

**Video: Antz -I Feel So Insignificant!** Have you ever felt like a bit like that? As if your life is pointless and insignificant? After all what can one person really achieve in a world full of 7 billion people? We can feel so small, weak and powerless that it feels like we're just condemned to a meaningless and irrelevant existence of just going through the motions of life without really making a difference at all.

But God disagrees. This morning we come to the end of our studies in the early chapters of Genesis. We've discovered that:

- This wonderful world was made by our Creator God and it was very good.
- But God's world was messed up when Adam & Eve rebelled against God.
- And this sin brought separation, struggle, suffering and death into this world.
- And even after God wiped this world clean with a flood and started with a new family, still the problem of sin remained.
- This led to family problems, rebellious cities, confused speech and a scattered population.

So what would God do now? How would he intervene? How would he start to reclaim the people that he had made for himself? Well he didn't do it through a mass movement of people, nor through a powerful ruler or dynamic leader. Instead he did this through one seemingly insignificant person.

Genesis 11:27-12:5: "This is the account of Terah. Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran. And Haran became the father of Lot. <sup>28</sup> While his father Terah was still alive, Haran died in Ur of the Chaldeans, in the land of his birth. <sup>29</sup> Abram and Nahor both married. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife was Milcah; she was the daughter of Haran, the father of both Milcah and Iscah. <sup>30</sup> Now Sarai was barren; she had no children.

<sup>31</sup> 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.

<sup>32</sup> Terah lived 205 years, and he died in Haran.

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.

<sup>2</sup> "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.

<sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you,

and whoever curses you I will curse;

and all peoples on earth

will be blessed through you."

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> 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."

## 1. God Works Through Individuals

God's answer to the problem of sin in this world began with a man called Abram. He became the father of a great nation. But even more importantly, he is the father of all who've placed their faith in Jesus as "Those who believe are children of Abraham." Galatians 3:7 He is the father of faith. And this journey began with God's call.

### a) Called To Leave

It was a call firstly to "Leave your country, your people and your father's household..." Genesis 12:1 This was much more than a change of address. God called Abram to leave behind everything he'd depended on up to then. To leave all previous sources of guidance, security, protection and provision.

### b) Called To Trust

But this was not just a call to leave an old life, it was also to start on a brand new one. "Go to the land I will show you." Genesis 12:1. God was asking to be in charge from now on. For Abram to put his life in God's hands. To trust that God would lead him in the right direction, secure his future, that God would keep him safe and provide for his needs.

The people of the city of Babel didn't want to do that. They'd trusted in themselves and their own combined strength. They'd built their city so that together they could become a great nation. And they built that tower "So that we may make a name for ourselves." Genesis 11:4

But God called Abram to do the opposite. He called him to transfer his trust in himself or in those around him – and put

that trust completely in God. And to encourage him, God gave him some amazing promises: [“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.”](#) Genesis 12:2

The proud people of Babel had been humbled by God. They were divided into many nations and scattered throughout the world. But God promised that if Abram trusted in him, then he would make him into a great nation, he would give him a great name.

And Jesus still calls people to leave and to trust. His message was, [“The time has come... The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!”](#) Mark 1:15

- He calls us to leave our old life behind. To leave behind the way of this world with its various ideas and teachers. To leave behind depending on our own strength, achievements or good works.
- And instead to start a new life of simply trusting in Christ and him alone for our standing before God, our security in life and for our salvation!

Today, we're called to leave and to trust!

## 2. God Works Through The Unlikely

But often we don't feel worthy of that call. We don't feel important enough, or good enough, or that we've achieved enough! But that's not a problem. Abram too was a highly unlikely father of faith.

### a) Nobody Special

He wasn't anybody special. He wasn't a great leader, a powerful ruler, or an impressive warrior. He wasn't like the guy called Nimrod who is described in Genesis 10:9 as [“A mighty hunter before the Lord.”](#)

In fact, Abram was a bit of coward. On two occasions, just to protect his own skin, he lied about his relationship to his wife and said, [“She is my sister.”](#) Genesis 20:2, letting the Egyptian Pharaoh and King Abimelech take her as their wife.

