

THE ONE THING

PART NINE & TEN – FRIENDS OF GOD

REVIEW

Friends, we are now on part nine of our “The One Thing” study where we are learning that spending time in God’s presence, just simply fellowshiping with and getting to know Him, is the high calling of every believer.

It really is! Yes, more than how many souls we win or how many works we do, getting to know God is the life that we are called unto. Sure, these other things are important too, but they come as a fruit of our fellowship with God and are not what constitutes our relationship with God itself. Yes, spending time with Him is what will make us even more fruitful for Him, because as we’ve learned, this is where the power to do these things comes from. Amen?

So the way we have been studying this most recently is by looking at the various relationships that God has given us on the earth. Yes, the way the LORD has created things on this planet shows us how we relate to God. For example, through the parent / children, the husband / wife, and other relationships where love is received and given, we can get a taste of God’s taste.

There have been many who have learned that they can be rich, possess fame, and have all that this world has to offer in regard to stuff, but if they don’t have the love of family and friends, they will still be miserable. Yes, you can have things, but if you don’t have people to share it all with, you won’t be happy. This world’s joy is rather found through relationships and by giving and receiving love.

So if it works that way in the natural, do you suppose it might work similarly in the spiritual? It does! You see, you can have all the knowledge of God’s Word you want, but if you don’t have relationship with the God of the Word, then you won’t have joy. Joy comes by having good fellowship with God and with the people of God. Yes, it comes through loving Him and loving others. This is eternal life, a life like no other!

So most recently, we have been looking at some of these other relationships we have in life, namely the ones the Scriptures use to describe our relationship with God—the husband & wife and the father & son. And what we have been doing is going through these two, oh so important relationships in life, and learning that what makes them work is what makes our relationship with our Heavenly Father & Heavenly Husband work too.

For example, in the first relationship we experience in life, the parent / child relationship, we learned that it's also the first commandment with a promise – to honor & obey our parents. Therefore, we saw that this must be important in our relationship with God for us children of God. Yes, honoring our God and approaching Him with this reverential respect sets us up for things to be well with us. This involves trusting His Word, believing what He tells us, and giving Him the honor He is due. This is the basis for good relationship with our Heavenly Father. Amen?

Also, in the example of a relationship between a bride with her husband, we learned just how important both quantity & quality of time spent with each other affects their relationship. And while it might not seem natural for us to spend time with a God we cannot see, we learned that fellowship with God is a spiritual experience, not a physical one. Therefore, spending time in God's presence by faith is what will determine how good of a relationship we will have with the LORD.

THE INNER CIRCLE OF FRIENDSHIP

Well, since the time we have been covering these couple of relationships that are used to describe our covenant with God, the LORD showed me that there is another level of fellowship that is used to describe our relationship with Him – and that is FRIENDSHIP.

You see, the Scriptures reveal to us that we are capable of being friends with God. But this relationship with Him does not come cheap! No, it is not reserved for everyone. This is for the ones who possess a much closer walk with God than your average believer.

Jesus spoke to His disciples of this friendship with Him when, at the end of His ministry, Jesus said to His disciples – *"You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you."* (John 15:14-15)

Now, of course, Jesus was called a friend of tax collectors and sinners, meaning He befriended even those who were not doing His commandments. So when Jesus speaks here of His closest disciples being His friends if they do whatever He commands them, it's to be assumed that He is referring to a specific kind of friend.

You see, we can have different spheres of friends. We have our outer circle and our inner circle of friends – and sometimes we have varying degrees of friends in between. Jesus certainly had this with His disciples: He had the 70 disciples, but then He had the 12 disciples from within those 70. But even then, He had the 3 disciples that were even closer to Him (i.e. Peter, James, & John). Because these three were closer to Him, they were invited to be present during significant events in Jesus' ministry, such as the Transfiguration and the Garden of Gethsemane.

So my point is that what Jesus was describing to His disciples here is talking about that inner circle of friends – the level of friendship that few ever have attained with the LORD, but that all have the opportunity to possess.

And notice how Jesus describes this level of friendship in verse 15 – as no longer being just servants, but as being those who are afforded the opportunity to know what their Master is doing. Yes, Jesus describes this inner circle of friendship as being where everything that He hears from His Father is being shared with them! Praise God, I don't know about you, but this is where I want to be!

So over the course of the next couple of weeks, I want us to look at a couple of people that the Scriptures specifically tell us were these kinds of friends of God because the Bible actually speaks of certain people being friends of God before Jesus came along. But this wasn't used just about anyone. It is used of those who truly walked with God on a level that few do. It was a title reserved for the Abraham's, the Moses', and the close disciples of the Lord Jesus. These are who the Scriptures called His closest friends.

So I want us to look at a couple of examples that are along the lines of what we just saw Jesus speaks in John chapter 15 about His friends being able to know things that others can't.

So let's begin with the man, Moses ...

MOSES – AS A MAN SPEAKS TO HIS FRIEND

You know, we don't even have to have a verse telling us that Moses was God's friend because we can see it by all that God revealed to Moses: You see, Moses got to see & know the hidden things of God like no one else did in the Old Testament, didn't He? The Scriptures even tell us how while the children of Israel knew His acts, Moses knew His ways (See **Psalm 103:7**). This means that while the rest of the Israelites knew what God did, Moses knew why God did what He did.

