



STEP 12: LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE

As we've been looking at the life of Abraham, it's been obvious from the start that this 'journey of faith' is not just a vertical relationship – between us and God. It's a horizontal relationship too – between us and the people around us. Because we do not walk this journey alone – we walk it with others. And while you're alive on this planet, you have the potential to impact others for Him.

In the passage we're going to look at today, Abraham finally – *finally* – comes to realise this fact. Let's turn to ...

Genesis 21:22-34

We live in a world where confusion and conflict can very easily happen. In marriages, families, friendships, workplaces – even churches! In fact, Kellie has a theory: that a lot of people live their lives according to what they're currently watching on TV – life imitating art, as it were.

E.g. if this story had been a soap opera, it might have sounded something like this:

Abimelech: "Abraham, you claim God is with you in everything you do, yes?"

Abraham: "That's right."

Abimelech: "Well, prove it."

Abraham: "What do you mean, 'prove it'?"

Abimelech: "I mean prove it. Swear to me that you're not planning something."

Abraham: "Planning what? What are you talking about?"

Abimelech: "I'm talking about stealing my land once I'm dead, that's what!"

Abraham: "Me? You've got a nerve! The other day your men came along and claimed that one of my wells was theirs. That's what you *call* stealing!"

Abimelech: "I don't know what you're talking about."

Abraham: "Oh really? I bet you set the whole thing up. You've been looking for a chance to drive me out of your land for a while – and taking my wells in the process!"

Abimelech: "How dare you! Are you calling me a thief?"

Abraham: "If the crown fits."

Abimelech: "I've never been so insulted in my life!"

Abraham: "I find that hard to believe."

Abimelech: "That's it! I've had enough! This means war, Abraham!"

Abraham: "Bring it on, Abimelech, bring it on ..."

And so on.

In reality, the dialogue plays out quite differently – for one very important reason. Abraham realises that, however this goes, it will in some way reflect on his relationship with God – and maybe even *affect* that relationship.

So how does he handle it? How should we?

1) Be Kind. Abimelech asks Abraham to promise to treat him as he has been treated – with kindness. And this is so important that Abraham swears to do it – and in the Bible you don't swear unless you seriously mean it.

As the adage goes, people don't care what you know unless they know that you care. It's like the Parable of the Good Samaritan: the message is not so much 'who is my neighbour?' as 'what kind of neighbour am I?' Is God kind? Merciful? Gracious? Yes. Then as much as is possible, so should we be. As Paul says: "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Not 'once we were sorted.'

So, show kindness to the poor, to the lonely, to the lost, to the broken. And to the belligerent, the angry, the arrogant, the fool. Why?

Because Jesus has shown kindness – to *you*.

2) Be Open. Abraham takes the opportunity to complain about something – on this occasion, the seizing of a well by Abimelech's men – because being kind doesn't mean sweeping things under the carpet. Sometimes you have to express yourself – to say what you see and how you feel about it.

But you also have to be open to the possibility you might have got this wrong. Abraham could have said, "Abimelech must know what's going on – I

bet this is all his idea." I.e. he could have thought the worst, rather than the best. But instead, he chooses to believe the best. Because you're more likely to have a positive effect on people if you do.

So, don't bury your grievances, but don't jump to conclusions, either. Ask yourself, "Have I got this right? And am I going about it in the right way?" Be "quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry" (James 1:19).

And when you do speak, choose your words carefully.

3) Be Humble. The 2 men make a covenant, and then Abraham offers Abimelech 7 ewe lambs. Why? As a way of saying, "Listen Abimelech, to avoid any question that this well belongs to me, I want you to accept these 7 lambs as payment." I.e. Abraham is willing to be the bigger man, even losing out in the process. The old Abraham would have looked for a way of gaining as much as he could out of this situation.

The new one is willing to surrender it.

Why? Because he's starting to realise there are bigger hills to die on. When we have disagreements, particularly with non-Christians, the most important thing is not to score a point or win an argument. It's to win a soul. So do everything you can to do as Jesus would – to restore and to reconcile.

And remember: avoidance should be a *last* resort (Matthew 18:15-17).

Stickability Matters!

These 3 things – being kind, being open, being humble - are so important that Abraham and Abimelech swear to do them, and name the place *Beersheba* – which sounds like the Hebrew for 'Well of the Oath' but also 'Well of the 7.' It's a reminder that's still there, 4000 years later. And then, once everyone else has gone, Abraham plants a tamarisk tree – a tree renowned for its endurance and toughness – as a reminder of God's eternal faithfulness. Hence the fact he calls on the name of *Yahveh El Olam* – literally 'He is the Eternal God.' I.e. He's the God who sticks with us, who doesn't give up easily. And if that is true of God and His relationships, it should be true of us, and ours.

It also explains this final verse: "Abraham stayed in the land of the Philistines for a long time."

How often has Abraham left a place? On bad terms? Not here! And stickability says a lot. It's true of marriage, of family, of friendships, of work, of church. It's true of our relationships – with Christians, and non-Christians. Yes, some people are toxic and need to be avoided. But generally, our relationships are the biggest opportunity to let Jesus shine.

So let Him shine, guys. Let Him shine.