

## Abraham – Walking by Faith

### #1 in series “Biblical Characters who walked with God”

Monday week ago I was listening on the ABC to Richard Fidler’s “Conversations” program. He was interviewing a lady named Julee-Anne Bell. Julee-Anne was born completely blind. It was fascinating to listen to her journey. Like when she was at high school and had to struggle with the daily terror of crossing the school grounds without a cane or assistance. Her insights of what it’s like to navigate life as a non-sighted person were both insightful and humbling. And to hear how she has developed techniques to better navigate her way through life was inspiring.

Can you imagine what it would be like to walk through life unsighted? It’s hard, to, isn’t it. But it is to this very journey that we have been called. Listen to what Scripture says; *“We walk by faith, not by sight.”* 2 Cor 5:7 (NRSV).

We don’t often think of ourselves as blind people – as unsighted people – but that’s exactly what Christians are. The whole nature of our faith is unseeable, unprovable. You can’t see God. You can’t prove his existence - or non-existence for that matter. You can’t prove that what he says – what he promises - are real and true, a solid foundation on which to build your life. You can’t prove that there is more to come – an eternity with God in heaven – after this life comes to an end.

In many ways, I wish I didn’t have to live by faith. And I’m not saying that – as a person of faith – that there is no evidence for God and his reality in my life and in this world. There is evidence. But it’s the evidence that comes with the eyes of faith. I wish I didn’t have to worry about the “eyes of faith” part. I wish I could just say to my non-Christian friends: “Here it is! The scientific, incontestable proof that God is real and that his promises can be banked on!” But I can’t. And you can’t. Because God – and the Christian faith – are not like that. Paul spells that out so clearly – also in Heb 11:1 - *“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”* (NRSV).

So – when it comes to “Walking with God” – as an unsighted person, as a “by faith” person - how can we best do that? A great place to go – I think – is to the biblical character Abraham. If ever a person walked by faith and not by sight, it was this man. So let’s run our eyes over his life and see what we can learn from him to make our faith walk even more deep and real and significant.

Can we first go to some of the “walk by faith, not by sight” challenges that he faced. And he faced plenty, but this morning we’re going to just look at 3.

Here’s challenge #1 – facing the UNREALISTIC. *“The Lord had said to Abram, ‘Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father’s family, and go to the land that I will show you.’”* Gen 12:1

Leave what? Pretty much everything! Your house and furnishings. Your wider circle of friends and relatives. Your community – with all the familiarity and security that brings. Just turn your back on all that and head off.

To where? *“To the land that I will show you.”* Incredible! He’s got to leave everything behind, and he’s not even told where he’s going! In due time, he’ll be shown, but for now it’s just heading out – blindly! If only he had known! The place he was to go to was Canaan – 1,800 km’s away. And that’s on foot! It ended up taking them years. They got side-tracked because of famine and other disasters. How often must his family members have said; “That’s it, Abraham. Enough is enough! This is madness!”

And how old is he when God asks him to head out? Is he 21? 40? In the prime of his life? No, he’s on the pension! He’s 75 years old!

What a challenge! Every rational bone in his body would have been saying; “No way Jose! To leave everything I’ve built up, to sever relationships with those I love and value, to head out into the unknown, and at my age. You have got to be joking!”

Sometimes we get called into the unknown too . . . from our comfortable surroundings and family and friends where we feel secure into a future that is insecure and cloudy. At times that’s a call from God to head somewhere else to be a part of his mission to the world. Some of you here have faced situations like that. I have too. But there are also circumstances that call us, force us into uncharted waters. A serious illness. A death. A loss of a job. An estrangement. And instead of coasting along without a care in the world, we are left anxious, afraid, paralysed.

Can I take you to the 2<sup>nd</sup> “walk by faith, not by sight” challenge – facing the IMPROBABLE. God goes straight on to say; *“I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others.”* Vs2. A few chapters later God takes Abraham outside one evening and he says; *“Look up into the sky and count the stars if you can. That’s how many descendants you will have!”* (15:5)

*"A great nation"?* Descendants as many as *"the stars"?* Just a small problem. There are no kids! He and his wife Sarah are childless! And they are both old. Genesis 16:11 tells us that Sarah is past menopause. It's almost laughable. And Sarah does laugh when she hears this promise of descendants upon descendants. And the years go on. 20 years from the promise of a child to now. She's 90 and Abraham is 100. And still no child!

