

Ruth: The Inconsequential Outsider

The Weft And Warp Of Scripture

The word of God is like a vast tapestry, its main theme interwoven with many sub-plots and side stories that run like golden threads through an intricate design. Each of these threads complements the complete telling of [God's story](#) and narrates again and again to us the way in which God views our world and us, the people who inhabit it.

The story of Ruth, a seemingly inconsequential outsider, is one of these golden threads. At face value, it appears to be a brief narrative concerning an unimportant family, living in a [small and insignificant rural village*](#). It hardly seems a grand stage on which the compelling drama of God's purpose is to be acted out.

The story is placed within the time period known as "The Judges" (thought to be around 1220 – 1050 B.C.), when heroes like Samson the Mighty and Ehud the Brave lived- impressive and inspiring characters, who took centre stage in the dramas that unfolded around them.

The story of Ruth seems, at first glance, a strange and somewhat ordinary inclusion in the rather extraordinary cast that surrounds it. And yet, when we consider each part of this remarkable story, we understand that we are being told something very important about God and about ourselves. We learn that God sees into our hearts (1 Samuel 16:7). He is more interested in what we can become, than in who we are right now, and that our very ordinariness is what God sees and works with to bring us to an extraordinary place.

In fact, God often does some of His best work with the most

unlikely people, as the story of Ruth proves.

Who Was Ruth?

Ruth was, by definition, an outsider. She was not an Israelite but a native of the country of [Moab](#), a mountainous tract of land now in modern Jordan. She had married an Israelite man who was living in Moab with his family; his parents and his brother. The family had relocated due to a famine that had occurred in their homeland and in chapter 1 of the story, Ruth and her husband had been married for 10 years before he, and his brother, both fell ill and died.

It seems tragedy had already befallen the family previously, with the death of Elimelech, Ruth's father-in-law, very soon after the family's relocation. The death of the sons now left Ruth, her sister-in-law, Orpah, and Naomi, her mother-in-law, as widows, in probably very bleak circumstances.

Ruth was, of all people, an unlikely heroine. Not only was she a woman, in a time when women were of minor importance, but she was also now a widow. Finally, she was poor and foreign and would have been considered an outsider to any true-born Israelite.

Ruth's Story

Ruth may have been poor in position but she was rich in love and faith. When Naomi, her mother-in-law, made the decision to return to her homeland of Israel, Ruth did not hesitate to follow her. She left all that was familiar, everything that she was culturally connected to, and, much like [faithful Abraham](#) before her, she *"went out, not knowing where she was going..."* (Hebrews 11:8).

She heard the call of God and she followed, with an implicit faith and unswerving devotion. She trusted the journey and embraced the destination, even though she hadn't yet seen it.

This is the definition of faith (Hebrews 11:1-3). Faith is what distinguishes her character and faith is what motivated her choices, which become more and more evident to us as we discover her story.

The story is short in its telling and it's well worth pausing here and [reading it quickly for yourself](#).

Like every great story, it contains all the important elements of interest; drama, grief, desolation, decision, redemption, and resolution. As a stand-alone story, it would be successful in its own right. Yet it is the conclusion to the story that makes us really sit up and take notice. This is where we realise that nothing is an afterthought to God, nobody is *actually* inconsequential and His plan is purposeful and far-reaching.

He has a definitive purpose and plan and every single person can play their part. There is a place for all of us in God's story, if we choose it.

Ruth made the choice and decision to follow Naomi, to become part of God's plan. Yet even she couldn't have realised the extent to which God would involve her. The epilogue of the story contains an unbelievable twist, a beautiful thread that we almost have to read twice to believe.

Ruth's Defining Legacy

Ruth found a home, belonging, and happiness in Israel and went on to marry Boaz, a wealthy and respected landowner. She was accepted completely into the family of [Abraham](#), father of the Israelite people.