But why? Was it because God just chose to show these things to Moses and not to the others? No, I don't believe so. I believe it was because Moses was God's friend. Yes, I believe it was because He made certain choices that brought Him into the LORD's inner circle which opened up the door for the revelation that he had.

You see, **Psalm 25:14** says, *“The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him, and He will show them His covenant.”* Moses certainly was one that God showed His covenant to, right? Yes, He was the one whom God delivered the Old Covenant through, so needless to say, Moses had revealed to Him God's covenant. So why? It was obviously because, according to this verse, He feared His God (i.e. highly revered & respected), which is another way of saying that He was a friend of God.

So let's look at a verse that specifically shows us how Moses was the friend of God that God shared this inside information with – Exodus 33:11.

In **Exodus 33:11**, we see that *“The Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.”* Now this illustrates the intimate relationship Moses had with God.

But I want you to notice what this was preceded by: **Verses 7-10** say, *“Moses took his tent and pitched it outside the camp, far from the camp, and called it the tabernacle of meeting. And it came to pass that everyone who sought the Lord went out to the tabernacle of meeting which was outside the camp. So it was, whenever Moses went out to the tabernacle, that all the people rose, and each man stood at his tent door and watched Moses until he had gone into the tabernacle. And it came to pass, when Moses entered the tabernacle, that the pillar of cloud descended and stood at the door of the tabernacle, and the Lord talked with Moses. All the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the tabernacle door, and all the people rose and worshiped, each man in his tent door.”*

WHERE WE PITCH OUR TENT

Now notice that verse 7 starts out by saying that he took his tent and pitched it outside the camp, far from it: It’s sad, but this is just the way it is. If you are going to meet with God and enjoy this one thing with Him, you’ll have to take your tent and pitch it outside, far away from the camp (i.e. from the place where everyone else pitches their tent).

This is part of the reason why Jesus said that when we pray, to do it privately, in your own room and then close the door (See Matthew 6). It’s because, as Jesus once said, “where I go, you cannot go.” It’s because our fellowship with God is a private place that cannot be shared with others.

But the truth is, if we want to run with the majority and make that our “fellowship,” then it’s going to be hard to be God’s close friend – because most people are just not there. No, they are not going in the same direction that you are pursuing. Therefore, you’ll have to take your tent and pitch it far away from the majority of other people.

Now don’t misunderstand what I am saying here – This is not permission for you to remove yourself from fellowshiping with other believers because you think you are at a place spiritually you ain’t or for other reasons. This is strictly talking about prioritizing God’s presence over the presence of others.

So our point is, don’t be like Abraham’s nephew, Lot, who when he separated from his uncle (who also was a friend of God, mind you) “pitched his tent towards Sodom” (See **Genesis 13:12**). In short, this describes him desiring to have what they had.

I can just imagine Lot getting tired of all that wandering around with Abraham. “I want something like they have over there in the city!” he might have said in his heart. So when they finally split up, that’s the first thing we see Lot doing – facing Sodom & Gomorrah and, thereby, heading in that direction.

Well, we know the story, right? Thanks to Uncle Abraham, Lot and his family were spared from the judgment that ended up coming upon those godless cities. So when he and his family were leaving, Lot's wife turned around to look, and she was turned into a pillar of salt. One does not have to speculate as to why this happened to Lot's wife. Jesus told us in **Luke 17:31-33** that in the last days, not to try and preserve our possessions and the life we have here on this earth – for he who seeks to save his life will lose it and whoever loses his life, will preserve it. In all of this, Jesus said, “Remember Lot's wife.”

So that makes it clear why Lot's wife received such a terrible fate. Sure, it was simple disobedience because the angels told them not to look back. But Jesus reveals that it wasn't just a curious glance; no, it was a look of longing for the life they had built in Sodom. She was thinking about certain family members they left behind. She was thinking of their home and possessions. Yes, she was looking back because she loved the life they had built there and her heart did not want to leave their family and possessions. Therefore, she lost her life as a result of looking back.

So here's the lesson – Don't become attached to the things of this world – the stuff, the relationships, etc. – because these things can cause you to suffer true loss. Yes, don't look back to the life you had, and “preserve” your life. It's simple – lose your life and preserve it or seek to save your life and become a “preservative.” 😊

THE TABERNACLE OF MEETING

And then the next thing we see in Exodus 33:7 is what Moses called this tent – the Tabernacle of Meeting.

Now this was different than what we know as the Tabernacle. The Tabernacle of Meeting was a temporary structure used by Moses to meet with God before the Tabernacle was constructed. The Tabernacle was a more elaborate and permanent sanctuary built later. Then, of course, under King Solomon's direction, the Temple was built later, an obviously even more permanent structure than the Tabernacle. But it all started with this Tabernacle of Meeting – a tent that was used for the children of Israel to “congregate” together with their God and to “communicate” with Him.

