

## ***Abram***

# **The Courage to Leave Home**

The first example we will consider in this series is Abram. He displayed courage when God called him to leave home and go to an unknown land which the Lord would show to him.

*“Now the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father’s house, to the land which I will show you; and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.’*

*“So Abram went forth as the Lord had spoken to him; and Lot went with him. Now Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his nephew, and all their possessions which they had accumulated, and the persons which they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan; thus they came to the land of Canaan” (Genesis 12:1-5).*

God is not going to speak to us today and tell us to leave our home like He did with Abram. But there are lessons

about acting with *courage* to be learned from Abram's example. Courage is *faithfulness* in the midst of trials and temptations. In the example of Abram, we see one who sacrificed what was comfortable and familiar for hardship and uncertainty.

## **The Background**

Abram left Ur with his wife, father, and nephew and settled in Haran (Genesis 11:31). The text says, "*They went out together from Ur of the Chaldeans in order to enter the land of Canaan*" (Genesis 11:31). Yet the inspired record indicates that they stopped and settled in Haran. Terah, Abram's father, would later die in Haran before any of his family ever reached Canaan (Genesis 11:32).

After he and his family settled in Haran, God called Abram to leave. What was he to leave? God said, "*Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house*" (Genesis 12:1). He was called to go to a land which God would show him (Genesis 12:1). The Lord assured Abram that he would be blessed (Genesis 12:2).

When God called, Abram obeyed (Genesis 12:4-5). He left with his wife, Lot, and all of their possessions. This occurred when Abram was already seventy-five years old (Genesis 12:4). As we will see later in this lesson, his age was significant.

## **Why This Took Courage**

The Scriptures provide a few reasons why it took *courage* for Abram to leave his home and follow where the Lord would lead him.

First, it took courage because he did not know where he was going. The text states that Abram and his family left Ur “*in order to enter the land of Canaan*” (Genesis 11:31), but there is no indication that Abram had any familiarity with the land when God called him. As a matter of history, we know that Abram was going to the land of Canaan. But Abram left Haran “*not knowing where he was going*” (Hebrews 11:8). Familiarity with an area would allow one to plan the best route and prepare for specific challenges he would face. Abram did not have this luxury. Instead he simply put his faith in God and followed the Lord.

Second, it took courage because he had to leave his father and his relatives. This was the time of the Patriarchs. One’s identity was tied to his family. While he was alive, the patriarch was the head of the generations that followed. Abram was told to leave his “*relatives*” and his “*father’s house*” (Genesis 12:1). He was divorcing himself from his kinsmen during a time when one had to rely on these people for support, protection, and companionship. Furthermore, Abram did this when he was “*seventy-five years old*” (Genesis 12:4) – hardly a young man eager to move out on his own. He had ties to his family that were firmly established over the course of decades. But he left his family so that he might become the “*friend of God*” (James 2:23).

Third, it took courage because he had to leave the home he had established for himself in Haran. Again, Abram was seventy-five years old when God called him (Genesis 12:4). Yes, people generally lived longer then, but he was still not far from “*old age*” (Genesis 21:2). This description was used when Abram was “*one hundred years old*” (Genesis 21:5). He

left with no guarantee that he would ever get settled again. But he was seeking God's reward. The Hebrew writer said, "*By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents...for he was looking for a city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God*" (Hebrews 11:9-10).

## **Abram Took Courage**

Abram knew what was right. God *told* him what to do: "*Go forth...to the land which I will show you*" (Genesis 12:1). He responded "*by faith*" (Hebrews 11:8). Abram *knew* what was right because God revealed it to him. The only way *anyone* can know what is right in the sight of God is through the Spirit's revelation to man (1 Corinthians 2:10-12).

More than simply knowing what was right, Abram believed in God's promises. God promised to make of him "*a great nation*" and that through his seed "*all the families of the earth [would] be blessed*" (Genesis 12:2-3). Though Abram was childless, God promised him descendants; and he believed (Genesis 15:5-6). Because of this belief, Abram became the father of the faithful (Romans 4:3, 11).

After knowing God's instructions and believing in His promises, Abram acted. God told him, "*Go forth*" (Genesis 12:1). Without hesitation, "*Abram went forth as the Lord had spoken to him*" (Genesis 12:4). "*When he was called, [he] obeyed*" (Hebrews 11:8), even though it meant being a stranger in the promised land (Hebrews 11:9). Acting according to God's instructions was a sign of courage on the part of Abram.

## Application for Us

God is not directly calling us to leave our homeland and relatives today. But there are certainly lessons for us to learn from the example of Abram.

