

Freeway Series / Sermon 3: Discovery

April 24, 2016

(*John 10.10*) We're in the middle of a 7 week series we're calling "Freeway." You see, we believe Jesus when he said, "I have come that you may have life, and have it to the full," a rich and satisfying life. (*John 10.10*) And Jesus wasn't just talking about heaven. He was talking about life here, on earth. The problem is, that's not how most Jesus followers would describe life, here on earth. In fact, I suspect a lot of folks think that what the church is offering is more of a bait and switch. We promise way more than we deliver ... they think. Let's picture it this way ...

(*17 mile drive*) How many of you have driven down some drop-dead beautiful roads? Some drives are just jaw-dropping gorgeous! I was born in Carmel, California. There is a road there that is quite famous, it's called the 17 mile drive. It will take your breath away. Any of you guys seen it? (*Hwy 101*) When we moved to Oregon our driveway dumped into Highway 101 – that's another blow your mind beautiful road, right along the Pacific coast. Any of you guys driven it? (*Old Frankfort Pike*) We have them here in Kentucky, too. Every once in a while we'll take the Old Frankfort Pike to Lexington. It takes a little longer, but boy it's pretty! (*Switzer Bridge*) And how about the old covered Bridge at Switzer? That's gorgeous, too, isn't it?

(*beautiful road 1*) Well, here's the deal: That's what a lot of folks think we're promising. They think all this talk about a "Freeway" means the path will be beautiful, and safe, and fun, and invigorating. (*beautiful road 2*) God is supposed heal you when you are sick, isn't he? He's supposed to heal your relationships when they break, and heal your checkbook when it gets too lean. He's supposed to make life way better, isn't he?

But instead ... here's what people see; here's what Jesus followers actually experience. (*treacherous road*) This "Freeway" gets treacherous at times. Sometimes God tells us to do things we don't want to do, and to go places we don't want to go. Sometimes it doesn't feel like it's so beautiful, and safe, and fun. Other times it feels more like this (*busy road*). The Christian life for many kind of feels like drudgery. We have all these extra responsibilities. And to top it off, we get sick, and God doesn't heal us physically. Relationships break, and God doesn't fix them. The

checkbook gets lean, and there are no mysterious checks in the mail. And we still battle some of the same issues we were battling before we started following Jesus. We discover that we are still a mess, and people around us are still messy. Life is still hard! That's real.

Well guys, this isn't some bait and switch. We do believe that Jesus offers us a better life in this world, and an infinitely better life in the next one. But to experience what he wants for us, we'll have to make some discoveries. We started out this series two weeks ago by talking about God, about God's heart. He wants the very best for every one of us, no matter where we've been or what we've done. Last week we talked about awareness. We have to allow God to show us those things inside us that corrupt our life. There are things we think, there are things we do – we might think they're okay ... He doesn't. And we prayed that he would make us aware of the junk inside us, so we can let him deal with it.

This week is about discovery. There are 3 discoveries you will make if you travel very far down this "Freeway."

- Discovery #1: The road will still be rocky; it will still have steep climbs, and dangerous corners, potholes, and patches of ice.
- Discovery #2: You don't have to go it alone. He doesn't want you to go it alone. In fact, you won't be able to navigate it successfully alone. So we have to learn to ... trust ... him. That may be the biggest, and the toughest discovery of all. Do you trust him?
- And Discovery #3: The path of trust will transform life from oppressive, to abundant. If you trust him, you will discover a way better life here, and an infinitely better life after this one.

Let me unpack each one of those discoveries for just a moment. #1: The road will still be rocky. Guys, when you become a Jesus follower, you still have a lot of junk inside he has to deal with. And God will be working on your messes till you die. And the people around you, they've all got junk inside. The Bible tells us that all of us are sinners – which means we're pretty good at hurting each other. Even as Jesus followers, we are broken people living in a broken world. So the road will still be rocky. But here's the deal. You can either face those messes without Jesus as Lord, or you can face those messes with Jesus as your Lord. It's going to be messy till you die. The question is: Will it be better with him, or without him?.

