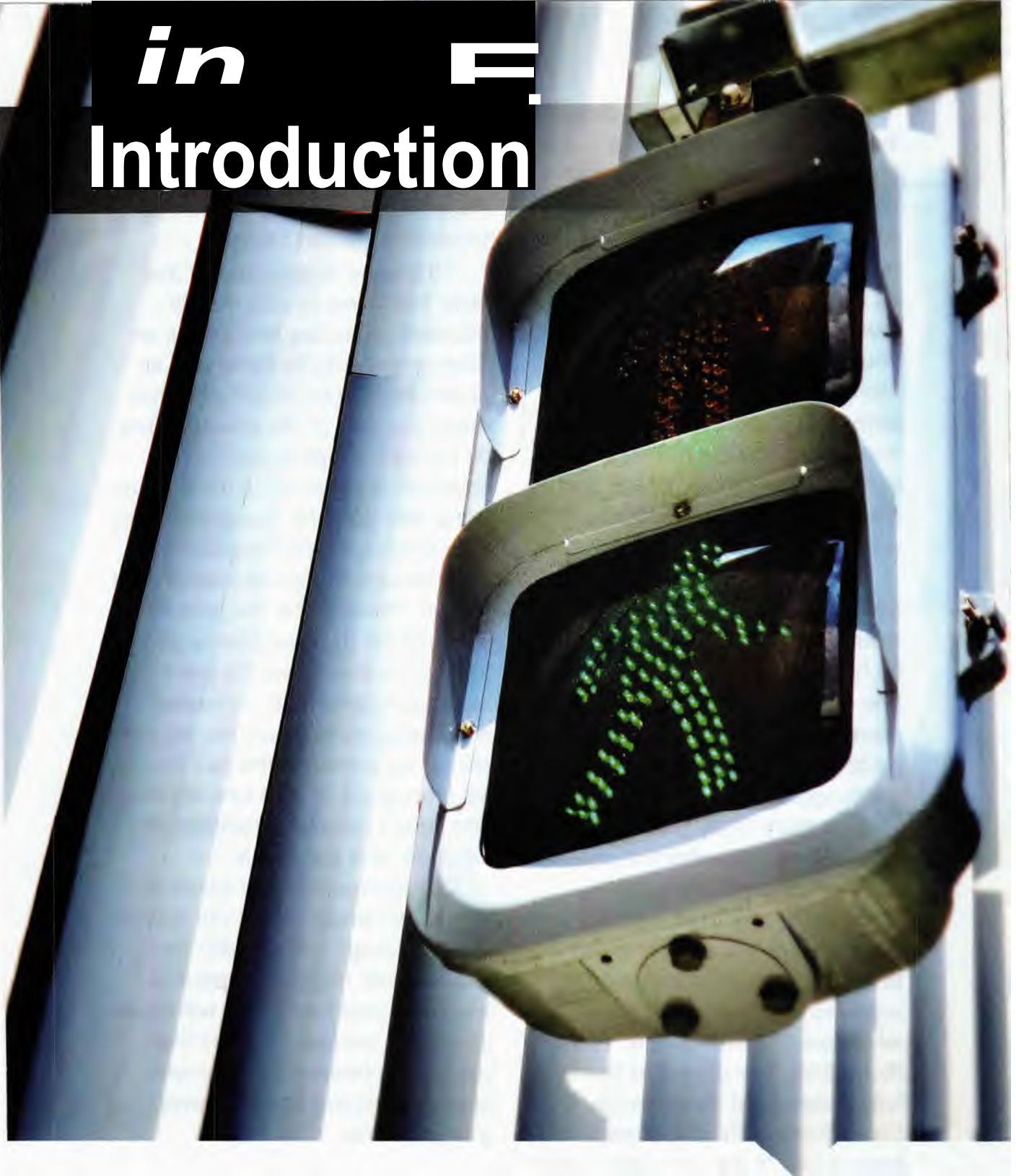


in **E** Introduction



WALKING IN CONFIDENCE

When fear begins to creep into our lives or a conflict in a relationship begins to grow, it can be easy for confidence to take a back seat. When we walk through seasons of uncertainty, times of testing, or flat-out failure, it can be true that maintaining a high level of confidence can be very difficult. How would you rate your confidence level? Where do you secure your confidence? Could you draw from a better source? How do you strengthen your confidence to prepare for the unforeseen circumstances that life always brings?

Be warned. This study is about to "get up into your business" as we dive into Abraham's personal life. Using his life as a lens, we will evaluate the level of our own confidence. As we explore Abraham's victories and losses, the goal is to allow his example to stretch and strengthen our confidence in God. So, if you're ready to increase your confidence level, let's jump in.

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SESSION 1

The Basis for Confidence



QUESTION 1:

When have you seen confidence in someone really pay off?

THE POINT

Confidence comes from trusting God.

