

Episode 027

Living At A Higher Level

Introduction

Ever felt like the 10 spies that Moses sent out to scout the Promised Land? Overwhelmed by the seemingly insurmountable odds? Having seen their walled cities, armies and to reach the conclusion that conquering the land of Canaan was a bridge too far? This led the 10 spies to conclude with an exaggerated report in Numbers 13:33 (NIV) “We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.”

Have we at times looked at the situation at hand and declared that we are too small and the problem too big? We must not be living like grasshoppers. But be giant slayers! Especially if we are leaders on God’s purposes. We should rise up to be more like Abraham who learnt to live at a higher level. With faith. Faith that enabled him to achieve far more than others would have imagined. Including himself.

Hebrews 11:8–10 (NIV) 8 By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. 9 By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. 10 For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

Let me share 4 faith keys we can learn from Abraham’s experience. How we can begin to live at a higher level. As we ought. As leaders representing God.



By faith, receive the call of God

Hebrews 11:8 reveals to us that “By faith Abraham, when called to go...”. There was an important aspect of Abraham’s calling by God.

Abraham knew his call from Genesis 12:1–3 (NIV) 12 The LORD had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household 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.”

Abraham knew he was called was to be a faith-traveller on a journey of faith to a Promised Land. Paul knew his call to be an apostle. To live at a higher level there must be a sense of the call of God. Do you have a sense of God’s call?

God’s call will always lift us to a higher level. Abraham was a nobody. Paul was a murderous zealot. David was a shepherd boy. Yet each became more, someone greater. By responding to and embracing God’s call upon their lives.

Abraham’s father was Terah. The interesting thing was Terah somehow got a glimpse of God’s leading to the Promised Land. How do I know this? Genesis 11:31 (NIV) 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.

So Terah set out with his family, including Abraham to the land of Canaan, the land promised later by God to the Israelites and specifically to Abraham! So they left their homeland of Ur of the Chaldeans! But when they came to Harran, they settled there. Genesis 11:32 (NIV) Terah lived 205 years, and he died in Harran.

Terah was a nobody and remained a nobody. Why? He did not have a sense of God’s call. He wasted his life mid-way between Ur and the Promised Land. The big difference between Abraham and his father Terah is that both heard from God in some way. But Abraham understood it as a call while Terah did not.



Too many Christians, even leaders live mid-way. Because they got lost mid-way. Why? They were not clear about their calling. They did not grasp it and let it to go along the way.

How can we discern God's calling? There are a variety of ways. It could be through the Word of God, where the call of God comes alive in our hearts as we read His Word. It could be through prophetic words delivered through God's servants. I have had my calling clarified through such prophetic words. It should include the Holy Spirit witness or burden in our hearts. God does not just speak through others but will speak to us directly as well. It may perhaps not be as clearly articulated, especially if we are not as discerning of God's voice. It can be through His servants in other ways as well.

We must appreciate and understand the progressive unveiling of God's calling. Just as it occurred progressively for Abraham, so it usually does for us. Especially as we serve the Lord faithfully. Over the years as I served the Lord, my calling became gradually clearer and clearer. By 1990 it was clear to me that God was calling me to be a teacher of the Word. Prophetic words confirmed it. By 1992, it became clearer that God was calling me to be a pastor and into full-time ministry eventually as well as to be involved in apostolic ministry. Again, there were prophetic words confirming it. Since 2000, more emphasis grew on my apostolic ministry and eventually even my role to lead Hope International Ministries.

God has been gracious to me. Impressing upon my heart and confirming it prophetically by prophets who knew nothing about my journey. I believe an important key to God's continual guidance was my response. I heard. I understood the call. I received it. I grasped it. By faith.

All leaders need to have a sense of God's call. No matter how small. Start there. Then we will not serve God or undertake a ministry just because our leaders gave it to us. We carry it out because we have the sense of God calling us personally.



By faith, resolve to obey the call

In Hebrews 11:8, Abraham “obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.” Abraham did not procrastinate even though his father Terah had established roots for the family in Harran.

Besides understanding God’s call upon our lives, we have to respond to it. It takes faith to act upon it and go forth. It takes determination to keep to it. Apostle Paul resolutely pressed on in his calling. Philippians 3:12–14 (NIV) 12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 13 Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Faith brings forth fruits, when we obey and act upon it resolutely. It is like planting a tree. We have planted a number of fruit trees right now in our garden. It takes faith to see the fruits you desire from a tree. But it takes action motivated by faith to plant the tree. That is what we did with our 2 apple trees. It takes ongoing faith to continue to nurture that tree until it bears fruits. Pruning and fertilizing it. It takes resolute faith to continue to nurture and guard the fruits against all the myriad of pests that attacks it until it is fully grown. Then we were able to enjoy some 100 apples each year!

Being resolute helps us not to waver even when there are great obstacles, great opposition. When you do something great for God – expect great opposition, great obstacles. When John Wesley determined to bring the Gospel throughout UK, he faced tremendous opposition. Many pastors guarded their pastorate jealously, suspiciously against this radical preacher, calling him a heretic amongst many accusations. Despite the opposition, Wesley persisted by preaching anywhere he could. Churches, fields, cottages, barns, marketplaces, even cemeteries.



