

I. The Universal Encounter with God

Abraham has an encounter with God, like every human being that will ever walk the planet. It will not always be the same encounter, but everyone gets one. Everyone gets at least one encounter. In Genesis 12:1, it says, "Now the Lord had said unto Abram." This encounter may not have been his first one; it might have been the hundredth one, but this is the first one that got recorded.

I can tell you, I had encounters with Christians who were giving me the gospel many times before I heard it. I rejected it with extreme prejudice most of the time. Most of the time it was my hard attitude, I am sure of it, but a lot of it was these people were not living anything close to the words they were saying. When I heard those things and saw the things they were doing, that made a difference.

At some point in the life of every human being, the Word of God is going to come to us and be presented in some way, shape, or form. We will all know for sure it is the Word of God, and we can either accept it or reject it. As I said, I had a lot of encounters with God before I started paying attention. I do not know if Abraham did or Abram did. I think he might have had a couple of encounters, but this one gets recorded.

According to John 1:9, everyone gets a chance at least once.

John 1:9

That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.

That happened to Abram. We are all on our merry way through life. You know how salvation is, right? You get saved, everything is great. You are floating around on a pink fluffy cloud, and everybody likes you, and you like everybody, and every sermon is perfect. It is right on the mark. Everything is great until one day it is not. Then we come to a different place in our life, and I think we will see that as we go through Abram's journey here.

II. The Altar of New Life

Our first encounter with God is pretty much similar to what Abram says: "Get up and get out." He says, "Get thee out." Get out of the false religion that you are in, or get out of the bad relationship you are in, or get rid of the bad friends you have, or the bad drug habits you have, or the things that you are doing with your life. Get up and get out.

Our first encounter with God is to stop the direction that we were going in and go in a different direction; to repent of the direction; to turn away from the direction we were going and go right back in the direction that God wants us to go. For me, it literally was, "Get out of a false religion." Born and raised in a false religion. Thank God I did not inhale. It was just a part-time religion. It was not the religion of my parents. They sent us to church occasionally. It was not

like they had indoctrinated me to this. Thank God, because it is the hardest religion to get out of, if you ask me, because it is part of your nationality. I am half Italian, and I was half Catholic, whatever that was. It was really a strange experience, but I got out of that place where I was.

For me, it was, "Get up out of California." I got out of California on a business trip and ran into a bunch of people that actually believed the Bible, which was so rare for a guy from Southern California to even meet anyone that actually believed that thing. They told me to go to church. They told me to do these things. They told me I would probably still go to hell. I was like, "Yeah, I am going to go have some fun." That is what I was doing when I had my last encounter with God.

He came to this place that I call the altar of new life that Abram is at right now. He is at an altar of new life. I got my head in a Bible and my rear end in a church. That church was in California for a while, and then I was lucky enough to move back into the St. Louis area. That is a long story, but that is not part of the deal. Once I got headed in the right direction, I wound up in a place that God wanted me, and that just happened to be 2,000 miles away from home. I moved my family to a place where I could go to a Bible-believing church with those people who blessed me by not only telling me what God said, but actually doing what God had told them to do.

In Genesis 12:7, God says:

Genesis 12:7

And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him.

He has finally arrived by whatever path and whatever timeframe. Maybe it was the first encounter. You cannot say it is not. I am fine with that. He blesses Abram for being in the right place. He did not know what was going to happen when he got there. He just heard God say, "Go," and he went. That is really what happens at that altar of new life. You hear what God has to say. You turn from the direction that you have gone in, and that is your waypoint. That is what we would call in the Navy our home waypoint. Usually home was a boat in the middle of the ocean, but for this, Abraham's starting point was that altar of new life. He built that altar, and God spoke to him.

At that encounter with God, not untypical, are these things that happened with that encounter. There are three commands that he got:

1. He said, "Get out of thy country." For me, that was just, "Get out of California," I guess. Get out of the place I was at. Go to a different place.
2. He says, "And from thy kindred and thy father's house." We know that Abraham did not do this perfectly. I did not either. There is something to be said for putting some distance between us and our old friends. There is only one human being. The person in this room that has known me the longest is sitting over there in a corner. That is weird. I am 2,000 miles away from that middle school that we went to, and he is sitting right over there following me around. He has known me since 1973. They follow you wherever you go. Be careful how you encounter people. He is right over there.

3. The third command was, "Into a land that I will show thee," that altar of new beginnings. It does not lead us into the wilderness. It takes us to a place that God will show us. When God takes us from somewhere, He always leads us to somewhere. I just love it when people go, "Yeah, I left church. I do not really know where I am going to go yet." I am like, "Oh, cool. Let me know how that works for you." I am like, "Yeah, I am checking out a few." I am like, "Oh, interesting. God said that, huh?" God told us to go into the wilderness because that is what He did with Abraham. He led Abraham.

Then that encounter comes with blessings, promises, good and bad.

- The first promise is that He goes, "I will make of thee a great nation."
- The second promise to God is, "I will bless thee."
- The third one is, "I will make thy name great."
- The fourth promise to God was, "Thou shalt be a blessing."
- The fifth promise to Abraham was, "I will bless them that bless thee."
- "I will curse them that curse thee."
- "And in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed."

