

God of Second Chances...

Abraham

If you were here on Sunday, I began by asking you if you had any regrets last year. Most of us said there was at least one thing that we wish hadn't happened or would have happened differently. That's how life is, we all make mistakes and we all have things that we wish we had done differently. In fact if you don't, if there's nothing that you ever regret or wish you had handled differently then there is probably something in your heart that's not right. What I mean is this when I go through life thinking or believing that everything I have ever done is great, then I can easily become arrogant which leads me to believe that I'm better than you. Let me give you this as an example. Brett Favre left the field on Sunday and he made the statement "I have no regrets". Now I think Brett Favre is an awesome quarterback and he's done some great things. But what did he really mean by that. If he meant he has no regrets about playing this year, I can accept that but it's a little bit crazy. He played on a broken ankle, with a torn rotator cuff, and his last play resulted in being knocked unconscious. Maybe he doesn't have any regrets right now about playing this season, but will he down the road. I don't know how many of you remember Jerome Bettis. He was a running back for the Steelers. As much as I can't stand the Steelers, he was great. They say it takes him 20 to 30 min every morning to get out of bed. His legs hurt and cramp so much that he literally has to pick them up and lob them over the side of the bed to get the circulation going so he can get up and move. His career was shorter than Favre's and he played healthy most of it. I mean when you think about that, will it really be worth it to Favre.

On the other hand if Favre really met he has no regrets, really. Even with the lawsuits and accusations, no regrets? No sorrow toward your life, your kids, your family? None? How arrogant does that sound? It's pretty messed up. That's one of the many things that is so awesome about God, when we admit that we've got some failures, when we admit that we've messed up and don't want to live that way anymore. God is willing to heal, restore, and give us a second chance. There are really two types of second chances that we're going to be focusing on for the next four weeks. The first type is the second chance is really where we are going to be for the majority of tonight. The first type of second chance is the one that God gives us. We do our own thing, we sin, we separate ourselves from God and then we admit our guilt, ask for forgiveness and turn away from it. We're given grace and a second chance. The first type of second chance we like a lot, because it's for us. We love getting second chances, but we don't always want to give them. That's where the second type of second chance comes into play. The other type of second chance is the one that we give to others. When someone sin's against us, when someone breaks our heart, are we willing to give a second chance? Are we willing to be like Christ in that manner, even when it hurts, even when it costs?

The bible speaks to us about a man name Abraham; Abraham got a lot of second chances. It wasn't because he was really bad or anything; for the most part Abraham was a pretty good guy. He didn't have a bad past like some of the other people we see in the OT. In fact he had a lot going for him. His faith was really strong and he was able to visualize the promises of God even though He couldn't see them. The things is though, he was still a man. And just like the rest of us, he made mistakes, had some regrets, and God gave him a second chance. Unlike some of us though, he didn't allow his past mistakes and regrets to interfere with what God had for him. Instead he accepted the 2nd chance that God gave him and moved forward in faith toward what God had promised. What about us, are we willing to accept the second chance God gives us and move forward in faith to receive what God has for us?

Many times it's difficult to put ourselves in other's shoes, because everyone is at least a little different. We have different back grounds, histories, and even cultures. The same is true of people in the bible, so let's look at what the bible has to say about Abraham and see if we can put ourselves in his shoes.

Abraham's life story is about 9 chapters or so, so we are going to hit some of the highlights...

Gen. 11:27-12:9, we are introduced to Abraham.

Abraham's wife is Sarai and he has a brother as well as a father at the time.

God is clear with what He wants Abraham to do (Gen. 12:1)

God makes a promise to Abraham (Gen. 12:2-3, 15:1-6)

With just these three highlights we can see that we have some things in common with Abraham. All of us have a family, it may not be exactly like Abrahams but that's ok. There's no two families are exactly alike. We see from God's word that God is clear with the things he wants us to do and the people he wants us to be. Those callings may look different for each of us but the principles are the same. Let's look at some of them...

Be Wise (Eph. 5:15-17); Love (Rom. 5:6-8, Lk. 10:27); Serve (Eph. 2:10, Col. 3:17)

By no means is this a comprehensive list, but it's a start. Are we doing any of these things, are we doing them for God or for ourselves. The last thing we see is that God makes a promise to Abraham; he makes promises to us too.

