

3 – “Prioritize Me and Multiply” // Genesis 13:1–14 // Multiply 3

Summit Church! Genesis 13...

- We're in **week #3 of a series through the life of Abraham** called *Multiply*, in which we're **taking some time** to talk about where God is taking us as a church.
- God has blessed us, Summit Church, and with that blessing comes the responsibility to multiply it.
- So we are **talking about steps** we need to take as a church in obedience to that. We are also talking about what your role is, individually, in that.

This series is not just about what God wants to do **through us in the** community, but what he wants to do **in us as he deepens our trust** in him and our commitment to the mission of God.

I told you last week that our **hearts are like a car** severely out of alignment, always veering into the ditch of self-centeredness and self-sufficiency.

So **periodically the Holy Spirit** needs to get our attention to have us examine what our **priorities** are; **whose mission** we are really living on, and in whom we are really trusting.

*I heard about a **dad here at TSC** whose son was having some behavioral issues. The man **tried everything he knew** to get his son's attention, but nothing worked. Well, **he was a pilot** so he decided to take his son for a ride on his airplane—to give him a **different perspective; to talk to him about his need to grow up** and make better decisions. He discovered that these **high altitude conversations put his son in a totally different frame of mind**, and **after they returned from the flight** the son was much more cooperative and respectful.*

*So whenever the boy's behavior began to deteriorate, the he'd take him up on another plane ride, **look him in the eye**, and tell him what he expected of him.*

*Well, **one of this man's friends was amazed at this technique** so he asked if he could come with him on one of these father son airplane rides. **“I want to see if this might work with my son.”***

*Well the dad agreed and during the flight, the second man took this photograph—which might help explain why the technique was so successful. **PICTURE OF BOY ON JET***

Well, God does this with us from time to time to help us get our bearing.

Listen, **I know it might be uncomfortable** for you. It is for me, too. But **that's good**. It's the dilemma of being a living sacrifice. Living sacrifices always try to get up off the altar...

Today we're going to talk about establishing your priorities. You're going to see God put Abraham in a couple of situations where he has to choose what is **most important, most foundational** to him.

- He's **not having to choose between something bad** and something good, but **which out of a couple of good things** are the *most good** and which ones should come first.

These **subtle choices** are going to have a **dramatic impact** on how Abraham's life turns out.

- **Every leadership book I've read** says that establishing priorities is the most essential key to success. Knowing what, in a long list of *good things*, should come first; which are mission critical and which are nice but not essential.
- *In the kingdom of God, that is especially true.*

Genesis 13:1–17

13:1 So Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot (his nephew) with him, into the Negeb (which was a region in the future Israel)

2 Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold. 3 And he journeyed... as far as Bethel, 4 to the place where he had made an altar at the first. And there Abram (again) called upon the name of the Lord.

5 And Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents, 6 so that the land could not support both of them dwelling together; for their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together, 7 and there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock.

8 And so Abram said to Lot, "Let there be no strife between you and me... 9 Is not the whole land before you? If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right, or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left."

- What Abraham does here is **pretty unheard of**. The average observer in those days would have expected one of two reactions: **War, or Abraham just asks Lot to go somewhere else**, since Abraham is clearly the big man in this party. He's older; he's richer; and, he's the one who received the promise directly from God. (If **anything, Lot was kind of a tag-along** in this.)
- But **Abraham does neither** of these things. Not only does he avoid conflict, he gives the lesser man the better choice.
 - o How many of you **had an older brother**? It'd be like him giving you the **extra piece of chicken** at dinner or the last brownie. Unheard of!

10 And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw that the Jordan Valley was well watered everywhere like the garden of the Lord... 11 So Lot chose for himself all the Jordan Valley.

12 And Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled among the cities of the valley and moved his tent as far as Sodom. 13 Now the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the Lord.

14 After Lot had separated from him, the Lord said to Abram, "Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward, 15 for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever. 16 I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted. 17 Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you."

What you see here is a contrast between **2 different sets of priorities**; **2 different ways of looking** at the world.

Both Lot and Abraham are **ambitious** men, and both made **smart decisions**, according to a particular system of values.

- But **Abraham's choices led to increased prosperity** and blessing and multiplication;
- Lot's led to **destruction**: Abraham is going to have to **rescue Lot twice from Sodom**: once in the next chapter; and then again in chapter 18, just minutes before God destroys Sodom and the whole Jordan Valley. **And that was where Lot lost all his possessions** and his wife turned to a pillar of salt.

Let's look at the value systems, and priorities, of each:

LOT

1. Lot prioritized... the riches he could see

- When Lot looked out at the options, he made his choice **based on one factor**: Which direction can make me wealthier?
 - o *Financially, his decision was a good choice!*
- But in the process, he shows **total disregard**, even disdain for, spiritual things:
 - o He knew God, worshipped God, so there's **no prayer** or **any consultation** with God in his choice.