She also became the mother to a little boy called Obed (Ruth 4:16). Obed was the father of Jesse and Jesse, in time, became the father of David, one of the greatest kings in Israel's history. David would become famous, not only for his skill with the harp and his compassionate love for and protection of

his sheep as a shepherd boy but also for his courage and bravery in fighting against the enemy Goliath, his stirring example as a brilliant military leader and king, and his complete trust and faith in God.

Most breathtaking of all, King David became an ancestor of Jesus Christ, God's own Son! This makes Ruth an incredibly significant and vital part of God's plan of salvation for the world.

God's methods often [confound and confuse us](#). He doesn't always choose who we would expect or work in the way we would like. He sees all, from the beginning to the end (Isaiah 46:10), while we can only see a small portion of now. His purpose is perfectly orchestrated and remarkably interwoven in ways that amaze us.

In the story of Ruth, an inconsequential outsider, we see that God gets involved in the lives of all kinds of men and women, bringing about His purpose. We can take confidence and have faith that He can and will work in our lives, in the same way, and that we too can become part of [His story](#), if we choose it.

* Here's another plot twist for those of you who love a good story! Wondering about that "small and insignificant rural village", found at the beginning of this tale? That village is none other than the little town of Bethlehem, where, many years from Ruth's time, a small baby [would be born](#), in humble circumstances, and would be laid, sleeping, in a manger; [Jesus – the hope of the world!](#)

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Radical Social Change: A Letter To Philemon

“Injustice: unfairness, unjust act, Unfair: not equitable or honest, not impartial or according to rules, society: organised and interdependent community, system and organisation of this” – The Australian Oxford Dictionary, Third Edition

The issue of social injustice* has always been one that is close to my heart. It's something that I like to talk to my kids about often, to try to impress upon them just how fortunate they are in many aspects of their life. They live in a modern, western country and are possessors of freedoms and rights still not available to many other peoples of the world. My daughters, particularly, have liberties still not accessible to many other [girls and women](#). And on the delicate subject of race, my children haven't had to endure the criticism or racial bigotry experienced by those who clearly display the truth of their indigenous ancestry by the colour of their skin (and who have been and are still being treated unjustly because of it).

Historically, social injustice has often been tolerated or, even worse, promoted on the basis of prejudice and [erroneously applied religious doctrine](#). Religious intolerance has fuelled many of this world's wars and God has been made the “scapegoat” for much of what is the worst of humanity.

One only needs to look, for example, at the [founding document](#) of the devoutly Christian American nation, the Declaration of Independence, to see that what people say and what people *do* are often two quite different things.

The statement in the second paragraph, **“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights,**

that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness” did not prelude American citizens from denying those same rights to thousands of men and women during the infamous period of slavery, based simply on the colour of their skin.

Mistreatment of slaves was further bolstered by their ignorant and prejudicial application of Bible passages. It took nearly 250 years for the official practice of human trafficking and slavery to be abolished in America and yet the affects of slavery are still felt and are at work today in many parts of America, and indeed the world.

Social injustice, however, is not just an American problem, or a historical problem. It's a world problem, manifested in many different ways, and is still a very relevant conversation for modern times.

“Over and over again, in the history of the world, man has made life into chaos.” – Oswald Chambers

What Does God Have To Say About Social Injustice?

God, the creator of all, made all equal. The only difference commented on in Genesis, at the creation of humanity, was our genders – both uniquely special and individually reflective of God's glory. We're told throughout the Bible that God makes no distinction between people based on their social status (Jeremiah 22:3), their ethnicity (Acts 10: 34-35), or their gender (Galatians 3:28).

In fact, we're told that God is just, fair, and completely impartial (Deuteronomy 10:17, Romans 2:11). He despises mistreatment, discrimination or prejudicial treatment:

“Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.” | Isaiah

1:17 (ESV)

“This is what the LORD Almighty said: ‘Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor. Do not plot evil against each other’ | Zechariah 7:9-10 (NIV)

“Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.” | John 7:24 (NIV)

This impartiality is thrown into sharp relief against the story found in the letter to Philemon.

