

## Like Father Like Son

Father Abraham – Part IX

Romans 4:22-25

### Introduction

After observing the American culture for several years, one author wrote these rather piercing, convicting words,

*I [am confused as to why] so many people live so badly . . . there is little to admire and less to imitate in the people who are prominent in our culture; we have celebrities but not saints . . . neither the adventure of goodness nor the pursuit of righteousness gets headlines; if on the other hand we look around for what it means to be a mature whole blessed person, we don't find much; they aren't easy to pick out. No journalist [will ever] interview them, no talk show [will ever] feature them; they're not admired, they're not looked up to, they do not set trends; there isn't any cash value in them; at the end of the year when magazines are compiling the lists for the ten best dressed celebrities; the ten most beautiful women; the ten most eligible men; at years end, no one ever compiles a list of the ten best lived lives; no Oscars are given for integrity; [the truth is], our society is devoid of models; the pedestals are empty."<sup>i</sup>*

He is right. If you look around your campus, among the faculty, throughout the corporate hallways, in the stands at a game, at the shop, or in the local grocery store, it is true that, just as this author said, "there is little to admire and less to imitate."

What a challenge that is to every one of us who represent Jesus Christ in the world. Is there anything

about our actions and our words that is worth admiring?! Is there anything worth imitating?!

Jesus Christ commanded His disciples, as recorded by Matthew, in chapter 5, verse 16,

***Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.***

Paul Gilbert put it this way in his famous little poem,

*You are writing a gospel,*

*A chapter every day,*

*By the deeds that you do,*

*By the words that you say;*

*Men read what you write,*

*Whether faithless or true,*

*Say – what is the gospel, according to you?!"<sup>ii</sup>*

An anonymous poet put the same idea a little differently, when he wrote,

*I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day.*

*I'd rather one would walk with me than merely show the way;*

*The eye's a better pupil and much sharper than the ear,*

*Fine counsel might confuse me, but example's always clear,*

*The lectures you deliver may be very wise and true,*

*But I'd rather get my lesson by observing what you do.*<sup>iii</sup>

## **Seven Lessons to Imitate From Father Abraham**

We have been observing Abraham through several studies in Romans, chapter 4. And, for the first time, we are specifically told that what has been written about Father Abraham has been written for us to imitate.

What I want to do, as we conclude our study in this chapter and on this man's life, is to give some lessons. These are lessons learned by having watched Abraham through the video lens of scripture. There are seven lessons, in fact, that are not only to be learned, but imitated . . . and believed.

### **Lesson #1: Salvation does not depend on who you are, but on who you know**

1. The first lesson is that salvation does not depend on who you are, but on who you know.

To word this in the clearest terms possible, we are not only to be like Abraham, we are to believe like Abraham. We are to follow Abraham's example in the most important issue of all, which is the issue of personal salvation.

We have clearly been taught by the apostle Paul that salvation is not based on who you are, but on who you know; that is, Jesus Christ. Notice Romans, chapter 4, verses 22 through 25.

*Therefore it was also credited to him as righteousness. Now not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him, but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.*

Salvation is not based on who you are, but on who you know. Furthermore, salvation does not depend upon what you do, but upon what Christ has done for you.

Look back at verses 5 and 6 of this same chapter.

*But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works*

Pastor Gary Tolbert told the story about a little boy who had come with his parents to see the sights and monuments of Washington, D.C.

*When they arrived at the Washington Monument, the boy was speechless – staring up at the obelisk that stretched into the heavens. Then he noticed a guard standing by it. The little boy walked up to the guard and said, "I want to buy it."*

*He motioned toward the Washington Monument. The guard said, "Excuse me?"*

*The boy said a little louder, "I want to buy that!"*

*The guard bent down and asked, "Well, just how much money do you have?"*

*The boy reached into his pocket and pulled out 25 cents. The guard said, "I'm sorry son, that's not enough."*

*The boy replied, "I thought you'd say that," and he reached into his other pocket and pulled out 9 more cents and held all 34 cents up to the guard.*

*The guard looked down at the boy and then squatted down and said to the disappointed negotiator, "Listen son, you need to understand some things; first of all, you don't have enough money to buy this thing – 34 cents or 34 million would not be enough to buy the Washington Monument; secondly, you need to know that the Washington Monument is not for sale. But you also need to know that if you are an American citizen, the Washington Monument already belongs to you; it's already yours."*

Do you know what you can learn from Father Abraham? Justification, forgiveness, and eternal life with God in heaven cannot be purchased. In fact, none of us would ever have enough money to buy things that are as priceless as these. You also need to know that these things are not for sale. The good news is, however, when you place your faith in the cross-work of Jesus Christ, all of these things belong to you; they are yours.

