

Halfway There

Genesis 11:27-12:5

Let's say you need to meet a friend or client for lunch on the other side of town, but you just can't think of a good place to go. Now there's a very handy website that can help you find the perfect spot. It's called MeetWays.com, and it was established to help people easily find a halfway point between two locations. It also lets you to enter two locations and the type of restaurant you are looking for. Meeting someone halfway for lunch can be a very good thing to do. Or say you're taking a trip, and you want to know what the halfway point is. Just enter the location of both ends of the trip, and in seconds, you'll know—even on your iPhone—totally free of charge.

Imagine that you're having a disagreement with someone. You both have valid points to make, but neither of you wants to budge. Sometimes meeting halfway can be a very good thing. If someone has a goal to lose a certain number of pounds, reaching the half-way point can be a real encouragement. When a church is raising money for a special project, the half-way point can provide the impetus that propels the congregation to finish.

But the half-way point is not always a good place to be, particularly when we're talking about our walk with Christ and our spiritual commitments. In Genesis 11 we are introduced to a man named Terah, who, as it turns out, became the father of Abraham. Terah wasn't a believer, but his life serves as a mirror for many of us as we examine what took place in his life.

Verse 31 tells us that the entire family packed up and left the city of Ur to go to Canaan. We learn in other places, such as Stephen's speech before he was stoned to death, and in Genesis 15, that the reason they left their hometown of Ur was because the Lord directed them away from that city. We know from archeological discoveries that Ur of the Chaldeans was a center for moon-worship. In fact, the name "Terah" in Hebrew is related to the word for "moon." Joshua 24:2 describes Terah as having been an idolater, worshipping false gods. It was from that kind of atmosphere that God called out Terah and his family to go to Canaan.

But they never arrived. They traveled about 550 miles, moving up the Euphrates River until they came to a place called Haran. Terah had had a son named Haran, who had died while they were still living in Ur, as we see in 11:28: *“While his father Terah was still alive, Haran died in Ur of the Chaldeans, in the land of his birth.”*

Added to that was the fact that Haran, like Terah’s hometown of Ur, was a center of moon-worship. Perhaps by this time, Terah was beginning to feel a little homesick, so when he came to this city which reminded him so much of home, he settled there instead.

Did the Lord speak to Terah about continuing his journey into Canaan? The Scriptures are silent about that. But we are able to feel a deep sadness when we read the end of verse 31 and all of verse 32: *“But when they came to Haran, they settled there. Terah lived 205 years, and he died in Haran.”* (Genesis 11:31–32, NIV)

And when he died, Terah was only halfway there. So many blessings and joys for him and his family went undiscovered and unexperienced because he quit before he arrived in Canaan.

Terah’s story is a tragic one. His life stands as a monument to the half-hearted brand of Christianity so many people practice. Many begin the journey towards Christ-likeness, but not so many arrive. Indeed, not many people can say with the apostle Paul, *“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.”* (Philippians 3:12, NIV)

Perhaps you are one of those who have heard the Lord’s call to you sometime in the past, but you have failed to follow through. The closing verses of chapter eleven give us the warning, but the opening verses of chapter twelve give us the hope. This very human tendency to go only halfway in our commitment to the Lord can be victoriously overcome!

We never want to exclude the power of the Holy Spirit from anything we say about our living the Christian life. But there are some things we can do, some things we must do, if we are to have anything more than a halfway kind of commitment.

1 Keep hearing the call, 12:1

We've already seen that the Lord had called the family of Terah to leave Ur and go to Canaan. Terah may have been a good father in that he probably did well in providing for his family, but he evidently tried to worship the Lord God at the same time he was worshiping the false moon-god. He may not have realized it, but the more he worshiped the moon-god, and the longer he stayed in Haran, the fainter grew that original call the Lord had given to him in Ur. There were too many outside influences plugging up his ears and hardening his heart, so that he no longer heard the call.

