

# Altar Tent and Well

by David Ravenhill

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of consecration, dedication, and sacrifice in our relationship with God, using the life of Abraham as an example.*

**Duration:** 1:03:54

**Scripture:** Exodus 20:24, Isaiah 6:3, Isaiah 6:8, Jeremiah 48:11, Acts 9:1-6, Romans 11:36 - 12:1

**Topics:** "Altar"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the challenge of maintaining faith and consecration in the Christian life. He uses the analogy of a marriage proposal to illustrate the initial excitement and commitment, but emphasizes the importance of keeping the fire burning during difficult times. The speaker also highlights the need for revelation and consecration in following God's will, using examples from the Bible such as Paul's conversion on the Damascus road. He concludes by emphasizing the importance of being led by the Spirit and having a flexible mindset in order to grow in faith.

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## Transcript

...teaching of Jesus when it comes to seed faith. He said, consider the birds of the air, they neither what? Sow, nor reap. And yet you turn on television today, it's all about sowing and reaping.

And Jesus said, listen, you know, if I as a father can look after a sparrow, how much more value are you? And so I remember when I was a kid that I never, ever worried about whether I was going to have breakfast, whether there was going to be clothes to wear to school. That was dad's responsibility. And my father in the natural looked after me.

And it's been very easy, I should say, to be able to transfer that to my heavenly father and say, listen, if I'm his kid, he's well able to look after a sparrow, he's able to look after a raven. And he has, but he's also done it through people like you, so thank you. Alright, appreciate that song.

You've heard me say, some of you at least, that I am left-handed and tone deaf. So, number one, I would struggle to play an instrument. Number two, it would sound terrible if I sang.

And somebody did hear me sing many years ago and afterwards informed me that I was a prison singer. I made the mistake of asking what a prison singer was and they said, somebody who's behind a few bars and missing the key. Any other prison singers here? Billy and I will do a duet tomorrow night.

But anyway, I'm waiting until I get my sanctified and glorified voice and you'll hear me spiraling above everybody else in heaven and playing all the instruments spontaneously. I'm making up for lost time. Well, let's get into the word tonight.

I want to talk to you about the life of Abraham. There are three essential requirements, I think, that God is looking for in the life of every believer. And I see them exemplified in the life of Abraham and symbolized by the altar, the tent, and the well.

Those three areas, the altar, the tent, and the well. Well, if you've studied the life of Abraham, he was always building altars. He was always digging wells and he was always pitching his tent, moving from place to place.

The altar speaks of consecration, dedication, and it deals with my attitude towards self. The tent speaks of progression or transition, deals with my attitude towards change. And the well speaks of satisfaction, deals with my attitude towards God Himself.

Where do I derive my satisfaction from? Where is my true life? Now, Abraham, as you know, according to the Book of Romans, is called the father of all those that believe. I said last night, the ultimate father, obviously, is God. But Abraham is referred to as our spiritual father.

And fathers have a profound impact on our life, either for good or bad. Every one of you here, obviously, has got a father, whether he was an absentee father, whether he was a cruel father, or loving, whatever, makes a great impact on us. If your father was an early riser, chances are you are an early riser.

If your father was a doctor, chances are you know all sorts of medical terms. If your father was a lawyer, chances are you can rattle off all sorts of Latin phrases. If your father was a mechanic, you know all the parts of an engine.

If your father was a builder, you can talk about studs and drywall, and all that sort of stuff. If your father spoke Chinese, chances are you do. If your father ate with chopsticks, chances are you are pretty adept at it as well.

In other words, fathers have a profound influence on us. And Abraham is our spiritual father. He was a Gentile who became a Jew.

He became a Jew the way you and I become Jewish, by faith. The Bible says he is not a Jew that is one that is circumcised of the flesh, but he is circumcised of the heart. And Abraham was not born a Jew.

He didn't have any Jewish ancestry. He became a Jew because of his faith in God. I've told my Messianic friends, and I have a bunch of them, that one day I will write a book called The Gentile Roots of the Jewish Faith.

That sort of, you know. Because most people are not aware there's 2,000 years of history. The Old Testament is divided into two 2,000 year periods.

First 2,000 years, there wasn't a Jew on the face of the earth. And then the Jews came along, and then we've got two more thousand years before the birth of Jesus. Isn't that right? And we forget that because those 2,000 years were sandwiched in to the first 12 or 13 chapters of Genesis, we assume that, you know, it's just almost like a weekend, and then you've got the rest of the Old Testament.

There was a priesthood before the Levitical priesthood. Right? There were offerings before the Jewish offerings. The Sabbath and all those, you know, they were all preceding that.

You know, all my Messianic friends get excited about the fact that supposedly, you know, they're putting together or gathering all the pieces for the temple in Jerusalem and so on. And I said, you realize now that, you know, even if they did build a temple, Jesus could not qualify to be the priest because he was not of Levitical order. You know, you had to be a Levite to be a high priest.

So Jesus could not qualify, but he is a priest what? According to the order of Melchizedek. Anyway, we won't go into that, but other than to say, you know, there was a temple before the original temple, the Garden of Eden, and I could prove all that. But anyway, here is Abraham.

Abraham was the first disciple in the Bible. Discipleship is not something that we just find in the New Testament. We find in the Old Testament.

The first thing that God said to Abraham, I want you to forsake father, mother, brother, and sister. Take up your cross and follow me. He said it slightly differently, but I want you to forsake your father and your mother.

I want you to get out of your country, your father's house, and so on and so forth. We were always taught in Bible school that the Old, meaning the Old Testament is in the New Testament revealed. The New is in the Old concealed.

Or the Old is in the New explained. The New is in the Old contained. And so really there is nothing new under the sun.

Discipleship again was there in the life of Abraham, again as our sort of spiritual forefather. And much of what you see in Abraham's life, God will take you through. There will be a time when He will dislodge you, if you like.

Get out of your father's house. We'll explain that in a few minutes. There will be a time when He'll ask you to give up your Isaac.

It may not be a literal flesh and blood Isaac in the form of a child, but it may be your career, it may be a boyfriend or girlfriend, it may be, you know, giving up some other thing, but He will ask you to put that thing that you cherish and is so precious to you on the altar to prove that your love for God surpasses the love of whatever that thing is that happens to be an Isaac in your life. And so for that reason, I enjoy studying the life of Abraham. He is an interesting individual.