III. The Altar of Decision or Validation

So that is the altar of new life. We come to this new place that changes the direction of our life. We are given commands and promises. Abraham got all those commands and promises, and he went on his life, and it was a great place. Remember a pink fluffy cloud and everything is great. Everyone loves you. You love everyone. Every sermon is exactly perfect, and guess what? Look at Genesis 12:8.

Genesis 12:8

And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Beth-el, and pitched his tent, having Beth-el on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the LORD, and called upon the name of the LORD.

Every Christian that ever met God at the altar of new life is going to come to another waypoint in his life. Another altar, let us say, in his life. About one or ten thousand times, they are going to come to this place, and I call it the altar of decision or the altar of validation, which is more often the truth. We often come to this altar instead of making a decision; we make a validation of our life. We have already told God what we are going to do. This is where Abraham is, in my opinion.

Once we get on board with God, there are choices that come up. After that initial love fest wears off, and you start to realize, I never forget Dan Schmidt laughing at me when I complained. He just laughed and said, "Welcome to the ministry, Bob. Welcome to the ministry." I was like,

"Wait, wait, wait, it is not supposed to be like this. Everybody is happy, right?" No. But there are decisions to be made, and I like to believe we make the right decisions, but we all know it is not true. Everyone who has ever been saved has kind of been in a place where they made a wrong decision, and they are faced with these decisions. They are either designed to draw us towards God or away from God. That is the good thing. There are only two ways to go, right? So you have a 50-50 shot at it. The problem is we are about 25% accurate when we make those decisions. Abraham was like that too. How we make these decisions will change history with Abraham. It changed history.

So he is at that place, that altar of new life, and in Genesis 12:8, it says, "And he removed from thence." Do you ever wonder if the promises of God are so good, why do people leave them? I mean, God did not tell him to go anywhere. God had not spoken. You see, he calls upon the name of the Lord. God does not answer. This is an altar of validation in his life, and we will see. We know where he went. We know what he does. If promises of God are so great, and they are great, trust me. Boy, I like them a lot. Why do I keep removing myself from a place of blessing? Why do I keep removing from thence? I do not understand it. Is that a universal experience? Does anybody else in here, does Christianity have a new car smell? I know. It is the principle of the first door ding. I do not want to wash my Christianity anymore because it has got a ding in it. It happens. We get saved, and there is that pink fluffy cloud around for a while. Everyone is nice.

But remember, Abraham carried a lot of baggage with him to that altar of new life. I carried a lot of baggage with me to that altar of new life, and I took some of it with me through it, and I think that might have been a problem. Sooner or later, though, reality seeps in, and you realize that this Christian walk is one of those long-term things that we talk about, rather than short-term things. It is a lifestyle, right? It is a longer-term thing, and the rubber meets the road here, and I am not saying you throw Christ out the window. Abraham did not throw God out the window, but he certainly was not in a place of blessing. He removed from the place that God told him to go. What happened was we start to miss those things I gave up, and I start to really appreciate the things I picked up that I might not have should have picked up. It brings me to a place where I have to make a decision, a decision to either stick with God or an altar of validation to validate what I want.

Abraham left some things behind. I think he misses them, and he picked up some things, and he starts to value those things more than the things that God wanted him to have, like his relatives, friends, hangouts, habits, lifestyle choices that you should not have brought with us. And he called upon the name of the Lord, Genesis 12:8. Here is our first mistake. I think this is the first mistake we make in Christianity: we build an altar to validate our choices rather than to acknowledge God moving in our life. There are two kinds of altars. God is involved in one, and God is not involved in the other one. Can you hear that? Someone just flushed the toilet upstairs. All right, amen.

So when we get here, these are the things we do. We build an altar of validation because we do not want to hear what God has to say, right? We have already made up our minds, and at this altar, we let God know, "Hey God, I am going to marry this person." Really? Yeah, because you want it. And then 18 months later, "God really showed me we do not belong together. We are

going to divorce this person." And then, "Oh, God really told me I could this." "Anyways, God wants me to do these things." "He is fickle." "God is fickle." "God really wants me to church hop for a while until I settle on one." "God really wants me to investigate other religions for a while." Okay. We move from a place so that we take ourselves from a place of blessing because we feel like it. Then we thank God for the decision that I made. We build an altar, and we tell God what to say. We pray about it. So we say we do, but we are still under that last standing order. God had told Abram, "Get up, get out, get rid of these things, go to a place that I will show you. When you get there, I will let you know what to do." And God shows up at that place and said, "I am going to give you this land." Abraham goes, "Great, I am out." Right?

Sometimes we are just supposed to sit still and let God act. Sometimes we just have to go. God never told him to go anywhere. He just came to that conclusion all by himself and called upon the name of the Lord. Is not that great? Is not that great? He has picked up my NIV. "Oh Lord, thank you for giving me this." How do you pray for something like that? How do you pray when you get out of a place of blessing? How do you call on God? I am afraid, at least this, I am afraid to call on God's name when I am out of fellowship with God. I am afraid of it. He scares me. He scares me. I got a good, healthy dose of fear when I used to travel to St. Louis. Las Vegas, a lot in Mel was there. I would always make sure I was there on a Wednesday night so I could go to Bible study with him. Then we would go out and eat, and he would talk. The thing he talked about the most was the judgment seat of Christ. That was 20 years ago, probably more than 20 years ago now. And he scared me. And I am scared. When I am out of fellowship, I am almost afraid to pray for forgiveness because He should kill me. He should just kill me.