#2: He does not want you to go it alone. In fact, you will not be able to navigate life successfully alone. We have to learn to ... trust ... him. Now here's the deal about trust: You only need trust when it's tough going. Think about it: If I ask you to trust me, it probably means that what's coming next is going to be hard. How do you respond when your husband or your wife says, "You've got to trust me on this one"? How do you respond if a kid tells you, "I need you to trust me on this one"? Well, how do you respond when God says, "You have to trust me on this one." You see, probably the biggest lesson you will have to learn to navigate this "Freeway" successfully is to ... trust him.

#3: The path of trust will transform life from oppressive, to abundant. We believe trust works. We believe that life with God makes way more sense than life without him. We believe that doing life his way is way more satisfying than doing life my way. He's smarter than me. Do you believe that? Without doubt. He's smarter than you. Do you believe that? He wants our best. Do you believe that? Guys, if that's true, then doing life his way will be better. It will be better here, in this life, and it will lead to an infinitely better life, in heaven.

So it starts with awareness, and then there is discovery – we discover trust. Now we are going to dip in and out of the story of one of the most important guys in the Bible. It is the story of a rather ordinary guy like us, who had to learn to trust God. Sometimes he failed badly, like us; and sometimes he succeeded spectacularly (he has a lot to teach us).

Okay, there are scenes in the Bible that blow my mind. I read some of these stories and I think, "I couldn't do it. It's so far beyond anything I could ever handle." This is one of those stories. Abraham is with his son Isaac on Mount Moriah. They are there because God told Abraham to kill his kid.

Now this isn't about God tempting Abraham to kill Isaac because he is an ornery neighbor kid. That would make some sense. This is Abraham's own kid, a good kid, deeply loved by his parents. So let's just lay it out there: You are a Jesus follower, if God tells you—and you are 100% convinced it is God—God tells you to kill your kid, would you do it? I'm not talking about a fit of rage; I'm not talking about some accident. Somehow God makes it crystal clear: I want you to take a knife and kill your boy. We

push back: That would violate God's character... I know. But that's not the real problem. Or, I love God...but I love my family, too! Why would God ask that? The question is not why he would ask it, ... it is, would you do it if he did?

I told you there are Bible scenes I can't imagine; this is one of them. But do you know why the story is here? God is testing the limits of Abraham's trust. You see, I don't think my faith, my trust, has never been stretched enough to prepare me for a test as big as this one. I don't think I've managed the lesser tests sufficiently for God to raise the bar to this height for me. Every Jesus follower starts a journey of trust; very, very few make it as far down that path as Abraham.

Now, the story of Abraham's life with God begins exactly the way yours does: It's all about grace. It looks like Abraham grew up in a pagan family. Why God chose Abraham we don't know. There's nothing in the story about Abraham turning his back on idols and searching for the true God. There's nothing in the story about Abraham being the smartest guy in the world, or the most honorable guy in the world, or the best looking guy in the world. God just ... graces him. God whispers, "Abraham, follow me. I want to use you, and I want to bless people through you." And for some reason, Abraham says, "Okay, I'm in."

Guys, God is saying the same thing to some of you today. Maybe you it makes you nervous; maybe you're not listening closely. But if you are not a Jesus follower, God is whispering, "Come with me. I want to do life with you, and I want use you to bless others." You've felt that nudge, from God. He's inviting you to make a change.

Now here's what happens next when a man or a woman tells God, "Okay, I'm in." Nearly always what comes next is some kind of test. You are a newborn; you are at your most fragile, spiritually. It seems like what happens next is one of two things: Either Satan comes after you to try to knock you down, or God does something to push you out of the nest. Whether it is God or Satan, something is going to happen that either knocks you down, or makes you stronger.

