

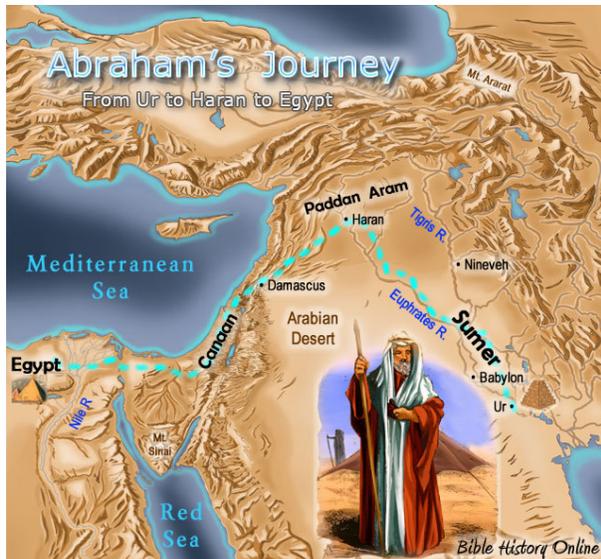
Galatians 4:19-30

19 My children, I am again suffering labor pains for you until Christ is formed in you.

20 I would like to be with you right now and change my tone of voice, because I don't know what to do about you.

**That
takes
time.**

**He
never
gave
up on
them.**



Genesis 12:1-9

1 The LORD said to Abram: Go out from your land, your relatives, and your father's house to the land that I will show you.

2 I will make you into a great nation, I will bless you, I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.

3 I will bless those who bless you, I will curse those who treat you with contempt, and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

4 So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was 75 years old when he left Haran.

5 He took his wife Sarai...

Genesis 16:1-5

1 Abram's wife Sarai had not borne any children for him, but she owned an Egyptian slave named Hagar.

2 Sarai said to Abram, "Since the LORD has prevented me from bearing children, go to my slave; perhaps through her I can build a family." And Abram agreed to what Sarai said.

3 So Abram's wife Sarai took Hagar, her Egyptian slave, and gave her to her husband Abram as a wife for him. This happened after Abram had lived in the land of Canaan 10 years.

God wasn't working fast enough for Abraham and Sarai so they thought they would help Him along.

4 He slept with Hagar, and she became pregnant. When she realized that she was pregnant, she treated her mistress with contempt.

5 Then Sarai said to Abram, "You are responsible for my suffering! I put my slave in your arms, and ever since she saw that she was pregnant, she has treated me with contempt. May the LORD judge between me and you."

Angry wife's note to husband:

"Your dinner is in the recipe book on page 32 and the ingredients are at the store."

Chuck Swindoll writes: "I read this past week of a couple (let's call them Carl and Clara) whose twenty-five year marriage was a good one. Not the most idyllic, but good.

They now had three grown children who loved them dearly.

They were also blessed with sufficient financial security to allow them room to dream about a lakeside retirement home. They began looking.

A widower we'll call Ben was selling his place.

They liked it a lot and returned home to talk and plan.

Months passed and one day - out of the blue, Clara told Carl she wanted a divorce. He went numb. After all these years, why?

And how could she deceive him...how could she have been nursing such a scheme while they were looking at a retirement home?

She said she hadn't been.

Actually, this was a recent decision now that she had found another man.

Who? Clara admitted it was Ben, the owner of the lake house, whom she inadvertently ran into several weeks after they had discussed the sale.

They'd begun seeing each other. Since they were now 'in love,' there was no turning back.

Not even the kids, who hated the idea, could dissuade their mother.

On the day she was to leave, Carl walked through the kitchen toward the garage. Realizing she would be gone when he returned, he hesitated, 'Well, hon, I guess this is the last time--' His voice dissolved as he broke into sobs.

She felt uneasy, hurriedly got her things together, and drove north to join Ben.

Less than two weeks after she moved in with Ben, her new lover, he was seized with a heart attack.

He lingered a few hours...and then died."

Deuteronomy 11:26–28 (HCSB)

26 “Look, today I set before you a blessing and a curse:
27 there will be a blessing, if you obey the commands of the LORD your God I am giving you today,
28 and a curse, if you do not obey the commands of the LORD your God and you turn aside from the path I command you today by following other gods you have not known.

Genesis 17:1

1 When Abram was 99 years old, the LORD appeared to him...

Genesis 17:15–16 (HCSB)

15 God said to Abraham, “As for your wife Sarai, do not call her Sarai, for Sarah will be her name.
16 I will bless her; indeed, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she will produce nations; kings of peoples will come from her.”

Gal 4:22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave and the other by a free woman.

23 But the one by the slave was born according to the impulse of the flesh, (**Ishmael**) while the one by the free woman (**Isaac**) was born as the result of a promise.

24 These things are illustrations, for the women represent the two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai and bears children into slavery—this is Hagar.

25 Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children.

26 But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother.

Daniel McGraw

Giving up on Religion

Here is an interesting idea. Why don't you just give up on religion? Religion has caused wars. Religion drives people to do crazy things. Religion is just a way of controlling people.

These are all things that I have heard often when I am talking with people.

Before I get too far, I need to point out, that I am not against religion.

On the contrary I am all for it in the right context. My story is simply about me giving up on my ideas on what my religion actually is.

Growing up in west Texas, you never asked anyone if they believe in God.

