

Move

I remember reading about Abraham for the first time. I read about the devout patriarch who left his family and homeland after a command from God. I read about the audacious advocate who bargained with God to save the few righteous souls in Sodom, and I learned about the faithful man who would have sacrificed his son Isaac without question. I grew up to believe that the narrative of Abraham was one of complete obedience and faith, and at times it left me feeling a bit empty, uneasy and unworthy.

I was unable to connect the spiritual call of Abraham to my Christian journey, because Abraham was seemingly always in relationship with God, and sadly there have been many times in my life that I have felt a greater connection to the secular than to the divine. I believed that the poor choices I made in life kept me at arms length from any kind of meaningful relationship with God, or with anyone else for that matter. Even after I entered seminary, I wondered how God could possibly use me? I was still broken. I still had many fractured relationships. Contrary to what many people believe, entering into seminary doesn't always mean that you have faith all figured out. I still remember my professor's question to the class, "why did you enter seminary", my classmates all confidently talked about a life long faith, a true calling and a clear direction for their future. I would say, I'm not really sure, but I believe I need to be here.

It wasn't until I truly dug into the narratives of Abraham that I realized the devout patriarch of Israel was an imperfect man, who struggled with his faith and in his relationships. He didn't always believe God would protect him and he often put his own wellbeing and pride ahead of those he loved. Soon I began to see the account of Abraham as a narrative about relationships. His relationship with Sarah, Lot, Hagar, Ishmael, Isaac and most importantly God, these were the core relationships in his life, and these relationships shaped his character and faith, even if at times these relationships were flawed. Once, I was able to read the narrative of Abraham through a different lens my perception of Abraham changed forever. I realized that as a Christian the narrative of Abraham is in fact extremely relevant to faith and spirituality. Then, suddenly, Abraham was more relatable to my own Christian journey.

The call of Abraham in 12:1-3 is more than a promise to an ancient man in a far away place. The promise is that if we follow God, amazing changes in our lives and in the lives of others is possible. Abraham's reward for obedience to God's command was progeny, land and a great name, but it wasn't just a blessing for him, it was a blessing for the faithful around him and for all of us today. God tells Abraham, "And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." We can interpret this as Abraham being the standard by which blessings are to be invoked. A more likely translation of the verb is as a passive: "shall be blessed through—because of—you." God's promises to Abraham would then proceed in three stages from the particular to the universal: a blessing on Abraham personally, a blessing (or curse) on those with whom he interacts, and a blessing on the entire human race. So, it is clear that the blessings bestowed on Abraham are not limited to Abraham, the blessings or curses are also about those in relationship with Abraham.

How then can we be blessed by following God's command and also be a blessing to others? I see two steps. First, before we can be blessed in any manner or be a blessing, we must follow one simple rule in our faith. A rule that we must follow every day; *we must move in faith*. We must move before we think we are good enough, smart enough, faithful enough, have enough money or are perfect in our relationships. We must move even if we feel safe where we are.

The entire narrative of Abraham is based on the simple fact that Abraham moved when God commanded. This is how Abraham was blessed. His journey may not have always been a straight line, but he did move forward. We must move in our faith and not be passive, because

faith is not a passive activity; it requires effort, strength and determination. God can do amazing things but we must also make an effort, *we must move*.

The second step is to *move intentionally*. Clearly, we must move in faith, but we must also seek to move intentionally towards becoming a blessing to others. Moving intentionally, instead of passively, however, may not be as easy as it sounds. Moving intentionally means to look at the injustices in the world and act from a perspective of Christian ethics, instead of national or secular morality. It means that at times we need to do more than pray about injustice, we must act in ways that are outside of our comfort zone.

The philosopher, and professor Peter Singer frequently poses an interesting dilemma to his students. He asks, imagine you see a drowning child and without the chance of any possible harm to yourself, you can save the child, but in the process your expensive shoes will be ruined once you enter the water. Do you have a moral responsibility to save the child? According to Singer the answer from his students is always a resounding, "Yes of Course". Singer, then retorts, that by donating the cost of new shoes, a shirt or a night out at a restaurant or concert to an overseas relief agency a difference could be made between life and death to more than just one person somewhere in the world. Usually, this is when the classroom falls silent, until students begin to raise practical and logistical difficulties in donating money spent somewhere else in the world. Interestingly, the students don't debate the underlying ethics of the question, but only the logistics of getting the money to those who actually need it. The point Singer is making is that our moral responsibility is not limited to just what appears in front of us; it is global. The drowning child is found all around us, and like his students we often find a reason to avoid getting involved.

But, moving intentionally means being a global voice for social justice. We need to recognize the drowning child in systemic racism. Because we should be outraged that Jemel Roberson, a 26-year-old security guard was killed last Sunday by police just moments after stopping a drunken customer who had opened fire at a bar. Roberson bravely held the shooter down until police arrived. Right now, we should be hearing about how Roberson, the hero, the church musician, who refused to allow people to be harmed on his watch, bravely brought a gunman to justice. But instead, we are learning that as witnesses screamed, 'he was a security guard, an officer basically saw a black man with a gun and shot first. It is a narrative we have become all too familiar with.

We should see the drowning child in the eyes of every individual with a disability who is marginalized or mistreated. We should understand that the drowning child is found inside every member of the LGBTQ community who are made to feel ashamed, unloved and unwelcomed because of their sexual orientation. The drowning child is found in every woman who has been mistreated, objectified or sexually abused by a man in power. Now, the drowning child stares desperately at us as we weigh the mentality of nationalism and America First against offering asylum to immigrants and refugees.

As Christians we have an unconditional obligation towards any victims of oppression, regardless of their societal order, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity or faith tradition. If we are not moving intentionally then we are complacent, colluding with the oppressors and a curse to those around us. Moving intentionally means putting faith in God and setting the fears of the world aside.

The world is in turmoil, and God's creation is screaming for redemption and salvation. As Christians we must be obedient to the command of God and go forth from what is familiar and comfortable. When God calls for us, we must respond, "here I am" with authenticity, obedience and enthusiasm. We must move into a realm of unfamiliarity and turn control over to God. We must never forget that the call of Abraham is a call every Christian should seek to answer. It is a call to move in faith; it is a call to move intentionally. It is a call to save the drowning child.