So, the first lesson, and arguably the most important lesson from Romans, chapter 4, and the life of Abraham is that salvation does not depend on who you are, but on who you know.

### **Lesson #2: You can believe God's promises, even if they seem too good to be true**

2. The second lesson is that you can believe God's promises, even if they seem too good to be true.

Heading through the Arabian desert, away from Ur, Abraham must have scratched his head and thought, "What in the world is God up to?"

The point was, and still is today, God happens to know what He is up to!

### **Lesson #3: You should obey God's commands, even without a good explanation**

3. The third lesson is that you should obey God's commands, even without a good explanation.

"Abraham," God said in Genesis, chapter 17, verse 5b,

*... I will make you the father of a multitude of nations.*

Did Abraham comprehend that promise? No.

"Abraham," God said in Genesis, chapter 12, verse 3b,

*... in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.*

Did Abraham fully comprehend all of that? No.

"Abraham," God said in Genesis, chapter 22, verse 2,

*... Take now your son, ... Isaac, and go ... and offer him ... as a ... offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you.*

Did Abraham understand the implications?

Could he have used a little more information; some sort of explanation?

But Abraham obeyed.

Perhaps the reason there are not more Christians imitating Abraham in faith and obedience is that too many of them are waiting for more information; for a better explanation. Some are waiting for guarantees. Others are waiting for better conditions. The church of Jesus Christ is filled with mediocre Christians who will not surrender their lives to God until He explains what He plans to do with them.

That was Peter's problem at the end of John's gospel account. The apostle Peter was walking with the resurrected Lord. He saw John following at a distance and asked the Lord, in verse 21 of chapter 21,

*... Lord, ... what about this man?*

In other words, "Lord, what are you going to do with John?"

The Lord answered and said to Peter, in verse 22, ... *what is that to you?* ...

In other words, "That's none of your business!"

Then, He added the command to Peter,

*... You follow Me!*

Not only does God not give an explanation concerning the lives of others, He does not fully explain His plans regarding your life either. He just says, "You follow Me!"

### **Lesson #4: People of great faith are not perfect**

4. The fourth lesson is that people of great faith are not perfect.

I am so glad to have learned that I have not been told to imitate perfection. Even the great apostle Paul, whom we would say, without hesitation, was a model of faith and faithfulness, once wrote these encouraging words to the Philippians, and to us, in chapter 3, verse 12a,

*Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on ...*

I press on! Like Paul, you admit, "I haven't 'arrived' and I'm not perfect, but I'm pressing on!"

Being a man or woman of faith requires on-the-job training. You do not learn obedience while safely tucked inside a classroom or an auditorium.

I can remember being concerned about our firstborn twin sons learning, developmentally, to walk and talk at the right time. They are, today, athletic sixteen year olds and, in fact, just won second place in a state tournament. They defeated one team in the tournament that had not been defeated in three years. I just thought I would throw that in! There was a time, however, when we were not sure how much balance and coordination they had. One of our boys never even crawled. He just sort of pulled himself along with one arm, like a wounded soldier on the beach at Normandy. And, like most young parents, my wife and I wondered if they were progressing on time.

By the time we had our fourth child, however, we had completely changed. We did not care if she was on schedule with walking or not. In fact, we did not really want her to learn because it was so much easier when she stayed in one place!

Isn't that the typical progression of parents, though? When your first child's pacifier falls on the floor, you boil it in water; when the second child's falls, you rinse it off; when your last child's falls, you wipe it on their shirt and plug it back in! By then you have seen them eat enough dirt and sand for fun that you know they will survive!

All four of our children learned to walk the same way yours did. They learned how to walk by failing over and over again. And no child ever said to himself, "I'm gonna try three more times and that's it." Never.

I want you to know that learning to walk physically, is a lot easier than walking spiritually. Why do you think the apostle Paul urged the Roman believers, in chapter 8, verse 4b,

*. . . do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*

What believer ever learned to walk in the Spirit by saying, "I'm gonna give it three more tries and that's it!"? Never.

