

“Trust Me and Multiply” // Gen 15:1–21 // Multiply #2

OK, let me **catch you up** if you weren’t here last week.

- As a church we are taking a few weeks to consider where God is taking us as a people.
 - **God has blessed us, Summit Church**, and with that blessing **comes a responsibility** to multiply that blessing for the blessing of the world.
- I’m **also presenting that question to you, personally**: *Where has God blessed you, and how does he intend to multiply you?*

I am doing the **unusual thing of asking you to come for every week** of this series. I know your habits, and I don’t judge you... (3/1)

- I’m **not saying that these sermons** are going to be the most awesome things you’ve ever heard... just that I believe that **the next few weeks will be a defining moment... will change our church...** in two ways.
 - **First, God is going to extend our reach...**
 - The **video you just saw** talks about how we impact the world through church planting.
 - **You know, our vision is really twofold**: We want to equip you to better reach your friends, neighbors, and families—to be the church here
 - I said this last week, but in the 3 weeks leading up to Multiply, we baptized **340 people here**. Stories still coming in...
 - I’ve asked God to let us **baptize 50,000** people in the Triangle, and that’s in front of us in this next season.
 - We also want to send out people to plant churches where there aren’t any: 1000!
 - This season is also going to **change us, personally**.

- It’s going to **challenge us to re-ask** what our engagement in the mission of God looks like.
 - I don’t know about you, but **my heart is like a car severely out of alignment...** the **two ditches** are self-sufficiency and self-centeredness. From time to time we need to stop and have the Holy Spirit challenge us to re-center ourselves on the mission.
- Let me remind you that **Commitment Weekend** is Nov. 21/22, be here that weekend as we covenant together as a church to take this step together.
 - If you missed last week, there was a great **video presentation** summarizing what is in front of us, **check that out on the website**.

Let me encourage you to take notes in your **Multiply booklets** (which you either received last week or on the way in today).

- **Page 42**, a place for you to take notes...
- I can’t prove this, but I’m pretty sure that taking notes on sermons increases the square footage of your mansion in heaven. (*I think it says that somewhere in Deuteronomy, which is where pastors always quote from when they are making stuff up...*)

BIBLE: Genesis

We’re looking at **the life of one of the most important figures in human history**, Abraham, to see how God multiplied his life for eternal significance, and more importantly the path God led him down to accomplish that, because it is a **path that you and I will have to walk**, too, if we want our lives to multiply for eternal significance.

- (*Isn’t that what you want? To get to the end of your life and know that you did **more than just pay bills** and **occupy space** and **consume resources**? I know you do...*)

Today we’re going to talk about a component of that path called **TRUST**.

It would be **great if Abraham's choice** to follow God in Genesis 12 led to an unbroken string of obedience, **a dazzling succession of faith victories**, but that's just not the case. Before he **even gets out of chapter 12**, he has just about given away the farm!

Gen 12:10: God sends a famine to the region where Abram was staying, so he has to detour down to Egypt because that was the only place with food.

[12:11] When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to Sarai his wife, "I know that you are a woman beautiful in appearance, [12] and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' Then they will kill me, but they will let you live. [13] Say you are my sister... that my life may be spared for your sake." (Genesis 12:11-13 ESV) In other words, say you are my sister, so if Pharaoh wants to marry you, then he won't kill me and steal your wife...

- What do you call this? A **lack of faith** or **your answer** to "Why I should be featured on the Jerry Springer show"?
- **Abram, do you not believe that the God** who promised to make you a great nation can keep the Egyptians from stealing your wife and then killing you?

This scene is strangely comforting to me, because my life has hardly been an unbroken string of successes since becoming a Christian. It seems like each epoch of my life has been marked by wavering faith!

- In **high school** I just couldn't be satisfied with God's opinion of me. I had to prove myself to everybody else and it wore me out.
- In **college I wasn't content** with God's timing. I wanted to be married and I wanted to get out into the world.
- **When I first became pastor here** I wasn't content with the ministry assignment God had given me... I wanted the church to be bigger and I wanted to be more important.

So I look back through my life and see where I've stumbled and fallen and disbelieved at every stage...

Well, I count at least **5 instances** in Abram's life where he pretty dramatically drops the ball.