But let's begin the altar. The altar deals, again, with our attitude towards self. And it speaks of dedication or it speaks of consecration.

The altar was always the place of sacrifice. It was the place of surrender, the place of death, the place of abandonment, yieldedness, and all of those things. And the altar always demanded the best.

Let me say that again. The altar always demanded the best. Every time there is an altar in the Bible, one of the functions of the priest was he had to inspect what was on that altar.

And if it did not meet the requirements of God, it was rejected. One of the big gripes that God has in the book of Malachi, He says, oh, that somebody would go to the back door, basically, I'm paraphrasing it, and

shut the door, that you might not uselessly kindle fire on mine altar. And the children of Israel, what? And God says, you know, I'm not accepting what you're putting on the altar.

You're bringing the blind, you're bringing the diseased, you're bringing the lame, you're bringing the sick, you're bringing all sorts of defilement and so on. And in other words, your worship is absolutely meaningless. You might as well shut down the whole thing, shut the door at the back, don't let anybody come in with their sacrifices.

Those sacrifices are not acceptable. That's why the psalmist says, let the words of my mouth, the meditation of my heart be acceptable. God inspects our sacrifices.

He inspected our sacrifice tonight. You know, was it the best, or were we sort of lackadaisical, thinking, where am I going to eat after this message is over, and so on and so forth, you know. And I have to keep myself in check from time to time, say, Lord, you know, I wasn't really giving you the best tonight when I sang.

I was, you know, thinking about this, or thinking about that, and so on, you know. So the altar always demanded the best. And Abraham gave his best, if you like, to God.

We meet God, obviously, on the basis of the sacrifice. The altar also demanded everything. It didn't demand just a part, it demanded the whole.

Now when we talk about that in the New Testament sense, it's giving God everything. I tell people, at the age of 18, I gave God my life. And then I say, I would dare say that in the average church, and I think this is a little different, but in the average church, 80% of the people have never given God their life.

They've given God their sin. There's a big difference. In other words, we give God all the garbage.

God, clean up my mind, clean up this, take me, you know, free me from drugs, free me from pornography, whatever. And we come to the altar, and we pile all the trash of our life on the altar, and then we reserve the best for ourselves. And what God is looking for is our life.

You know, I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your body. That's what God is after. He doesn't want your sin, He wants you.

That's a whole new message, I'll just touch on that. So, Abraham was always building altars, and he was always coming before God, and presenting the very best that he could offer. Now, the altar results from a correct understanding of who God is.

In other words, before dedication, there always comes revelation. Before there's real dedication, there's always revelation. For instance, in the life of Abraham, according to Acts chapter 7, the God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham.

There was a revelation. Abraham had a revelation of the majesty, the splendor, the glory of God. God in all of His infinite wisdom, and so on and so forth.

Somehow, we don't know how, but it was revealed to Abraham. And then, we have Abraham willing to forsake everything virtually and follow God. You've got the same thing in Isaiah.

Isaiah goes in the house of God on this particular occasion, and all of a sudden he has a revelation of God like he's never seen before. The whole house fills with smoke. The seraphim appear, and they're crying out, Holy, Holy, Holy.

He hears the voice of God saying, Who shall we send, and who will go for us? I'll go. In other words, there was revelation, and then followed by consecration. We have Paul on the Damascus Road.

You know, he's going around persecuting the church. He's got in his pockets, if you like, scrolls of permission to do whatever he wants with the early church. And all of a sudden, the Shekinah glory of God appears on that Damascus Road.

Paul falls off his horse, seemingly. And he says, Lord, what will you have me to do? First of all, there is a revelation, and then it's followed by consecration. Lord, what do you want me to do? I'll do anything you want me to do, sort of thing.

Now, if there's no consecration, it's a result of having no revelation. In other words, if you have never fully given yourself to God in total abandonment, put yourself on the altar and say, Lord, here am I. Use me in whatever way you can, and so on and so forth. It's because you've never had a revelation of the majesty, the splendor of God.

You don't have, let me bring it down into very practical terms. Here is a young man. You'll see if you were watching that I was on a motorcycle today.

You know, my mother was sitting up in heaven, you know, praying, I guess, but no. But anyway, let's say here's a young guy, and his dream is to have a Harley Davidson. And he's been saving up.

He's got \$20,000 in the bank, and that is the one thing. I mean, he is just obsessed with getting this Harley Davidson. And then one day, along comes a beautiful girl.

And all of a sudden, his interests seem to dissipate concerning the Harley Davidson, and he's got a new love affair now going on. And as he begins to date this girl, he begins to get revelations. Revelation of her beauty, revelation of her character, and so on and so forth.

And the more revelation he gets, he thinks, you know, I am willing now to take that \$20,000 that I had reserved for that Harley Davidson, and I'm going to make the ultimate consecration, if you like. And he takes her out to dinner one night, and during the meal, you know, kneels down, takes this little box out of his pocket, and said, will you marry me? And there is this, you know, four-carat diamond ring that's cost him \$15,000. And as he's presenting it to her, he says, you'll never know how much this cost me.

I don't think so. You know, he thinks, this girl is worth, if I had \$50,000, I would blow it on a ring. I mean, this girl is, you know, she is so wonderful.

I've got to know her now. I've got a revelation of her beauty, character, and all of this. I would do anything that she wanted me to do.

In other words, revelation comes first, and then consecration becomes easy when you've had the revelation. You don't have young guys going around, you know, taking \$10,000 rings out of their pocket, proposing to every, you know, every gal in the church. No, there's got to be revelation first.

In the book of Romans, the last verse of Romans chapter 11, I've told people this is the worst chapter division I know of in the Bible. But it says, From him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever.

Amen. Because there's an amen there. I guess whoever was dividing up the Bible into chapters decided that he would have a coffee break and come back and start chapter 12.

But this is one of Paul's greatest revelations. I honestly believe this. That from him and through him and to him are all things.

In other words, God created everything. God is the initiator of everything. All things came from him.