People of great faith are not perfect. In fact, they have learned how to walk in faith by failing. They are the ones who have been taught by their gracious and patient Lord, that failure in the Christian life is never fatal.

#### **Lesson #5: Stepping out in faith will probably mean the start of real problems**

5. The fifth lesson to be learned by watching God work in Abraham's life is that stepping out in faith will probably mean the start of real problems.

While submitting to the sovereignty of God is the only life where true fulfillment is found, at the same time, when you step out in faith, "wham!" be prepared for challenges like never before. The Christian life is often a paradox. There are valleys of low depth and mountain peaks of exhilarating joy, and they are sometimes separated by only a few minutes.

Consider the account of Jesus Christ being baptized by John the Baptist, in Matthew, chapter 3. The Spirit descends upon Jesus Christ like a dove and the Father's voice from heaven speaks, as recorded in verse 17,

*. . . This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.*

Then, immediately after that incredible description of the triune God in unity together, Jesus is led into the wilderness where He is tested by Satan.

We have the idea that, if God the Father were to say to us, "I really love you and am proud of you," the last thing to happen would be a follow-up time of a personal attack by Satan. We think that when the Father says, "I love you and am proud of what you're doing," that it means life is going to get easier; better; happier; even richer. *No!* It may just mean that you are ready for a real battle.

Abraham obeyed God and left his home. He followed the command of God and, "wham!" there was a famine in the land! What you learn from watching Abraham is that initial obedience to God is the starting point, not the final destination.

We have the misconception that deciding to live for Christ is all that matters. We say, "Lord, I surrender to You. I want to be like Christ." and think, "Great, that takes care of my spiritual maturity."

The truth is, once you are on it, you discover that the path of faith is not level. It is certainly not a descending hill upon which you can coast. That is not faith, that is fantasy! Most often, it is an ascending trail, which is designed by God to develop the muscle and ligament of faith in the believer's character.

So, you need to be ready. Deciding to live for God may invite nothing less than tremendous battles.

I have been reading through the letters of Paul, as paraphrased by Eugene Peterson in his New Testament paraphrase entitled, *The Message*. This past week, I read the letters written by Paul to Timothy and Titus, who were two young pastors in the early church.

In II Timothy, chapter 3, Peterson paraphrases verse 12 so vividly that I could not forget it. It read,

*Anyone who wants to live all out for Christ is in for a lot of trouble; there's no getting around it!*

That jarred me when I first read it! And it is a very accurate paraphrase to the original text, which says, in the Contemporary English Version,

*Anyone who belongs to Christ and wants to live right will have trouble from others.*

You will not find that verse on posters with eagles flying over snowcapped mountain tops. That verse is probably not hanging in anyone's kitchen or carved into wood and sitting on someone's desk.

Isn't that a great verse, though? Isn't that the kind of verse that will encourage all of you who stand up and say, "I belong to Jesus Christ."?"

Like Abraham, when you live all out for God, you know that may be the start of some real problems!

#### **Lesson #6: The life of faithfulness is not one decision, but many**

6. The sixth lesson from the biography of Abraham is that the life of faithfulness is not one decision, but many.

Fred Kradic wrote this insightful parable on the Christian life.

*To give our life for Christ appears glorious; to pour ourselves out for others, to pay the ultimate price of martyrdom, "I'll do it. I'm ready, Lord, to go out in a blaze of glory."*

*The problem is, we think that giving our all to the Lord is like taking a 10,000 dollar bill and laying it on the altar and saying, "Okay, Lord, here's my all. Take it all and use it."*

*But the Lord hands us the 10,000 dollar bill back and He says, "I want you to go to the bank and I want you to exchange it for quarters."*

*And [therein lies the faithfulness of the Christian life]. As you walk with God, you put out 25 cents here and 25 cents there; sharing the gospel; forgiving an enemy; giving food to someone hungry; pulling weeds; painting the house of a widow; [parking cars on Sunday; – I added those words, and these – greeting newcomers; listening to teenagers; putting out chairs; teaching children stories and songs; rocking little ones in the nursery; making phone calls for ministries; stuffing inserts into Communiqués; manning the lights during the church services . . . and on and on].*

*Usually giving our life to Christ is not a glorious thing. It's not done in amazing, glorious acts, it's done 25 cents at a time.*

The life of faithfulness is not summed up by one heroic act, but by many simple, ordinary, even mundane acts of obedience and character and faith.

