


**GROWING**deeper



Pastor Michael O'Neill  
November 29, 2015

**ADVENT 2015**  
**JESUS' FAMILY TREE**  
**HOPE: ABRAHAM**  
Matthew 1:1-17; Hebrew 11:1;  
Romans 11:8-12, 17-19

**1. Hope Through Failure**  
- Genesis 12:1-9, 10-20, 13:1-13, 14:1-17, 21-24, 13:14-18,  
14:18-20, 15:1-7, 8-21, 16:1-16, 18:10-33, 19:1-29,  
20:1-18, 21:8-21, 25:5-6

**2. Hope in a Name**  
- Genesis 12:1-9, 13:14-18, 15:1-21; Romans 4:18;  
Jeremiah 29:13-14

**3. Hope as the Father**  
- Genesis 21:1-7, 22:1-19, 15:1-7; 1 Corinthians 13:7

love.learn.live.  
westvalleychurch.com

11/29/15  
 West Valley Church  
 Michael O'Neill

## Advent 2015 Jesus Family Tree Hope: Abraham

I want to read to you a section of the Bible that some think is one of the most boring passages – it's the genealogy of Jesus from Matthew 1 – the list of Jesus' relatives traced back to Abraham. But I want you to help make it a little more interesting for us. I'll give you hand signals along the way and I want you to respond according to the sign I give you. We'll do this by sections. So these two sections over here, when I give you a thumbs-up sign, I want you to stand and clap and cheer. That means we know that the person whose name I give you is a good person. These two middle sections, when I give you a thumbs-down sign, I want you to stand and boo. That means that the name I give you is someone that the Bible tells us was a sinner. And then these two sections, when I do this with my fist, I want you to stand and then you say 'Huh?' That means that we don't know anything about that person. Got it? Our kids are with us today, so kids I want you to really help us out with this, alright? Let's practice: ↑ ↓ ■

This is the list of the ancestors of Jesus Christ; ↑ a descendant of David, ↑ who was a descendant of Abraham. ↑

Abraham was the father of Isaac, ↑ who was the father of Jacob—the man who stole his brother's birthright. ↓

And Jacob was the father of Judah and his brothers who sold Joseph into slavery. ↓

And Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah ■ by Tamar ■ and Perez was the father of Hezron ■ and Hezron the father of Ram ■ and Ram the father of Amminidab. ■

And Amminidab was the father of Nahshon, ■ who was the father of Salmon ■ who was the father of Boaz by Rahab, the prostitute. ↓

And Boaz was the father of Obed by Ruth, a great woman whose story is told in a book of the Bible bearing her name. ↑

And Obed was the father of Jesse, who was the father of David the King. ↑

And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, whom he had murdered. ↓

And Solomon was the father of Rehoboam, a good king, ↑ but one who disobeyed God for several years. ↓

And Rehoboam was the father of Abijah, who had fourteen wives. ■

And Abijah was the father of Asa, a good king ↑ but later disobeyed God and died of gangrene of the feet. ↓

Asa was the father of Jehosophat, a king who ruled wisely most of the time. ↑

Jehosophat was the father of Joram, ■ the father of Uzziah, whose pride caused his downfall, ↓ But Uzziah was the father of Jotham, a very good king in every way. ↑

And Jotham was the father of Ahaz, a very bad king in every way. ↓

And Ahaz was the father of Hezekiah, who cleansed the temple and re-established the kingdom. ↑

Hezekiah was the father of Manasseh, who ruled for fifty-five years, ↑ but who was evil for most of that time. ↓

Manasseh was the father of Josiah, who did right in the eyes of the Lord. ↑

Josiah was the father of Jechoniah, who was the father of Shealtiel, the father of Zerubbabel, a governor of the people who was chosen by God. ↑

And Zerubbabel was the father of Abiud, ■ who was the father of Eliakim, ■ the father of Azor, ■ the father of Zadok, ■ the father of Achim, ■ the father of Eliud, ■ the father of Eleazar, ■ the father of Matthan, ■ the father of Jacob (not the one we spoke of earlier). ■

And that Jacob was the father of Joseph the carpenter, ↑ who was the husband of the Virgin Mary, ↑ of whom was born Jesus, whom we call *Lord of Lords and King of Kings—the Christ!* ↑

The Bible is not afraid to show that there are all kinds of people in Jesus' family tree. There are good people, bad people, and people we know practically nothing about. Some were kings and heroes of the faith who were dedicated completely to God. But others were sinners on a grand scale: murderers, prostitutes, and all kinds of dysfunctional characters. In other words, they were ordinary people like you and me.