Not only that, he is the creator, he is the sustainer. In him we live, we move, we have our very being. So it's from him and through him, and then ultimately Paul says everything belongs to him.

And then he goes right into the next verse. Therefore, after having that revelation, therefore I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your body a living sacrifice. In other words, if you really believe that everything comes from God, everything is sustained by God, everything finds its ultimate consummation in God, the least you can do is give back to God that which is from him, through him, and belongs to him.

So revelation always precedes consecration. So here we have Abraham. He has a revelation of the glory of God and he's willing to build an altar and put on that altar whatever God asks him to put on the altar, Abraham is willing to do it.

And we should be in that same place. I believe that's what God is looking for in the life of every believer, that whatever God says we are to give up, we will readily, willingly, and hastily put it on the altar and say, Lord, I'll do anything you want me to do. No sacrifice is too great because of who you are.

Now let me talk for a moment about the law of the altar. In Exodus chapter 20, there is an old, I understand last week you had some teaching on exegesis and so on, but there's an old principle that many of the old expositors use called the law of first mention, or the law of beginnings, that when you see something for the very first time mentioned, a principle in the Word of God, it establishes a precedent as to how that is used all the way through the rest of the Scripture. And this is the first time that the altar is mentioned in the Bible, in Exodus 20 and verse 20.

And the Lord said to Moses, Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, You yourselves have seen, no, verse 24, And you shall make an altar of earth for me, and you shall sacrifice upon it burnt offerings and peace offerings, your sheep, your oxen, in every place where I cause my name to be remembered. And I will come to you and I will bless you. And if you make an altar of stone for me, you shall not build it of cut stone, for if you wield your tool on it, you will profane it.

And you shall not go up to mine altar by steps that your nakedness may not be exposed upon it. As far as I know, that's the first time that God laid down a law or rules, if you like, concerning the altar. He says if you build an altar, it's to be either made of earth, in other words, just clumps of sod, just a simple altar, or stone.

But the moment you build it of cut stone, you take your tool and you engrave it in some way, it's profane. Now what does that tell us about the altar? The altar is for God. It is not to draw attention to man.

Let's suppose that this is the Old Testament, and I've gathered you, you're all my friends, and I said, you know, I'm going to do something very special tonight, and I want you to be a part of it. And so you all come, and here I've got this big covering over this thing, you don't know what it is. And then I say, the reason I called you here, I'm going to make a sacrifice to God tonight.

And I wanted you to be a part of it. And I pull back this tarpaulin or this covering, and here is the most elaborate altar you've ever seen. I mean, it is a work of art, it's studied with diamonds and different things, and it's beautifully carved, and, you know, silver and gold, ornate.

And you say, wow, who made that? Where did you get that? And I say, I made it. Now, the moment I wheel my tool on it, I've profaned it. Because now the altar is drawing attention to me and away from God.

And God says, the moment you embellish it in any way, you've profaned it. Now, how does that translate into, you know, everyday life? I've watched people, I've been in the ministry now 45 years, and, you know, I can't help but see people, especially when it comes to music. This does not concern the beautiful song tonight.

But I've seen people play in such a way that they want to draw attention themselves. Here you've got a bunch of guitarists and so on, and you've got the one that, you know, he's doing his thing, you know. Excuse my mimicking, I've never played a guitar in my life, but that's a left-handed guitar.

But you know what I mean, you know. Or he's playing the piano, you know, sort of, you know. Like I can play, you know, nobody else can play.

That's embellishing the altar. That is distracting. It's not glorifying God, it's seeking honor from man.

That's the practical side. Now, the altar is about death. Death to self.

Dying to self, dying to, you know, that which exalts me or magnifies me or makes a name for myself and so on. It's for God and for God alone. Not unto us, not unto us, but to your name be glory.

Do I magnify the Lord? Or have I got alternative motives? I was sharing with some of the guys last night at the restaurant there that Winky Prattney, some of you may know him, said to me many, many years ago. I've never forgotten it. He said, David, when we stand before God, he will not ask us what we did.

He will ask us why we did it. That's frightening, isn't it? You know, you may have built the biggest church in Lexington, but if your reason was that you were competing with the church down the road to prove that you could out-preach, you know, so-and-so or build a bigger Sunday school, you know, your motivation is wrong. The Pharisees loved to pray.

Now, we could admire them and say, hey, they were men of prayer. They were men of prayer, but they did it for one reason, not to have fellowship with God or communion with God, to be seen of men. And so, motivation, God examines the thoughts and the intentions, the motives of the heart.

And the altar then is for God Himself. It's not for men. And so, He says, do not, you know, place your tool upon it.

And then in Leviticus chapter 6, we have the law of the burnt offering. The reason I've chosen the burnt offering here is it was a voluntary offering. Leviticus 6 and verse 8, And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Command Aaron and his sons, saying, This is the law of the burnt offering.

The burnt offering itself shall remain on the hearth of the altar all night until the morning. The fire on the altar is to be kept burning on it. Two things about the burnt offering.

Number one, it had to remain on the altar all night until the morning. I think one of the hardest things to do in our Christian life is to keep what we put on the altar, keep it on the altar during the night season. In other words, tonight there's a certain atmosphere here, we're friends, we've had beautiful music and so on and so forth.

I give an altar call, let's say, let's say it's a missions meeting and there's an altar call to go to Timbuktu or something. People stream forward, your girlfriend goes forward and, you know, so you go and kneel beside her and there's a whole atmosphere and it's very easy to do. But then that atmosphere is going to change in 24 hours.

You're going to be back at McDonald's flipping burgers, you know, in the morning and the atmosphere is not there and now a night season sets in. Can I keep on the altar during the night season what I put on, you know, during the day, so to speak? That is the challenge of the Christian life. The next thing, which is even harder is, and the fire is to be kept burning on it.

Can I keep the fire burning during the night season? We all go through night seasons when there's a lack of vision, lack of direction, maybe a lack of feeling, whatever you want to term it. You know, can I keep the fire burning? I think that's the hardest thing in the Christian life, to keep on the altar what I put on the altar and then to keep the fire burning even during the night season. But that was the law.

In other words, it wasn't just a momentary thing. Okay, God says, I see your offering, you can take it off now, you know. No, it had to remain there.

