



# VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

## Abraham: An All-In Life

### Joy in the Journey

Tim Badal | November 10, 2019

Let's turn our attention to God's Word this morning as we continue in our series "Abraham: An All-In Life." We've seen how God called Abraham out of total obscurity in northern Iraq, not because of anything Abraham did, but because of God's grace. God told him, "I'm going to bless you and make you great."



A man whom no one outside of his community knew anything about eventually became one of the greatest men in human history. Three religions—Islam, Judaism and Christianity—look to him as their founding father and model. We as Christians realize that of the promises God made to Abraham, the most precious was that through his seed all nations would be blessed (Genesis 12:1-3, 18:18). Abraham would have a son in his old age, but more importantly from his line another Son would be born Who would change the world. When Matthew opened the New Testament, he connected Jesus back to being a descendant of Abraham (Matthew 1:1-17).

So we're looking at a man who was faulty in many ways, but we celebrate him and seek to model our lives after him. By the grace of God, he was able to accomplish awesome things and eventually saw that God was in fact a faithful promise keeper. We need to remember that we can't make one-to-one correlations between Abraham's times and ours. Still, there are themes in his life that are valid today. We can see what it means to follow and trust God and what it means to make God the priority in our lives. Then last week we learned the importance of serving God with all our heart and serve the communities around us by going before God on their behalf, as Abraham did with the people of Sodom.

This morning we'll be in Genesis 21 where we'll see the first high point in Abraham's story. For 25 years, Abraham and Sarah have been waiting for the child who was promised to them. When Abraham left Ur of the Chaldeans back in Genesis 12, we learned that Sarah had been barren for a long time. In fact, they had concluded that she would never be able to have a child. Their wait for this child lasted 9,125 days, plus or minus a few. As the days went by, their hope faded.

Maybe today you too are holding on to a promise from God, something He's spoken to you through His Word or through a circumstance. You've been praying about something for so long, but each day your hope is eroded more and more. You wonder if God is ever going to come through. As believers, all of us are in a season of waiting. God has promised He's going to prepare a place for us. John 14 tells us that if He's gone to prepare a place for us, He will come back and take us to be with Him forever. Some of us look at the world and the circumstances of our lives, thinking, "God, it's been a long time. You said You were coming soon, but it's been 2,000 years. We understand that to You a day is like a thousand years, but we sometimes have a hard time believing that promise is true." When we find ourselves waiting, we can begin to doubt.

In Genesis 21, God gives those of us today who are waiting on one of His promises something to hang our hopes on. This is where we read about the birth of Isaac, the son promised to Abraham. After all the years of waiting, after all the ebb and flow of bad decisions and foolish thoughts and doubts, they were finally able to celebrate with their friends the birth of a child to a 100-year-old man and a 90-year-old woman. We will read how Sarah laughed in amazement at how God finally gave her what she desired, then how Abraham threw a feast to celebrate.

Let's read Genesis 21, then we'll set that aside and look back at some of the earlier events that made Genesis 21 such a time of celebration and joy. Hopefully we'll be able to glean some truths for ourselves in these passages. We'll start in Genesis 21:1:

<sup>1</sup> The LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did to Sarah as he had promised. <sup>2</sup> And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him. <sup>3</sup> Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac. <sup>4</sup> And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. <sup>5</sup> Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. <sup>6</sup> And Sarah said, "God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me." <sup>7</sup> And she said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age." <sup>8</sup> And the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned.

There's something awesome about a party. One of the reasons I love my catering job is that the majority of the events I cater are parties. They are celebrating something, so I'm invited to come and cook for these families and their friends. It might be a birthday, an anniversary or a wedding. Even as a caterer who is there simply to work, I still feel like part of the celebration. Parties are fun to attend. Last night our church threw a party and it was a great time of celebration for all of us. It's interesting that we don't have to teach people how to celebrate. It's an instinct we have.

But there's something about celebrating our relationship with God that we don't always do well. As Christians, who should be celebrating God and be filled with joy at what He's doing, far too many of us don't know how to do that. Even though joy is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), it's one we don't often harvest in our lives. We're kind of like the Puritans of whom it was said that they were "haunted by the fear that someone somewhere might be happy." Does that describe you this morning? Does it touch the cynic in you or the part of you that feels discouraged? "How can I be happy with this circumstance in my life?" Billy Sunday, the evangelist who was known for celebrating, once said, "If there's no joy in your religion, then you are a leaking vessel. There's a leak in your Christianity somewhere."

The number one job of a Christian is to celebrate what God has done out of gratitude. We should be the most joy-filled people, because we realize that when we were lost, we were given new birth in Jesus Christ through His finished work on the cross. We have been brought into a relationship with the omnipotent Creator Who gives us everything we need to be in relationship with Him. That should fill our hearts with great joy!