- And he **makes his home next to Sodom**, which was notorious for its wickedness. He put his family in grave spiritual danger, because **Sodom was where the money was at**.
 - And you see these choices **play out tragically** in his family.
 - In chapter 13 he moves “**next to Sodom.**”
 - In chapter 14, he is no longer *next to* Sodom, but now actually **in Sodom**.
 - By chapter 19, not only is Lot in Sodom, he is one of the **most respected men** in Sodom.
 - And **eventually, when God calls him to get out**, his wife is so in love with the material prosperity and the way of life of Sodom that she can’t leave it... and God turns her into a pillar of salt.
- **Listen: God sometimes calls his people to live in Sodom.** (*I say that for all the people at the Chapel Hill campus.*) The **point is not that you shouldn’t live in a place with sin (that’s everywhere); the point** is that Lot prioritized material things above God.
- I know **people who are in jobs** that are terrible for their family and **leave them no time for family** or serving God, but it pays for a lifestyle they’ve always wanted so they stay in it.
- I know of couples with kids **where both parents work**, not because they feel **called to it** or because it is the wisest use of their gifts, or because they believe it is truly what is right for their family, but simply because **two incomes are required** to pay for a lifestyle they really want.
- I know parents whose kids are **not really involved** at the church because they are so committed to dance, or baseball or softball...
 - **And listen, I get it...** I have 4 kids. And **as they get older**, it’s *hard to figure out* how to balance everything...
 - **But let’s face it.** Your **kid is probably not going** to play in the Major Leagues, but they are definitely going to go to

heaven or hell, so **why would you sacrifice spiritual things** on the altar of something you know is passing, fleeting, and improbable?

- When I watch, it seems that many of you parents care more about where your kids go to college than where they spend eternity, and honestly, that’s sad.
- What good is it if you and your children become leading men and women in Sodom but lose their souls?
 - **It’s not that any of these other things are wrong...** just that God should get the priority in all your decisions.
- **ONE MORE: What is the primary factor in the career you choose or where you live?**
 - **WHAT WE SAY...** Whatever you are good at, do it well...
 - **Many factors in where you choose your career...** *Why not let the kingdom of God be the largest factor?* You have to get a job somewhere, why not get a job in a place where God does is doing something strategic?
 - **Lot’s primary concern** in where he pursued his career was where he could make the most money. It did not turn out well.
 - **Whatever you are good at...**
 - **DWELL**

2. Lot prioritized... self-interest (over generosity)

- Lot chose what was best for him, even though in this case he **actually had to wrong his Uncle** to get it. (Abraham clearly should have been given the better choice).
- Lot is **miles away from a generous heart**. He thinks about the prosperity of one person in his choices: him and his immediate family.

ABRAHAM

1. Abraham (by contrast) prioritized... the kingdom of God.

- His **question was not**, “Where is the best land?” but, “God, where do you want me to go?”
 - Did you notice in **vs. 3–4** that his first act upon coming into the new land was to build an altar and ask God what he wanted?
 - **In fact, when he got there he went to this place called Bethel** where he previously had heard from God because he said, “God, the 1st thing I need from you is to hear from you about what you want from this chapter of my life.”
- **Abraham thought about God first and most in every decision.** You see that not only in how he makes decisions; you see it in what he does *with his blessings* and victories.
 - **In the next chapter** (14, which we won’t take time to read) Lot is going to get captured by some of the kings of Sodom, and **Abram is going to mount a rescue operation** where, against incredible odds, he pulls off a great victory. In the process, he **ends up with a lot of spoil** from the kings who attack him, which made him **even richer**.
 - The **first thing Abram does is tithe** (give 10%) to a mysterious man named Melchizedek who is presented as a priest of God.
 - Not only was GOD **Abraham’s first thought in making the decision**, he was the **first place Abraham turned** after the victory to say “thank you.” (Because all Abraham’s blessings and prosperity come from God, God **should get the firstfruit** of everything Abraham received).
- **You may ask:** Why was giving to Melchizedek considered giving to God? Because Melchizedek was God’s appointed instrument.
 - **Well, in the NT, God’s appointed instrument is the church.** Look through the book of Acts—God does his work on the earth through one primary institution—the church. The church was the means through which he preached the gospel, disciplined people, met the needs of the poor...
- So around here we say you don’t give to the church, but *through* the church.

2. Abraham prioritized... generosity (over self-interest)

- Abraham thought about himself THIRD in this decision (*God was first, Lot second, Abraham third*). Because of that, *guess who thought about Abram’s needs? God did.*
- **I love this verse:**
 - **Prov 19:17**, “Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will repay him for his deed.” x *When you loan money, you ask. Will they pay me back? Giving to the poor is like a loan made to God: he will pay you back. You prioritize the needs of the poor. God will take care of you.*
 - Or this promise: **Prov 11:24**, “Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered.” Abraham experienced that.

