

## Genesis 12-13:4: “Purge. Progress. Pursue.”

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### INTRO:

This morning, we’ll be studying from the book of Genesis, specifically in chapter 12.

*If you need a Bible, please catch our ushers’ attention and they’ll make sure you get one to follow along this morning.*

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*This morning, we’ll learn from a man named Abram whose name meant, “Father,” yet he was 75 years old and – still, no children... Let’s just say, Abram was preparing for retirement at this point.*

*You’ve heard the saying, “All dolled up and no place to go.”?*

*Well, for Abram, we could say he was, “All ‘dad-joked’ up and no one to embarrass!” He had read his copy of “World’s Greatest Collection of Dad Jokes” from cover to cover year-after-year.*

*Dad jokes are the best. You know why? Because if a joke falls flat and no one laughs, you just blame it on being a dad. When a single guy makes a flat joke, we say, “Aw, he’s just immature.”*

*But people take pity on dads.*

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The title of today’s message is, “**Purge, Progress, Pursue.**”

The account of Abram’s journey in Genesis 12 really outlines a perfect parallel for our own journey with the Lord.

*There are three things that take place for the Christian who desires a serious walk with the Lord:*

- **Purging** (a purging of yourself from the world and the things of this world from your life)
- **Progression** (a genuine moving forward to the call of obedience to God in your life)
- **Pursuit** (recognizing God’s pursuit of you in your life – and then pursuing God and His call on your life)

*Let's pray and ask the Lord to speak to our hearts through His Word this morning.*

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## PRAYER

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First of all, we all know the man that we're studying this morning as Abraham. Before God changed his name to Abraham, he was known as he is in Genesis chapter 12 this morning, as [Abram, meaning, "Father."](#)

For the sake of our Scripture this morning and to put us in the timeline of where Abraham was in his walk with the Lord in this chapter, I am going to call him "Abram."

So, try not to be confused if I slip and call him two different names.

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The end of Genesis 11:27-30 outlines Abram's family and the beginning of his journey and walk with the Lord.

God told Abram to leave the land of Ur, his home, and go to a land that He would show him. God was even specific enough to tell Abram he needed to leave his extended family behind.

But the events in verses 31-32 are actually out of order from how they're recorded here in Genesis. We know this, because when Stephen addresses the religious leaders in [Acts chapter 7 \(7:2-4\)](#), he tells us "The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, BEFORE he dwelt in Haran, and said to him, 'Get out of your country and from your relatives, and come to a land that I will show you.' Then he came out of the land of the Chaldeans and dwelt in Haran. And from there, his father was dead, He moved him to this land in which you now dwell."

I'll make mention to some key points found at the end of chapter 11 shortly, but for now, take a look at God's instructions to Abram in Genesis chapter 12:

*12<sup>1</sup> Now the LORD had said to Abram:*

*“Get out of your country,  
From your family  
And from your father’s house,  
To a land that I will show you.  
<sup>2</sup>I will make you a great nation;  
I will bless you  
And make your name great;  
And you shall be a blessing.  
<sup>3</sup>I will bless those who bless you,  
And I will curse him who curses you;  
And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”*

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What an incredible promise!

God promised Abram that through him, He would bring a great nation. [He promised Abram an enormous plot of beautiful land, eventually, the land we know today as Israel](#), and He later says that Abram's descendants will be like the sands on the shore and the stars in the sky. What a great blessing, indeed.

Today, there are almost 9 million people living in Israel, which doesn't even count for Abram’s descendants that lived from the time he settled here, all the way until today - AND BEYOND - Just take a look at the Jewish and Christian population over the past several thousand years and you’ll see just a *glimpse* of God’s promise to Abram here in chapter 12.

A very key promise from God that has benefited even you and me today.

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And, here in chapter 12, we see the first requirement of Abram’s journey with the Lord: A [Purging](#).

Abram’s first pivotal moment in his walk with the Lord (as recorded in verse one) was to **“Get out...”**

Sounds kind of harsh, huh?

