

Devotions for August 22 – August 28 2011

Monday, August 22, 2011: *Relationship* Daily reading: Genesis 1:26-31

The Bible has a reputation of being rather stuffy: dry as toast and dusty as the desert the characters traveled through. There is a lot in the Scriptures that would support this claim. But when you really dig around in it, you start encountering the kind of people that we've met over the past several weeks, and you might begin to appreciate the human element at its best and at its worst. The golden thread woven through it all, from the table of contents all the way through to the maps, is relationship. God, from the very first sunrise right up to today, has desired relationship, and goes to extravagant lengths to woo us into that relationship. Ask God to clear away your stuffy perceptions and renew a sense of relationship.

Tuesday, August 23, 2011: *Abram?* Daily reading: Genesis 11:27-32

"Abram means 'exalted father' (ironic in that he was childless at the time), but his name was changed to Abraham when God promised to make him the father of many nations (thereby putting the 'Ha!' in Abram ...). What's more, he gave up everything to relocate (and relocate and relocate) because God told him to. And he was willing to use his son as a burnt offering to the Lord, again because God seemed to think this screwy math (1 son + 1 sacrifice = many, many, sons) was a good way to keep a promise ... But the main recurring theme in Abraham's story is faith. The most important thing about Abraham is that he believed, he trusted. God spoke and Abraham listened" (*– from "Crazy Book: A Not-So-Stuffey Dictionary of Biblical Terms," Augsburg*). Can you trust the promises of God? Ask God for enough faith to step into today with confidence in God's promises.

Wednesday, August 24, 2011: *Go!* Daily reading: Genesis 12:1-5

You've got to go when the Spirit says "Go!" God calls Abram to leave his home and family at age 75, and head to a new land. "So Abram went." These are three of the most important words in Scripture. A great deal hinges on Abraham's act of obedience. Abraham is 75 years old, and God commands him to pick up, pack up, and head out to an unknown, underdeveloped place. God says, "Leave your people, your tribe, your father's household. Leave everything safe and familiar. Leave your old gods. Leave all of that behind." This is the Old Testament concept of separation, the call from God to be separate from other gods and the cultures built around them; the old values, old priorities, old identities. What do you need to leave behind today? Ask God to move you to a new spiritual place.

Thursday, August 25, 2011: *A Way?* Daily reading: Genesis 15:1-6

God makes a way where there is no way. God promises to bless Abraham with descendants too numerous to count. His wife, Sarah, is barren, and doubts God's promise. She helps God out by giving Abraham her servant, Hagar, a common custom in these days. Hagar bears a son, Ishmael, when Abraham is 86. Hagar is the only person in the Bible to call God by name (Genesis 16:13), and the only woman to personally receive the divine blessing of descendants. Abraham and Sarah are filled with doubt, mistrust and wonder, but they manage to hold on to some threads of God's outrageous plan. A year later their son is born. God tells them to name the child Isaac, meaning "he laughs." What thread of God's plan do you need to hold onto today? Ask God to guide you through this day, providing a way where there doesn't seem to be a way.

Friday, August 26, 2011: *Delivers* Daily reading: Genesis 21:1-7

God promises to bless Abraham and Sarah with a child. They're nearly 100! They laugh. God delivers. So does Sarah. In the midst of this unfolding story is this little line: "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" What do you think? Abraham is in his 70s, and God says to him, "You're going to be a daddy." A dozen years later, God repeats the promise: "Really, I'm not kidding." We get the idea that God is just stacking up the improbabilities. Pushing Abraham and Sarah toward a nursery in their golden years is like tying one hand behind his almighty back, just to make it interesting. Abraham is pushing 100, and he's about to push a stroller. Sarah pushes through contractions and God pushes the promise that nothing is too difficult for God. How has God delivered in your life? Ask God for patience, waiting for God's plan to play out.

Saturday, August 27, 2011: *Doubts?* Daily reading: Genesis 18:9-15

Do you ever have doubts? Do you ever wonder if the whole faith adventure is a bunch of hoopla and hilarity? Do you wonder if God will show up for you? Do you wonder if you've taken yourself out of the game, and God has abandoned you? You're in good company. Frederick Buechner once wrote, "Whether your faith is that there is a God or that there is not a God, if you don't have any doubts you are either kidding yourself or asleep. Doubts are the ants in the pants of faith. They keep it awake and moving." Doubt and faith can live side by side. One scholar even argued that doubts prove the existence of faith, because doubts can only be found within the framework of faith. What kind of doubts troubles you? Ask God for the marvelous mystery of faith to grow in you today.

Sunday, August 28, 2011: *Leave?* Daily reading: Isaiah 51:1-6

The prophet reminds the people of Israel about their roots: Abraham and Sarah, who pack up and move to a new land, leaving everything behind. Do you ever trust God like that? Is God asking you to leave anything behind? Any idol, sin or fear? Is God asking you to go someplace? A new area of ministry? A new adventure in your life of faith? Is God calling you to bless someone in your sphere of influence? Do you ever trust God like that? Do you ever say, "Okay God, I'll go." Think about the crossroads where Abraham stands, and what his life ends up contributing. And what it would look like if he stays in a safe place. Ask God to help you leave those things behind that you need to leave behind.