Reading through the list of names can feel monotonous, yet all of the people listed have made some contribution to the One whose arrival we celebrate: Jesus. These are names that have faces and stories to tell – it was important enough to Matthew to list them and to God to have them included in Scripture.

This season of Advent, our sermons will explore the stories of just a few of the people in *Jesus' Family Tree*; some are well known and some not so well known. We want to see a more human side of Jesus and to find the traditional Advent themes of Hope, Joy, Peace, and Love.

So today we are looking at the very start of the list that Matthew gives us, and that is with Abraham. Abraham is not only the start of the Jesus' genealogy; he is the beginning of the hope of our faith. Now, I have to tell you that Abraham's life spans 175 years and 14 chapters of the book of Genesis. So unfortunately, we won't have time today to go through all the story of his life. But by the time we are done, you will have the overview as well as coincident Scripture references.

What you need to know about Abraham to start out is that he was just an ordinary guy, one among all the men on earth at that time. He was a descendent of Noah. (But

then pretty much everyone was, right?) Then, God began to work in Abraham's life. God told him to move his family to a land that God would give him, even though Abraham didn't know where it was. So Abraham did. God told him that his descendants would be as many as the sand on the beach and stars in the sky. Even though he and his wife were old – I mean REALLY old, they would have a son. Even though Abraham never saw all the descendants in his lifetime, he still had hope in God and died trusting God. Abraham never gave up his hope in God and God's promises, so his faith has become an example for us all. Faith and hope are Siamese twins. The Bible says:

“Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see.” (Hebrews 11:1, nlt)

Abraham is the beginning of our hope, because the promises start with him. And Abraham became an example for all of us to have faith in God no matter what we are going through, no matter how badly we screw things up. God's love for us, and the promises he makes for us out of his love, can always be counted on. God will never let us down. That's why the New Testament says this about Abraham:

“It was by faith that Abraham obeyed when God called him to leave home and go to another land that God would give him as his inheritance. He went without knowing where he was going. And even when he reached the land God promised him, he lived there by faith – for he was like a foreigner, living in tents. And so did Isaac and Jacob, who inherited the same promise. Abraham was confidently looking forward to a city with eternal foundations, a city designed and built by God.

It was by faith that even Sarah was able to have a child, though she was barren and was too old. She believed that God would keep his promise. And so a whole nation came from this one man who was as good as dead – a nation with so many people that, like the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore, there is no way to count them...It was by faith that Abraham offered Isaac as a sacrifice when God was testing him. 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.' Abraham reasoned that if Isaac died, God was able to bring him back to life again. And in a sense, Abraham did receive his son back from the dead.” (Romans 11:8-12, 17-19, nlt)

Abraham is a hero of our hope, the father of our hope. Our Savior, Jesus Christ Himself, is both a direct biological and spiritual heir of Abraham. It's interesting, isn't it, that Abraham put his hope in God, and his eventual offspring is the God of hope.

In the history of the Christian Church and the tradition of Advent, this is the Sunday of Hope. Abraham is a good person for us to learn from about hope.

But for all of that, I want to remind you that Abraham was a normal guy. In fact, much of what Abraham learned was how to have...

## 1. Hope Through *Failure*

There's no question that Abraham is the father of the Jewish nation, and is enshrined in hall of faith heroes. But truthfully, Abraham screwed up. And he did it *a lot*.

It all began when God promised Abraham a bunch of land – what historically became known as the “Promised Land.” Here's the amazing thing – Abraham didn't know where that land was, what it looked like, or how far away it would be. But God said, “Pack up your household and go.” Household, by the way, meant flocks, herds, all of his possessions, and hundreds of servants and workers. This was no small thing. It would be almost like all of West Valley packing up and moving together. God told Abraham that he was going to need this new land because it would be filled with his offspring someday (Genesis 12:1-9). Abraham packed up and went, and that's all really good. But he no sooner started travelling then he messed it up. As he travelled through Egypt, he got scared. Sarah, Abraham's wife, was a good-looking woman. Abraham was sure that the Egyptians were going to want her. So instead of protecting her, he told everyone in these towns that she was his *sister*, not his wife! He literally threw her under the Egyptian chariot just to protect his own skin (Gen. 12:10-20). Nice work Abraham! She was so good looking that the Pharaoh himself took her in to be his wife. He figured it was okay since he thought Sarah was just Abraham's sister. But then that made for some trouble because God brought a curse on the Egyptian king. So Pharaoh gave her back to Abraham and sent them out of town.