But this is what Abraham does. He goes, "Man, I made this decision." He calls upon the name of the Lord. He sings a song, hoots and hollers, "Woo hoo!" Right? Great. Here is the problem. I will give you a laser beam and a flashlight. I will buy you one. And as Bob would say, you can stay up all night. You will never see God telling him to get out of that place. If you read on, and we will, we will see what happens with him. "I built the altar. I prayed about it. I hooted about it. I told all my friends about it." What did God have to say? This is a milestone we all come to. This altar of decision or altar of validation is more likely the place that we build. It is not of God; it is of our own self. I think it is a natural part of being a Christian. At least, maybe not for you, but for me it is. I find myself making these decisions all the time. They are not good. And they get harder and harder to come back from over time. So you might want to quit. I do not know.

Did God speak? No. Did He give us a verse? No. Did He give Abram a principle or anything? No. The last time He spoke was in Genesis 12:7. He says, "I am going to give you this land." And that is it. The next thing, the next thought was Abram's, not God's. That is me. So I am going to give you a little Hebrew lesson. No, I did not look it up in the Strong's. I asked a Jew from Israel what these words meant because it is interesting to me. I think weird thoughts. That place, "unto a mountain on the east of Beth-el and Hai on the west," or west and east. I wrote it down wrong. The Hebrew word for city is "bet." And one of the Hebrew words for God is "El." So Bethel means "house of God." The Hebrew word for Hai means "heap of ruins, trash, a dump, things that people do not want." So Abram finds himself sitting between a place called "house of God" and "heap of ruins." That is a great place to be. It is also a high place, which is another

thing. He is in no man's land. He is not in. He is not out. Oh, wait a minute. I heard that before. He is neither cold nor hot. He is not completely out. He is not completely in. He is neither cold nor hot. We all know how that warmed up. This is what happens. We are not, "Hey, I am not rejecting God. I am not rejecting church." "Hey, I still love Old Paths Baptist Church. I am just not sure where I am supposed to be right now." Okay. Where are they now? I do not know. They are not around. He is not in. He is not out.

You all know where Abraham winds up though, right? He is making bad decisions, and he is probably the loudest amen in church. That is always the one you watch out for. The loudest amen, Charles. I appreciate the amen, Charles. So why do we leave this place of blessing unto a mountain on the east of Bethel? You see it here. He is not in. He is not out. He is just chilling out, not quite in God's house, not quite given over to the world. We do not just jump into sin. We take little baby steps, like little baby steps, a little bit more here, a little bit more there. You know that Proverbs 10:8 says, "But a prating fool shall fall." We never run to the cliff. We get to the edge. We look over, and we jump. We just take the last little baby step. This is what he is doing.

When we do this, God is going to put all those promises we just talked about on hold. I have never been blessed by God when I am in a place that God does not want me to be, which is probably why I do not have too many bullets. I have been blessed beyond my wildest dreams, which scares me because to whom much is given, much is expected. That judgment seat of Christ looms large for a guy my age. I know I have some more years hopefully to go, but it is starting to loom large. If a guy like Sabaka had a healthy fear of the judgment seat of Christ, I guess every one of us ought to have a healthy, not all of you got to know that guy. He was a good guy.

But if we know our geography and our Bible, we know where Abraham is headed, right? He is not there yet, but he is on his way. He may not even know it yet, but he is on his way. Look in Genesis 12:9:

Genesis 12:9

And Abram journeyed, going on still toward the south.

We all know what South is, right? We all know where he winds up. There is a lesson here. That is Egypt. He winds up in Egypt, and Abraham, if he can be considered a picture of a Christian that has met God, acted on that encounter, arrived at a place that God showed him, a Bible-believing church for me in St. Louis, Missouri. I still cannot get over that. He gets that promise, and then he leaves, and he gets caught between the things of God and the things of the world. That is no man's land. That is the most dangerous place you could be. Because God says you are neither cold nor hot. If you are cold, if you are hot, we can do something about it. If you are cold, we can do something about it. If you look more, we cannot even tell who you are. It is like, "Where did they go?" It does not matter.

Abraham is like any other person walking the earth. Abraham is like any other person, well, basically walking with God. The world is going to step in and call us back towards the world. I do not know about you, but James 1:8 says, "A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways."

You cannot have it both ways. You cannot sit there in no man's land and expect that to work out good. But here is the interesting thing about this altar or this milestone or waypoint. God does not appear to him. He called upon the name of the Lord. God does not appear to him. God is not talking to him. He is like, "Nope, you are not where I told you to be." When we are not in a place of blessing, God is not going to cosign those bad choices that we make.

Now look in Genesis 12:10-13:

Genesis 12:10

And there was a famine in the land: and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine was grievous in the land.

Genesis 12:11

And it came to pass, when he was come near to enter into Egypt, that he said unto Sarai his wife, Behold now, I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon:

Genesis 12:12

Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they shall say, This is his wife: and they will kill me, but they will save thee alive.

Genesis 12:13

Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister: that it may be well with me for thy sake; and my soul shall live because of thee.

