

It's Your Call Genesis 35:1-15

Well this past week I have been pondering a very simple word that is found in today's passage in **Genesis 35:1-15**. It has just two letters but put together form a very powerful word. It's the word GO, G-O. It's a word that requires some action on the part of the person who hears it, given as a command by someone who may be in some position of authority to mandate it.

For example, if you have served in the military your superior officer will give a command to go do a 10 mile march in full gear, or go stand at attention in the rain for an hour, or go and do 50 push-ups.

Parents have certainly used the word, sometimes out of exasperation or frustration.

Go clean your room.

Or just simply, go to your room.

I well remember a beautiful summer day at the age of 10 when my two brothers and I had gone down to the pump house. There was a hill on the one side so we could climb onto the roof. A bunch of us kids from the neighborhood had gone down there to play dodgeball. Mom was a few months pregnant and quite sick and we were supposed to stay in the yard. After walking the quarter mile or so to where we were, her command was "go home, and wait for your father to get there after work." We obeyed the command, but I'm here to tell you we could have waited days on end knowing what was going to happen when he arrived home that night.

I'm sure every parent about to embark on a long road trip will tell their kids before they hop in the car to go to the bathroom, only to be half hour into the trip when someone in the backseat pipes up that they have to go.

And of course if you are in the work world, you have had a boss or supervisor tell you to go and take care of some responsibility.

We can use the word in anger when we are in a heated argument with someone by telling them to go away.

The word carries the idea of some kind of action or movement. To move along, to travel, or proceed. When directed at a person there is an expectation of obedience to accomplish a desired outcome.

Roget's Super Thesaurus has a lot of synonyms. Words like proceed, advance, begin, move, start, set out, travel, progress; leave, depart, run, 'split', 'scram', 'hit the road', and a number of others.

We shouldn't be surprised then to find the word throughout Scripture. We have seen it in our study of Genesis.

The word is implied in the command given to Adam to go and fill the earth and then to go and subdue the earth. And then after their sin both Adam and Eve were told to go and leave the Garden of Eden.

It's also implied in the command God gave Noah to go and build an ark. When it was ready, God told Noah to go into the ark. Then when the waters had receded so that they could leave, God told him to go from the ark.

Abraham was told to go from his family to a land God would give him.

He was told to go and sacrifice his son Isaac on an altar.

Abraham told his servant to go to Haran and find a wife for Isaac.

Jacob was told to go to Haran and stay for a while.

God told Jacob to go back to the Promised Land.

And in today's passage there is the command to go.

Now in that simple word, a word that carries with it a command, the command is to be completed without delay. It is to be completed in its entirety. It is to be completed without compromise. It is to be completed without criticism or complaint.

I said last week that **chapter 34** is one of those passages you wished wasn't found in Scripture. There is no mention of God, no pursuit of God, no obedience to God. It is unbridled evil with passion gone awry when Dinah was violated by Shechem. There is deceit and murder and the potential of an unholy blending of two people groups not sanctioned by God.

Chapter 35 stands in stark contrast. It is a 180^o turnaround from where Jacob was to where we find him here and the chapters that follow. Here we find him in a willful act of obedience.

About the change in Jacob, Donald Gray Barnhouse states “The contrast is striking, as it always must be in the life of a believer living out of the will of God, and again when he returns to the will of God.”

Maybe you have experienced a similar dramatic change. Maybe you have a **chapter 34** and a **chapter 35** in your life, one where you were out of the will of God but have returned to live in the will of God. Or maybe you’re still in **chapter 34**. Be encouraged today that there is hope when you willfully choose to obey God.