After that was settled, some of Abraham's workers and the workers of Abraham's nephew started to fight over water rights and property. Pretty soon it became a Hatfields and McCoys thing, so they had to part company (Genesis 13:1-13). (That's what happens when you hire family!)

Later on Lot got caught in the middle of a war between a group of four kings, on one side and another group of five kings, so Abraham had to go bail him out. (Genesis 14:1-17, 21-24) Did anyone's family get in an argument on Thanksgiving? You think your family has dysfunction!

Well, several years went by, and God spoke to Abe four more times over the years, reassuring him of the promise (Genesis 13:14-18; 14:18-20; 15:1-7; 15:8-21). But Abe got impatient. He and Sarah were getting up there in age, so they took matters into their own hands. Sarah told Abraham that she's never gotten pregnant, she was getting too old to get pregnant, so she gave Abraham one of her maidservants to sleep with so that he could get her pregnant. Can you imagine what Abraham was thinking? “Let me get this straight: you want me to impregnate this other woman, and *you are totally fine with this? You aren't going to get mad at me at all?*” I'm sure he thought, “Let me think about this for a minute – okay I'll do it! I mean, if you really think I should...” Not smart! Hagar, the servant girl, got pregnant, and right away Sarah hated Hagar. So Sarah asked Abraham's permission to abuse Hagar and

treat her horribly. Abraham basically said, “Yea, whatever.” Hagar and her son, Ishmael, ended up having to run away for a while. (Genesis 16:1-16).

Later in the story, Abraham had to rescue Lot and his family yet again. Then, yet again Abraham pretended that Sarah was his sister – with the same results as before. God promised them a son and neither of them believed it (in fact, Sarah laughed in God’s face), and that’s not everything – there were a whole bunch of other screw-ups (Genesis 18:10-33; 19:1-29; 20:1-18; 21:8-21; 25:5-6).

We just covered about 175 years. I’m telling you all that for a reason, and it’s this: we have a tendency to look at Abraham and think he had this amazing faith and hope and everything went great in his life and he was a perfect saint with a big halo and he never messed up. But he was a *total* screw up! All through his journey of hope he made some colossally stupid decisions and committed some horribly sinful things. But here’s the deal: Abraham’s hope was not based on *his own* faithfulness. Abraham’s hope was based on *God’s* faithfulness. God promised it, and so no matter how many mistakes Abraham made, he would keep believing that God loved him, God had promises for him, and God would be faithful to him. Listen today: no matter what you have done, don’t give up your hope. If you are discouraged, then you are putting your hope in your *own* reliability. And you are not very reliable. Put your hope in God’s love for you and his promises for you that never change.

Abraham had such a difficult time with this that God decided to help him. He put...

## 2. Hope in a *Name*

When I entered junior high we started PE classes. We didn’t have PE in grade school; we had recess. *Big* difference! One was free time; the other was a class. One was on the playground; the other was in the gym. One was fun; the other was a class. In one, the bell rang and you went back to your classroom. In the other, you had to go to the locker room and shower. That, in it self for a junior high guy, was a devastating proposition – especially if you were a late bloomer like I was. I couldn’t even grow a beard until I was in my late twenties! Don’t get me started on the locker room trauma that had on my young psyche. This will turn into a therapy session and you don’t have that kind of time! But another thing we had to do was write our names on the elastic band in our underwear and gym shorts and on our t-shirts. It was like a permanent nametag. We’d always know those shorts were ours; they had our names in them. And, in case I got hit in the head too many times in dodge ball, I could just look at my shorts and remember my name.

Well, basically, God wanted to make sure that it was easy for Abraham to remember the promise so he wrote it in his name.

I need to back up for a second: for most of Abraham’s life, his name wasn’t Abraham – it was Abram. Abram means “exalted Father.” It’s a hint of what was to come, although it could have just as easily have been interpreted to mean, “wise man” or “strong leader.” So all through the promises that God gave, Abram, was his name (Genesis 12:1-9; 13:14-18; 15:1-21). When God first promised Abram he’d have

many descendants, Abram was 75 years old. Then twenty-four years went by, and still no son. Abram was 99 years old! But then God's promise got specific. God appeared again to Abram and changed his name to *Abraham*. It's a subtle but big difference. His name now meant, "Father of a multitude."

God *built into* Abraham's name the very promise.

So every time someone called his name, he heard the promise. Every time his wife whispered his name in the dark of night, he heard the promise. Every time he looked at his camel driver's license, he saw the promise. His very name had hope. When he looked at his household with no children playing in it, no Legos laying on the floor for him to step on, no evidence of the promise, his very name had hope in it.