So Abraham is fully committed. He is on his way south. He is fully committed to his journey to Egypt. We all know what happens there. He gets into trouble. That is how we fall into sin, right? This is how we, quote unquote, "just this accident." It was not really an accident. He took those first baby steps when he left Bethel, built an altar, did not hear from God, told God what he meant to say, "God is what you meant to say, right?" And he went on and acted on that. To compound his mistake, he heads south more, right into Egypt, that old picture of the world. There is that prating fool of Proverbs 10:8 falling right there. He sidled up to that line, stepped right over the line, and he fell. Abraham has always been heading there since the moment he left that place of blessing where his treasure was. We will see this, I think, in a little bit. His heart will be too. Abraham's heart was in the world. That is why he left. Abraham got enticed back to the promises that the world could give him because they are easier to get. They are not as good, but they are easy. And there are so much more of them, leaning not unto his own understanding where our treasure is our heart. He leans towards the world. So he went towards the world. We lean, we are going to go in a direction we are leaning in. That is what we do when we walk. We lean in a certain direction, and we go there.

Now to ensure that God is with him, this is great. To ensure that God is totally in this journey, he tells his wife to lie. Should not that be the first clue? He tells his wife, "Hey, check it out. This is really for you. Just say you are my sister." But he exposes himself and says, "That it may be well with me." "With me." "They will kill me." "They will kill me if you do not." He was after

himself. Great leadership always looks after themselves first, right? Great leadership is about making sure that you are, that is politics today. Politics today is me first, then you, right? That is not leadership. That is not how that is supposed to be.

So Abraham comes to a place where he has to make this decision, and sitting waiting for God to speak, he pretends God has spoken. It is easy to pretend. I do not know if God talked to you or not. None of us know that. You do not know if God, if I say, "God really told me to go do this thing," you have no idea whether God told me that or not. And I am on my own, right? Nobody just stumbles in there. They build their way there. Abraham pretends he has spoken to God. He builds an altar. He calls upon the name of the Lord. He validates his own decision. He acts on his own understanding. And now he is in Egypt instead of this place that God showed him. Nobody just stumbles there. We get there on our own two feet. We have to work pretty hard to get there.

So now he winds up in a different place. Once we step towards that world, the path gets easier. I am telling you, it is easier because sin is fun. If it was not fun, I would not do it. Just to be honest, I am being honest with you. If sin felt bad, would you do it? Sin feels bad when you get caught. Sin feels good when you are doing it. That is just the way the devil designed sin. So that is just the way it is human nature. We can step away. We can, "Let us just not go to church on Sunday. Get extra sleep, more time with the kids." It is always about the kids, right? It is always about the kids. "Oh, no, the kids. The kids need this. The kids need that." It really turns into more TV time, more reading time, usually a paper, not a Bible, more work time. But somehow, I do not think this time ever translates into doing God's work. It just kind of does not work that way. It never does.

IV. The Altar of Reflection

Hopefully, we ultimately come to this next milestone that Abram comes to. But experience shows me that while we are waiting for that to happen, more water goes under the bridge. More decisions are made, more altars of validation take place, and now more baggage is with us. And it is harder and harder and harder. So by the time Abram has been in Egypt for a while, he gets into this mess, lying to Pharaoh about Sarai, and he winds up back at the very place that he was.

Let me go there. It is in Genesis 13:1-4:

Genesis 13:1

And Abram went up out of Egypt, he, and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the south.

Genesis 13:2

And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold.

Genesis 13:3

And he went on his journeys from the south even to Beth-el, unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Beth-el and Hai;

Genesis 13:4

Unto the place of the altar, which he had made there at the first: and there Abram called on the name of the LORD.

So he went right back to that place, almost back to church, but not quite. Almost back to the place of blessing, but not quite. It is not necessarily bad. He is headed in the right, he is leaning in the right direction now, right? Unto the place of the altar, which he had made there at the first, and Abram called upon the name of the Lord, and the Lord said absolutely nothing. So by the time he has been there for a while, this mess with Pharaoh, he gets out, he goes right back to the place, the ground zero of his bad decision, right? You can almost see him saying, "Hmm, something went wrong there. Maybe I better rethink that decision I made." But he does not quite get back where he was supposed to go.

When you find yourself in Egypt, we need to reflect on what brought us there. It is, I call this the altar of reflection. It is a point where you have made a decision; now reflect on that for a while. He is going to do that. It is going to happen. So, I do not deny this is going to happen. It has happened to me a bunch of times. I learn from my mistakes, and I try to not make the same ones over and over again. I call this the altar of reflection.

So what do you do when we get to this place in our life? There are three things I think we ought to do. So he is in this place between Hai and Bethel, and he calls upon the name of the Lord. God is not talking, but he is leaning in the right direction. So what does he do?

4. We reflect on our motives here. It is not said what drove Abram to leave that place of blessing and run off to Egypt, but there is a clue there in Genesis 13:2. Genesis 13:2

And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold. Could that have been why he went down there? There was a famine in the land. It is always a test, right? So he comes back. He is rich. This comes up later on, becomes a problem for him. So you wonder why he braved the hard, cold world. It might have been that it was serving the flesh and not trusting God. I do not know. Whatever the motives, there is no evidence that he heard there was a great revival going down in Egypt or a protest march. It just had to be that there was a reason he went down there. It is my opinion that he was after something other than what God wanted him to have. So he was reflecting. When we get to this point in our life, and we all will, we need to reflect on the motives that brought us there. What was the motivation for Abram to go? I think it was riches. Maybe not.