As we'll see, while Abraham and Sarah were filled with joy in Genesis 21, they had not always been joyful. The road to Genesis 21 is like the roads many of us find ourselves on. They allowed some things to kill their joy on that journey,. Let's remember that in Genesis 12, the God of the universe said to Abraham, "I want to bless you, not only in your life but in the lives of your descendants." No doubt Abraham was celebrating when he heard this, even though it took a step of faith.

We have been given a similar promise that God would bring us blessing. The Bible tells us we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing under heaven (Ephesians 1:3-14). Why is it that Abraham in Genesis and we today are not filled with the joy we should be experiencing?

## **1. In the journey of life we find joy by steering clear of roadblocks.**

If we want to experience joy, if we want to celebrate God, we've got to steer clear of some roadblocks. There were some roadblocks in the life of Abraham and Sarah, and there are roadblocks in our lives that keep us from experiencing the joy of the Lord. What are some of these roadblocks? Let's see what they were in Abraham and Sarah's lives, then we'll be able to see reasons why our joy can be robbed as well.

### **The roadblock of frustration**

The first thing that blocks our joy is frustration. Back in Genesis 12, God said to Abraham, "You are going to have a son." They didn't quite know how that could happen, but they had been given a promise. But year after year, no son came. Turn for a minute to Genesis 16:1 which is probably one of the most frustrating verses in all of Scripture. It says, "*Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children.*"

If we were to superimpose that on Genesis 12, we would think something was wrong. God said they would have a child. Years later, there was no child, as well as no assurance that the future would be any different. Frustration is defined as the disappointment or anger of something not going the way we expect it will.

We experience frustration all the time. Our kids don't do what we expect them to do, or our spouse doesn't do what we expect. Maybe it's the person driving next to us who doesn't do what we expect they will. As a result, we feel frustrated, which then can move to disappointment and then to anger.

Abraham and Sarah were disappointed, and although Scripture doesn't say this, they might have felt some anger against God. "God, we expected something, but You haven't done it." It's not because they had put an undue expectation on Him; it's because He had promised them something and they expected it to happen much sooner. Instead of experiencing an abundant life, instead of experiencing the joy of walking with God and trusting in His promise, they became frustrated. Things weren't going the way they expected.

Sadly, frustration tends to invite friends to join in: anger, bitterness and even rage. Some who are here this morning are at a place of frustration. Life isn't going the way you wanted it to. Your marriage isn't going the way you wanted it to. Your church isn't going the way you wanted it to. Your relationships aren't going the way you wanted them to. Your job isn't going the way you wanted it to. Frustration mounts and mounts.

But God says, "I didn't come into your life to frustrate you." Jesus said in John 10:10, "*I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.*" God's desire for us is that we be filled with joy, not frustration.

## The roadblock of foolishness

Then foolishness comes on the heels of frustration. What we see as Genesis 16 continues is that out of their frustration, Abraham and Sarah did something foolish. This is also true of us. We get frustrated because God doesn't seem to be moving, or maybe someone around us isn't doing what we want, or maybe the church or our job is letting us down. As a result, we can make some rash decisions, not out of wisdom, but out of frustration.

In Genesis 16:1-2, we see a move of frustration that leads to a foolish decision: "*Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar. And Sarai said to Abram, Behold now, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children.*" That's frustration. "It's not my fault, God; it's Your fault. You prevented me from bearing children."

Sarai continued, "*Go in to my servant; it may be that I shall obtain children by her.*" Talk about foolishness! "*And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai.*" Moses makes an incredible statement here. Over and over, God had come to Abram and spoken to him. And when God spoke, Abram listened, but out of frustration, Abram listened to his wife's voice instead.

<sup>3</sup> So, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her servant, and gave her to Abram her husband as a wife. <sup>4</sup> And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress. <sup>5</sup> And Sarai said to Abram, "May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my servant to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the Lord judge between you and me!"

Notice the exclamation point—Sarai was yelling at her husband. They were living in a time of frustration. I get it. No doubt it would have been difficult for us if we had been in their shoes. Instead of waiting on God and trusting Him, we get frustrated like them and start making decisions for ourselves. We move outside of God's will and Word; we begin to start rationalizing. "God, if You're not going to do it, then I'm going to take my life into my own hands. God, if You're not going to give me that promotion, maybe that means I've got to get a little more cutthroat with my sales. Doing it Your way, God, isn't getting anywhere. You've given me desires, but you're not giving me the spouse I need. I'm not going to wait for You; I'm going to sleep around. I'll do whatever the world tells me to do, because that's where I'll find my happiness."