The Bible says this about Abraham:

"Even when there was no reason for hope, Abraham kept hoping – believing that he would become the father of many nations. For God had said to him, 'That's how many descendants you will have!'" (Romans 4:18, nlt)

Friends, I don't know what you are going through. I know some of you are fighting cancer. Some of you just got the prognosis. Some of you are getting divorced. Some of you spent Thanksgiving without your mom, or dad, or you spent it all alone. Some of you were reminded on Thursday that your child died. Or your husband, or wife, or parent passed away. Some of you are trapped in an abusive situation. Some of you are addicted to something that won't let go of you and you can't let go of it.

But this is *Christmas*; everywhere you look right now you are reminded of the promise of Hope – that God loves you. Every song, every bell, every tree, every light is screaming at you the promise of hope. And it's not just at Christmas; the Bible says that Jesus is *God with Us* – that's the promise. If you look for him, you can't even turn around without seeing him. God promised:

"When you come looking for me, you'll find me. Yes, when you get serious about finding me and want it more than anything else, I'll make sure you won't be disappointed. God's Decree. I'll turn things around for you."  
(Jeremiah 29:13-14, tm)

Even if you have failed miserably, don't depend on your own reliability; depend on God's promise, on his never-ending, never changing love for you. Just look around you; he's everywhere. He loves you. You can put your hope in God.

Abraham did, and finally he found...

### 3. Hope as the *Father*

When Abraham was 100 years old, Sarah gave birth to their first born son, Isaac (Genesis 21:1-7). Imagine the incredible joy for Abraham and Sarah, after all they'd been through, the promise was finally beginning to come true. Abraham finally found hope as a father. For close to the first fifteen years of Isaac's life, it must've

been bliss! Then when Isaac was fifteen, God spoke to Abraham again. Only this time, he told Abraham to take his son up on a mountain and sacrifice him to God. What??! Isaac IS the promise fulfilled! By this time Abraham was at least 115 years old. The likelihood of *another* son was beyond hope. What kind of a God would ask such a question? But by this time, Abraham knew what a kind of a God he was – he was a father – a good father. Because Abraham was a father now, too. He knew he could put his hope in God the father, even if it meant it would cost him being a father himself. So Abraham obeyed, went up to a mountain with his son, tied him up and laid him on an altar of sticks, raised the knife, and before he could plunge it into his one and only son, God stopped him. Then God provided a ram – a sheep – a lamb – to sacrifice in the place of his son (Genesis 22:1-19). Does that sound familiar? One day a Baby Boy would be born on Christmas: God’s one and only Son. And God would sacrifice the Lamb that was his Son for *all* His sons and daughters of mankind. Abraham found hope as a father, and found hope in the father.

Because God’s Son was born on Christmas, we can have hope in God’s love for us – God as our Father.

Abraham became the father of a nation, and his offspring included Jesus, God’s Son. Abraham is more than the biological father of a race and religion; Abraham is the spiritual father of all who put their hope in Christ. That includes you.

During one of the promises that God gave Abraham, he said something interesting. This was maybe 14 or 15 years before he and Sarah had become pregnant with Isaac. God reminded Abram of the promise, and...

“Abram replied, ‘O Sovereign Lord, what good are all your blessings when I don’t even have a son? ... You have given me no descendants of my own, so one of my servants will be my heir.’ Then the Lord said to him, ‘... You will have a son of your own who will be your heir.’ Then the Lord took Abram outside and said to him, ‘Look up into the sky and count the stars if you can. That’s how many descendants you will have!’ And Abram believed the Lord, and the Lord counted him as righteous because of his faith.” (Genesis 15:1-7, nlt)

Think about it: about 4,000 years ago, as Abraham looked up at the stars clustered in the Milky Way and beyond, out in the middle of the desert unhindered by any kind of natural light, one of the stars he saw on that night had been lit for you. *You!*

You can have hope because Abraham hoped in God to be a father despite all the times he messed up and God was faithful and loved him without reservation and gave him a son, whose eventual offspring was the ultimate act of love – God’s one and only Son. You can have hope in God as the Father.

I know some of you have it rough right now. Listen, my year hasn’t been great either – especially if I had put my hope in my circumstances. But my hope has been in the Father of the Son Jesus Christ, because *he loves me*. No matter how much I screw up, I don’t have to look far to see the steady reminders of his love for me as my Father.



“Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.” (1 Corinthians 13:7, nlt)

*Pray*