5. The second thing we need to do is we need to act on the reflections. This is where I get caught up. I reflect. Good. I know what my motives are. I know when I have done, I even know when I am doing it that they are not right. It is acting on these things biblically that is a problem. I can almost always identify my motives. It is acting biblically. It does not come quickly. He is no deadbeat though. He is not a deadbeat. He gets into a bind. He reflects on his motives, and he does something about it. James 2:18

Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. There are two types of Christians. There are only two. One type of Christian says what they are going to do. And the other type does

it. There are only two. And Abram turns out he is a guy that says it and does it. I mean, I am not picking on Abram. I am telling you about my life. And Abram just happens to pattern that. And I am going to guess that he probably patterns some of you too. We do not always take the right actions, but I almost always know what I am supposed to do when I take the wrong ones. It just takes me a while to get them right. These waypoints or altars are there to tell me where I am at. Remember I had that home waypoint at salvation somewhere in a car going down I-70. He listened to this madman scream at me for no apparent reason whatsoever. Like, why is he yelling? I have never heard anyone yell in church. You did not talk in church. You might wake God up in the church I went to, and He might be angry when He woke up from His nap. He whispered. The loudest thing I ever heard in church was a kid crying. And they had a whole special room called the crying room for that. It is like, "Get out of here." It was really weird.

6. The third thing: You seek God's direction. If we are at an altar of reflection stage in our life, it is usually because we have done something we should not have done. But I am saying you should probably reflect on our lives anyways. Examining our own selves, right? Second Corinthians 13:5 tells us to examine our own selves. Not just for the Lord's Supper, but I would say we ought to do a self-evaluation anytime, any day. Examining our motives is good. Acting on them is good and biblical. But Abram leaves one thing that got him into Egypt in the first place. He acted without God's direction. While he goes back to the very place where he made that bad decision, the ground zero of where he started, he does not get all the way back. Sometimes when we are in such a mess, just getting out of the mess is a better place, even though we are not in a good place. Just getting out of the mess. But Abram was supposed to get right back to where he started because that is where God wanted him to be. He is just in a less bad place than he was before.

Here is how that looks. So you get saved, you get out of bad relationships, you get rid of some bad habits, but you just cannot quite get into church. You are in church, you make a, you come to an altar of decision, instead you validate it, you leave church, you just cannot quite get back. You are back to the place you were. It is better than where you were before, but it is not where you should be. You get back to church, but you just cannot get back into ministry. "Oh, those people, oh, I am not going to know those people. They do not want me around anyways." Well, maybe that is true. I do not know. But thank God that God will meet us halfway. He will meet us more than halfway. If nothing else, Abram is headed in the right direction. If you look real careful in Genesis 13:4, again, Abram calls on the name of the Lord, but God does not speak yet. But I think that is why I say He will meet us. He has got a second and third and fourth and 150,000th chances. Abram is leaning in the right direction. He is not all the way right, but God is going to deal with him. And all the Pharisees just said, "No way, you have got to be perfect." I am like, "Yeah, like I moved to Florida about three years ago." So do not worry about it.

V. The Altar of Separation and Growth

So there, we are at another altar now. We are about to come to another place, and you will still be here in Genesis chapter 13. I do not recommend this, but while Abram is not completely back to a place where God wants him, he is at least on the right track, and he is chilling out here for a

while. Some time goes by. If you can hang out long enough, but not too long at this next altar or this next waypoint, God will deal with us. But our heart needs to be right. It is a scary place to be because you are not in God's blessing. It happens to Abram. He is reflecting now. And I call this the altar of separation and growth. We see this happening when he starts talking in Genesis 13:5.

Genesis 13:5

And Lot also, which went with Abram, had flocks, and herds, and tents.

Genesis 13:6

And the land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together: for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together.

Genesis 13:7

And there was a strife between the herdmen of Abram's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle: and the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land.

Genesis 13:8

And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren.

Genesis 13:9

Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left.

Here it is. "Get out" one more time. He is starting to get, something has clicked now. Abram is starting to realize, "Hey, I brought something with me I was not supposed to bring." When I encountered God in Genesis 12:1, He told me to get out of from my kindred, from my father's house. And he kind of did, but not really. "God, you did not really mean that, did you? You did not mean to leave my brother, right?" No, maybe He did. Maybe He did. He is in a place right now where he says, "Separate thyself." And he has seen where he has gone wrong. He is not completely back where he is supposed to be yet, but his heart is inclined toward God now. He is leaning towards God now. So God is going to deal with Abraham in a way that I just mentioned. He will meet us more than halfway. He is setting the condition for Abraham to get back in fellowship.