Well, this time it's God. God pushes Abraham out of the nest. God says, (Genesis 12.1-2), "I want you to leave your country, I want you to leave your relatives, I want you to leave your father's house."

Imagine the day you were baptized, you are drying off and God says, "Welcome aboard! I'm so glad you decided to go on this journey with me. Now pack up." You are thinking, "What do you mean, 'Pack up?'" And God says, "Let's go." "Well, where?" "Don't sweat the details. Just trust me. We are leaving town. Oh, and take your passport" "What about my responsibilities, what about my family?" "Leave them behind. And your stuff, too." "Wait! Wait a minute! You want me to leave my home... leave my family... and leave all the stuff I've planned my life around? Where are we going?" And God says, "You are on a need-to-know basis and right now you don't need to know. Just trust me." "Oh, and one more thing: I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing to others. So ... Are you in?" Would you go all in?

The Bible doesn't call it a test, but it was! And to be honest, I think I'd give Abraham about a "D" on his first test. You might score him a little higher, but I think a "D" is appropriate. The Bible says, "So Abraham went, as the LORD had told him." Good job! Well done! Pretty radical trust! He is rocking! But then it says, "Lot went with him." I thought God told him to leave his family behind, and Lot is his nephew. Why did he bring Lot along? I don't know. But it's no big deal, right? We'll see.

Then it says Abraham took "all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran." Now, we're going to find out later he took hundreds of people with him, and as much stuff as he drag along. Abraham doesn't pack up his pick up with a pup tent and sleeping bags, like God told him; he's got moving trucks, semi's moving cattle and sheep, RV's for the family to hang out... But it's no big deal, right? Better to be prepared, right? Well, Abraham has a problem. God says, Leave your country—check. He says, Leave your family—oops. He says, Leave your father's household—oops again. If this was a test, I'd give him a "D." Do you think his misses mattered?

Well, here's what happens when we don't go all in with trust. Here's what happens when we think we know more than God, so we compromise with

him. It kind of looks like every compromise Abraham made brought trouble. Here's what happens: They finally get to the promised land and there is this severe famine. There is not enough grass to feed his livestock; not enough food to feed his entourage. If it was only Abraham and Sarah, they probably could have made it; but no, there are family, and servants, and livestock... So Abraham decides to leave the land God had called him to and go to Egypt where he gets into trouble—trouble he would have avoided if he had listened to God.

A little later there is this story about his nephew Lot getting kidnapped by some thugs. Abraham has to stop what's he's doing to go rescue them—putting his people in harm's way and burning up resources. Why, because he decided to bring along those God had told him to leave behind.

Now understand this: God was always there for Abraham. God didn't leave him hanging, but don't you see that life gets even rockier when we ignore God's leading and try to do it our way. We compromise, and then we are shocked when things don't go as planned. We kind of obey God, and then we act all surprised when life gets messier ...

- Teens, you are in love, and you are going to get married anyway, right? So you end up pregnant and life gets complicated because you're not even 2 yet and you're about to become 3.
- Or you marry a person who doesn't want anything to do with God, and then you want the church to do something because your kids don't want God in their lives. Go figure!
- Or you pray for a job so you can provide, then you get it and you are too tired to come to church—you need your day of rest. And you grow more and more distant from God.

Sometimes, guys, God's way is hard. We think that if we try to be a Jesus follower, God ought to make the way a little smoother for us... It doesn't work that way. We are still messy people, doing life with messy people, in a broken world that is at war with God. The big question is this one: will you trust him, even when the way is hard? And will you realize that God will use those rough spots to build trust in you ... if you'll let him?

The next piece of Abraham's story challenges another way we struggle to trust him. You see, God promises to help us, to give us some victories, and give us some blessings. Well, we want them now.

- He promises freedom from our addictions. Well, we want freedom now.
- He promises to break the chains of our depression. Well, we want those chains broken now.
- He promises to guide us. Well, I want him to reveal his will to me now, my way.
- He promises to heal all our diseases, and someday he will. But I want that healing now: for me, my wife, my kids.

