



## DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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### Genesis: Abram & The Halfway Call

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Genesis 11:27 – 12:5

For years I've collected superhero comic books. Sometimes I feel less like superman, and more like mediocre man. Mediocre husband, mediocre dad, with mediocre energy and mediocre ability, a mediocre Christian following a mediocre God. (And those are my *good* days! ☺ I have to work hard to get up to mediocre! ☺) What a way to do life... How can you gear up for *anything* big when you just feel mediocre? Do you ever feel just mediocre? It's not like we mean it. We're trying our best with what we know. The problem is, it mostly leads to mediocrity. Like Jim Collins realizes in his book *Good to Great*, the greatest barrier to becoming great, for corporations as well as individuals, is not being *bad*, but being only *halfway good*. Good is the enemy of great. As Christians, we've been taught to believe that good's okay. "Just don't make a fuss." After all, "not everyone's called."

In the church we've even created "levels" of Christians, just to explain our mediocrity. Most of us are in the "God's called me to just go to church" and not swear to much level." (The other levels go something like this: If you're really called, you become a Sunday school teacher. And if you're really, really called you become a pastor. Or if you're really, *really* called, you become a foreign missionary.) And so we wind up frustrated and dull and mediocre. And most tragically, we miss experiencing God throughout our lives, let alone experiencing God making an impact in the world around us. And the world winds up dying apart from God, because we've got nothing to show for it. The world winds up saying "Your God is irrelevant." When it's really we who have chosen that. We never meant to, but somewhere along the way it happened? Mediocrity, I mean. The questions are where, and how, and how long do we have to stay there?

Well this almost happened to one of the greatest figures in the entire Bible. It was not very long after the flood before the descendents of Noah (which was everybody) began to turn aside from the living and true God. Humanity was growing great, yet few among them sought after God. Humanity seemed left to itself, given up to idols. Yet God's grace hadn't given up the throne. God would select a family to be His servants; and they should grow into a nation, through which God would redeem the every nation... and God chose Abram, and his wife Sarah.

Genesis 11:31 *"Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Haran, they settled there. 32 Terah lived 205 years, and he died in Haran.*

12:1 *The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go 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. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."*

4 *So Abram left, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran. 5 He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there."*

God's purpose was to keep His truth alive in the world by means of a people who would be set apart for Him. That nation was Israel. Do you know what the word for "set apart" is? Holy. Israel was called out of the multitudes, from the common way that everybody else did things; set apart—holy—for God.

Do you know God's Holy Spirit has continued this? The modern day Israel, the holy nation for today—is the Church. It has no borders, no boundaries. As Christ's body, where 2 or 3 are gathered in His name, there He is. The problem is we've got this mediocrity thing going. Here's what I think it is: God's still calling us like Abram. Our problem is, the call is often only half-obeyed. *"They came to Haran and settled there."* The Lord had appeared to Abram and made him to understand that he must leave his country and tribe. Somehow, it was laid on Abram's heart that he must journey with God—he didn't even know where.

His first step would be to tell his family and friends. If they would have told him he was crazy, if they'd have opposed his decision, it would probably have been clear to Abram what to do. But look what happened: his family and friends were for it. Not only that, but they consented to go with him. It was probably what he would have wanted: that they would come with him, and give their lives to God too. Not only that, but look what it says in 11:31 *"Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. It was sort of the patriarchal thing to do. They start for Canaan together—so far so good. "But when they came to Haran, they settled there."*

Their huge caravan hadn't gone far before someone makes the proposal that they should stay in Haran. "We've done a ton for Abram, we've let him have his way. He can put up with us in this one." His faith is sincere; but he can't be that close-minded to think that God wanted only Canaan." And Abram was conquered—not by enemies, but by his family and friends.

**To obey God partially is to disobey Him.** If the Lord wants Abram to go to Canaan, Abram's not going to be faithful by only going to Haran. **Half obedience to God's call is whole disobedience.** To be faithful in your marriage 6 days a week is to be unfaithful. By the fact that we are here, you and I are admitting God has a right to our obedience. But then why don't we follow Him in all things?

Because he hung around in Haran, Abram created a messy future for him and his family. (Lot got him in a lot of trouble!) ☺ Before you start settling for a mediocre "call" from God, check and see if you are hanging around in Haran, when God has called you to Canaan.

