

24th May 2020

Welcome back Church. Today we're going to look at Abraham's response to the call. Last week we looked at the call, how God called Abram. Today we are going to look at the response of call, but before we do that let's get together and bring this message to the Lord in prayer. Father we ask O Lord that we are dealing with serious things. We want to look at your call, how you've called us in our lives to serve you, how we are now going to respond. We pray O Lord you will use Abraham's life to inspire us, to teach us, to guide us, to mold us to the direction in which we will respond to you. We ask this for Jesus sake. Amen

Right. So let's look at what we did last week. Last week we looked at God's call. The nature of God's call. How it is a personal call but God calls us to himself personally and he's the one to whom we are responsible and we answer to. The promise of the call and then lastly the challenge of call. This week we're going to look at how we respond. Now this is very-very important to us. Because how we respond will determine the course of our lives. How God works in us and what are the challenges to our response and finally how this response that we actually have to God's call will actually determine the outcome of our lives. And how we respond would we divide it into three basic points based on the second half of chapter 12 to chapter 14. First of all, our response to the call is inevitably imperfect. Our failures provide a path for growth and lastly our responses have consequences.

Now let's look at the first point. Our response is inevitably imperfect. Genesis chapter 12 verse 4 says,

So Abram went and the Lord had told him, as the Lord had told him and Lot went with him and Abram was 75 years old when he departed from Haran.

So if you look here Abram obeyed but did he obey from the get-go. If you look at actually chapter 11 verse 31,

It was his father, Terah took Abram his son and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson and Sarah his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife and they went forth together from Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canaan and when they came to Haran they settle there.

Acts chapter 7 Stephen tells us

Brothers and fathers hear me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia before he lived in Haran.

So you actually have a situation, the call of Abraham was through a vision according to Stephen and this was at the Ur of the Chaldeans. He didn't go. It was actually his father Terah who took him halfway to Haran. He didn't say, Oh I'm gonna leave everybody, I'm gonna leave you father, I'm gonna leave you mother and go all myself all the way to Canaan. No, it was his father who took him there and Abraham himself went the rest of the way from Haran down to Canaan only later on, in verse five

Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered and the people that they acquired in Haran and they set out to go into the land of Canaan.

So here we actually have the issue of Abram. He didn't actually obey immediately, it was his father, that God arranged his father to take him half way and then he went the rest of the way. So our response to God, although we obey on a global sense, in actuality it's punctuated with imperfections. It is like the gospel, in Acts chapter 1 you see we're supposed to share the gospel, the disciples are supposed to share the gospel from Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the world. And if you look at this map by nature by the AD 100 the gospel was spread over much of the Roman Empire but all this was actually spurred not by a voluntary evangelistic

campaign but a lot of it was because of persecution. God sort of helped nudge them along. Now, Genesis chapter 12,

Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son

Was he supposed to take Lot? If you look back at the promise in chapter 12 verse 1, go from your country your kinsmen, which means your relatives, your father's house to the land that I will show you. He was supposed to leave everybody and the original core excluded Lot and he Lot along and that actually has consequences later on where we can see Lot and Abram having tension and conflict and problems. Now let's look at chapter 12 verse 6

Abram passed through the Land to the place at Shechem, to the Oak of Moray. At that time the Canaanites were in the land.

Here he comes all the way to Canaan and you will find low and behold Canaan is full of Canaanites. God didn't bring him to an empty parking lot and tell him this is yours. He came to a place that is already populated by other people. Alright, to this place called Shechem. Now Shechem and then after he built an altar there. If you look at Genesis chapter 12 to all the way 13, there are four altars every time he goes to the promised land, when he enters from promised land there are altars he starts to build to basically worship God. Now the Oak of Moray is at Shechem. This is a very important place. This place is a site of pagan Canaanite worship. So all the Canaanites were there worshipping their gods and Abram comes and he worships the One God. He starts there to establish his place that he has come based on the promise. A very profoundly important place. This is the same place where Jacob would buy the land 175 years later on to bury his idols to declare he worshiped only one God. Jacob was sold to slavery over this place at Shechem. This is the place where Joshua returned from Egypt to dedicate nation to God. This is the place where the coronation of Abimelech and also Rehoboam and this is the very place where Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman that he was the Messiah of the world. Very important place, the Oak of Moray at Shechem.

