

**Psalm 84:5 says**

**Blessed is the man whose strength is in You, whose heart is set on pilgrimage.**

“Life is a journey”. If you just groaned and thought to yourself, ‘I’ve heard that said a thousand times already’ you are right! Nevertheless, it is still true. If you are a believer and have responded to Jesus’ call to ‘Follow Him’ then you my brothers and sisters are invited on a journey of pilgrimage. A pilgrimage being a journey with a spiritual destination. We know that ultimately that destination is our heavenly home.

What I want to talk about today is entitled ‘**Strength for the Journey**’. If we know and understand that life itself and especially the Christian life is a ‘journey’ what lessons can we learn to aid us in that journey? Well, today I want to use Abraham’s journey in scripture and lesson’s I’ve learned on my own journey to encourage you.

Let’s start with Abraham.

**Hebrews 11: 8-16**

*By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9 By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; 10 for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.*

*11 By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child[b] when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised. 12 Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude—innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.*

*13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them,[c] embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. 14 For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. 15 And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.*

Abraham is a wonderful example of someone who knew how to follow God in pilgrimage. He walked with God because as a pilgrim, a nomadic wandering shepherd, he was determined to make spiritual progress. He wasn’t a remarkable character. He and his forebears lived in the land of Canaan. We don’t read anywhere within scripture that Abram had previously achieved remarkable feats or had remarkable attributes like strength, military power, wisdom or might etc. He didn’t lead the exodus, or bring the law or build the temple like some of those that would come after him. All we know is that God for whatever reason called and chose him to be the father of Israel.

Hebrews 11 says he followed God looking for the city whose architect is God, and it comments that Abraham never really arrives at it but sees it from a distance. What he has seen with the eyes of faith is what Jesus brings, the reign of God, the rule of God the Kingdom of God. He welcomed it from a distance but died never seeing it.

But, in seeking the city God was building he went out at the call of God, not knowing where he was going. No google maps. He has no idea, he simply follows the leading of the Spirit of God.

Just imagine for a moment what that might have felt like. I can imagine the conversation between Abram and Sarai going something like this:

Abraham: Sarai Sarai, God showed up and spoke to me.

Sarai: God? Which God? And what did He speak to you for? Are you in trouble?

Abram: It was the Lord. He told me we have to get out of here and go to the land He will show us.

Sarah: Oh aye, Where's that then?

Abraham: Good question, errr.....I don't actually know

Sarah: What do you mean you don't know? Did He at least give you a direction. North, south, east, west, something!

Abraham: No, Sorry, He didn't say.

Sarah: So where are we going to live then?

Abraham: We can live in tents.

Sarah: Tents? Tents? We are already getting old Abram and we have a great place here. You want me to leave this house of ours to your family and for us to live in tents? We have such a good life here Abram. Have you been drinking?

Abraham: No, I'm serious. The Lord appeared to me and told me to go. He said He would make of me a great nation and through me all the families of the earth would be blessed.

Sarah: (Cries buckets of tears). You are a lunatic Abram, but I love you. I'll get packing.

*Several months, perhaps even years go by and Abraham continues to journey with God. All the while Abraham was moving his family from one place to another as the Lord led him. This was one super long camping holiday that seems to have gone badly wrong.*

Abram: The Lord's appeared to me again Sarai

Sarai: Now what? Tell me we aren't going to move again! I'm sick of these tents and all this moving about!

Abraham: God said 'I am your shield and exceedingly great reward' so I complained a bit and said to him 'Look God, you have given me no children, indeed one born in my house is my heir!'

Sarah: Good on you, so what did He say to that then eh?

Abraham: Well, he took me outside to look at the stars and said one that comes from your own body will be my heir. He also told me to count the stars if I am able and said my descendants will be innumerable just like those stars.

Sarah: And you believed him?

Abraham: Yea, why shouldn't I?

Sarah: Well I'm infertile for a start!