Let the opening words of **chapter 35** inspire you. Notice the very first two words of **chapter 35** – “**Then God**”. In spite of the tragic and godless acts we saw in **chapter 34** these are beautiful words that capture for us the essence of God’s character. The opening words convey a message for all who are wandering from God either because they have never had a relationship with Him or who have for a season not been walking with Him as they should. Those words are the refreshing rains after a season of drought. They are a cool drink after a period of thirst. They are comfort for the grieving, strength for the weary, hope for those in despair. “**Then God**” speaks to the grace of God that is available to everyone no matter how far away we are from Him. Grace is a call to experience Him in His fullness, in His forgiveness, in His faithfulness. Please take note how important those words are following what transpired in **chapter 34**. “**Then God said to Jacob.**”

Jacob was not where God wanted him to be, he hadn’t been fully obedient, but God in His grace worked to bring him back. You and I need to hear that message of hope. This chapter is God’s command to go and be obedient. For Jacob this chapter is where God begins to break the earthly ties of His servant. It is not the last chapter about Jacob, but it is the last chapter in his spiritual journey. John Phillips gives us some perspective.

In **chapter 28** we see how God saved Jacob
In **chapters 29-32** we see how God subdued Jacob
In **chapters 33-34** we see how God separated Jacob
In **chapter 35** we will see how God sanctified Jacob

God gives him a command. Notice first it’s a call to leave.

I. IT’S A CALL TO LEAVE – v. 1

The word leave speaks of a separation, to put something behind you. That’s the intent in **Genesis 2:24** when God’s instruction for marriage is to leave father and mother. There’s a separation that takes place. It doesn’t mean that you sever all ties with your parents and never have anything to do with them. Before marriage you were under the protective custody of your parents. After marriage, after the leaving, you establish a new family unit.

God is calling Jacob to leave his past behind and do three things. The first thing was a call to return.

A. A Call to Return

“**Then God said to Jacob, ‘Go up to Bethel.’**” It’s the same command God gave Jacob in **31:13** “**I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and where you made a vow to Me. Now leave this land at once and go back to your native land.**” It is the same place where 20 years earlier Jacob had made a vow after seeing God in a vision he would return to that same place. We read about it in **Genesis 28:20-22** “**Then Jacob made a vow, saying, ‘If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear so that I return safely to my father’s house, then the Lord will be my God and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God’s house, and of all that You give me I will give You a tenth.’**”

From the first meeting when Jacob met God in that vision until God told him to return to the place where he made the vow it had been 20 years. From the time when he left Haran to return to his home until our passage where God tells him to go back to Bethel, it had been another 10 years. He had delayed.

Let me ask you a question to consider. **Have you delayed or gotten sidetracked from doing something God called you to do? Is God calling you to go back and fulfill what you told Him you would do?**

The prophet Samuel once told King Saul **“To obey is better than sacrifice.”** Jacob was on his way back, but decided to stop at Succoth. Even though he built an altar it wasn't where he was supposed to be. God is now calling him to go back to Bethel to complete the vow he had made earlier.

So what is your Bethel where God is calling you back to? What is the vow He is asking you to complete? Learn a lesson from Jacob and go up to your Bethel. He was called to leave behind the attachments of his past and head to where God wanted him to go. It was a call to return.

There was a second thing he had to do in leaving. It was a call to reside.

B. A Call to Reside

“Then God said to Jacob, ‘Go up to Bethel and settle there.’”

Jacob was called to leave one place and return to another place and to settle there. It's interesting that the very first definition in Webster's dictionary states that the word reside means to put in order. The second definition says it means to put in place firmly. It's not until the third entry that we find the word to mean the establishment of a residence, suggesting permanence.

For years Jacob lived in one place with his parents. After he moved away from home, the places where he lived brought him no joy or peace. Life with his father-in-law, Laban, was not easy or pleasant and neither was life with his four wives. He headed back home but ended up staying in Succoth for a few years and then on to Shechem, which resulted in living in fear and failure. When we are living outside the will of God there will be no lasting joy or peace. Only when we are in the will of God will they be ours to experience.

I hope you have found the truth of the lyrics in the

hymn we sang earlier – Trust and Obey.
When we walk with the Lord
In the light of His Word
What a glory He sheds on our way.
While we do His good will,
He abides with us still
And with all who will trust and obey.
Trust and obey, for there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.