Abraham has realized, maybe because there are symptoms now, rather than he came to this great revelation that, "Hey, I did not do this." He has seen the symptoms of his decisions, and there is now strife between his herdmen and Lot's. I wonder if that could not be the riches that got in the way. The land was not big enough to contain the cattle anyways. So Abraham is only partially compliant. Back in Genesis 12, he says, "Get thee out of thy country," and "from thy kindred," nope. And "from thy father's house," sort of. And "the land that I will show thee," yeah. But then he left. So he is like one for four. That is a batting average of what, 250. That might get you in the Hall of Fame. It will not get you into fellowship with God. He is one out of four there. That is not good enough. The riches of the world's promises have now become a problem in Abraham's

life. Those things that he thought he needed, the house, the car, the job, the things, have now gotten in his way. They have gotten between him and his relationship with God. And they were not the real problem. They are just the manifestation of the real issue of not being where God wants you to be.

In Genesis 13:10-13, Abram says, "Just go, please go, get out. Look, if you go left, I will go right. You go north, I will go south. Just go." This is where he says, "Separate thyself." So Lot breaks left. Abraham goes right. Lot kept going away the world. And Abram went God's way. We will pick that up in Genesis 13:14. The Lord is talking now. He is not back in Bethel yet, but the Lord is talking. He is in the right direction. So God says, "All right, all right. I see you have had enough. Let us go."

Genesis 13:14

And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward:

Genesis 13:15

For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.

Genesis 13:16

And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered.

Genesis 13:17

Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee.

Genesis 13:18

Then Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the LORD.

God speaks, Abram builds an altar. That is the sequence. God spoke in Genesis 12, Abram built an altar. God did not speak, Abram does some things. God speaks, Abram builds an altar. He spoke there in Genesis 13:14, "And the LORD said unto Abram." It is the first time we see God talking. I do not know how, there has been a period of time that has gone by. Some great things have happened to Abram. He almost gets his wife taken from him. He is getting in fights with his family. He is out of fellowship with God. All he ever had to do is comply with the command. But even though Abram was not physically, exactly, perfectly in line with every last jot and tittle and doctrine of his King James Bible, God dealt with him anyway, because his heart was leading in the right direction. And there he built an altar unto the Lord after God had spoken. God does something, then Abram builds an altar.

VI. The Altar of Sacrifice

Then we come to this last milestone in Abram's life. So you go through Genesis chapter 14, Abram has to go back and get Lot out of a bind because Lot is a knucklehead. So maybe you do not, maybe we separate from our family, but we do not leave them destitute. Maybe we are supposed to be a witness to that family somehow. Maybe we are not supposed to antagonize them to the point where they do not want to ever hear anything about God ever again. My dad, the atheist, I cannot go at him like I could go at somebody else. There are certain things that just will not work on him. So I am not going to leave him alone.

Genesis chapter 15, Abram gets the promise of a child. Genesis chapter 16, Abram's faith is tested. He fails again. He sets the stage for at least one great nation that we hear about in the news every day. Now Abraham is pretty old. He is about to wind up in yet another jam. This time it is one that God devises. In Genesis chapter 17, God reiterates His promise, changes his name to Abraham. Genesis chapter 18, Sarah laughs at God. And Abram bargains for Lot's life. Genesis chapter 19, you have the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. And Genesis chapter 20, Abraham does it again. He is in Egypt again, telling his wife to lie. I wonder why Isaac winds up doing that later on.

In Genesis chapter 22, Abram comes to this next waypoint, this next milestone, this next altar in his life. That is the altar of sacrifice, and it is coming. So in Genesis 22:1, you see Abram coming to this final milestone in his life.

Genesis 22:1

And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am.

Genesis 22:2

And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.

Genesis 22:3

And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him.

Genesis 22:4

Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off.

Genesis 22:5

And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you.

Genesis 22:6

And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife; and they went both of them together.

Genesis 22:7

And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?

Genesis 22:8

And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together.

Genesis 22:9

And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood.

Genesis 22:10

And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.

So the altar they are at right now is the altar of sacrifice. We all know the story. You probably learned it in Sunday school. I guess I never went to Sunday school. I do not know. Sunday school was weird in Catholic church. Trust me. It was really weird. A lot of singing. This altar is going to ask us three questions. It is a place that may even be physically the same place where this altar of new beginnings took place. I do not know. I have heard it said that I could not really prove it. So for Abraham, it is just another beginning, right? It is just a circle of life. He gets back out of Egypt. He almost loses his wife. He finally got rid of Lot. He avoided the allure of Sodom and Gomorrah somehow. A lot of time passed, 13 years or so. Abraham is older now than he was before. It is a time in a Christian's life when there is an expectation of giving something back to God. This is a good place to be. It might not be the best place you want to be. It might not be your favorite place, but it is a good place to be.

In Genesis 22:1-2, there is a question there: "Are you really ready for what God has to say?" Really? Here it is. Before it was, "Hey, dude, get up into this land. I will give you a present." Now it is like, "Take your son, your only son, and offer him for a burnt offering." That is the good deal that is going on here now. We are really good at lip service when it comes to serving God, right? Really? Just like the nation of Israel was back in 1 Samuel chapter 17, when they are talking about Goliath, "Boy, we are going to get you. Oh, boy, we are going to really give it to you." 40 days they did that, but they did not. They sat there every day. They would say, "Oh, we are going to kill you. We are going to get you. Oh, boy, we are going to..." And they did not. And they did not. And this is human beings. This is our human nature. We talk a tough talk when it comes to serving God. But when it comes down to this altar of sacrifice, how are we going to do it? How are we going to get there? What are we going to do?