Nothing can separate us from His love (Rom. 8:38-39), He doesn't leave (Deut. 31:6, 8)
He will complete what He started in you (Phil 4:6)

You see we actually have more in common with Abraham than we think we do when we consider it. And that's why many of us get tripped up the same way Abraham did. You see Abraham believed God for His promise, but he wasn't always willing to wait on God's timing or for God's way. Abraham took matters into his own hands, anyone here guilty of that?

Door illustration: Think of it this way, you are following God; you're doing the right thing. As you approach the door that God's told you to go through you find that it's locked. So what do we do? Some of us will walk away right then, because we really don't believe that God told us to go through the door. For the most part though if you're following God and doing the right thing you don't just give up and walk away like that. What a lot of us do at that point is that we bang on the door as if God can't hear us and doesn't know we are there. It might start with a knock, but then it's like banging on it. When nothing happens, we may play with the lock trying to get it open. Some of us will just jerk the door back and forth till it breaks and we get in. Usually though when you break down a door there's damage, there's damage to the door and you might even get hurt. That's what Abraham does, we go through some doors before God unlocks them for him and as a result damage is done. What Abraham could have done, should have done is prayed and asked God for wisdom concerning the door. Many times the answer is to "wait". Keep knocking, keep asking, keep seeking, and wait. God opens the door when it's time not before and not after, in his perfect timing and in his perfect way. Abraham didn't though and as a result needed some second chances. Let me show you what I mean...

On Abraham's journey there's a famine and he goes to Egypt. As he comes to Egypt Abraham recognizes that there's probably going to be trouble. So HE puts together a plan to get HIMSELF out of trouble. Who's giving directions here? (Abraham) Who should be giving directions? (God). Listen to his thinking on the trouble ahead...

Ge 12:11 As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, "I know what a beautiful woman you are. Ge 12:12 When the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' Then they will kill me but will let you live. Ge 12:13 Say you are my sister, so that I will be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you."

Now does that creep anybody out besides me? This wasn't part of God's plan; this would have resulted in brokenness and separation. But all Abraham see's is the situation and the logic in his plan, he doesn't see beyond the situation. The "door" appeared to be "locked" and Abraham was going through anyways. Thankfully God intervened, but it wasn't without consequences....

Ge 12:14 When Abram came to Egypt, the Egyptians saw that she was a very beautiful woman.

Ge 12:15 And when Pharaoh's officials saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh, and she was taken into his palace. Ge 12:16 He treated Abram well for her sake, and Abram acquired sheep and cattle, male and female donkeys, menservants and maidservants, and camels. Ge 12:17 But the LORD inflicted serious diseases on Pharaoh and his household because of Abram's wife Sarai. Ge 12:18 So Pharaoh summoned Abram. "What have you done to me?" he said. "Why didn't you tell me she was your wife? Ge 12:19 Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her to be my wife? Now then, here is your wife. Take her

and go!" ^{Ge 12:20} Then Pharaoh gave orders about Abram to his men, and they sent him on his way, with his wife and everything he had.

Not only did Pharaoh and his house hold get sick, but Abraham compromised his integrity by lying. Damage was done.

Abraham attempted to go through a locked door a second time as well. Remember that even though Abraham and his wife were in their 90's God promised them kids. More kids than they could count. Abraham knew though that door was locked, Sarai (his wife) couldn't have kids. Sarai knew this too so she went about trying to figure out how to get the door opened. Listen to how she did it...

^{Ge 16:1} Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian maidservant named Hagar; ^{Ge 16:2} so she said to Abram, "The LORD has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my maidservant; perhaps I can build a family through her." Abram agreed to what Sarai said. ^{Ge 16:3} So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian maidservant Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife. ^{Ge 16:4} He slept with Hagar, and she conceived...

Again, doesn't this creep anybody out besides me? Same thing here, Sarai said the "door" isn't open, I'll jimmy the lock and make it work. Again, God intervenes but their damage....

...When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress. ^{Ge 16:5} Then Sarai said to Abram, "You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my servant in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the LORD judge between you and me." ^{Ge 16:6} "Your servant is in your hands," Abram said. "Do with her whatever you think best." Then Sarai mistreated Hagar; so she fled from her.