Abraham: He cut a covenant with me. He'll do it Sarai, you'll see.

*Several more years then pass.*

Sarai: So much for God's promise Abram. You are 86 years old and I still have no children. Perhaps you should have a child with my maid that we can raise as our own?

Abraham: OK (I find it amazing that Abraham had no objection!!) By this point Abraham was 86 years old.

*13 years later:*

Abram: Sarai, Sarai, God appeared to me again!

Sarai: Whatever.....! I suppose He made more promises, yadda yadda.....

Abraham: No, the same one as before.

Sarah: And you still believed Him?

Abraham: Actually, I laughed. I'm going to be 100 soon and you are already 90. Doesn't look likely does it? I asked that He would let Ishmael live before Him.

Sarah: And what did He say to that?

Abraham: He said no, then He reiterated His promise, reminded me of the covenant and changed my name to Abraham which means father of many nations, and yours to Sarah. He then promised to give us a son and told us to call him Isaac. He then described how we are to circumcise every male in our household!

Sarah: Great, more mess to clean up.

And so the story goes on. Sarah does indeed bear Isaac and God is proved faithful to His promise and His covenant.

But I hope you can see from this little drama some of the feelings they must have felt, some of the hardships that Abraham, Sarah and their household faced. Regularly moving from place to place, regularly facing the issue of doubt and wondering if God would ever fulfil what He promised.

**So point 1 is this:**

**ON YOUR JOURNEY WITH GOD - YOU ARE GOING TO HAVE TO DEVELOP PATIENCE AND ENDURANCE**

So why couldn't God have done it any sooner for Abram and Sarai? Why did it take 25 years or so for the promise to be fulfilled?

**In any journey with God you can't teleport from A to B.**

**You have make the road by walking!**

I'd like to suggest that one of the reasons God didn't do it any sooner is that Abram wasn't ready when He first appeared to Him and neither was Sarai. They had to get OUT of the land they were in (Canaan), a land whose culture was rooted in barbaric human sacrifice and Polytheism (the worship of many God's). God through Abraham wanted to establish monotheism. They demonstrated again that they

weren't ready to embrace the promise when Sarai suggested Abram take her maid Hagar and Abram agreed (their Ishmael moment).

Don't be tempted to bypass patience and shortcut God's plan for you. You may end up with an Ishmael instead of an Isaac, and you won't have developed the internal character you need to sustain it. Don't fall to the temptation to do what God has promised in your own strength, or own talents or own gifts. Remember, when the son of promise came, the son of the bondwoman was sent away.

Anything born of God takes time:

**Abraham 25 years, Jacob 20 years, Joseph 13 years, Moses 40 years, David, 12 years, Jesus 30 years,**

And you can add to the need of patience, endurance.

Have you ever been asked by God to get involved in something? Do you know that as soon as it gets difficult God isn't giving you permission to quit?

**(CAN YOU IMAGINE THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE APOSTLE PAUL QUITTING)**

I'd like to suggest that God wants to build something within you called ENDURANCE during those uncomfortable times. **Hebrews 10: 35 – 37 says**

**<sup>35</sup>Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward.<sup>36</sup>For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise:**

**<sup>37</sup>"For yet a little while,  
And He<sup>[a]</sup> who is coming will come and will not tarry.**

So don't quit in the tough times. Let God transform you, mould you, develop you. Perhaps like Paul and Silas in prison, you need to worship.

**'Follow me and I will make all your ambitions come true and you will have an easy peasy life filled with holiday's, cruise ships, lavish houses, fast cars, teddy bears, sweets and fluffy unicorns.....said Jesus NEVER!' THE AUTOMATED PADDED SELF PROPELLING CROSS.**

Because, Personally, I've never seen God change His mind about the things He has called me to or asked me to do. Yes, there are times and seasons, but I believe these are measured in multiples of years, not in days, weeks or months.

