



# VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

## Abraham: An All-In Life

Believing God: The Key to Living

Life to the Fullest

Tim Badal | November 24, 2019



Turn in your Bibles to Genesis 25, as we finish a two-month series called “Abraham: An All-In Life.” We have been watching a man who stands tall in all of human history. Why is he such a great man? It’s not because he invented some new form of technology or because he led great armies to great conquests. It isn’t because he was some great legislator who wrote great legal documents for a society. Nor was it because of his athletic prowess that accomplished awesome things on an athletic field.

The reason why Abraham is so important to our lives and our faith is because he did one thing well—he believed God. We’re told this in the Old Testament and it’s repeated again in the New Testament. He serves as a model for us because when God spoke to him, he believed—even when what God was saying seemed crazy and it seemed to go against all reason or hope.

How did God respond to Abraham’s faith? God called him a friend. He walked with Abraham along the journey, all the days of Abraham’s life. He also blessed him again and again and again. Although Abraham’s life was difficult at times, and even though he failed at times along the way, his belief in God was the rudder for his ship that enabled him to do great things for God. That’s why we can thank God for the man Abraham.

As we’ve gone through this series, we’ve been learning what it means to live an all-in life. We’ve seen that it means to trust and follow God. We’ve learned what it means to prioritize and serve God, to celebrate Him when good things happen and to trust Him when difficult times come. Most importantly, we’ve learned what it means to surrender to God, especially as we saw Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son, because he believed God had a plan and purpose in all He was asking Abraham to do. This is what it means to be all-in and we’ve learned that we too are called to this kind of life.

In order to follow, trust, prioritize, celebrate and surrender to God we must understand that these things happen to the same degree that we are able to believe God. In other words, if we believe in God in little ways, we will trust, follow, prioritize and surrender to Him in little ways. But if our understanding of God and belief in Who He is is robust and full, if we love to experience Him in greater ways, then our faith, priorities and surrender will grow larger and larger, encompassing more and more of our lives. This is what Abraham has taught us.

Turn now to Genesis 25, where Abraham’s life is nearing its end. We’ll see how even in his death, Abraham modeled for us what it means to leave a legacy. First, however, we need to note that a lot has happened since Genesis 22 when we read about Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice Isaac and God’s provision of a ram substitute. Let me share a few of these things with you:

- First, as we read last week, Abraham’s wife Sarah died and he went to great lengths to bury her and mourn her death.
- Second, Abraham searched for a bride for his son Isaac, finding a suitable wife in Rebekah.
- Third, Abraham experienced the joy of the birth of two grandsons, Jacob and Esau.

We’ll also see in Genesis 25 that after Sarah’s death, Abraham took a new wife named Keturah, who gave birth to more sons who eventually made him a grandfather many times over. As we look at this last chapter in the patriarch Abraham’s life, we’ll be able to identify three blessings that come when we choose to believe God. Here’s what Genesis 25 says:

<sup>25:1</sup> Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah. <sup>2</sup> She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. <sup>3</sup> Jokshan fathered Sheba and Dedan. The sons of Dedan were Asshurim, Letushim, and Leummim. <sup>4</sup> The sons of Midian were Ephah, Epher, Hanoch, Abida, and

Eldaah. All these were the children of Keturah. <sup>5</sup> Abraham gave all he had to Isaac. <sup>6</sup> But to the sons of his concubines Abraham gave gifts, and while he was still living he sent them away from his son Isaac, eastward to the east country.

<sup>7</sup> These are the days of the years of Abraham's life, 175 years. <sup>8</sup> Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people. <sup>9</sup> Isaac and Ishmael his sons buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, east of Mamre, <sup>10</sup> the field that Abraham purchased from the Hittites. There Abraham was buried, with Sarah his wife. <sup>11</sup> After the death of Abraham, God blessed Isaac his son.

Amanda and I had the great privilege of being part of the funeral services for Omar Sutherland this last Thursday. For some of you who don't know him, Omar and his wife Rose were two of our founding members in the church. In fact, long before Village Bible Church had this property and these buildings, before there were multiple campuses like there are now, it started in a living room in Sugar Grove—in the home of Omar and Rose Sutherland. This couple served for many, many years as missionaries with Campus Crusade ministries. They are the quintessential disciple-makers that God has called all of us as Christians to be. Omar's service on Thursday was a celebration of the life of a man who lived life well.