- We have **this scene in Genesis 12**;
- He's going to have **another one in Genesis 16**, when he gets worried after a few years because God still hasn't given him a son, and so he follows Sarah's lead to sleep with Hagar, their house servant.
- Well, then, Hagar gives birth to a son through him, named Ishmael.
 - And you'd think, "Hey, success!" Everyone is happy!
 - But do you **really feel like this was good** for Abram and Sarah's marriage?
 - **Think about it:** you and your wife can't have kids, and so one night, in frustration she says, "Oh, why don't just go sleep with our maid and see if you can get her pregnant."
 - So you do, and she does. **You think your wife is going to be happy about that?** Men? Show of hands? No.
 - **Sarah is ticked.** And she starts abusing Hagar, simply for doing what Sarah asked her to do. And Abram, spineless wonder that he is, says, "OK. *You girls work that out*" and he lets Sarah abuse her. **That's failure #3.**
- **Then in Genesis 17, God re-appears to Abram** to renew his promise to give him a son through Sarah, and Abram laughs—*the father of our faith scoffs in God's face*.
- Finally, **Genesis 20, Abraham** runs into another king who scares him, and so he lies **again** about Sarah being his sister so the king won't kill him and steal his wife.
 - This one is **really weird because it brings us full circle** back to the beginning.
 - **I know someone who was reading the life of Abraham** in the Bible and they got to this and thought... Did I somehow read the story out of order? I thought I'd already this. No,

it's in there twice. The same mistake he made at the beginning he's making again at the end.

- **I don't know about you, but I'm feeling a lot better about my life.** Aren't you?

But here's what we learn:

1. God grows our faith by testing it

- **Right after Abram started to follow God,** God caused the famine so that Abram would have to go Egypt, a place where he'd be scared.
- God was **testing, and trying to grow**, his faith.
- **You see, we don't just make a one-time decision** to follow God and move on.... God is going to test, and grow, your faith.
- **Faith, you see, works like a muscle.** You can only strengthen it by straining it.
 - **When you work and strain a muscle,** you produce thousands of little tiny tears in it, and then it grows back stronger.
 - **That's how God grows our faith.** He puts us in situation where he "tears" us, so that it can grow back stronger.
- Y'all, I see this happen so regularly in people's lives I would say it is the **standard experience.** You come to Jesus, and pretty soon you'll go through an experience where you'll ask things like:
 - **Well, how is God going to provide for me now?** I know people who *upon getting serious with God* lost their job... They think, "Is this how you reward me?" No, he's testing your faith.
 - **Or you'll ask, "Am I going to be able to make it** through this difficult season of my marriage?
 - **Or he'll allow people to turn on you.** It seems like I see high school and college students come to Jesus and a lot of their friends turn on them. *Behind that, you see, is God asking, "Do you trust and value me more than these?"*
- **Faith is the most important muscle in the Christian life, and God** is committed to strengthening.

- *Faith is not just how you begin the Christian life; it's the whole thing!*
- *Diving board...*
- *Everything in the Christian life grows in the soil of faith*

2. In testing our faith, God often brings us to the very brink

- **God could have given Abram a son immediately,** but instead, he waited somewhere between 25 and 35 years before keeping that promise. And Abram had already been in his 70's when he first received the promise!¹ **Why wait so long to fulfill it?**
 - **Well, let's go back to illustration of muscle...** Workout specialists talk about something called "**muscle failure.**"
 - The way to **really strengthen a muscle** is to push it until it can't go any farther, and then it **multiplies in capacity.**
 - That's what God does to your faith. He'll **push it to the brink.** Only then will it multiply in you.
- **Had God given Abram a son immediately,** you see, it would have called for rejoicing, but not faith.
 - *Abraham had to **FEEL the his total helplessness** in the face of sterility, his **hopelessness in the face of Sarah's barrenness**, if he was to cast himself utterly upon the arms of divine promises and really grow in his faith.*²
- Is God doing that with you? Is he pushing you to the brink?
 - Listen, the **way you become an Abraham** is not pleasant...
 - He **leads you through the valleys** so he can show you he can provide for you there; **sends you into the storms** so he can demonstrate his ability to walk on water; **surrounds you** with conflict so that he can show you his ability to provide a table for you in the presence of your enemies.