And Exodus 33:7 goes on to say, “And ... everyone who sought the LORD went out to the Tabernacle of Meeting which was outside the camp.” So everyone who was serious about seeking the LORD went out to meet with God there, where this tent was.

You know, seeking the LORD is one of those things that we all must do. No, not seeking for Him because He is lost or something, but seeking to know Him. As David said in **Psalms 27:8** – to seek His face as we are commanded to do. Seeking Him and His face is seeking to know Him, church! It is pursuing the knowledge of God that we might know who He is and have a personal relationship with Him. This is the high call that we all have!

But Exodus 33:8-11 paints a different picture of Moses versus the children of Israel: Verse 8 begins with showing how that when Moses would go out to the Tabernacle, everyone

would stand up and watch Moses go into it. Verse 9 then tells how there was a cloud of glory that descended on the door of the Tabernacle and the LORD talked to Moses there. Then in verse 10, we see that they all saw this cloud of glory, they even rose and worshipped, but they did it from their own tent door. In other words, they didn't get in the cloud; they just watched it from a distance. Then we have our verse – verse 11 – which tells us that the LORD spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.

I don't know about you, but I would rather be in Moses' shoes than in the rest of the children of Israel's. Moses went into the tabernacle of meeting, going in the middle of that cloud, and talked to God face to face while the others stood at their own tent door and watched. Sure, they got to worship, but it wasn't in God's presence. It was from a distance. Moses got to get into the cloud and didn't just have to observe it from a distance. And the reason why Moses got to go into the tabernacle of meeting was because He was a friend of God.

WHOEVER THEREFORE WANTS TO BE A FRIEND OF GOD

So what was it that made Moses God's friend and opened the door for Him to dwell in God's presence like this. Well, let's consider some decisions Moses made early in his life:

For one, we are told that, by faith, he left all the comforts of Egypt and dwelt in the wilderness: **Hebrews 11:24-26** reveals to us that *“By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.”*

So it all began with Moses, at an early age, making the choice that he wasn't going to continue living in the pleasures & comforts of Egypt, but would give it all up so that he could become like his people. This led him to defend one of his brethren who was being abused and then leaving Egypt to dwell in the wilderness of Arabia. There, He got to know God and was even the first to learn God's Name of Yahweh when God appeared to him in the burning bush.

In fact, in Exodus 2:18, Moses' eventual father-in-law, Jethro, was called Reuel, and in Hebrew this meant – friend of God. So it is interesting that Moses dwelt with this man called “a friend of God.” (Exodus 2:21). Why? Because what do you suppose Moses was learning while dwelling in this man's tent? Friendship with God, of course!

You see, there's something to be said for the person who leaves the treasures & comforts of this world and chooses to make the sacrifices necessary to get alone with God. And this is my testimony too: After the LORD saved me at the end of 1999 and I was filled with the Holy Spirit, I spent close to four years in the “University of Arabia” where I separated myself from the world around me and studied to show myself approved. Yes, for those 4 years, I was in the Word and in prayer! And guess what? God grew me exponentially during that short period of time!

Church, it's amazing what God can do in the person who separates themselves from "Egypt" and makes the appropriate sacrifices to make God their best friend. And while we know Moses fled into the wilderness of Arabia to flee from Pharaoh, He got to know God while in that time of isolation.

On another note, an interesting parallel here is between Moses and another man whom I consider to also be a friend of God – the apostle Paul. And that is that they both spent a few years in the "University of Arabia" after their conversions. And isn't it interesting that both of these men who went away to get alone with God ended up writing more Scripture than anyone else in their respective covenants? Coincidence? I think not!

But there is a principle in this, and it's found in **James 4:4**, which says, *"Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."*

Notice how James says that there is something called "friendship with the world." And he also says that when one befriends the world like this, they are actually in direct opposition with God. Why? Because, as he says, it's spiritual adultery!

This verse used to puzzle me because I did not understand why he called them adulterers and adulteresses in reference to befriending the world. Then the Lord revealed to me why. It was because when we give any part of our heart over to the things of the world, God sees it like we are being unfaithful to Him. As a matter of fact, the words "adulterers and adulteresses" is an incorrect translation: The original manuscripts only use the word "adulteresses." Why is this important, you ask? It's because it shows that this verse is addressing the bride of Christ.

You see, we need to understand that our covenant relationship with God is like a marriage. We are called the bride of Christ, and we have been made one spirit with our Groom – the Lord Jesus Christ. So when we allow part of our hearts to desire the things of this world, we are committing adultery against our Lord and Husband! This is obviously a serious thing!

You see, when we are in this covenant with God, which is likened to a marriage, God considers the giving of our heart to anything or anyone else as spiritual adultery. That is why it is so important to Him that we give Him all of our hearts! He does not want to share us with anyone or anything else! And if we do share ourselves with this world, then that is being unfaithful to Him!

Do you know what the LORD called this throughout the Old Testament? He called it "playing the harlot!" (See Jeremiah 2:20-3:15, Ezekiel 16:15-41, etc.). And in the passages of Scripture that refer to "playing the harlot," idolatry is usually the issue. And although many of us do not believe that we have ever been guilty of idolatry because we have never worshiped a graven image, idolatry is much more subtle than that. The apostle Paul even calls "covetousness" idolatry in Colossians 3:5. Therefore, lusting for anything other than God is considered idolatry in His sight – which is, unfaithfulness!

