

**Theme: Leaving our comfort zones**

Readings: Genesis 12:1 – 9, Acts 9:10 – 19a

In 1960 a woman named Frances lived in a tiny village in Wiltshire with her husband and three children. Her parents, brother and his wife and two daughters lived not far away in Marlborough. Frances had never lived outside of Wiltshire. She enjoyed living in the head Shepherd's cosy farm cottage. Frances was content. And then her crazy, Kiwi husband said "Come with me to New Zealand! We'll raise our children there. We'll have a much better life."

Frances thought long and hard. In those days, it was a 6 week boat trip from the UK to NZ. Most people didn't have telephones. Letters could be airmailed but most mail went surface ie via boat. Frances' family was not well off so wouldn't be able to visit. Frances thought she would never see them again.

But Frances' husband loved her and she loved him. Frances was my mother. Late 1960 I celebrated my 4<sup>th</sup> birthday on the Rangitata as our family journeyed to NZ.

My mother got way out of her comfort zone. She said 'yes' and we all sailed to the land of opportunity.

We all need to leave our comfort zones sometimes. Comfort enjoyed for too long leads to complacency. Complacency leads to indifference. Indifference leads to hard-heartedness and laziness. I know this from experience. I love my creature comforts. I often need a shake-up from God to make me move. Does anyone else identify with this?

I wonder if Abraham's wife Sarah was anything like my mother. I imagine she would have much preferred to stay put with the family and the environment she knew. However God had different plans. God had big plans for this couple.

God says "Leave your country, your family, and your father's home for a land that I will show you." They are required to go – who knows where? The Lord knows but he isn't telling them at this point!

What he does tell them is this amazing promise:

I'll make you a great nation  
and bless you.  
I'll make you famous;  
you'll be a blessing.  
I'll bless those who bless you;  
those who curse you I'll curse.  
All the families of the Earth  
will be blessed through you."

Wow! What a massive, massive promise – a little short on detail but certainly mind-blowing. "All the families of the Earth will be blessed through you."

So for love of God, at 75 years of age, Abram and Sarai pull out their tent pegs and go where God tells them to go. Our reading doesn't concern itself with detail – we

are simply told they arrive at Canaan. At different stages of the journey God reassures them of his promise and they respond in worship by building an altar, just as Noah did on arriving safely on dry land.

Then follows an epic adventure – an adventure full of blessings and monumental challenges – and they miraculously conceive Isaac. The rest of Genesis is devoted to the story of Abraham’s descendants and their part in fulfilling God’s promises.

This is possible because Abram and Sarai obediently leave their comfort zone out of love for God!

Turbulent times followed the death and resurrection of Christ. In Damascus, somewhere AD 35 a Christ-follower named Ananias heard the Lord speak. But he wished he hadn’t!

God told him to go to a posh area of town, Straight Street, and pray for for a man named Saul who had been struck with blindness. “Saul has been praying,” God said. “In a vision, he saw you coming to pray for him.”

The trouble is that Ananias knows who Saul is. Saul persecutes Christians. It’s a wonder there are any Christians around at all after hearing that Saul was in town. He was greatly feared and people would often hide when he was around. This was the guy who watched approvingly as another Christ-follower, Stephen, was stoned to death. Saul was out to persecute and kill as many hated Christians as he could.

And God tells Ananias that Saul is praying. Well big deal! Saul is a Pharisee. He has to pray. Many religious extremists pray. Ananias is not reassured!

The Message translates his protest like this:

“Master, you can’t be serious. Everybody’s talking about this man and the terrible things he’s been doing, his reign of terror against your people in Jerusalem! And now he’s shown up here with papers from the Chief Priest that give him license to do the same to us.” vv13 - 14

I’d be with Ananias! But then, God gives him more of the picture. In fact, the Lord tells Ananias something no-one else knows at this point. God, the Lord whom Ananias knows and follows, has chosen Saul to be his representative to people outside the Jewish race. Not only that, but Saul will tell the Message of Jesus to Kings!