Now God reaffirms his promise to Abraham when he actually gets to the promised land. The Lord, verse 7, appeared to Abraham said to your offspring I will give this land. So he built an altar to the Lord who had appeared to him. So God reaffirms his calling to us progressively bit-by-bit. The first trial comes in, Genesis chapter 12. There was a famine in land, so Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there for the famine was severe the land. So when he brings him to the promised land, when the first land, the first thing that happens he has a trial. It is not fertile like the river Euphrates where he actually came from the Ur of Chaldeans. He comes to a land and the first thing that hits them was a famine. There is no food. What would Abram do. This was a trial where God was testing him and in he actually left to go somewhere else rather stay in a promised land and I think this is the first trial which he failed. Isaiah chapter 31, this is the same thing here of the northern kingdom

Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help and rely on horses who trust in chariots because they are many and in horsemen because they are very strong, but do not look in the holy one of Israel or consult the Lord. So Egypt has always been that source of temptation where you actually represents the strength of man. Here you have the temptation of the famine. What would Abram do? Would he stay in faith in the land which God has...? I mean why would God bring you to a place where you starve. Surely God who brings you here will provide for you right. He didn't believe, bit a loss of faith and he ran down to Egypt. So Egypt is always cast as an alternative to God and you can see it's very easy to build altars. He build three altars there. He is very religious but the true test is discipleship is actually obedience. This is 1 Samuel 15:22 where Samuel child saw,

Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord. Behold, to be is better than sacrifice, and to listen then the fat of rams.

So therefore it's easy to be religious, it is easy to go to church services and sing your songs. The real test when the rubber hits the road is actually obedience. There is a picture of Joshua Harris, came to fame at 21 years old, of age. He wrote this book, I Kissed Dating Goodbye. Set up principles that in his life that he would not actually date. He would not kiss his wife. He would just find the right girl and get married. A prime example of chastity and biblical values. He actually became a mega pastor of a congregation of 4,000, but after a few years it was easy to be religious. Joshua Harris divorced his wife and now promotes gay marriage as well. So religious services, building altars is a little bit different from obedience. Obedience is a lifelong calling from God.

Now let's look at what Abram did in Egypt.

When he was about to enter Egypt he said to Sarai his wife, "I know that you're a woman beautiful in appearance and when the Egyptians see you they will say this is his wife and then they will kill me and they will let you live. Say you are my sister that it may go well with me because of you that my life may be spared for your sake.

So here we have a scheme which he thinks up, because he knows he goes down, he has a very beautiful wife. Can you imagine Sarai is 65 years old and she's a looker, and he knows that when he goes down they're gonna take her away and kill him if he is the husband. So therefore if he is actually the brother he would be the guardian and his life would be under threat. Actually he told the half-truth, because Sarah is actually his half-sister because they shared the same father. Right, so verse 14,

Abram entered Egypt and the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful and when the princes of Pharaoh saw her they praised her to Pharaoh and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house and for her sake he dealt well with Abraham and he had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male servants, female servants, female donkeys and camel. So he went down and he passed himself off as the guardian, the brother. So therefore he did well. They treated him well so that he could, the Pharaoh could basically make Sarai his wife. But what happened in verse 17,

The Lord afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife. So Pharaoh called Abram and said, "What is this that you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? He knew something about, he had a great plague, coronavirus, people died and verse 19

Why did you say that she's my sister, so that I took her into took her for my wife. Now then here's your wife take her and go and Pharaoh gave men orders concerning him and they sent him away with his wife and all that he had.

So here you have to have a lie. Abraham told the lie in order to get away, in order to have some gain. Well, why did the plague happen to Pharaoh and the Egyptians. If you look back at Genesis chapter 12 verse 3, there is a covenant along with the call and God says

I will bless those who bless you and him who dishonours you I will curse

And obviously God being faithful to this covenant, and it was actually Pharaoh who has dishonored Sarai and Abram by taking his wife's therefore the whole household comes under the curse and the plague happens to them. Some lessons here. Everybody in their walk with God will actually face a famine and our default escape mechanism mostly involves a lie unfortunately. Lying is so common. In fact this is a quote from Arnold Goldberg, professor of psychiatry at Rush Medical Centre in Chicago. He says,

Lying is as much part of normal growth and development as telling the truth. The ability to lie is a human achievement, one of those abilities that tend to set them apart from other species.

