home that day to Sarah? And Sarah is sitting in the living room. "Uh, sweetheart, I've called the UHaul company. Let's pack up our things. We are leaving. Where are we going? God didn't say. We are just leaving."

Now, the Bible does not say. I believe there is a piece of the story missing here. I think Abraham's real conversation with Sarah is left out. Because my theory is that Sarah convinced Abraham to go. Because let's face it. Behind every good man is an even better woman! Abraham listened to Sarah...And Sarah said, "You pray and I'll pack!" Let's be honest, "If Sarah had said no, Abraham would not have gone!"

So, the Bible tells us in Genesis 12:4 nine of the most important words in the Bible: **So Abram went, as the LORD had told him**

So Abraham and Sarah left their home having no clue where God was taking them. But he promised them children and many descendants. He promised to answer their prayers. And God was faithful and honored Abraham's faith and eventually God would lead him to the Promised Land!

What kind of people do this? Those who have great trust in God! In fact, the Bible mentions Abraham's great faith in God over 31 times! It was his faith that the rest of the Bible is built upon. Take a look at what

the New Testament says about Abraham in **Hebrews 11:8-12:**

**8 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. 9 By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised....10 For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. 11 By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was too old—and Sarah herself was barren—because he considered him faithful who had promised. 12 Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, “as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.”**

Folks, Abraham’s faith is so inspiring. He was just like you and me, but he had the good sense to trust God even when he had no idea where he was going. And look how God blessed him! What I have learned is that yes there is a time to wrestle with God and then there is a time to trust God. Perhaps today, whatever your struggle is, it is time to trust God. He is faithful.

### **T is for Trust**

Now we have O and don’t miss this lesson. **The O stands for Obedience.** It says, “An Abraham went.” He trusted God and then he put one foot in front of the other and obeyed God. Sometimes the hardest trip to take is to go from faith to obedience. But obedience makes all the difference in the world! Obedience is that opens the door to God’s power and purpose for our lives.

Let me ask you. If God called you tonight to sell your home and just go without knowing exactly what would be next, would you do it? Is God speaking to you today? Is God nudging your heart today to move out of your comfort zone and do something extraordinary for him? Is God asking you to trust him in a way you have never trusted him before? I don’t think we are truly obeying God unless from time to time we are forced to trust him beyond our comfort zone.

Maybe in the silence you feel that pull from God. Maybe in this message you have felt that pull. Perhaps lately as you read scripture you feel that pull from God. Maybe it is to do that right thing and speak up for someone. Maybe it is a new ministry God has gifted you to start. Maybe it is just inviting that neighbor to church, but you have been too shy to do it. Maybe it is to give more, to trust more, to follow that dream you

know God has put in your heart.

I have a friend named Sue. I’ve known she and her husband Allen a long time. Sue was once a high-powered attorney in Tampa, driving a BMW and making lots of money. She cut through cases with her sharp, brilliant mind. She was admired and sought after for her skills and talent.

She did go to church on Sunday from time to time. And then one day she felt it. And she kept feeling it and sensing it. She hoped it would go away and it never did. It just gnawed at her. She felt that God was calling her into the ministry... wait, I’ll have to give up all this money, this car, this lifestyle, this prestige...

It was a very hard decision for her. She wrestled with God. Came up with excuses. Told herself it was really nothing. Then one day she made that leap. She left the prestigious firm, sold her BMW, said goodbye to her expensive townhouse and lifestyle and entered seminary not having a clue what she was doing except following a call that would not let her go.

Where is Sue now? Well, we all know that she is now the bishop of the North Georgia Conference! What a ministry! And it all begin with one obedient step of faith. What is God calling you to do? Just imagine where that obedience to God will take you. Because obedience leads to blessing.

And that’s what B stands for. **B stands for blessing.** Take a look again at what God says to Abraham in Genesis 12:2: **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.**

Abraham was blessed to be a blessing! At the end of the day, God blessed Abraham so that he could be a blessing to others! And what a blessing he was!

Folks, we are blessed by God to be a blessing. That’s your purpose and my purpose in life. And until we figure that out, we will never find meaning and fulfillment in life. Mark my words. The happiest people in the world are the ones who have figured this out. And the most miserable people on earth are those who haven’t.

There are two types of people in the world: Those

who always look around for what they don't have, who always feel like they don't have enough, who take, take, and take. And then there are those who see everything they have as a blessing and ask each day, "How can I bless others with my blessings?" Which one are you?

Do you look for ways to be a blessing to others with what you have? Or do you always feel you don't have enough? After people leave your presence, do they feel blessed to have been with you or do they feel like that time was time they will never get back? What do you have that will bless others?

*This is 77 year old James Harrison of Australia.*

When he was 14 years old he underwent major chest surgery and almost died. He required 3 gallons of blood in order for him to survive the surgery. Realizing the blood had saved his life, he vowed that when he was old enough to donate blood he would.

James started donating blood in 1954 and soon it was discovered that his blood contained special antibody that cured Rhesus disease, the most common blood disease in newborns. In 2011, Harrison reached a blood donation record of 1,000. That is one donation every 3 weeks, and he never misses an opportunity. Even on vacation, he makes sure to stop by a donor center. He is known as *the man with a golden arm* because over the course of 57 years, he has saved the lives of over 2.2 million babies.

He says, "More and more blood is needed every day, so if every current donor brought along one friend we wouldn't have the sort of shortage we have at the moment," he said. "An hour of your time is a lifetime for someone else."

It could be donating blood, it could be donating time, donating money, your skills, but you are blessed to be a blessing.

Now FTOB – You remember that and follow that and you will never be the same again. Amen.



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