Just think about this a little: How would you feel if your significant other said to you, “Honey, I am going to continue to sleep over at my last girlfriend/boyfriend’s place, but I still want to be married to you. How about I spend all day Sunday with you and then the rest of the week I’ll spend with them?” Do you think that would be okay with you? Of course not! Many of you would say something to the effect of – “Look! It is either all of me or none of me. You decide!” Well, thank God He is not like that. The Lord is faithful even when we are faithless! He will not immediately sever our relationship with Him because we occasionally run around on Him, but that does not mean we should continue breaking His heart, right?

The next verse in James says, “...The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealousy” (**James 4:5**). You see, God loves us with a godly jealousy just as we love our significant other so much that we would be jealous if they were unfaithful to us. He desires to possess all of our hearts so that we can have that relationship with Him that He desires and we were created for! Jesus wants all of our hearts – not just a portion. He wants a monogamous relationship with us – that is, a whole-hearted devotion to Him.

So let’s bring this back to the example of friendship since we are referring to the Holy Spirit: Church, the Holy Spirit is the part of the Godhead on the earth with us now. Therefore, He is the One that we are described as being called into “communion” with (See **Second Corinthians 13:14**). This is why we include in our blessing regarding Him – “Holy Spirit, You are my best friend.”

Let’s be more like Moses in this respect, church. Let’s separate ourselves from this world – from the flesh – and start walking in the Spirit. By choosing to walk with the Holy Spirit and commune with Him, we befriend Him. And by befriending Him, we take a major step in this one thing – fellowship with God. So whoever therefore wants to be a friend of God, this is how it begins. Amen.

FAITHFUL ABRAHAM

Now let’s move on into another example of one of God’s friends. This next example we have is actually the first one – the father of us all & the father of faith, Abraham. Let’s look at a couple of verses that reveal to us how Abraham was God’s friend and why God considered him His friend.

In **Isaiah 41:8**, the LORD reminded His people – *“But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend.”* He went on to describe the lengths He went to in order to call them and be their God, but he threw in this little nugget – that they were the offspring of His friend, Abraham. Now the way I see it is that it was because Abraham was His friend, that all these other things he did for Abraham’s offspring were possible. In other words, it was because of His friendship with Abraham that Jacob was called and that the children of Israel were chosen.

We see this in Abraham's life, don't we? On one occasion, God first visited Abraham on His way to do what He intended to do to Sodom & Gomorrah. He did this because He wanted to let Abraham in on it. And we know what happened next, don't we? Abraham "Jewed" Him down, and God heeded him!

You see, this happened because Abraham was God's friend! So what made Abraham a friend of God? Well, we don't have to speculate – for James reveals it to us when he said, *"And the Scripture was fulfilled that says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,' and he was called God's friend."* (**James 2:23**)

So this highlights Abraham's faith as the basis for his friendship with God, doesn't it? Yes, it was because Abraham believed God that God called Him His friend.

So what does this mean for us? It means that if you and I want to be God's friend, then faith is the requirement and faithfulness is a prerequisite. I add faithfulness in there because, as James is making the point of in James chapter 2, it's not just about saying we believe God; it's about proving that we believe Him by our actions.

You see, James makes the point here that faith without works is dead. In other words, just going around saying we have faith is not what makes us God's friend. It's having the corresponding actions, that prove we believe God, that He looks for. And one of the corresponding actions of faith is the fruit of faithfulness.

Doesn't this describe Abraham to a T? He was faithful to His God! He followed Him wherever He wanted Him to go. He was there whenever God decided to show up. He was devoted and committed to God. We see this in how Abraham was chosen because God knew that he would teach his children after him. You see, that is a quality of a faithful person. They are consistent and can be counted on, which is what God saw in His friend, Abraham.

You see, **Proverbs 27:6** states that faithful are the wounds of a friend. That doesn't mean you can count on a friend to hurt you. It means that when a true friend corrects or rebukes, you can trust that they did it in love. Why? Because good friends are faithful!

THE FRIEND THAT STICKS CLOSER THAN A BROTHER

But Abraham certainly didn't always believe God and wasn't always faithful. If you look at his life closely, he made plenty of mistakes. So Abraham's friendship with God wasn't always because he did everything right.

In fact, his friendship with God didn't start with Him. God initiated the good gesture of friendship and then it was consummated by Abraham's response. In other words, God calling Abraham, while he was a pagan worshipper and with zero revelation of truth & righteousness, was obviously an act of God's grace. So God graciously gave Abraham this invite to be His friend.

This was when the LORD appeared to him, making him the promise of *“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. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you”* (See **Genesis 12:2–3** & **Genesis 15:1–21**).

You see, God called Abraham when He was a pagan, moon worshipper. It wasn't like he was just stuck in neutral spiritually either, to where he wasn't worshipping anything. No, he was an idolater, yet the LORD called him anyway.