First, we must be willing to follow God wherever He calls us to go. Again, the calling is different, but we are certainly called. Paul said that we are “*called...through [the] gospel*” (2 Thessalonians 2:14). Being called through the gospel does not mean we simply hear the word and believe in God’s promises. Many believe that such a response to the gospel is sufficient for salvation. But the example of Abram shows us that salvation is “*not by faith alone*” (James 2:20-24). If we “*do not obey the gospel,*” we will “*pay the penalty of eternal destruction*” (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9). Jesus is “*to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation*” (Hebrews 5:9). If we want to be saved, we must obey the instructions found in His word. As Mary told the servants at the wedding feast, “*Whatever He says to you, do it*” (John 2:5).

Second, we must be willing to put God above our family. Jesus said, “*Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man against His father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man’s enemies will be the members of his household. He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me*” (Matthew 10:34-37). If forsaking family in order to follow Christ is necessary, we must do it. Would this be difficult? Sure it would. But we must put the Lord above everyone – even those who are the closest to us in this life.

Third, we must recognize that we are strangers on the earth. But more than just acknowledging this status, we must act like we are strangers. Peter wrote, “*Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul*” (1 Peter 2:11). We must “*not be conformed to this world, but transformed*” (Romans 12:2). Remember that “*our citizenship is in heaven*” (Philippians 3:20). Abram’s desire was to find “*the city which has foundations whose architect and builder is God*” (Hebrews 11:10). He desired “*a better country, that is, a heavenly one*” (Hebrews 11:16). This must be our desire as well.

## **Conclusion**

Abram was willing to leave what was comfortable and familiar in order to follow the Lord. We must be willing to sacrifice anything – even our own lives (Romans 12:1) – so that we might please the Lord. It will not be easy, but we must *take courage* and do it.

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## **Questions for Discussion & Reflection**

1. How does God call us today?

2. Abram was the father of the faithful. What does his example teach us about faith? (See Hebrews 11:8)
  
3. Describe the circumstances that would require us to choose between God and our family.
  
4. Why does it take courage to forsake family in order to follow Christ?
  
5. If we are strangers on earth, how should that affect our behavior?
  
6. As Christians, where is our citizenship?



## **Joseph**

# **The Courage to Maintain Purity**

The second example in our study is Joseph. He had the courage to maintain purity when he was tempted to compromise his morals. When his master's wife seduced him, this young man refused to yield, choosing instead to act in such a way that would please God.

*“It came about after these events that his master's wife looked with desire at Joseph, and she said, ‘Lie with me.’ But he refused and said to his master's wife, ‘Behold, with me here, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house, and he has put all that he owns in my charge. There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great evil and sin against God?’*

*“As she spoke to Joseph day after day, he did not listen to her to lie beside her or be with her. Now it happened one day that he went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the household was there inside. She caught him by his garment, saying, ‘Lie with me!’ And he left his garment in her hand and fled, and went outside” (Genesis 39:7-12).*

We live in a society in which immorality is common – premarital sex, adultery, homosexuality, pornography. We need to have the *courage* to maintain our purity “*in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation*” (Philippians 2:15). Joseph’s example shows us how to do this.

## **The Background**

Joseph was the favored son of his father. “*Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons, because he was the son of his old age; and he made him a varicolored tunic*” (Genesis 37:3). Though the parent is to blame when such favoritism is shown, the resentment by the siblings is usually directed toward the favored child. This was what happened in the case of Joseph. “*His brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers; and so they hated him and could not speak to him on friendly terms*” (Genesis 37:4).

Joseph’s brothers hated him even more for his dreams. In one dream, Joseph’s sheaf rose up while his brothers’ sheaves bowed down to his (Genesis 37:5-7). The brothers knew exactly what this meant: “*Are you actually going to reign over us? Or are you really going to rule over us? So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words*” (Genesis 37:8). Their problem was that they understood the meaning without recognizing that the dream came from God. The second dream was similar. The sun, moon, and eleven stars bowed down to him, signifying that his brothers and parents would all bow down before him (Genesis 37:9-11).

After these dreams, Joseph was sent by his father to check on his brothers who were pasturing the flock in the area of Shechem (Genesis 37:12-13). When his brothers saw him, they planned to take advantage of this opportunity to

kill Joseph (Genesis 37:18-20). After Reuben intervened and convinced the brothers to throw him in a pit instead – with the plan that he would come back later and rescue Joseph – the other brothers decided to sell Joseph to some traders that were passing by (Genesis 37:21-28). These traders “*brought Joseph into Egypt*” and “*sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, Pharaoh’s officer, the captain of the bodyguard*” (Genesis 37:28,36). While he was serving Potiphar, he was tempted to commit fornication with his master’s wife.

## **Why This Took Courage**

Given his circumstances, there are at least five reasons why it took *courage* for Joseph to maintain purity and resist the temptations of Potiphar’s wife.

First, the temptation was to fulfill a natural desire which God had instilled in man. God created man in such a way that he would desire sexual gratification. However, just because such a desire was given by God does not mean that man has the license to fulfill that desire in any way he pleases. The Hebrew writer said, “*Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge*” (Hebrews 13:4). It would have been natural for Joseph, as a young man, to have the desire for sexual gratification. Yet it would have been sinful to fulfill that desire with another man’s wife (Genesis 39:9).

