

## STRUGGLES ON THE JESUS WAY

### Risk

Genesis 12:1-4

Dr. Doyle Sager, First Baptist Church, Jefferson City, Missouri

March 16, 2014

AUDIO: [www.fbcjc.buzzsprout.com/7678/158107](http://www.fbcjc.buzzsprout.com/7678/158107)

A letter, dated January 31, 1829, addressed to President-elect Andrew Jackson: "Dear sir, The canal system of this country is being threatened by the spread of a new form of transportation known as 'railroads.' The Federal government must preserve the canals for the following reasons: One: If canal boats are supplanted by 'railroads,' serious unemployment will result. Two: boat builders will suffer. Three: Canal boats are absolutely essential to the defense of the United States. As you well know, Mr. President, 'railroad' carriages are pulled at the enormous speed of 15 miles per hour by engines which...snort their way through the countryside, setting fire to crops...The Almighty certainly never intended that people should travel at such breakneck speed." Signed, Martin Van Buren, Governor of New York.

Someone has wisely said that it is not change that we fear. What we fear is the unknown which change brings. That's true, isn't it? So this morning, scripture identifies for us one of the struggles on the Jesus way: risk, stepping into the unknown. Our text tells of Abram's journey (he wasn't renamed Abraham until later in his life). A look at a map will show us that he started with his family from Ur (in current Iraq) and traveled to Haran, in modern-day Turkey. Genesis 12 tells us that in Haran, Abram received God's call to travel to a new place. From Haran to Shechem (Canaan, or the Holy Land) is approximately 400 miles. Four hundred miles! No four-lane highways or cars, no cell phone towers. Just a long, arduous, dusty journey

In God's call (v. 1), we see at least three separations Abram is asked to make (see if they resonate with you): 1) Leave your country: his ethnic, racial and national sense of identity; 2) Leave your homeland (kindred, or "kind"): culture, language, customs, worldview; 3) Leave your father's house: family, friends, sense of connection and community. Bible scholars have noted that each "leave" moves to the more intimate and personal. It's never easy to pull up stakes. Someone once said, "It takes guts to leave the ruts."

But now notice (vv. 2-3) what God promises. 1) A nation; 2) A reputation; 3) A relationship with God; 4) A relationship with people (receive a blessing and BE a blessing). The words "blessing" or "bless" are used five times in two verses. How we handle new, risky situations impacts others...we receive blessings and are transmitters of blessings.

But. But. What keeps us from these blessings? Have you noticed how much we all love sameness? Comfort. Security. Walter Brueggemann has written that there are plenty of Bible verses about equilibrium (staying put, order, discipline). There are also plenty of scriptures about transformation (going, change, revolution). We usually gravitate to one or the other.

Which one attracts you? Yes, we DO make an idol of security. But I ask you. Where would be today if Abram had not risked obeying? Remember: "It takes guts to leave the ruts."

Part of our problem is that we not only worship security; we also worship success. Here we are, First Baptist Church in the state's capital. Over the generations, we became programmed to succeed. A new program would come out from the Convention. We would pilot it. It would succeed. Or not. We're that way where we work. We are programmed to succeed. Pretty soon, in order to insure success, we start playing it safe. And we do that by staying in control.

But remember Abram isn't focused on success; he is focused on obedience. It's not all neat and tidy. He was not in control. I'd like to make a case this morning for mistakes and messiness. There are FEAR mistakes and then there are COURAGE mistakes (mistakes we make trying to follow God, trying to obey). I think God smiles on courage mistakes. Steve Jobs once said, "Remembering that you are going to die is the best way I know to avoid the trap of thinking you have something to lose. You are already naked. There is no reason not to follow your heart." So maybe that's why there is no much boredom among church members and so little joy. We haven't risked enough. There is no celebration without risk! Remember? "It takes guts to leave the ruts."

How does God's direction come to Abram? Look carefully. All God says in v. 1 is that God will SHOW Abram the land. That's it. No address. No details. No specifics. All God said in v. 1 was that the land would be shown. God doesn't say the land would be given until v. 7, after Abram obeys. We would like God's will to be mapped out, every inch of the way. Instead, it comes light the headlights on our cars. They only continue to penetrate the dark if we keep moving. If we stop moving, the lights stop moving.

Now let's see. How old is Abram at this time? Seventy-five! I saw a church sign a few weeks ago: "If you're still breathing, God isn't finished with you!" God isn't done with you! It doesn't matter if you've gone through divorce, a moral failure, battling addiction, declining health, too young, too old, you don't know the Bible well enough. God isn't done with you! Where you are now doesn't define you. It's not where you will be. You are moving with God. If you're willing to risk! Remember? "It takes guts to leave the ruts."

So, who wants to go further with God this morning? Who wants more than what you have in your relationship with God? What would that look like? What would that cost? It would cost. It involves risk. But it's all about being blessed...and being a blessing.