Philemon, squeezed between the epistle to Titus and the letter to the Hebrews, is often overlooked and under-read. But it is a truly astonishing and socially radical exposition of exactly how God views all men and women. It tackles the serious and often difficult shift in thinking that is required and shows that belief in and love of God must affect our relationships with others in positive ways and with complete impartiality.

Sometimes, these effects are profound and far-reaching, as in the case of Philemon.

Who Was Philemon?

Philemon was a wealthy, Christian slave owner, living in Colosse, a city which is now in modern Turkey. The area of Asia Minor was a huge melting pot of ethnicities and also one of the [first areas to flourish with converts to the new religion of Christianity](#). Overlaying this was the fact that this area was part of the hugely expansive [Roman Empire](#), at the height of its glory and, as such, was subject to Roman law and Roman customs.

In many cities in the Roman Empire, up to [30% of the](#)

[population were slaves](#). They undertook the bulk of the work required to keep the empire running and were considered to be the legal property of their owners. There were some rules against cruelty, but we would recognise them as the equivalent of 'animal rights', certainly not as human rights. Owners, like Philemon, essentially had the right to treat slaves however they wanted.

Who Was Onesimus?

Typically, a slave would take on the religion of his or her master and Onesimus, the subject of the letter to Philemon, was one such slave. Having converted to Christianity, he then, at some point, fled his master's household and travelled hundreds of miles to where Paul was, the heart of the empire itself, to Rome. Rome differed from Greek city-states in that freed slaves were allowed to become citizens and perhaps this was Onesimus' objective in seeking out Rome.

The testimony of a slave could not be accepted in a Roman Court and they had no rights at all under the law. A master could punish a slave, however he wanted, and punishments included branding, scourging, torture or death. The punishment for a runaway slave was often branding in the forehead and the deliberate breaking of bones or joints.

This was Onesimus' expected fate, under Roman law, and Philemon had every right, as a master and Roman citizen, to enforce such punishment.

Jesus Changes Our Culture

Paul's letter, however, is full of warm entreaty on behalf of Onesimus. He reminds Philemon that God's rule of love transcends any man-made law and that, in Jesus, both slave and master are equal. They are considered brothers, both children of a Heavenly Father. Paul was sending Onesimus back to Philemon, not as just a slave, but as family.

Paul tells Philemon to add any debt owed by Onesimus to his own account but, in fact, considers it a favour to be done for Jesus. Paul is more than confident of Philemon's response and gives much emphasis to "this faith we hold in common...and that people recognise Christ in all of it".

The remarkable transformative power of the Gospel spills from the words in this letter – showing the dramatic ripple effect a response to God has in our personal lives. It challenges everything we do, our belief systems and possibly even misplaced prejudices about others. It compels us to behave justly to others, with impartiality, even though the world around us might not be just or impartial. **It compels us to do better and be better, simply because Jesus is.**

The Gospel of Good News often causes radical upheaval in our own lives as it forces our practices and beliefs to fall into line with the ideals of a true, loving, and socially just God.

"He's already made it plain how to live, what to do, what GOD is looking for in men and women. It's quite simple. Do what is fair and just to your neighbour, be compassionate and loyal in your love, and don't take yourself too seriously – take God seriously." | Micah 6:8 (The Message)

***In this article, "social injustice" is used in conjunction with the dictionary definitions noted at the beginning. Social injustice can be considered to fall into two categories, which are often inter-connected. These categories are defined as 'Inter-Social Treatment' and 'Unequal Government Regulation'. "Inter-Social Treatment involves unequal treatment of a group(s) of people within the local and regional scale. The basis for this unequal treatment is usually due to a personal belief about that group(s): Unequal Government Regulations are laws and regulations that purposefully or otherwise,**

discriminate a group(s) from the same opportunities and resources, based on differences that are unique to that group(s)”

(cited: <https://www.pachamama.org/social-justice/social-justice-issues>) Examples may include: unfair labour practices, racial, gender, age or ethnicity discrimination, inequality of health care or education based on certain criteria and to the worst degree, systematic genocide based on certain criteria.