And the LORD did this because that's what a friend does – As the first half of **Proverbs 18:24** says, *“A man who has friends must himself be friendly...”*

You know, there is something to be said about people who know how to be friendly. They are the ones who make & maintain friends. I've run into a lot of people who don't have many friends and they wonder why. Well, the answer oftentimes is staring them in the face. This word of wisdom says that in order for a person to have friends, they must themselves be friendly. In other words, it's not just the people who desire friends that will have them; it's those who are good friends themselves that have more friends.

Now being a good friend needs to be understood not as what we want to do ourselves, but as what we wish others would do unto us. So ask yourself these questions – What kind of friend do you want? Do you want someone who actually cares about you? Do you want a person who will let you talk? Who asks about you? Who you know will be there, if you need them? Then guess what that means. That means, according to this proverb, you need be that kind of friend to others first.

Church, I can guarantee you that if you will purpose in your heart to be this kind of friend to others first, you will have your pick of friends.

Well, this is what God did here with Abram, isn't it? He didn't wait for Abram to be His friend, but came to him when he was ungodly and befriended him. This is the friend we have in Jesus. As **Proverbs 18:24** goes on to say, *“... but there is a friend that sticks closer than a brother.”* The Lord certainly does that with us! Amen?

And then it wasn't like Abram saw the error of his ways and followed the LORD perfectly from that day forward. He made another poor choice immediately after the LORD appeared to Him initially. Let me explain ...

STUCK IN HARAN

You see, **Genesis 12:1** says, *“Now the Lord had said to Abram: ‘Get out of your country, from your family, and from your father's house, to a land I will show you ...’”*

This is a very significant verse because if you look back to the end of chapter eleven you will see how Abram and Sarai left Ur of the Chaldeans with Terah (Abram's father) and

with Lot (Abram's nephew) even though God specifically said to leave his family and father's house behind (see **Genesis 11:31**).

But someone might be thinking what I once did – “Didn't God speak to Abram *after* he and his father moved to Haran? After all, Genesis chapter twelve does follow chapter eleven!” That is a good point... I'm glad you brought it up☺ However, in the Book of Genesis, every chapter is not necessarily in chronological order (compare chapters 2&3). It is for this reason (as well as many others) that it is important to interpret the Scriptures in light of other Scriptures. In this case, Acts chapter seven gives us a more accurate description of what actually took place.

In **Acts 7:2-4**, when Stephen was addressing the high priest concerning the charges being made against him, he gives a very specific commentary on what actually occurred during this time-period of Genesis. Stephen stated that God appeared to and spoke to Abram while they were still in Ur before they moved to Haran. This does not at all contradict what we see in Genesis chapters 11-12 because notice again what Genesis 12:1 said – “Now the Lord **had** said to Abram ...” The word “had” denotes that what God said to Abram was something that took place in the past, and from Stephen's statement, it took place before Abram and his father's house moved to Haran.

So why do I make this point? It is to show that Abram only partially obeyed God's command when He invited Abram to come follow Him. You see, God told Abram to not only leave his country, but also to leave his family and his father's house. But instead of him and Sarai leaving Ur alone, Abram took his father Terah and nephew Lot with them. You see, by not fully obeying what the Lord had told him to do in leaving Ur alone, Abram got off the path that God intended for him to be on and became stuck – living in Haran. I believe it is no coincidence either that when they left for Canaan that they wound up dwelling in this place called “Haran.” Isn't it interesting that the place that they wound up living in had the same name as Abram's deceased brother- Haran?

You see, Abram was obviously very much attached to his family by his evident unwillingness to fully obey God's call to leave his relatives behind in Ur. And then – whether it was motivated by Terah or Abram himself – they ended up dwelling in a place named after the one very near and dear to them that had passed away.

All of this that we see in the calling and initial steps of Abram should teach every one of us a very important lesson for our Christian walk... **The call to a life of faith is a call to a life of discipleship!**

We see when Jesus called His disciples to a life of faith He just simply said to them – “Follow Me!” This simple call had a variety of implications. It basically implied the same thing as what God said to Abram when He told him in **Genesis 12:1** to – *“Get out of your country, from your family, and from your father's house!”* You see, although God may not have ever called us to forsake the specific things that He told Abram to forsake, all three of these things denote things that we can all relate to.

Number one, to “get out of your country” simply denotes leaving the place that we have been so familiar with: For example, this might describe moving from our hometown – where we are comfortable, have a steady job, and all our friends & family are at. But getting out of our “country” could also be just simply quitting a job that you know God does not want you at. Can you imagine the resistance Abram must have received when he told the people of Ur how this unknown God had spoken to him and he was leaving?

Number two, to depart “from your family” denotes restructuring your priorities in regard to certain relationships: Many of us are familiar with the teaching of Jesus on discipleship where He said, *“If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.”* (**Luke 14:26**) Well, although it might seem harsh on the surface, Jesus was just talking about restructuring our priorities. If you compare Luke’s account with **Matthew 10:37** you will find that the word “hate” just simply means to “love less than.” You see, in order to have a disciplined walk of faith, the Lord must be the number one person in your life, to where if anyone gets in the way of you following Him wholeheartedly, you will sever that relationship.