In Genesis 15, you have Abraham and I don't want to get into too much detail here because I may touch on some of this tomorrow depending on how far we get. But in Genesis 15, God speaks to Abraham. He's about ready to make out his will if you read this portion of Scripture.

And he's basically blaming God that he has nobody to give his estate to apart from his servant Eliezer. Notice what he says in verse 2. And Abraham said, O Lord, what wilt thou give me since I am childless? And the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus. And Abraham said, Since thou hast given me no offering, accusing God, one born in my house is my heir.

In other words, you know, I guess I don't have anybody to leave this to except for one born in my house. You never gave me any kids. So he thinks, I assume that he's going to die.

And then the word of the Lord comes to him and God says to him, Go outside, verse 5. He took him outside. Now look towards the heavens and count the stars if you're able to count them. And he said, So shall your descendants be.

In other words, God says, listen, I'm going to keep my promise and any time you doubt, all you've got to do is go outside at night, look at the stars, and count the stars. That's how many descendants are going to come forth out of your loins. So the stars became to Abraham what the rainbow became to Noah.

It was a constant sign to him. Every time Noah saw a rainbow, he was reminded of the fact that God would never again destroy the earth. Every time that Abraham looked up at the stars, he was reminded that God was going to keep his covenant and he was going to have a host of descendants.

The other thing is, he says, I'm going to give you all of this land. One thing about God, one thing about giving everything to God is you can never out-give God. I don't know how big the spread was that Abraham gave up when he had to leave his father's house, but God one day took him up to a mountain and said, look, northward, southward, eastward, westward, all of this land I'm going to give you.

And then Romans 4 says that God made Abraham what? The heir of the world. In other words, God will always give back more than what you give to him. We can never out-give God.

He's not an old Scrooge that says, you know, you give me this or else. No, he always blesses abundantly. No man having forsaken what? Houses and lands shall not in this life receive houses and lands, brothers and sisters and so on.

God always gives abundantly. He's no man's debtor. And so God, Abraham, makes the mistake of saying, well, Lord, how's all this going to happen? And God says to him in verse 9, bring me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtle dove and a young pigeon.

And he brought all these things to him. He cut them in two. He laid each half opposite the other.

But he did not cut the birds. So, first of all, you've got the promise. The promise is you're going to have all these kids and I'm going to give you this land.

And then you've got the price. There's always a price tag with the promise. And the price is it's going to cost you something.

There is sacrifice. And Abraham has to go out and he has to prepare all these sacrifices. And he does exactly what God tells him to do.

One of the things I've always said I don't like about the Word of God, that sounds terrible, but we don't have the time element. In other words, verse 9, bring me a three-year-old heifer, so on and so forth. Verse 10, and he brought these to him.

Ten seconds. Now, that's hours and hours of work. He's got to go out to the flock.

He's got to inspect every single one. He's got to get something that's absolutely spotless. Doesn't have a hair missing sort of thing.

It's not diseased. It's not broken. Then he's got to prepare it.

He's got to kill it. He's got to sacrifice. He's got to build two altars.

He's got to get all these animals. I mean, there's hours and hours and hours of work involved in this. And then instead of God keeping his side of the bargain, God says, you do that first.

All hell breaks loose. Notice verse 11, and the birds of prey came down upon the carcass. Birds of prey are always a type of the enemy.

And every time you build an altar and you put your best on it, all hell's going to break loose because the enemy hates sacrifice. He hates you surrendering your life to God. He hates you giving your best to God.

He will do everything he can to get you to take back what you put on the altar. And all day long, Abraham has to drive away the birds of prey. And the sun begins to go down.

And it says in verse 12, So Abraham has got this terror of great darkness. The way I interpret this is that, you know, as the sun goes down, he's losing any sense of visibility. These birds are coming.

As long as it's daylight, he can see where they're coming from. He can defend what he's got on the altar. But as it begins to get dark, you know, he doesn't know where these birds are coming from.

And all of a sudden he panics and he thinks, can anything get worse than this? What happens if it gets to be pitch black here? You know, I, you know. And so he panics. But notice what happens.

It came about when the sun had set, verse 17, that it was very dark. And behold, there appeared a burning or a smoking oven and a flaming torch and so on. Now what happens when it's very dark? The Bible is not trying to be overly graphic here.

You can go outside at nighttime, if you go outside the city limits with all the lights, on a night where there is a full moon, and you can literally walk home or drive home by the light of the moon. Isn't that right? Because the Bible says God made the stars and the moon for light by night. You can read a book, it's so bright.

But if there is a cloud cover and there's no lights, it is very dark. So when it says it's very dark, there's no more stars. There are times when God will test us.

When that promise that was such, so real to us a few days ago, where we can see the stars, so to speak, brightly, now all of a sudden you can't recall a single thing. That prophetic word that was given or whatever, you know, just seems to have dissipated. And, you know, can you trust God during the night season? Abraham was that sort of an individual.

Just explicit trust in God. All right, Abraham has to drive away the birds. And many times, again, when we make that sacrifice, that supreme sacrifice, whatever it is, the enemy will, you know, attack you and try and get you to take back that thing.

All right, the next thing is the tent. The tent speaks of progression, transition, and deals with our attitude towards change. Abraham was always pitching his tent.

In fact, in Hebrews chapter 11, it says that he dwelt in tents along with Isaac and Jacob, and never again did he go back to a house. When God says to Abraham, I want you to get out of your father's house, if you look it up in the Hebrew, it means a building with a foundation, you know, as we would know a house. Something that is permanent, something that is solid, something that is located in a particular area.

In other words, the thing about a house is it controls you. Isn't that right? Every one of us tonight will go back to a house or an apartment. The thing about a tent is we could pitch a tent on the lawn here, if there is one.

A tent is flexible. You know, you can go anywhere if you've got a tent. You can't go anywhere with a house.

The house controls you, you don't control it. When you've got a tent, you're in control. A house is permanent, a tent is obviously flexible.

A house is familiar, a tent is unfamiliar. A house is comfortable, a tent isn't exactly very comfortable, and so on. But the first thing God says to Abraham, I want you out of your father's house.