If you are not experiencing joy or peace in your life, it could be that you are not in the place where God wants you to be, that you are out of His will and this is a call to not only return to whatever is your Bethel, but to reside there as well, to get back in line with living in and doing God's will, whatever that is for you. Jacob was called to obey God and reside at Bethel, to set his stakes there and live. But he couldn't make that happen until he put some things in order, until he had them firmly in place. That's when we note a third call in our passage. It's a call to rekindle.

C. A Call to Rekindle

“Then God said to Jacob, ‘Go up to Bethel and settle there, and build an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you were fleeing from your brother Esau.’”

To rekindle means to kindle something again; to make someone have a feeling they had in the past. Something was there before that needs to be started up again or returned to again.

Paul encouraged Timothy to fan into flames his spiritual gift. It implies that his spiritual gift had been left unattended and was just a heap of smoldering coals. So the encouragement was to blow on the embers and get the fire going again. If you have been camping and had a fire that's died down, you know what I mean.

God told Jacob to return to Bethel to rekindle his faith, rekindle his worship, return to Bethel where he had his first real encounter with God. Return and renew.

When we get sidetracked, when we are out of the

will of God, it can be easy to let the flames of faith die down. In grace God is issuing a call to return to the place where you first experienced Him and to rekindle your faith by fanning its flames. Return to that place of worship at your Bethel. Go up to your Bethel – return, reside, and rekindle.

Verse 1 is a call to leave. In **verses 2-7** it is a call to cleave.

II. IT'S A CALL TO CLEAVE – vs. 2-7

Leaving one thing summarily means that you are pursuing something else. Again, that's the intent of God's marital instruction in **Genesis 2:24** where the husband is to leave his parents and cleave (KJV) to his wife. The NIV uses says he is to be **"united"** to his wife. The Message says **"He embraces his wife."** That's the idea presented in these verses. It was a call for Jacob to go with his family, leave their past, and be united to God by going to Bethel. But before they could go to Bethel, which is what was ahead of them, they had to get rid of some things that they were holding on to. We can't be in God's will while still holding on to things that are in our past. We can't cleave if we don't leave.

Their call to cleave, is first met with a call to remove idols.

A. A Call to Remove Idols

"So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, 'Get rid of the foreign gods you have with you.'"

Jacob is taking the responsibility as head of the home to lead his family in spiritual matters. Before they could go to Bethel, the House of God, they had to get rid of their idols. Now you might be asking yourself just who is this directed to because the verse talks about his household and to all who were with him? His family would include his four wives, 11 sons and one daughter. It's also possible that some of his sons were old enough to be married and have children of their own, although we can't say that definitively. But we can say that with the vast number of flocks and herds he had accumulated in Padan Aram that he also had many servants to care

for them. We learned **in chapters 32 and 33** that the gifts he sent to Esau were led by servants. The bottom line is that everyone was called on to get rid of their foreign idols.

The second question you might be wondering about is where they got these idols? We read in **Genesis 31:19** **"When Laban had gone to shear his sheep, Rachel stole her father's household gods."**

Remember that this was an idolatrous culture they were living in. Idols were a natural part of their religious belief system. When we discussed this passage several weeks ago, we mentioned that there could have been several reasons she took them. She may have still had some ties to the religious culture, which believed that when you traveled somewhere the gods stayed home. The gods didn't go with you. She may have wanted some protection on their journey, which they believed the gods offered.

Aren't you glad that the God we love and serve never leaves or forsakes us, He never abandons us, or leaves us to go it alone?

Another reason she may have taken them was to get back at her father for how he had treated them over the years being married to Jacob. He cared little for them, so maybe she wanted to take his gods to leave him feeling unprotected. Whatever the case, they were in her possession.

In **chapter 34** we learned that after Simeon and Levi murdered all the males, they looted the town of Shechem. Among the loot would have been idols and bracelets which we read about in **verse 4**. The bracelets weren't just fashion statements worn as accessories to adorn their outfits. They were worn as part of their pagan religious custom and ritual. Archaeologists have uncovered earrings from that region and era in the shape of a crescent moon, which was one of the gods they worshipped.