It seems to be part of our normal human development. New York Times in 1988, Daniel Coleman writes, Psychologists who are studying how and why children learn to lie are finding that certain lies play positive roles in a child's emotional development.

So we actually learned to lie as we grow and adapt to life. And there's a book by Paul Ekman who writes, why kids lie and it says,

The crucial human skills are among those that equip children to lie: independence, intellectual talents, the ability to plan ahead and take other person's perspective and the capacity to control your emotions.

You need all these higher functions in order to lie. So lying is default. It is like instinctive, like a possum. When a possum is threatened, he will lie down and play dead. There is a form of deception. Why do we lie? We lie like Abraham lied because we want to cope with a situation or threat, to gain an advantage. But it's not actually loving your neighbour because you're deceiving your neighbor and it's not honoring to God. The problem with the lack of integrity and lying is that it destroys human community, we sat people apart. It destroys your own identity because you tell so many lies you don't even know who you are in the end and it destroys human dignity and is very common among politicians who will basically lie in order to facilitate a following. So he is treating people as if they're numbers and in the end they will put you in a collision course with reality. So the other lesson that we learn here in our responses, even in the life of Abraham, the father of faith is that he's responses to God and responses to trials were somewhat suspect. He is imperfect at best. We need to avoid putting anyone, anyone especially leaders on a pedestal. Because once you do that you'll find disillusionment when you actually dig a little deeper. And if you are a Christian leader, the problem with people putting you on a pedestal is hypocrisy, because you've got to live up to the reputation for which people have actually plastered you with. And actually that will actually bring you down.

So we have seen that our responses just like Abraham's are often imperfect. Now second point that we can see in Abraham's life is that our failures provide a path for growth. If you look into his life. Abraham failed. He ran off to Egypt. He didn't really trust God. Engaged in lies and deception there. And he's back and we looked, the surprising thing in verse 2 when he came back Abram was very rich, livestock, silver and gold. He journeyed from the Negeb as far as Bethel to the place where his tent had been at the beginning between Bethel and Ai.

So he came back and ironically even though it failed he was rich. Why? Because actually not because of himself but because of God because God said in Genesis chapter 12 verse 2, I will make you a nation I will bless you, I will bless those who bless you and him who dishonors you I will curse.

And we shall learn the astonishing fact that the blessing of the Covenant doesn't depend on the performance of man. It is not through his progress, his faithfulness, or brilliance that he actually got all these riches. It was almost accidental but it was actually arranged by God. So he goes back to a battle where he first started and he and the first thing he did was he actually worshipped God and that was the correct response that God allowed him this grace.

Now the question that we need to ask, why did God allow a famine and the threat to Sarai's life as she went down to Egypt. Was it to test Abraham's faithfulness? Didn't God know that Abraham would fail? Well he did and I believe Moses is showing us that he wanted to provide a path for growth. If God doesn't show us where weaknesses are then we will not have a path for growth. He would test us. The reason God tests us is not because he wants us to prove to him that we are worthy, because he wants to show us where the weaknesses are, so that we might be able to grow. So we need to look at the tests and trials in life, not necessarily as that which is used to pass or fail us but that to basically display our weaknesses that we made prod and a path to growth.

Next test that God throws in this path is now the test of prosperity and they have the cattle and herds under Abraham and Lot and they're now flourishing, doing so well, so well that there is not enough space in the land and they're basically having conflict and then Abram said to Lot in verse 8 of chapter 13,

Let there be no strife between you and me and between your herdsmen and my herdsmen, for we are kinsmen. Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand then I will go to the right. If you take the right hand then I will go to the left. Simple enough isn't it. So because there's so much conflict, you go left, I go right, you go north, I go south and this is what Lot did. Lot being a younger guy was allowed to choose. Verse 10,

He lifted up his eyes and saw that a Jordan Valley was well watered everywhere like the Garden of the Lord (Garden of Eden), like the land of Egypt, in the direction of Zoar. (This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.) So Lot chose for himself all of the Jordan Valley and Lot journeyed east.

