

Listen up: Genesis 12:1-9

As Abram's heirs, we must know that our lives are not so much about *choosing* as they are about being *called*.

by [Prince Raney Rivers](#) in the [May 22, 2002](#) issue

Maybe it was time for Abram to move on. After all, he and his wife Sarai had been living in Ur for many years. Abram's father had died, and Abram had lost his brother Haran to an untimely death. Moving on might do both him and Sarai some good. Yet we all know that in the wake of crises like these, moving on is sometimes difficult. Nostalgia can be paralyzing.

What was Abram thinking when he heard "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land I will show you . . ." ? He was living in his father's country among his extended family. But his life was devoid of purpose or passion until he heard this word from the Lord. He needed this call to help him separate from his past and embrace God's future for his life.

The issue at stake for Abram and for us is the issue of "calling." Often we are encouraged to make choices that result in the highest financial return or the most personal gain. Dennis Campbell, former dean of Duke University Divinity School, suggests that we must examine the vocation of ordained ministry more closely. The dominant concern of many young people today is finding a job that provides high pay, security and "no risk." The ministry doesn't fit these criteria.

In *Who Will Go for Us?* Campbell tells of an undergraduate who talked with Campbell about problems he was having with his father. The father had a very specific plan for his son—college, a corporate training program, an MBA, and finally a career in corporate finance. But the son was not interested. He had recently worked with children at risk as part of a church-sponsored summer program. Mature and socially adept, he learned that he was effective in public speaking, community organizing and human relations. He wanted to spend his life addressing society's urban

problems. The result was serious conflict. As the son said to Campbell, “My father has one definition of success: making a ton of money and being totally independent.”

A college chaplain told Campbell that she rarely gets calls from parents upset about how their children are doing in school, either academically or socially. But parents will call about a child’s religious commitments, especially commitments that may involve mission opportunities. Parents can accept their child’s religious involvement—as long as that child is not allowing his or her life to be influenced by a sense of calling.

In order to live out the truth of our calling, God challenges us to listen to one voice—a voice that brings challenge and comfort. Sometimes the voice says “leave” and at other times the same voice says, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” What was Abram thinking when he heard the voice? Go to a land he had never seen and follow a voice that seemed to know him better than he knew himself? Or stay in Ur and put down roots?

If we are to live out our lives with authenticity and sincerity, we should examine the calling of Abram. As heirs of this Chaldean pilgrim, we must know that our lives are not so much about *choosing* as they are about being *called*. But this kind of thinking runs contrary to cultural norms. We are so accustomed to charting our own course and making our own way that yielding our lives to God brings genuine struggle. Yet the consequences of not engaging the struggle can also be devastating. Ask the young woman who married the “right man.” Or the man who pursued the “perfect career.” In many cases you will find that although they made all the right choices (the lucrative career, the dashing or beautiful spouse, etc.), their lives are still empty because they have no purpose and no guide greater than themselves.

Abram left Ur because he was called by God. His life, like our lives, was devoid of purpose or passion until he heard the voice of the Lord. The New Testament praises Abram’s faith because Abram accepted the challenge of living in obedience to God. For 21st-century Christians, there are so many voices competing for our loyalty and obedience that we must retune our ears daily to the One who is calling our name. Oprah’s voice reaches 20 million viewers daily. When she speaks, people buy books. Magazines in the check-out line at the grocery store clamor for our attention with the cacophonous voices of “experts” who will fix our relationships, mend our brokenness and supercharge our self-images. Politicians promise legal panaceas for

society's problems of the day. But we, members of the body of Christ, are not to take our cues from them.

Instead, we must listen and respond to the only voice that can redeem us. God will visit us where we are. This is both exciting and terrifying. It reminds me of the roller coasters I enjoyed in my adolescence. I would eagerly wait in line, but once I sat down in the car and felt the pressure of the lap bars being lowered over my shoulders, an uneasiness in the pit of my stomach reminded me that I was in for the ride of my life.

Abram heard the voice of the Lord and followed that voice to a place he had never seen before. He accepted God's gracious call even though he did not have all the details in the beginning of the journey. When he packed up his family and departed from Ur he took his first steps on the journey of redemption. Whether he knew it or not, he was in for the ride of his life.