¹ Abram was between 62–75 when he got the call in Gen 12; Isaac was born when he was near 100.

² Adapted from Alec Motyer's description of what God was going with Israel in letting Assyria get so close before he delivered them in Isaiah 36, *Isaiah By the Day*, 172.

Listen: God is serious about teaching you to live by faith. Faith is not part of the Christian life; it's all of it!

Because, you see (LISTEN!) in order to multiply, you have to learn to exercise faith.

- **Last week we saw where Paul compared everything God has given to us as a seed.**
 - (Think of three major categories: **Time, Talent; Treasures.**)
- **Two things you can do** with most seeds...
- **When you plant** a seed, there's an inherent faith required; faith that the sun will shine and the rain will fall, otherwise you've wasted your seed.

History tells us that a lot of farmers in Oklahoma in the late 1930s faced a harrowing choice. **During the 1920's**, a lot of these farmers had left their factory jobs in the Northeast and for a chance at fortune in the fertile fields of the great American Midwest. **But then in 1931**, this huge, decade-long drought commenced. Well, by 1939, only a few farmers remained there... And many had **just enough grain** left to feed themselves and their families for another year. The question was **whether to take half of that grain** and plant it... because if no rains came, when the spring hit they'd have nothing. But, of course, if they didn't plant the seed, they could never reap a harvest. **Good news: In the fall of 1939, the rains came** and those who had planted reaped a huge harvest.³

- **Throughout your life, God continually puts you in this situation.**
- **During this Multiply season**, he is going to call some of you to give, and sacrifice, in ways that are going to scare you! (NOT BIG?)

³ <http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/depression/dustbowl.htm>;

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/timeline/dustbowl/>. I first saw this story connected to kingdom giving in Andy Stanley, *Fields of Gold: A Place Beyond Your Deepest Fears, a Prize Beyond Your Wildest Imagination* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2004), 9–13.

- *Do you believe God can multiply what you give to him, taking care of you and blessing the world at the same time?*
- **C.S. Lewis said** that the **only safe rule** when it came to generosity is to give until it scares you, because only then do you know that you are giving by faith...
 - **SAFE LIFE... /not talking to you...** but a life that multiplies and counts for eternal significance
- **The only way to follow Jesus is with total abandon.**
 - There was a place I used to go with some of my friends called *Split Rock Canyon*. Park your car on the side of the road... You have to go all-in. **Same with God.**
 - **The Christian life doesn't work if you hedge your bets**
- ~~Faith doesn't become faith until you act on it.~~
 - ~~Many of you like to talk about faith~~, but when it comes time to show it, you don't have it.
 - ~~In Hebrew, there is no noun for faith~~; faith is only a verb. That's because faith is an action. ~~Faith doesn't become faith until you act on it.~~

Where do you get that kind of confidence to plant, or to jump?

3. Confidence to risk for God comes from comprehending the commitment of God

We know **Abraham eventually "got"** this. **How? Gen 22.** After God finally gave Abraham this promised son, he asked Abram to offer this son up as a sacrifice.

- Now, **we're going to go more in depth** with this later... but Isaac was not only what Abram loved most in the world; he was Abram's only son and represented all of Abram's hopes for the future... *And Abraham did it!*

After failing again and again, where did Abram finally get the confidence to obey God here? (*After being the kind of guy who threw wife under bus...*)

I think I know. Genesis 15:3. Abram is in one of his times of doubt and God re-appears to him and says, **"Fear not, Abram, I am your shield and your exceeding great reward."**

- And Abram says, *"Whew. Thanks, God. That helps so much. You taught me the lyrics to a worship song. Much better now."*

Um, no, that's not what he says. [3] And Abram said, "Behold, you have given me no offspring. (Gen 15:4) Abram says, "Yeah, God, speaking of reward... that child you promised me... where is he?"

WHAT DO YOU CALL THAT? **DOUBT.**

- **So God takes him outside** and shows him the stars and says, "As multitudinous as these stars will your offspring be."