He chose the best for himself. If you look what Moses is doing in Genesis here, chapter 13, is he bringing two people side by side. Lot and Abraham. Lot is like a foil for Abraham. Now why did they separate? Well Abraham was concerned about harmony, Lot was concerned about material gain. There was so much fighting he they had to go their separate ways, but Lot was more interested on the benefit and the growth of his flocks. Abram was generous, he gave Lot first choice. You go north, I go south, you go east I go west. Lot was ungrateful. Here is a chap who basically followed his uncle. He should have been grateful, instead he took advantage of his uncle and he took the best for himself. Abraham now back from his trials in Egypt is confident in God's promises. Lot was confident in his own strength and intellectual ability to choose the best land for himself. Abraham and Lot both went down to Egypt but Abraham learned his lesson, he learned to trust God. Lot did not learn. He wanted the river Jordan and the East, even though the author says this is before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. This is not the good place which he actually chose.

You see, Lot has the mindset of a secular mindset, even though he was with Abraham. Idea that there are winners and losers in life. The best example is President Trump. These are quotations. He says,

I've always won. I'm going to continue to win and that's the way it is.

So there are winners and losers in life.

I like thinking big. If you're gonna be thinking anything you might as well be thinking big.

So therefore in his mind he's always got to be a winner. There's no other dimension in life. Actually when they actually look at his tax returns in 1985-1994 they actually found that he lost. He actually lost more than 1 billion dollars in losses and even one year in 1990 in 1991 the story said that the Trump's losses are so large they were more than double those of the nearest taxpayer in IRS information for those years, which means he was the biggest loser and yet this is what he tweeted in response.

Sometimes considered tax shelter...you would get it by building or even buying. You always wanted to show losses for tax purposes...

So actually when he is losing he is actually winning because he's using his losses as tax purpose, but for tax write-offs as. Here is a man trapped into one-dimensional unrealistic thinking. That's why as president now presiding over the pandemic response, he writes,

Thanks to our all-out military operation and extraordinary devotion of all of our people. We believe we will experience far fewer deaths than even the optimistic projections.

He can't think in categories other than success. Even though they're more than almost a hundred thousand Americans dying, it's a success. President Donald Trump Financial Review, 17 April 2020. President Donald

Trump declared America has met the moment. We are prevailed by delivering a testing capacity that's unmatched and unrivalled anywhere in the world. A one-dimensional response because he categorizes everything either as winners or losers and this is a quotation from the handbook of motivation at school.

A lot of people still think of failure as a sign of personal incompetence and try to avoid it all cost. We protect our self-worth by believing that we are competent and by convincing others of it too.

Here we don't want to admit that we fail. You know why? Because performance is linked to self-worth. If you fail in any area, it means you're not a winner. You are a loser. And that's actually very damaging attitude. I remembered there was a brilliant show some years ago call, Amadeus. They actually looked at the life of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. He was a brilliant musician. He was a younger man but before in the court of Vienna there was actually a more senior musician called Antonio Salieri and if you look in the film there was a scene where his rival Antonio Salieri he actually happens to come across a rough draft of music written by Mozart. They were just the first draft and final draft and it was brilliantly written down with not a single mistake and it just blew his mind. When he looked at it, he was so upset. Antonio Salieri, his rival was so upset that he fell out to the ground. When he fell onto the ground, totally consumed by jealousy and he wrote these words, and he said these words

Grazie, Signore! (he is actually addressing God) You gave me the desire to serve you – which most men do not have – and then you saw to it that the service was shameful to the ears of the server. Until this day I've pursued virtue with rigor. I have labored long hours to relieve my fellow man. I've worked and worked and the talent you allowed me, you know how hard I work! Solely that in the end, the practice of the art which alone makes the world comprehensible to me, I might hear your voice and now I do hear it – and it only says one name, Mozart...

So therefore from that moment onward Antonio Salieri and God parted ways. He was so angry because there was somebody else who was actually better than him. You see, his self-esteem was tied to his music. He had to be the best in the world. The world was only defined as either a winner or a loser and that's the problem about failure.