### b) No Background

Abram also had no background in following God. He lived in [“Ur of the Chaldeans.”](#) Genesis 11:28. This was a prosperous and sophisticated city in modern day Southern Iraq. But it was an ungodly city where over 300 different gods were worshipped. It was a city of magic, superstition, immorality and idolatry.

Abram's family wasn't any better. [“Terah...worshipped other gods.”](#) Joshua 24:2 Abram didn't learn about the one true and living God from his dad.

### c) No Children

But Abram was also highly unlikely because he had no children. Genesis 11:30 says of his wife: [“Sarai was barren; she had no children.”](#) And both Sarai and her husband were getting to the age when this was increasingly unlikely – unless of course you are someone like Mick Jagger.

Childlessness can be a difficult burden for any couple to bear. But for Abram it must have felt like a cruel joke. His name meant “exalted father.” But instead of being a name of honour, it only reminded him of everything he was not. He had no kids, no heir, no-one to keep his name after he was gone.

How could Abram become the father of a great nation? You'd think having at least one son was an necessary qualification for that role.

### d) But Chosen By Grace

In so many ways Abram was an unlikely candidate to be used by God to start a movement that would change this world – and yet this is exactly whom God chose to work through: an unimportant nobody, from an ungodly background, with an unfulfilled dream.

Why? Well to reveal God's grace. [“God in his grace gave it to Abraham.”](#) Galatians 3:18 God did not choose Abram because of who he was, where he had come from, or what he achieved. Instead God choose Abram by his grace – by his completely undeserved favour and love.

And God still chooses to work through the most unlikely of people for that same purpose. Paul wrote to the church in Corinth: [“Think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.”](#) <sup>27</sup> But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong... so that no-one may boast before him.” 1 Corinthians 1:26–29

God chooses to work through insignificant, ordinary, everyday people like you and me, so that all the praise glory goes to God and not to us!

### 3. God works through Faithful Individuals

So it wasn't really important who Abram was. But what was important was how he responded.

#### a) Partial Obedience

Initially his response was only partial obedience. "Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai... and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan." Genesis 11:31

I don't know why Abram travelled with his dad. Perhaps it was too difficult to leave him behind. But what is clear is, that although Abram set off in response to God's call, he got stuck. "But when they came to Haran, they settled there." Genesis 11:31

We can only guess at why they stopped here. Maybe this was Terah's home town. Maybe it was because it was similar to Ur in race, religion and language. But whatever the attraction, Haran was not God's plan for Abram. It was not supposed to be his final destination. Abram settled for a half-way to God's plan!

And lots of people get stuck there. They hear the call to leave their old life behind and to trust in Jesus – but they only partially obey. They compromise. They hold onto old habits and attitudes.

But this will never bring us fully into God's plan and purpose. Jesus is looking for whole-hearted obedience. "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." Luke 9:23 His call is to repent and believe, to leave our old life behind and trust him completely for our new life.

#### b) Complete Obedience

And Abram eventually got there. After Terah's death, Abram set off again to complete his journey. "So Abram left, as the Lord had told him." Genesis 12:4 There was another new beginning in Abram's life!

I think this is such an encouragement to see that Abram, the Father of Faith, did not get it right first time. He too struggled with compromise and doubts. He too struggled with a half-hearted commitment. And that means if we've stumbled in our first steps of faith, got stuck between faith and doubt and settled down at the half-way house – we can hear God's call again and leave this world, and follow Jesus!

#### c) That Comes From Faith

And the key to this obedience is faith. Hebrews 11:8 states: "By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went."

