

Have you ever deliberately departed significantly from the ways of a key generational relationship? Frankly, pretty much everyone has departed in some dimension from what their parents taught them. The question is: what did you depart from and how much did you depart from it? As for me, neither of my parents were believers early on...so I departed greatly from what my family household said and did about God when I was growing up. And praise the Lord for that! Perhaps you have a similar story, perhaps not.

That brings us to Abraham once more in this series profiling this amazing man, and this time we're talking about generational choice. You see, most every great story of a great life has a point where a line was drawn...a somewhat-surprising direction taken...sometimes a generational choice made that re-vectored the life of not just one life but also, quite often, the lives of many others. So it was with Abraham.

So, let's start with Abraham's earthly father, Terah. Terah was a descendant of Shem and fathered three sons: Abram, Nahor, and Haran. Of course, Abraham was still called "Abram" in these early years. Abram's brother Haran died early in this family narrative but the other two brothers married, with Abram wedding Sarai who had yet to bear a child. Here's a story fragment from that time, found in Genesis 11:31-32.

"Terah took Abram his son and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife, and they went forth together from Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canaan, but when they came to Haran, they settled there. The days of Terah were 205 years, and Terah died in Haran."

Did you catch that? Out of the three sons of Terah, Nahor was the one who did not go with his father. There you go, *that was a generational choosing*: Nahor did not go with his father. Perhaps Nahor felt tied to where and who he perceived himself to be—after all, his grandfather's name was also Nahor. Or maybe he just wasn't invited. The long and short of it is, Abram's brother Nahor disappears from the narrative.

Another generational choice was that Abram's father Terah relocated—taking Abram, Sarai, and grandson Lot and leaving Ur to go into the land of Canaan. But Terah stopped short in Haran...a place actually with the same name as his deceased son, who was the father of Lot. There, in Haran, Terah settled—and there he died. Yeah, Terah never got to Canaan as planned. Right, he never got to the land of Canaan.

Then came God's famous call of Abram found in the Genesis 12 narrative—where "the Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.'" And Abram's *generational choice* was to obey God by leaving his country and his father's house. Yes, that was *a generational choice that was different than that of his earthly father*. But, contrary to God's instruction, Abram *did* take one of his kindred with him—his nephew Lot. And that became a real problem...as we labeled it in a previous episode: Lot brought Abraham "a whole Lot of troubles."

But make no mistake. Obedience to God's plan is a human choice. And so is disobedience. And both have consequences. Here, the fact is that Abram took a journey with his earthly father that Terah chose not to complete. Later, Abraham took a complete journey by faith that his earthly father did not. What an object lesson for us to ponder, to marinate in! Many listening to this can relate to Abraham in this specific way.

Here's the thing. Abraham also had a couple of other extraordinary generational choices: one was contrary *within his generation*—Abraham continued on while his brother Nahor stayed behind. And as to the next generation, Abraham made a radical choice—he was willing to sacrifice his son Isaac in obedience to God!

But, from humanity's beginning, all too often folks choose a disobedient trek...perhaps simply defaulting to folding into predetermined slots created and bestowed by the preceding prestigious, powerful generation...or maybe to leap into new adventures with the youthful generation following, where their approaches are fresh but untested and largely clueless...or perhaps to stick with their current generation of peers who crave potential power and wealth and have FOMO—yeah, the Fear Of Missing Out!

That last circumstance exactly describes ten of the sons of Jacob, the man whose name changed to "Israel"—ten brothers so jealous of Joseph that they sold him into slavery. Then, those ten deceived their

very own father, lying in order to try to bump their more favored brother aside permanently. You know, they were like their father Jacob himself who deceived his father Isaac to bump aside *his* brother Esau! Yes, every generation chooses, even within that generation—choosing themselves over others!

Maybe you're of a theological disposition where, right now, you're thinking of generational curses from the Old Testament (Exodus 20:5). That's where the expectation is that God is going to punish people to the third or fourth generation. But Exodus 20:6—the very next verse—says God shows “steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.” Yeah, even for an idolatrous Israel, repentance staves off punishment...for one example, see 1 Samuel 12:10-11.

But just what is totally reliable and true about *today*? This very day...for us? Well, believers are a new creation in Christ! (2 Corinthians 5:17) And we know that “there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” (Romans 8:1) You see, we as believers have true freedom in Christ, even if our family tree is full of degenerates and murderers—*there is no generational curse!* The key is to be “in Christ,” of course, making great choices and responding in obedience by loving God and loving others!

But the fact is, it's unavoidable—and also desirable—that we both *gather from* and *discard from* the generations around us. Are you “gathering from” your parents, all the good and holy traits they exhibited—while also “discarding” the pitfalls God wants you to avoid? And when it comes to the next generation, too, are you then distributing to them all that is good and holy—while discarding the lesser?

But probably the sneakiest generational choice we can make is aligning with our generation. Yes, I mean our generation and our friends and our church—yes, those with whom we can quite easily let our guard down. That means we won't identify close-in problems and separate ourselves from them...you know, like Abraham did from his kindred, all except for his nephew Lot. And like the people of Israel didn't, with lone prophets often fruitlessly coming and going as Israel went in different directions than God's direction!

Here a vein of gold to mine: Revelation 1-3 surely has much for us to ponder. That's where seven churches were profiled...and most were found wanting. That ranged from abandoning the love had at first; to needing to repent; to accommodating a false prophetess and being sexually immoral; to being dead; to being lukewarm in faith. But glory to God, the church at Philadelphia was found blameless.

And, yes, like all other generations throughout history, our generation is a wicked generation. But there are individuals and groups who comprise a faithful remnant seeking after the Lord in the midst of it all. And God is always seeking after such individuals...in every generation! As the Scriptures themselves in this amazing passage say seven times—yes, saying this once each to seven churches: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” Yes, each of us is to hear the Spirit in order to avoid the pervasive problems of churches that are present and problematic in every era!

And of course, this key principle applies to our workplaces, too! Our challenge and our opportunity is to both wisely gather from and relentlessly discard from all the generations around us. So, what's the overarching approach to that? Well, to remember what Jesus said! “I only do what I see my Father doing.” And we ourselves are to be conformed to the Christ who conforms to His Father! And Romans 12:1-2 can serve us well in our dealings with the generations before, current, and after. Here it is...

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” Every generation must choose its own way—and every individual within each generation is to do so, too—sometimes conforming when it's called for, other times, “shaking the dust from our feet” when the ways, perspectives, and passions of others are deficient or lacking.

Yes, be like Abraham in his good choices. Like Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Amazing. Let's pray these five words together: *God, help us choose well!* Say it again. *God, help us choose well!*

## *A&A: Application & Action*

1. Can you readily identify the key ways that you (and your church) have correctly gathered from previous generation(s) of church leaders and theologians? What about the ways that you have properly discarded from them? Be specific...and be sure to point to the fruits of these actions.
2. How proficient is your workplace leadership and culture at keeping the right ways while discarding the wrong ways of the previous generation of leadership? Discuss.
3. How about you personally...across all areas of life? Have you fruitfully applied what you wisely gathered from the previous generation—your parents, teachers, pastors? And have you discarded the lesser, fruitless ways of that previous generation in order to best serve the next generation you are teaching, mentoring, discipling? Discuss.