You know, this is Martin Covington, professor at University of California, describes there are four kinds of students in class. There is one which is called the over-strivers. This group is always afraid of failure, so they overwork himself. Another group is a failure-accepting students. These are the ones that internalize failure, they have always failed. They don't really try because they're still, they're no good. And third one would be the failure-avoiding students. These are the one who avoid failure. They make excuses. They don't participate in tutorials. They not to take the test because they are trying to avoid failure. The last group is the success-orientated students. These are the ones that actually see failure as a path to growth and that failure has no relationship or impact to their self-worth. These are the ones that actually are successful. That's why Hebrews chapter 12 verse 5,

My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, do not be weary when reproved by him for the Lord disciplines the one he loves and he chastises every son whom he receives.

Discipline is a way in which we like Abraham discover the path to growth. Look at Jonah. Remember the prophet Jonah was asked to bring the gospel of repentance to the people in Assyria. He ran away. When he ran away God appointed a great fish to swallow him up and Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights. And he had time to reflect upon his failure. At the end there

the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah up. Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights. Then Jonah prayed to the Lord, his God from belly of the fish saying I called out to the Lord out of my distress and he answered me out of the belly of the shoal and cried you heard my voice.

So therefore God catches Jonah in the belly the fish and allows him time to ruminate over his failure and show him the path growth. There is an African proverb that says, to bring up a child it takes a village and it takes a church. Because all of us are imperfect, all of us have failures. It is up to us to point out to each other how to grow because if you reject rebuke, Proverb says

Because you have ignored my counsel and would have none of my reproof, I also will laugh at your calamity. I will mock when terror strikes you.

If you accept rebuke. If you turn at my reproof behold I will pour my spirit to you. I will make my words known to you.

So we need a church where we actually point out to each other mistakes that we have made, failures that we had in life in order to grow. Our failures provide a path for growth. We live before the audience of One. You know, some of us live as if the audience of One is Satan. Whenever you fail, Satan will come up and say, you are hopeless, you're useless. God doesn't love you. But remember when we live we only have one audience, that we are audience before God who promises eternal life, who promises to be with us to the end. Our failures do not define us and people grow people are not the same. You see someone five years later on in church. He may not be the same person in the end. We all grow. I remember a situation in my own life where this has been seen.

So not only our responses are inevitably imperfect, failure provides the pathway for growth; lastly our response always has consequences. Here you have the Lord pulling Abram aside and tell him, lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are; northward, southward, eastward and westward, for all the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that the one can count, so that if one can count the dust of the earth your offspring can also be counted. Arise, walk through the length and breadth of the land for I will give it to you.

So even though Abraham had given up eastern side where the River Jordan was God came to him and reaffirmed his faith that it doesn't matter that you gave Lot first dibs on the land, I will give you everything as I have promised. So the action of others does not negate the promises of God. Sometimes we look at the prosperity of others and we look with them at envy. We look at Psalm 73, it says, truly God is good to Israel and to those who are pure in heart, but as for me my feet almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

When we see how other people lie and cheat and do things which are unethical and untruthful we sometimes get jealous and we're saying why is God blessing them when I am not being blessed. You know no that's not true. The action of others does not negates God's promises to us in the end.

So Abraham moved his tent and settled by the Oaks of Mamre which is at Hebron and he built an altar there and then you've got conflict. You've got a whole bunch of kings, actually having a bit of a conflict and in chapter 14 verse 11,

The enemy kings came and took possession of Sodom and Gomorrah and all the provisions and went on their way. They also took Lot the son of Abraham who was dwelling in Sodom and his possessions and went their way.

So there is huge conflict, political, military conflict and Lot was taken as hostage. And here we have when Abram heard and his kinsmen had been taken captive, he led forth his trained men, both born in his house, 318 of them and when in pursuit as far as Dan.