In chapter twelve, Abram was able to hear the call of God as it came to him personally. His father was gone from the scene, and Abram more and more grew to understand that the Lord God is a personal God, who speaks to His people and Who is intimately involved in their lives. So when the call of God came to Abram as it had come to Terah years before, Abram was ready to respond.

He might have ended up like his father did, finding some city or town which reminded him of home, and settling down there, content to take whatever life offered him. He might have gone only halfway in his commitment to the Lord's leadership, but for one thing: Abram kept hearing the Lord call him.

Verse seven tells us that the Lord appeared to Abram and repeated the promise of blessing in the land of Canaan. Abram heard the call once again. In chapter 13 we see Abram and his nephew Lot parting company, but once again we read of the Lord appearing to Abram and underlining all that He had said to him before. And all of chapter 15 is the record of the Lord's appearing to Abram to tell him that he would have so many descendents that they could not be counted.

Many times along the way Abram had just cause to either turn back or quit before he arrived in Canaan. But the key to his whole-hearted commitment was that he kept hearing the call God had placed upon his life.

In the Hall of Faith, in Hebrews 11, we read this about Abraham, “*By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.*” (Hebrews 11:8, NIV). He heard the call, and he kept on hearing the call.

You and I have been given a call, too! First of all, we have received a call to receive Christ as Lord of our lives. “*Turn to Me and be saved, all you ends of the earth,*” said the Lord in Isaiah 45:22, “*for I am God, and there is no other.*” John recorded in his Book of the Revelation that “*The Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come!’...Whoever is thirsty, let him come and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life*” (Rev 22:17). You may have heard God calling you to be saved, and you may have partially responded, but if you are not saved this morning, it is because you only went half-way in your response to that call.

As a Christian, you should keep hearing the call of God to a life of holiness and commitment. In his first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul reminded them that the Lord had called them to live a holy life: “*For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.*” (1 Thessalonians 4:7, NIV). Paul began his letter to the Roman Christians by reminding them—and we are reminded as well—that Christians are called by God to be *saints!* (Romans 1:7).

Paul prayed for the Ephesians Christians that they might come to fully experience the hope to which the Lord had called them (Eph 1:18). On the basis of that call, they were to live holy lives. Ephesians 4:1 reads, “*As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.*” (Ephesians 4:1, NIV). In other words, keep hearing the call!

Terah evidently did not maintain a vital relationship with the Lord, and as a result, the time came when he no longer heard the Lord at all. Not so with Abram. As we follow him in his journey to Canaan and throughout life, we are able to see that Abram worked at listening to God. Over and over again we read that when Abram arrived at a particular place, that he built an altar to the Lord. He knew that the call God had given him was a strange one, and that he would need to hear it over and over again. The call of God to a life committed to him often sounds strange to our ears and our hearts, but if we are to go further in our walk with Christ than merely “halfway there,” we must keep hearing the call! We must decisively make the time

in our lives to get alone with the Lord to hear Him speak to us. If He is really the Lord, then He is definitely worth listening to.

2 Keep separating yourself from the world, 12:1b

When we think of Abraham, we naturally think of faith. But we overlook one important fact: the reason we know of Abraham's faith is because of the numerous times he was called upon to separate himself from places, people and possessions, that God might fulfill His promise.

For instance, in 12:1, the Lord spoke to Abram and said to him, *"Leave your country, your people, and your father's household and go to the land I will show you."* Many people have left home, many without knowing where they were going. The difference here with Abram was that he was separating himself from everything in his past in order to follow a God he couldn't see. God knew where He was taking Abram and his family, but Abram could not even guess.

Sometimes God will call a person like that today, to come out from his family and friends and his job and school, to go to a place and a work unknown to him. Those around him may not always understand it, but the call is strong and must be obeyed, nevertheless. The person who commits himself entirely to the Lord is a person who is to be remembered for his strong faith in the Lord's guidance and leadership.