Sometimes God's promises seem so . . . far-fetched! Unlikely! Impossible! laughable! Like Abraham and Sarah, they sound nice and we want to believe them, but they just don't seem to be grounded in reality. We hear the words of Jeremiah 29:11 - *"For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope."* But those words are cold comfort when your world is falling apart and your future seems hopeless. *"I will never fail you nor forsake you"* he promises in Heb 13:5. Yet there are times – as with Abraham and Sarah – where God seems absent – AWOL – for month after month, year after year.

What do you do when God's promises seem so shaky, so improbable? You'd love to be able to claim them in faith – but the reality of your situation seems to render God's promises impossible. So how do you walk with God at times like that?

Can I take you to one final challenge Abraham faced in walking by faith and not by sight – facing the ABSURD. God says to Abraham: *"Take your son, your only son—yes, Isaac, whom you love so much—and go to the land of Moriah. Go and sacrifice him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains, which I will show you."* Gen 22:2

Wow! How absurd that command seems. It took decades – and a gynaecological miracle - for Sarah to conceive and Isaac to be born. And now God is commanding Abraham to kill him. What then for the promise of descendants upon descendants? It's crazy! It's foolishness!

Sometimes the way of the cross, the way of life for a Christian seems foolish too. Society out there seems to think us as . . . odd to say the least. Read the Letters to the Editor in the newspaper and we get labelled as old fashioned and bigoted, and that it's about time we joined the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Watch TV and we're usually portrayed as dim-witted – someone to make fun of. And the central tenets of our faith seem to be so much at odds with how people are living these days. We're here to serve and give and forgive and show grace whereas society looks at us and says; "what's wrong with you?!"

Walking by faith and not by sight. That's a huge challenge. For Abraham. And for us. But it is a challenge that needs to be faced. And Abraham teaches us that. That in any given situation in life, the challenge has to be faced and a decision has to be made. The decision to walk by faith or to walk by sight. And that often requires a decision to put the sight – what we can see and know and what makes sense to us to the side, and to decide to not let that guide our decision. But instead to trust that God can make better sense of things, that God can see the future and how his way will work better and bring greater blessings than our way. And so Abraham made the decision to set off into the unknown and to head to a foreign country when all reason said to stay. And he made the decision to believe – year after year – that God would bring him a son when every medico in the land said "not possible!" ..... And he made the decision to take his son – his only son, his long awaited son – and he bound him to the altar and was about to kill him when every fibre in his body was screaming "NO!"

The choice needs to be made between faith and sight. Maybe you're having to make that choice right now in some area of your life. And we all will. Many times in our lives. And it's not easy. I don't pretend it is. It can be hellishly hard. When God is making promises that don't seem to stack up. When he is asking you to go in a certain way, to believe certain things when they just don't seem to make sense. But that is part of our walking with God. An integral part. It can't be sidestepped. The choice of walking by sight - by reason, by what makes sense to us. Or walking by faith - by trust, by believing that it makes sense to God if not to us.

And when we do take that risky step and launch out in faith, trusting that God is in control? What happens then? Well look at Abraham. Remember his story. If there's one thing it tells you again and again and again, it's that God is faithful. God is in control. God will provide. The promised land of Canaan was reached! And the long awaited child and heir – Isaac – did come! And the sacrifice – a ram caught in a thicket – was provided!

God is faithful! That's his promise. That's his commitment. That's his track record in the lives of Christians over the centuries. And it can be his track record in your life too. All he asks of you is to walk by faith, and not by sight. And you will find him faithful. Maybe not always according to your time-frame or in the way that you think is best. But if Abraham's walk with God tells us anything, it is that at the right time, and in the best way, God will keep his promise and he will bring his blessings. If we just walk by faith!