There is going to come a day when God has expectations. God has expectations. I may not know what they are in total, but I know He has got them. And I know that I do not necessarily live up

to those expectations. I mean, what is the big deal? He will just let me out. He will let me slide at the judgment seat of Christ. I am Bob Craig, for crying out loud. No. It comes a day that we are going to have to give up. We have to put up or shut up when it comes to God and stop talking about it and doing it. This is Abraham's day. This is Abraham's chance now. He has not done a perfect job of it, but we know he does this time. But boy, that is a pretty heavy toll to pay to serve God, and he is willing to do it. There are things that we value that God does not value. That might be our life. I do not know. You never know. Certainly God expected something to happen here, and Abraham was willing to do it at this point in his life. A lot of water passing under the bridge. Abraham is a good dude. He lived a hard life, lived a good life, served God, made some mistakes. That is why I think he is just like us.

There is a second question that this altar asks us, and it says, "When God speaks, are you ready to listen?" You see that in Genesis 22:3-10. There is a sacrifice about to happen, the ultimate sacrifice. God spoke, now Abram is listening. If you look really careful, this is a picture of two mature men of God. Isaac is a child, I think about 13 years old. How old is Jordan? He can still beat me. So you think about this 90-some-year-old dude and his 13-year-old son, and you tell me that guy could not have gotten away if he wanted to. There are two sacrifices going on here. Abram is sacrificing his son, Isaac is sacrificing his life at that altar of sacrifice. There are two sacrifices. You cannot convince me that it is not two sacrifices because if Isaac was not willing, remember, they left the two dudes behind. He said, "Hey, me and the lad, we are going to go over here and worship, and we will come back to you later." And then God speaks.

In Genesis 22:9-11, I will read those again.

Genesis 22:9

And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood.

Genesis 22:10

And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.

Genesis 22:11

And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I.

He said, "Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me." So God speaks here. One more time, Abraham has heard God speak, then he builds an altar, and now Abraham is a type of God the Father giving his son as a sacrifice. This is how it is supposed to work. We are all in this army, right? We are all soldiers for Christ, right? Soldiers sacrifice. Soldiers die. Soldiers do not think they are going to die, but they are willing. It is weird how it happens. People do things at that moment of sacrifice that they would never think about doing prior to that moment of sacrifice. A real soldier for Christ comes to a point where there is nothing held back. We all say we are in the army except when we do not want to be.

I do not know about you, but when I was in, you did not get to pick which commands you took. There was not an option. They did not get, "Hey, I am going to take a break for a while, Admiral. I will just, I will be over here chilling out. I am going to go on shore leave for a while. You guys go on the boat. You guys go play war. I am going to go over here and chill out for a while." It was not a thing. A real soldier does not take a break. They do not pick what commands or what orders we were going to take. A real soldier knows their life is not even important. The only thing that is important is the mission. That is why these guys will give their lives.

Shortly before I left the service, there was a, I did not know these guys, but they were in an F-14. They took off. They had an engine failure, and they were not high enough to recover from it. At Miramar, when you took off, the maneuver was you get out, you get overland, you quickly overland over the ocean, but you are over Mission Bay. It was Memorial Day weekend, and Mission Bay is full of people and boats and people swimming in kayaks and all kinds of stuff going on. The pilot told the RIO to get out. So they popped the canopy, and the RIO went out. Well, you do not both go out. Sorry, Top Gun. You do not both go out unless you want to. The RIO gets out. The pilot stayed with the plane because he knew if he did not steer the plane, he would land in the middle of that day. And he stayed too long. He gave his life. He did not have to. He punched out of that thing, and it killed 20 people. No one is saying a word. At the last moments of his life, he was more concerned with somebody else than his own life. That is a soldier.

So do not tell me you are a soldier in God's army and then take the week off because it is pretend. You can buy the uniforms. You can wear the camouflage. You can call yourself anything you want, but a soldier does not have a choice. The soldier is bought and paid for by the United States military. You do not get a choice anymore. You sign a blank check. You do not get to pick. It is not part time. Sacrifice is not giving up something that causes us inconvenience or is sinful. That is not giving. Sacrifice is giving up something that is something dear to you, like your life, like your time, like your liberty, like your will, things that you are not supposed to have. It costs us something. It changes. Sacrifices change lives. They save lives. They change lives. It means something to someone else. That guy did something that meant something to someone else. Every one of those people on that beach that day knows what happened. They might have not been affected by it, but there would have been people affected by it. He got out. He did get out, but he was vertical, and he was too low, and he slammed into the ground and died. He tried, but he knew that his life was not as important as saving those innocent people in the water that day. That dude was a man. He is a soldier for sure.

Sacrifices have given up cigarettes or fast food or kale. I gave up kale. I had a lady at work three years ago. This is the honest to God's truth. She said she is Catholic for Lent. She is saying her daughter caught her cheating at Lent because she had given up hard liquor and Sprite. And she caught her, no, sorry. She had given up Sprite. Sorry. You never give up hard liquor for Lent if you are a Catholic. So she had given up Sprite, and her daughter caught her making a, I do not know, vodka and Sprite drink. That was her sacrifice for Lent was she gave up hard liquor. Well, okay. A real soldier will give up those things that are held most dear to them. The things that mean the most to them, the things that affect them the most.