This says to me that before I can return to the House of God, to worship Him, I need to remove whatever idols I may have in my life. Idols don't have to be made of wood, stone or precious metals. They can be anything that takes the rightful place of God in our lives like a career, a hobby, a sin, or even our

family. Now, with the exception of some sin we may be harboring, the other things are good if kept in their proper place.

So, are there any idols in your life you need to get rid of before you embark on your journey to Bethel?

When we are called to cleave, it is a call to remove. It is also a call to repent. Notice **verse 4** again.

B. A Call to Repent of Sin

“So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, ‘Get rid of the foreign gods you have with you, and purify yourselves.’”

The word purify simply means to get rid of impurities, to free from guilt or sin. Sin stains our lives and we purify ourselves of those sins through repentance, admitting that we have sinned, confessing them to God, and asking His forgiveness for our wrongdoing. Confession and repentance free us from the guilt of our sin.

Psalm 51:1-9, 16-17

Psalm 139:23-24

I John 1:9

We read of repeated warnings and calls to repentance throughout the Old Testament. Prophets called on the people to repent and return to a right relationship with God. In the New Testament, Jesus called people to repent. One day the Pharisees brought a woman caught in the act of adultery. They asked Jesus what should be done to her. The Law demanded she be put to death, but Jesus said that whoever was without sin could throw the first stone. No one did. Jesus then told the woman to go and sin no more. It was a call for her to purify herself.

James tells us to submit and draw near to God. He calls on to **“wash our hands and purify our hearts (James 4:7-8).”**

In the Old Testament before a priest could approach God in the tabernacle, he had to go through a special washing ceremony that symbolized spiritual cleansing and purification to stand in God’s presence.

If we are to return to the House of God to worship

Him, we are called to repent, to purify yourselves. The third thing God called them to do was to be refreshed in character.

C. A Call to Refresh Their Character

“So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, ‘Get rid of the foreign gods you have with you, and purify yourselves and change your clothes.’”

Changing one’s clothes symbolized a transition from one state to another.

When I played basketball, ran track and cross country I would change my clothes into the appropriate attire before going out to participate in that event. When the event was over, I changed back into my street clothes.

Before the priest went into the Tabernacle, he changed his clothes by putting on special garments that were to be worn only in God’s presence.

Before we can come into God’s presence we must be clothed in the righteousness of Christ. We do that by faith in Christ. **II Corinthians 5:17** says that if we are in Christ we are a new creation, the old has passed, the new has come.

As a symbol of their leaving the past and going on to Bethel, after they had removed their idols, after they had repented, they changed their clothes to symbolize a break with the past and a change in the direction their lives were now taking spiritually by faith. They were called to put away the idols of their heart by removing them, purify their hearts by repenting and preparing their hearts by refreshing their clothes. Each spoke of returning to God.

Paul uses the same symbolism when he wrote to the Ephesians and Colossians by telling them to put off certain sinful characteristics and put on certain other characteristics that exemplify Christ. **“Put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness (Ephesians 4:24).”**
(Colossians 3:5-14)

Before they could return to Bethel, they had to change their clothes, separate from their past sins.

Do you need to remove any of the old nature and clothe yourself with the new nature, one that reflects the character of Christ?

If I am going to take Robyn out for dinner after working out in the yard all day, she expects that I will first change. Yet how often do we try to come into God's presence without changing. **“Put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness.”**

We cleave by removing, repenting, and being refreshed. We read of their obedience in **verses 4-7** and their return to Bethel where Jacob built an altar to God and led them all in worship. Jacob has now fulfilled his vow to God, made 30 years earlier. Their pilgrimage to Bethel was as a new people. Old things have passed away and the new has come. Though not stated, it's also assumed that he gave a tenth of his possessions to God as promised.

Even they have now returned to Bethel, Jacob isn't quite done with leaving the past. In **verse 8** we see that it's a time to grieve.