And, number three, to depart “from your father’s house” denotes the abandonment of certain securities that we were once dependent on: All of us can remember the reality that sunk in when we moved out of our parent’s house for the first time. Nothing anybody could say to us could prepare us for the revelation to come of how much it costs to fully support ourselves. Well, oftentimes God will call us to leave the “nests” that we have in our lives and climb out on the limb of faith – trusting God with every step of faith.

You see, the Lord will oftentimes call us to do some very difficult things in our walk of faith. Following Him and seeking first His kingdom is not always the easiest decision to make. Sometimes it requires much self-sacrifice and will defy our natural reasoning. But when we act on what He leads us to do – fully trusting Him even though it does not currently make sense – we will always find that His way is the best way!

So my point is that forgetting the things which are behind and immediately following the Lord is the first step into friendship with the LORD. Yes, in order to be a friend of God, you cannot be a friend of the world – meaning, you cannot love the things of this world, whether sinful or not, above Him.

But even though we, like Abram, might not always do this perfectly, the LORD Himself does. Yes, He showed Himself friendly to Abram, and I believe this is what led Abram to reciprocating that friendship.

But even though Abraham was certainly not perfect after this little speedbump of following the LORD, we do see him making some positive strides into this friendship with God – and we find that this all began with the foundation of faith ...

THE FOUNDATION OF FAITH

Let's look at what God said to Abram in His initial calling to a life of faith ...

He went on to say in **Genesis 12:2-3** – *“I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”*

Notice that after God gave Abram a commission (vs.1), He gave him several exceedingly great and precious promises. So Abram's whole pilgrimage began with a Word of God. It was through these promises made by God Himself that fueled Abram's faith.

You see, what these promises did was they birthed hope in the heart of Abram. He heard what God said He was going to do for him, and it fueled His faith because he confidently expected God to perform what He promised. And this is how faith begins with us to ...

We see in **Hebrews 11:1** that faith is the substance of things hoped for. You see, without hope, we have nothing for our faith to give substance to. This is why **Romans 10:17** says that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God... It is because it is impossible to have Bible faith without first hearing what His will is for us. F.F. Bosworth once said, “Faith begins where the will of God is known,” and this is so true. You could turn this statement around and see the same truth... “Faith never starts where the will of God is unknown.”

You see, many have been mistaken in regard to faith: You will hear of many so-called faith people that are believing for this and that. The problem is that they are basing their faith on nothing. If you were to ask them – “What is your faith based on?”, they couldn't tell you. They are just “believing” for something off a whim, just simply because they desire it. This is not how faith comes! Faith comes by hearing – either from God or about God. Either way, faith will only begin after we have heard the express will of God, and this is what true faith is based on.

It is most definitely true that we walk by faith and not by sight, but this does not mean that faith is blind... This just means that our walk of faith describes the steps we are taking after faith has already come. Our “walk” of faith began when we heard of God or from God, but our “walk” of faith requires nothing more than what we heard in the beginning. It walks completely by faith in what it heard and is not moved by what it sees. **Faith is not based on what it sees; Faith is based on what it has heard.**

What an important lesson this is for us too: Just as Abram heard from God and then stepped out in unwavering faith based on the promises God made to him, so we need to follow in his footsteps. We need to put the utmost importance on both hearing what God has promised us in His written Word and having what He speaks to us through His Holy Spirit, and then step out in the full assurance of faith, not letting anything or anyone deter us from obtaining those promises. Hearing from God and hearing His will is so vitally important to

our walk of faith because just as it was with Abraham, so it will be with us. We will have a lot of opportunities to quit following God, but if we have hope as the anchor of our soul and faith as the rope connecting us to that anchor, we will remain grounded, steadfast, and will not be moved away from the hope of the gospel which we heard (Colossians 1:23)!

Now as Abraham began following the LORD, he ran into multiple hiccups along the way to where I'm sure it seemed as though God's Word to him would not come to pass. But because he had ears to hear God's Word His faith carried him through.

Someone might say, "How do you know Abraham had ears to hear God's Word?" I know because he had the corresponding actions of faith. You don't do the things He did after hearing God's promises to him unless you believe. Amen?

But did you know that Abraham's faith in God's Word was not all that kept him going? There was something else that He did that I am convinced kept His faith strong – this one thing – He spent time in the presence of God!

BETHEL - THE MOUNTAINTOP EXPERIENCE

In Genesis 12:7, we see God revealing Himself to Abram again. He had faithfully led Abram to the Promised Land and now gave Abram His Word that He would give it to his descendants!

So notice what Abram did in response: The second half of **Genesis 12:7** says, "*... and there He built an altar to the Lord who had appeared to him.*" The building of an altar in those days described erecting and consecrating a place of communion with God. In other words, an altar represented a place of prayer, praise, and worship.

So what do we see Abram doing right here? Abram is worshipping God and His fellowship with the Lord is great! Through this time spent with his God, Abram is having what we might call a "mountaintop experience (spiritually speaking)!"