You get the idea. We want it all, and we want it now. But sometimes the test is the waiting, sometimes God cultivates trust in the waiting. Will you learn to trust God's timing? In Abraham's story, this was really, really hard. Because God's timing seemed crazy!

Remember, they seemed to have lived quite a bit longer back then, but some things still worked the same. (Genesis 12.1-2) If you dig around a bit you'll discover that Abraham was about 70 years old when God promises him a family. Guys that's really old for a guy; but it is impossibly old for a lady. He and Sarah had been married a long time – no kids, she was a barren old woman. And God waits till they are 70 to promise them kids. Would any of you 70 year olds in here be tempted to question God's timing? I mean, 20s or 30s would be perfect; 40s would be acceptable; 50s is pushing it. But 70? Seriously? By then, at least for the ladies, most of the manufacturing equipment has shut down. But it says they trusted God's promise anyway. That's pretty amazing!

(Genesis 15.5-6) About 5 years later God says, "I really mean it, you're going to have a kid, and grandkids, and great-grandkids – too many to count." Let's see, God promised us kids when we were 70, now we're 75, still barren. Would you be struggling to trust God yet?

Well Abraham was kind of like a lot of us: he kind of trusted God, and he kind of doubted God too. There are two verses that kind of clash, but they show he was real, kind of like us. Somehow God takes Abraham outside and he tells him to look up into the night sky. Then somehow God says to

him, “Count the stars if you can. That’s how many descendants you will have!” And here’s how Abraham responds. It says, “Abraham believed the Lord (He trusted God. Wow! He’s 75, and he believes God for a kid), and (it says) the Lord counted him as righteous because of his faith” ... because of his trust.

(Genesis 15.7-8) Right after than God reminds Abraham that he is giving him a promised land, too. And Just 2 verses after radical trust, there is this doubt. Abraham says, “How can I be sure (How can I know; how can I trust you) that I will actually possess it? I mean, He just affirmed his trust that God will work a miracle in his wife’s belly, and in the next breath he doubts that God will keep his promise about a home? Really?

On the other hand, that actually sounds a whole lot like my life with God. Sometimes I trust him, and with the next breath I doubt. Have you ever been like that – have you ever struggled with both trust and doubt? And here’s what is so cool: God is so pleased when we trust him, and he is not put off by our doubt. When Abraham pushes back and tells God, “How can I be sure,” God doesn’t smack him down.

Listen guys, God is not wounded by your doubts, he is not surprised by your doubts, he is not offended by your doubts ... if they are honest. He knows that his way is hard sometimes. He knows that his way is counterintuitive. He knows that some of us will struggle. What he honors is when we are honest with him. What he honors is when we take our doubts to him. And he’ll use those hard times to build your trust.

- Guys, have you ever doubted whether there really is a God at all? Have you ever doubted whether Jesus is really the Son of God, or whether God really did raise him from the dead? You can admit it ... he knows!
- Or, maybe you believe in God. But maybe you have doubted whether he is really all that powerful or all that good? I mean, there are so many messes he doesn’t fix. Have you ever doubted that God really is all knowing, and all powerful, and all good?
- Or maybe it’s more personal. Have you ever doubted that God really listens to you? Or that he really cares for you? Have you ever doubted that God really knows what is best for you? Whether his way is really better than your way?

Did you know that God is not afraid of honest doubt, he's not put off by honest doubt ... if you'll bring it to him ... like Abraham did? Dealing with our doubts is one of the ways he builds trust in us. Honest doubt is not the enemy of trust; it's part of the path.

Do you know how long Abraham and Sarah had to wait for their kid? 25 more years. Now they are about 100. Would you still trust God if he made you wait that long? It was crazy to trust him at 70; how much crazier to still trust him at 100. Which is why, I suspect, that very few of us would ever have the trust to face God's ultimate test. Maybe the reason most of us can't fathom how we would manage a test like offering a child to God is that we have failed so many of the lesser tests, so we aren't ready for a really big one.

