

# "Legacy: The Gracious Invitation"

Genesis 11:31-12:4 and Acts 7:2-5 A Sermon by Dr. Jim Davis  
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It's a part of communion. And when we take communion we hear it, on the first Sunday of every month, "the gracious invitation."

It can be given in different ways each month, using different words. Because to tell you the truth it's not the words that are important. It's the simple fact that the invitation is offered to us, again and again, each month, by the grace of a God who calls us to do something.

He calls us to come to His table. He calls us to remember Him. He calls us to receive what He wants to give us. And He calls us to do all this because He knows us. He knows that we need more an invitation. And part of the reason He knows that about us is because of the legacy that comes from the life of Abraham.

Not once, not twice, but three times in the Bible we read it. Abraham was God's friend. But God's friendship with Abraham, like a lot of friendships started in an interesting way. Stephen tells the story. "The God of glory," he says, "appeared to our father Abraham while was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran. 'Leave your country and your people,' God said, 'and go to the land I'll show you.'"

It sounds like a funny way for a friendship to start, doesn't it? But I love the way Ann Graham Lotz talks about why it worked for Abraham in her book about him called *The Magnificent Obsession*. Ann, of course, is Billy Graham's daughter, his second daughter as a matter of fact. And she's a terrific Bible teacher. I recommend her books to you if you haven't read them. Anyway here's part of what she writes about the way the friendship started between Abraham and God.

"The Bible doesn't tell us exactly what prompted Abraham's desire to know God. Perhaps the desire began when he witnessed the miracle of human birth and marveled. *This baby is so perfectly and wonderfully made, there must be a Maker somewhere.* Or was it when Abraham observed the migratory habits of the birds and the way the sun came up every morning and went down every evening, and reflected to himself, *these things must be more than just an accident or a coincidence.*

Was it when he entered into a business deal and refused to cheat even though he could have profited personally if he had? Did he walk away, shaking his head and wondering, *What's wrong with me? Why did cheating make me feel so uneasy? How did I know that it was wrong even if I could have gained by it?* Did he come away from the worship of idols empty and dissatisfied with his religion, restless in his spirit, increasingly convinced that it was as man-made as the objects of wood and stone on which it was focused?

Although I don't know the tantalizing details that surrounded Abraham's launch into the adventure of knowing God," Ann writes, "it's clear that something stirred in his heart. The small candle of his conscience must have been lit, his spirit must have sought to draw near to the one true living God, because God leaned out of heaven and invaded Abraham's life ...

Why? Why out of all the people living on the planet did God lean down out of heaven and call Abraham to follow Him in a life of faith? Was it just *because*? Or was it because God discerned that Abraham, deep down in the secret recesses of his soul longed to know God 'in spirit and in truth?'"

Great questions, aren't they? And if you agree they are, ask yourself this question. Am I like Abraham? If God looked into my heart this morning, what would He see? Would God see in my heart this morning the same desire that was in Abraham's heart?

The Bible tells us that God knows all our thoughts, mine and yours. And He knows when they turn towards Him. He knows how much a desire like Abraham's dwells in your heart and mine. But He also knows how quickly our hearts turn away from thoughts of Him to thoughts about things around us; the world of our senses, instead of the world of the Spirit.

And because God knows all this He certainly knows that if our fleeting thoughts are ever going to turn into a true friendship, it's going to depend on Him, not us. He's going to have to offer us His friendship. And the interesting thing is that when God offers us His friendship, the offer usually comes to us in a way that we don't expect.

"Leave your country and your people and go to the land I'll show you." As far as we know those are the first words that God spoke to Abraham. They probably weren't words that Abraham expected to hear from God, or probably wanted to hear. After all his country was his country. It was where he was comfortable. It was the place he knew, the place he loved. It was where he lived and worked. It was the place where he went about his daily routine.

But don't you see? That's the point. In order to start a friendship with someone you have to do something different. You have to break out of your routine. You have to be willing to come out of your comfort zone, to walk away from the people you usually talk to and walk across a room to meet someone new.

Bill Hybels writes about how it happened in one person's life. He tells the story in a book. It's called *Just Walk Across the Room*. "He was a Christ-follower," Bill writes, "at a cocktail party. He was engaged in a circle of conversational comfort; involved in a group where it was easy for him to relate and effortless for him to engage.

There was zero threat of anything risky or unsafe unfolding, which is why he had every reason to stay within the confines of that little circle of conversational comfort. Yet drawn by the fact that one man stood alone, on the other side of the room, he left that circle and that little family of friends and walked across the room."

And ultimately in the book we learn that this Christ-follower became God's co-worker. His walk across the room changed another person's life forever. But it never would have happened if he hadn't left the place he knew, the people he knew, and walked across the room.

"Ten thousand steps," Bill writes, "That's roughly the distance you travel from sunrise to sunset, each and every day. It adds up to about 115,000 miles in a lifetime - more than four times around this big blue planet of ours. Are you using your steps wisely?"

And let's take that question just a little farther. Are you not only using your steps wisely? Are you using them at least some of them in response to God's call? Are you using them to let God lead you out of your routine? Are you using at least some of your steps to let God ask you to walk somewhere new in your life? To become part of God's mission, to help Him in someone's life?

Because that's what God asked Abraham to do. That was his gracious invitation to him. "Leave your country and your people and go to the land I will show you."

And along with the gracious invitation Genesis says God made Abraham a promise. Actually he made more than just one. He made seven. "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. I will curse those who curse you." Those are the first six promises. And then comes the seventh promise, the one that ties all the other promises together by telling

Abraham the purpose that lies behind the promises. "And all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

The purpose behind the promises is the blessing God wants to work out through Abraham's life. He wants to use Abraham's life to bless others, many others. He wants to use Abraham's life to bless all the peoples on earth. But it all depends. Will Abraham accept the gracious invitation of God? Will he leave his comfort zone and his circle of friends and walk across the room? Will he decide to get involved in the work God's doing in another part of the world? Will he? Will we?

The legacy of Abraham, the Bible says, is this. He did. He didn't do it all at once. He didn't do it consistently or perfectly. But he did it. And because he did, his life left a legacy behind it that fulfilled God's hope for him.

And your life can too. And so can mine. If we'll listen to God's gracious invitation this morning. Not only to come to His table. But then to rise from His table and let him God lead us on a walk across ... well, to tell you the truth, I don't know where God will ask you to walk.

He may ask you to walk across the parking lot into our church office this week and volunteer to help with a ministry of our church like the Gathering Place, that works one day each month with people who are beginning to experience symptoms of memory loss and their caregivers. He may graciously invite you to do that. Or God may ask you to walk to a place He will show you in Humble, a place called HAAM where each week, people from our church provide food, and help and job counseling to people who are struggling to make ends meet.

God may ask you to walk a little father, down into the third ward in Houston, to get involved with our mission partners down there at the Forge for families, tutoring inner city kids. Or God may even ask you to take a long walk and travel to Peru this summer to be part of our mission team, bringing basic medical care and vision care and a vacation Bible school to some of the poorest kids in Lima.

I don't know where the gracious invitation of God may ask you to go. But I do know this. We need to learn to let God call us, in the same way he calls us to His table each month, we need to learn to let God call us to take a walk, to take a walk that will take us out of our routine so we can become a blessing in someone else's life. Friends, we need to learn how to respond as readily to God's call to us to do that, to become His co-workers in mission, as we respond to God's call to come to this table.

For if we do, then our lives will leave a legacy just like the life of Abraham. And we too will become God's friends.

Let's pray ...