Now, every one of us here in this room, including myself, has a father's house. And the father's house is the way you were raised. You know, there's a certain familiarity with the way you were raised.

We all like to go back to our father's house, at least most people. You know, grandkids like to go back to grandma and grandpa's and so on and so forth. But also, there's a certain protocol, if you like, that we were raised in.

And one of the things that God wants to do, and I'm speaking spiritually now, is dislodge us. Because that house that we are so familiar with, we've become so comfortable in doing things a certain way, and many times the way of our father's house is contrary to the ways of God. I'll give you an illustration.

I was born in England, raised in Ireland. My mother's Irish, my father's English. And I was raised in a very conservative house, holiness background, never raised our hands, certainly would never dance.

Dancing was the ultimate sin, you know, playing cards, dancing and smoking were the three, you know, most evil things a person could do when I was a kid, you know. Sin has improved since then, if I can put it that way. But, you know.

But anyway, and so Nancy and I, my wife and I, we ended up in New Guinea in 1971. We were with a bunch of young people from Australia and New Zealand that were very liberated, certainly compared to my wife and I. And I was in charge of the youth of the mission base. I was the base director, we had a local church, and I was the pastor of the local church.

And these kids, you know, every time there was a song, I mean, they'd pick up their feet and start singing, you know, dancing and clapping their hands and so on, raising their hands and, you know, type thing. And, you know, I had all the reasons why you should not do that. You know, let everything be done decently and in order.

You see, that was my father's house. And I was raised in my father's house. And I was not about to get out of my father's house because I was comfortable in my father's house.

You know, that was the way I was raised, and I was familiar with that, and nobody was going to change that and so on and so forth. Well, long story short, we eventually moved to New Zealand, and we went through a short-term Bible school in an independent sort of charismatic Pentecostal church, and they had a lot of teaching that I had not been exposed to before. And so we took a year off to sit under a very godly man that I eventually ended up working with.

And he was a real character, a little bit like Billy down there. But Sunday morning, at that time, I think the church was about 450 people, 350 people, something like that, and we had an orchestra, and it was a, you know, wonderful, wonderful, wonderful church. But it was a Sunday morning, and I was not yet a part of the staff.

I was one of the students in the school. And we were sitting, Nancy and I, somewhere on the back, and in the middle of the worship, Peter, who's since gone to be with the Lord, Peter Morrill, who's the pastor, he stopped the entire worship team. Stop, stop, you know, stop the orchestra.

And he said, Ravenhill's not dancing back there. We'll sing it one more time. And here I was in front of 300 or 400 people, put on the spot, you know, that I was not entering in.

And I made up my mind, you know, if you can't beat them, you've got to join them. And so I said, Lord, help me, you know, and began to sort of put up my hands. It felt very awkward, you know, to sort of get my hands up, and, you know, as everybody watching, you know, I was going to be struck dead, you know, lightning bolt or something, you know.

But anyway, you know, that's an illustration, if you like, of getting out of your father's house. God had to break something in me. And I believe that, you know, God had to do something in the life of Abraham.

Number one, he says, get out of your father's house. That was the pride of security. That was his security.

Just like all of us, when we're young, and we're in our father's house, there's a security in it. I mean, mom and dad look after us, provide for us, blah, blah, blah, and so on. But God was wanting to teach Abraham something.

He says, I am your shield. I'm going to be your exceeding great reward. I'm going to be your father now.

I'm going to be your security. I'm going to look after you, and so on and so forth. Then he says, I want you to leave your relatives, which is pride of family.

I mean, he had all sorts of relatives. Because why? God was going to give him a new family. He knew all the families of the earth were going to be blessed.

He had to get out of his country, because God was going to make out of him a new nation. And so on. So God had to break these areas, if you like, of resistance, not because he was trying to be mean, but because God was wanting to give him far more than he could ever dream of.

In other words, God will never come and ask you to give something up that he won't replace it with something far better. He's not just in the business of trying to make your life miserable. He's literally trying to bless you, and ultimately, of course, do what's best for his kingdom.

But we tend to resist change, don't we? We don't like change, because it's unfamiliar, it's uncomfortable, and so on. In Numbers chapter 9, you'll see how God was trying to teach the nation of Israel here to be open to change. You remember that after they came out of Egypt and the tabernacle was erected, that God would come down in the day in a pillar of... a cloud, rather, at night by a pillar of fire.

And I believe those had very practical applications. I believe that the cloud by day was like a sun umbrella, because during the time in the wilderness, temperatures could literally soar to the point where people could die very easily. At night time, the temperatures could plummet.

That's why the Bible says, the sun will not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. And so God put this, if you like, air conditioning system in place, this huge umbrella that shielded them. At night time, you know, you had this fire going that I think was more than just manifesting His glory, but it had also a practical application of, you know, taking the chill off the night.

After all, they were in tents, there was no heating system, and so on. But verse 15, it says, on the day that the tabernacle was erected, the cloud covered the tabernacle and the tent of testimony. In the evening, it was like the appearance of fire over the tabernacle.

So it was continuously. The cloud would cover it by day, and the appearance of fire by night. Verse 18, at the command of the Lord, the sons of Israel would set out.

At the command of the Lord, they would camp. Sorry. As long as the cloud settled over the tabernacle, they remained camped.

Even when the cloud lingered over the tabernacle for many days, the sons of Israel would keep the Lord's charge and not set out. If it remained for a few days over the tabernacle, according to the command of the Lord, they remained camped. Then, according to the command of the Lord, they set out.

If sometimes the cloud remained from evening until morning, when the cloud was lifted in the morning, they would move on. If it remained in the daytime or at night, when the cloud was lifted, they would set out. Whether it was two days or a month or a year that the cloud lingered over the tabernacle, staying above it, the sons of Israel remained camped and did not set out.

But when it was lifted, they set out. At the command of the Lord, they camped. At the command of the Lord, they set out.

In other words, God was teaching these new Christians how to be led by the Spirit. And he says, listen, we're staying here for two days. Two days.

If we stay a week, that's all I want you. If we stay a year, that's my prerogative. When that cloud moves, you move.

When that cloud remains, you remain, and so on. And here is an entire nation of new Christians, let's face it, just redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. God is trying to teach them how to be led by the Spirit of God.