I cannot help but think that my time in church, that is not a sacrifice. That is giving my time for whatever ministries I have been involved in since I have been saved. It is not a sacrifice. I give up time for that. It is not a sacrifice. Neglecting my kids is not a sacrifice. That is not a sacrifice. It is an abomination. But what does it cost us to serve? Have we given up anything to serve our offerings that we give on Sunday? Does it cost anything, or is it just kind of leftover stuff? It is like, "Yeah, I need all my stuff here, and I have got this much left over. You can have that." Does it cost you something? Because if it does not, I do not think it is a sacrifice. I think we will all find out at the judgment seat of Christ what God thinks about that.

VII. Conclusion and Application

My guess is that anyone that has met God at the altar of new life is in trouble. I think I know everyone here. I am sure all of you have met God at that altar of new life. So, yeah, you are saved. You are going to heaven, but you are going to face that man at the judgment seat of Christ someday. And He is going to want to know what you did. Why did you do it? Where did you start? Where did you go? How did you get there? A lot of us are going to stand there and go, "Yeah, you know, hey, man, I preached on Sunday morning in front of Barb. How about it?" No, I am totally in because of that. You cannot preach in front of Barb and go to hell. That is not possible. That is not possible.

But if you have met God at that altar of new life and you have stepped out to follow those commands, you are also going to come to that altar of decision. You are going to come to another waypoint in your life. You have to. That cloud dissipates, that little pink fluffy cloud where everybody loves you. It is not real. It is not real. They do not all love you. We are not all good people. Sorry. We are not all good people. Not all the time, anyways. We do not really, dare I say that, do we really care about each other? I think we do, but do we? Sometimes we do not, which means that we do not. You cannot love someone and then not love them for a while, then love them again. It is not possible.

You and I both know that there are things that we brought with us into salvation that we should not have brought into salvation. There are things that we have picked up since we have been saved that we should not have picked up. These are the things that draw us out of Bethel to that high place between, we draw us out of the place of blessing to that high place between Bethel and Hai. You have got one foot in God's world and one foot in the world. I cannot even say what you are doing in between. You are not doing the right things. These things that we pick up, they will cloud our judgment so that when we come to these altars of decisions, we wind up building an altar of validation instead. That decision point, you have got a book. You have got a principle. You have got a verse. You have got a pastor. You have got a counselor. You have got somebody that can help you make that decision. But what we do is we build the altar. We hoot and holler about it. We amen it really loud, louder than everybody in the room. And then we go tell God what we are going to do. How does that work? Where are they now? Where are they now? They are not there. I cannot tell you how many people are not even in the ministry anymore that used to stand here, and they were so self-righteous, and they are gone. Where are they now?

If we are not careful at these decision points, we will just validate our own decisions. I do not know about you, but I do not always make great decisions. So when we invariably find ourselves between God and the world in a straight line between the two, we will hopefully find our way to this altar of reflection because we are supposed to examine ourselves. 2 Corinthians 13:5, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves." Some people never make it back though. That is the problem. Once we leave that place of blessing, you are on your own. You saw God did not speak at all. God did not start speaking until Abraham got himself leaning in the right direction at least. He got close, and then he needed to lean in the right direction even after God spoke. He still went back down to Egypt again. So, hey, I am not saying that to say we all get a pass because we are all going to do it anyways. I think we are going to pay for those things at the judgment seat of Christ. You knew better. Some people never make it back. They try to live in the margins, and "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." Just a little bit of honey, right? What is the big deal? No one will know. Yeah, no one will know. I will never know. I do not care. I spent a lot of time caring about myself. They will never do anything substantial in their lives other than in the world.

It comes to the day when God says, "Well, what have you done with what you knew?" That is the scary day for me. "What have you done with what you knew?" I feel like I know my Bible pretty well. I feel like I met God at that altar of new life. I feel like He changed my life. I know He did, but what have I done with what I know? I feel like I have been in a Bible-believing church since I got saved. Some better than others, but I have been in a Bible-believing church since I got saved. I think I know a few things, and what am I doing with those things? What have I given up? When we fail at that altar of decision, if we are lucky enough to make it to the reflection altar or that waypoint in our life, we have got some decisions to make. When you reach that milestone of the altar of sacrifice, did we pretend our way there? Do we think we are sacrificing because we gave up kale? Where is Judy Schmidt? I gave up nuts and celery for Lent this year.

God said, "How can two walk together, except they be agreed?" I cannot be in agreement with God and not be in a place of blessing. I cannot be in agreement with God and not be in a Bible-believing church. I cannot. So if you can, let me know because I can show you some sleep on Sundays. I could probably use some time on Thursday nights. I could certainly use a lot of time writing up those stupid prayer group meetings that we do not do anymore. But I could use that time. I would say, "Bob, I am done here." I cannot tell you it is a privilege to stand in your pulpit. I used to dream about this before I ever met you. I am like, "Man, someday." And then it comes like, "Yeah, whenever you do a sermon here, you want to make it the best one because it might be your last." I am hoping I get another shot someday. Because that was not anyhow. This is weird looking at you and preaching, but I am done. Thanks, God. Thank you, Bob. I appreciate that. Good job.