

The 1 Thing God Will Never Do

“For I called him alone, and blessed him, and multiplied him” (Is. 51:2).

Speaking of Abraham, the prophet Isaiah writes: “Listen to Me, you who pursue righteousness, you who seek the Lord: Look to the rock from which you were hewn and to the quarry from which you were dug” (Is. 51:1). Not only the physical nation of Israel, but also Abraham’s descendants by faith, can trace their beginning to one man, Abraham, and one woman, his wife Sarah. God starts small and builds from the ground up.

Isaiah invites those who want to pursue righteousness and want to seek the Lord to watch the process by which one became many. And the irony is not just that Abraham is only one man, but that he is one man who lacks the very thing he needs to father a nation. He lacks a son.

The person who is living a praying life is not circumstance-driven, but Christ-driven; not problem-centered, but power-centered. Our frame of reference is not what we lack, but what God has. We define our lives within the context of eternity instead of time.

I find it interesting, then, that when Abram, later to be Abraham, is first introduced on the pages of Scripture, he is defined by what he lacked. We first encounter his name in the lengthy lineage recorded in Genesis 11. All the other men were described in terms of whom they begot. Whom they fathered. Abram is described by his failure to father an heir. That’s what we learn about him first of all. The narrative tells us that Abram took a wife named Sarai, and that Sarai was barren and had no child (Gen. 11: 20).

Abram, who was destined to stand front and center as the very definition of a living faith, is introduced not as brave Abram, or faithful Abram, or kind Abram ... just childless

Abram. Defined by lack.

Why? When there were so many other things to say about Abram, why turn the spotlight on the one thing he lacks? I think the reason is that by shining the light on the lack, the Scripture rivets our attention on the cusp of recreation. We can't look away. How will a God who so directly calls our attention to Abram's greatest sorrow and humiliation, show Himself the Life Creator? Watch Him work!

Have you noticed this about God? He never avoids the issue. He never spins the facts or brushes reality under the rug. He is an up-front God. Look how Paul summarizes Abraham's situation: "Against all hope, he believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations according to what was spoken, 'So shall your descendants be.' And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body to be dead (when he was about a hundred years old), nor yet the deadness of Sarah's womb. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully persuaded that what God had promised, He was able to perform" (Rom. 4:18-21).

God just puts it out there. The bad news is setting the stage for the good that is about to come. It's like He's calling our attention to the need so that when the supply is revealed, we won't be focused elsewhere and miss the power display.

Abram's lack has a starring role in the eternal drama. Playing opposite the power and provision of God, Abram's need offsets the wonder of God's plan so that we are nearly blinded by its luster. It's as if in Abram's lack, God is saying, "Right here! This is exactly where I am about to apply My power. Take a good look. See the barren, sterile, dried-up dream? See the death of hope? Right here is where I'm working!"

God is a resurrection God. From Abraham—as good as dead—and Sarah, whose womb was also dead, came Isaac. Laughter. Joy.

Merriment. Celebration. Life that came from death—resurrection. Paul says God “calls those things that do not exist as though they did” (Rom. 4:17). Are these two descriptive phrases two ways of stating the same thing? I think so.

These words are presented to us within Paul’s description of the miraculous birth of Isaac. Life that came out of death. Paul says the He “calls” those things that do not exist as though they did. “Call” can mean to call aloud, utter in a loud voice, invite; to call by name. When did Jesus “cry out in a loud voice” and bring life out of death? He did it in John 11: 43, as He stood at the grave of Lazarus. “Lazarus, come out!” He called out loud.

I think the Scripture is saying that God steps right into the middle of mucky, messy death— all-hope-lost death; no-way-out death; not-gonna-happen death— and He calls, “Life, come out!” And the voice of the in-the-beginning God reproduces the earth’s opening act. He calls order out of chaos. He calls something out of nothing. He calls life out of death. The lack sets the stage for the provision. Death lays the groundwork for resurrection.

In your praying life, is there a big, hot light on your need? Does it seem to define you right now? You don’t have to pretend it’s not there. In fact, show it off.

That’s where God is about to apply His power.

Jennifer Kennedy Dean *is an author, speaker, conference leader and executive director of the Praying Life Foundation. You may visit her online at .*