Wow! And Ananias gets to be part of it; part of spreading the Gospel to other nations and peoples and royalty and who knows who else! All he has to do is go and pray!

By the way, did you notice the footnote the Lord gives to Saul’s mission? In case Ananias thought it was all milk and honey for Saul, the Lord tells Ananias that Saul is going to suffer. Saul, who becomes Paul, will not have much of a comfort zone at all – ever!

So Ananias goes. He goes in God's strength; not his own. He leaves his comfort zone risking his life as he does so, because he loves the Lord and wants to obey him.

The rest of the story is history!

In his book, *Just walk across the room*, Bill Hybels tells the story of a Christian guy at a party. He notices a Muslim chap standing alone and breaks away from his own comfortable group of friends to chat to the guy. They develop a lasting friendship, have lots of conversations, and eventually the Muslim guy comes to know Jesus as his friend and Saviour. The premise of Hybel's book is that we all need to leave our comfort zones. We need to listen to what God is saying and then do it.

For some who are timid, that might mean saying hello to a stranger or reaching out when others are holding back. For an evangelist, or someone who talks a lot, it might mean holding back when we long to just add a few more sentences in order to convince the person of what they need to do. Hybels puts it like this;

*"My objective is to walk when He prompts me to walk, talk when He says to talk, fall silent when I'm at risk of saying too much, and stay put when He leads me to stay put."*<sup>1</sup>

As we have worked our way through the book of Genesis, we have seen time and time again, people leaving their comfort zones. They always do so in response to a command and often a promise from God. There is no point in being a masochist. Why make ourselves uncomfortable just for the sake of it?

But if God asks us to do something and we don't, because we are afraid, or apathetic, or lazy, or proud, then we are in trouble. And our lack of obedience may well affect others around us.

In Bill Hybels' book, he mainly talks about small things we can do. That is reassuring. We can all smile at someone. We can all be friendly. We can all pray for someone even if we don't want to pray aloud with them. There are lots and lots and lots of small things we can do that will take us out of our comfort zones.

But let's not limit ourselves and let's not limit God. For some of us, God will want us to leave our comfort zones in more dramatic ways. I believe that God has mighty things for some of you and they will involve leaving your comfort zone in ways that you had never imagined.

Very often we want some of the blessings promised by God but we want to settle for far less than God has for us. We want to be comfortable but perhaps God has other ideas?

My Dad promised my Mum a better life if she'd leave her comfort zone and go to New Zealand. That didn't happen – she actually had a difficult life. God promised Abraham he'd sire great nation if he and Sarai left their comfort zones. That

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<sup>1</sup> All references to the book come from [www.christianbooksummaries.com/library/v3/cbs0321.pdf](http://www.christianbooksummaries.com/library/v3/cbs0321.pdf)

certainly happened as did God promise to Ananias that he'd pave the way for Saul's great mission to the Gentiles.

Throughout the book of Genesis, in fact the whole Bible, we see God's expanding plan. God's will is that every person would come to know him. His challenge is for us to get out of our comfort zones to work with him so that his plan is fulfilled. His promise that he will be with us will never fail. All of God's promises involve us leaving our comfort zones to discover more of him. Obeying God will always cost something – a measure of loneliness is one of the costs we pay.

The Lord asks us to leave our comfort zones; not to make us unhappy but because he sees our potential to connect with others. However old or settled we are, He calls us to leave our comfort zones. Which comfort zone is the Lord asking you to leave right now?

I want to leave the final word to Bill Hybels:

Are you going to throw your one and only life into pursuing small fish, or will you risk tossing your nets out there in anticipation of catching the human-sized ones?"

**Reflection questions:**

*How have you heard God's call in the past?*

*What aspects of loneliness did you have to embrace to answer the Lord's call?*

*What results did your response and the Lord's enabling bring?*

*What current comfort zone are you being prompted you to leave now?*