During the service someone read a quote from Matthew Henry. About 400 years ago, Matthew Henry wrote one of the most well-respected and best-selling Bible commentaries that has ever been written. He was a godly man whose study of Scripture has helped many more Christians than he ever would have imagined. On his deathbed, Matthew Henry said this: "A life spent in the service of God and in communion with Him is the most comfortable and pleasant life anyone can live in this world." Let that sink in. "A life spent in the service of God and in communion with Him is the most comfortable and pleasant life anyone can live in this world."

Do we believe this? Do we believe dedicating our lives to God and walking with God is going to bring us the most comfortable and pleasant life in this world? That's what we're all searching for, but sadly, the world disagrees with this quote. Even more tragic, most Christians—even those who say they believe this—don't really live any differently from the way the world calls them to live.

Matthew Henry got it right. I think Omar Sutherland got it right. I think Abraham got it right. Those three men knew that if they dedicated their lives to walking, talking and living faithfully with God, they would find the peace and contentment they were looking for in this world. Will we?

This morning our Scripture passage is what I would call "earthy." There's nothing deeply spiritual about the events in the text, but in them we see how walking with God is not done in the clouds. Rather, it happens in the everyday moments, in the good, the bad and the ugly of life—and yes, even in death.

As we'll see, Abraham lived his life to the fullest, and you and I can do that as well if we will believe and trust God. When we listen to His Word and follow His ways, then we too have the opportunity not only to leave a legacy for those who come after us, but also to experience His goodness and grace each step of the way, just as Abraham did.

## **Believing God enables us to finish well.**

The first blessing we can receive when we believe God is that this enables us to finish well. In Genesis 25 we're told that Abraham died at the age of 175. You think you're old? You're a young pup. The axiom that comes to mind when we look at the life of Abraham is it isn't how you start, it's how you finish this thing called life.

For the first 75 years, Abraham lived for himself and worshiped other gods. His job was to make idols so people could worship other gods instead of the one true God. But when he was 75, he came to realize that Yahweh was the God he was called to serve and live life with. He began to trust, follow and surrender to this God.

For the next 100 years, Moses, the author of Genesis, gives us the following details about Abraham's life and death. He wrote in Genesis 25:8, "*Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people.*" It was a tribute to a life lived well, or said another way, Abraham lived a satisfied life.

Can you say that you are satisfied with life? If you can't, it isn't that our circumstances are the problem; it's that you are keeping yourself from this kind of life. You have not surrendered your life to the One Who truly satisfies. If you want to have this epitaph on your life, you need to be willing to give it to the One Who truly satisfies.

How do we believe God? Abraham did two things that resulted in him finishing well

### **Abraham loved well.**

We saw in chapter 23 how Abraham responded to the death of his wife Sarah. She died at the age of 127, so he lived nearly 50 years longer without the love of his life. But their marriage had lasted over 100 years. What a testimony and sign of dedication and commitment!

Was it a perfect marriage? No. They had their issues and struggles. No doubt if they were here with us today, they could tell of episodes in which they would be ashamed of their choices and actions. That's true for any of us who are married. We've all done dumb things. We can hurt one another through the decisions we make. Abraham and Sarah no doubt hurt each other many times. Nor did they have a traditional family. Theirs was a blended family. Sarah had a stepson. These situations can often be dysfunctional even today.

Yet we see they shared a great deal of love. Turn to Genesis 23 for a minute. We read in the first few verses that Sarah lived to be 127, then we learn where she died in Canaan. It says in verse two, "*Abraham went in to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her.*" That speaks of the loss a person has when their spouse dies.

I've sat with those who have said goodbye to the loves of their life. I've watched the weeping and mourning of a husband who for 50 years had woken every morning beside that beautiful woman he called his wife. These are people who shared the ebbs and flows of life, the joys of children and grandchildren. I've seen a strong capable man break down like a baby, weeping with great sorrow for the loss of his beloved.

Abraham must have felt this massive hole in his heart, with his partner in life, his lover, his confidant and best friend now gone. Did you know this is the first time we see any mention in Scripture of a person weeping and mourning? Was Abraham the first to mourn? Surely Adam and Eve mourned the loss of Abel. But perhaps the Holy Spirit led Moses to see Abraham's sorrow as more noteworthy than any prior loss.

We see his love also through the great care he took to bury Sarah properly. Remember, he was a sojourner in the land of Canaan. God had promised to give him that land, but it was not yet his. Instead, Abraham went to the Hittites to purchase a place to bury his wife. This was a marriage filled with love. Abraham loved Sarah well. This carries an application for our own relationships, modeling commitment and dedication. But I would especially note how this applies to those who are married. Are you loving your spouse well? Don't go too quickly to where your spouse is lacking. "Well, Pastor, I would if he would do this, this and this." "I would do that, Pastor, if she was more like that, that and that."

