

Keep Walking

Trailblazer Series, October 28 & 29, 2023 | Genesis 25:7-11(Background: Genesis 23-25)

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What are you going to do when you retire?

For some people, retirement implies that we stop working and start playing instead.

It's a chance to linger over your devotional and coffee in the morning.

It's a chance to play pickleball and go on trips. You get to do what YOU want to do.

That's what some people say about retirement.

Jimmy Carter has shown us what retirement can look like.

Carter was President of the United States from 1977-1981.

Since then, Carter has been an active and impactful former president.

He started the Carter Center at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. He and the Center have worked to bring peace to many conflicts around the world.

President Carter has written thirty-two books and has been a tireless advocate for Habitat for Humanity and was providing housing with dignity for the poor right up until 2020.

President Carter taught Sunday School at his church weekly for most of his life.

President Carter turned 99 years old earlier this month, and he is now in hospice care.

President Jimmy Carter has shown us what retirement can look like.

Can Christians retire?

I don't mean can Christians retire from work or from the workforce. The answer to that question is an obvious and resounding, "YES!" Of course, Christians can retire from work.

But can Christians retire from walking with God, from ministry, from discipleship, and from taking next steps with God?

Some people would say a quiet, "Yes." They think that they've put in their time, done their thing, and are due an opportunity to play pickleball.

I think the answer to that question is a resounding, "NO!"

Can Christians take a break?

Again, we're not talking about taking a break from work like a weekly Sabbath and day off.

Can Christians take a break from God, ministry, discipleship, and next steps?

Again, some people say "Yes." They're tired, discouraged, or distracted. They want a break.

But again, the real answer is "No." If by "break" you mean backing away from God, from ministry, from discipleship, and from taking next steps, then no. Christians don't take breaks from God.

Can Christians stall?

Can the engine that is driving their spiritual life just slip from “drive” into “neutral?” Can they coast through life, through their journey with God, and through ministry?

I know what the answer should be. The answer should be “NO!”

But we all know people who are stalled out spiritually, stuck in neutral with God, and coasting.

You may be one of those people today.

Abraham shows us a better way.

Abraham lived a long life. He lived to 175 years old.

He never retired from God. He made mistakes, but he never really retired, took a break from God, or stalled out.

Instead, he kept walking with God right up until the end. Abraham blazed a trail for us again.

Sarah died, and Abraham kept walking with God.

Sarah died at age 127.

Sarah gave birth to Isaac sometime around the time she was 90 years old.

Then she lived for another 37 years. Isaac was 37 years old when his mother died.

Abraham was 137.

Abraham grieved but had to get on with the business of life.

Abraham went in where Sarah died to mourn and weep. Then there was work to do.

Abraham needed a place to bury Sarah.

Abraham appeared before the Hittite princes of the region.

Abraham went to them, likely near the gate of a local city.

Abraham pointed out that he was not one of them. He was not born in Canaan or own land.

However, they recognized him as one of them. He wasn't a Hittite, but he was still a prince, and they were eager to do business with him.

Abraham bargained for a place to bury his dead.

The Hittites offered Abraham one of their own tombs.

Abraham wasn't looking for a handout, though, and he wanted a place to bury Sarah and generations of his family that he expected would be born and live after him.

He started negotiations for a cave, the Cave of Machpelah.

The owner, Ephron, politely insisted that Abraham buy the field as well.

Then they settled on a price, 400 shekels of silver. That's more than a hundred pounds of silver. It's an exorbitant price for the piece of land in question.

But this was a deal between princes for a burial place for an important family.

Abraham didn't argue. He agreed to the price and paid it.

Abraham now owned his family's first piece of land in Canaan.

God promised Abraham that his family would one day own all the land of Canaan.

However, up until this point Abraham didn't own any land.

That all changed. Now Abraham owned the Cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron, east of the oaks of Mamre, which would one day be part of the city of Hebron. It was theirs!

Abraham and his family owned their first piece of the Promised Land.

Abraham took one next step after another with God right up until his death.

Abraham found a suitable wife for Isaac.