And then occurs that **famous verse that the Apostle Paul** says shows us how we get saved, 15:6, **"Abram believed the Lord, and it was credited to him as righteousness."** 15:6

- *(People say, "How are people saved in the OT?" Same way as in the New. In the OT they believed God **would** keep his promise to send a Messiah and guarantee our future; in the New Testament we believe God **has** kept that promise. The **only difference is they looked forward** and we looked **backward**, but the faith is the same.)*

Anyway, Abram believed what God said... *So, yeah... Way to go Abraham!*

- But then, after the most famous verse on faith in the whole Bible, Abram says, **15:8, "But he said, 'O Lord God, how will I know...?'"**
 - He **doubts again!**
- *He is doubting two things here (and these two components form the basis of every doubt) -*
 - **The first is: God, how can I trust you?** It's been like 2 decades, God, are you really going to keep your word?
 - **The second is: How can I trust me?** I've proven to be pretty unreliable. What if I screw it up?

- **Here is God's answer. 15:9–10.** I'll summarize: **Bring me 5 animals: a cow, a goat, a ram, a turtledove and pigeon.** Cut them each in half and put them on either side of a walkway so that they make a little river of blood in the middle... You're like, "What?"
 - **We live in a written age.** So when we want to get a guarantee, we ask for a written contract. When a contractor quotes you a price to work on your house, you ask for it in writing... so if he comes back and says, "Actually, I've decided to charge this instead," then you say, "But here's your name on the contract guaranteeing this price!"
 - Well, in their day, instead of signing a contract, they **cut a few animals open**, and walked through the "river of blood" so that it splashed up on their robes, saying, "If I don't keep my end of the covenant, may this happen to me!"
 - The **Hebrew word for covenant** literally means, "to cut."
 - **I just feel like this would be more effective with my contractor.** *"How much are you charging for the painting? I don't think so, my friend. I've got the bloody robe to prove it."*
 - Well, they are supposed to make the covenant at sundown. **[12] As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram, a dreadful and great darkness fell upon him... [17] And a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch** (same words used to describe God's presence on Mt. Sinai) **passed between these pieces. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram. (Genesis 15:12, 17–18)**
 - **Wait... so God went through the pieces... Who didn't pass through? Abram.**
 - **In those days, if a king made a covenant** with a servant, the servant walked through alone, because it was assumed that the king would keep up his end.

- **This is the only covenant in recorded history** where the king goes through and the servant doesn't.
- **The meaning is clear:** If God fails to keep up his side of the bargain he will pay with his blood. But if Abram fails to keep his side of the bargain, God also will pay with his blood.
- **I want you really to think about this:** *God makes himself responsible for both sides of this covenant.* God says, "I'll pay the penalty if **I don't keep up my end** of the covenant; and I'll pay the price if you don't keep yours, either."
- **This, of course, gives us one of the clearest pictures of Christ** in the OT.
 - Just like **Abram fell into a deep sleep**, we were in the deep, dreadful sleep of sin.
 - The Gospels tell us that when Christ died a dreadful **darkness descended** upon the whole earth.
 - And **Jesus' blood flowed** out of his side like a river.
 - Was God's Son dying because he hadn't kept up his end of the bargain? **No, he was dying because we hadn't kept up ours.**
 - **He took my sins and his sorrow**, and he made them his very own! He bore my burden to Calvary, and suffered and died alone! (Where was I? I should be dying!) **How Marvelous**, how wonderful, and my song shall ever be...!"
- **This is where** Abram got the faith that he showed in Gen 22 when he was called on to offer Isaac. **This scene assured him** of what God would do and how God would see this promise through to the end, even when Abram himself faltered!

True, even after this scene, Abram struggled with doubt... but you see this conviction beginning to settle in.

- **True confidence doesn't come from within us.** It comes from what **was done for us.** *Courage is NOT a character quality; it is a consideration of God's commitment to us shown at Calvary.*

- And in the cross we see God's commitment to see it through, and that becomes our anchor to boldly go forward for him.
 - **Not only will he always keep up his end** of the bargain; he will make up for where I mess up.
- REFLECT ON HOW comforting this is.
 - God's commitment to **my family** is greater than mine. Where I mess up, he stays committed.
 - God's commitment to **this church**...
 - His commitment to my **growth in Christlikeness**...
 - Guidance (God's will)

Here's what that means... no matter where you are, or how badly you've stumbled, you can get up and go onward in faith because God's commitment to you has never subsided!

