

Journey Into Purpose

LESSON 1 . . . Initial Steps for Finding God's Purpose (Genesis 12:1-20)



When it comes to **finding God's purpose** for one's life, Abraham is a pioneer. Pioneers are always a breed apart because they venture into uncharted territory. Abraham has no Bible, church, or pastor; yet he journeys into unknown territory and experiences the wonderful adventure of **finding God's purpose** for his life.

NOTES

Abraham's prominence in the Bible is evident by the amount of space devoted to him and the way his life is mentioned in the New Testament. For example, three times he is called God's *friend* (2 Chron. 20:7, Isa. 41:8, & Jas. 2:23). The first book of the New Testament traces the genealogy of Christ to its spiritual beginning, Abraham (Mt 1:1). According to Romans 4:11b, why is a study of Abraham's life so important to us today?

In the Bible, Moses is the great lawgiver, David the great king, and Elijah the greatest OT prophet. You can never be a lawgiver like Moses, Israel's greatest king like David, or a prophet like Elijah, but you can, like Abraham, be God's *friend* by finding and fulfilling His purpose for your life. This takes **four** initial steps.

1. Activate when you hear God's voice (12:1-5).

Abraham is born around 2,160 B.C. and is known as "Abram" until God changes his name to "Abraham" when He establishes the *covenant* of circumcision (Gen. 17:5-10). Abraham grows up in Ur (ER) with his father Terah (Tee-ruh) and two brothers, Nahor and Haran, who becomes the father of Lot (11:27). After his brother Haran dies, Abram, his wife Sarai (Sar-eye or Say-ri), his father Terah, and his nephew Lot leave Ur and settle in Haran (see map on page 12), where Terah dies (11:31-32). God's call initially came to Abram while living in Ur (Acts 7:1-2), but now God speaks to him again in Haran. What does God tell him (Genesis 12:1)?

God also says He will make him *a great nation*, make his *name great*, and make him *a blessing* (12:2). God has three very important purposes for His call on Abram. First, He has a land he wants to *show* Abram. Second, He wants to make Abram's seed *a great nation*. This promise was fulfilled

physically since Abraham is the father of the Hebrew race. But how is it also fulfilled spiritually, according to Galatians 3:7?

Third, God says He will make Abram's *name great*. These promises are amazing because when God makes them, Abram is 75 years old and Sarai is barren (Gen. 11:30). However, God makes the promise, Abraham believes, and then he leaves, taking *his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran* and goes to *Canaan* (12:5). What makes Abram's obedience so remarkable, according to Hebrews 11:8b?



All God tells Abram is to *go to the land I will show you* (Gen. 12:1). God says, "I want you to leave, but I'm not telling you your destination." To find God's purpose for our lives, we must be moving—doing whatever God's will is for the present, not knowing where it might lead.

Finding God's purpose for your life is like steering a car—you can't steer it unless it's moving. To find God's purpose, we must be moving, actively serving the Lord by attending worship services, Bible studies, and any other available opportunities where we are likely to hear God's voice. We find God's purpose one step at a time. God never reveals the whole deal in the beginning. We must be faithful in the little, everyday things. We know this because of what statement Jesus made in Luke 16:10a?

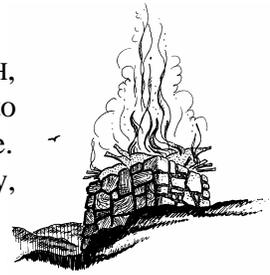
Initial steps in finding God's purpose are: **activate when you hear God's voice** and . . .

2. Communicate with God (12:6-9).

When Abram arrives at his destination, Canaan, he is surprised to find there are Canaanites in the land (12:6). The Canaanites were descendants of Canaan, who was the son of Ham, one of Noah's sons (9:22). They were extremely immoral, violent people. This had to be very upsetting for Abram, but the Lord appears to him and says, "*To your offspring I will give this land*" (12:7). So, Abram builds an altar to the Lord.

Abram then travels southward and sets up camp in the hill country between *Bethel on the west and Ai on the east* (12:8a), about ten miles north of what is now Jerusalem (see map on page 12). There he again builds an *altar* and

calls on the Lord (12:8b). The Hebrew word translated *altar* (MIZBEACH, miz-bay-ach) means “place of slaughter or sacrifice.” Anytime we begin to search for God’s purpose for our lives, there will be sacrifices to make. We live today in a “Canaanite” society with sexual immorality, pornography, profanity, and violence. Therefore, we all need an altar where we can regularly obey what command in Romans 12:1b?



Finding God’s purpose always requires offering ourselves to God *as living sacrifices*. This means we have an *altar*, a suitable place where we can be alone with God and commune with Him without interruptions.