But, not really. Here’s what we know about Abraham from studying the Bible:

- No Old Testament character (aside from Moses) is mentioned in the New Testament more than Abraham.
- Abraham is known as “God’s friend” in James 2:23.
- Paul tells us in Galatians 3:7 that those of the faith are known as children of Abraham.
- Hebrews 11 makes it clear that Abraham was a great man of faith.

But he did not START there.

Abram and his family were from the land of Ur of the Chaldeans, a very wealthy and prestigious area. But they were also known for their worship of idols and pagan gods. It was definitely an area in which Abram needed to flee.

**I like to think that maybe God used a Southern accent when he told Abram to leave. “Abram – get out of Ur!” ☺**

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According to Joshua 24:2, Abram’s father, Terah, and his family “served other gods.”

When God spoke to Abram and called him out, he literally called him, “OUT!” Much like many of us here today, when God first spoke to you – and prodded and poked at your heart – I’m guessing you weren’t fully living in obedience to the Lord?

But, I do know – [2 Chronicles 16:9](#) says, “For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him.”

I can’t speak for Abram, because I wasn’t there, but I’m guessing this statement applied in his life at this time.

Even in the midst of pagan worship and idolatry, God saw something in Abram – something that was, perhaps, different enough from his surroundings that set him apart for God’s purpose and plan.

[When I think about the eyes of the Lord running to and fro throughout the whole earth, looking for those whose hearts are loyal to Him... Lord, I pray Your eyes would land on my heart. And on the hearts of these, Your people.](#)

God spotted Abram in a land of mayhem.

He sees you.

BUT – in order for the Lord to use Abram – and for Abram to be fully obedient to the call of the Lord in his life, it required a **purging**.

God was very clear to Abram when He said, “Get out of your country, FROM YOUR FAMILY.”

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Was Abram obedient? Not fully, actually! He left his country, yes, and maybe even some of his idol-worshipping family... but he still took his father, Terah, and his nephew, Lot, with him.

There’s a reason (at times) that following the Lord means separating yourself from the things and from the people that will hold you back.

Something that Abram had to learn early in his walk is the same thing we must learn in our growth with the Lord: Our faith – is just that... OUR faith! Sometimes... being obedient to the Lord often requires that we give up certain roles of our relationships with other people.

A relationship with the Lord often conflicts with the relationship of others who are very close to us – and certainly our relationship with the world.

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At Christmastime, we read, “*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!*” (Luke 2:14). And, yes, that is true. Jesus came to this earth to bring peace. He is known in Isaiah 9:6 as the “*Prince of Peace*”.

But - the peace that JESUS came to bring – is a peace between man and God. Not man and the world.

Jesus said it best: “*Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and ‘a man’s enemies will be those of his own household.’*” (Matthew 10:34-36).

Well, there you go.

Don't misunderstand! Jesus didn't come to bring a *literal* sword! Jesus didn't come to bring tension, nor did He come to cause division amongst Christians and disrupt Christian households!

What He is saying is – there comes a time when – in order to move FORWARD in your relationship with the Lord – you may be faced with the choice of choosing obedience to Him over obedience to those around you.

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John chapter 15 was a passage that literally changed my life when I first started in my walk with the Lord.

And it was because I was struggling so much to get serious with the Lord – AND – still fit in with those who were around me.

But – my whole view changed when I read these words of Jesus – they set me free! I realized it's okay to stand out!

In the 2017 movie, *Wonder*, 10-year old Auggie Pullman is trying to figure out how to fit in and have a “normal” life while dealing with Treacher Collins syndrome. But, because of his looks, he immediately stands out to everyone around him.

His natural inclination and thought? “How can I fit in? How can I disappear? How can I live a normal life without being noticed?!”

To which his mom replies, “*You can't blend in when you were born to stand out. Show them.*”

God did not create the Christian to blend in with the world around them. He created them to stand out for Jesus.