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David's Story: God Sees The Heart Of Us

[David](#), the shepherd boy-turned-king and famous author of the Psalms, is perhaps one of the most complex characters in the Bible. At times, he displays examples of great faith, leadership and spirituality. Yet, these admirable qualities are often starkly contrasted against the deplorable choices and wicked actions for which he was responsible.

How can God have cause to say of him *“I have found David, the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, who will do all my will.”* (1 Samuel 13:14, Acts 13:22)? How could God say this about a man whose actions at times seemed deeply in contrast to the will and character of God himself?

Examining the **why** of this statement tells us so much about how God really sees us and, in turn, how we should see ourselves.

God See Beyond The Valleys

In the vast landscape that is our life, there are moments of grandeur, like lofty mountain peaks. And yet there are valleys too, times when we find ourselves in low and desperate places.

These are the times when we find ourselves making poor choices or bad decisions or, like David, being responsible for actions that are completely wrong and offensive to God.

Among the list of David's failures is found adultery (2 Samuel 11:4) and murder (2 Samuel 11:15). He was less than an exemplary example as a father (2 Samuel 13:15-22), and at times, as a king. It could be difficult to see what God saw or loved about this man, when collating the different snapshots of his life.

It seems contradictory that the very thing that God commended David for – his heart – is the very place in which these evil choices find their root.

“For out of the heart come evil thoughts: murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.” – Matthew 15:19, NLT

Yet God sees beyond the valleys. He deciphers the intentions of our heart and looks past the lapses in our spirituality or even those sins we find most heinous. In a certain sense, our mistakes matter less than our motivations. He is more interested in who we can become than in who we are now and this is exactly what He saw in David, the potential and the will to **do** better and to **be** better.

This is why He was able to look into David's heart and see something of Himself there.

That David was considerably flawed is unquestionable. His love for God, however, is not. His ability to be deeply touched by truth and show genuine remorse for his wrongdoings is what God loved about him. That he **wanted** to do right, even though he often didn't, is what God took notice of. He displayed a truly penitent response when confronted with the reality of his decisions and his many psalms are evidence of his beautiful, contrite spirit.

Despite Our Flaws, God Still Loves Us

The Bible doesn't seek to gloss over David's mistakes. He could have been easily painted in quite a different light; recorded for history as a glowing example of virtue and goodness. Yet he wasn't and that, in itself, is telling.

God wants us to learn something very important from David's life, his choices and his mistakes. God wants us to learn that despite all our flaws and weaknesses or even despite the worst things we may have done, God is able to see into our hearts and love us for who we really are.

We see God's love displayed in the most ultimate way by the provision of His son as the saviour of mankind. God didn't send His son to die for a world of righteous men and women. In actuality, God knew how deeply flawed the human race was, yet still He sent [Jesus](#) to die for humanity. He knew what we **could** become and what He hoped we **would** become, and that was enough.

"For at just the right time, while we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. It is rare indeed for anyone to die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God proves His love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." – Romans 5:5-7, NIV

Does this mean that we can do what we like, because God loves us anyway? Not at all. Paul the Apostle answers this question in Romans 6:1-2 where he says *"Of course not! How can we who died as far as sin is concerned go on living in it?"*

Just because God will forgive us, doesn't mean we should provide Him endless opportunity! Just because God's gift of grace has been given, doesn't mean we should abuse it.

Choices And Consequences

Did David “get away with” the terrible things he did, just because God loved him? Absolutely not. God’s universal law of choice and consequence, established in Eden, still played out in David’s life.