We do this all the time. Out of our frustration, we rationalize our choices, but they lead to foolishness. Abram and Sarai's foolish decision made in a time of frustration would impact their marriage relationship. Think of the dinnertime conversation. Think about the dynamics of the connection Abram now had with Hagar and her son. Think about the jealousy that produced in Sarai. It also impacted their relationship with God. I believe they knew exactly what they were doing. This wasn't an accident. They knew this was not God's plan, but they decided to go against God and His word.

Unfortunately, we do this as well. While the frustration itself might not be a sin, it's a very slippery slope. So if you're living in a perpetual state of frustration, be careful, because with frustration comes a lot of foolishness.

## The roadblock of fear

There's one more roadblock. What keeps us from celebrating and enjoying God every day? Fear. Turn now to Genesis 20. We are probably wondering why Abraham would be fearful. Back in Genesis 13, he had no fear of giving his nephew Lot the first choice of land, because he knew God was with him. Then Lot found himself in a dilemma in Sodom, because they were in conflict with some of the surrounding kingdoms. Eventually he and his family were taken hostage. Abraham took a couple hundred men and rescued Lot. He was fearful, because he knew the enemies were more numerous, but in Genesis 15 God told him not to be afraid and that He would be with Abraham.

Then in Genesis 19, Abraham got a front-row view of God's immense power as the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed. He knew the God Who had made those promises was mighty enough to both protect and to destroy.

Then in Genesis 20, we find that Abraham is afraid again. It's much like what happened in Genesis 12. What's going on in Genesis 20? Look in verse one: "*From there Abraham journeyed toward the territory of the Negeb and lived between Kadesh and Shur; and he sojourned in Gerar.*" As Abraham was traveling to these places, he realized that the countrymen in those regions were more powerful than he was. So he responded in a fashion similar to what he had done in Genesis 12 when he was in Egypt. He knew his wife was so beautiful that

these men might kill him so they could have her which is why Abraham asked Sarah in Genesis 12 to say she was his sister, so he would not be a threat to Pharaoh. In that situation, God protected Sarah.

Now in Genesis 20, Abraham was again in the territory of a powerful man named Abimelech. So again he used the same strategy and Abimelech took Sarah. But before she could be defiled, God spoke to Abimelech in a dream, saying he must give Sarah back to her husband Abraham. Then God added that Abraham was a prophet who could pray that God would not punish Abimelech. Again, as in Egypt, God afflicted the people until Sarah was safe. Look at Genesis 20:9-11:

<sup>9</sup> Then Abimelech called Abraham and said to him, "What have you done to us? And how have I sinned against you, that you have brought on me and my kingdom a great sin? You have done to me things that ought not to be done." <sup>10</sup> And Abimelech said to Abraham, "What did you see, that you did this thing?" <sup>11</sup> Abraham said, "I did it because I thought, There is no fear of God at all in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife."

Fear can cause us to do a lot of dumb things. We can be fearful because of our circumstances. We can be afraid of tomorrow. We can fear the threats from those around us. We have lots of reasons to be afraid. But God does not call us to have a spirit of fear, but of purpose and a sound mind, as Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 1:6-7. We are not to be afraid, because we serve a God Who is afraid of nothing. He doesn't spend a moment of His time worrying about anything.

Because God is on our side, my friends, we also have nothing to worry about. It's because of God, not our circumstances, that we are to be anxious for nothing. Instead in everything, through prayer and supplication, we are to bring our requests to God (Philippians 4:4-7). We have a God Who will protect us and meet us in our time of need. He will take care of everything that concerns us today.

What roadblock is keeping you from experiencing the joy God wants you to have? Is it frustration? Is it foolishness? Is it fear? How do we get from all of these mistakes to celebration in Genesis 21? It comes by realizing God is faithful even when we're faithless.

## **2. In the journey of life we find joy by staying close to God.**

So if we want to find joy in the journey, it means we must steer clear of roadblocks, and at the same time, we must stay close to God. He was the One Who continually initiated the ongoing relationship with Abraham. "The Lord visited... The Lord visited..." We see this again and again. "The word of the Lord came to Abraham..." This wasn't Abraham seeking God. "Where are You? I can't find You." It was God going to Abraham and saying, "Let's huddle up and talk about these things. I want you to be close to Me." In fact, in Genesis 18 God actually showed up at Abraham's tent with a couple angels on their way to Sodom.

As you and I live in a place of frustration or foolishness or fear in our journey, God is always coming to us to say, "I want you to be close to Me. I want you to walk with Me." In Genesis 17, God came to Abraham. If we are in a place of frustration or foolishness or fear, God wants to do two things.