III.IT'S A TIME TO GRIEVE – v. 8

Given all the events of what is taking place in **chapter 35**, this verse seems quite out of place. It's the death of Rebekah's nurse. We don't know the when or the how, but sometime after leaving Haran and returning to Canaan following his meeting with Esau, Deborah came to live with Jacob's family. It implies that he had visited his father perhaps on several occasions before his father died. Scholars suggest that she went with Jacob to care either for his own small children or children that may have been born to any of his married sons. She is by this time about 180 years old. Having been the nurse of his mother, Rebekah, Deborah, is one of the remaining ties to his past. So while this verse may seem out of place, I believe it is included because it is one step closer to being separated from the man he was to whom God wanted him to be.

They took her and buried her south of Bethel and I'm sure there was a time of grief. She had cared for Jacob many years.

Thus far we have noted from our passage that it was a time to leave, a time to cleave, and a time to grieve. We conclude with a time to believe.

IV.IT'S A TIME TO BELIEVE – vs. 8-15

In this call to believe, Jacob is called to remember three things. First, it's a call to remember his person

A. A Call to Remember His Person – v. 9-10

Jacob's name change occurred about 10 years earlier on the eve before meeting Esau when he wrestled with the pre-incarnate Christ. We read about it in **32:28**. As they wrestled, the Lord forced Jacob to acknowledge who he really was, to see his past and to make a choice – continue as he had been or change by acknowledge God in his life. He came to see that God was the source of his possessions, the one who would fulfill His promises. Faith was no longer in himself but God.

Folks, as we return to our Bethel, be reminded of who you are in Christ. You are a new creation. You are a child of God. You are forgiven. You are redeemed. You are loved. You are free in Christ. You are part of the body of Christ. You are transformed in character. Satan wants to try and keep you in the past and God wants you to be reminded of who you are and about your future. Never forget your person as a child of God. Never forget who you are in Christ.

The second thing Jacob was called to remember was a promise.

B. A Call to Remember A Promise – vs. 11-13

His faith journey had really begun at Bethel and it was back to Bethel where his faith is being rekindled. Once again, God reminds Jacob of the promises made about his people and his property. God reminded him that He is the Almighty God, the One through whom all these promises would come to pass. The One who would make them happen. It was a reminder to Jacob that God is the One who is strong enough to meet every need.

How beautiful are the words of **II Peter 1:3-4** **“His**

divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness. Through these He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”

Jacob was called to believe the promises of God by faith. Everything that God had promised to Abraham and to Isaac, He was promising to Jacob. He laid them out again to Jacob as a reminder that He who promised is faithful, He will do it.

Numbers 23:19 “God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should change His mind. Does He speak and then not act? Does He promise and not fulfill?”

God is calling us as well to believe by faith His promises to us. We can be assured that He will keep His Word. Not one promise will fail. Remember.

Then finally, it was a call to remember his praise.

C. A Call to Remember His Praise – vs. 14-15

Here’s the bottom line. When we have come into a right relationship with God through obedience, when we have removed from our lives those idols that hold us back, when we have repented, when we have chosen to return to walking with God, then the natural response will be an outpouring of praise.

Jacob set up a stone pillar. He did that the first time he was at Bethel when he encountered the living God. He poured a drink offering on it, which was part of a sacrifice. A drink offering was a symbolic form of dedication as if to say the worshipper was pouring himself out to serve and obey the Lord. In this act Jacob was committing himself to follow the Lord. Jacob’s faith has been renewed as he offers praise to God, anointing the place as the House of God, Bethel.

Let me close with a word from Warren Wiersbe who encourages us with words of hope: **“This chapter shows us that no matter how many times we fail, we can return home if we repent and obey.”**

Has God been calling you back to your Bethel where your faith can be rekindled?

What idols is He asking you to remove?

What clothes is He asking you to change into?

What promises is He reminding you of?

We have a lot to learn from Jacob.

His call is your call as well

A call to leave

A call to cleave

A call to grieve

A call to believe