## **Point 2: IN YOUR JOURNEY WITH GOD, TRAVEL LIGHT AND DITCH THE BAGGAGE**

The baggage of the old man needs to be cut off. Put on the new man.

Travel light - Dump the baggage

1. JUDGMENTS: Get rid of judgement in the form of preconceptions and false expectations - Pride
  - a. Apple
  - b. Messiah (Disciples wanted Lion warrior king. Jesus was a lowly lamb)
    - i. Incarnation – stable, lowly, humble.
2. OFFENCE:
  - a. Dump bitterness and un-forgiveness
  - b. If you are going to vent, dump it on God. He can handle it.

### 3. MASKS AND VENEERS: TAKE OFF THE FALSE YOU

- a. Be the authentic you

#### Prophetic Picture:

Picture of the Oak table in a carpenter's shop. There were many similar tables each looking the same, covered in veneer. It occurred to me that the veneer was first applied to cover the imperfections like knots, uneven grain, colour differences etc. The veneer made the table look perfectly uniform and just like the others, but cheap. I then saw a carpenter inspect the table and run his hand over the veneer. He then took a large tool like a chisel and began to remove the veneer bit by bit. When all the veneer was removed the table still had dried glue on it so he began to sand away all the glue. He then carefully sanded the oak until it became smooth again and then applied a beautiful clear varnish that restored the table to its intended beauty. It still had the knots, the uneven grain, the colour differences, but instead of disappointing the carpenter, it pleased Him all the more. The differences and transparent varnish enhanced the beauty of the table.

The interpretation is as follows. We are the oak table. We feel so ashamed of our imperfections and differences that we seek to cover them with masks and false personas in order to feel accepted and not stand out. (These are the knots, uneven grains and colour differences). The carpenter is the Lord. His desire is to remove those masks and false persona's and show us the beauty of how He created us. The removal of the veneer seems painful and requires time, great humility, vulnerability and courage on our part in order for the real us to be exposed. However, that is the carpenter's wish and His work in us. He wants to demonstrate that we are accepted in the beloved just as we are. He wants us to know just how beautiful we are when we are our true selves. He then applies the varnish, the Holy Spirit to further enhance our beauty. It is this varnish that reflects Himself within us.

#### Point 3 – There are going to be up's and down's, successes and failures

**Psalm 27:13 I would have despaired (lost heart) unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living**

You just have to look at the heroes of faith and their journeys to see that everyone of them made a complete mess of things before they got it right.

*Moses killed a man, then fled for many years.*

*David committed adultery and had the husband murdered.*

*Peter denied Jesus three times.*

*Elijah got spooked by Jezebel and hid in a cave.*

*Gideon hid in a winepress*

*Jonah ended up in the belly of a whale.*

If you think you are going to get through life's journey without making at least one hash of it you are badly mistaken. There is a saying, "The man who has never made a mistake has never made anything"

I've made loads of mistakes. Mistakes in communication, mistakes in judgements, mistakes in assumptions, mistakes in character. Too many to mention.

**BUT GOD IS FULL OF GRACE AND MERCY – REPENT – CHANGE YOUR MIND WHERE YOU NEED TO AND LEARN FROM THEM AND THEN MOVE ON**

**Phil 3:12-15:**

**Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. 13 Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, 14 I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. 15 Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind**

**POINT 4: YOU WERE NOT MEANT TO JOURNEY ALONE**

You were never meant to journey alone.

- b. Jesus Sending out the disciples in pairs (Disciples, Paul and Barnabas/Silas/Timothy)
- c. God putting us in Families
- d. The family of God – Church

What God has for you on this journey of pilgrimage will involve other people. God is not interested in solo-superstars. 1 can put a thousand to flight, 2 ten thousand. 3 fold cord is not easily broken.

But when you do find yourself alone. When you find yourself in your Garden of Gethsemane. I want you to know and understand that **'He will never leave you nor forsake you' Hebrews 13:5.**

He will lead you to the promised land – For us that is Eternal Glory. He wants to make us more like Jesus on the way.