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I don't believe God wanted Abram to forsake his family and leave them stranded, trying to figure out life on their own. And I don't believe God would have us mistreat our family and abandon them, either! But – I do believe Jesus wanted to make the point clear to each of His followers: *Following Him means separating yourself from those who are not following Him.*

It means separating yourself and purging yourself from those things which will hold you back in your walk with the Lord. You've got to make your relationship with God your OWN relationship with God.

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Remember those pictures where you have to pick out the things that don't belong? It's as if there are two pictures that show your life. **The first is a giant picture that shows the world. What doesn't belong? YOU! The second is a picture of your life... and what doesn't belong? The world.**

HEY – anything that doesn't belong has to go!

**There is a huge liquidation sale for the Christian who wants to progress with the Lord! Your business with the world is now closed. It's time to reap the benefits of walking with the Lord.**

Ask yourself: *What is keeping me from progressing in my walk with the Lord?*

Loose the strongholds.

It's time for a **progression**.

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*<sup>4</sup> So Abram departed as the LORD had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.*

What did Abram do? He went. He departed as the Lord had spoken to him.

Good job, Abram! That's progress 😊

And take note of Abram's age when he did! Abram was 75 years old when the Lord called him out and moved him forward.

There is no age-limit on being used by God! I know plenty of people that have given their life to God at the young age of 75!

But I've known others who think of themselves as being "too late" or "too old" to make that decision.

**Saul of Tarsus wasn't too wicked for God to save, Abram wasn't too old for God to use, and you are not past the ability for God to use you!**

Get that thought out of your head! It's time to move forward with God.

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At this point, Abram was only PARTIALLY obedient to what God called him to do, and it brought some real negative consequences into his life.

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For instance:

Names in the Bible are often an indicator of a person's personality, or maybe a prophecy, or something that is very specific to who they are.

Abram's name (at this time) means, "Father" – yet – his wife, Sarai, was barren. She's been unable to produce any children for Abram over all these years and, now... [Abram and Sarai are well-advanced in years at this point, and Sarai is now past the age of childbearing anyway.](#)

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Can you imagine being Abram and introducing yourself to others? "Hi, I'm 'Father.' I'm 75 years old and I have ZERO children!"

[He breaks out the rolodex of photos, but by this point, he just ignores the blank stares.](#)

"A little ambitious with your name there, weren't you, 'Abram'?"

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Abram's father was [Terah, whose name means, "delay."](#)

Together, they travel to the town of [Haran, which means, "parched," or "barrenness."](#)

So, when Terah, or "delay," went with a partially obedient Abram to Haran, a place of "barrenness," we see that *delay* and *barrenness* are what follow.



An interesting challenge to us in our times of disobedience.

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But, here's the coolest part: God did not take away His promise to Abram. Because, God is a *faithful* God and He does what He says He will do!

But – He did put His promises "on hold" until Abram was ready to listen.

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*<sup>5</sup> Then Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people whom they had acquired in Haran, and they departed to go to the land of Canaan. So they came to the land of Canaan. <sup>6</sup> Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem, as far as the terebinth tree of Moreh. And the Canaanites were then in the land. <sup>7</sup> Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." And there he built an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him.*

Notice: It was AFTER Abram was obedient to God's instruction that the Lord appeared to him once again to remind him of the promise.

Here, we see Abram do what he does best. *As soon as God promised him this land, Abram builds an altar, or a place to worship, and he worshipped the Lord.*

Abram never lived in a permanent home here in Canaan; he was always living in tents! Abram knew that his earthly dwelling was only temporary, and that his permanent dwelling was one day with the Lord.

Yet – he can't help but live in the world. But we must remember – that our journey on this earth is only temporary. *2 Peter 2:11 reminds us of this: "Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul..."*

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The Bible is clear: We are called to live **IN** the world, but not to become **OF** the world, or to become like the world that surrounds us.

