

Act 1: A Prototype of Faith

Happy New Year, everybody. Thanks. I hope your new year has started really well and that all the plans you've made are perfectly happening. I wish that were my case. I looked at my Bible app this morning and it said, "You're 0 for 2" on my Bible reading. I thought, the one thing I really set out to do—and luckily I have a long drive and I can listen to it and recover.

But a lot of times we make plans, and they don't always work out the way we hoped, right? That shouldn't stop us from making a plan. We have a fresh start here.

Just as a quick overview of what we're going to be doing over the next seven or so weeks, we're going to be looking at purpose. Some places call this mission. It's the idea of what are we actually here for. We're going to look at some general principles while we try to nail down exactly what that is in our vision. Please be here next week after church.

While that's the case, there are some general principles, and we're going to look at them through the first book of the Bible, through Genesis, and what that actually looks like—not just as an individual purpose, but as a church. By February, by the way, we're supposed to have all of our data from all of us synthesized, and we will actually have new vision and new purpose statements. You'll think it's groundbreaking and amazing—maybe not—but it's the whole thing that keeps us focused and oriented in a direction.

That's really what we want to do, because it's so easy to get so many pots on so many fires and none of them are boiling. Does that make sense? We want to make sure we're clear and oriented in the same direction, even though there will be different ways we can express that, that we're here for the same purpose and that the same heart is behind everything we're doing.

What does it actually mean today to follow Jesus? To spend time with Him? To have a relationship—what's that? Discipleship—we'll go into that. Thank you for saying that. You fell right into the trap I was hoping somebody would fall into.

I think we have to ask the question: what did Jesus actually come here to do? If we're followers of Jesus, and if He was up to something and wanted us to be up to something, then we have to ask, what are we actually doing? Yes, we're with Him first and foremost, but what was He actually up to? There's that whole thing about saving the world—we'll cover that on other days.

In the first century, the idea of the Messiah was that your teacher was your very way of life. In fact, Jesus says, "I am the truth, the life, and the way. I am the road system that you actually follow." For a first-century Jew, when someone said, "Come and follow me," it meant coming to live with them.

What we typically do is talk about discipleship as being a student of Jesus. We think of it as understanding what Jesus meant, believing it, and deciding those are the beliefs we should live by—and then we're baptized, and that's the end. Then we wonder why we can't hear God's voice, or where Jesus is in all this, or why we struggle.

Those beliefs are wonderful, but they're not a connection with Jesus. We talked about that last week. A better word for disciple is apprentice. Instead of someone sitting in a seat listening to a teacher, an apprentice lived

with their master—ate, slept, walked with them, learned their very way of life day by day. That's what disciple meant.

That's why it always seemed weird to me that someone would drop everything and follow Jesus. But that's exactly what it meant. They left everything to learn how to actually live, not just religious principles. Who better to learn life from than the author of life itself?

We've entitled this "The Prototype." I believe the first follower of Jesus is Abraham—far before Jesus was born. I believe Abraham's purpose is the same purpose you and I have today. This principle comes up again and again: God calls you into healing—wholeness—by His life-giving presence as a way of life, and then calls you to become an apprentice in the healing of others.

Let's read Genesis 12:1–2.

"The Lord had said to Abram, 'Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father's family, and go to the land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others.'"

Why would God do this? Abram leaves everything—stability, career, home, even how he eats and gets water—for the unknown. That's terrifying. And he's 75 when he does it. This happens because he first hears God's voice. That's the first thing.

Hearing God's voice isn't easy. We practiced that here last night. The first Friday of every month, we're trying to hear God's voice personally and corporately. It can be scary. I think the difficulty of hearing God's voice is by design.

I've never heard God speak audibly, but I've experienced things I can't explain any other way. God speaks differently to each of us, and the breakthrough is when you hear it and take a step.

Once Abram hears, he acts. He goes. That's scary, and we'll talk about failure next week, but he acts on the conviction in his heart.

I shared my story of leaving Alaska. I knew I had to leave or I'd be consumed by my environment. Changing location wasn't the full answer, but it was part of it. I didn't know the specifics—I thought I was going to nursing school—but I was after life, and I found it.

That's true for Abram too. He goes toward life, even without details. That's why he's the prototype.

Some people struggle with faith because they need a full plan. Others struggle because they never want a plan. God needs both. We act, we listen, and we go.

The third thing is blessing. Blessing in Hebrew means success, happiness, flourishing, wholeness, deep satisfaction. Our world is starving for that.

How do we know success? The Bible calls it fruitfulness. Faithfulness leads to fruit. As a church, success isn't just being full. That feels good, but it's not enough. Growth without transformation isn't the gospel.

Jesus fed thousands, and when the crowd followed Him for bread, He challenged them—and many walked away. Jesus wasn't after excitement. He was after hearts hungry for life.

Peter said it best: "Where else would we go? You have the words of life."

Healing is part of this—mental, physical, spiritual, emotional, social. When anxiety is healed, when bodies are healed, when faith is restored, when relationships are reconciled, when loneliness fades—that's fruit.

The church becomes a sanctuary because it's a place of healing, and then we go out and create little pockets of heaven wherever we are.

That was God's plan from the beginning with Abraham, and it's His plan for us today. We're already doing many of these things, and we'll keep growing in them.

Let's pray.

Jesus, thank You for Your healing touch. Help us hear Your voice, follow Your way, and live the life You offer—not to earn life, but because it is life. Heal us holistically and help us serve a hurting world. In Jesus' name, amen.

Kids, you can come up and get your tokens. Have a great rest of your weekend. I hope you find rest and peace. Happy New Year, everybody.