

This scripture tells the final stage of Abraham and Sarah's calling. Many of us have heard the story of Abraham and Sarah being called to birth a nation, a "multitude of nations," in fact, with more descendants than stars in the sky, at 90 and 100 years old. It seems so miraculous that we tend to put them on a pedestal. We think there must be something special about them for God to give them such an important calling. We don't really know much about Abraham and Sarah before their calling, except that their names used to be Abram and Sarai, and that Abram was a descendent of Noah. They were just two ordinary people living life, when God speaks, and their journey begins.

God didn't tell Abram and Sarai in the beginning what the end result would be. God rarely tells us the end game because we'll never do what God is calling us to do. We just can't wrap our minds around it. A lot of growth has to happen at each stage of the journey for us to begin to see what God is doing in us, to see that God is equipping us for this calling. And, we become too reliant on ourselves instead of relying on God at each step of the way.

So, let's back-up and see how Abraham and Sarah got to this point. Let's look at the beginning of their call. [Read Genesis 12:1-9]. God tells Abram that he will be "blessed to be a blessing," but God doesn't tell him exactly how that will happen, nor all the bumps he'll experience along the way. God doesn't give him specifics, not yet. God just says, "Go...I will show you."

And so, Abram did. At seventy-five years old, he and Sarai and their nephew, Lot, gathered their possessions and moved. They had no idea where they were going.

They just went and trusted that God would show them where to go.

When they arrived at Canaan, the Canaanites inhabited the land. God showed them the place, but it wasn't the right time. God also said, this isn't for you; this is for your offspring. This is the future. If we were Abram, we would probably question, "Uh, how exactly is that going to work?" But, Abram didn't. He built an altar and invoked the name of the Lord in this land. He wasn't ordained. He didn't call in the local rabbi to bless this land. He, ordinary Abram, claimed this land in the name of the Lord, because God was faithful and showed him the place.

Shortly after he arrived, there was a great famine in the land, so he fled to Egypt. Perhaps this was the next stage. God didn't call Abram to go to a foreign place, and then that was it, end of call. It was just the beginning of his journey, and verse nine tells us that he journeyed on in stages. Let's recap: God calls Abram at 75 to leave all that he knows; the comfort and safety of his family; to go to unknown territory. And, when he arrives there, the place is occupied by other people and it becomes a place of famine, a place of barrenness. That doesn't seem like a blessing.

Then, as strangers in a foreign land, family drama takes center stage. Between the two of them, Abram and Lot had accumulated quite a bit of livestock and people to care for them. It was chaos and no one got along. In order to keep the peace between family members, Abram and Lot had to part ways. Perhaps another stage in Abram's journey.

But, let's remember the importance of Abram's nephew, Lot. Lot's parents

died, so Abram and Sarai considered Lot as their son. So, when the Lord tells Abram that the land will be given to his offspring, Abram assumed God was talking about Lot since Sarai was barren. If Abram had to part ways with his “offspring,” then how will God’s plan come to pass?

That was the question he kept asking God, and he got impatient. Sarai got impatient, and they took matters into their own hands, by cooking up a plan to have Abram create a son with his slave, Hagar. God sees the disaster they are creating, and tries to break in, revealing a specific, detailed plan through a vision: *“¹³Then the LORD said to Abram, “Know this for certain, that your offspring shall be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and shall be slaves there, and they shall be oppressed for four hundred years; ¹⁴but I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. ¹⁵As for yourself, you shall go to your ancestors in peace; you shall be buried in a ripe old age. ¹⁶And they shall come back here in the fourth generation; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.”¹ God is still working out the timing.*

This is why God rarely gives specifics. We can’t wrap our minds around the specifics, and we often don’t like what we hear. Abram and Sarai couldn’t see how to get to this result from where they were in the journey. How do we get there from here? Their faith had become barren. They were too focused on their scarcity than on God’s abundance. Their barrenness was just

too great for them to wait one more day. They tried “to help God” move things along.

What they did wasn’t bad, per se. It wasn’t God’s plan, but God made something good out of their meddling, because that’s what God does. Their plan caused a lot of needless drama and caused harm to Hagar and Ishmael, the ones they brought in to their renegade behavior. However, this is part of the story that we can relate to. Seeing them as ordinary people who fail, who make mistakes, who take their eyes off God, for even a moment in their journey, inspires us.

God breaks in to their barrenness. When they experienced famine, God provides a detour until it’s the right time. When their family experiences strife, God resolves the conflict. When their bodies fail to reproduce, God delivers a miracle. And, when their faith is lacking, God shows up in a big way. God enters into an everlasting covenant with them, claiming them and even renaming them for God’s extraordinary purpose.

God calls two ordinary people to journey into a new land, to trust God with each uncertain step, and to live in God’s abundance even when experiencing barrenness and strife. This is Abraham and Sarah’s call, but it is our call too. God calls ordinary people to do God’s extraordinary work. We are never too old to be called. We are never too old to be led into unknown territory where we have to trust God for the next step. We are never too old for God to break-in our barrenness and give abundantly. May we always be open to the next step on our journeys. Amen.

¹ Genesis 15:13-15.