David suffered great loss, political instability, serious dysfunction within his family and heartbreaking betrayal by his peers, as a direct result of his actions. God didn’t shield him from these or remove them from his life, even though He certainly had the power to do so.

Just like David, we are [responsible for the consequences of our choices](#) and must learn to live with them. Yet, we can be confident that God can see to the heart of us too. That He is still working in our lives, despite our failures, to [bring us to Him](#). And that He alone assesses our motives.

“All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight, But the LORD weighs the motives.” Proverbs 16:2, NKJV

How Should We See Ourselves?

It’s very easy to judge ourselves from the valley floor. We may be living with deep regrets about choices and decisions we’ve made in the past. We may feel judged by others and feel that no-one really knows us or understands our motives. We may even doubt God’s love for us and His ability to forgive us.

The deeply personal message of the Bible is that God **does** love us. He doesn’t judge us on our moments of failure or weakness – He knows and understands that we’re human. He surveys the landscape of our life, both the highs and lows and is able to weigh that all in the balance, seeing to the heart of who we really are.

“Then hear from heaven, your dwelling place. Forgive and act;

deal with everyone according to all they do, since you know their hearts (for you alone know every human heart)” – 1 Kings 8:39, NIV

God doesn't want us to remain in the valleys. He is ready and willing to help us climb out of them. We have a remarkable gift of grace and forgiveness offered to us, through Jesus, and it is God's power in our lives that can bring us up from the valley floor and on to the mountain heights. Like David, our hearts will sing the song of ascent:

“I lift up my eyes to the mountains— where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.” Psalm 121:1-2

Paul the Apostle likens the gift of grace to treasure in jars of clay. This treasure is God's glorious light that has shone in our hearts, illuminating what lies within and giving us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. It's grace that teaches our hearts to trust God and relieves our fears. And it's grace that will lead us home. Amazing Grace – how sweet the sound! How precious it is!

“But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.” 1 Corinthians 4:7

This article was first published 28 May 2018

Abraham | Father Of The Faithful

(Not a reader? Take a listen instead ↓)

I heard a sermon recently about the life of Abraham and it got me thinking a lot about the man, his life and the choices that he made. There are very good reasons why he's described in the Bible as "the father of the faithful" (Romans 4:12) and "the friend of God".

It's worthwhile considering these two great epitaphs about a man who provides so much inspiration and encouragement for our own lives today.

Who Was Abraham?

Abraham, originally named Abram, was born (c 2000 BCE) and lived in the city of Ur, in what is now modern-day Iraq. Abraham was the son of Terah, ninth in descent from Noah, who was the main character in the Great Flood narrative found in Genesis 6-9. After the Great Flood, Noah's descendants settled and spread out from what is now modern Turkey, moving south into the region of Mesopotamia.

Ur was an important [Sumerian](#) city-state in ancient Mesopotamia. Mesopotamia, meaning "land between rivers", has long been called the cradle of civilisation and the region was one of the four riverine civilisations where writing was invented. Once a coastal city, near the mouth of the Euphrates on the Persian Gulf, the coastline has shifted over time and Ur is now well inland, on the south bank of the Euphrates, in modern-day Iraq.

As with all the city-states, Ur was centered on a temple

dedicated to the particular patron god or goddess of the city. The city was ruled over by a priestly governor or a king, who was intimately tied to religious rites that took place in the city.

It was a wealthy, prosperous and advanced city, with culture, religion and social structures firmly established. This cradle of civilisation was also the seat of a vigorous polytheism, chief of whom was *Nanna*, the Sumerian-Akkadian moon god.

It is with this rich and complex background that Abraham is introduced to us in Genesis 12. This is where God appears to Abraham for the first time, telling him to leave all that was familiar and travel to an unknown place.

Hebrews 11, the great dissertation on faith, expands further, telling us that *“by an act of faith, Abraham said **yes to God’s call** to travel to an unknown place that would become his home. When he left, he had no idea where he was going”* (Hebrews 11:8-10).