### **Staying close to God may require redirection.**

First, He may want to redirect us. Did He do it by yelling and screaming at Abraham, "How dare you? I can't believe you did that with your maid servant. I can't believe Sarah would come up with that idea. You've ruined everything!" No, He didn't do that at all. In Genesis 17 we read this:

<sup>1</sup> When Abram was ninety-nine years old the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, <sup>2</sup> that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly." <sup>3</sup> Then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him, <sup>4</sup> "Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. <sup>5</sup> No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. <sup>6</sup> I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. <sup>7</sup> And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. <sup>8</sup> And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God."

God was saying, "Abraham, you've been living in frustration and fear and foolishness. You need to redirect your life, follow Me and walk blamelessly with Me." And Abraham obeyed God.

This is a truth for us as well. Maybe you walked in here today with fear and frustration and foolishness. Maybe your life is a series of foolish decisions and you might think God doesn't want you. But let this remind you that God is saying, "Walk with Me. Let Me bless you."

God redirected Abraham by reminding him of the covenant. God reminds you of His promises for the future. The only one who reminds you of your past is the devil, so don't listen to the devil. Listen to God's great promises for you. If we will walk and talk with God, if we will experience Him on an everyday basis, those foolish decisions and frustrations and fears we've known before will be gone. Instead, we will walk in freedom going forward.

## Staying close to God may require rededication.

This redirection will also require a recommitment. In Genesis 17, God brought up something new. God said to Abraham, “Now that you’re back on the right track—trusting that I’m going to bless you—I have something to ask of you.” God then begins to explain circumcision. Abraham must have thought, “You want me to do what?” God wanted this not only for him, but for all his household.

This was the first mention of circumcision in the Bible and there was significance to it. It represented a commitment, a cutting off of a very personal part of the body. It was painful and would change the person forever, but it was done out of a heart to follow God. When we get to the New Testament, we are told this has been fulfilled, so circumcision no longer holds the place it did in Abraham’s time.

If we focus only on the pain, we miss the significance of the faith it represented. God had told Abraham he would have a son from his own body. Now he was to focus on the part of his body through which that promise would be fulfilled. He really didn’t know what it would do to his body, but he trusted God. He had no idea if it would impact his ability to produce a child, but he was willing to obey.

God was asking for a small part of him to be cut away, and in another sense today, God is also asking this of us. What part of you is keeping you from following Him? What possession, desire, plan or relationship is more important to you than following Him? Abraham endured the pain, because he wanted to recommit his life to the Lord. Recommitting your life to the Lord will always cost you something. That’s what I love about the idea of “all-in.” It brings us to the place where we ask, “Lord, what part of me are You asking me to give?” Are we willing to give up anything that’s keeping us from following Him?

Abraham was given the grace to be redirected and recommitted to God—and we have access to that same grace. We can have joy and the abundance in life God has promised us, but we have to walk blamelessly before Him. At times we have to cut part of ourselves away so we can more fully follow Him.

## 3. In the journey of life we find joy by seeking God’s course and timing.

The final thing we need to do is seek God’s course and timing. We get to Genesis 21 and the baby has been born! After great frustration and foolishness and fear, the baby had at last arrived. Even when they were faithless, God was utterly faithful.

That’s true for you this morning as well. Like your pastor, you have fallen because of sin and foolishness. But out of His immense love for us, God keeps His promises. He reminds us that nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:31-39).

With Paul’s permission, let me change his list of things that do not separate us from God. Can frustration separate us from God? No. Can foolish and sinful decisions separate us from God? No. Can fear separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus? No. We are, brothers and sisters, more than conquerors in Christ Jesus. Amen? Because of His grace and goodness, He gives us unspeakable joy. Because of this, we get to dream about what God is going to do and how He is going to change lives. We have the opportunity to laugh at how God has used our foolishness and our frailties to accomplish His great things.

Last night was a deeply moving night for your pastor. It was an opportunity for me to look back, seeing where I started as a pastor and where God has brought me now. When I was the student body president at Waubensee Community College, I got impeached because of bad behavior. The last time I was there, I had the board of directors yelling at me for being a bad student. I have to laugh that God took a crazy teenage kid and made me a pastor. I laugh that God has given me a church like this. I laugh at the hilarious idea that God would use Tim Badal the way He has. When we enjoy God, we laugh and say, “God, You’ve used such a foolish person like me to accomplish such great things for You and Your Kingdom.”

We get to dream, laugh and enjoy walking with God. It is our great honor and blessing to experience the God of the universe Who has given us great and precious promises. That should make us walk into our offices and schools tomorrow with a smile on our faces and a song in our hearts, with the joy of the Lord going before us. The people around us will say, “It’s Monday. How can you be so filled with joy?” Then we can tell them, “Because I’m entering the new week with my God. Because He is with me I can do all things through Christ Who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:13). That’s the joy we have at our disposal. But we have to trust and obey in order to experience it.