

Unshakeable Faith

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*⁶ Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. ⁷ The Lord **appeared** to Abram and said, "To your offspring^[c] I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the Lord, who had **appeared** to him. (Gen 12-NIV)*

As the Union Pacific Railroad was being constructed, an elaborate trestle bridge was built across a large canyon in the West. Wanting to **test** the bridge, the builder loaded a train with enough extra cars and equipment to double its normal payload. The train was then driven to the middle of the bridge, where it stayed an entire day.

One worker asked, "Are you trying to break this bridge?" "No," the builder replied, "I'm trying to prove that the bridge won't collapse." The goal was to test the strength of the bridge.

As we saw last week, there are many tests you will see over and over in your life. And God uses each test to grow your faith. Our story comes from the book of Genesis. The most important book of the bible, because it tells us about many firsts in the bible. The first sin. The first time God offers blood to atone for sins. The first test. The first time God appears to a person.

Genesis 1-11 spans several thousand years. Here we see in chapters 1-11, the **root to the stem**.

The next 39 chapters spans just about 400 years. Here we see the **stem to the forest**.

In order to experience Unshakeable Faith, you will have to go through many tests. And each test is designed to build you, not blast you.

To prepare you, not penalize you. To grow you, not gild you.

Now, there are 4 kinds of tests. And we see them in the life of Abraham, the father of Faith. Friend of God.

The What test-God you want me to do what? Leave my homeland? Offer my son as a sacrifice? Circumcise my males?

³¹ 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. But when they came to Harran, they settled there. (Gen 11:31-NIV)

The Where test-you are sending us (Jews) where, to Babylon?

The When test-when are we going to be there? It took forty years in the wilderness before God's people reached the Promised Land.

Yet the LORD says, "During the forty years that I led you through the wilderness, your clothes did not wear out, nor did the sandals on your feet. (Duet 29:35-NIV)

The children of Israel could have arrived at the Promised Land in less than 2 weeks. About 14 days of travel along the coast. But it took them 14, 600 days. God's people only slightly got off course, don't you think?

The Why test-how many of you have wondered why something in your life has happened the way it did? **Oh, many, many of you!**

In 2008, the banking debacle caused us to lose our house at 838 Gladstone, on Camano Island, Washington. I cried, yelled and became depressed asking why, until I was blue in the face.

God has used that heartache to help many people as well it was a test that God wanted Danice and I and our kids to walk through.

You are in good company because many of God's servants have asked why?

King David, "Oh, Lord **why** do you stand far off? **Why** do you hide yourself in times of trouble? (Psalm 10:1)

Job asked, "**why** have you made me a target?" (Job 7:20)

Jesus on the cross, "My God, my God, **why** have you forsaken me? (Matt 27:46)

Then what do I do, when all I have is Why? I seem to be stuck unless I get some clarity. God will either answer you directly, and/or remind you **God is in control**. Or the answer will come later, as you learn what the benefit are of the test. Let me make a couple suggestions about God testing you.

1. Seek the tests. (Ps 26:2)

Test me, LORD, and try me, examine my heart and my mind; (NIV)

Put me on trial, LORD, and cross-examine me. Test my motives and my heart. (NLT)

2. Rewarded for the tests.

Blessed are those who endure when they are tested. When they pass the test, they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. (James 1:12-NLT)

3. This is how you discover God's will for your life.

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:2-NIV)

And by the way, the more like the world you are, the less impact you will have. Who wants to know God's will for their life? Romans tells us when you are tested, you can discover God's will.

*² Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and **test you** in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. (Duet 8:2-NIV)*

I would call God's tests in our life a **keystone habit**. Keystone habits are changes or habits that people make and, when adopted and nurtured, trigger a **domino effect** of positive changes in other areas.

You exercise so you want to eat better. You get on a budget, so you can give more to God, because now you actually can control spending, so you can be generous. You eat together as a family, so you work better together as a family as you do house cleaning, traveling on vacation or having a garage sale.

Jimmy works at a job with a lot of stress.

At lunch instead of frittering his time away on Facebook, he goes to his truck and eats his lunch and plays worship music. **Is listening to worship music a keystone habit?** When Jimmy returns to work, stress is reduced, and once again he enjoys the job. Most all his mood is improved for the second half of his shift.

Practicing habits and patterns in one area of your life produces and creates the potential to **start a chain reaction in others**. So, what are you suggesting pastor? That growing your faith is a keystone habit. And to **grow your faith you have to be tested**.

Growing Your Faith is a keystone habit.

And to grow it God uses the testing process to shape YOUR faith into Unshakable Faith. So, friends, we don't have all day to pull this Christian life off. Maybe we should quit doodling and doddling and get to work. And quit whining. **Hey friend, whining is a keystone habit**. It leads to depression, anger and anxiety. Ouch! Well, I think you get the point.

So, growing your faith is a keystone habit. Many sitting here today, if you were honest, are not quite sure **how to grow your faith**.

