

The Suitcase Calling

Week 2

Read Genesis 12:1-3 (text below):

“The Lord had said to Abram, ‘Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.

‘I will make you into a great nation,
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you.’”

This moment is the start of Abraham’s relationship with Yahweh. For all we know, this is the first moment he ever heard God’s voice. And God’s command to him is simple: “Go from this land to another place.” But notice one important detail:

God does not tell Abram *where* he is going.

Does that seem like a problem to anyone else??

God’s calling on Abram’s life led him into the unknown.

But notice God’s promise to Abram: God would provide, bless, and increase his descendants.

Abraham would not journey alone.

Pause for discussion

1) How do you usually react to circumstances that are *unknown* (or mysterious) in your life?

Let’s jump to another story in Scripture, remembering what we’ve learned from Abram’s story.

Read Judges 7:1-8.

There is a phrase repeated throughout this passage that I find interesting. God says to Gideon, “You have too many men.” First, he tells him this in verse 2. Gideon responds by removing 22,000 men from his army (*that’s a lot of men!*). But God repeats his command in verse 4: “There are still too many men.”

This command makes *no sense*. God is telling Gideon to take a *smaller army* into battle: to actually *decrease* the amount of warriors Israel has on the battlefield. To make things worse, they are facing a much, *much* bigger army than his own!!

God's call on Gideon's life didn't make logical sense.

But again, notice the promise from the Lord: God would be the one who would save Israel.

Pause for Discussion

1) Have you ever felt God ask you to do something that didn't make sense? If so, what?

As we reflect on the stories of Abram and Gideon, consider the following story from our modern day context:

I went to college with a girl named Katie. One day, Katie decided she wanted to study abroad during her college experience. She chose to travel to Lithuania and to study there for a period of four months.

During her time there, she really wanted to do more than just study in Lithuania; Katie wanted to minister there as well. She knew the people there were desperate for Jesus, so she went there looking for an opportunity to minister. Once she arrived, she found an orphanage in her local village. Seeing her chance, Katie decided to visit the orphanage one day to see if they needed help.

On her first visit, Katie was greeted by a pack of small kids inside the orphanage doors. She kindly knelt down and interacted with them. Noticing someone out of the corner of her eye, Katie turned her attention away from the group of students in front of her. A young boy, standing alone, was what caught her eye. He was very small. He wasn't interacting with anyone.

His name was Domantus.

Katie inquired about this little boy. She discovered that he was on the edge of failure to thrive. Essentially, he was severely underdeveloped and malnourished. He had no family, no language skills, and very poor health. The officials at the orphanage guessed that Domantus was about 2 years old, but his body was the size of a tiny one-year-old.

Katie's heart was pricked. She had found the ministry for her time in Lithuania. She decided to make loving Domantus her focus for the next four months.

For weeks, this little boy hardly responded at all to Katie. He wouldn't acknowledge her presence, he could not speak back to her, and he ran from her whenever she attempted to reach out. Katie was relentless, but the rejection from this little boy was extremely discouraging.

About a month into visiting the orphanage, Katie saw a breakthrough. During her daily visit to the orphanage, she knelt down in the midst of the children to play with them. Feeling a small hand touch the back of her hair, she turned around. It was Domantus. He repeated the gesture another time, stroking her hair with tentative curiosity. As you can imagine, Katie was delighted!

Slowly, this little boy began to warm up to her. One day, he allowed Katie to hold his hand. Finally, weeks into her time at Lithuania, Katie was able to pick up Domantus.

While this was all going on, **Katie had been wrestling with God**. She had clearly sensed God telling her, “Katie, I want you to adopt Domantus.” But that was absurd! The ramifications of that decision would change her life. She couldn’t seriously risk her career, her college education, and her future on taking care of this little boy. Besides, as an American college student, she couldn’t believe she would have the legal or financial opportunity to provide a home for Domantus.

Yet God began to surprise Katie. Within a small time of sensing God’s leading, she saw funding come her way to be able to support an adopted son. She had people contacting her to affirm this leading of God on her life, while her investigation of the Lithuanian legal system led her to believe she might actually be able to adopt this little boy.

Finally, Katie had a very serious talk with God. She’d been debating this decision for weeks, and finally felt in her heart that she knew why it was so hard for her to make this decision.

“God, I know you’re telling me to adopt Domantus,” Katie prayed. “But I know why I don’t want to. God, I’m afraid that if I adopt him, nobody will want to marry me when I return to America. I’ll be a single, 21-year-old female, with a very needy son and a ton of college debt. I’m afraid, God.”

Katie’s honesty was commendable. She wrestled, prayed, struggled, and thought about this calling from God during her time in Lithuania, all the while she was growing closer to Domantus each day at the orphanage. One day, Katie reached a decision in her heart.

She told God “yes.”

God’s call on Katie’s life required tremendous sacrifice.

What is the common theme between these stories? What do Abram, Gideon, and Katie all have in common? Simply this:

Sometimes, **God asks us for radical obedience.**

Radical obedience is following God’s voice into *the unknown* (like Abram). It’s following His lead when it *doesn’t make logical sense* (like Gideon). And it’s being faithful to His Spirit when He invites you to *sacrifice something* in order to follow (like Katie).

Radical obedience is costly obedience.

Sadly, we sometimes think that stories like these are “exceptional.” We operate as if God only calls *some people* to do crazy things. While these stories are clearly amazing, they are only incredible because these people said “yes” to God.

God is inviting *all of us* to radical obedience.

Last week, we studied Samuel’s life. We learned that our *first calling* is to God’s presence. He is constantly, urgently calling us to come and spend time with Him. That is the highest “calling” on our lives.

But out of that *first calling* arises a *second layer of our calling*. Our lifestyle of pursuing God's presence leads us to extremely, costly, *radical* obedience.

That is the second layer of our calling. We are called to obedience.

But the only way to be radically obedient is for us to clearly grasp the connection between our first calling and our second calling. What is the relationship between God's presence and radical obedience?

Facing Fear

What is the biggest obstacle to radical obedience? Fear.

Pause for Discussion

- 1) Remember a time in your life when you were in a difficult situation: specifically, when you knew the right thing to do, but were afraid to do it. Share that story with the group.
- 2) What is your typical reaction when you feel fear? How do you respond? (For example, do you avoid the situation, get angry, give up, or distract yourself?)

Fear is our number one obstacle (for many of us, it is our only obstacle). We fear what radical obedience might cost us.

Throughout the Bible, the reason people did not need to fear was that **God was with them**. God was present with them. His presence surrounded them. He went before, with, and behind them. **God's presence defeats our fear.**

The power of fear is broken by the presence of God. The weight of anxiety, the emotional battle, and the helpless, powerless feelings that fear cause are washed away by God's presence. His presence disarms our fear and makes it powerless.

Our *first calling* empowers us for our *second calling*. Let me restate that in a different manner: It is impossible to be radically obedient without anchoring your life deeply in God's presence.

Close in prayer with the group.