We have got to be the same thing. We've got to be flexible. We've got to have a tent mentality.

Four years ago, my wife and I built a brand new house. I had it built. And long before we entered into that house, actually took possession of it, I said to Nancy, I said, I want you to know, this is a tent.

And if God never wants us to go into that house, I'm willing. And every house we've had, and we've had something like 22 homes in 45 years, I actually bought houses. I mean, I know that blows your mind, some of you.

It sounds like I'm a spiritual butterfly, but we've remained, you know, years in certain places. But we've bought and sold houses, and moved into them, and not bought and sold just to flip them, but bought and sold and moved. But I've always considered every house we've moved into, including the one we're in right now, as a tent.

In other words, I've always wanted to be open to the next move of God. Never wanting to settle down in the sense of saying, God, I'm tired of moving, and I don't want you to ever move me again. I'm not open.

I'm not willing to do anything else. I've moved enough. I want to have that openness to God to say, God, if you want me to go back to the mission field, if you want to move here or there, that's the tent mentality that God's looking for.

And Abraham was that sort of an individual. That's why Hebrews said he was a dweller in tents, along with Isaac and Jacob, and never again went back to a house. Why? Because he was looking for a city whose builder and maker was God.

Now, I'm just trying to think where to go from there. In Psalm 45, I think it is, the Bible says, forget your people and your father's house. Then the king will desire your beauty.

In other words, God wants us to forget our people, in that sense, because we are to become the people of God. We are to be led by the Spirit of God. We are to take on a new family.

It's not our brother and sister that's that important anymore. It's our brothers and sisters in Christ, if you like. We are a community of believers.

We need to be open to what God is doing, and so on. And so there's certain things that we have to be willing to give up. We settled in New Zealand for 15 years.

That church that I mentioned grew to almost 2,000 people. I was the associate pastor. We had a paycheck.

We had people that loved us. Our kids were in a Christian school. You know, everything was going well.

We just enjoyed what we were doing. I was certainly totally involved. And then I felt God say, I want you to leave.

And I thought, you know, I am leaving 2,000 people. I'm leaving a program, if you like. I knew, you know, the sort of schedule.

I'm leaving a paycheck. I'm leaving, you know, the popularity of one of the biggest churches in New Zealand and so on. But the verse that God gave me was Jeremiah 48.

In Jeremiah chapter 48, you've got an interesting little verse here. At least this is one God gave me. Verse 11.

Moab has been at ease from his youth. He has also been undisturbed on his lease. Neither has he been emptied from vessel to vessel, nor has he gone into exile.

Therefore, he retains his flavor, or his aroma, and his aroma is not changed. Now, that may be Chinese to some of you. But what God is speaking about here is the making of wine.

When wine is made, you know, there's the crushing of the grapes. It was normally done by foot. And they'd have these, you know, big wine presses, and they'd tread out the grapes.

And as the juice ran out, so would bits of the pith, and the skin, and the seed, and maybe little bits of twigs, and so on. And then they would take that grape juice, and they would pour it into a vessel, and they would let it settle. And that which settled to the bottom was called the leaves.

And it was like a thick syrupy, you know, substance, because it was made up of leaves and bits of the grape, and so on. And then once it had settled, they'd empty it into another vessel. And they'd let that settle again, and then they'd empty it into another vessel, and the best wine was that which was emptied from vessel to vessel.

If it was allowed to settle on the leaves, then it would cause a certain aroma. It would sort of pollute the wine, and the cheapest wine, the worst tasting wine, was that which, you know, had not gone through the process of being emptied from vessel to vessel. And the Lord said to me, at least this is what I felt the Lord

said to me, you've settled long enough.

You've been 15 years, and you've got a certain aroma. Now I travel, and I travel right across the body of Christ. I've gone from, you know, Mennonite churches, and let's see, I can't even think now, the Mennonites, and the Amish to, you know, full gospel meetings.

So, you know, the whole gamut, and everything in between. And you can go into a church, and you can smell the aroma, you know. Assembly of God church.

Baptist church. Nazarene church. You know, because there's a certain way of doing things.

There's a certain aroma because they have stayed that way for 60 years as a denomination. They've never moved, they've never been open to, you know, whatever God is doing, and there's a certain aroma. And God is, I believe in these days, you know, He is emptying us from vessel to vessel.

And in the winemaking process, let me share this with you. Somebody many, many years ago, I took some notes at the time, talked about making a wineskin. You recall that the Bible says that the new wine cannot be placed in an old wineskin.

The reason being that the old wineskin gets rigid. You know, we talk about somebody who is set in their ways. They're not flexible anymore.

They've got a certain way of doing things, and unless it's done that way, you know, they won't cooperate. There's no ability to adapt and do things a little different because they've always done it that way, and so they're set in their ways. And God, of course, the wind bloweth where it listeth.

God is not one that always is stereotyped and does things the same way over and over again. He's always coming up with new ways of doing things. Isn't that right? And so in the making of a wineskin, the first thing that has to go is there has to be depth because wineskins signify that there was an animal.

And from my little research, the wineskin was made many times from the foreleg of the animal or the hind leg because it's a natural funnel shape, you know, and so they would skin it and then bind up the bottom, you know, with some sort of, I guess, a tap or something and then sew up the top, but you had that natural funnel. So, first of all, something had to die. And I believe in our own life if we are going to be open to the things of the Spirit of God, we've got to die to our own ways.

You know, that rigidity, it's got to be done this way, this is the only way, you know, I was raised this way, it's got to be done the Nazarene way, it's got to be done the Baptist way, it's got to be done the Assembly of God way, it's got to, you know, whatever it is, and we become rigid, we can only, you know, we have sort of tunnel vision spiritually speaking. God says, listen, behold, I do a new thing, you know. The second thing is, the flesh has to be removed from it.

And the flesh speaks of that tendency within us to do our own thing, you know. The first definition in the Bible of flesh is, let me just give it to you, all of a sudden I'm having a senior moment here. And the Lord said, My spirit will not always strive in man forever, because he also is flesh.

The margin says, in going astray, he is flesh. That's the first definition of flesh in the Bible, talking about the law first mentioned. When the Bible talks about the flesh, you know, that we should not walk in the flesh, it doesn't mean this flesh, there's different types of flesh in the Bible.