The Call Of Abraham

God’s call has been echoing down the centuries, appealing to any who would listen. Isaiah 55 likens this call to the provision of thirst-quenching water, free of charge, to those who are dying of thirst.

“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.” Isaiah 55:1, ESV

Abraham, surrounded by gods of every description, was dying of spiritual thirst and eagerly accepted the call of the one true God when it came. However, the most interesting and thought-provoking aspect of Abraham’s acceptance is the fact that **he had no idea where he was going.**

Think for a moment what Abraham was leaving behind in Ur; the comforts and security of a highly advanced civilisation, the birthplace of culture, learning, and writing. A well-established society, wealthy and prosperous.

He left all this on the word and promise of God (Genesis 12:1-3). He chose to enter into God's story and this choice was the turning point in his life. It was a risky decision from Abraham's perspective, based only on trust, and it is this extreme act of faith that enabled God to count him righteous ("justify" him) and guaranteed him the title of father of the faithful. He "*trusted God to set him right, instead of trying to be right on his own*" (Romans 4:1-3)

Paul, when commenting at length on the life of Abraham (Romans 4), does not say "Abraham *worked* for God and therefore was justified." Neither does he say "Abraham *undertook acts of love* and, because of this, was justified." or that "Abraham *made progress in character reformation* and therefore was justified.

He says, "Abraham ***believed*** God and that faith was credited to him as righteousness."

It is the one aspect that elevates Abraham to the superior example of what faith is and why, without it, it's impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). Hebrews 11 further indicates that faith is not about what we 'know' but is confidence and trust in God and belief that His promises are sure.

I find this remarkable: the word *believe* used in Mark 16:16 in relation to the preaching of the gospel ("whoever *believes* and is baptised will be saved, but whoever does not *believe* will be condemned") is the same word used in Hebrews 11:6 describing Abraham's decision to leave Ur. It's a translation of the Greek word *pisteōs* (πίστεως) and means 'to have faith' or 'to entrust'.

Abraham *believed* that God exists and that He rewards those who

seek Him (without any facts or proof at that time that this was true). Then, he then acted upon it (living faith).

He demonstrated the kind of faith/belief that was worth commentary in Hebrews. And not just commentary, it's the kind of faith we are to model.

It certainly wasn't built on His 'correct doctrinal understanding' of God. It was trust *in* God. The reality is that when he left, he had no idea where he was going and, likely, a limited revelation, at the time, of the God whose call he was responding to. He simply *entrusted* his story into God's safekeeping and believed that God was good for His word. This is the definition of belief.

God looks to our heart. He's far more interested in who we can become, than in who we are right now. He's also not impressed by the amount of catechisms we can recite or how much we know. None of those things are equivalent to the biblical meaning of 'belief'. 'Believing' is *to have faith*, specifically, to have faith in the promise of God, not 'to have agreement to doctrine'.

Believing is firstly a posture of the heart. *Having faith* is trusting God and believing in His provision of 'water without cost'. Faith is looking away from our hopeless, ungodly self and looking to God's grace.

The fulfillment of God's promise to us depends entirely on trusting God and embracing Him and what He is doing.

This book [the Bible] is different. This is a world of revelation: God revealing to people just like us – men and women created in God's image – how He works and what is going on in this world in which we find ourselves. At the same time that God reveals all this, God draws us by invitation and command to participate in His working life. We gradually (or suddenly) realise that we are insiders in the most significant action of our time as God establishes His grand

rule of love and justice on this earth (as it is in heaven). 'Revelation' means that we are reading something we couldn't have guessed at or figured out on our own." | Eugene Peterson

Abraham Becomes A Father

Abraham is, quite literally, the father of the Jewish and Muslim peoples of the world but he became a father, long before either of his sons, from whom these descendants would come, were born. He was and is styled "father" of all those people who would embrace what God is doing for them and who believe and trust in that work. Abraham is the father of us all, if we choose it (Romans 4:18).

