

Vocation looking backwards

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Recently I had the opportunity to talk about Christian call and vocation with an adult education class. Normally I have this conversation with 17-21 year old people, but last weekend the crowd was a bit older, closer to retirement age. I asked them to think about what society had told them about vocation, what the church had told them and what their experience of vocation had been.

The interesting thing this group said was that often vocation only became clear in retrospect. In the midst of life one's vocation was not necessarily clear. It is not surprising that older people said this. If you have lived more than a couple of decades you probably have noticed this.

Sometimes younger people are very concerned that they make the correct choices about their vocation. This is a good thing. They are thinking seriously about their abilities and gifts and what the world needs. They want to be faithful. But they wonder, how can they know that they are making the correct choice? I tell them that all they have to do, all they can do, is take the first step as faithfully as they can. And then they take the next step, as faithfully as they can. And then the next step. They might have to backtrack occasionally but God can work with that. It may not seem that they are headed anywhere special. Their path may not be clear. Life might be pretty confusing. But when they are older and looking back on their life, that's when their vocation becomes clear.

I suspect this is small consolation to younger people—hearing that someday things will make sense. But that is one of the lessons of Abraham's life.

You will remember that God tells Abraham to go. But God doesn't tell Abraham where exactly he is to go. Abraham goes to the land of [Canaan](#), but that is a pretty big place. In addition, God makes some big promises to Abraham, a son, descendants, and the security of his own land. But Abraham's life is full of difficulties and Abraham makes plenty of mistakes. Often Abraham is not the blessing that he is supposed to be to others. It is [quite a story](#).

By the end of Abraham's life, it still isn't clear that all of God's promises will be fulfilled. And then in the book of Hebrews ([Hebrews 11:8-15](#)) the author reflects on Abraham's life. Abraham lived by faith. He traveled one step at a time, trusting in God, trusting that things would make sense, trusting that God was at work in all of his life. In retrospect, we see how God was at work in Abraham's life.

Each of us is called to love God and to love our neighbor. Exactly how each of us does that is unique—and not without mistakes and regrets. But somehow, in retrospect, we see, or our children see, or our great-grandchildren see how God was at work in our life. Faithful living means that even though we may not see the big picture, we trust that God does.

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