This flesh is not sinful. If it was, you could be holy by going on a diet. So, you know, this flesh is not sinful, but it's that tendency within us to do our own thing.

That is what sin is all about. And so, the flesh has to be taken out. We've got to die to our way of doing things.

The second thing, it had to be washed in water. There was a process where they would thoroughly wash that wineskin, or the making of the wineskin, and remove every trace of flesh and blood and everything else. And to me, that speaks about soaking again in the Word of God.

Going back to the Word of God and soaking again and saying, Lord, what are you saying to me? You know, I want to be open to, you know, whatever you're saying to me. I don't want to be, you know, look at things through my sort of tunnel vision and so on. The second thing, it was placed in the furnace.

The psalmist talks about it, Psalm 119 verse 83, he talks about feeling like a wineskin over the fire or over the smoke. And it was basically a primitive curing process. But there is many times when God will put us through the fire.

And then the final thing is, it was soaked in oil. And the oil gave it, again, the waterproofing and that elasticity, if you like, and made it supple and flexible. And the oil, to me, speaks again about the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

So there is the making of a wineskin, and we all need to be open to what God is doing, what God is saying. And you've heard the saying, I'm sure, that the persecutors of the present, or the pioneers of the past, are the persecutors of the present. In other words, let's say we have a revival here tonight, and God moves in a certain way.

And then there's another revival five years from now. We are going to say, and it's different than what it was tonight. We are going to insist, listen, if this was a real revival, it would happen the way it happened five years ago.

And we become the persecutors of the present. God is constantly changing things in that sense. Now when I talk about change, I'm not talking about something that is contrary to the Word of God and all of that.

But I'm just talking about being open to the leading of the Spirit of God. And this is the sort of guy, if you like, that Abraham was. Now there's reasons why we resist change.

Number one is tradition. We've always done it this way. It's the way I was raised.

Again, it's my father's house. And so on. Remember in the New Testament, a man that was healed of blindness, and they came to his father, and he was afraid of being put out of the synagogue.

So he basically said, well, ask him. Don't ask me. Some of us are afraid of being put out of the synagogue.

Because there's a certain way the synagogue does things, and if I do it contrary to that, it may cost me my job and so on. And so we kowtow, if you like, to man's way of doing something because we're afraid that God will not provide for us. After all, if I leave my denomination, then I'm going to lose this, and I'm going to lose that, and so on and so forth.

And all of that is unbelief that God can not provide for us. And so instead we stay confined. And I'm not against denominations in saying that.

The next thing is cost. You know, it's the cost of maybe losing some friends, especially if it entails making a move. There's a cost, you know, financially.

When God called me to go full-time into an itinerant ministry, I was pastoring, making a steady salary. I stepped out, I had three meetings for the entire year, and I resigned from the church, and I thought, you know, how is God going to provide? Again, I didn't have a newsletter, I wasn't going to beg, I wasn't going to ask God to open doors, and so on. But if God asks you to do something and makes it clear, He will provide, and He has.

You know, God is faithful. But there's also that fear of the unknown that keeps us many times. There's a cost involved.

The next one was fear. You know, fear of the unknown, the insecurity, and so on. There's doctrinal reasons why we resist change.

You know, we've believed a lie about a certain thing. Maybe God begins to move on us about believing God for the supernatural realm. We've been raised a cessationist and so on, and we've got to break out of that.

I believe all that started with the ten spies. When God says, you know, this is what I will do and I can do, and they said, no, we're not going to believe it. But anyway, we won't go into that.

And then the other thing is, tents can become a house. In other words, we can revert back. I'll give you an illustration.

For instance, when Moses was in the wilderness and the children of Israel were in a state of rebellion and God sent judgment in the form of serpents, Moses cried out to God and said, you know, give us an answer basically. And God says, I want you to make a brazen serpent, put it on a pole, and whoever looks at it will be, you know, will be healed. Well, that was great.

That was God's answer for that particular time and place. Right? It was an incredible blessing. It was from God.

There was no question about that. God told Moses specifically what to do on that particular occasion. But 700 years later, they're worshipping that thing.

They've made that thing into an idol called Neheshtan. And one of the things that Hezekiah did, I think it was Hezekiah, he came along one day and he had to grind in pieces that brazen serpent that Moses had made. Now, can you imagine the uproar? You know.

You did what? You know. I wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for that brazen serpent. How dare you do that? My great-great- great-grandmother was complaining, my great-great- great-grandfather about Moses and the wife he married or whatever.

And a serpent came in and, you know, she was dying or he was dying and they dragged him out and, you know, I wouldn't even be here. Why did you? But they'd made it into an idol. And we can do the same thing.

You know, God does something for a particular time and season and then all of a sudden we make it into a form. But this is the way now it has to be done the rest of the time. And so we've got to be careful.

You know, we can do that with the Scriptures. You search the Scriptures for in them you think you have eternal life, but you will not come to me. In other words, the Scriptures themselves became more to the Pharisees and the one who was the incarnate word.

The old covenant, you know. There's a new covenant but people are gravitating back even now in many charismatic circles. You know, there's a going back to the Jewish ways.

And, you know, it's going back to an area of bondage. The New Testament, the path of the just shall shine, you know, more and more. You don't get light by going back.

You may get inside and, you know, a lot of people never studied the Old Testament. Once they do, you know, they get excited about it. But then it becomes a hook and they, before you know it, they're back, you know, doing all the Jewish stuff.

We don't have to do that anymore. But, you know, so we've got to be careful. But God is wanting us to be open to the moving of the Spirit of God.

And we've got to have that mentality of being a tent. Lord, I'm open to the leading of your Spirit. Alright, the next one and the last one is the well.

And the well speaks of satisfaction, deals with my attitude towards God Himself. Abraham was always digging wells. Wells in the Scripture, as you know, water is always speaking of life.

We can't live without water. It's essential. The enemy was always filling in the wells.

Remember, Isaac had to dig again the wells that Abraham had dug. One of the strategies of war was to fill in the wells so that you could not survive. And when you went to, you know, get water, then they would take over your territory and so on and so forth.