Abraham didn't want Isaac to marry a Canaanite who might draw him into their ways.

Abraham wanted Isaac to marry someone from his own family, the family that had, at least, begun to declare their loyalty to the LORD.

So, Abraham sent a servant to a town in Mesopotamia where his brother, Nahor, had settled.

Abraham sent his servant with instructions to find a member of Nahor's family for Isaac to marry.

Abraham sent the servant with camels, servants, and gifts for Nahor's family.

Through God's provision, Abraham's servant found Rebekah, Nahor's grand-daughter.

She was perfect for Isaac, and she was willing to move to Canaan to marry him.

All the details were settled quickly, and Rebekah returned to Canaan.

Isaac and Rebekah saw each other in the distance and recognized one another.

They married quickly and seem to have loved one another. Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah, and Abraham could feel safer about Isaac and the family.

Abraham secured Isaac's future.

Abraham had Isaac by his wife, Sarah.

He also had a son, Ishmael, by Hagar, Sarah's maid, whom she gave to Abraham to marry.

At some point, Abraham seems to have remarried after Sarah's death. Her name was Keturah, and she gave birth to at least six sons.

God was very faithful to his promise to Abraham to give him multiple descendants. His sons went on to be the fathers of many nations.

As Abraham could tell that his death was nearing, Abraham gave all of those other sons gifts and sent them away, to the east, where they would be no threat to Isaac and his descendants.

Abraham even saw the next generation born and begin to grow up.

Abraham was 140 years old when Isaac and Rebekah married.

Twenty years later, Isaac and Rebekah had children of their own—twins, Esau and Jacob.

Abraham died fifteen years after Esau and Jacob were born. It is quite possible that he knew Esau and Jacob; at least it is likely he knew they had been born.

Then Abraham's death is recorded in Genesis 25:7-11:

These are the days of the years of Abraham's life, 175 years. Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people. Isaac and Ishmael his sons buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the

son of Zohar the Hittite, east of Mamre, the field that Abraham purchased from the Hittites. There Abraham was buried, with Sarah his wife. After the death of Abraham, God blessed Isaac his son. And Isaac settled at Beer-lahai-roi.

He was buried in the same cave as Sarah with his beloved wife.

We actually have a reasonable idea of where the location is today.

Today the Cave of Machpelah, the tomb of Abraham and Sarah, is in Hebron in the West Bank.

In the Roman Era, Herod the Great built a structure around the site of the cave.

Over centuries, the site has changed hands multiple times.

One building has replaced another.

Today, Jews and Muslims tensely share custody of and access to the site.

That is probably where Abraham and Sarah and their descendants were buried.

Ishmael AND Isaac were both there to bury their father.

Both of them came when Abraham died; they both helped to bury their father.

Abraham's death points us toward an important truth:

There is no place for quitting in our relationship with God!

Somehow, we get a mistaken notion that our relationship with God has an end.

We somehow get the mistaken notion that the Gospel comes to a stopping point.

Let me back up for a moment to show you what I mean.

When I tell God's Story from Creation to Conclusion, I start at the beginning.

In chapter one, Creation, we remember that God made the world and everything in it. He made us, and he made us to have a relationship with God.

Then in chapter two, Brokenness, we disobeyed God. We sinned and actually rebelled against God. That brought death and suffering into the world. We broke ourselves, our relationship with God, and the world. We cannot repair what we have broken.

But God sent Jesus into the world. Jesus died to pay the price for our sin. He rose from the dead three days later, victorious over sin, death, and evil. Now, if we will say "yes" to Jesus, we can be forgiven for our sin, adopted as sons and daughters by God, given new life, and given the promise of eternal life that starts now. That's chapter three.

And when we say "yes" to Jesus in chapter three, we sometimes get the notion that we are done. However, the Gospel doesn't end when we say "yes" to Jesus!

In chapter four, we are being sanctified.

You may be confused that there is more to the story after we accept Jesus. There is!

Chapter four is "the Church." In this chapter, God sends his Holy Spirit into us.

When God puts his Holy Spirit into us, God the Holy Spirit changes us. We are made holy!