THE PASSAGE

Genesis 12:1-8

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Years ago some friends challenged me to go skydiving. Due to their relentless barrage of peer pressure, I finally agreed—albeit reluctantly. My confidence meter continued to free-fall as jump day approached. I'll never forget the moment on jump day when, 13,000 feet in the air, the door of the plane flew open. I yelled back to the guy I was awkwardly strapped to, "What about landing? You never talked to me about landing!"

He shouted back, "I'll teach you in the air!"

Before I could finish screaming my response, "Teach me in the air?!" we were free-falling.

What gave me the confidence to jump out of a perfectly good airplane? In the same way, what gives us the confidence to make bold leaps when it comes to making decisions in our lives? How do we get the assurance to jump when God is calling us in a direction that may feel unknown, extreme, or even farfetched? Let's take some cues from a man named Abram who demonstrated just that type of confidence.

Genesis 12:1-3

1 Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee:

2 And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:

3 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

KEY WORD: Blessing (Gen. 12:2)—To bless someone is to wish or declare God's goodness or favor on them. The greatest blessing given by God is the forgiveness and salvation offered by the work of Christ.

God made this covenant with Abram long ago, but it's a promise that still lives on today. As Christ followers, we get to live in the benefits of this fulfilled promise. This was the promise that God would not forget about His creation, but He would provide a way for us to be in a right relationship with Him. This was the starting point of God's unfolding grace. We see this promise ultimately displayed and fulfilled with the birth of Jesus Christ, who was a descendant of Abram (Gal. 3:16).

God chose Abram (whose name God later changed to Abraham [Gen. 17:5]) to initiate this promise. It was a promise of multiplication, by way of land, children, and blessing. God told Abram that He would make his name great; in other words, the patriarch would be famous. Today, all three major world religions—Islam, Judaism, and Christianity—identify Abraham as a key figure. God did as He had promised: He made Abram famous. But far more than just being well-known, Abram's greatness would be significant because all peoples of the world would be blessed through him when his descendant Jesus Christ came to earth.

Let's try to see this from Abram's perspective, hearing this proposal and promise for the very first time. We have the benefit of knowing how the story ends, but Abram had no clue of what the outcome would be. Imagine him scratching his head and saying, "Wait a minute. You want me to do what? You're going to do what?!" This was a bold request and a bold promise from God.

What gave Abram the audacity—the confidence—to accept such a request? When I first got the invitation from my friends to go skydiving, I thought they had to be out of their minds. However, I ended up going because of who was asking me. My close relationship with those friends drew me in; I knew their character. In the same way, our understanding of God and our relationship with Him will dictate how we respond to Him.

We don't know what type of relationship Abram had with God prior to his encounter with Him in Genesis 12, but his understanding of the nature and character of God may have been quite limited. Abram's ancestors, including his own father, worshiped other gods (Josh. 24:2), and Abram himself may have even initially engaged in such pagan worship. So, when Abram heard God's request, he may have been overwhelmed by it, but he was willing to trust and act. Abram's confidence rested not in himself, but in the One who was calling him to go.

The more we understand the heart of God, the stronger our dependence and confidence will grow in Him. As a result, when God calls us to something specific, His voice no longer seems foreign to us; instead, it will seem familiar. This will help give us the confidence we need to move and act on what God is calling us to do. When we trust God, we act on that trust.

QUESTION 2

When have you sensed God leading you to do something challenging?

Genesis 12:4-6

4 So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran.

5 And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came.

6 And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land.

God told Abram to go, and that is exactly what Abram did. "So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him." Abram packed up his possessions and left everything he knew. Although he "took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son," and others with him, other family members that he loved and invested in were left behind in Haran. In that culture and time, land and family had a powerful emotional bond connecting them, but for the sake of survival, they also formed a strong economic bond. Relocating had a whole other depth of meaning compared with relocating in our world today.

Abram responded to God's call with obedience. He did not respond by simply affirming what God had said; he responded with action. When he came to Canaan, "Abram passed through the land" even though he knew the Canaanite people had already inhabited the land God promised to give him. When it came to children, Abram kept trusting God even though he and Sarai were childless; now he was seventy-five years old and his wife Sarai wasn't getting any younger. He didn't know how God was going to show off His power in either situation, or how specifically God was going to get it done. However, he kept moving and trusted God would show him how.

When my skydiving instructor shouted to me, "I'll teach you in the air," I had to have the confidence that my instructor would show me what to do at the right time. In a similar way, we see Abram "free-falling" if you will, on his journey from Haran to Canaan, trusting God to teach him what he needed to know at the right time. Abram's actions imply a trust that God would reveal to him each detail in His perfect timing.

God spoke specifically to Abram, but he wasn't the only one to step out and move. His wife, Sarai, and nephew Lot also moved. That means Sarai and Lot were most likely getting second-hand information of this promise from Abram, and yet they still moved. They trusted that Abram was trusting in God, which reminds us of a couple of things.