Let's clarify: to us in 2012, this call may be more spiritual than physical. We're not necessarily called to leave our country; but it seems to me we're called to a much more difficult position—to stay right here, among old friends, and yet lead a wholly new life in Christ. I think we're afraid to go all the way with God because we think it means we become a hermit. But if you read further in Genesis, you know God does not call Abram to become a monk, nor live in a cave, like a hermit. Abram was a leader of men. Abram pursued his living as a great businessman of huge flocks of sheep and oxen and camels. He cared for his neighbors—none of whom were God-worshippers. Abram even had to defend his family in war. And day in and day out, he would have led his large tent-city in the Lord God's name. Listen to Jesus' words: *"17:15 "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of it."* Fulfill your calling. Be distinct. And to do that you will need faith and to have faith you need the grace of God. You will never know what life beyond mediocrity looks like till you fulfill God's calling on your life.

**Apart from God, you will never know how far you can go beyond mediocrity. (Going only halfway with God...) But you and God can go far beyond anything you can imagine for yourself.** First, like Abram, you have to step out in faith. You can't do it on your own. Maybe your first step today is to put your trust in God, who sent His Son to die for every time we stopped short of our calling. Maybe your step today is to look around and see that you've settled short of God's call to Canaan. It matters where you stop, because God needs you and me. Who will reach the people that no one else is reaching?

- If you're a church leader already, God's calling you: maybe it's time to step up our game. I volunteered about 6 hours yesterday at the Dexter High School to work with the barbershop quartet for the Music Man. People are still working on their lines, remembering their blocking, the notes, and lyrics. I just wanted to say to those kids "YOU HAVE A SHOW IN A WEEK! It's time to be deadly serious about this! It's important—this is The Music Man!" And here we are, with an "Opening show" every Sunday that could impact people's lives for eternity. This is important!

- If you're a marketplace leader, maybe God's calling who are on the sidelines in Haran. God's looking for you—in Canaan! Without you, everybody loses. The downtown business people. The U of M office workers. The folks in the auto industry...
- The younger generation—get in the game! Don't mess around for another decade. Start now: this is your call. Jesus was 12 when he went to the Temple. Who's going to reach the swimmers, if you don't? Who's reaching the debate team? The teachers? The sophomore class...

What if our great leaders get side-tracked? God never gives a leader an easy task. But like Abram, we could unleash a revolution of faithfulness and purpose and life for people; walking with God ALL the way—one step at a time.

## **Study Guide For Genesis 16 – 20**

**Monday: Read Genesis 16.** Hagar & Ishmael. The Nuzi tablets show it was common in this time for barren women to seek children for their husbands by one of her slave women. But it was done without God's direction. Note that Ishmael is the father of the Arabs, with whom Israel still experiences conflict today. Muslims, Jews, and Christians trace their roots to "Father Abraham." Where have you been waiting "10 years" for God to fulfill a promise? Where have you seen God lately?

**Tuesday: Read Genesis 17.** The Covenant of Circumcision. If you could change your first name, what would it be? Note that circumcision is not the covenant, but was a sign of the covenant – like baptism. Abram becomes Abraham here. Have you allowed God to BE your God? What is holding you back?

**Wednesday: Read Genesis 18.** The 3 Visitors (1-15), the Promise to Sarah. This is the first account of God's messengers (angels) taking a human form. They give the message that Sarah will conceive, and she laughs! Where in your life is God telling you 'It's never too late'? Or is God saying 'It's okay to laugh'? Or, 'No need to rush around'? What will you do about it this week? Abraham Pleads for Sodom (16-33). This is the first extended prayer in Scripture. How has God shown His patience with you? For whom is God asking you to intercede as Abraham did here?

**Thursday: Read Genesis 19.** Sodom & Gomorrah Destroyed (1-29). In God's dealings with Abraham, Lot, and Sodom, what do you learn about God's character and purposes? About judgment and mercy of wayward people? In reviewing your response to crises this past year, at what points can you identify with those in the story: Abraham waiting? Lot, hesitant? Angels, rescuing? Sons-in-law, joking? Lot's wife, trapped? How does our society compare with Sodom? What do you think has prevented total destruction of it? When have you hesitated to obey God because to do so might jeopardize your standing with a particular group? What happened? Lot & His Daughters (30-38). Why is this story in Genesis? If omitted, what picture of Lot would be missing? What bothers you most in this account: the drinking? The deception? The incest? Why? Children of alcoholics suffer from the sin and sickness of others. Lot's family may have too. What about Lot's story moves you to act? To pray?

**Friday: Read Genesis 20.** Abraham & Abimelech. When have you "repeated the same mistakes twice?" How do you relate to Abraham here? His all-too-human relapse? His repeated fib? His unwitting test of God's promise to him? The irony of the rescuer now needing to be rescued? Who has been an Abimelech to you – one who bravely sets you straight? Where might God be calling you to be an Abimelech for someone else?