Here we are, Hebron going all the way to Dan. You will need to remember Abram only had 318 men, which is not a lot. We're talking about him attacking a group of people, which are made up of about four to five kings which is basically thousands of men. What would have entered his mind? I mean most of us Abram said, look Lot you chose your land, you chose the riches, so if you get captured that's your business, so why should I risk my family and my men. But here instead you will see the bravery and loyalty the Abraham exhibited with only 318 men he went up North and he pursued them as far as Dan and he divided his forces against him at night. He and his servants defeated them and he pursued them to Hobah, north of Damascus. A great victory, 318 men defeating numerous kings. And then when that has happened he's in charge he's got all this plunder, two kings come and visit him and this represents another trial in his life. One is Melchizedek and the other one is the king of Sodom and Gomorrah, and here you actually have a response to prosperity. What would Abraham do? Here we have two kings. The king of Salem and the king of Sodom. Salem is Jerusalem. Melchizedek, who is the high priest and he says in verse 21 of chapter 14,

Blessed be Abram by God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High who has delivered your enemies into your hand

So here he comes to honor God. He says Abraham's victory is by God. The other king of Sodom comes and he says to Abram, give me the persons that means all the people who have been taken hostage but take the goods for yourself. I mean why would he do that? Because the goods actually belonged to Abram. Abram has won the victory, not him, he's the one who lost. I think the Thomas Carlyle, a Scottish essays and historian actually said,

Adversity is sometimes hard upon a man; but for one man who can stand prosperity, there are a hundred that will stand adversity. So it's easier to withstand adversity than prosperity, you're always tempted.

And I want to put our chart of the Abram's answer to both kings and Abram's reasons. Now what did Abram do in response to the king of Salem. He gave one tenth of everything because he recognized him as a priest who worship the Living God and Abram attributed his miraculous victory, 318 men defeating thousands and so therefore he gave God his due. He gave glory to God. Now the king of Sodom, Abram rejected the war booty. All the war booty they won, he gave it back to the king of Sodom. Why did he do that? Well because Abram's reasons about giving one tenth to the high priest which is the king of Salem gives glory to God. And for the king of Salem, King of Salem said you Abram you can keep all the gold, treasure and war booty, he actually rejected it. The reason why he rejected it because if he had kept it people would say that actually the king of Salem gave him all this stuff actually and that would deny God of glory.

You can see the response to prosperity Abram had learned this lesson, he always acted in the way they gave glory to God. Now we have the two people side by side both Abram and Lot imperfect. Abram learns from his failures, Lot never learned. Abram lived by faith, Lot lived by sight. Abram grew in his character, Lot stagnated. Abram's descendants would bless the world, Lot's descendants later on would slink off into obscurity. Abram chose to respond in faith.

Hebrews 11,

By faith he went to live in the land of promise as in the foreign land, living in tents.

He left his city, Ur and Haran to live in tents because he responded in faith. Lot chose to live in Sodom. 2-Peter 2:7,

And if he rescued righteous Lot greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked, for as that righteous man lived among them day after day he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard.

Lot chose to live in Sodom. Lot chose in a place there was immoral, although he was righteous because he comes under the covenant from Abram he suffered. He was tormented. He was basically tempted day after day because of immorality of the people around him. Abram chose to live in a tent, out there in the wilderness in a farm land because he trusted God. Because God will give him a city one day, foundations were built by God. Lot chose to live in a city, in Sodom where he was tormented, he was tempted day by day.

There is a famous story in 1923 of a meeting of all the top the most richest people in America. President of the largest steel company, largest utility company, largest gas company, stock exchange, all of them met. Together they probably controlled more money than the United States Federal Reserve and then they looked at this same group of people 25 years later on. Every single one of them bankrupt, bankrupt, mental breakdown, prison, suicide, suicide, prison. It doesn't amount to much in their lives. If you look at the life of Abraham because he's chose to answer the call, because he chose delivery with integrity, he had generosity, absence of greed, courage and sacrifice, his life changed. And if you look in psychological terms, you will thought that Abraham was in this zone, flow, maximum difficulty, maximum skill, no. If you look in Abraham's life what he did was beyond difficult. He didn't have the skills, God provided the skills with 318 men. That's why Philippians says,

I press on towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus

So therefore the challenge is to for all of us. We need to respond to God. In responding to his call, we want to live a life that really matters.