1. In whatever area you have the role of a leader—and we all lead someone in some capacity—keep striving to be Spirit-led in how you lead and influence others. Remember how much weight is in each word you speak. Remember how much is at stake in every action you take.
2. Be Spirit-led in the leaders you choose to follow. Don't just flippantly follow someone because of his or her position, possessions, or popularity. Rather, choose to follow those who model grace, generosity, and gratefulness. The more a leader looks like Jesus, the more confidence we should have to follow that leader.

It can be easy for us to lose confidence in the direction God is leading us. We can easily be swayed from obedience to disobedience. I wonder if Abram ever struggled with the temptation to say, "Maybe we should just turn back. Maybe I misunderstood what God was telling me."

Thankfully, God does not leave us alone. As His followers, He has placed His Holy Spirit in our lives. We are to trust the Spirit of Christ when we're not feeling confident. He is our line of defense that gives us the confidence to keep moving even when we don't know exactly how we are going to land.

QUESTION 3:

When have you found it challenging to follow God's leading?

Genesis 12:7-8

7 And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him.

8 And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the LORD, and called upon the name of the LORD.

The more we learn to trust God, the more our confidence will grow. What is amazing about God is that as we trust Him more and more, He is faithful to increase our faith by continually reaffirming us along the way. The journey from Haran to Canaan was around 400 miles. Since Abram and his assembly likely were traveling on foot, it would have taken them several months to arrive. Before Abram set up camp on "a mountain on the east of Bethel," the Lord appeared to him. This surely reassured Abram during his journey; God's presence affirmed that God was always with him. God not only reassured Abram of His presence, He also reaffirmed His promises of land and children.

When we have the courage to step out in faith, along the way on the journey we must hold onto the truth that God is always with us. We are reminded in both the Old and New Testaments that God will never leave us or forsake His children and followers (Deut. 31:6; Matt. 28:20). We must watch and listen for ways He reassures us of His presence and reaffirms the promises He has given to us.

Some people dismiss God's presence or promises; they rationalize that what we experienced was a mere coincidence. When we seek God, He has ways of making Himself known—and we don't have to look far. He reveals Himself through His creation (Rom. 1:20), through His Spirit (John 14:26), through His Word (2 Tim. 3:16), and through His people (1 John 3:24). God has gifted those who surrender their lives to Jesus with the gift of His Spirit. As we trust Christ, His Holy Spirit takes up residence in our lives. He is our Advocate, our Helper, and our Comforter who gives us a level of confidence way outside of our own abilities. We can rest assured that God is with His followers.

When the Lord appeared to Abram in verse 7 reassuring him of His presence and the promise of land and children, Abram responded with worship. "There builded he an altar unto the **LORD**, who appeared unto him." We recognize an altar as a place of worship, a place where we bow in worship before the Lord, but an altar also could serve a second purpose: a place of remembrance. Even as Abram worshiped, he created a marker for himself, the Canaanites currently living in the land, and future generations of His people. Abram built these altars not only so that he would remember, but also so those in future generations would remember what God has done. The altar also served as a sign to those already living in the area that the One true God had sent Abram.

What does an altar of worship and remembrance look like for us today? Some people have created literal altars of stone or wood to mark and remember God's work in their lives, but let me suggest another approach: write. Create a written "altar" of remembrance and worship. Pick up a pen and start writing in a journal all that God has been doing in your life. I have found that the more I write, the more I lift Him up. When we take the time to pause, reflect, and write, it helps us to remember all God has done, and that leads us to worship.

If you're anything like me, you're forgetful. So, when your confidence begins to shrink and when your trust begins to decline,

you can run back to your "altar," the place where you remember all the wonderful things God has done. And when we remember, we are moved to lift Him up in worship and anticipate that He will do it again. In the process, our faith is strengthened—and so is our confidence.

QUESTION 4:

What is a marker in your life that helps you remember God's faithfulness?

QUESTION 5

What are some ways we can grow in confidence in our walk with God?

ENGAGE

God promised in Genesis 12 to bless Abram with a community, a reputation, and a home. How has God blessed you in similar ways? List below. Then write a prayer thanking God for His promises.

Community:

Reputation:

Home:

My Prayer:

LIVE IT OUT

Confidence comes from trusting God. Choose one of the following applications:

Evaluate. Be real and take some honest, personal inventory and determine how distant or how close your relationship with God is right now. Talk to God about how you truly feel things are going in your relationship.

Move. Is there some area in your life where God has been stirring in you to make a move but you just keep ignoring it? What move can you make today to start heading in the direction of what He has called you to do?

Write it down. Pick up a pen, grab a journal, and begin to write. Reflect and remember how God has shown His presence and His promises to you in your life over the past month.