A page from John Wesley's Diary reads as follows:

- Sunday a.m., May 5, preached in St. Ann's, was asked not to come back anymore.
- Sunday p.m., May 5, preached at St. John's, deacons said, "Get out and stay out."
- Sunday a.m., May 12, preached at St. Jude's, can't go back there either.
- Sunday p.m., May 12, preached at St. George's, kicked out again.
- Sunday a.m., May 19, preached at St. somebody else's, deacons called special meeting and said I couldn't return.
- Sunday p.m., May 19, preached on the street, kicked off the street.
- Sunday a.m., May 26, preached in meadow, chased out of meadow as a bull was turned loose during the services.
- Sunday a.m., June 2, preached out at the edge of town, kicked off the highway.
- Sunday p.m., June 2, afternoon service, preached in a pasture, 10,000 people came to hear me.

Wesley never wavered from his calling and persisted to the end of his life. The result was he established the Methodist movement which became one of the largest denominations in the world today.



By faith, make the necessary sacrifices

We know that Abraham became wealthy in his time in Harran. Yet to obey God's command to travel where God leads him, he had to become a nomad as he 'lived in tents.' By faith, Abraham was willing to make great sacrifices. Can you imagine Abraham's conversation with Sarah that day? Imagine it in today's terms.

Abraham rushed into their luxury mansion to find Sarah.

"Sarah, God just spoke to me so clearly about what His destiny is for me!"

Sarah, somewhat taken aback, could only blurt out "What do you mean?"

"God wants to me to become a blessing to this world. He is going to bring us to a special land that He will show us. There we will grow into a mighty nation!"

Sarah starts to warm to the idea. "OK. So let's start buying some tracts of land there for our home and flocks. And we will shift there in a few years once our new mansion is built."

Abraham shakes his head. "No, no, no! We have to go now! God wants us to start off as soon as possible."

Sarah tries to figure out what that would mean. "I guess we could fly over and rent a temporary home first."

Abraham shakes his head again. "No, no, no! I don't even know where this place is. God will show us as we travel. All I know is we need to travel by land. We need to uproot everything and live a nomadic life. Travelling until we reach that land."

Sarah is in shock. "But...but...what about my huge wardrobe? My collection of shoes rivals that of Imelda Marcos. I love our swimming pool and home gym. I don't think I will get used to that kind of lifestyle!"

Abraham tries to calm Sarah down. "Honey, we just have to simplify our lives. Live more simply. Take with us only what we really need. Maybe we can put the bulk of your wardrobe and shoes into long-term storage."

Sarah brightens up a little. "I can take along my hairdresser and beautician, right?"

Abraham rolls his eyes.



To live at a higher level, we have to leave behind what keeps us at a lower level. To Abraham that meant leaving Haran and all the niceties of a settled wealthy lifestyle! To Paul it was Judaism. To Peter it meant his fishing career. To me was being a scientist. These sacrifices may mean leaving behind the familiar to embrace the uncertain. It may mean financial sacrifices of a career we had built. It may mean sacrificing comforts we have become accustomed to, and adopting new lifestyles patterns.

Yet such sacrifices are not truly sacrifices to us because of our perspective of the desired outcomes. Jesus set us the ultimate example of His sacrifice at the cross. He faced it with joy, knowing what it would accomplish. Hebrews 12:2 (NIV) ...Jesus...For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

I am often inspired by elite athletes. They make enormous sacrifices because they know that to go higher, they need to let go of things that keep them down. They instead grasp for things that lift them higher. The training regime, the mental focus, the specialized nutrition, the intense competitions and so forth.

How high a level are you willing to go? How much of that which holds you back are you willing to let go? The extent we are willing to pay the price will also set the pace for our people. A leader I know often stated, "We have to sacrifice 2 buckets of blood to inspire our followers to sacrifice 2 drops!"



By faith, contribute to the big picture

Hebrews 11:10 revealed Abraham's key motivating factor to endure the challenges of a nomadic lifestyle, "For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God." We understand now that this city is the Church that God is building. Abraham understood that his faith journey will eventually contribute towards the city of God. He had to do his part. While trusting that God will do His part.

It help our motivation when we realize how our faith, our life contributes to God's big picture. We are all working together to build God's city, God's church, God's kingdom. (Eph 4:16 NIV) "From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."

I understood my part in contributing to the Kingdom of God. Even when I was starting small in ministry, I always had the sense that what I contribute to the Kingdom will make a difference. Even when I was just driving people to church or when mentoring young believers. Whether I was teaching a Christian subject in a class or leading a life group. Whether I am preaching in a large church or an intimate gathering. That perspective continues to motivate me to give my utmost.

When people's vision is too small, when their perspectives too inward, they go for what looks nice or convenient. What is comfortable and pleasing. Hence, they look only for churches that meets their needs, that make them feel good and comfortable. But that is not what is involved in building God's church. We should be part of churches that will seriously build God's kingdom! We ought to develop such a realization in our people as well.

Conclusion

Let's be leaders that aim to live at a higher level by faith. Let's be a people of God who do not shrink back in our faith journey! But press on in God. Then we will build God's Church, God's Kingdom together!



Discussion Questions

These questions could be done personally or as part of a group discussion.

1. Why do you think that having a clear sense of God's call helps us live at a higher level? Discuss.
2. Why do you think that being resolute in obeying God's call is a critical part of living at a higher level? Discuss.
3. What are your thoughts about this statement: "To live at a higher level, we have to leave behind what keeps us at a lower level". Discuss.

Actionable Steps

Following questions are to prompt us on suitable actions. Importantly, come up with steps you will take to make progress. Give them datelines and priority.

1. Do you have a clear sense of God's call upon your life? What are some steps you could take to clarify God's call upon your life?
2. Can you identify some aspects related to God's call that you have yet to act upon? What specific steps can you take to act upon it?
3. Can you identify some key areas in your life which is keeping you at the lower level? Have are some practical steps you can take to leave these behind and grasp hold of what will lift you higher?





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