Let that question weigh on you for a while: am I loving my spouse well—in the big things and in the little things? Am I loving my spouse well where I think she should be loved, where he should be loved, even in the places I don't think they need to be loved? Abraham loved Sarah well.

Now, they had hurt each other and done stupid things against one another. No doubt forgiveness had been extended. Are you loving your spouse as Christ loves the church? Are you sacrificing for them? Are you nurturing your spouse in such a way that honors them and glorifies God? As married individuals, for us to finish well, we need to love our spouses every day until we're called home. Can you look in your spouse's eyes and say, "I've done that to the best of my ability"?

Moses seems to paint this romantic picture of Abraham and Sarah. A marriage that lasted 100 years. An aged man burying his wife and weeping over his loss. Yet in chapter 25—just two chapters later—the Hallmark romance is gone. After she died, he might have said was, "There's no way to replace her." But then Abraham took another wife named Keturah. We don't know anything about her, but this gives us an opportunity to address this kind of circumstance. Even though God has purposed for one man and one woman to live their lives out in marriage, He has still given provision for widows or widowers to remarry. In fact, Paul told the Corinthian church that those who are widowed should find another believer to marry (1 Corinthians 7:39). So we can assume that this was what Abraham did, for their marriage was blessed with many children—six sons. Again, it seems Abraham loved well.

When it comes to navigating a second marriage, we must admit it can be difficult. Widows and widowers who desire to remarry need the wisdom of Solomon regarding the timing of that second marriage, the process, the feelings of their families, and so on. Abraham had to deal with that, just as we would if this becomes our circumstance. As Christians, we need to realize that the loss of our spouse will leave a massive hole in our life and family. We also need to remember, however, that God can make up for that loss. The Bible says many times that God is the Defender and Protector of widows. He cares for those who have lost their spouse. In His grace, God also gives opportunity, and I would say as a pastor, so should we. If your parent or someone close to you loses their spouse through death, we need to be gracious, because we rarely understand the level of pain they're experiencing in losing the one they love. Abraham seems to have done this well, allowing him to finish well.

### **Abraham led well.**

In Genesis 25, we're told that at some point in his old age, Abraham blessed his children with gifts. He gathered them together and as the family patriarch, he began to extend love and grace to his children. We read in Genesis 24 how he gave Isaac the greatest gift of all—a wonderful and godly wife, Rebekah. I could spend a lot of time on that. But let me say this to parents. One of the greatest legacies you

can leave is first modeling what a healthy marriage looks like, then also being involved in the process of each of your children finding a spouse. That happens long before they bring that first date home to meet you. Pray for your children's spouses. Advise your children.

None of my sons are ready to be married—they'd better not be. But we will sit our boys down and say, "This is what we want for your spouse. This is what you need to be looking for in a wife." I am beyond thankful that I have a wife who models to my three sons what a godly wife should be like. Abraham goes even farther in that he prearranged the marriage of Isaac and Rebekah. I know a lot of you parents wish we could go back to this. If you go there, let me know how it works out.

We're told in Genesis 25:9 that Isaac and Ishmael came together to bury their father. We need to remember that the dynamics between these brothers were not good—and who can blame them? Think of the soap opera these boys would have experienced growing up. It probably gave them a broken relationship from the start. But because Abraham was a good father and a faithful man, these sons set aside their issues with each other and chose to honor their dad by burying him together. That speaks of a life lived well by a father who led well.

At the end of his life, Abraham did a couple things we should note. First, he gave gifts to his children and we need to do that as well. We live in a society that encourages us to spend everything we have on ourselves. But as Proverbs 13:22 reminds us, "*A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children.*" This means each of us as adults should live within our means and be open-handed to others, especially to those in our family.

Second, Abraham left a legacy of faith. Abraham taught his son Isaac, the second patriarch of our faith. He too is in the Hebrews 11 Hall of Faith.

As a son who has the honor of walking in the footsteps of a great man, I have received a heritage of faith from my own father. He has taught me faithfulness and obedience, not just through his words but through his walk. He has showed me what it means to live life well for the glory of God. I now have the great responsibility of doing the same for my own three sons, so they might live blessed lives and extend this legacy to future generations.