This is illustrated in the beginning of **verse 8** when we are told that he moved from there to the *mountain* east of Bethel. In the Hebrew language "Bethel" literally meant – "the House of God" (which denotes the presence of God). This definition of Bethel was literally shown to be true in the later generations of Abraham's descendants. For example, twice Jacob had an encounter with God in Bethel – once when he was traveling toward Syria to find his bride (see Genesis 28) and again after he had returned to his homeland years later (See Genesis 35). Bethel was also commonly known as a place associated with God's presence and blessing in later generations of the Jewish people as well.

So here we see that through Abram erecting an altar to God and spending time fellowshiping & worshipping Him, He ended up moving to that mountaintop experience in God's presence.

Have you ever experienced those times in His presence in your pilgrimage of faith, where He is just so evident in your life and you sense His grace and blessing? I would call these wonderful experiences our days spent in “Bethel.”

It is during these times spent in God’s presence that we are excited about pursuing God... We build our “altars” and are excited about spending time with God and are hungry for His Word. These are the times that we actually feel like seeking Him. What a glorious place this is in our faith walk!

SPIRITUAL FAMINES

But, as we can all testify to, with these mountains come the valleys! No, I am not talking about valleys of sickness, disease, poverty, and tragedies like some sincere but sincerely wrong ministers teach. I am talking about the valley experiences of not “feeling” God’s presence and of not “feeling” like seeking Him.

And this is what happened to Abram next: In **verse 10** we are told – *“Now there was a famine in the land...”* So after Abram dwelt on a mountain in God’s presence, he then finds himself in the middle of a severe spiritual famine! He was in one of those valleys of the faith walk when the showers of God’s presence seem to cease and the living bread that comes through God’s Word is hard to come by. He found himself in a dry desert spiritually!

You know, we all experience this periodically as well. There will be times in our faith walk that we are going to have to use more faith than other times. There will be times in our Christian walk that we are going to have to persevere and do what we know is right, not because we necessarily feel like it, but simply because it is the right thing to do. This is what walking by faith is all about!

And this is also where our friendship with God will be tested. But what does **Proverbs 17:17** say, *“A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.”* Yes, if we are God’s friend then we will love Him at all times, not just when we are on the mountaintop, but also when we are in the valley or in a famine season.

But how did Abram respond? He did what everyone of us are tempted to do in those spiritual famines – to head south!

TURNING TO THE SOUTH

Verse 10 goes on to say- *“... and Abram went down to Egypt to dwell there, for the famine was severe in the land.”*

This is exactly what our flesh will try and do in these spiritual famines... It will try and bring you down! As long as it is not being satisfied with an emotional touch or an occasional goosebump, it will try and get you to give into something carnal – whether it be as subtle as not seeking the Lord as much or as extreme as giving into a temptation to sin.

The key is to continue to do *by faith* what you know is right and not to be moved by your feelings.

But Abram failed to do this like all of us have at some time or another. Yes, he let the circumstances move him instead of what God said!

This is one of the elementary principles of faith that is so hard on our flesh – to not be moved by what we can see, hear, touch, taste, and feel, but only to be moved by what we believe from the Word of God. We have to make what God said in His Word the only truth in our life, because when difficult circumstances like this kind come up, we will be tempted to be moved by them. God's Word is a sure foundation that will keep us rooted and grounded from being moved.

Unfortunately, Abram did not turn to the Lord during this famine; He turned to Egypt! Abram turned to Egypt to meet his needs instead of turning to God. Now there will be those who will defend Abram's decision by saying that he had no other choice, but all things are possible with God! In **Genesis chapter 26** a similar situation happened to Isaac, Abraham's son: A famine arose in the land, and Isaac was tempted to do exactly what his daddy did and turn to Egypt, But God intervened this time! He encouraged Isaac to not go into Egypt, but that He would bless him despite the circumstances. And in **verse 12** we are told that he sowed in the land and reaped in the same year a hundredfold harvest!

Of course, God was just as able to do this for Abram as He was for Isaac. So why did God not intervene in Abram's case? We don't exactly know, but it might be because God wanted to show us what can happen as a result of turning to "Egypt" instead of to Him.

You see, this decision to go to Egypt set in motion a couple of circumstances that were not God's will. For instance, we all know the story of what Abram felt compelled to do with Sarai, his wife. Well, he did not go to Egypt trusting the Lord. So, of course, he was not going to trust the Lord to save his neck from the lustful Pharaoh either. And here's the lesson – the moment we compromise in our walk of faith, the snowball effect of compromise will take place.

You see, in the Scriptures, Egypt is a type and shadow of the world. So for us to turn to the world to meet our needs is no different than Abram turning to the south during the famine to meet his needs. And because we live in a natural and carnal world, it is easy for our flesh to seek its fulfillment from the world rather than from God. Whatever the crisis may be, our flesh will always gravitate towards looking to "Egypt" for its answers. Following the Lord will oftentimes take us in an illogical direction. But although natural logic and reasoning might seem to side with doing things the world's way, doing things the Lord's way is always the best way.