Jesus prayed for His followers in *John 17:15*: “*I do not pray that You should take them **OUT** of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one.*”

The answer isn't to remove ourselves from the world or worldly situations... The answer is **ABSTAINING** from those “*lusts, which war against our soul.*”

Jesus simply prayed, “God, keep them from the evil one.” Other than the view, what changed for Abram wasn't the people and situations around him. What had to change was **him!**

*Romans 12:2* is a great reminder of this thought: “*And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*”

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When Abram arrived in Canaan, he found himself among some of the most wicked people around. They, too, were idol-worshippers. Yet, it didn't stop Abram from making a name for himself as one who was set apart for God. Everywhere Abram went, he pitched a tent, built an altar, and he worshiped the Lord!

He was always leaving burned spots and heaps of ashes that signified who he was to the world.

*In other words, everywhere he went, he left his mark. Are you leaving your mark on the world around you?*

*In Acts 17, the Jews of Paul's day accused the disciples of turning “the world upside down.” Can that be said of you? Does your workplace see Jesus in you? Does your FAMILY see Jesus in you? Do your spouse and kids see that you've been transformed by Jesus? Are YOU leaving your mark – on the world around you...?*

You and I are no different than Abram here. If you've given your life to Jesus, then there is a godly call on your life to **LEAVE** the things of the world behind you – to be **OBEDIENT** to the call of the Lord ahead of you – and to move **FORWARD** in obedience to Jesus, as you walk with Him daily.

This is how we **progress** in our walk with the Lord.

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*<sup>8</sup> And he moved from there to the mountain east of Bethel, and he pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; there he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD.*

Abram is in such a pivotal moment of his life right now – and here’s why:

We’re told he pitched his tent between Bethel and Ai.

Once again – names often have their perfect meaning in the Bible:

Bethel means, “House of God”, while Ai means, “place of ruin”. Did you catch that?

Abram pitched his tent between the place “of God” that was BEFORE him – and the “place of ruin” that was BEHIND him.

A pivotal moment, indeed. If Abram were to turn back? Ruin awaits.

But ahead of him is the “House of God.”

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And, yet... Abram still had a lot to learn – and a long way to go:

*<sup>9</sup> So Abram journeyed, going on still toward the South. <sup>10</sup> Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to dwell there, for the famine was severe in the land.*

I believe – that God wants to USE our problems, our trials and temptations, in order to **GROW** us. To progress us in our faith.

If life were always “peachy” we’d just end up staying in our own, little bubbly comfort zone. We’d never had any reason to allow God to stretch us. The answer to a full cup isn’t to dump some of the

overwhelming contents out... the answer is to allow your cup to be *stretched* -- so that it can hold MORE.

And, don't you want MORE of God's blessings in your life? It might require some growth.

As Pastor Sandy has told us: *"There is no growth without change – no change without loss – and no loss without pain."*

You've heard the old saying, "Where God guides, He provides!" And, I believe that. **God will not LEAD you somewhere, only to LEAVE you there** (MH). If God is behind the problem, I assure you – He's also in front of it – and He will be present in the midst of it.

**WE** must learn – to let God lead us *through* it.

Much like we do sometimes, Abram assumed too much responsibility for God's plan!

**But – God's *peace* should always follow His *plan*.** Surely, Abram did not feel a peace about what he was doing.

The peace of knowing you are following Jesus is better than the guilt that comes with a disobedience to God's Word.

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One of the things I love about Abram's story is this: He was a great man of faith, yet still a man of great mistakes. Yet, God chose such a man as this to carry out His plan – and His future purpose.

And, God still uses people like Abram – like me – and like you – every, single day... to carry out His plan – and His purpose. Aren't you grateful for God's grace in your life?

Abram is famous for his faith! May we be known for ours. But, take comfort that even if you don't have faith the size of Abram's, you DO serve the same God! God can INCREASE your faith, as He did with Abram along his journey. **The Abram we know (and read about in Hebrews 11 – "The Hall of Faith") is a man who became a legend in his faith.**

Yet, here, we see a man who is still *growing* in his faith – and in his obedience – to the Lord. May we allow the Lord to continually grow us in our faith – and in our obedience – to Him.

