

**Genesis 12:1-9 [NIV]**

*The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.*

*<sup>2</sup> "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.*

*<sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."*

*<sup>4</sup> So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran. <sup>5</sup> He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.*

*<sup>6</sup> Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. <sup>7</sup> The Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the Lord, who had appeared to him.*

*<sup>8</sup> From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord.*

*<sup>9</sup> Then Abram set out and continued toward the Negev.*

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We're in the book of Genesis this morning, if you'd like to turn there with me. We're heading back there to Genesis 12 in just a couple minutes.

Although the whole Covid thing is certainly still affecting people and families, especially in other parts of the world, here in the U.S. we have, for the most part, returned to a more normal way of life, which, in my mind, allows us to begin thinking, maybe a little more objectively, about how this past year or so has affected us as individuals and families and communities.

Of course, all along the way, we've all been evaluating and processing and adapting. But you know, sometimes those evaluations and determinations that we make "on the run" can't really be trusted for the long term because of all the emotions and distractions that are present in those moments.

Someone told me a long time ago to avoid, as much as possible, making big life-changing decisions when you're in the midst of a crisis, because your perspective is skewed, and you're very likely to wind up acting out of emotion and making a regrettable decision.

Personally, I've found that to be sound counsel, which is why I say, in many ways, I think only *now* are we really able to objectively start thinking about what these past 12 to 15 months have done, both *in* us and *to* us.

Now, to make those evaluations for any of *you* is not my job. None of us can do that for someone else.

But, just the same, I'd encourage us *all* to give those things some serious thought. We *all* ought to be prayerfully asking ourselves and our spouses and families some questions, such as the following.

"How have the past 15 months changed us? How have these experiences affected how we *think*, what we *do*, what we *prioritize*?"

"How have our schedules changed, and are those changes for the better?"

"What relationships have changed – and do some need to be repaired?"

"Have we come to wrong conclusions or made bad decisions that need to be re-thought or revisited?"

"What are we doing now that is feeding our faith and our family?"

"What changes have we made that are proving unhealthy or even destructive, relationally or spiritually?"

"What have we done well over this past year?"

"What have we done not so well?"

"What changes do we need to make going on from here?"

I think we all need to ask ourselves those sorts of questions, because through this past year, we've all experienced at least one truly catalytic event, and most of us more than one, and we've all faced some potential turning points in our lives.

And it's our responsibility to make sure that the turns we've taken are taking us in good and godly directions.

That's both the challenge of, and the opportunity in, life's turning points.

We all face them in life. We all experience catalytic events. We all confront change. The challenge is to do it well.

When we're young and childish, we tend to take those turns based on our emotional response – what we feel in the moment. And more often than not, the evaluations and decisions we make lead to even more problems.

Maturity helps us confront change in healthier, more rational ways: ways that lead to good and ways that can even repair damage done in the past.

So, we want to be mature in the ways we face turning points in our lives, because they come to all of us: to everyone who has ever lived, including those people of Scripture – those we'd consider giants of faith.

We're blessed that the Bible gives us glimpses of how the great men and women of faith have handled their own lives' crises, challenges and turning points. There is much to learn from them, if we will.

So, sort of in response to our own past year or so, for a few weeks here this summer, I'd like us to consider some of the catalytic events in the lives of the Bible's best and how they responded – how they handed their own turning points and what they teach us about handling ours today.

And since this is Father's Day, I thought it appropriate to begin with Abram.

Abram's story begins in Genesis 11 and carries on for at least part of 15 chapters – which speaks to his importance, especially when you consider how little attention, comparatively, is given to the big issues like the creation and the fall. The first eleven chapters of Genesis cover huge issues and long stretches of time very quickly. But when we get to Abram, the pace of the story suddenly slows way down.

Eighty percent of the book of Genesis is devoted to just Abram and his family – which tells us what the real purpose of God's revelation is here: it's not, primarily, to answer in detail all the philosophical or metaphysical and technical questions that we, in our modern way of thinking, like to ask, especially concerning origins and creation.

The purpose of Genesis is to explain very carefully how God and humanity are to get along with one another.

Genesis is here to explain the nation of Israel, the twelve tribes and their significance, and Israel's claim to the land of Canaan – which is still very much relevant to today, isn't it?

Genesis reveals God's love and redemptive character, and it tells us how His redemptive plan began. And with Abram specifically, Genesis reveals how God is able to take one rather obscure person – one life – and use that life to change the world.

God can do that, and He wants all humanity to understand that.

God creates, certainly.

God loves.

God redeems.

And God uses people to fulfill His purposes.