MOVING ON FROM THE SOUTH

But, praise be to God, Abram did not stay in Egypt very long! **Genesis 13:3** says that "*he went on his journey from the South as far as Bethel ...*"

After Abram saw what the world had to offer, he “came to himself” like the prodigal son (Luke 15:17)! He pulled up his stakes and headed back to the Father’s house (i.e. Bethel). You see, this is what repentance truly is! Repentance is not wallowing around in our mistakes – just feeling sorry for what we’ve done. No, repentance is a conscious decision to change. It is not an emotion; It is a decision. It is not based on a feeling of guilt; It is based on an act of our will. What the enemy will try and do, after he has tempted you to sin in the first place, is to make you feel guilty about it. He will pour on the condemnation saying things like – “What kind of Christian do you think you are? You were not trusting God at all! You’re a failure! You might as well hang it up! You’re never going to be a person of faith!” It is then that we must ignore those guilt-ridden thoughts and the negative emotions that come with them and do what we are told Abram did at the beginning of verse 3 – “he went on.”

We must move on and not get stuck in the memory of our mistake. We must realize that the past is, in fact, the past! There is nothing we can do to change it, and it is absolutely futile to entertain even the thought of it. When we miss it – as we are all likely to do – we must forget those things. Why? Because they are behind us! We cannot change our past, but we can change our future! We can make the same decision that Abram made when he “went on” with his journey, and moved on with God.

You see, **Proverbs 24:16** says that a righteous man may fall seven times, but he will arise again. God understands that those whom He has freely made righteous by His grace are subject to making mistakes and falling “south,” but He, through that same grace, has made provision for us to “rise again” (to get back up, dust ourselves off, and continue on with our journey of faith). Praise the Lord, for His mercy endures forever!

So, if you fall again, realize that God is not through with you! You can rise again and draw back near to Him! And the promise we have in James 4:8 is that when we draw near to Him, He will draw near to us! In other words, when we make the steadfast decision to change directions and move on with God, He will meet us on that road and provide us with all the grace we need to help us on our journey, just like the father of the prodigal son did for him.

RETURNING TO YOUR ALTARS

But notice specifically where Abram went and what he did as he arose from the South and came back to Bethel (i.e. the Father’s house) ...

We are told that he went *“to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, to the place of the altar which he had made there at first. And there Abram called on the name of the Lord.”* (**Genesis 13:3-4**) This is extremely significant because after Abram got off his path of faith, he went back to the last place God had spoken to Him and the last place he experienced God. This is always a good move ...

You see, sometimes when our walk of faith goes “south” it is because we failed to do what He last spoke to us. Notice I didn’t say we failed to *hear* what He last spoke to us; I said we failed to *do* (i.e. apply) what He last spoke to us. It is one thing to hear the Word of God; It is a whole other thing to do the Word of God. It is not only hearing what He said that keeps our life from falling; It is in doing what He said that keeps us grounded and steadfast on the rock (see Matthew 7:24-27).

So whenever we see our walk digressing or our faith failing, we should revisit the last things that we know God has spoken to us and then ask ourselves – Am I doing what He last told me to do? More times than not we will find that the mess we are currently in is a direct result of not doing what He previously told us to do.

And Abram did not just go back to the general place that God had spoken to him, he specifically went back to the altar which he built in that place. Now, again, these altars represented the places where communion with God was enjoyed – where man went to pray and worship God. So the fact that Abram returned to this place where he enjoyed God’s manifest presence to call on the name of the Lord gives us some practical wisdom to live by ourselves.

You see, sometimes when we are in those good places of God’s manifest presence it is directly a result of good decisions that we have made. In Abram’s case, when he built this altar, he was actively seeking God.

It has been wisely said that we are as close to God right now as we want to be. What does that mean? It means that our experience with God, that is, our partaking of the riches of His glory, is based on the level of our hunger for Him, not on His hunger to manifest Himself to us. No, I can assure you that if we are not experiencing God on a daily basis, He is not the variable; We are!

So another question we can ask ourselves whenever we conclude that our faith-walk is not where it once was is – What (if anything) was I doing different when I was in a better place spiritually? More times than not we will find that we were more focused on the Lord then than we currently are ...

Either we were consistently spending more time in fellowship with God through prayer and/or the Word or we were consistently spending more time in fellowship with other faith-filled believers. It is then that it is wise to do what Abram did: We should go back to that place where we last remember enjoying the fullness and contentment of His presence. For some of us that might be as simple as returning to our “altar.” In other words, making time once again for God in our daily routine by spending some quality time with Him through prayer and the Word. For others, this might be restoring a severed relationship with another believer or returning to a body of believers that you know in your heart you should have never left.

This is the principle the Lord Jesus taught us in Revelation chapter 2 – that when you have left your first love, you simply repent and do the first works again. What are those “first

works”? They are the things you did when you had your first love. (See **Revelation 2:4-5**).

And church, that is what I feel the Holy Spirit is wanting to target with us here this morning: I believe that many of us have dwelt in Bethel before, but a lot of us didn't stay there. I believe we have many who have headed “south” and have been dwelling in Egypt, trying to get our provision & satisfaction out of it. But the Lord is saying to us today, “It's time to come back home, to the House of God. It's time to look up, to arise from the South, and come back to Bethel where you built your altars with Me. This is where you will find this one thing – not by befriending the world, but through pursuing friendship with Me.” Amen!