I want to end with the testimony of Mother Teresa. She was called to serve God at a young age of about 12. Father died when she was at that age and her mother was actually quite a poor woman but even though she was poor they took in six people, other children and she adopted them and she says these words,

By blood and origin I'm all Albanian. My citizenship is Indian. I am a Catholic nun. As to my calling I belong to the whole world. As to my heart I belong entirely to Jesus.

This is a woman who's answering the call of God. In fact she asked that the priest at that time, how do I know God has called me. The priest said to him when you have joy, whatever you're doing for the Lord, if you've got the eternal joy that is how God is calling you to that particular ministry and she followed. She went into the ministry she dedicated her life to the poor. But if you look at her answering call. Hers was also the imperfect response. In fact a lot of critics came up and they visited all the places where she ministered in the convents, in orphanages, and refugee camps that she held they complained there was poor hygiene, they actually used hypodermic needles which they reused. There were places where she actually used to put people to take baths where there were no heaters, people with pneumonia and she was resistant to change. That linen was dirty often soil with faecal material. There was no training provided to the staff. There's few or any medical staff that actually were in any of her orphanages or her houses for the poor. She had non-transparent financial records and in fact one of her former volunteers came out and criticized her and described the places she ministered to as a scene out of a World War II concentration camp.

See Mother Theresa gave her life to the call but she was not perfect. Failure provides a path for growth. Years later on she died they published her letters and the letters showed the struggle of failure in her life. She actually wrote,

In my soul I feel just that terrible pain of loss of God not wanting me, of God not being God, of God not really existing.

She actually struggled. She said, you know her whole life was in service for God and the terrible irony is that God was hidden from her. In fact for 45 years she never felt the reality and joy of God. In fact she said,

Please pray specifically for me that I may not spoil his work. That our lord may show himself for there such terrible darkness within me as if everything was dead it had been like this more than more or less from the time I started to work.

From the time she started the work she faced failure, she faced discouragement, she faced depression but yet she continued because that failure provided the path for growth. As one of our biographers actually write, Reverend Brian Kay wrote,

She was a very strong personality and a strong personality needs a stronger purification, as an antidote to pride.

So she struggled with pride all her life and she lived a consequential life in the end. At the end of her life – 5000 sisters of her order in 766 convents, in 137 countries, 363 active brothers and even in 1985 in front of TV cameras at the Ethiopian Minister she asked him directly, can I have these two buildings for orphanages and he couldn't even say no. She won a Nobel Prize for her work with the poor.

She is not perfect, she struggled. The challenge is for us today. God has a calling for every single one of us. We need to respond and he understands. He knows that your response needs to be by faith and it's not going to be perfect. You are gonna to fail but you don't have to feel depressed about the failure because failure only provides a path to pleasing the audience of one. It is not going to categorise you as either winner or loser. That's what the devil does. The devil either categorizes you as winner or loser. God is only interested in using failure to help us grow into the upward call that is in Christ Jesus and every single one of our decisions that we make today in answering God's call is going to lead to a consequential life, a life that matters or a life that does not.

God is calling every single one of us. It is my prayer whether we go out as a missionary, whether we preach the gospel in the church here, whether we are involved in audio-visual ministry or we are an artist or a doctor or a lawyer, in every circumstance when you serve God there will be that joy. Just like Mother Teresa has said, but then there will be times where you feel depressed and you're struggling even with the existence of God, but the most important thing that we should do is answer that call and say yes Lord send me because that's the kind of life you want to live to make a difference. A life that matters.

Let's pray.

Father Lord, only got one life, and I am going to ask right now for every single one of us in First Baptist Church that we will feel, we will discern your call. That we would answer your call with fear and trepidation just like Mother Teresa. That we're not adequate, we don't have the skills. Sometimes we can even doubt you and yet father we just need to have enough faith to say yes, yes Lord send me. Send me to the lives of people who need me whether they're suffering, in depression, suffering in need or needing comfort, needing encouragement. Send us so that we would live a consequential life and when failure comes in our life we pray O Lord that you would open our eyes and see failure as a path to growth not as a dent in our self-esteem because our self-esteem is filled with the glory of Christ. Because Christ saw it fit to die for us that is our immense glory. We just thank you for that. We ask all this for Jesus sake. Amen