Hagar runs into the desert and is about to die of thirst when God sends an angel to nourish her and her son. Beyond the damage that we see in passage though, there's a bigger picture that I want to look at. Most of us are familiar with the Middle East; we know that there is the country of Israel and that around Israel there are Muslim countries which would like their land. The Israel in the bible is same area as the Israel today for the most part. The people of Israel descended from Abraham and the son that Sarai eventually has is Isaac. He becomes the first of many sons' of Israel which make up the people of Israel. However the other son that Hagar has, he is the first of them Muslim people. We've had roughly 2000 years of war, terrorist attacks, and a whole other religion that all descended from Abraham, attempting to go through a "door" that wasn't unlocked yet. Now I'm not saying that it's entirely his fault, because we each make our own decisions. But what I want you to see is that one person's choice to do something that wasn't in God's timing or God's will, can change history.

You see when we go through doors that are locked instead of waiting on God's timing and will, damage is done and we as well as those around us have to deal with that damage and the consequences of those decisions. But it's not the end, God intervenes, God heals and restores so that we have second chances. God heals and restores so that we can understand his grace in the context of our broken and sinful lives. You see even though Abraham wasn't that bad of a guy, and even though Abraham forced some doors open God gave him a second chance and kept His promise to Abraham despite his failures. Listen to how it happens...

^{Ge 18:1} The LORD appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. ^{Ge 18:2} Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground. ^{Ge 18:3} He said, "If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by." ^{Ge 18:4} Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. ^{Ge 18:5} Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way—now that you have come to your servant." "Very well," they answered, "do as you say." ^{Ge 18:6} So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah. "Quick," he said, "get three seahs of fine flour and knead it and bake some bread." ^{Ge 18:7} Then he ran to the herd and selected a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant, who hurried to prepare it. ^{Ge 18:8} He then brought some curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared, and set these before

them. While they ate, he stood near them under a tree. ^{Ge 18:9} “Where is your wife Sarah?” they asked him. “There, in the tent,” he said. ^{Ge 18:10} Then the LORD said, “I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son.” Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him. ^{Ge 18:11} Abraham and Sarah were already old and well advanced in years, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. ^{Ge 18:12} So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, “After I am worn out and my master is old, will I now have this pleasure?” ^{Ge 18:13} Then the LORD said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Will I really have a child, now that I am old?’ ^{Ge 18:14} Is anything too hard for the LORD? I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son.” ^{Ge 18:15} Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, “I did not laugh.” But he said, “Yes, you did laugh.”

The angels show up and they inform Abraham and Sarah that a year from that point they will have their first son. Sarah doesn't take them seriously, but God still delivers....

^{Ge 21:1} Now the LORD was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah what he had promised. ^{Ge 21:2} Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. ^{Ge 21:3} Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him. ^{Ge 21:4} When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God commanded him. ^{Ge 21:5} Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. ^{Ge 21:6} Sarah said, “God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me.” ^{Ge 21:7} And she added, “Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.”

Despite the failures and mistakes of this everyday couple, God was still faithful and kept his promise, he gave them a second chance. As we close out tonight I want to go back to one of the first verses we looked at.

^{Ge 12:1} The LORD had said to Abram, “Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. ^{Ge 12:2} “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. ^{Ge 12:3} I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” ^{Ge 12:4} So Abram left, as the LORD had told him;

God told him clearly what to do and Abraham obeyed. As we are each on our journey are we doing and living as God has clearly told us. Are we making the most of every opportunity, are we seizing our second chance with thankfulness and an understanding of God's grace, moving forward toward the goal that God has called us to or are we allowing are failures and mistakes to keep us from accepting our second chance? If you are, you don't have too. Theirs grace and forgiveness for those who admit their guilt and turn from it.....

Suggested Small Group Discussion Concepts:

1. Go back to the door illustration.

What are some “doors” that you've broken through when you should have waited for God to unlock?

Are you more the type of person who breaks down doors because you want to get through so bad that you don't care or are you the type of person who will try to jimmy the lock and make it look like it was open?

2. Discuss a time when you got a second chance, maybe from a parent or teacher.

- Did you deserve it? (we never *deserve* second chances)

- Did you use the chance to try and “get away” with the same thing again? Why or why not?

- If not, what did you do with your second chance?

3. Can you think of any place where 2nd chances are never given or seldom given?

(never: hell, seldom: pro sports)

-Does that affect how often we give second chances and forgive others even when they don't deserve it?