In Genesis 12:8, the Hebrew word translated *called* (QARA, car-raw) has the idea of accosting a person or intrusively calling out to someone. Things weren’t working out like Abram thought they would, so he begins to pray intensely. When we follow God’s direction, we expect everything to be “hunky-dory,” but it seldom is. Sometimes when we are obeying God as best we know how, our lives get more, rather than less, difficult.

After praying, Abram continues *toward the Negev* (Neg-ev), the dry desert country in southern Canaan (12:9). Many times when we are seeking or fulfilling God’s purpose for our lives we must spend some time in the desert. Immediately after the Lord Jesus was baptized, which was the inauguration of His earthly ministry, what do we read in Matthew 4:1?

To find God’s purpose for your life, you must take these **initial steps**: **activate when you hear God’s voice, communicate with God**, and . . .

3. Anticipate problems (12:10-16).

Sometimes we mistakenly put the great heroes of faith on pedestals of perfection, as if they are superhuman. However, this is not how God’s Word describes its key characters. With shocking candidness God tells “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth” about His great saints, such as Noah’s getting drunk, Samson’s weakness for women, and David’s adultery. Even the greatest of OT prophets, Elijah, had lapses of faith. Why, according to James 5:17a?

Since Abram is also human just like us, when he faces starvation during a famine in the land, he doesn't consult the Lord but goes *down to Egypt to live there for a while because the famine was severe* (Gen. 12:10). Because his well-being and life seem in jeopardy, Abram panics. Now God's scorched Promised Land doesn't look nearly as good as the fertile banks of the Nile River; so without asking God, Abram goes to Egypt.

Following God's purpose for our lives doesn't mean an end to our trials. Even in the midst of fulfilling God's purpose there may be financial pain, relationship problems, and various other personal struggles. At this point we must remember what words of Jesus in John 16:33b?

Knowing his wife Sarai is beautiful even at age sixty-five, Abram anticipates having a problem when he enters Egypt. Because she looks so young and beautiful, she could do a facial cream commercial. Abram knows the Egyptians would kill him to have her, so he proposes to her: "*Say you are my sister, so that I will be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you*" (Gen. 12:13). This was at best a half-truth because she is his half-sister (20:12), but she is also his wife. Perhaps Abram thinks if he is thought to be her brother, any marriage arrangements would have to be made with him, and he could negotiate with them until the famine was over.

Sarai agrees, and when they arrive in Egypt, the Egyptians see Sarai is *a very beautiful woman* (12:14). But things get much worse *when Pharaoh's officials* see her because they praise her beauty to Pharaoh and she is *taken into his palace* (12:15). This means she became one of Pharaoh's wives (12:19). As a result, Pharaoh rewards Abram with *sheep and cattle, male and female donkeys, menservants and maidservants, and camels* (12:16). Abram's deceit seems to be paying off, but that's about to change.

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4. Capitulate to God's discipline (12:17-20).

Abram is apparently happy as he ignores God's purpose for his life and counts his sheep, cattle, and servants. However, in the midst of Abram's sin, God doesn't forsake him but intervenes and inflicts Pharaoh and his household with *serious diseases* because of Sarai (12:17). Pharaoh knows the plagues are some kind of curse and somehow discovers Sarai is Abram's wife.

As sad as it is, we now see a pagan ruler acting with more integrity than Abram does. Pharaoh calls Abram and asks, "*Why did you say, 'She is my*

sister,' so that I took her to be my wife (12:19a)? He then tells Abram: "Now then, here is your wife. Take her and go!" (12:19b).

Before we come down too hard on Abram and Sarai, we need to remember they came out of and lived in a pagan culture. Their morals were not based on the Bible because they never had one, so we shouldn't act "holier than thou." Given the right circumstances, none of us are beyond any kind of sin, and remember Abram was fearful for his life. That's why the Bible gives us what warning in 1 Corinthians 10:12?

One of the wonderful things about our gracious God is even when we get off course in His purpose for our lives, He doesn't forsake us. When we get out of God's will, He often sends a storm, as he did with Jonah (Jonah 1:4) and with Abram and Sarai, to change our course and get us back on track.



Pharaoh was God's storm; he orders Abram to go *on his way, with his wife* and all he has (12:20). How humiliating for Abram! But God's amazing grace allows Abram to keep his animals and servants. Thus, Abram leaves Egypt embarrassed and humble, but much wiser. This is a wonderful example of what admonition in Hebrews 12:5b? (Also, see Job 5:17.)

Four **initial steps in finding God's purpose** for your life are: **activate when you hear God's voice, communicate with God, anticipate problems, and capitulate to God's discipline.** Which of these have been most difficult in **finding God's purpose** for your life and why?