Second, Joseph was the only God-fearing person in this area. The Egyptians certainly were religious, but they did not serve the true and living God. Those who believed in God sold him into slavery. Joseph could have turned

against God because of them. He could have reasoned that there was no point in following God when no one else there was following Him. We are reminded in the example of Peter that it is much easier to boldly proclaim one's faith when among like-minded friends (Matthew 26:33-35) than it is to do so when one is standing alone among those in the world (Matthew 26:69-75).

Third, the temptation was regular and persistent. Potiphar's wife did not just tempt Joseph one time and then leave him alone after he refused her advances. "*As she spoke to Joseph day after day, he did not listen to her to lie beside her or be with her*" (Genesis 39:10). Continual temptation like this often wears someone down to the point in which he gives in to sins he once resisted.

Fourth, Joseph may have been able to sin without others finding out. After the temptations had been going on for some time, an opportunity presented itself in which Joseph might have been able to give in without anyone else knowing. "*Now it happened one day that he went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the household was there inside. She caught him by his garment, saying, 'Lie with me!'*" (Genesis 39:11-12). No one was home except Joseph and Potiphar's wife. This would have been the ideal time to commit fornication with her without anyone else knowing about it.

Fifth, the temptation had reached the point in which Joseph could no longer just say "no." At the final temptation, the situation had become such that a simple "no" would no longer be sufficient. She had "*caught him by his garment*" (Genesis 39:12). He could have said "no" and she would have still been there clinging to his clothes. More

was needed to resist this temptation. So “*he left his garment in her hand and fled*” (Genesis 39:12).

## **Joseph Took Courage**

Joseph knew what was right. He knew that it would be wrong to give in to Potiphar’s wife’s temptations. Why? First, it would betray the trust of his master: “*Behold, with me here, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house, and he has put all that he owns in my charge. There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife*” (Genesis 39:8-9). Second, and more importantly, it would be a “*sin against God*” (Genesis 39:9).

Joseph also believed that God would bless him for doing what was right. He already had the dreams that indicated God’s plan to exalt him (Genesis 37:5-11). He did not want to sin *against* God (Genesis 39:9), which implies a fear of divine judgment. Even though he was separated from his people, he wanted to be sure he was still in God’s favor.

Finally, at the critical time of temptation, Joseph acted. When Potiphar’s wife first tempted him, he refused (Genesis 39:7-9). When she persisted day after day, he remained steadfast (Genesis 39:10). When the situation escalated, he fled (Genesis 39:12).

## **Application for Us**

Joseph’s example provides several lessons for us.

First, we must maintain sexual purity in order to please God. We are to respect God's arrangement for fulfilling these natural desires – marriage (Hebrews 13:4; 1 Corinthians 7:1-2). But even without marriage, we must resist temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13). When Paul wrote to Timothy – a young, unmarried man – he told him to treat “*younger women as sisters, in all purity*” (1 Timothy 5:2). He was not to flirt with sin and see how close he could get to it.

Second, we must be faithful to God, even if we must stand alone. Though he would later deny Jesus, Peter's initial attitude was commendable: “*Even though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away*” (Matthew 26:33). If brethren forsake, desert, or mistreat us, it is discouraging; but we must remain faithful anyway (2 Timothy 4:16-17).

Third, we must remain steadfast, even if temptation is persistent. Peter warned his readers: “*Be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness*” (2 Peter 3:17). It is possible for one to be steadfast but eventually give in to error and sin and fall away.

Fourth, we must avoid sin, even if we think no one will find out. Even if it might be possible to sin with no other human being aware of our transgression, God will know. “*And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do*” (Hebrews 4:13).

Fifth, when necessary, we must be willing to *flee* temptation. Paul said, “*Flee immorality*” (1 Corinthians 6:18), and, “*Flee from youthful lusts*” (2 Timothy 2:22). This

does not necessarily mean we must *run* as Joseph did. But it does mean that we *leave* any situation that poses a great threat and temptation for us – whether it be a friendship, job, city, etc.

## **Conclusion**

Joseph maintained purity even though he was forsaken by those who should have supported him and was severely tempted to commit a sin that would have been difficult for many young men to resist. We must diligently strive to keep “*the marriage bed...undefiled*” (Hebrews 13:4). Then when we are tempted to seek sexual gratification outside of this divinely-approved arrangement, we must ask what Joseph asked: “*How then could I do this great evil and sin against God?*”

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## **Questions for Discussion & Reflection**

1. When Joseph refused the advances of Potiphar’s wife, he was ultimately refusing to sin against whom?
2. What arrangement has God provided for us to fulfill natural sexual desires?

3. How can one who is unmarried maintain sexual purity?
  
4. Why are persistent temptations dangerous?
  
5. Even if we manage to hide our sin from everyone else, who will always know about it?
  
6. Explain why it might be necessary to flee from certain temptations.

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