Now Abraham and Sarah have a kid, a miracle kid. And Abraham and Sarah grew incredibly attached to this kid, Isaac. So what do you think is going through Abraham's mind about 10, or 12, or 15 years later when he gets this message from God? (Genesis 12.1-2) It says, "Some time later God tested Abraham (It's usually not fun to be tested by God!). God says to him, "Abraham!" Abraham answers, "Here I am." Then God says, "Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there (kill him there, I want you to kill your kid) as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you." "Are you willing to give up your son for me?" Now before you get too hard on God, don't forget that sacrificing a one and only son is something God was willing to do for you.

Now we are told, right at the start, that this is a test. Abraham doesn't it know it yet. God's intent is not to eliminate Isaac; his intent is to test Abraham's trust. How much does do you trust him? He's been trying to teach you to trust him since the day you came out of that water. How much do you trust him? You see, the Free-way is about trust. What makes it work is trust. Do you trust him enough to do it his way even when you don't understand him? Do you? Do you trust him enough to do it his way even when you don't agree with him? Do you?

- What if you were to discover that God wants you to tell the truth – with grace – even if a white lie seems more expedient? Do you trust him enough to tell the truth?

- What if you were to discover that God wants you to wait – till marriage? You don't see anything wrong with it: It's just sex. Will you trust him enough to wait?
- What if you were to discover that he wants you to give him the first part of your earnings – as a recognition that everything you have is really his, and he wants you to live generously. Will you trust him, even when money is tight?
- What if you were to discover that your participation in worship every week is important not just to you but to God, as a test of your allegiance. Will you trust him enough to make worship part of the rhythm of your life?
- What if you were to discover that he wants you to set aside some time, beyond Sunday mornings, to give exclusively to him? Will you trust him enough to bump other stuff on your schedule for him?
- Will you trust him when he calls you to do something incredibly hard?
- Will you trust him if he tells you to give up something incredibly important to you?

This is a test, a test of trust – because the heart of a life with God is trust. There is a verse in the New Testament, written 2000 years later, that gives us a glimpse of what was going on in Abraham's mind. (Hebrews 11.17-19) It says, "It was by faith (it was by trust) that Abraham offered Isaac as a sacrifice when God was testing him. (You see,) Abraham, who had received God's promises, was ready to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, even though God had told him, "Isaac is the son through whom your descendants will be counted." (And here's why Abraham was willing to kill his boy. It says,) Abraham reasoned that if Isaac died, God was able to bring him back to life again."

That's so powerful! Do you trust God that much? If you believed God had the power to raise your son from the dead, if you believed God had the intent to raise your son from the dead, would you do what God told Abraham to do? How much do you believe, in God? How much do you trust him? I told you, this would be hard for me. I told you, if one of you told me that's what God wanted you to do, I'd have you arrested, and committed. But this flawed man trusted God so much ...

So Abraham took Isaac up on that mountain. He built an altar, he tied up his son, and he raised the knife ... And God says, "Don't you dare!"

(Genesis 22.12) He says, “Don’t lay a hand on the boy! Do not hurt him in any way, for now I know that you truly fear God. You have not withheld from me even your son, your only son.” “Now I know,” God says, “that you are all in.”

Guys, we’re talking about the “Freeway,” a different way to live, a better way to live. It starts with awareness. He’ll show you what there is inside you that God needs to fix. And then there is discovery. And Discovery is all about trust.

- You will discover that the road will still be rocky; in fact, if you follow Jesus, it may even get tougher for you.
- You’ll discover that he doesn’t want you to go it alone. In fact, you won’t be able to navigate it successfully alone. You will discover you have to learn to … trust … him.
- And you will discover that this path of trust will transform life from oppressive, to abundant. If you trust him, you will discover a way better life here, and an infinitely better life after this one. Do you believe that?