

THE JOURNEY FROM BARRENNESS TO HOPE

Part II – Taking the First Step

For a baby, taking his or her first steps is very exciting, challenging, and rewarding. The same is true for any one of us who is experiencing something new in our lives, whether it is a new job, a new school year, or a new marriage. I remember the first day I entered school in America. It was a very intimidating experience. Everybody was different from me, from the way they dressed, to the colors of their hairs, even our accents were different when we spoke. The experience was so overwhelming and nerve-racking. Yet I knew that I needed to face this challenge. I mean, I could not stay at home forever; I needed to go to school and meet new people. That first day everybody was staring at me; I just wanted to hide under my desk. It did not help that my teacher did not know where the Philippines was (my country of birth). And my English was so horrible; I had to repeat myself at least twice when I spoke and I could not understand anything that people were saying. I must admit that there were countless times I wished I was back in the Philippines. The obstacles were too great to overcome, I felt.

Taking the first step in a new journey is always hard. New expeditions are always unpredictable. They demand that we leave our comfort zones and dive into an experience filled with risks and barriers. Hindrances and trials are quite common in a new surrounding. Abram faced a similar situation in his journey to find hope in his life. God invited him to begin a new trek based upon a promise that Abram would be the father of a great nation. This promise alone will lead Abram and his family into a journey packed with great uncertainties and trouble. Nevertheless, if Abram wanted the promise to be fulfilled in his life he must take the first step. Without the courage to take that initial movement, the promise will remain void in his life.

Text: Genesis 12:10-20 (NLT)

¹⁰At that time there was a severe famine in the land, so Abram went down to Egypt to wait it out. ¹¹As he was approaching the borders of Egypt, Abram said to Sarai, "You are a very beautiful woman. ¹²When the Egyptians see you, they will say, `This is his wife. Let's kill him; then we can have her!' ¹³But if you say you are my sister, then the Egyptians will treat me well because of their interest in you, and they will spare my life."

¹⁴And sure enough, when they arrived in Egypt, everyone spoke of her beauty. ¹⁵When the palace officials saw her, they sang her praises to their king, the pharaoh, and she was taken into his harem. ¹⁶Then Pharaoh gave Abram many gifts because of her--sheep, cattle, donkeys, male and female servants, and camels.

¹⁷But the LORD sent a terrible plague upon Pharaoh's household because of Sarai, Abram's wife. ¹⁸So Pharaoh called for Abram and accused him sharply. "What is this you have done to me?" he demanded. "Why didn't you tell me she was your wife? ¹⁹Why were you willing to let me marry her, saying she was your sister? Here is your wife! Take her and be gone!" ²⁰Pharaoh then sent them out of the country under armed escort--Abram and his wife, with all their household and belongings.

Notice that Abram's journey began in a state of disorder: there was a brutal famine in the land. This was not a good way to start off in search of hope. Emptiness and barrenness filled the landscape of his life. What made Abram's situation look wearier was that the famine pushed him towards the powerful nation of Egypt. This "father of a great nation" was totally powerless in the political setting of the time and his calling took him to the most dominant nation of that time. Abram's journey started off quite bleak.

1. In our journeys to find hope, **expect to encounter spiritual roadblocks**. (v. 10)

- Famine represents the nothingness and poverty of our lives
- Egypt represents oppression and abusive power

We will face obstacles when we begin to live out God's promises in our lives. Many of these roadblocks represent spiritual *famines*, times of worthlessness and lack of purpose. Exploring hope becomes difficult when we have a clear deficiency of meaning in terms of where we are to go and what we are to encounter.

And many times our journeys out of barrenness will be met by abusive forces in life. Potentially the absence of meaning in our lives is due to the violent powers we have experienced against us through others. We are called "useless," "worthless," and "stupid." Oppression in the physical, emotional, and spiritual states slow us down in witnessing God's promises come to fruition.

And that is why taking the first step in the direction towards God is so important. When we remain motionless, we are accepting our demised fate. But, when we choose to forge ahead towards the divine and hold onto his great promises for us, we will begin to break free from the roadblocks that have clasped us down for far too long. Abuse and exploitation do not need to reside within our souls; taking the first steps in our journey of hope will initiate spiritual recovery and liberation.

To take the first step, however, requires a significant principle to take place:

2. But, it is important that we choose our first steps **with foresight**. (vv. 11-13)
 - Looking forward
 - Consequences of our actions

Abram faced a predicament as he approached Egypt. The Bible states:

Abram said to Sarai, "You are a very beautiful woman. When the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife. Let's kill him; then we can have her!' But if you say you are my sister, then the Egyptians will treat me well because of their interest in you, and they will spare my life."

Abram made his personal calculations based upon what he thought would happen to him. But, notice that he made his decision without God's intercession on the matter. He never secured God's knowledge; instead, Abram chose the path of deceit in order to spare his own life.

The steps we take on our journeys of hope bear consequences, whether good or bad, determined solely on our decision whether to follow God's plans fully or not. We must choose our steps with foresight, recognizing the outcomes that result from our own personal choices. We must be wise in our decision-making because one false move could detract us from the road that God intended for us to walk on. Abram chose to disobey God by not seeking the divine for guidance. The result of his action was catastrophic:

3. When we move in disobedience, **punishment** will also impact those that surround our lives. (vv. 17-20)
 - Even the innocent can be affected

People suffered because of Abram's lack of faith. The Bible tells us

But the LORD sent a terrible plague upon Pharaoh's household because of Sarai, Abram's wife. So Pharaoh called for Abram and accused him sharply. "What is this you have done to me?" he demanded. "Why didn't you tell me she was your wife? Why were you willing to let me marry her, saying she was your sister?"

The innocent, in this case Pharaoh and his household, incurred God's wrath because of Abram's lack of spiritual judgment. Abram chose to deal with his circumstances alone without God's intervention. In this story the end result was Pharaoh experiencing God's righteous anger.

Our journeys to find hope will unavoidably affect other circles of people. Whether it be our parents, spouses, children, co-workers, etc., we live in motion, not in isolation, but in relationships with others. Abram's journey must go through other networks of individuals and nations for God's promise to be fulfilled. The same is true for us today.

So far in Abram's story we observe that faithlessness leads to destruction. But, in faithfulness, as God was in the story, we witness triumph, and it is triumph in full abundance!

4. Though our journeys will always start in emptiness, through God's intervention, **will end in overpowering victory.**

The amazing thing about this story is that Abram received the pot of gold despite his insecure faith. The point of the narrative is not that God rewards those who do not trust in him. The lesson here is God's promise will come to completion, no matter what the circumstances might be. Our lack of faith will not stop God from fulfilling his purpose. Our faithless timidity will never prevent God from finalizing what he had started. In fact, while the passage seemed to be about Abram's insecurity on his spiritual journey, it is actually about God's steadfast grace upon those who are taking their first shaky steps on their journeys.

Hence, we come to the conclusion that

5. Regardless of our faithlessness, God **will always remain faithful to his promises.**

What a wonderful promise for us who are on this journey of hope. God never fails in his promises for each of our lives. This does not mean we can continue our lives of sin though. When we experience God's faithfulness to us each and every day, and when that experience grows more and more in our very souls, our faith in him will increase as well. God will definitely honor the initial steps we are taking as we draw closer into his presence. Taking those very first steps might be scary, but believe in faith that God is there for you. Choose to follow God in all his wonder and glory.

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