Should you go to church more? Yes, when the doors are open. Jesus did and so should we. Read my bible. Yes, you know I am advocating for 15 minutes in a chair. Perhaps, I should serve the poor or care for the incarcerated. These are all good practices that can grow your faith, but why do I suffer from spiritual weakness so much? Here are a few questions you might be asking.

Question: If the God I love and serve is the possessor of unlimited power, and many bible verses indicate that God is willing to infuse that unlimited power into me, **then why** do I walk around feeling weak all the time.

Question: Why do I fall so easily into temptation, not once, not twice but over and over again?

Question: Why do I have a bad attitude? Slip into depression and anxiety so often? Why don't I take more risk with God? Why do I sin so often?

If only I had more faith, right? To discover the answer, I want to share a biblical insight that eluded me for so many years. Here it is.

Somewhere between here and there, God will appear.

As you start walking with your family, possessions, and livestock, somewhere between here and there, God will appear. You have to walk in the general direction of obedience if you want your faith to grow. And the way that God gets us moving is by testing us. Let's go back to our opening text and see if I can't fill in the story line.

⁴ *So Abram went, as the Lord had told him ...this is the second time Abraham got moving. You see he started and got stuck for 15 years in Haran, Gen 11:31, **but he stayed in Haran.** We read in verse Gen 12:1, *the Lord had said.... Let's get walking and this time, don't stop until you arrive at Canaan.**

and Lot went with him. Because Abraham's brother had died, he became responsible for this nephew Lot. Lot will be a key part of the story of Abraham and God will use Lot as a test. Several times.

Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran. This part of Abraham's life shows us what it means to move with God. Leaving all that is familiar, fun and financially lucrative and possessing a new future can be unsettling. It takes courage to move to an unknown territory. New job. Give remarriage a shot. Participate in a Charismatic church. Take a risk of building some new friends.

Unfamiliar territory can be an incubation for anxiety. It can be an inspiration for depression. In a new place we need to learn how to get around? What are the practices of this culture?

⁵ *He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.*

Now, unless you look back at the previous chapter, you don't know that Abraham and Sarai are **childless**. They carry the hurt and loss of not having any kids. This will be an important fact, as we will see God is going to bless them with biological kids, step kids, and spiritual kids.

But Sarai was barren; she had no children. (Gen 11:30-NET)

In many ways, this will be the primary test to grow Abraham and Sarah's faith. Can God provide children in their old age? When Sarah is 90 and Abraham is 100, they will become parents of Isaac.

Somewhere between here and there God will appear. Now, for God to appear, like Abraham, you have to build continual encounters with God. Reminders daily, you want his presence, power and protection to be at work in your life. ⁶ *Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land.*

The Canaanites controlled the land that had been promised to Abraham. The Canaanites were like a dark cloud that always hung over Canaan. This would be unsettling for sure. But God soothed his fears by showing up, as Abraham called on the Lord.

You will be equipped to handle whatever test comes your way, if you spend regular times of fellowship, worship, study of God's word with the Lord. Determine a place to meet. Identify a time and to meet. Read God's word and journal.

An altar is a place where you arrange hard things before the Lord. So, you, like Abraham are building daily alters to meet with God. Sacrifice to God. And move with God. Have your sins atoned for.

⁷ *The Lord **appeared** to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the Lord, who had **appeared** to him. (Gen 12-NIV)*

This is the first time God appears to a person since the garden. Other than the prompting to leave Iran/Iraq and go to Canaan there is no record of Abraham receiving any further revelation from God until the call to leave was obeyed.

God did not show Abraham where to go until he left, and then as he journeyed God actually revealed the land to him. This is strength along the way. This is answers along the way. This is somewhere between here and there, God will appear. God will do a miracle.

God will intervene somewhere between here and there is a theme throughout the bible. Perhaps a couple New Testament stories will help. One takes place at a wedding and the other outside a town with 10 lepers.

⁷ Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim. ⁸ Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet." (John 2-NIV)

¹⁴ When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed. (Luke 17-NIV)

Thank you, Bill Hybels, for this insight: God will intervene somewhere between here and there.

As you start pouring water, it will become wine. As you begin walking toward the health care czar, leprosy becomes healed bodies. As you release your fear of moving to a new city, new job new school, new relationship God will give you peace and joy.

There can be little movement or improvement in your Unshakable Faith unless you start pouring or start walking. Start packing. Start telling friends you are moving. Start filling the U-Haul. Start looking for new work. (1) Financial breakthroughs is just beyond you giving God the tithe. (2) Asking your boss for Sunday off, will produce an example to the family, God is a priority.

What God is promising is a pattern we see in scripture—it is FAITH along the way. Somewhere between here and there, God will do a miracle. God will show you where the Promised Land is. **God will tell you that in spite of infertility you will not be childless.**

We would all rather receive God's faith before a showdown before we are out of wine and before we begin walking out of Ur. God tells me, I am going to give you faith, but you will have to start pouring first, start walking. I will give you faith as you pour wine; as you walk toward Canaan. I will provide you with Unshakable Faith en route.