If you somehow imagine that God does not love, or that God does not redeem, or that God cannot possibly use you to do some profound thing for His glory in the world, then you should re-read the story of Abram.

Because Abram's life says otherwise.

And yet, as Vic Hamilton points out, even with 15 chapters devoted to him, we still only have a small part of Abram's story.<sup>1</sup>

There is nothing about him in any extra-biblical literature. We know nothing about his first 75 years of life and very little about his last 75 years. The part of Abram's life that means something, for God's purposes here, is just a seventh – the middle seventh of his life – the 25 years between his 75<sup>th</sup> and 100<sup>th</sup> birthdays.

That's the part we read about in chapters 12 through 21.

Those are the key years, and they begin with a catalytic event that becomes a turning point in Abram's life.

Actually, Abram's life is itself a turning point in world history. Genesis shows us that clearly.

From Adam and Eve on throughout the first 11 chapters of this book, we are presented with example after example of disappointing circumstances and

disobedience to God that culminate in the tower of Babel – this initiative undertaken for the sake of the glory of human achievement.

*"We will be our own gods and we will make a name for ourselves!"* That was the direction of the world up to chapter 12 here, and the tower was the symbol of that sentiment.

But then comes Abram, who is different from those who came before him and different from those all around him in his day, and God wants us to notice him and what makes him different, because what was possible for Abram is still possible for any of us if we'll be different from those who came before us and from those around us in this world.

What's the difference?

The difference was his willingness to believe, trust and follow God with all he was.

That's what we see in Abram that we don't see in most people who came before him, and God determines that through bringing this catalytic event to his life: God asks Abram nothing less than to leave all that was familiar to him – his land, his people and his security – and go somewhere else.

And God doesn't even identify the specifics of the "somewhere else." He just says, *"Leave and go where I'll show you."*

These are the first words God has spoken since the Flood.

*"Leave here, Abram, and I'll show you where to go."*

It was a call to give up all that was familiar and secure, and to trust God for everything from that point on.

You and I would say, "Well, that's quite a risk!"

And it was. Honestly, it was even more significant for Abram than for us. In Abram's society, your family and tribe defined who you were. To break away was to lose your very identity – and also your security, because your extended family was your protection in that big, bad world. There was no 911 to call.<sup>2</sup>

On top of that, Abram was being asked to leave the most sophisticated and affluent part of the known world – all for the sake of an unknown land.

So, it was a bigger ask than we realize.

The natural response would be, "Why should I do this? What's in it for me?"

Well, God anticipates that and answers the question even before Abram asks it. God says in verse two, *"Here's what's in it for you Abram – seven things actually (to use a good, Biblical number):*

1. *I will make you into a great nation.*

2. *I will bless you.*

3. *I will make your name great; in other words, I'll make you famous!*

4. *I will make you a blessing to others.*

5. *I will bless those who bless you.*

6. *I will curse those who curse you – which means, I will protect you.*

7. *I will use you to bless all the people on earth."*

<sup>1</sup> Hamilton, Victor. Handbook on the Pentateuch. Baker. 82

<sup>2</sup> Wenham, Gordon. Exploring the Old Testament. Intervarsity. 40

That was the offer that God laid on the table in front of Abram. Opportunity out of the blue. A catalytic event. A turning point.

How do you respond to a proposal like that?

How did Abram respond?

Did he think about it for a long time?

Did he make a list of pros and cons?

Did he ask for the counsel of his friends and family?

Did he ask God any follow-up questions?

We don't know. If he did, we're not told.

All we're told is verse 4 there – my version says, in three words, "*So – Abram – left.*"

But really, the Hebrew there is just one word that translates, more or less, "*went.*"

And with Abram's decision, summed up in one Hebrew word, the course of the history of the world was changed, you see?

That Abram *believed* and *trusted* and *followed* – it was indeed one *huge step* for the man Abram – certainly. But you might say it was one *giant leap* for mankind, which is what God wants us to realize.

The act of one person simply saying, "OK," to God, and then living out that agreement – this turning point for one unknown man in an unknown town of an unknown time – wound up being a turning point for the whole world.

He didn't realize it at the moment, of course, but Abram's trust in God began God's plan to redeem all those who would follow Abram in believing, trusting and following.

That's what it took to live in peace with God, and that's still what it takes today, you see?

And this was the turning point in all that – the choice that changed the world.

Now, was Abram's decision to believe, trust and follow popular at the time?

I doubt it. I mean, if you were Sarai, his wife, would you have embraced this?

If your husband (or wife) came home one day with a story like his, you would think they'd lost it. You'd be looking to have them evaluated or medicated or committed.

*"God told you to leave, huh? And to go where? And who's God anyway?"*

I seriously doubt anyone around Abram thought this was even remotely reasonable, let alone a great idea.

