

Sermon: Looking for God
Rev. Dr. Don Hackett
First Presbyterian Church

October 3, 2010
Cherry Street Worship at 10:30am
Lancaster, Pa

Question: Where have you seen God lately?

Introduction

This week we dive into our year long journey together in the book “Life with God.” This is a daily devotional book that will guide us into a deeper life with Jesus Christ. We are agreeing to prayerfully read the one page devotions each day. We want God to meet us in that time and space. We want God to change us as we meet, hear God’s message, and allow God to penetrate our thinking, feeling and living. We encourage each of you to purchase the book and join us in this adventure of faith. Next to the books are copies of our preaching schedule for the year that will help you know the particular text from which we will be preaching.

During the course of this study we will be introduced to seventeen spiritual practices that seek to connect us with God. The practice for the first two weeks is “Looking for God.” Remember a spiritual practice is a way of engaging the world, a mindset, an attitude, a holy habit that will lead you and me to the heart of God if we allow it. These practices are not magic, but roads to walk. We cultivate intimacy with God as we allow God to walk with us.

Our Biblical passage today is describes a family that learned to walk with God. Let us listen to account of God’s interaction with Abram.

Text: Genesis 12:1-4

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.

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.

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."

⁴ So Abram left, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran. ⁵ He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.

Background

Prior to this passage, we discover that Abram is from the important ancient city of Ur of the Chaldeans (in current day Iran). His father (Terah) and two brothers (Nahor and Haran) are all mentioned in Genesis chapter 11. Here is what happens:

- Haran gets married and has three children, Lot, Iscah, and Milcah.
- Abram marries Sarai, Nahor marries his niece, Milcah.
- Haran dies in Ur.
- The father, Terah, sets out with his whole family from Ur to go to Canaan (what we call the Holy Land).
- For some reason when they got halfway to the city of Haran (about 600 miles to the northwest), they stopped and settled.
- Terah dies in the city of Haran.

What happened? They were headed for Canaan but only made it half way. Did Terah get sick? Did they encounter hardship or persecution? The text does not say. All it states is **“But when they came to Haran, they settled there.”**

Sometimes as we listen to God he will tell us to get up and go like Terah did. Did it make sense to his family and friends that he was leaving one of the most sophisticated cities of the ancient world to go out to the barren wasteland? Probably not. Was it hard to do? I imagine it was very hard to obey God in this move. **What is important is** that we are listening and willing to do whatever God asks of us. Terah, thank you for discerning the call of God the best you could and obeying at great personal cost. **How did Terah know** it was God speaking to him? We do not know. The text does not tell us. I believe if you and I are sincerely looking for God, he will come to us in ways that are clear and that enable us to follow him.

When some people hear that I left Southern California after graduate school and moved back to Pennsylvania, they look at me and ask, “Why?” My only reply is “I sensed God told me to move.” How did I know? I was looking for God to guide me. I prayed. I studied the Bible and asked God to speak to me through the Scriptures. I sought the advice of wise friends. I was willing to go and do whatever God wanted me to do. I am glad I did. I met Rila (my wife of 24 years) the first month I was there. God had great blessing in store for me. I just needed to trust him.

Mike and Amy Weaver moved from Lancaster to near Messiah College this past summer. They looked for God and listened carefully to what God was doing in their lives. When God wants you and me to do something, I think there is often a stirring in our hearts, a passion that grows. Mike and Amy asked God to help them discern priorities and then took a step of faith on what they understood. **Michael and Bethany Marcello** did the same and now live in Oregon. **Rob and Danielle Hartley** moved to Knoxville, Tennessee to pursue their dreams of serving Christ in planting new churches. When God is on the move, so are his people. *What is God asking you to do in this season of your life? Move? Make a change? Go deep with God? Go serve someone who is outside your comfort zone?*

For reason we cannot discern, Terah settled in Haran. The call was to go to Canaan. God is persistent in wanting to bless us. God comes to Abram and issues an invitation to Abram to be the father of a great spiritual nation. God promised land, a large family (a nation!), a great heritage, even though Abram and Sarai had no children. I think Abram knew his family was supposed to go to Canaan. He grew up watching his parents live out a trust and obedience to God. So when God comes to him, I do not think he was surprised. I think he was ready.

What did Abram need to do in order to obey God? Like his father he needed to pack up his family and move out in faith. Did it make sense to his family and friends that he was leaving to go out to the barren wasteland? Probably not. Was it hard to do? I imagine it was very hard to obey God in this move. Abram did not have a GPS. He did not have motel reservations. He did not even have a child to be the seed of this great nation. He took what he had and offered it to God. "I am going. Use me to fulfill your plans to bless the world."

How do you and I look for God everyday? I think it starts with being open. We ask God to show us himself in the big and little events in our lives. I invited some people to reflect on how they experienced God this past week and this is what they replied:

Hi Don,

During this past summer we had a double dormer built in my study to bring more light into a very dark, cave-like room. As it was being built I came to realize that this six foot area was to be my "sacred space" at home. And, indeed it is so. Each morning now I spend some time there before going downstairs. One morning this week the sky was just beginning to turn brighter and I watched as sunrise came closer. There was a beautiful sense of peacefulness during those few minutes that I experienced as one more assurance of the Presence we often call God. The centered feeling of that time stayed with me all day.

Peace,
Alicia

Hi Don,

I have experienced God in the early moments of the new day and in listening to the rain. I have seen God in the people around me, often doing ordinary things but sometimes in extraordinary ways. I have a sense that God is working in all ways and in all things for good.

Blessings,

Chuck Manners

Don,

Amy had an mri done yesterday, and they found some plaque on her brain, Could be minor but we don't know yet. We prayed about it and actually were able too get a good nights sleep! Don't know what the future holds but we know who holds the future.

Amy and Don

p.s. thanks for your prayers

How appropriate it is that we celebrate the Lord's Supper today. Jesus lived a life with God. While he was here on earth, Jesus woke up everyday ready to see what God the Father was doing and join Him in his wonderful work. Jesus even put his own self concerns aside when the Father asked Jesus to die for us. Jesus replied, "Not my will, but your will be done."

Prayer: Thank you, Gracious God, that you desire to live your life in and through us. We dedicate ourselves to you today. Work in us by your love and grace so we can follow you and bless the world in Jesus Name. Amen.