This is how we can move out in complete obedience. It is faith in God and in his promises that frees us from the hold of our old life, that releases us from slavery to old habits, that enables us to put our life in Jesus' hands, trusting him for everything we need now and forever! As Paul said, "I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Galatians 2:20

### 4. God Works In His Own Time

Of course this was not the end of the challenges to faith that Abram would face. "Abram was 75 years old when he set out from Haran." Genesis 12:4, but the fulfilment of God's promises didn't happen quickly.

#### a) His Son

It was another 25 years later before his promised son was born: "Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him." Genesis 21:5

#### b) His Land

And taking possession of Canaan took even longer. When he arrived there, "he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country." Hebrews 11:9

In fact, even by the time of his death, the only part of this land that he actually owned was the field and cave in Machpelah which he'd bought as a family burial site. It was a further 580 years before the Israelites took possession of the Promised Land.

### c) In Our Lives

God works in his own time – and that timing is often different from ours. Yes, the instant that we trust in Jesus we receive forgiveness, acceptance and adoption into God's family. But the full experience of all that God has promised to do will take time.

So James 5:8 says: **"Be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near."** We don't need to get discouraged. We don't need to despair of God working through us. We can be patient and stand firm, because although God's timing is different from ours, he is faithful and he will complete the work that he has begun in us.

## 5. God Works In Astonishing Ways

And if we remain faithful, we'll not be disappointed with what God will do through us. God did far more through Abram than he could ever have imagined.

### a) Through His People

If you read the rest of the Old Testament, and I encourage you to do it, then you'd see all the amazing things God did in and through Abram and his descendants:

- Protecting Abram and his wife even despite Abram's foolishness.
- Giving Abram a son, even in his old age.
- Protecting this family from famine by taking them down to Egypt.
- Rescuing them from Pharaoh through amazing plagues and miracles.
- Providing for them miraculously for 40 years in the wilderness.
- Bringing them into possession of the Promised Land despite the huge challenges and powerful enemies.

But even that was not the end of God's work in Abram's family.

- When his descendants failed God and were pulled into immorality and idolatry, God rescued and restored them again and again.
- And even when their sin became so great that they were exiled in Babylon, again God intervened to restore them to the land that he'd promised, rebuilding the temple and his relationship with them.

### b) Through His Son

But even this wasn't the end of God's work in Abram's family. God had something much greater in mind so that his promise would come true that **"all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."** Genesis 12:3

That of course was the birth of Jesus. He was the greatest descendant of Abram and yet he could also declare that: **"Before Abraham was born, I am!"** John 8:58 because he was the Son of God, the eternal Creator.

This was what Abram was looking forward to. Jesus said: **"Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad."** John 8:56 He knew of the coming salvation and rejoiced in knowing about it and expecting it.

But this went further and greater than even Abram could have expected. When Jesus died on the cross, he not only paid for the sins of all the physical descendants of Abram, he also died for the sins of the whole world. He is, **"The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"** John 1:29

And so through faith in Christ, we too can be blessed. Through repenting of our sins and trusting in Jesus we can be completely forgiven, declared righteous in God's sight and adopted into God's family. **"So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith."** Galatians 3:9

I'm sure that when Abram set out from Ur of the Chaldeans, he had no idea that this would be his destination. When he answered God's call to leave and to trust, he could never have imagined all that God was going to do through him.

### c) Through Us

And if we put our faith and trust in Jesus, then the same will be true of us. God is the one **"..who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us."** Ephesians 3:20

We might feel small and insignificant. We might feel fragile and powerless. But if we put our trust in Christ, then our lives will not be limited by our weakness, but instead they will be transformed by God's power!

## Conclusion

So how will we answer God's call on our lives?

- Will we stay where we are?
- Will we go just half-way to half-hearted obedience?
- Or will we like Abram, leave our old life behind, put our trust in Christ and allow him to work in and through us in ways beyond what we could ask or imagine.

Andrew Burt

Enniscorthy Christian Fellowship December 10<sup>th</sup> 2017