Practically speaking, was doing this – was listening to God and leaving – an easy thing to do?

Not at all. There was no "Two Men and a Truck" or "Pods" that Abram could call. And even if there were, they wouldn't have come, since he was moving a farm.

And on top of that, Abram knew there would be trouble, even violence, in this endeavor. God admitted that in promising to "curse those who cursed Abram."

He knew there would be opposition.

You know, people who think following God should just automatically provide them care-free, pain-free, problem-free lives are deluded, really, because that notion simply doesn't exist in the Biblical witness.

In a sinful world, problems arise when someone chooses to believe, trust and follow God, as Abram found out.

And then, in his following, did Abram wind up trusting God perfectly? Unfailingly?

No. Several times he made mistakes.

Several times he told lies, or maybe just not complete truths.

Several times he fell back to the habits and ways of his old life.

And yet, at the end of the day, Abram's heart was to believe, trust and follow, and God knew that and loved it.

Abram's heart and motive were much like that of King David so many centuries later.

Was David's belief in God always popular? No.

Was his life of trust easy? No.

Did he follow God perfectly? No.

But David's intent was pure and sincere. And so was Abram's, such that when he said, "yes" to God, his heart was clean and God knew he meant it. God knew he was serious.

And when God knows we're serious about believing, trusting and following Him – and He always does know whether we're really serious or not, not only does He seem to be endlessly patient with us when we mess up, but it also seems that there's no limit to what He can do *in* us and *with* us and *through* us.

Abram's invitation to believe, trust and follow came at 75.

Seventy-five years he'd lived, and only then does the turning point of his life arrive.

We tend to think we're mostly spent at 75, but here's Abram at 75 just beginning to do what God raised him up to do.

Maybe God knew Abram needed 75 years' worth of maturity – of knowledge and experience and tries and fails in his own strength – in order to choose the right thing. I don't know, but whatever the reason, the world is indebted to Abram for recognizing this moment for what it was and for choosing well.

That's wisdom, you see? Real, Godly wisdom: recognizing a moment for what it is, for Who it's from, for what it means (even if just partially), and jumping on it choosing to trust God and to make the most and best of those turning points in our lives.

Abram did that, and he was changed.

Because he chose to believe, trust and follow, nearly 25 years later, when he was 99, God formalizes this deal, this agreement. And as part of that, He changes Abram's name from Abram, which means "great father," to Abraham, which means, "father of many nations."

And, of course God made good on all his promises.

So, Abram's life was changed.

But even more, Abram's family was changed. All that "great nation" business from God must have seemed ridiculous to Abram, since he and Sarai were unable to have children.

But look at what God did for them with regard to family.

So, Abram was changed.

Abram's family was changed.

But even more than that, the whole world was changed.

The family that Abram brought forth brought forth a nation, and that nation brought forth a Savior, and that Savior brought forth God's redemption and mercy, you see?

And it's still coming, still flowing, still active in our world.

And it's all because Abram chose to believe, trust and follow.

An encounter that became a conversation that became a proposal that became a turning point that changed the world.

And God is still doing these sorts of things today.

He uses encounters, experiences, even crises to get our attention.

And when He has our attention, He speaks. He offers a proposal – a deal, if you will.

And that can become a turning point in our life – if we'll believe and trust and follow.

And if we will, although we may not see it or understand it completely, the world will be different because of it.

We've all shared at least one major experience over this past year or so. Between Covid and politics and everything else of these past months, God is trying to get our attention.

And He's done that because He has something He wants to say.

Have you heard His voice? What's He saying to you? To all of us, but maybe especially to you fathers?

What is God saying to you?

What kind of proposal is God offering you?

And how are you responding?

Will you allow all that has happened to become a turning point in your life, so that God might take you in some new direction?

Whatever He's saying through all that these months have brought, will you believe, trust and follow?

Will you let God change the world through you?

In a world full of aimless, purposeless, wandering people, God is looking for people, just as He was looking in the days of Abram. God is still looking for people who will be part of something great, something enduring, something even eternal!

You want to experience a blessing?

You want to bless your family?

You want to bless the world?

Out of all this mess of this past year, would you take some time in these calmer days and listen to what God is saying – what He's proposing to you – and then would you believe Him and trust Him and follow Him?

Let's not let all that has happened be for nothing. Let's all be part of a turning point that will change the world.

Prayer

Closing Song: *Christ Be My Leader*

Benediction: Even here this morning, may the Lord raise up many new Abrams: men and women and boys and girls who grasp the significance of saying "yes" to God – whatever He asks – so that a turning point in our lives may become a turning point for good for our world.