No, you simply asked people what church do you go to.

So growing up I was set with this notion that everyone around me was religious and that church was where you had to go every Sunday and that the bible was a book on how to live your life.

So I got good at that, because "hey that's what you are supposed to do right?"

It was in this setting that I learned about Jesus and how he died on the cross to save us from our sins. Well I knew that I had sinned before so I decided that I needed to accept Christ and try to live a better life in order to earn love from God.

So I became a self proclaimed super Christian. I would go to church every Sunday and do everything that our youth group offered. Church camps, mission trips, you name it, you could find me there.

They say that in university you can find out what you really believe.

So I went to my university and got involved in a church very quickly.

I had to keep up my life of being a super Christian because I needed to do these things to be right with God.

There however was something missing throughout this... love.

Not that God didn't love me but I didn't love God.

**It was
this
checklist
that I had
to do.**

To fix this, I got involved in more and more stuff.

I joined a student group that talked about sharing their faith a lot.

They challenged me to take a class on that and I agreed because hey that is something we are told to do.

I didn't want to but it checked another box so I went.

From here the teacher asked if I would go on a summer trip that the focus was to grow in that.

Again, I couldn't help but to go although I didn't want to at the time.

So you might be asking yourself "What does this have to do with giving up religion?"

Well one hot summer day in Branson, Missouri I was sharing my faith with someone outside of shopping mall.

I had already talked about how God had created you and has a wonderful plan for your life but what keeps us from experiencing this is our own imperfections that have separated us from God.

I had shared that Jesus Christ came to earth to live the perfect life and die for our imperfections and was in the middle of sharing how all you have to do is accept it when I realized "This is what I believe!"

I had always agreed with this but until this point it had not clicked what that actually meant.

I had lived my whole life focused on what I thought was the religion of Christianity.

I had always thought you had to earn your salvation or relationship with God through faith and works.

It had finally clicked though. It is not a check list but a relationship with God that Christianity is all about.

That is what I had missed out on.

My "religion" was getting in the way of me experiencing that.

So at this point I decided to drop my religion and start my relationship with God.

I started to read my bible, not because I was told to, but because I wanted to know what the God who created me and died for me says.

I gave up on the shame that followed me every time I made a mistake because I am not trying to earn this anymore.

It was given to me as a free gift from Christ.

A surprising thing happened then, I became a better person.

This came from wanting to be more like Christ not because it was a rule to follow.

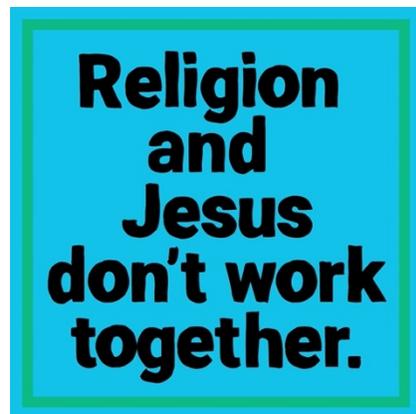
I am far from perfect, I still do bad things, but these do not define me.

Jesus paid the ultimate price and took the punishment I deserved and now when God looks at me He sees Christ's holiness and not my mistakes.

My life is far from easy but it is filled with so much more freedom that can only be found in Jesus.

27 For it is written: Rejoice, childless woman, who does not give birth. Burst into song and shout, you who are not in labor, for the children of the desolate are many, more numerous than those of the woman who has a husband.

28 Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise.



Genesis 21:8-21 (HCSB)

8 The child (Isaac) grew and was weaned, and Abraham held a great feast on the day Isaac was weaned.

9 But Sarah saw the son mocking —the one Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham.

Gal 4:29 But just as then the child born according to the flesh persecuted the one born according to the Spirit, so also now.

10 So she said to Abraham, “Drive out this slave with her son, for the son of this slave will not be a coheir with my son Isaac!”

**The child
born of flesh
cannot
coexist with
the child born
of the Spirit.**

Gal 4:30 But what does the Scripture say? Drive out the slave and her son, for the son of the slave will never be a coheir with the son of the free woman.

**Religion
and
Jesus
don't work
together.**

Gen 21:11 Now this was a very difficult thing for Abraham because of his son.

12 But God said to Abraham, "Do not be concerned about the boy and your slave. Whatever Sarah says to you, listen to her, because your offspring will be traced through Isaac.

Gen 21:13 But I will also make a nation of the slave's son because he is your offspring."

14 Early in the morning Abraham got up, took bread and a waterskin, put them on Hagar's shoulders, and sent her and the boy away. She left and wandered in the Wilderness of Beer-sheba.

15 When the water in the skin was gone, she left the boy under one of the bushes.

16 Then she went and sat down nearby, about a bowshot away, for she said, "I can't bear to watch the boy die!" So as she sat nearby, she wept loudly.

17 God heard the voice of the boy, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What's wrong, Hagar? Don't be afraid, for God has heard the voice of the boy from the place where he is.

18 Get up, help the boy up, and support him, for I will make him a great nation."

19 Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. So she went and filled the waterskin and gave the boy a drink.

20 God was with the boy, and he grew; he settled in the wilderness and became an archer.

21 He settled in the Wilderness of Paran, and his mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

Genesis 16:12 (HCSB)

12 This man will be like a wild donkey. His hand will be against everyone, and everyone's hand will be against him; he will live at odds with all his brothers.