So... which man better exemplifies your approach to life?

A few diagnostic questions:

A. What is “first” in your decisions?

- **Closest I have to a life verse:** My dad. **Matthew 6:33**. “All these things”: money, relationships. *Always ask what God wants and do that; always prioritize the kingdom of God and the mission, and God will supply all that you need.*

B. Does God get the first and best of all you receive?

- Let me tell you a story that has **really rocked me** recently... **Cain and Abel**
 - **Cain and Abel were the 2 sons of Adam and Eve**, both made an offering to God. But there was **a difference**:
 - **Abel gave** the firstborn of his flock. What that means is that before any other animals, God got the first... what if no more animals were born? He trusted God with that.
 - **Cain, by contrast, gave only after the whole crop came in.** He waited until it was all in to see if he would have enough, and only then did he give. He was what we call a **“December giver,”** he waited until the end of the year to see what he could spare.

- God was pleased with Abel's offering and rejected Cain's.

Which represents your approach to giving?

What you give your first and best to reveals what is God in your life.

Friend of mine: Everybody **tithes to** something. Everybody **gives their 1st & their best** to something. What you give your 1st & your best to...

- ...shows what you treasure most.
 - If the 1st & best of your paycheck goes to improving your lifestyle, that shows that what you deem most important in life is comfort.
 - Did you notice in **vs. 10** that Lot described the Jordan Valley like the "Garden of the Lord" (10 And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw that the Jordan Valley was well watered everywhere like the garden of the Lord.) There is a reason the writer describes it that way: What Lot saw had a spiritual dimension for him... This was paradise. So it was first in his decisions.
 - For Abraham, God's presence was paradise, so that is what he put first...
- What you give your 1st & best to shows what you trust most...
 - If the first thing you do with your paycheck is save from it (you give your 1st & best to savings) that's because money is what you trust. You think you are responsible to secure your future.
 - Abel could give the first of the flock to God because he trusted God to provide more flock. Abraham could be generous with the land because he trusted God was going to provide him with the land.
 - E.g. I heard about a pastor... tithing envelope you give to me that I promise to return if things don't work out by the end of the month.
 - For many of you, the reason you are not generous is not that you are stingy; you are fearful. God is not your trust.

What you give your first and best to reveals what is God in your life.

- Scripture says that money competes with God in 1 of 2 ways in our lives, depending on your personality. For some, money is their significance... EXTRA \$1000. For others, it is their trust. In God's sense of humor, these two people always get married to each other.
 - Both think the other have a problem with money. But, ironically, both have the same problem, just from a different direction: both idolize money. They look to money to do something that God should do.
 - God should be our primary source of significance, and God should be our primary source of trust. Only then are we FREED up to be generous.
- Let me say it again: Everybody tithes to something. Everybody gives their first and their best to something. What is it for you?
 - (Don't get hung up on the 10%. FIRST AND BEST means 1st priority for you. The largest part of your budget.
 - I say that because for many years, tithing was just a "line item" that came out of my budget. It didn't really affect anything. It wasn't really first and best because it didn't affect anything that came after it.
 - God wants me to give in a way that shows he is my first and best.
 - What do you spend your first and best on? Your mortgage? Your savings?
 - Whatever you give your first and best to is what you worship, what is God in your life.

C. Do you think of yourself as an owner or steward of your blessings?

- God had told Abraham that he was going to bless him to be a blessing, so when Abraham received any blessing his natural disposition was to consider how it was going to bless others, too...
 - Thus, even when it came time to choose where to live, he gave the first and best choice to Lot.

- **Lot, of course, was the opposite.** He thought about himself first.
 - Lot is the **first American** in the Bible: **Get all you can; can all you get; then sit on your can.**
- **Which better represents you?**
- Are you a **channel of blessing, or a reservoir?**
- **Listen:** According to Scripture, God blessed us not just so we could enrich our lives, but also *so that through us we could bless others.*

Remember our verse from 2 Cor: **“You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way...”** 2 Cor 9:10

- **What this means is that if you don’t give generously, you’re actually stealing.** *You’re embezzling God’s money.*
 - Think about **how upset you would be if you made a huge donation to ‘Feed the Children,’ then found out that 90% of that money went to the CEO (and not, you know, ‘feeding the children’).** *You’d rightly be outraged, because that **guy was stealing** what wasn’t meant for him.*
 - That’s **exactly what each of us is:** *every individual in the church is a sort of ‘non-profit ministry,’ and **God has made donations** to you because he wants you to use them for his mission. **If you sit on them or use them for your own luxuries, you’re embezzling money.**¹*
- God blessed you to **increase your capacity** for generosity. Not just to increase our standard of living, but to increase our capacity for giving!