But most of the time, the kind of separation you and I are called to is of a different kind. Most of the time, we are called to be separate from the world while remaining right where we are! Shortly before His arrest and trial, Jesus prayed for His disciples. He said, *"My prayer is not that You take them out of the world, but that You protect them from the evil one...Sanctify them by the truth"* (John 17:15-17). The word "sanctify" means "set apart for a holy use." Jesus was praying for His Hebrew disciples, and for us in the twenty-first century, that we might be set apart for holy purposes, separated from the purpose of the evil one.

Most of us have seen the demonstration where a person's body is charged with electricity so that the person's hair stands on end. The secret to that trick is to have the person stand on a platform or sit on a stool so that the person is not touching the ground. In the same way, you and I must be isolated from the influences of the

world around us if we are to be charged with power from on high. There are no tricks involved—just wholehearted commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ, and a willingness to be separated from the world.

It is a verse we've heard before, but have not obeyed nearly enough: "*Come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you*" (2 Corinthians 6:17). Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:11, "*Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.*"

The testimony of so many Christians is that we are like Terah—we are unwilling to separate ourselves from the things which pull us away from the Lord. Those things are comfortable to us and do not pose a threat to our security. If we really got serious with the Lord, we might have to separate ourselves from some of the things and people and places we hold so dear. That is what we think, and we are right. For if we are honest, we will have to admit that some of those things we like to do, some of the people with whom we associate, some of the things we like to own, are pulling us away from the Lord. We make a lot of excuses and become expert at procrastination, but the plain truth is that we wind up going only halfway in our relationship to the Lord.

We must keep separating ourselves from the world! The influences of a world without Christ constantly creep into our lives and hearts like an ominous fog across the water. For that reason, separating ourselves from the world's influence and power is a continuous task. It is a task that must be undertaken for all of life, in every area of life.

3 Keep following the Lord, 12:4-5

To overcome the human tendency to go only halfway in our commitments and promises to the Lord, there is one other thing we should do. We must keep hearing the call, and we must keep separating ourselves from the world. If we do that, the third step becomes simple. We must keep following the Lord.

If Terah had *continued* following the Lord, he would never have settled in Haran. If Abram had *stopped* following the Lord, he would never arrived in Canaan. Reading the account of Abram's life from the Scriptures, we can imagine Abram

pausing in his journey long enough to build an altar to the Lord and praying, “What next, Lord?”

What a tremendous difference it would make in our lives should we begin to ask, “What next, Lord?” on a regular basis. We are not going to Canaan in a physical sense the way Abram was, but we are called to follow the Lord, wherever He would lead us. The Lord Jesus Himself said very pointedly, *“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me”* (Luke 9:23)

We cannot rely on our own power or understanding! But the person who would follow Jesus unreservedly is given a promise from Jesus Himself: *“Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the life of life”* (John 8:12)

Keep following the Lord! He will never lead any of us to go only halfway! He will never abandon us at the halfway point, either. The Christian life is a life to be lived in constant fellowship with the Lord Jesus. He is going to lead us, if we stay close enough to Him to see where He is leading.

At the beginning of this message, we quoted the words of Paul in Philippians 3, where he said, *“I do not consider myself to have arrived spiritually, nor do I consider myself already perfect. But I keep going on, grasping ever more firmly that purpose for which Christ Jesus grasped me”* (v. 12). But pay attention to verse 14: *“But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”*

Paul had a singleness of purpose in his life as he followed the Lord. We are no different. There’s only one way to follow the Lord—wholeheartedly. Anything less is only halfway there.

Are you only “halfway there” in your commitment and relationship with the Lord? Have you ever set out for your spiritual Canaan, but ended up staying in Haran? Did you start out to follow God and walk with Christ, but somewhere along the way you got sidetracked—and never finished your journey? We plan to do what God says, and go where He says to go, but somehow we don’t follow through. Perhaps our fears keep us from trusting God the way we should. Maybe we think

the challenge is too big. Perhaps like Abram's father Terah we've been attracted to the familiar, rather than depend on our faith in God. That is our nature, but it can be overcome! We must keep hearing the call of God to our hearts. We must keep separating ourselves from the world's influences. And we must keep following the Lord.

Are you ready to resume your journey to a spiritual promised land, or are you satisfied to die in Haran?