



STEP 3: MAKE GOD YOUR NO.1 PRIORITY

Who had a to-do list last week? Did you get it all done? Or was there some carry-over?

I have to admit, my life runs on to-do lists. But how do you, how do I, work out what goes in, and in what order? The answer is: priorities.

In a similar way, the journey of faith involves understanding what matters most – to us, and to God.

But as we'll see, that can be easier said than done ...

Genesis 13

Last time, we looked at how Abram disobeyed God and fled to Egypt. And things got a bit ... messy! But now he's back where he's meant to be. Building altars, worshipping God.

Problem solved, right? Not quite.

Abram is now loaded; the land can't sustain it all; and it leads to friction between Abram's herdsmen and Lot's. I say 'loaded', but in reality, Abram is weighed down – by 3 things, all of them consequences of his earlier disobedience:

- **Too much stuff.** Sometimes, more = less. More money, more objects, more luxury = less God. Truth is: the more 'world' you have, the less 'God' you see.

- **Too many people.** It would have been easy for Abram to rely on such a large group of servants for his protection and provision – and never rely on God.
- **Too much Lot!** God had commanded Abram to leave his father's house. So why did he take Lot? Answer: disobedience! And the end result of it is? Conflict.

As the late Mohammed Ali once put it: "It's not the mountain ahead that wears you out, it's the pebble in your shoe."

So Abram, as the elder in his community, has to do something about it. And he makes a decision which not only solves the problem, it shows that he's learnt a lesson. It shows that God is becoming Abram's no.1 priority.

Now saying such a thing can be easy. But what does that actually look like? For Abram? For us? Like this:

1) Living Selflessly, Not Greedily. Abram gives his nephew Lot the opportunity to choose where he wants to live. Now this was a counter-cultural thing to do (in the ancient world the younger would always serve the elder). But it was also counter-intuitive (it was pretty obvious Lot was going to go for the better land). But rather than pulling rank, Abram gives him first-dibs. And Lot "chose for himself."

If your life is all about what you can get out of it, rather than God and others, then congratulations! You are officially God in your life! But it won't make you happy – regardless of what the world might tell you. Doing God's thing, God's way, is the only thing that will achieve that (hence Psalm 1). In fact, living for yourself is likely to have the opposite effect.

No, if you're looking for happiness, you'll need to make *God* no.1. And if you do, it'll mean living selflessly, not greedily.

2) Living Faithfully, Not Easily. In giving Lot first choice – and going with it – Abram makes the right decision, not the wrong one; does the difficult thing, not the easy one.

For us, the easy thing might be to continue with this relationship, with these friends, with this job, with that leisure activity, with this lifestyle, with this calendar, with these books, with this TV series. But if it's not good for you, or for your faith, sometimes you have to do the difficult thing. You have to part company. We live in a society that is built on comfort, on convenience – on easy. But easy doesn't build character; doesn't build strength; doesn't build faith. That's why the Bible is full of people being called to some very difficult paths. God is honing them into *His* people.

If God is no.1, then like Abram, it'll mean living faithfully, not easily. And like it or not, that is what we need.

3) Living Gratefully, Not Enviously. In vs10, Lot "lifts his eyes" – but unlike his uncle in vs14, it's not high enough. Lot looks at the land of Sodom: it reminds him of Egypt, and Eden, and so that's where he heads – towards the east. 'East' usually represents Mesopotamia, the land Abram and Lot

came from – and future exile. A sign of where Lot's heart is leaning, perhaps? It could be.

The main point, though, is that sin is often about looking at something that's not ours or something that's not good for us, and wanting it for ourselves. Instead, we need to acknowledge that what God wants to give us is best; that when God says "no", that's a blessing in itself; and to be grateful to Him, for the big blessings – and the small.

If God is no.1 – and we want to be more like Abram, less like Lot – then it'll mean living gratefully, not enviously.

4) Living Eternally, Not Temporally. Lot accepts the offer and heads towards Sodom, i.e. he operates according to what he can see. Abram, on the other hand, operates by faith – and stays in a tent, as Hebrews 11:8-10 tells us.

But as a consequence, God speaks to Abram (the first time since entering Egypt). He reiterates His promise that Abram will have billions of children, biological and spiritual. And He reassures him that his descendants will inherit this land. As I said earlier, in the eyes of the world living in obedience to God's commands and promises can seem counter-intuitive – a stupid thing to do, rather than a wise one. But ultimately, this works out worst for Lot – and best for Abram. And it will work out best for us, too.

If God is no.1, we'll have a focus beyond this world and on the world to come. We'll live eternally, not temporally.

Future-Focus

So, Abram heads for the wilderness, with his flocks and herds. And that 'wilderness experience' is a common one for God's people. But there's a pay-off, too: a closer walk with God. In the Bible, the wilderness is not a bad place – it's a place of growth, the beginning of something big. It was for Abram. It was for Israel. It is for us.

But it can also be a place of loss. There are Christians out there – and in here – who know what this feels like. Some have lost spouses. Family. Friends. Promotions. Pay-rises. Jobs. Some Christians today are losing their freedom, health, even their lives. To us all God says what He says to Abram: "See all this? One day it'll all be yours."

And listen: God does not ask us to do anything that He is not willing to do Himself – and then some. In fact, everything I've said about priorities could just as easily be describing who? Jesus of Nazareth. The One who said, "Seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matthew 6:33).

Which, rest assured, will amount to a bit more than what one hamster might leave another.

Cue a certain Liz Climo cartoon!