Summit Church, we also have to ask that as a CHURCH: Why has God blessed us? FOR ONE REASON: To bless the Triangle and the world with the gospel!

- **What does Lot-style self-centeredness** look like for us? To **not posture ourselves** to grow.
- **GROWTH CHART**
- Will we continue to reach people? Better enable ourselves to disciple people? How could we not?

¹ Rick Langston

Conclusion

The end of this whole thing is that God multiplies Abraham beyond his wildest dreams.

*Abraham’s story illustrates something called “Kingdom Economics” that so few people get: **Whatever you prioritize before God, you’ll lose. But whatever you give to God the first and the best of, he multiplies for eternal significance!***

Whatever you prioritize you lose...

- **Can’t you see that play out with Lot?** Lot chose money first. And so, he **lost his fortune and family!**
- **Lewis:** First things and second things. “When we put first things first, God multiplies second things. When we put second things first, we lose not only first things, we also lose second things.” (SAY A COUPLE OF TIMES): If you can’t figure that out, just think about Lot.
 - **#1 contributor to divorce** is not infidelity, but money issues.
 - **Ironically, when you put money first, you lose even the capacity to enjoy it:** **Ecclesiastes 5:10, “He who loves money will not be satisfied with money.”** I’ve heard some older people complain that as they got older they **lost their sense of taste.** They can eat great and costly food, but they don’t enjoy it!

But when you put God first, he multiplies you, like Abraham... God increased what Abraham had and he blessed the world in the process.

- Here’s how the writer of Proverbs says it: **Prov 3:9–10, “Honor the LORD from your wealth and from the first of all your produce; so your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will overflow with new wine.”** (or, grape juice for you Baptists)
 - Not necessarily making you richer, like a prosperity gospel... but he will **enrich your life to eternal significance.**
 - **How do they overflow?** By giving the first and the best to God.

- **What you give to God he multiplies.** We see this all over the Bible.
 - **Little boy gives his 5 loaves and 2 fish... 5000 are fed.** 12 baskets full...
 - **Elijah and the jars of flour and oil:** (1 Kings 17:8–16). He asked her to fill his first. The jar of flour never went empty and the oil never ran dry.

My primary prayer in this season is not that we get the resources we need to go forward. I trust God with that. My primary prayer is that you learn to give God the first and the best of you life, and you see yourselves as only stewards of what he has given to you, and offer up more and more of your life to be multiplied...

Now, I've told you this before and I'll say it again... if this really bothers you, and you feel like this is all self-serving, I'd invite you to give somewhere else. **My primary goal is for you to learn to be a generous giver,** and if you not being able to trust this church is in the way of that, give somewhere else. I mean that.

I want you to move past the question, "How much do I have to give?" to **"What am I not giving and why?"**

- **For years, that was** the primary question I asked, "How much do I have to give?"
- **A kingdom disciple is** someone who sees everything that God has given to him or her as seed to be used for multiplication in the kingdom.
- So the question is, **"What am I not giving and why?"**
- Obviously, some things God gives to you use to bless and take care of your family.
- **But when you start asking the question, "What am I not giving and why?"** you might discover that there are many things you prioritize over God's mission, and things you trust and depend on more than God.

That's what this card is all about. What represents **my first and my best,** and do I recognize that **everything I have been given is on loan** from God, to be used in the blessing of the world?

2 last things:

The opposite of Kingdom economics is where many of us are... in debt, unable to give.

- **And we want to help you** with that...
- Debt is **not necessarily a sin,** but the reasons we get into debt sometimes are. You are **discontent; impatient; don't trust God.**
 - So we offer these things called **Financial Peace** classes or one of our financial coaches... and the 1st thing they have you do is develop something called a **budget.** And **I know that word makes some of you break out in hives.** *But budgeting is not just for the type-A. It is the path to honoring God with your finances.*

Lastly, don't try kingdom economics until you know the King!

- The reason that Abraham could do all this was because he **trusted God;** and the reason he could do that was because he was sure in the promises of God.
 - **He knew that God had made him a promise** and God was going to keep it...
- **You and I know that God has made us a promise.** Jesus Christ died **to** remove all the **condemnation of our sin** and anything that would separate us from God and he told us that **in him God would never leave or forsake us.** And we know that who did not spare his own son for us will not also with him freely give us all things!
- Have you **trusted Jesus with your whole** life?
 - If so, are you **ready to take the next step** and trust him with your finances?
- **You can obey like Abraham** when you know you are loved and held secure like Abraham.
- Jesus **invites you to that** kind of relationship. Will you receive it?