- **"The righteous man falls seven times, and rises again." Proverbs 24:16.**
 - Imagine a guy who falls 7 times.
 - **God says a righteous man can get back up again each time.** *Your righteousness is not shown by never falling...*
 - Why? Because righteousness is your declaration that where you falter, God is still faithful...
 - Abram fell **5 times**. But each time God says, "Abram, get up. I still have a plan."
 - **I know some of you have messed up, badly.** Get up. Getting up is a declaration of faith that God hasn't given up on you—and he proved that in Christ—it is your faith declaration that he still has a plan to bless and multiply your life and use it for good!
- Did you **mess up your marriage**? Fall back into **porn**? Make a really bad mistake?
 - **GET UP!** He **walked through Calvary alone** and he'll **never give up** on you.

4. Multiplying power comes through faith

- Watch what happens. Gen 17, God appears again. **"No longer shall your name be called Abram (daddy), but your name shall be**

Abraham (big daddy); for I have made you a father of many nations.” (17:5)

- **Interesting picture...** all God added was one little Hebrew letter, ‘h’ to Abram’s name. It’s as if he put a little breath into Abram. Abra-*ham*.
- This **might be pushing** it too far... but it is like God is putting his Spirit into Abraham. The **Hebrew word for breath** is *ruach*, which also means “Spirit.”
- **Immediately after this**, Sarah got pregnant.⁴
- God put the multiplying power of his Spirit in Abram when we persisted through in believing.

I don’t know about you... but **I want the breath of God** in all that I do. J-ha-D.

This **only comes through bold faith**. God will **multiply only that for which you wait for him** in faith...

- **Are you single?** *And you find it so hard to wait for marriage...* Can you trust God and let him grow you in this season? He’ll **multiply your character** and **your joy** in this season if you’ll trust him.
- I know of people who have **gotten pregnant at the wrong time**, maybe not even married... and now they are in a difficult situation, thinking of an abortion. *Will you trust God to provide for you and the baby? Who knows what multiplying power God will bring through that baby that you let live and trust God to help you take care of?*
- Or maybe he’s called you to **go overseas**... You ask: How is this going to work? My kids? My life? Are you ready to obey in faith and let God **multiply you?**

In this season God is asking us to take huge steps... Both us **together** and you **personally**

- **Lewis: “The only safe rule”**

- When you obey in faith, God multiplies in the power of the Spirit.
- He can only multiply what you give him in faith.⁵

Because Abraham **trusted God**, God filled him with the Spirit, and you and I are here today. **Literally:** we are sitting here because he trusted and multiplied.

- Here’s my question: Who will point to you from eternity and say, “Because he or she **trusted God BOLDLY and DARINGLY and EXTRAVAGANTLY...**” God multiplied them and now I am in the kingdom.
- Because they **planted/jumped**

Conclusion:

God is serious about teaching you to live by faith.

- *Before God can do something **through** us, he’s got to do something **in** us.*
- He **has to multiply faith within you** before he can multiply the ministry through you.
- *So where do you need just to trust and wait on God?*

So you ask, **“Why are we doing this *Multiply* stuff again?”** *Two reasons:*

1. *So many people need to be included. 3400/2000*
2. Because I need to be challenged again to live by faith...
 - I am the car severely out of alignment; going into the ditches of self-centeredness and self-sufficiency. I need constantly to be challenged to whether I’m living with faith, or for his kingdom or my own.
 - Listen, **if you are the kind of person who doesn’t need to be challenged again and again to live by faith and with sacrifice**, we are different!
 - *And, congratulations, **you are greater than the father of our faith**, Abraham, who faltered in faith 5 times!* So if

⁴ Jennifer Kennedy Dean, *The Life Changing Power in the Name of Jesus*, 313.

⁵ From Craig Groeschel

that's you... if you don't need to be challenged, maybe you could be gracious to those of us who are not as awesome as you and need to be challenged from time to time to **refocus on the mission and live by faith.**

- I told you last week that Paul calls us a **living sacrifice**. Here's the dilemma with a living sacrifice...

What barriers are there to you living all out for God by faith? To give extravagantly by faith?

Will you take this card and ask God to help you obey fully whatever he says, in faith, trusting him?

- BOW YOUR HEADS AND pray over card...
 - **Picture yourself jumping!**
 - What will keep you from going all the way and feeling the joy of reckless abandon in this season! Name it and ask God to help you with it?