#### **Lesson #7: Being remembered as a person of faith, obedience, and courage will require moments of faith, obedience, and courage**

7. The seventh and final lesson that I have observed from the life of Father Abraham is that being remembered as a person of faith, obedience, and courage, will require moments of faith, obedience, and courage.

How many would like to be listed in the "hall of faith," in Hebrews, chapter 11?! Listen to what the writer of Hebrews said, in verse 8,

***By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going.***

That is how you become known as Abraham was known – willing to risk, willing to change, willing to serve, willing to follow after God.

Do not forget, according to his biography in the book of Genesis, Abraham was asked to leave:

- his society,
- his stability, and
- his security.

He left it all. How could he do that? By sheer faith in the promise of God's word, that God would provide. You have that same promise, by the way.

And may I remind you that you have actually done something similar to Abraham, many times. You have exercised faith in someone's word as well. For example:

- When you bought that automobile from that salesman, you exercised faith in his word that the car you had just bought would last.
- When you bought that home, you exhibited faith and courage, based on the sheer promise of another person that there were no surprises waiting in the attic or the basement.
- For you guys who are married, you proposed and told her that you loved her and, on the basis of your word, she said, "Yes." And she has lived to regret it! No, not you. Think about it, however, when you asked her to marry you, you told her you would take care of her for the rest of her life. And she believed you! She had sheer faith in your word. And she altered her entire life around your promise. Everything would change.

That is what courageous Abraham did – he altered his entire life around the promise of God.

Do you want to be known as a person of faith and obedience and courage? Do you want to imitate Abraham? Do you want people to say, “You remind me of your Father in the faith, Abraham.”? Do you want it to be, like Father, like son . . . or daughter?

If you want to be a person of faith and obedience and courage, you have to exhibit faith and obedience and courage!

Abraham went out, not knowing where he was going. He just knew that God was leading! And that was enough for him!

## Conclusion

Sam Kamaleson, who is the vice president of a mission organization, told the story of a seventy year old lady who came to faith in Christ.

*The lady did not know any better, so one day she approached her pastor and said, “I believe God has called me into some sort of ministry. What should I do?”*

*He said, “Maybe you ought to go home and pray about it.”*

*That is classic advice – when you do not have an answer, say something spiritual.*

*She did. She went home and began to pray. It seemed that God was impressing her heart to do one particular thing. She went down to the drugstore, bought a batch of 3 by 5 cards and wrote on those cards these words, “Are you homesick? Come to my home for tea at 4:00.”*

*She lived in Melbourne and she took that stack of 3 by 5 cards and went all around the University of Melbourne putting them on poster boards, placing them in places where*

*people would see them, at the cafeteria, leaving them everywhere. “Are you homesick? Come to my home for tea at 4:00.”*

*So, she prepared tea at 4:00. Days went by, nobody came, but she continued to prepare tea. Finally, on the fifteenth day, an Indonesian student showed up at her door homesick and as eager to talk as she was to listen. So, she served him tea and listened. He got back to campus and told all his friends, “Hey, you won’t believe it. I met a lady that’s just like my grandmother.”*

*Soon many were coming to her home. God gave that lady a ministry for ten years.*

*When she died, there were no less than seventy pallbearers, Indonesian, Malaysian, Indian, international students who had come to her home and found Jesus Christ. She had served them tea and shared the Gospel. This lady had heard and obeyed the call of God.*

She lived like Abraham – imitating his faith, replicating his obedience, sharing his passion for the One. The One that Paul wrote about at the end of chapter 4, who was delivered up so that we could be forgiven of our transgressions, and was raised from the dead so that we could be saved.

We can be sons and daughters, not just of Abraham, but of God, through our faith in the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ. And, we can sing,

*He is Lord, He is Lord, He is risen from the dead and He is Lord,*

*Every knee shall bow, every tongue confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord.*

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 11/10/2002 by Stephen Davey.

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<sup>i</sup> Eugene Peterson, Run With The Horses (InterVarsity Press, 1983).

<sup>ii</sup> Robert J. Morgan, Stories, Illustrations & Quotes (Nashville, TN, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000), p. 275.

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid., p. 274.