Are you doing that today or are you promoting other things in your children? Things like education, athletics, artistic skills, business abilities. All of these are wonderful and important, but remember that while they may never use these skills in the future, there is a 100% certainty that they will one day stand in the presence of Almighty God. Have you and I as parents prepared our children well for this? Are we sending them in the direction of faithful living before God?

Do you want to finish well? It isn't how you started the race—it's how you finish it. Maybe today you're realizing you've not been running the race well. That's okay. Abraham and Sarah could share with us today some of the terrible decisions they made. I could give you even more examples of dumb decisions I've made in my life. That's why we must throw ourselves on the grace and mercy of God.

Today is a new day and God is giving us a new opportunity. Whether you're 40 or 80, if you have breath in your lungs and brainwaves in your head, use these to serve and honor God. Write this down: "If you ain't dead, you ain't done." We still have the chance to love and serve and give. If this is how we live, we will finish well.

## **2. Believing God allows us to live faithfully.**

Let's look at our next two points quickly. Believing in God also allows us to remain faithful. Go to Romans 4 where we are told by Paul what it means to be a sinner saved by the grace of God. In the first three chapters of Romans, Paul has explained that there are no righteous people—not even one. We all fall short of the glory of God. Then in Romans 4, he shifts his attention from our sinfulness to God's gift of faith through which we can come to believe in Him. Paul could have chosen anyone in human history he wanted as an example of this, but he decided to choose Abraham.

We read this in Romans 4:18-22:

In hope [Abraham] believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, "So shall your offspring be." He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. This is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness."

Paul is saying, "If you want to finish well, remain faithful by following Abraham's model." Abraham was able to "believe against hope." Abraham had the same two choices we have this morning. As we're coming to realize, there's news and there's fake news. The world tells us fake news about ourselves. The devil tells us fake news about who we are. The reason we're so broken, isolated and without hope is that we've bought into the world's idea of hope.

Abraham said no to the fake hope of what the world and the devil promised, instead choosing the hope that God's promise was true. If you want to remain faithful to God, stop reading the world's press about you and your circumstances, and start believing the promises of God.

Abraham said no to the world's wisdom and yes to the wisdom of God. We need to shut off the flow of the world's media and turn on God's "media" —His Word and prayer—so that we might hope against hope. When we do this, we too will not waver. No matter what the world throws at us, we will be able to stand steadfast. Second, we will grow and mature in our walk with God. And third, we will give glory to God. Abraham exhibited faith in God. When you and I also exhibit faith that goes against the wisdom and hope of this world, we bring glory to God. God looks at the angels and says, "Hey, that Abraham is a chip off the old block, isn't he?" That's what God says when we choose to live by faith and not by sight. "That's My boy. That's My girl. I'm proud of them." We show the heavenly beings around God that living a life of faith brings great blessing.

### **3. Believing God causes us to always look forward.**

Finally, we see that Abraham was able to finish well and remain faithful because he looked forward. What would make a man leave his homeland and everything he knew to live in tents, moving from place to place in a land that wasn't his own? What would make him do things that seemed absurd to the world and yet made total sense to him?

Hebrews 11:10 tells us the reason why Abraham did these things: *"For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God."* Abraham stopped looking at the here and now, looking forward to the future. He knew God had a plan and purpose. He realized that even after he died, God was not done.

Even more, Abraham realized that God's promise to give him the land of Canaan paled in comparison to what God was building in heaven. Jesus told us, "For I go to prepare a place for...Abraham?" Yes, Abraham, but for us as well (John 14:1-4). If we're going to finish well and leave a legacy, if we're going to remain faithful, it all comes down to our belief that we have a home that isn't here and that one day—either when we die or when Jesus returns—we will be with Him in a place He has prepared for our blessing and our good. This is where we will spend eternity.

And if eternity means we'll be worshiping in the presence of God forever, then what should this little dot on that eternal timeline look like here on earth? Should we be pursuing what we want, doing the things that bring us pleasure only, or should this be a prelude to what we're going to do in glory with God in heaven? We've got a lot of work to do. We have a week ahead of us where filled with life and family and opportunity.

Remember, if you ain't dead, you ain't done. So roll up the sleeves of your faith and trust God. Believe Him, pursue Him and surrender to Him, so that when your life is done, you will realize you've honored God each step of the way. In the process, when you struggle and fail, you can experience the grace of God.

While Abraham was an awesome model for us, there is an even greater model in Jesus Christ. Jesus endured great hostility so that we might have grace and redemption. He now sits at the right hand of the Father and has prepared a place for us to one day be with Him forever.

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