Accepting God's call in our own life, entering into the same promises made to Abraham, and trusting that God will make good on His word brings us into the great story of what God is doing with humanity.

"Long ago the Scriptures said God would accept the Gentiles because of their faith. This is why God told Abraham the good news that all nations would be blessed because of him." | Galatians 3:8, CEV

Abraham – The Friend Of God

God really wants us to know Him and trust Him. He always has. His plan from the very beginning was to have a relationship with us. Even when it seemed like we had ruined every chance of that, He went out of His way to put measures in place to repair the relationship, by sending His son to save the world.

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." | John 3:16, ESV

Faith is what brings us to that place of being "put right with

God” but it is faith, meshed with action, that really brings us into a full relationship with Him.

The all-encompassing meaning of belief is intrinsically linked with the actions that back it up – seamless *believing and doing*. It isn't the doing that makes us right, but it's impossible to show our faith, without the doing. James tells us that it's like separating a body from the life force or spirit within – all you end up with is a corpse (James 2:18-26).

It is this [faith, coupled with action](#) – *believing and doing* – that elevates Abraham from being not just a “father of faith” but also the “friend of God” – participant in a close and intimate relationship of knowing and being known.

Abraham is now regarded as one of the most influential people in all of history. The world's three largest monotheistic religions—in fact possibly monotheism itself—found their beginnings with him. Over 3 billion people in the modern world cite Abraham as the “father” of their religion. Abraham was promised by his God descendants as numerous as the stars of the sky, but today two branches of his family, the Jews and the Muslims, continue to battle for his birthright. – [Encyclopedia.com](#)

Epilogue

What did Abraham find in a strange and unknown place?

What Abraham found was grace in the eyes of God, through faith alone. God drew him to faith and God counted that faith as righteousness – as a “right standing with God”.

His great legacy and true birthright is as the Father of Faith to countless people who have come after him, regardless of their social status ([Jeremiah 22:3](#)), ethnicity ([Acts 10:34-35](#)), or gender ([Galatians 3:28](#)).

Having faith or believing isn't measured by an exhaustive list of facts we say we agree with but rather the act of entrusting our lives to God [through the work of His Son] and acting and living in a way that shows we believe His promise to be true.

The phrase *to believe* can sometimes be hijacked and become synonymous with *agreement to a list of doctrines*, but to make it this loses the living reality of what is meant by the word and contradicts the examples given to us of those who *believed* ('had faith').

The solid rock of confidence in Christ must be the starting point of a Christian's faith, not an extensive list of facts to which they may give agreement, but their heart possibly remains unconverted.

Abraham knew very little but gave all his heart in confidence and trust to God. Perhaps we would call this *allegiance*. Perhaps we ought to speak more of *allegiance* and less of *doctrine* when evangelising.

We're not joining a club when we become Christians, we're giving our lives in trust to the Master and this trust will hold us far more steadily through the buffeting waves of life than all the facts (true or otherwise) that we've collected in our heads.

Having faith like Abraham looks like not always knowing what the next step is, what the future will look like, or even how we'll get there. But it also looks like movement and transition; a stepping forward in confidence, believing in the One who does know what the future holds, trusting that He is a good, good Father and a rewarder of those who seek Him.

"We don't believe something by merely saying we believe it, or even when we believe that we believe it. We believe something when we act as if it were true." | Dallas Willard

Abraham's journey in faith towards the great unknown can become ours too. We just have to accept God's call and take that first step...

Further Recommended Reading

1. The subject of faith, coupled with action, is one of the great threads running through the Bible and makes for interesting and inspiring reading. I would recommend the following chapters as further reading on the subject: Genesis 12, Romans 4, Hebrews 11, and James 2.

2. As always, I value feedback and conversation, so I'd love your comments and thoughts on this subject!