Let me give you an illustration in Jeremiah. And you're familiar with this complaint to the Lord through the prophet. Jeremiah 2, verse 13, My people have committed two evils.

They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living water, and they have hewn out for themselves broken cisterns that can hold no water. In other words, we have to have a well and that well has to become God Himself. Our satisfaction, our life has to be found in our relationship with God.

It can't be found out of relationship with others. As important as that is, we have to derive our relationship from God Himself. By saying that, I'm not suggesting that, you know, you separate from your friends that are essential.

We need the body of Christ and so on. But when Christ who is our life, she'll appear. I say to young people, and I was asked a question last night, something about what is the most important thing you would share with somebody, and I have one pat answer, and it says, don't neglect your devotional life.

In other words, dig a well, get a relationship with God so that you can know the voice of God, draw from God, get into the Word of God, and so on. We need to establish a relationship with God. And Abraham again was always digging wells which to me are symbolic of having this relationship with God.

The woman at the well, remember Jesus said, I can give you water so you'll never thirst again. The river of God is full of water. God explains over and over in the Bible, you know, that water is a type of the Spirit of God.

In fact, well, I'll touch on it tomorrow night, so I won't touch on it right now. But the well to me represents what do you derive your life from? Where do you find your true satisfaction? You know, I find Christians that, you know, can rattle off every player in the NFL, whatever it is, you know, NBA and so on, and don't know the books of the Bible type thing. And I know, you know, where they derive their life from.

You know, they'll complain if church is five minutes late, but they certainly will sit there when the game goes into overtime until it ends, even if it's three in the morning, you know. There's something wrong. In other words, their life, the thing that excites them, the thing that motivates them, the thing that they find their satisfaction in, is not really God.

They have another idol, if you like, in their life. God doesn't want that. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

And we need to, again, find Him as our source. He needs to be our satisfaction, and so on. I'm preaching to myself, because like all of us, you know, these days where the media dominates our homes and television and so on and so forth, and you know, I've got to watch it just like everybody else.

But you can so easily derive your life, your pleasure, your satisfaction by turning on television, watching five hours in a row, and never thinking anything of it, and skipping the Wednesday night meeting or the prayer meeting, and so on and so forth. You know, let's be honest. I mean, revival begins when we're honest, you know.

Do I have a well? And do I find my satisfaction from God Himself, or do I have something else? I get more excitement out of shopping. I get more excited out of watching a ball game. I get more excited about travel.

I get more, you know, whatever it is that happens to be your well. And Abraham, to me, is this individual. No wonder he is called three times a friend of God.

He aligned himself with God in every sense of the word. He was willing to uproot at the moment's notice. He was willing to follow the Lamb with us wherever He went.

He was constantly building altars, giving God the best, constantly moving, led by the Spirit of God, and that's what I believe God is looking for in the life of every individual. We have, you know, many brides that we find at the well. I've got a list here.

Eliezer met Rebecca at the well. Moses met Zipporah at the well. Jacob met Rachel at the well.

Jesus met the Samaritan woman that many people typify as a type of the Gentile church at the well. You know, it's at the well that the bride and the bridegroom meet. And I think the same thing is true in our lives today.

We meet Him at the well. And I suggest if you don't have a well, that you dig a well, so to speak. You know, pressing to God until you get a relationship with God, and then deepen that relationship, allow that relationship to become your life.

Jesus said on that last great day of the feast, if any man come unto me and drink, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. You know, there is a satisfaction that you can find in your relationship with God that surpasses every other relationship. And yet, you know, we drink from broken cisterns.

In fact, in Jeremiah here, it goes on to say, let me find it, where am I, Jeremiah, verse 18. What are you doing on the road to Egypt to drink the waters of the Nile? What are you doing on the road to Assyria to drink the waters of the Euphrates? In other words, God's complaint is you're drinking from everything but Me. You're going down to the Nile, which is Egypt, a type of the world.

Or you're drinking from the river of the waters of the Euphrates, which is Babylon. Same thing, in a sense. In other words, do we find our satisfaction in the world, in the whole Babylonian system of things, or do we find our satisfaction in the true source of life, which is Jesus Christ? And even in the church, I think we get more satisfaction in the world.

And yet, the Bible says, love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. And we need to be honest.

I think the major sin in the church is spiritual adultery. Spiritual adultery is where you're carrying on an affair, and you're deriving your satisfaction from that affair rather than the one that is to be your husband or your wife. And the Bible says the world becomes the mistress.

Love not the world, and the verse before that in James is, you adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that friendship with the world is enmity against God? And so, we are committing spiritual adultery because we have found satisfaction in the world that satisfies us more than our relationship with Jesus Christ should. And so, it's spiritual adultery. And again, Abraham found his satisfaction in God.

We've got to do the same thing. Those are the three essential things, I think. The altar, the tent, and the well.

Beautifully, again, symbolized and exemplified in the life of this wonderful man, Abraham, but a testimony and a challenge to all of us, including myself. They're a good little indicator. From time to time, we should just sit down and ponder.

Am I building a house? Am I getting so rooted here and so comfortable here that I can no longer respond to the call of God? Now, you know, that needs to be balanced. I'm not suggesting you're a spiritual butterfly and every week you try a different church and all that sort of stuff. That's not what I'm talking about.

I'm talking about that you give God the very best and you say, God, I'm willing to go and do whatever you want me to do. I'll go here, I'll go there. If you move, I want to move with you.

That's what I'm talking about. Let's just close in prayer, shall we? Father, I thank you again for the challenge of your Word. Lord, you said this Word has everything that pertains to life and godliness.

Lord, where I haven't been clear tonight, I pray that, Lord, you would clarify and make real to each and every single one of us tonight, Lord, the importance of being open and, Lord, to the moving of the Spirit of God. That, God, we would not be so housebound, as it were, that, Lord, you can't dislodge us, you can't move us, that, Lord, we're intolerant and inflexible, that, Lord, we would be new wineskin. That you can put in, again, the moving of your Spirit.

And so, Lord, I pray for every church here, every individual. God, we would respond again like Abraham. We'd be men of the altar, men of the well.

Lord, men of the tent. Bless each and everyone, I pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.

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