Don't become discouraged. Never stop growing. Never stop progressing.

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*<sup>11</sup> And it came to pass, when he was close to entering Egypt, that he said to Sarai his wife, "Indeed I know that you are a woman of beautiful countenance. <sup>12</sup> Therefore it will happen, when the Egyptians see you, that they will say, 'This is his wife'; and they will kill me, but they will let you live. <sup>13</sup> Please say you are my sister, that it may be well with me for your sake, and that I may live because of you."*

Abram recognizes the beauty in his wife's appearance. Smart man!

Abram knows her beauty is so great that they will want to take her from Abram to be given to Pharaoh as his wife. See, the Egyptians' custom did not allow for divorce. But – if Abram were dead... then Sarah could be given to Pharaoh as his wife! Apparently, they DID allow for murder! ☺ And, Abram knew what was coming.

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He says in verses 12-13:

*"Therefore it will happen, when the Egyptians see you, that they will say, 'This is his wife'; and they will kill me, but they will let you live. Please say you are my sister, that it may be well with me for your sake, and that I may live because of you."*

Abram and Sarai enter into the outer limits of Egypt, their GPS starts going off and they realize they're close...

And then Abram looks at his wife and says, "Woman, listen to me! You're beautiful."

"Well, thank you, Abram! What did I do to deserve such --- "

"Yeah, yeah, yeah; there's no time! Sarai, you're so beautiful -- that when the Egyptians see you, they're going to take you as a wife for Pharaoh – and kill me."

Abram has high confidence! He says, “Do this – that it may be well with me – for YOUR sake.” He says, “Listen, Baby. I’m better off alive to you than dead – trust me!” [She’s over there reviewing his life-insurance policy, realizing just how true that was!](#)

He doesn’t even seem concerned for her safety at this point! “Hey – they’ll take you as a wife for Pharaoh, but at least I’ll live! We’ll figure out the next step later – just be cool for now!”

"Please, honey... If you love me, let me live. Say you're my sister!"

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And, now, yet *another* issue arises. He asks that his wife portray a truth other than what’s at face-value. I say “truth,” because in Genesis 20:12, we read that Sarai really was Abram’s sister. They shared the same father but had a different mother, so – yes, they *were* husband and wife – but they were (in fact) *ALSO* – brother and sister.

In Biblical times, it wasn't uncommon sometimes for people to marry within the family. In fact, we see plenty of times where servants were sent to find a wife for their master's son, and they would often be instructed to travel to the homeland of their master, to find a wife of their distant family.

Looks like Abram didn't look TOO far in the distance, did he? :-)

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*<sup>14</sup> So it was, when Abram came into Egypt, that the Egyptians saw the woman, that she was very beautiful. <sup>15</sup> The princes of Pharaoh also saw her and commended her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken to Pharaoh’s house. <sup>16</sup> He treated Abram well for her sake. He had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male and female servants, female donkeys, and camels.*

I’m sure Abram started to realize at this point – [he started picking up a lot of baggage in his times of disobedience. When he was disobedient in the beginning by taking his extended family, he ended up with all the problems that Lot brought along. When he picked up his extra animals in Egypt, it later was the source of strife between his and Lot’s servants. And, now, one of the Egyptian maidservants, Hagar, will become the source of contention in his own household for many years to come.](#)

Hey – what happens in Egypt doesn't stay in Egypt! As [Numbers 32:23](#) says, “...*be sure your sin will find you out.*”

“\*One, \*tiny, \*simple, \*‘harmless’” act can affect not just you... but your family, your friends, and possibly many, many more in years to come. This is why it's important for us to listen to the Lord's leading in our life, and to reject what seems right in our own eyes at the time. We cannot be people who live “in the moment”. We must learn to look past the “here and now,” and start looking ahead to what's to come.

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Notice what God does for Abram – even in his disobedience: God blesses him. God's Word says in [Romans 2:4](#), “*Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?*”.