The process is called "sanctification", which means to be made holy.

In **2 Corinthians 3:18**, we read that God's Holy Spirit inside of us transforms us:

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

So, chapter four “the Church” is symbolized with an arrow going down and an arrow going up. The downward arrow reminds us that God sends his Holy Spirit into the world and into us. He makes us holy and sanctifies us. Then the upward arrow reminds us that we live holy lives for him. This is the chapter we are living right now, chapter four: the Church.

Also in chapter four, we are ambassadors.

God sends his Holy Spirit into us so that we have everything we need including gifts so that we can make and multiply disciples and share the Good News with the whole world.

God’s Holy Spirit makes us ambassadors or representatives of the Kingdom of God.

2 Corinthians 5:20 says:

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

That’s also going on in chapter four: The Church. The downward arrow reminds us that God send his Holy Spirit into us and sends us into the world. Then the upward arrow reminds us that we bring people and the nations to him.

Again, that’s what’s going on right now! We are living chapter four: the Church!

The Gospel continues with chapter five.

Jesus said that he is going to prepare a place for us. He also said that he will return one day so that we can be where he is. He will reign forever when he returns.

When will he return? When he is ready. When all things are ready.

That means God’s plan is still unfolding in history and in our lives.

We are still living in chapter four: the Church.

During this chapter of history, we are waiting for Jesus to return.

During this chapter, though, we aren’t just sitting around.

We are living chapter four: the Church. God is sanctifying us and sending us on mission as his ambassadors. There is work for God to do and work for us to do.

It isn’t time to retire, to take a break, or to stall out in our Christian lives!

It’s time to work. It’s time to let God work.

It’s time to walk with God. It’s time to take next steps.

That’s the nature of the Gospel. The Gospel keeps calling us forward, keeps calling us to walk on with God, keeps calling us to take next steps.

Let’s keep taking next steps as we walk with God.

Healthy Christians are doing more than hitting “like” and “subscribe” on social media.

Social media has produced a new kind of Christian, the Facebook Christian.

A Facebook Christian is someone who blatantly flaunts their Christianity on Facebook and other social media. They post bold statements of belief and imply that if you don't like or repost their material yourself, then you are not a true Christian.

However, they don't do anything with their faith in the real world. In fact, they may live lives that are outside the bounds of behavior for Christians in real life.

Healthy Christians aren't just disciples of Jesus on social media; they are disciples in real life.

Healthy Christians aren't just disciples of Jesus because of what they think or say; they are disciples of Jesus in their actions as well.

We have developed an Engagement Wheel to help us think through what healthy Christians do in the real world. We worship God regularly, publicly as well as privately, through daily time with him; we connect with other disciples of Jesus in real, authentic community; we serve people using the gifts God has given us; and we share our faith with our neighbors and around the world.

Healthy Christians are engaged with their faith in the real world.

Healthy Christians keep moving.

That's what **Hebrews 12:1-2** keeps reminding us. Let's look at it again:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

We are surrounded by generations and centuries of Christians who have set the example.

Jesus is the example; he is the greatest trail blazer, the founder and perfecter of our faith.

They all kept moving. That's what the passage tells us to do.

It says that we are to lay aside every weight; that's the stuff that holds us back and keeps us from moving. The weight that holds us back includes fears, lethargy, laziness, selfishness, competing agendas, and everything else that stops movement in our Christian lives.

Hebrews also tells us to lay aside our sin; it's sin ultimately that keeps us from moving forward in our walk with God.

But right there in the center of this passage is the command: let us run with endurance the race that is set before us. We are to walk with God, take next steps, run, do so with endurance, do so as long as we are living, and keep moving.

Healthy Christians are taking next steps with God for a lifetime.

That's what Abraham did.

He left his homeland and moved to Canaan.

He made mistakes along the way.

However, he said "yes" to God one time after another.

He kept walking with God and taking next steps right up until his death.

Abraham was a true trailblazer; he showed us the way God wants us to go.

What is your next step with God?

What is God calling you to do today, right now, in this season of your life?
There is a step God wants you to take. There always is. There always will be.
Take that next step today.