God delivered precisely what He promised: faith along the journey. Faith delivered along the way. *Abraham traveled from Chaldea to Canaan, yet he could not trust God in an hour of famine. (Gen 12:1-NIV)*

The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you."

Here we have the first real test, once Abraham is homebound. He has enjoyed the fruit of his labor. He checked out the landscape. He has slept under the stars of Canaan.

As the weeks go by, he notices the grass is turning brown. The creeks are drying up. And he sees only constant sunshine with no rain in the forecast. The next two tests for Abraham come back-to-back in the text but are separated by a disastrous flee to Egypt.

God tested Abraham's faith with a famine, later he would test Abraham with family stress.

Test 1-Famine in the land-external.

¹⁰ Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to live there for a while because the famine was severe. (Gen 12:10-NIV)

Although Abraham was a friend of God he failed big time. He should have stayed and allowed God to create Unshakable faith in a famine. And it is often true that one bad decision, can lead to a series of more bad decisions.

And there are clear reasons why he failed. Life is hard and dry during famine. Days pass without rain. The sun scorches the earth, leaving the wells dry and people experiencing dehydration.

Plant roots strain to find moisture. People become impatient, fearful and anxious about the future. And fear and anxiety got ahold of Abraham's heart. His assessment of the situation was wrong.

And his lack of patience and lack of self-control would be his undoing. It would not only impact him, but his whole family.

We see him not turning to the Lord, building an altar or calling for prayer and fasting. Abraham had his eyes on the land, instead of the Lord. He had his eyes on the clouds instead of the Christ.
He had his eyes on the ground, instead of God.

As Abraham is watching the harsh environment consume the lives of those around him he loves, he opts to skip God's scorched Promised Land for the greener pastures of Egypt.

When life is hard and harsh it is easier to find relief in Egypt. While Abraham had no indication that he was not permitted such a choice- God did not stop him; the harshness of the famine did not cripple him.

Egypt was not the real estate God has promised and enroute, we can see how the haste of fleeing was going to lead to Abraham's convictions becoming colored by compromise. Fear and anxiety will do that. They will color your convictions.

They will crumble your convictions.

They will cause you to cower when you should have convictions.

Abraham becomes carnal and his convictions become nonexistent.

The bible is filled with story after story of compromise. Jonah secured passage in the opposite direction of his assignment. Samson lingered in the Philistia valley of Sorek after hours. David's rooftop patio afforded the best view of the market and another man's maiden.

Each of these decisions brought each of the personal tragedy.

One verse to finish out the chapter, but it shows what spineless and self-centered and narcissistic man Abraham really was at times. I am just going to read right from my bible. **(Genesis 12:10-20)**

Abraham was willing to exchange his safety for his wife's security. For his wife's sexuality. For his wife's chastity.

No amount sin is ever ok, even if you prosper. That is big, fat deception.

Test 2-Fighting in the family-internal.

⁵ Now Lot, who was moving about with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents. ⁶ But the land could not support them while they stayed together, for their possessions were so great that they were not able to stay together. ⁷ And quarreling arose between Abram's herders and Lot's. The Canaanites and Perizzites were also living in the land at that time. (Gen 13-NIV)

Abraham prospered even though he was sleeping on the couch. Even though it took Sarah a long time to trust him. Don't be fooled, that just because prosperity is happening, there could be foxes in the vineyard. Riches are not a sign of God's favor; righteousness is a sign of God's favor.

As the cattle and servants increased so did the stress of managing it all. Financial stress is not limited to an empty wallet. Lot too, became wealthy. Kids often enjoy the blessings, even though they stumble because

their parents did not stumble. In this text we see two very different responses to wealth. Abraham, having learned his lesson; he looks beyond the land and leans on the Lord.

Here are couple observations to make about what we have studied today.

*You are going to go through many tests with God, each one is designed to build in you Unshakable Faith.

*Every decision you make has an immediate and imminent impact. (Gen 12:16-17-NIV)

*Abraham and Lot made decisions that paved the path of their futures-in opposite directions.

Expanded wealth brought Abraham and Lots herdsmen elbow to elbow. Feuding fractured a once peaceful family. Abraham, being the leaders realized something had to be done. And this time, we was not about to make a bad decision based on selfishness or safety. As foreigners in the land, a family feud could prove lethal to their families and wealth as the Canaanites were watching everything over the ridge. They might see the conflict as a chance to Insite a war. So, listen to the decision Abraham proposes.

⁸ So Abram said to Lot, "Let's not have any quarreling between you and me, or between your herders and mine, for we are close relatives. ⁹ Is not the whole land before you? Let's part company. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left." (Gen 13-NIV)

Here are a couple of practical insights about making decisions today:

1. Always look beyond the most immediate reward or opportunity.
2. Serve others dreams and God will fulfill yours. (Gen 13:14-17)
3. Never underestimate the consequences of a bad decision.
4. Making instant gratification your god, leads to destruction.
5. The more important the decision, the more critical wise counsel, peace of God, and timing.

Geneses 12 and 13 have many lessons to learn. Faith is a keystone habit. Somewhere between here and there.