I have found this to be so true in my life – time and time again. Nothing will reveal the kindness of the Lord quicker than His blessings being showered down upon you – when you know you don't deserve them!

Has that ever happened to you? You are in a place of disobedience and suddenly the Lord just blesses you? “Wow, Lord. What did I do to deserve this?”

“*Nothing.*” ☺

You deserve death and Hell. But because of God's grace – and God's mercy – and His Sovereignty – and – yes, even His kindness... He finds subtle ways to gently lead us back to Him.

God leads us out of our *worldliness*, He leads us through our *wilderness*, and He even leads us *BACK* to Him with His *lovingkindness*.

I couldn't think of three W's. So, you're stuck with two W's and one L. Which is better than what the Falcons are providing for you, so there.

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Look at how the Lord steps in in Abram's time of desperate need:

*<sup>17</sup> But the LORD plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife.*

This is how good the Lord is. God saw Abram's need, and met him right where he was. God saw that Abram was about to throw his life away, and God said, "No way."

But Pharaoh's no dummy...

*<sup>18</sup> And Pharaoh called Abram and said, "What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? <sup>19</sup> Why did you say, 'She is my sister'? I might have taken her as my wife. Now therefore, here is your wife; take her and go your way." <sup>20</sup> So Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him; and they sent him away, with his wife and all that he had.*

Pharaoh and his house are plagued, but God opened Pharaoh's eyes to what was REALLY going on.

Pharaoh figures out Abram's secret and wants nothing to do with his foolishness!

He calls Abram over, chews him out, tells him what he should have done instead, and says, "GET OUT!"

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Now, where did we hear those words before? "Get out."

Remember when God first spoke to Abram in the beginning of chapter 12? What did he say?

His first words to Abram were, "Get out."

Why? Because Abram was in a place where he didn't belong.

What are God's words to us when we're in a place we shouldn't be? "Get out!"

Remember – we must **PURGE** what doesn't belong if we ever expect to **PROGRESS** in our walk with the Lord...

And every now and then – when we mess up – and do stupid things like Abram did... God gently reminds us to come back to the start. It's time to reset. [We see the PURSUIT of our Heavenly Father, who loves us too much to see us ruin our life.](#)



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*13<sup>1</sup> Then Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot with him, to the South. <sup>2</sup> Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold. <sup>3</sup> And he went on his journey from the South as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, <sup>4</sup> to the place of the altar which he had made there at first. And there Abram called on the name of the LORD.*

After Abram sees the kindness of the Lord, he returns to the Lord. He witnessed – firsthand – the **pursuit** of God in his life.

He finds himself right where he started – back to where he should have been all along – in the presence of the Lord.

Learn to recognize the pursuit of God in your own life. He bought you, He paid for you with the blood of His only Son, Jesus, and He redeemed you from the world!

Even when you didn't deserve it. That's the beauty of His grace.

*Deuteronomy 30:6-8 tells us, “For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the Lord loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.”*

The Lord doesn't pursue you because you're “better” than others around you! He pursues you – yes, even you – because He loves you.

And – because we can see the hand of God's work in our life, it gives us reason to praise Him – and love Him back.

WE – can pursue – HIM.

*God promised in Jeremiah 29:13-14: “And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. I WILL BE FOUND by you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back from your captivity.”*

Praise the Lord.

Because of the Lord's pursuit of us, may we be a people who pursue Him!

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In Revelation 2 (2:1-7), Jesus had this against the church in Ephesus: they had left their first love.

Here, we see Abram coming back to the place where he was in the beginning. He comes back to his "firstlove."

If that's you this morning, learn to recognize the **pursuit** of God in your life. And respond to His call.

Because the Lord is waiting. Let's be found in His presence today.

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If you need prayer this morning, we would love to pray with you and ask the Lord to remind you of these truths.

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## **CLOSING PRAYER**

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## **PRAYER COUNSELORS →**

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