

## Leaving Home Genesis 12:1-8

Have you ever gone away from home for a very long time? So long that you miss the sights and sounds of home? It happened to Janet Ross, a native of Texas, who accompanied her Navy husband on his tour of duty in Japan. The first thing Janet did was look for a job to supplement their income.

She was pleased when her first interview netted a secretarial position at the nearby Army facility. She was sure her typing skills had landed her the post, but a few weeks later her boss called her into his office and admonished her that she was too quiet. "The reason I hired you," he explained, "was your delightful Texas accent. I'm homesick for someone who can talk right."<sup>i</sup>

Well, not everybody agrees that Texans "talk right," but if you've ever lived in a culture other than your own, you understand. We have an expression, don't we, that says it all? "There's no place like home."

Max Lucado tells about a parakeet in Green Bay, Wisconsin named Pootsie that suffered from homesickness. Pootsie escaped from her owner and became a guest of the humane society of Green Bay. When no one came to claim Pootsie, Sue Gleason did. Sue and Pootsie hit it off. They talked and even bathed together, becoming fast friends.

But one day the little bird did something incredible. It flew over to Mrs. Gleason, put its beak in Sue's ear, and whispered, "Fifteen hundred South Oneida Street, Green Bay."

Gleason was dumbfounded. She researched and found that the address which Pootsie recited actually did exist. She went to the house and found a seventy-nine-year old John Stroobants.

"Do you have a parakeet?" she asked. "I used to," said John. "I miss him terribly." When he saw his Pootsie, he was thrilled. "You know," he said with delight, "Pootsie even knows {my} phone number."<sup>ii</sup>

That sounds far-fetched to many of us, but there's "no place like home". We often think of America as being very mobile, but fifty per cent of Americans live within 50 miles of where they were born. Most people, given a choice, stay close to home. Home gives us our sense of identity.

Janet Ross may have gone to Japan to be with her Navy husband, but she was still a Texan. Many people move to this country, but at heart they're still Italian, Irish, Scottish, African. They may move to another state but they're still Hoosiers, Gators, Yanks.

Which is why sports teams have such a following. People define themselves as Tennessee Volunteers or Virginia Tech Hokies or UVA Wahoos. This explains why people can be so fanatical about their sports team. It's part of who they are.

Many people get homesick when they are far from home. Our lesson from the book of Genesis is about Abram and Sarai who were called to leave home. We know them, of course, as Abraham and Sarah.

More than 1,700 years before Jesus, God came to Abram and gave him a command and a promise: "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 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 shall be blessed.”

Abram was a wealthy landowner living in Ur, in Mesopotamia, in the north of what is now Iraq. He had family, friends, an honored place in the community. This was no small demand that God was laying on him.

It certainly could not have been easy for Sarai, his wife, either. Sometimes moving is more difficult for the spouse, or for the children, than it is for the one who's been called to leave to go to a new place.

It's not an easy thing to leave home. Home is where the heart is, says the old platitude. And it is true. God told Abram to leave his home. That must have been difficult for both Abram and Sarai.

However, **God spoke and Abram obeyed.** It's one of the most important statements in all sacred literature: “**So Abram went, as the Lord had told him . . .**”

It would be impossible to overstate the significance of Abram's step of faith for the subsequent history of the world. Three great world religions Judaism, Christianity and Islam trace their roots back to Abram's act of obedience.

This, by the way, is what faith is. God speaks, we obey. We don't say, “I've got to bury my father”; we don't say, “I can't afford it”; we don't say, “My friends at church won't approve.” God speaks. We obey. Faith is much, much more than belief. Jesus said even the demons believe. Faith is action. Faith is obedience to God.

When Hitler and the Nazi Party took control of Germany in the 1930s, many German Christians refused to cooperate. One of these was Martin Niemoeller, a Lutheran pastor. He was put in prison for his disobedience.

Someone said to his father, “Mr. Niemoeller, it must be a terrible thing to have your son put in prison by the Nazis.” Mr. Niemoeller responded, saying, “Yes, but it would be a much more terrible thing if God wanted someone to do it and my Martin was not willing.”<sup>iii</sup>

We really don't talk enough about the cost of committing ourselves to Jesus. So many people today think they can follow Jesus and it not affect the way they live their lives. That's just plain wrong.

At a meeting of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes years ago, Bobby Richardson, former New York Yankee second baseman, offered a prayer that says it all: “Dear God, Your will, nothing more, nothing less, nothing else. Amen.”<sup>iv</sup>

God told Abram to leave his home and go to a new country. God spoke and Abram obeyed. **And God made Abram a promise:** “**I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 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 shall be blessed.**”

God and Abram enter a covenant relationship. Abram and his descendants sometimes forget their part in that covenant, but God never forgets His.

Some of you will remember when Roger Staubach was the quarterback of the Dallas Cowboys. He helped bring Dallas an NFL championship in 1971. Staubach admitted that his position as a quarterback who didn't call his own plays was a source of trial. Coach Tom Landry sent in every play. He told Roger when to pass, when to run and only in emergency situations could he change the play (and if he did, he better be right!).

Even though Roger considered coach Landry a “genius” when it came to football strategy, pride said that he should be able to run his own team. Roger later said, “I faced up to the issue of obedience. Once I learned to obey there was harmony, fulfillment, and victory.”<sup>v</sup>

Abram obeyed God and God fulfilled His promise to make of Abram a great nation. But one thing more needs to be said. **God called Abram to be a blessing to others.** Whenever Abram’s descendants - whether they be Jews, Muslims or Christians - cease to be a blessing to others, they are ultimately disobedient to God.

Now we have to be careful. This thing of being obedient to God can be tragically abused. There are people who have done terrible things in this world saying that “God told me to do it”.

Mark this down and never forget it: if you hear a voice and it tells you to do something hateful, something violent, something that brings pain to others - that is not the voice of God. That is the voice of Satan. God calls us to be a blessing to our family, to our neighbors, to the world. Paul writes in II Corinthians 5:19, “**God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ . . . And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.**” That’s who we are and what we’re about: being a blessing to others because God has blessed us so freely.

God told Abram to leave his home and God made Abram a promise and an assignment—that he would be blessed and that he would be a blessing. May we be blessed and may we be a blessing to others as well.

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<sup>i</sup> “Humor In Uniform.”

<sup>ii</sup> *Traveling Light* (Nashville: W Publishing Group 2001), p. 153.

<sup>iii</sup> Karl D. Babb, editor, *Adult Life And Work Lesson Annual 1993-94*, (Nashville: Convention Press, 1993).

<sup>iv</sup> <https://www.family-times.net/illustration/Submission/202247/>

<sup>v</sup> <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/11007-discerning-the-voice-of-god/day/1>